



# Understanding Solidarity and Social Justice: Barriers that Remain

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## Introduction

Throughout this volume, it has become clear that solidarity, and social justice are necessary but contested societal elements in addressing social inequalities. If solidarity is about a shared identity, aims, and interests, and the willingness to share resources within and across groups, social justice provides the rules and values through which people can do so. Our social identities play a key role in shaping intergroup animosity, solidarity, and our receptivity to social change (Chaps. 2 and 3). Furthermore, group boundaries help determine who is included in our scope of justice (see Chap. 4). As noted by Lizzio-Wilson and colleagues in Chap. 2, our need for a positive self-concept is defined by the groups to which we belong and, crucially, the perceived value and social standing of such groups. How we respond to others is therefore driven by our membership in groups similar to or different from us. These identification processes take place at multiple levels, as discussed in Chap. 3, including macro-meso sociological and micro psychological processes. Knijn and Hopman highlight how social identifications, interests, and socio-cultural contexts such as power relations, and the scarcity of

resources (e.g., media, information), can trigger solidarity, and social justice at both levels, as well as boundary drawing between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Conversely, as multiple contributions to this volume highlight, when individuals perceive situations to be unjust, and/or when social justice aspects of certain situations are highlighted, individuals may be more willing to be solidaristic with others in society. In Chap. 2, the authors highlight how identifying dual and politicised identities can be important drivers of people’s willingness to seek social change. Similarly, Knijn and Hopman (Chap. 3) suggest that framing solidarity, in a social justice-based needs-discourse can help create feelings of solidarity and solidaristic actions. In short, the interrelationship between solidarity and social justice forms a foundation of societal willingness to tackle social inequalities.

Despite the necessity of solidarity, and social justice, historical and emerging societal challenges are putting them under pressure. Knijn and Hopman (Chap. 3) note that social justice-oriented solidarity initiatives challenge nation states and their populations about the redistribution of resources and the recognition of identities. Indeed, as discussed in Chap. 4, questions of who is deserving of what and by whom are at the forefront of much social scientific research. In this chapter, it becomes clear that justice is about much more than distributive questions alone, and at a minimum, questions about procedures,

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scope, and recognition also need to be addressed. How these can best be addressed remains contested, as dispositional, situational, and societal differences influence which form of justice people feel should be given primary consideration and which justice principle is preferred. The discussion by Bal and van den Bos also helps explain why injustices continue to endure, for example through our justifications of others' misfortune, or through the application of stereotypes. Indeed, as Laenen and Roosma show in Chap. 6, our perceptions of who is deserving of welfare state assistance and under which circumstances differs depending upon our perception of people's control of the situation, their attitude, reciprocity towards society, identity processes, and perceived need. Arguably, public opinion of the welfare state might matter for social policies aimed at addressing social inequalities (e.g., Sachweh, 2016; Sharp, 1999). But historically, welfare states have differed in the extent to which they are willing to address social inequalities dependent upon their normative foundations (Chap. 5). As Hemerijck and colleagues suggest, the continued popularity of welfare states puts pressure on policymakers to design social policies in a capacitating way, allowing citizens to adapt to rapidly changing economic and social conditions. Whether social policies are sufficiently able to address citizens in a capacitating way is a question of continuing debate (Parolin & Van Lancker, 2021; Yerkes et al., 2019), but clearly the normative pillars of solidarity, and social justice underlying welfare states have undergone significant redefinition. To understand the impact of these shifting foundations and continued contestations of solidarity and social justice, we focused our attention on societal fault lines related to gender, age, socio-economic position, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. What do these explorations teach us about solidarity and social justice in society?

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### **Key Conclusions About Solidarity and Social Justice**

First and foremost, these explorations demonstrate the constant struggle for solidarity, and social justice in contemporary societies.

