

**Epistemic Injustice
and Legitimacy in
U.S. Doctoral
Education: A
Systematic Review
of Literature**

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Our Research Team





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How did we get here?

Epistemic Injustice and Legitimacy in U.S. Doctoral Education: A Systematic Review of Literature

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Epistemic injustice is a condition where knowers and knowledge claims are

What is Epistemic Injustice?

(Frank, 2014; Dotson, 2011, 2020; Nikolaidis, 2021; Nikolaidis & Thompson, 2023)



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- When an **evaluative community/person dismisses a knower *and/or* knowledge** (Dotson, 2011; Frank, 2013; Fricker, 2007).

Three Forms of Epistemic Injustice

(Frank, 2014; Dotson, 2011, 2020; Nikolaidis, 2021; Nikolaidis & Thompson, 2023)

1. **Testimonial:** dismissal of **a knower** based on **identity-related bias(es)** (see Hernandez, 2021; Ortega, 2015; Turner, 2000 for examples).

2. **Hermeneutical:** dismissal of **knowledge/knower** based on an evaluative community's/person's **given/dominant epistemic resources** (see Gonzales et al., 2024 for examples).

3. **Contributory:** dismissal of **knowledge/knower** based on an evaluative community's/person's **refusal to acknowledge and engage other available epistemic resources** (see Dotson, 2011; 2014; Go, 2020, Grant, 2021; Hernandez, 2021; Stanley, 2007 for examples).



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- Women, People of Color, and other non-dominant groups describe academia, including graduate school, as hostile and incongruent with their orientations to and ways of being in the world.
- Scholarship has long suggested that this incongruence spills over to academic matters, **including how grad students are socialized and supported in their knowledge production efforts.**

Guiding Research Questions

(1) Does a select body of peer-reviewed scholarship concerning doctoral education in the United States provide evidence of epistemic injustice?

(2) If so, what can be learned from these studies about the manifestation of epistemic injustice in doctoral education?

Research Design: Systematic Review

- Systematic reviews are
 - guided by stringent search and inclusion protocols and informed by a theoretical or conceptual framework (Alexander, 2020; Gough et al., 2017; Hart, 2018; Jesson et al., 2011).
 - more rule-bound and targeted than descriptive reviews of the literature (e.g., uses strict search and inclusion rules).

Search Process and Rules

1. We bound our search to 2000–2020 because racial and gender diversity in U.S. graduate education increased during this time (Zhou, 2022), as did the research on historically minoritized students' doctoral experiences (Espino, 2014; Gardner, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Ramirez, 2011).
2. We used JSTOR and a few targeted journal searches to source literature.
3. We searched across all disciplinary fields (e.g., humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, applied fields).
4. We limited our search to peer-reviewed journals published in the English language.
5. We adopted and retained a predetermined set of search terms and search-term combinations that had yielded relevant results during a pilot study (see Leal et al., 2020).

Inclusion Rules

Is the article empirical,
meaning was it based on data?

Does the article
address doctoral
students and/or
doctoral education
process in the U.S.?

Does the article
address teaching,
learning, mentoring,
research training?

