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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Five Faces of Citational Injustice: Applying the Work of Iris Marion Young

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This article explores the non-distributive conception of justice found in the work of feminist political philosopher Iris Marion Young (1949–2006), particularly in her landmark volume *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990). As laid out in that work, Young's "five faces of oppression"—exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence—are central to the issues posed by citational justice scholarship and open up new ways of understanding *how* citational injustice is unjust. By connecting Young's work with questions of citational justice, this article seeks to develop a nuanced conception of injustice as oppression, and thus as a matter of radical progressive politics, rather than merely a question of the (re)distribution of goods, which is too easily co-opted to the capitalist logics of the corporatized university. The article concludes with some thoughts around reading and generative AI in academic work.

Keywords: citational justice; citational politics; political theory; theory of justice

> Citing, annotating, referencing – these practices are central to all forms of academic work. They are how we join the ongoing conversation of scholars, scientists and researchers, and how we contribute to the accumulation and revision of knowledge.
>
> — Aurélie Carlier, Hang Nguyen, Lidwien Hollanders, Nicole Basaraba, Sally Wyatt, and Sharon Anyango, "Aspirational Metrics – A Guide for Working Towards Citational Justice"

Introduction

One of the main concerns of citational politics has been to undermine or disrupt existing power relations within the academy, research, and scholarly publishing (Pereira 2024). However, the hegemonic liberalism of academia[1] obscures power relations, sometimes to the extent of denying that hierarchies and inequalities are evidence of structural power relations at all—they may be evidence of individual bias, or errors, or shortsightedness, but they are not evidence of widespread social power imbalance. The work of political theorist Iris Marion Young (1949–2006) provides an important counterbalance to the dominant liberal paradigm that sees power not as something structurally produced or reproduced but as something that individual agents possess, making power imbalances and inequality not something structural to be dismantled but simply something improperly distributed. In *Responsibility for Justice* (2011), for example, Young explores the idea that viewing marginalization or oppression as bad luck rather than the result of structural inequality leads people to adopt what Judith Shklar calls a "passively unjust" position in which the causes of oppression are mysterious and incapable of being changed, thereby absolving agents of any responsibility to change the social situation. For Young, "to judge that a suffering or disadvantage is unjust . . . implies that we acknowledge the circumstances as grounded at least partly in institutions and the social

[1] By hegemonic liberalism, I do not mean the right-wing idea that post-secondary education has been captured by left-liberalism (which I see as a North American political phenomenon); rather, I mean the longstanding ideology of capitalism that runs from John Locke to John Rawls and beyond and that encompasses both today's liberals and moderate conservatives.

processes they generate. When we acknowledge such social causes of suffering or disadvantage, we thereby at least implicitly recognize an obligation to try to improve those social processes" (2011, 33). Once we have recognized that oppression is structural, it becomes incumbent upon us to change those structures, rather than merely seeking to change individual situations or behaviours.

Young's work is not frequently referred to in the literature on citational justice, but given contemporary debates over justice ("culture wars," "cancel culture," free speech and expression, etc.), Young's work is at least as relevant now as it was thirty years ago. In this article, I want to explore how her important 1990 text *Justice and the Politics of Difference* can be applied to today's concerns around citational justice. I will look first at the metaphor of scholarly conversation as a free and unconstrained site of academic participation where injustice takes the form of unequal access to or participation in the conversation, exemplifying what Young calls the "distributive paradigm" of justice. I will then discuss Young's critique and displacement of distribution as the dominant paradigm, looking in detail at her conception of oppression, including the notion of cultural imperialism, all of which have major implications for our understanding of citational justice. Finally, I will work through Young's "five faces of oppression" to show how they apply to contemporary citation justice debates. I will conclude by briefly discussing the relationship of citation justice to the decline of engaged reading in the corporatized university, exacerbated by the colonization of knowledge work by generative artificial intelligence (AI).

