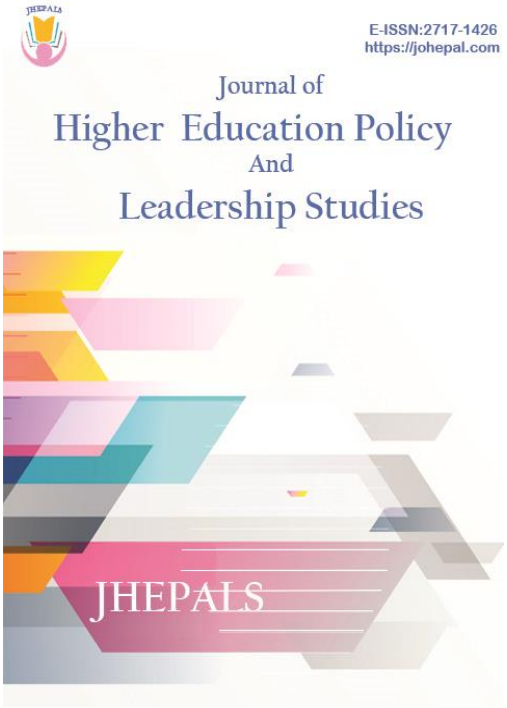
Journal of
Higher Education Policy
And
Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

https://johepal.com



Book Review: **Handbook of Social Justice Theory and Research**

Mohammad Reza Montazeri
Department of Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa, CANADA

Email: MohammadrezaMontazer@cmail.carleton.ca
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9494-6854

Book Review Received	Book Review Accepted	Published Online
2025/11/16	**2026/03/08**	**2026/03/31**

Cite book review as:

Montazeri, M. R. (2026). [Review of the book *Handbook of social justice theory and research*, by C. Sabbagh, & M. Schmitt (Eds.)]. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, *7*(1), 132-137. https://dx.doi.org/10.66224/johepal.7.1.132

[Downloaded from johepal.com on 2026-11-11]

[DOI: 10.66224/johepal.7.1.132]

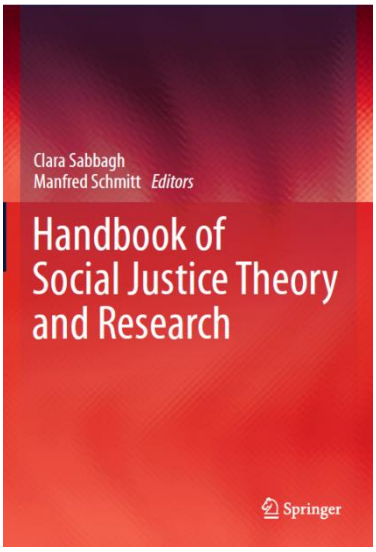
Book Review

Handbook of Social Justice Theory and Research

Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies (JHEPALS)

E-ISSN: 2717-1426
Volume: 7 Issue: 1
pp. 132-137
DOI:
10.66224/johepal.7.1.132

Author: Clara Sabbagh & Manfred Schmitt (Editors)
Publisher: Springer
Country of Publication: USA
Year of Publication: 2016
ISBN: 978-1-4939-3215-3
Pages: xxvii-504



Mohammad Reza Montazeri *

Keywords: Social Justice Theory; Higher Education; Unequal World; (In)Justice; Non-Western HE Context

In an increasingly unequal world, the study of social justice is of salient significance to understanding how fairness and moral bearing can be created and maintained both within and across societies. Not only do social justice theory and research enlighten the moral grounds of human existence, but they also guide the quest for equity in important institutions in a society, including higher education, and its linkage to governance. Against this backdrop, *Handbook of social justice theory and research* offers a timely and

* **Corresponding author's email:** MohammadrezaMontazer@cmail.carleton.ca

[Downloaded from johepal.com on 2026-11-11]

[DOI: 10.66224/johepal.7.1.132]

comprehensive contribution to this growing field by discussing how justice has been conceptualized, examined, and utilized across disciplines. The volume makes use of towering International Society for Justice Research (ISJR) figures to create a state of the art synthesis of justice research and a forward-looking vista for the next generation in this arena.

The volume commences with a compendious introductory chapter written by the editors, who expound justice as a perennial concern at the heart of both society and scholarly research. They plausibly argue that justice has been examined historically through diverse philosophical lenses, including classical Greek philosophy, Judeo-Christian thought, and more recent interdisciplinary research. The editors then provide an overview of justice's "prism-like concept" at both macro and micro levels across an array of spheres in the society (p. 11). The editors also mention several paramount gaps, such as Western-centered perspectives, scant attention to cultural variations, and the underexplored area of education justice. They urge richer methodological approaches and sharper measurements whereby personal and organizational viewpoints can be linked, particularly within educational settings.

The volume has a theme-based structure in five interconnected parts that span 26 chapters. Part I explores justice through four different disciplinary lenses. To begin, chapter 2 presents normative political/philosophical frameworks, which lays emphasis on topics such as liberal contractarianism and debates over cosmopolitan versus national obligations, intergenerational justice, and moral reasoning. In particular, the authors draw on Rawls's theory of justice by discussing how his ideas are crucially important in recent debates on fairness toward both present and future generations. Arguing that philosophy is not the sole lens through which justice is conceptualized and enacted, Chapter 3 complements the previous chapter (i.e., a focus on the normative, objectifiable aspect of justice) by emphasizing the integral roles of social structures, cultural expectations, and institutions, which do impact our perceptions of justice.