Solidarity is dynamic and shifting within and across groups, within and beyond welfare state borders. Our perspectives on what is just in society are similarly fluid, influenced by processes of identification in ever-changing societies, which affects our perceptions of what is fair and who is deserving of help from the welfare state. These struggles for solidarity and social justice are reflected in the empirical chapters of the book. In Chaps. 8 and 9, Meeussen and colleagues and Yerkes and Rose demonstrate the contested nature of gender, gender roles, gender stereotypes, and gendered perceptions of what is fair. We've seen how societal expectations of men and women differ, which affects not only our behaviour, but also our views of what is fair, as highlighted by the case of flexibility upon return to work (Chap. 8). Inequalities along gender lines continue to characterise contemporary societies, and in some countries are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (see Chap. 19). Yet dominant stereotypes and gender roles can be challenged, as discussed in Chap. 7, which could lead to different expectations of future generations of men and women and thus differing views on gendered (in)justices. Inclusionary outgroup solidarity could strengthen such developments, for example challenging the misrecognition of women in the public and men in the private sphere.

Just as stereotypes shape what we expect of men, women or other genders, age-based stereotypes shape what we believe about younger and older cohorts (Chap. 9). The inevitable process of ageing makes age-based stereotypes pernicious and persistent, but not unavoidable as Rauvola and colleagues show. Moreover, despite the strong presence of age-based stereotypes in our society, often used by political parties to suggest an 'age war' is taking place, Reeskens and van Oorschot demonstrate there is little empirical support for such a claim. They do find that younger cohorts are slightly less supportive of old-age welfare provisions, but not in the manner that popular representations of generational conflict would have us believe. In other words, inter-generational solidarity appears strong, although social injustices in the representation and recognition of age groups remain.

Potentially one of the largest societal fault lines in contemporary societies is socio-economic position. As highlighted in Chap. 11 by Mudd and colleagues, socio-economic position captures the complex interaction of income, educational level, and occupational differences in society that crucially shape multiple life outcomes. Health inequalities along socio-economic lines are some of the most despairing inequalities, with far-reaching consequences for social justice. However, whether we believe individuals with varying socio-economic backgrounds are deserving of help from the welfare state depends to a great extent on the societal context in which we are living in combination with processes of identification. As Filipovič Hrast and Zimmermann demonstrate in Chap. 12, stereotypical representations of various socio-economic groups and differing mechanisms of identity (lower socio-economic groups) and need (higher socio-economic groups) shape our perceptions of deservingness along classed lines.

Our willingness to share resources with other groups is further challenged by processes of migration in contemporary societies and subsequent ethnic diversity. Fears about competition for economic resources like jobs, housing, and welfare as well as fears about the preservation of national culture and identity give rise to ethnic stereotypes (Chap. 13) and feelings of welfare chauvinism (Chap. 14). Ethnic stereotypes are associated with prejudice, discrimination, and other forms of exclusion, which Martinovic and Flesichmann suggest ultimately stand in the way of achieving solidarity, and social justice. These same stereotypes can, however, incite helpful behaviour in some groups, such as support for short-term humanitarian help. Clearly, the extent to which such stereotypes pervade society differs across countries, and Lubbers and Seibel demonstrate the distinctions between soft and hard forms of welfare chauvinism. These forms range from citizens believing immigrants should only receive welfare state support under certain conditions (soft welfare chauvinism) to citizens feeling migrants should be excluded from welfare state support or immigration should be halted altogether (hard welfare chauvinism). Whether a

multicultural national solidarity model is sufficient to challenge these distinctions remains a matter of debate.

The final societal fault line explored in this volume is sexual orientation, a multidimensional concept shaped by history and culture. De Wit and colleagues highlight the particularly negative effects of sexual orientation-based stereotypes, leading to stigma and significant health and well-being consequences for sexual minorities. Recognitive justice (i.e., the recognition of sexual diversity) can help to overcome these stereotypes and can also create an institutional setting in which citizens are more accepting of diverse family forms, as highlighted by Dotti Sani and colleagues in Chap. 16. These chapters on sexual-orientation related stigma and attitudes towards diverse families demonstrate the interrelationship between societal acceptance of diversity as reflected in welfare state policies, and societal acceptance, as reflected in the occurrence of stigma and public perceptions of deservingness.

Alongside these societal fault lines, we focused on several overarching challenges to solidarity and social justice. Clearly, the Covid-19 pandemic is an example of such an overarching challenge, as it has placed unprecedented pressure on solidarity and social justice, as discussed in Chap. 19. The analysis by Bal and colleagues suggests the need to move beyond nation state-based forms of identification and solidarity towards a global scope of justice to successfully address the social and health crisis at hand. As the pandemic continues, the pressures on solidarity and social justice change. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a clear upward intergenerational request for solidarity was made. In the ongoing throes of the pandemic, we see a need for reciprocity (i.e., downward intergenerational solidarity) clearly appearing in multiple Western societies. As we finalize this book, we remain in the midst of the pandemic; the eventual impact on solidarities, social inequalities, and our sense of justice remains unclear. But what is clear is that how we cope with the pandemic now, with whom we choose to be solidaristic, and which principles of social justice take central stage in our decisions on how to handle the pandemic, will have a

great impact on what societies will look like in the future, not only with regards to health, but also with regards to societal well-being and social inequalities.

Similar to the need to extend our scope of social justice and solidarity in the pandemic, the far-reaching effects of climate change (Chap. 17) and the continued rapid expansion of digitalisation in social services (Chap. 18) are global challenges that raise questions about solidarity and social justice extending beyond welfare state borders. In addition, the pandemic creates cross-cutting impacts on the global challenges discussed in these chapters, particularly on digitalisation. Digitalisation accelerated at an unprecedented pace during the pandemic as workers, pupils, and students shifted to online working and education. Consequently, the pandemic accelerated and exposed the weaknesses of digitalisation, including inequality of access (Faraj et al., 2021), an issue discussed in Chap. 18. This and other concerns of digitalisation outlined by Lolic and Timonen have thus been exacerbated by the rapid and ongoing changes to digitalisation efforts. The two policy fields discussed in Chap. 18, elder care services and education, have been differentially impacted by the pandemic. Whereas elder care services have witnessed minor changes, for example through the use of telehealth (Baumgart, 2020) or robotics (Khan et al., 2020), the pace of these changes is likely much slower compared to the acceleration of digitalisation in education. Whether the momentum of digitalisation created by the pandemic will continue remains to be seen. As noted by Cone et al. (2021), the complexity and uncertainty of the long-term effects of these processes are shaped by the multiple actors involved, and an ongoing need for legitimacy. But the pandemic has clearly impacted and worsened inequalities in educational opportunities (Bol, 2020), which creates new social justice challenges for the future.

Lastly, as discussed in Chap. 17, the challenges of climate change extend beyond the border of nation states. Climate change will impact future generations more than current ones, people from disadvantaged communities more than most

Western high-income countries and will potentially have major consequences not only for human species, but also, or maybe even more so, for nature and non-human species (e.g., biodiversity loss). While most lay people understand these issues, it remains challenging to create a feeling of inclusionary outgroup solidarity toward these groups (i.e., future generations, people from disadvantaged communities, and non-human species and nature) as they are traditionally considered beyond the scope of justice and feel too far removed from us (either in space or in time) to consider their needs as equal to those of current human generations living nearby. The complexity and inherent uncertainties of climate change as well as sustainability transitions further complicate the creation of a shared sense of solidarity towards these groups. To create fair sustainable transitions, however, we not only need to account for new groups in our considerations of solidarity, and social justice, but we also need to ensure that all human groups (e.g., lower SEP groups) can engage in these transitions equally, or in other words, that ‘no one is left behind’. In Chap. 17, Bal and Stok argue that to achieve equal and fair transitions, we need to move beyond motivational accounts of sustainable behaviour towards a relational approach that accounts for the context in which individuals live, with varying opportunities and capabilities for participating in sustainability transitions. Overall, these global challenges require us to consider new scopes of justice and potentially new questions of justice to create and sustain a shared sense of solidarity needed to address these issues.

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## Solidarity, and Social Justice in a Changing World?

This book centres on three key questions: How do various societies respond to enduring, growing or changing inequalities? Do these challenges lead to an expansion of solidarity or an erosion of solidarity, in an ‘us versus them’ rhetoric? And to what extent do societies differ in their social justice values and hence the acceptance of social

inequality? Underlying these questions is a more basic question: To what extent do solidarity and social justice still matter in contemporary societies?