Before moving on, I want to make explicit my own positioning with respect to structural oppression and the politics of knowledge production. As a cisgendered, heterosexual man from the working-class North End of Winnipeg, my first introduction to radical politics of any kind was through Marxism, in particular the kind of class-only vulgar Marxism that is all too common in the Global North. As my engagement with radical political philosophy has changed over time, I have become increasingly interested in the ways Marxism can intersect, and not compete with, the politics of identity and difference. This form of Marxism comes out of the tradition of Antonio Gramsci and other "Western Marxists" (Anderson 1976), the work of cultural theorists like Fredric Jameson and Stuart Hall, and more recent Marxist scholarship on race, gender, sexuality, identity, Indigeneity, and non-Western societies such as Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke's work on transgender Marxism (2021) and Kevin B. Anderson's engagement with Marx's late work on gender and ethnography (2025).[2] These forms of Marxism retain the centrality of historical materialism while engaging and taking seriously issues of culture, politics, identity, and difference. Thus, I want to insist that I do not find Young's (feminist, political) approach in any way antagonistic towards my own understanding of progressive Marxism. In this sense, then, this article is an attempt—however meagre—at conscientious engagement with work outside "my own" tradition of Marxist thought.

I am also a librarian, which means I have a particular professional and disciplinary perspective on the politics of knowledge production as well as the structuring effects that capitalist society and the corporatization of academia have on information seeking, reading, writing, and citation. Far from seeing librarianship as it tends to see itself, as the neutral "handmaiden" to bourgeois liberal democracy, I see librarianship as capable of making progressive, even radical, political commitments while remaining true to the work being done every day in libraries around the world.

Universities and the Scholarly Conversation

The neoliberalization[3] and corporatization of universities over the past four decades—the extension of capitalist logic into educational institutions through what Marxists call the process of subsumption—has

[2] In recent years, class-reductionist Marxism has been resurgent in the form of a dogmatic Marxist-Leninism in response to the rise of right-wing populism worldwide (Harman 2018). However, even within the Western Marxist tradition, culturally oriented Marxism has often come under attack by more orthodox Marxists who feel that a focus on culture, politics, and ideas risks displacing class entirely (and thereby becoming "post-Marxism"). Bob Jessop and others criticized Hall's engagement with the cultural project of Thatcherism (see Hall 1988), and Jameson remarked that his interest in the "cultural logic of late capitalism" was seen by other Marxists as an abandonment (even a betrayal) of Marxism altogether (1991, 298). Both Hall and Jameson have sometimes been called post-Marxists, in my view incorrectly. More recently, Anderson argues that Marx's inheritors from Engels on obscured the wider social and cultural importance of Marx's later research, resulting in a "narrow focus . . . on capital and class to the exclusion of other issues" (2025, 7), which Anderson's own work is an attempt to overcome. This narrow focus in the years after Marx's death led to what is sometimes called "vulgar Marxism" due to its tendencies towards economic determinism and its view of cultural and intellectual phenomena as of only secondary importance (see, for example, Baring 2023).

[3] The word neoliberalism can be used in a variety of senses and its definition is contested. Following Harvey (1997), I use it to mean a new "regime of accumulation" (124) that developed from the mid-1970s, involving a return to free-market fundamentalism, entrepreneurialism, and the extension of corporate logics throughout the capitalist world. This marked a change from the post-war/Cold War liberalism, the political form of the long Keynesian economic boom from 1945 to 1975, which supported a large bureaucratic welfare state to supply social services and to stave off the perceived totalitarian threat from the Soviet Union (see Moyn 2023). Neoliberalism is one of the historically specific forms the liberal ideology has taken; in this article, I refer to liberalism when I mean the overarching ideology of bourgeois capitalism, and neoliberalism as the specific form this ideology has taken since the 1970s.

eroded any notion of structural power from the dominant discourse of higher education, restricting the scope of critical, radical, or progressive resistance and activism in the name of social justice to questions of the distribution of participation (in scholarly debate, citations, grant funding, etc.).[4] In cultural terms, this erosion was accomplished by making discourses of individual success, entrepreneurialism, the instrumentality of education for job training, competition, and the commodification and transactionality of higher education hegemonic within academia and society at large. The primacy of individualistic thinking within higher education has made it more and more difficult to recognize structural issues and to build solidarity and collective projects to challenge them. The erasure of structural power relations aims to make academics passively unjust in the sense noted above, conditioning them to believe that academic freedom and the rules of scholarly conversation are always already sites of free enquiry navigated solely on the basis of evidence and argument. Academics' and administrators' meritocratic view of scholarship attempts to ensure that the hegemonic liberalism of academia remains untroubled by any feeling of responsibility for justice on the part of academics themselves.