Unlike the previous two chapters on more objective lenses of justice, chapter 4 looks at justice from a subjective, psychological perspective, with a focus of justice as a fundamental human motive. The chapter examines intra/interpersonal and intergroup processes (including retribution, forgiveness, and collective action). Chapter 5 then explains that economic justice depends upon the context, accountability principle, and risk. Operationalizing fairness in measurable terms, this chapter also throws light on how these concepts are used in experimental studies. The chapter argues that fairness hinges on what people can control such as their efforts (as opposed to sheer luck or inherited wealth) and is influenced by the role of context and principles alike.

Part II seeks to answer the critical question: how do humans preserve a sense of fairness in a world fraught with inequality and how do they perceive, justify, and react to (in)justice? Chapter 6 seeks to clarify the point that self-interest is not the sole "cardinal motive of homo sapiens", which was morphed into the belief that some actions indeed stem from justice (p. 109). The chapter shows that while justice is universally valued, its meaning varies appreciably from context to context, and perceptions of unfairness could trigger moral emotions, which can be eased through fair procedures. Chapter 7 distinguishes *rational* (e.g., helping or opposing) from *nonrational* (e.g., denial or victim-blaming) responses. It argues that people opt for these responses based upon whether they believe

[Downloaded from johepal.com on 2026-11-11]

[DOI: 10.66224/johepal.7.1.132]

they have the ability to make a change in the (unjust) situation directly. While chapter 7 focuses upon coping strategies, chapter 8 discusses the Belief in a Just World (BJW) hypothesis, which ushers in a clear-cut way to distinguish personal BJW (i.e., believing my world is fair), which endorses human's psychological well-being, from general BJW (i.e., believing the world is fair for everyone), which justifies inequality or punitive disposition.

Furthermore, chapter 9 centers on the construct of justice sensitivity, which pertains to how people's roles (e.g., victim, observer, or beneficiary) affect their emotional or behavioral responses to unfairness. For instance, the chapter maintains that beneficiaries often act to prevent unfair advantage (e.g., sharing more in economic games), whereas victims may lose their trust in others and, instead, focus solely on themselves. Chapter 10, then, discusses how cognition and motivation can modulate responses to injustice. In essence, the chapter mentions that people with experiential mindsets may have automatic reactions (e.g., blaming a victim), whereas people with rationalistic mindsets make more deliberate judgments (e.g., blaming when just-world beliefs are strong).

Part III of the book covers chapters 11-14, each of which explores a distinct yet interconnected form of justice. Chapter 11 focuses on distributive justice by explaining that fairness in outcomes can lead to reactions from dissatisfaction to protest (e.g., students disagreeing with grades they deem unfair). In a related vein, chapter 12 turns to procedural justice. This chapter revolves around fair processes that can lessen negative emotions even when results are disappointing (e.g., employees accepting promotions given through transparent evaluations or having a voice in the process). Chapter 13 proceeds with an analysis of retributive justice, which posits that punishment is primarily impelled by moral indignation upon committing an offense in order to strike a balance in the society. As opposed to the 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' notion of retributive justice (p. 116), chapter 14 argues that this form of justice should be superseded by restorative justice by repairing harm rather than inflicting punishment across micro (dyadic), meso (triadic), and macro (societal) levels.

Part IV covers chapters 15-21, each analyzing the role of justice across various spheres. Authors in chapter 15 maintain that what people consider "fair" is heavily influenced by their political beliefs. For instance, conservatives tend to view inequality as a result of effort and merit, whereas liberals tend to associate it with equality. Extending this discussion to welfare systems, chapter 16 argues that social-democratic regimes focuses upon creating equal opportunities for their citizens, whereas liberal systems accentuate personal responsibility or individual achievement (e.g., Scandinavian childcare policies reducing class barriers).

Moreover, chapter 17 is associated with justice in workplaces by arguing that fair leadership and transparent pay decisions can be conducive to maintaining trust and motivation. Justice within families, discussed in chapter 18, is deemed a complex juxtaposition of equality, equity, and need in intimate relationships. The crux of the problem, the chapter argues, lies in the unequal division of unpaid labor (housework and childcare) due largely to the deep-seated gender norms.

Chapter 19 turns to education (primarily in Western contexts) and casts light on persistent inequalities in tracking, grading, and teacher-student interactions. Moving from the macro- to micro-educational spheres, the chapter focuses on the distribution of: (a) right to education; (b) educational places; (c) pedagogy; (d) grading; and (e) teacher-student

[Downloaded from johepal.com on 2026-11-11]

[DOI: 10.66224/johepal.7.1.132]

relations (e.g., respect, attention, care). The authors of the chapter subscribe to the notion that micro-level decisions by "gatekeepers" can inadvertently lead to the inequalities that already exist in society and negatively influence students' perceptions of fairness. The next chapter, chapter 20, revolves around environmental justice. The chapter takes the view that fairness across nations and generations can (and should) lead to prompt global cooperation and endeavor to protect our planet. The part then culminates with chapter 21, which links the idea of justice back to its evolutionary origins, where even primates resolutely resist unequal treatment (e.g., chimpanzees rejecting smaller rewards).