Reflecting on these questions is crucial because significant ambiguity exists in contemporary societies and welfare states about where individual responsibility ends and/or where welfare state support is required. Enduring and existing social inequalities are exacerbated in many contemporary welfare states (e.g., in relation to socio-economic position). Moreover, new inequalities are emerging in light of global social challenges, such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Individualistic tendencies can make it more difficult to look past short-term individual burdens (e.g., of needing to pay into the system) towards sustaining the welfare state in the long run. These global social challenges make reflections on solidarity, and social justice – both self-transcending values – all the more important.

This book highlights the importance of solidarity and social justice in contemporary welfare states as well as how they are constantly (re)constructed in contemporary debates around varying societal fault lines. Looking at gender inequality, for instance, we see that patterns of inequality as well as demands for equality are changing. Whereas early demands centred on women gaining equal rights to men, contemporary discussions focus increasingly on more subtle effects of misrecognition and on creating equal value for multiple roles in society, including traditionally gendered ones (e.g., care). Increasingly, societies also recognize patterns of inequality related to sexual orientation, including recognition of demands aimed at securing equal rights for sexual minorities and LGB communities. These structural inequalities remain unequally addressed across countries, and the developments in several Central and Eastern European countries show that advances towards equality for sexual minorities can even be reversed. These ongoing inequalities can be a crucial barrier for combatting societal stigma and the multiple long-term, negative effects associated with the societal stigmatization of sexual minorities. With regard to age, societies continue to maintain ideals cen-

tered on youth, at least in appearance, thereby undervaluing older age. However, demographic processes such as increased longevity create ageing societies, which pose new challenges to intergenerational solidarity. Intergenerational solidarity is placed under even greater pressure by the COVID-19 pandemic. Societal fault lines related to socio-economic position also appear to be deepening. While the existence of the fault line between people of lower and higher socio-economic position is recognized widely, addressing it has proven difficult, given its deep entrenchment in many facets of our lives. And as this book goes to press, Europe once again finds itself embroiled in discussions around migration, for example in calls for solidarity, with Afghani citizens seeking asylum following the return of the Taliban to power. In short, enduring and changing inequalities lead to continued contestations. Welfare states and the citizens living within them respond with varying forms of solidarity and social justice. This changing nature of social inequalities together with the global challenges outlined in this book and beyond require a continued discussion about and need for new solidarities and viewpoints on social justice. The discussions in this book are intended to provide a fruitful starting point.

While this book is comprehensive and interdisciplinary in its approach to issues of social inequality, solidarity, and social justice, we note a number of limitations. First, our interdisciplinary perspective focuses primarily on the integration of (social) psychological, sociological, and some political philosophical perspectives on these topics. Clearly other disciplines, including history, economics, cultural anthropology, and political science address issues relevant to solidarity, and social justice in contemporary societies, which will at times show overlap with the themes discussed in this book, but can also be complementary. This book does not aim to offer a definitive collection of interdisciplinary debates, but rather a starting point. Second, while we focused on several key societal fault lines, others have been excluded due to lack of space, such as inequalities related to disability. Similarly, as the book offers a broad view of societal fault lines, this

precludes chapters from going more in-depth on certain topics, such as the fluidity of gender or the intersectionality of social inequalities (see, e.g., Williams, 2021). Lastly, the focus here has primarily been on social inequality defined as an uneven allocation of burdens and valued resources in combination with the undervaluation of members of society based on their group membership. The aspect of privilege, also experienced by members of society based on their (oftentimes majority) group membership, has received less attention but remains a critical aspect of discussions on social inequality.

With the far-reaching extent of many of the social issues outlined in the book, some readers may now be looking for how to solve these social issues, and thus how to create social change. These readers may be disappointed. For while some chapter authors suggest ways in which social change could be achieved, this book is explicitly aiming to show the complexity of the social issues at hand *without* providing a definitive answer on how to solve them. For example, we recognize the presence of wokeness debates (i.e., an awareness of social justice issues, particularly pertaining to race) in many societies, yet this book is not a call to action. Quite simply, *there are no easy answers* to these social issues. What this book *does*, is outline numerous theoretical and empirical perspectives intended to help readers reflect. To reflect on why we feel particular social policy responses to social inequalities are needed, or not (i.e., whether we are willing to be solidaristic with others). To reflect on why we feel these responses are fair or unfair, just or unjust. And throughout these reflections, to recognize that debates and contestations about these issues are ongoing, and an inherent part of the societies in which we live.

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