Central to this view of academic participation is the idea that the scholarly conversation may be more or less *externally* (and illegitimately) constrained by, say, government policy or social pressure groups (while always holding fast to an ideal of academic freedom) but that it tries to be internally neutral, egalitarian, and open to all participants, taking arguments and contributions on their own merit, with no regard to the positionality of the contributor. The mechanics of scholarly publishing, library infrastructure, licensing, and citation are an integral part of this conversation as the infrastructure that enables decentralized access to and participation in the "Great Conversation" (Guédon 2014),[5] and so citational justice has become a central element in the broader quest for justice within the scholarly conversation as a whole. The notion of scholarly conversation as an ideal speech situation presupposing an "unrestricted communication community" (Habermas 1990, 88) is precisely what is challenged in critical discussions of citational justice.[6] In this respect, Young's insistence on the structural inequality of contemporary society, a situation that cannot be remedied by better distribution of goods and opportunities or by marginalized people taking personal responsibility for their oppression, is highly relevant to discussions of citational justice. In Young's work, both distribution and responsibility stand as criteria for social and political (and I would say academic) participation within a hegemonic framework of individual agency and autonomy of which she is deeply critical.

The notion of free, equal, and unconstrained conversation is not only one of the abiding metaphors of liberal scholarship (ACRL 2016; Keener 2019); it is also central to much Western political thought. Conservatives such as Michael Oakeshott ([1962]1991) as much as staunch liberals like Richard Rorty (1989) deploy it to exemplify both the model and proper outcome of the right to free speech/free expression (see Popowich 2024c). The idea of free conversation, irrespective of subject and social position and unconstrained by authority or power, goes back to the pre-history of liberal thought. In the work of Francis Bacon (in the *Novum Organum* of 1620) and Galileo Galilei (whose 1632 *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* was banned by the Catholic Church), for example, we find challenges to the authority—sacrosanct in medieval philosophy—of both Aristotle and the Catholic Church (see Rutherford 2006), and a vision of free conversation resistant to or immune from authority remains central to hegemonic liberal politics today. In the academy, the vision of unconstrained, free scholarly conversation lies at the heart of many of the free speech/cancel culture debates, holding to a view of scholarship as free from the authority of either the mob or the state (i.e., unstructured by the power formerly invested in medieval sources of *auctoritas*). But where, for the scholastic philosophers like Aquinas, the authority of Aristotle and the Church was openly admitted, liberal scholarship today takes from liberal politics the notion of a neutral, objective, *free* observer gathering the best empirical evidence and drawing rock-solid inferential conclusions. Power and authority are not absent but erased from this picture of scholarship and the academic enterprise, not accidentally but by design, in conformance with the requirements of liberalism as the ideology of capitalism and justifying its oppressions.

The contemporary version of liberal scholarship as immune from questions of power and oppression includes an outright rejection of what is variously thought of as ideology (Hands 2023), standpoint

[4] For examples of this dominant discourse, see Popowich (2024a).

[5] Paul Wouters's 1999 doctoral dissertation, "The Citation Culture," traces the development of citation practices through the lens of the sociology of science, supporting the notion that as communication and scientific practice expanded, citation culture became embedded in the conversation among and between researchers.

[6] The normative ideal of scholarship as an unrestricted communication community has come under attack from a variety of angles, not least of which is Miranda Fricker's idea of standpoint epistemology (Fricker 1999), which views knowledge itself as subject to one's position within a social structure. This idea is contrary to the fundamental liberal notion of free and unconstrained rationality found in, for example, Immanuel Kant's conception of Enlightenment and Rawls's ideal theory of justice.

epistemology (Widdowson 2023), or other forms of perspectivism or social construction (often, today, dismissed as irredeemably "woke" by the right), in favour of a universal and univocal conception of truth as accurate correspondence with reality.[7] In this view, it does not matter *who* is cited; it only matters what factual truth is being referenced because "the truth" (singular and universal) is independent of ideology or standpoint, and deviation from the truth is nothing but error. These debates are bound up with broader concerns around scientific realism and the postmodern challenge to correspondence theories of truth, which is beyond the scope of this article.[8] However, it should be noted that contemporary versions of "value-neutral" scientific objectivity are a mainstay of anti-"woke" activism and the right-wing positioning of the intellectual dark web (see, for example, Finlayson 2021).