Bridging theory with practice, part V demonstrates how justice is embedded in historical events, societal institutions, and the material conditions of life. Chapter 22 argues that justice and morality are two sides of one coin in that fairness judgments are controlled by the economist, politician, or theologian in a given society. Chapter 23 explains that procedural fairness eventuates in legitimacy and cooperation, as is seen in civil rights activism at Spelman College. Chapters 24 and 25 examine 'archives'; the chapter contends that the process of selecting and interpreting historical records can either reinforce existing inequities or be used to amplify marginalized voices (e.g., records of apartheid workers or LGBT education history). Chapter 26, finally, brings these ideas to life by explaining how the U.S. fought for same-sex marriage ideologies. The chapter depicts how tenacious activism and public attitudes coalesced to transform not just the legal recognition of families, but the everyday lives and rights of people from the LGBTQ+ community.

Final Words

Overall, the volume is written primarily for researchers, graduate (and higher-level undergraduate) students, and instructors in social sciences who seek to fathom how justice intertwines with different cultures, power, and human experience. As such, the main argument of the volume lies in its wide-ranging amalgam of complex theoretical and empirical research. The editors and chapter authors skillfully promulgate these ideas of justice in a myriad of disciplines, including education; in essence, they empirically weave philosophical concepts into these various spheres to accentuate the real-world application of the 'conceptual' justice. Despite its deep and sometimes complex ideas, the book should be highly praised in that it reads smoothly across its 26 chapters, which renders it a valuable reference for both academic study and real-world application, especially in the context of (higher) education.

The main limitation of the volume, however, lies in its chiefly Western-centric orientation, which could have been strengthened if more compelling arguments (and rationales) had been proposed concerning social justice (or the lack thereof) in non-Western societies, particularly in higher education and governance contexts. Even more striking is that ever since the publication of the book, the literature has been surprisingly silent on the implementation of social justice theories in non-Western higher education contexts, with very limited work to date (e.g., Zhaleh et al., 2025). Hence, future researchers are encouraged to extend these frameworks to diverse non-Western institutional settings to elucidate how (in)justice (and its various forms as explicated in part III of the volume) is perceived and enacted in tertiary education settings. Likewise, future researchers are urged to address the political unrest and the current traumatic war conditions in the Middle East

[Downloaded from johepal.com on 2026-11-11]

[DOI: 10.66224/johepal.7.1.132]

and their effects on (higher) education stakeholders with the sole purpose of ameliorating a just educational condition for all the stakeholders involved. This is because as Cammarota and Romero (2011) judiciously put it, "achieving an egalitarian world with safe, vibrant neighborhoods that support healthy, positive young identities" is what higher education should consider even amidst such war conditions (p. 490).

All told, this volume ingeniously juxtaposes philosophical and empirical research in an array of fields. By showing the current state of the field and pinpointing the gaps, each chapter creates unique avenues for future avid (higher education) researchers to conduct both quantitative and qualitative studies on social justice phenomena. As such, not only researchers but also educators and policymakers can find this volume both intellectually thought-provoking and fruitful in practice.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

Funding

No funding was received for completing this book review.

Human Participants

This work (book review) does not involve human subject participation that would otherwise necessitate Institutional Review Board approval.

Originality Note

This book review is the author's original work.

Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement

The authors claimed that there is "No Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies" in preparing this research.

[Downloaded from johepal.com on 2026-11-11]

[DOI: 10.66224/johepal.7.1.132]

References

Cammarota, J., & Romero, A. (2011). Participatory action research for high school students: Transforming policy, practice, and the personal with social justice education. *Educational Policy, 25* (3), 488-506. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904810361722

Zhaleh, K., Estaji, M., & Chory, R. M. (2025). Justice and fairness are not the same construct: Evidence from revalidating the Teacher Classroom Justice Scale on university EFL students in Iran. *Teaching English Language, 19*(1), 41-80. https://www.teljournal.org/article_214026.html

Mr. Mohammad Reza Montazeri is a PhD student at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. Mohammad Reza has published several studies on Vocabulary Acquisition, Formulaic Language, Corpus Linguistics, Authorial Identity, Positive Psychology, and EAP in top-tier journals, such as LTR, IRAL, and so forth. He has also presented at several international conferences in various countries, including the United States, Canada, and Iran. Mohammad Reza was recently awarded the 2026 Lynne Young ALDS Graduate Award in recognition of his academic excellence and research contributions to the School of Linguistics and Language Studies at Carleton University. I Apart from being an Applied Linguistics researcher, an ESL teacher, and an IELTS instructor, Mohammad Reza serves as an official CELPIP rater, which is a high-stakes language test in Canada.

[Downloaded from johepal.com on 2026-11-11]

[DOI: 10.66224/johepal.7.1.132]

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) which allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator.