

## Epistemic Injustice, Open Access, and Citational Justice\*

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### Commentary

Ford and Alemneh (2022) discuss *epistemic injustice* in their recent analysis on management of scholarly communications, framed in the context of disparities between scholars in high-income countries (HIC) and those in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). The authors focus “on those injustices affecting scholars who find themselves outside of the core research countries or high-income countries often found in the Global North”. Practical obstacles experienced by LMIC scholars when consuming, producing, and sharing communications are summarized in Table 1 (ibid. p. 67). Theoretical frameworks for epistemic injustice are summarized in Table 2 (ibid. p. 69) with their names and definitions. Listed here in alphabetic order, these categories of epistemic injustice include: apartheid of knowledge, contributory injustice, discriminatory epistemic injustice, distributive epistemic injustice, epistemic alienation, hermeneutical injustice, and testimonial injustice.

This commentary considers plagiarism and other forms of misconduct in academia and scholarly communications as another prevalent and problematic (in the sense of harmful) form of epistemic injustice. Plagiarism, combined with the willful disregard and intentional refusal to cite the published literature, remains another kind of epistemic injustice that involves both discriminatory and distributive forms of inequity and absence of fairness. Idea-laundering plagiarism and idea-bleaching censorship (S. K. Taswell et al. 2020), which involves feigning ignorance of the original author-scholars as if they do not exist and as if their historical papers were never published, derives from hierarchical structures of power-dominated and money-dominated control by rich groups of poor groups. This kind of injustice can and does occur between scholars at organizations all of which are located in the same HIC. Thus, the definition for this kind of epistemic injustice does *not* require it to be perpetrated by scholars located only in HIC against those located only in LMIC. Some academicians rich in money and power dominate, control and exploit victims poor in money and power, regardless of the victims’ skin color, gender persuasion, religious or ethnic origin, or current geographic location, North or South, East or West.

Therefore, plagiarism and misappropriation of the published literature can be considered another form of both discriminatory and distributive injustice within a catalogue of different kinds of epistemic injustice. Consider an interpretation of epistemic injustice to be most generally defined as the exploitation of the poor (those without power and money) by the rich (those with power and money) on matters concerning the production, consumption, and sharing of knowledge,

epistemics, epistemology, and scholarly communications. This interpretation can be considered inclusive of other perspectives whether geopolitical colonialism, ethnoreligious tribalism, gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or the power hierarchy between so-called ‘prestigious versus non-prestigious’ institutions, where the latter distinction can be simply correlated with the wealth, endowment, money, and/or number and size of research grants at those institutions.

Regardless of perspective on definitions for epistemic injustice, it is rare that those persons *without* power and money find themselves in a situation where they are the ones guilty of dominating, exploiting, or discriminating against other persons *with* power and money. How else do we explain the common expression about the societal phenomenon by which the “rich get richer and the poor get poorer”? Meanwhile, the persistence of kleptocracies with oligarchs and plutocracies with zillionaires continues to threaten the survival of true democracies with social democratic movements. Whenever minority rule has taken hold and oppressed a majority citizenry, that has occurred only in situations when the minority rule has been maintained by a corrupt kleptocracy led by autocratic dictators from Hitler and Stalin to Putin and Trump who rule by imprisonment and execution of their opponents and inciting violence against and murder of their opposition.

For democracy to survive, we must maintain the free flow of information with open access for all citizens of planet Earth to that information without the interference of any kind of epistemic injustice. Therefore, as excerpted from C. Taswell et al. (2022), we define *citational justice* with the following code of conduct:

- Giving credit where credit is due and respecting the historical record of published literature.
- Assuming individual personal and professional ownership of the duty and responsibility as a teacher or student to search, cite, reference, and discuss the original work of the original authors in open scientific debate of the artifacts, data, metadata, documents, and content published in online and offline media, repositories, conferences, journals, books, and libraries.
- Refraining from plagiarism; refraining from the silencing, gaslighting, and ghosting of the victims of plagiarism; refusing to participate in elaborate fiefdoms, collusion rings, citation cartels, and other forms of organized fraud in academia and scholarly research communications and publishing.
- Collaborating with other scholars to correct mistakes that appear in the published literature so that science remains a verifiable, reproducible, accountable and self-correcting endeavor that benefits all of us who believe in defending, protecting, and preserving life on planet Earth.

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