In the "textbook version" of scientific method (which, Donna Haraway notes, "no practitioner of the high scientific arts would be caught dead *acting on*" [1988, 576]), citations simply and unproblematically reflect the impartial evidence gathered and deployed in making claims and drawing inferences.[9] Power does not enter into this vision of scholarly method because the idea of authority is more or less explicitly excluded from it. Participants in the scholarly conversation are assumed to conform to universal, homogeneous liberal subjectivity, their freedom maintained by their academic status (with or without a formal right to academic freedom) and the academy's vision of itself as a space independent of and autonomous from social and political authority. Even if colleges and universities were at one time free from such structures (a counterfactual), the corporatization of higher education means that all the structures of oppression integral to racial, patriarchal, settler-colonial capitalism are present and at play in any and all academic activity.[10] It is for this reason that social justice critiques of power, authority, hierarchy, and oppression are now important facets of academic life and scholarship itself. The influx of academics from previously excluded, marginalized, or oppressed communities, beginning with working-class students and women after the Second World War, has dislodged the universal liberal subject—presumed to be white, male, cisgendered, and heterosexual—from an undisputed primacy as the neutral observer of empirical evidence in academic discourse to a condition of having to struggle with or against other subjectivities.[11] This process has brought questions of social justice into the heart of ostensibly pure and free intellectual activity.

Citational justice, then, refers to the question of how, why, and under what authority certain perspectives, positions, and voices are included in, excluded from, or constrained in their participation in any given scholarly conversation (Mott and Cockayne 2017; Dadze-Arthur and Mangai 2024). Once we reject the idea that such conversation is not riddled with power and oppression, who counts as worth reading, acknowledging, and engaging with becomes a directly political question, related not only to issues of acceptable academic methodology but to broader questions of social justice. In order to engage with the idea of citational justice, it follows that we must have a sense of what constitutes justice and oppression so that we can develop both a conception of justice through which to understand citational justice more specifically and a set of particular facets of oppression that, I will argue, structure and constrain who is read and engaged with in scholarly conversation.[12] The next section discusses how Young's conception of social justice rejects a distributive model of justice and involves two specific ways of naming *in*justice: as oppression, defined as institutional constraints on self-development, and as domination, defined as institutional constraints on self-determination.

[7] The correspondence theory of truth is still prevalent even within humanities discourse; in a recent survey of philosophers, for example, 48 percent subscribed to the correspondence theory of truth, 72 percent were scientific realists, and 69 percent were moral cognitivists (Bourget and Chalmers 2023). Scholars like Rorty, who denied the correspondence theory, are in the minority, and Rorty (1989) still valorized the idea of free, unconstrained conversation even without the correspondence theory.

[8] This is not to suggest that standpoint theories or theories of ideology are monolithic. Sandra Harding (2009) has reflected on the fact that standpoint theories remain contested and controversial even among standpoint theorists, while Donna Haraway (1988) early on challenged the idea that standpoint theories could not aspire to some level of objectivity. Marxists have disagreed on questions of science and ideology since the death of Marx.

[9] We have to distinguish here between citation as the mechanism by which the location of a specific reference can be found and citation as the intertextual weaving together of evidence and testimony in the form of other voices. It is hard to see how the mechanism of reference location can bear the weight of supporting or maintaining social justice in the way that the intertextual form can and must. Throughout this article, I will use citation in the second sense.

[10] I do not wish to suggest that such structures are uncontested or unchallenged or subject to countervailing political positions and resistance, or that the process of subsumption has been successfully completed. Simply that even oppositional, progressive, or radical orientations within academia are necessarily informed by (because opposed to) corporate, neoliberal logics.

[11] This is a complex sociological question, but the general outlines of the transition from a white, male, heterosexual default in academia can be traced through the work of cultural theorists (Hall 1990) and feminists (Brunsdon 1996), and the post-structural "decentering" of bourgeois grand narratives (Giroux 1990). The empirical question of the increase of marginalized students and faculty in universities can be seen, for example, in the effects of the G. I. Bill (Clark 1998; Stanley 2003) and class and racial integration (Anderson 1993; Hutcheson, Gasman, and Sanders-McMurtry 2011; Burkholder 2010) in higher education.

[12] Young's work has been applied to citational justice before, in the context of human-computer interaction (Kumar and Karusala 2021).

Young's Displacement of Distribution

In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), Young rejects the idea that *distribution* of social benefits and constraints should be the only component of justice, a view dominant in liberal political philosophy. Justice in that view consists of a fair distribution of moral and material goods. If we assume that we live in a society in which individuals are always-already free, undominated, and unoppressed, the only question that remains is how to divide the goods and products of a properly functioning political economy. Young insists, however, that justice has more to do with domination and oppression than with distribution. Domination and oppression cannot be assumed *a priori* to be absent from what we call liberal democratic societies and institutions. This shift from distribution to domination, Young writes, raises social questions that are often ignored in political theorizing, questions of decision-making, division of labour, and culture. More than this, however, Young's move makes the differences between social groups and the role of difference in structures of oppression explicit: "Typically," she states, "philosophical theories of justice have operated from a social ontology that has no room for a concept of social groups" (1990, 3). In contrast, she "argue[s] that where social group differences exist and some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those group differences in order to undermine oppression" (Young 1990, 3).

The social ontology Young challenges is liberalism's fundamental atomistic individualism, the idea that there are no social groups, there are only (free) individuals. In other words, it is an ontology of supposedly universal but isolated, atomic, and autonomous bourgeois subjectivity. For Young, this individualism requires that theories of justice abstract as much as possible from concrete social situations to invest the theory with a timeless, universal legitimacy that supports and maintains the liberal political order. That this social ontology and its theories of justice support and maintain the power of a single dominant social group—white bourgeois men—exposes their ideological nature as they centre a single (and partial) authoritative perspective in the name of universality. As long as a society is presumed to be "flat"—that is, made up of undifferentiated individuals all equally free, politically, morally, and economically—then by definition such a society cannot be structured or differentiated into groups. A society of atomic individuals can have no structural difference, no institutionalized hierarchies, and no systemic inequalities. Any inequalities that exist must be, in a sense, accidental,[13] to be mitigated (if necessary) by a technical redistribution of goods, rights, and opportunities. Such theories of society and justice have no room for domination and oppression, structural features of a social landscape for which redistribution is at best inadequate and at worst a guarantor of the continued hegemony of the entrenched power of the dominant social group(s).

In their landmark paper on citational justice, Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne argue that critical feminist and anti-racist scholarship "has drawn direct attention to the continued underrepresentation and marginalization of women, people of color, and those othered through white heteromasculine hegemony" by concentrating on the "politics of knowledge and how particular voices and bodies are persistently left out of the conversation altogether" (2017, 955). There is a temptation to see underrepresentation and marginalization in terms of distribution (Young 1994), but in this article I call this underrepresentation, marginalization, and exclusion an injustice in the sense used by Young, enjoining me to work through in some detail Young's non-distributive conception of justice as well as her notion of the mechanisms by which injustice is enacted, which she called the five faces of oppression.

Young traces what she calls the distributive paradigm of justice back to the work of John Rawls. Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (1971) is credited with renovating liberal political theory in the wake of various challenges to liberalism posed in the late 1960s (the student/worker revolts, anti-colonial movements in places like Algeria and Vietnam, anti-war protests, and some of the new social movements around race, gender, and sexuality). In a retrospective look at political theory from the 1970s to the late 1990s, Young notes that Rawls's *Theory of Justice* was a regrowth of political theory out of the "barren field" of the 1960s, noting that "despite its rhetoric of timelessness, *A Theory of Justice* must be read as a product of the decade that preceded it . . . [mapping] a theoretical terrain from the thicket of demands and responses to the Black civil rights movement and journalistic attention to poverty: social justice" (1997a, 155).[14] The "Cold War liberals" like

[13] Young writes that in the hegemonic American story of social and political progress, "the state and law should express rights only in universal terms applied equally to all, and differences among persons and groups should be a purely accidental and private matter" (1990, 157). Given that science *also* seeks universality, it follows that empiricism should also seek to ignore difference in the matter of ostensibly value-neutral evidence-gathering and citation.

[14] In her study of Rawls, *In the Shadow of Justice*, Katrina Forrester (2019) points out the extent to which anti-war protests influenced Rawls's political philosophy. At the beginning of the 1960s, Rawls considered Jim Crow laws and resistance to them unfit for political discussion, but by the decade's end he and a number of like-minded political philosophers began to see in civil disobedience a "template for philosophical treatments of political action and the obligations of citizens" (Forrester 2019, 41–42). Forrester's account also supports Young's view that Rawls's theory brought communitarian ideas back into individualistic liberalism.

Judith Shklar and Isaiah Berlin rejected progressive views of social justice in the name of defending Western society against totalitarianism, opening the door to minimal-state neoliberalism (Moyn 2023, 39–41). In contrast, Rawls's theory has been understood as "recommending an activist and interventionist role for government not only to promote liberties, but to bring about greater social and economic equality" (Young 1997a, 155).

Equality, however, was primarily understood in terms of fair distribution (Young 1990, 16–17; Rawls [1971] 1999, 9). The influence of Rawls's *Theory of Justice* on subsequent liberal thought made distribution the almost exclusive focus of theorizing around justice (Moyn 2023, 40). Young writes that "most [liberal] theorists take it as given, then, that justice is about distributions. The paradigm assumes a single model for all analyses of justice: all situations in which justice is at issue are analogous to the situation of persons dividing a stock of goods and comparing the size of the portions individuals have. Such a model implicitly assumes that individuals or other agents lie as nodes, points in the social field, among whom larger or smaller bundles of social goods are assigned" (1990, 18). The main issue with this view, according to Young, is that it inscribes the individualist social ontology onto any conception of justice. Individuals stand alone, are unrelated to each other, and the only difference that matters (the only thing that differentiates individuals) is the proportion of social goods they receive.[15] In addition, Young critiques the distributive paradigm for its "static," "pattern oriented" view of society itself, in which all that matters is the end-state configuration after distribution: Justice becomes simply an optimization problem in the distribution of goods, ignoring other vitally important aspects of social justice, identity, and difference.

We can easily see how the distributive paradigm might inform an inadequate conception of citational justice. In a 2022 *Nature* article, Diana Kwon points out (quoting information scientist Cassidy Sugimoto) that "citations are not just a way to acknowledge a person's contributions to research. Because funders and universities commonly consider citation metrics when making decisions about grants, hiring and promotions, citations can have a significant impact on a scholar's career. . . . 'Citations, in many ways, are the currency of the academic market'" (Kwon 2022, 569). When academic practice and knowledge production are organized along market lines, distribution is easily entrenched as the dominant, if not the only, aspect of justice.[16] Indeed, Young writes that the distributive paradigm considers social justice as a matter of "the distribution of material resources, income, or positions of reward or prestige" (1990, 18), and it would be tempting to consider citational justice in these terms. Competition among scholars for resources (grants and other funding, course releases, etc.), income, or prestige (enacted through, for example, tenure and promotion procedures or the distribution of endowed chairs, etc.), made more acute by the corporatization of academia, could reduce citational justice to nothing but a question of the proper end-state of distributions among marginalized scholars. In this view, the proportion of citations given to white, heterosexual, cisgendered men is inequitable only because it prevents others from a greater share of resources, income, or prestige, as seen in the "end-state" configuration of academic competition and reward. And indeed, this is not an entirely incorrect understanding of why we should be concerned with citational justice. But the distributive paradigm is insufficient to capture other, perhaps more important ways in which injustice is being done.