Data Set, after inclusion protocols



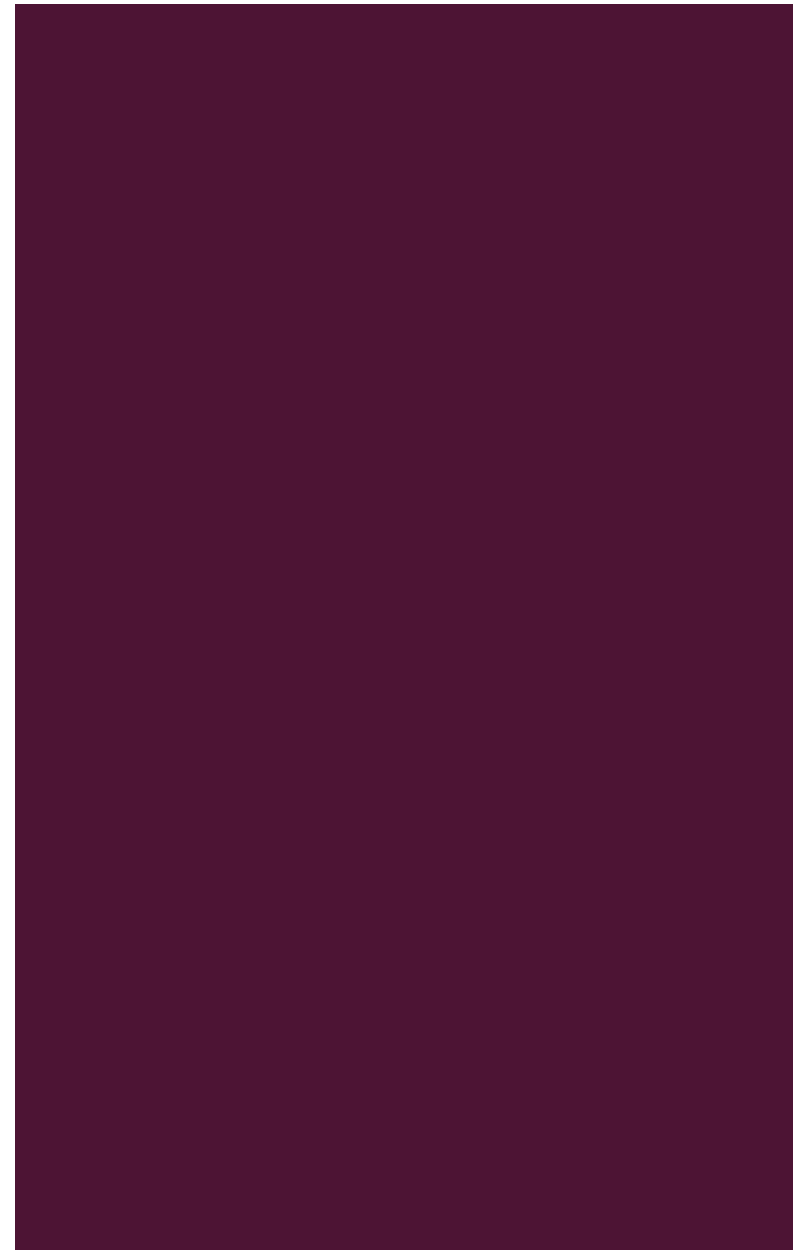
Analytic Approach

- Structural
- Deductive
- Inductive
 - Constant group check-ins



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Findings



Presence of Epistemic In/justice

Form of Epistemic Injustice

Presence in Data Set

- Testimonial Injustice
16 papers surfaced one or more examples of testimonial injustice.
- Hermeneutical Injustice
13 manuscripts held evidence of hermeneutical injustice.
- Contributory Injustice
7 papers provided clear evidence of contributory injustice.

Examples of Epistemic In/justice

Form of Epistemic Injustice

Example from Data Set

- Testimonial Injustice

A student recently came up to me and was like, “I think that in lab when white students . . . speak up our ideas are, you know, everyone likes them. But then we notice that when minority students speak up, it is like “No, that’s not a good idea.” I thought it was so great she was going to bring it up to the professor . . . I feel like I’m more at risk for being misperceived than she would be. (p. 273)

- Hermeneutical Injustice

- Contributory Injustice

Examples of Epistemic In/justice

Form of Epistemic Injustice

Example from Data Set

- Testimonial Injustice

- Hermeneutical Injustice

“My work with language revitalization did not fit the mold, I lacked guidance to propel me, and both of my co-chairs came from outside my major. It was hard bridging course work.” Eventually, the student was relieved “when the professors on my committee put aside their department political differences to help me” (Fox, 2013, p. 33).

- Contributory Injustice

Examples of Epistemic In/justice

Form of Epistemic Injustice

Example from Data Set

- Testimonial Injustice

- Hermeneutical Injustice

- Contributory Injustice

students in a graduate seminar were told that if they had not included a particular anthropologist in their papers, they were “stupid,” a comment that was immediately retracted but which had done damage regardless. Students in the seminar said that the comment was outrageous (*sic*) and extreme, but many also said that the sentiment expressed was typical of their graduate experience, even if most professors and students left such words unspoken. (p. 55)

What were the specific rules that set epistemic injustice in motion?

Rule

Definition/Manifestation

- Rule 1: Independence, Being a Self Starter
Doctoral students were socialized, rewarded, and legitimized for acting as confident, outspoken, and independent self-starters.
- Rule 2: Prestige Merits Status as a Knower
Faculty & student peers used prestige (e.g., academic lineage, scholarly awards, professional aspirations) to discern a doctoral student's worthiness as a knower.
- Rule 3: Knowers and Knowledge Production Are Disciplinary Bound
Students learned in rather explicit ways that the legitimacy of knowers and knowledge production is disciplinary bound. Professors (and peers) sometimes willfully refused to think beyond disciplinary norms as they made judgments about students'/peers' work.

Key Take Aways & Future Directions

- We found evidence of all three forms of epistemic injustice—testimonial, hermeneutic, and contributory across all academic fields.
 - This means there is a socialization process laden with epistemic injustice and compliance.
- We read graduate students' recounting of how faculty and/or peers shut down their status as knowers and /or denied the legitimacy of their knowledge claims.
 - Epistemic injustice is often racialized/gendered or has disparate effects on People of Color and women, *but so too are the rules!*
- These graduate students often commented on how hurtful these exchanges were in the moment and in the long-term.
- There is need for professional and disciplinary societies to dig deeper and consider the limits of their epistemic imagination and how such limits shapes doctoral student socialization within their field.
- More empirical/first-hand research across fields and disciplines is needed.