Young writes that while social justice *does* need to address material necessities through redistribution, given that in capitalist society we are all "possessors and consumers" of material goods, we are not *only* possessors and consumers. We are also "doers and actors," and as such "we seek to promote many values of social justice in addition to fairness in the distribution of goods: learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings; participating in forming and running institutions, and receiving recognition for such participation; playing and communicating with others, and expressing our experience, feelings, and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen" (Young 1990, 37). However, "the framework of distribution . . . leads to a deemphasizing of these values and a failure to inquire about the institutional conditions that promote them" (Young 1990, 37). What is unjust about inequitable citation practices is not limited to the distribution of resources, income, or prestige. Citational injustice includes the ways in which some people but not others are able to use their academic skills in socially recognized settings; some people but not others are able to participate in the running of academic institutions, and receive recognition for it;

[15] Within liberal thought there are gradations of individualism, from the atomistic libertarianism of Robert Nozick to the communitarianism of Charles Taylor. All liberals see individuals as socially primary, the locus of moral worth and personal freedom, but disagree on the manner and extent to which social relations ought to mitigate individual agency. By my reading, Young is a communitarian liberal who sees individualistic distributive justice as inadequate but is not wholly against a moderately individualist social ontology. This contrasts with, say, a Marxist/communist ontology which sees individualism not as foundational, but as the products of community and social relationships.

[16] This tendency even risks creeping in to work aimed at realizing citational justice. Amy Earhart, Roopika Risam, and Matthew Bruno (2020) focus on distributive metrics of distribution while acknowledging that such metrics are themselves insufficient to capture the whole picture of citation practice.

and some people but not others are able to communicate their views, express their experiences, and have others listen (or read). Citational *in*justice blocks some scholars from participating in some or all of these aspects of social justice because of who they are or where they come from.[17]

Young sums up the kinds of activities and experiences that *ought* to amount to social justice outside the distributive paradigm as exemplifying certain (political) values of the good life, with social justice concerned with "the degree to which a society contains and supports the institutional conditions necessary for the realization of these values" (1990, 37). The values in question are the ability to develop and exercise capacities and express experience, and the ability to participate in "determining one's action and the conditions of one's action" (Young 1990, 37). For our purposes, then, we can understand citational justice as (1) trying to foster the development and exercise of scholarly capacities among those who are structurally blocked from that development and exercise, and from the expression of their own experience, and (2) the ability both to participate in the scholarly conversation and to have an impact on the academic conditions surrounding that participation (e.g., decision-making and running of academic institutions including journals and universities themselves).

I argue that Western/Northern citational practices are unjust in terms of both oppression and domination. They are *oppressive* because they involve academic processes around, for example, scholarly publishing (editorial decisions, peer review, impact factor, etc.), university processes of tenure and promotion, and collegial governance, which block some scholars but not others from developing and using their "satisfying and expansive" knowledge and skills in academically recognized settings and by inhibiting some scholars' ability to communicate their knowledge and perspectives in ways that will be read. They are *dominating* because scholars are subject to official or unofficial institutional processes at the journal and university levels that block them from "determining their actions or the conditions of their actions" (Young 1990, 31), thus connecting citational justice with questions of academic freedom, collegial governance, and workplace democracy. "Persons," Young writes, "live within structures of domination if other persons or groups"—in this case, editorial boards, peer reviewers, tenure and promotion committees, and academic administrators—"can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their actions" (1990, 38). While oppression and domination overlap, it is important for Young's project that we understand the difference between them and the ways in which they are both differential and intersectional. The vectors along which oppression and domination manifest themselves, according to Young, are not limited to questions of distribution; they also encompass three fields of practice: decision-making, division of labour, and culture (1990, 39). These three areas inform Young's account of the "five faces of oppression" that we turn to now.

Young's Five Faces of Oppression

The ignorance or rejection of the fact that oppression and domination continue to be structural components of the liberal democracies of the Global North is one major obstacle to citational justice. Young remarks that a major political project of anyone who identifies or allies with an oppressed or marginalized group must be "to persuade people that the discourse of oppression makes sense of much of our social experience" (1990, 40). In recent years, discourses of oppression have been rejected not only by right-wing ultra-conservatives but also by staunch liberal centrists and even by some on the left. Generally speaking, any vestiges of oppression not already wiped out by the march of liberal civilization are seen as accidental (for example, in Ronald Dworkin's "luck egalitarianism" [see Arneson 2018]), the result of a few bad apples, ignorance, or error.[18] *Structural* causes of oppression are rejected in the name of a tried-and-true individualist ontology, and manipulation of discourse and cultural representation by the media, corporations, and ideological institutions like universities and libraries is seen as the product of corrupt, tyrannical, or evil individuals rather than a dominating tendency in liberal capitalist society (Mau 2023).

Young argues that we are ill-prepared to keep oppression centre stage because there is no clear agreement on what oppression means. Young accords with common political usage by defining oppression as something that happens to groups, not individuals (when individuals are oppressed it is because they are members of particular groups). When trying to understand the condition of any set of subaltern social groups, she notes, it is impossible to come up with criteria that adequately describe oppression across the

[17] Nancy Fraser has analyzed the relationship between redistribution and recognition, arguing that "only by articulating recognition *and* redistribution can we arrive at a critical-theoretical framework that is adequate to the demands of our age" (1995a, emphasis added). Fraser and Young carried on a debate in the pages of the *New Left Review* over the relationship between recognition and redistribution in questions of justice (Fraser 1995b, 1997; Young 1997b). A more recent exploration of the tension between epistemic and social justice can be found in the work of David Ludwig (2025).

[18] One of the arguments of Young's *Responsibility for Justice* is that if injustice is understood as structural, then the social mechanisms for avoiding collective responsibility for redressing injustice become unsustainable. On the "bad apple" argument, see Aragon and Jaggar (2018) and Sankaran (2021).

whole set. "Consequently," she writes, "the essential causes of the oppression of all these groups have frequently led to fruitless disputes about whose oppression is more fundamental or more grave" (Young 1990, 40). She contends that oppression is not singular or monolithic but in fact describes a family of injustices that she calls the "five faces of oppression": exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Each of these faces affects subaltern groups differently, and individuals can be affected by more than one face at a time in a given context. The edges are fuzzy and overlapping and intersecting, though for analytical reasons it is often clearer to treat them as standalone facets of experience.

Young begins her discussion of the five faces with an analysis of Marx's theory of the exploitation of labour, in which profit ultimately derives from the ability of human labour-power to produce new value and the capitalist's power to appropriate the difference between the value produced by the worker and the value paid out as wages (Marx [1867] 1976). Capital is always searching for new ways to extract more surplus value from the production process, either by lengthening the amount of time labour-power is put to work or by increasing the productivity of labour with respect to society-wide conditions of production. Young takes from this analysis the "central insight" of exploitation, which is that "oppression occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another" (1990, 49). Understanding exploitation in this way means that justice "requires eliminating the institutional forms that enable and enforce this process of transference and replacing them with institutional forms that enable all to develop and use their capacities in a way that does not inhibit, but rather can enhance, similar development and use in others" (Young 1990, 49).

The clearest example of exploitation when it comes to citational justice is the appropriation of others' scholarly work without any citation at all.[19] In her analysis of epistemic injustice more broadly, Jana Bacevic identifies four types of "epistemic positioning" that serve to evaluate "speakers' knowledge based on their stated or inferred identity" (2021, 1123):[20] bounding, domaining, non-attribution, and appropriation.[21] The last two, non-attribution and appropriation, can be understood as exploitation in Young's sense. Bacevic argues that while this kind of exploitation is most clearly seen in the case of plagiarism, "not only are many cases of plagiarism never recognized or publicized as such, they also rely on interconnected forms of epistemic devaluation that make plagiarism more difficult to identify, prove, and eventually address" (2021, 1124). Being able to name and describe these kinds of epistemic and citational injustices *as* exploitation, according to Young's argument, helps us to keep justice and oppression at the centre of progressive struggles.

Exploitation, for Young, joins up with marginalization in that marginalized people—"people the system of labour cannot or will not use" (1990, 53)—are structurally necessary to capital's exploitative power. Young writes that "marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression" because "a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination" (1990, 53). In academic terms, tenure and promotion committees often subscribe to the "publish or perish" model, in which a dearth of citations (either a quantitative lack or citations in the "wrong" kinds of journals) can prevent scholars from oppressed groups from acquiring tenure, job security, and other material benefits. In an academic labour regime increasingly reliant on precarious, non-permanent contract teaching positions, those who do not successfully compete for increasingly rare tenure-track positions, or those who fail at securing a tenured position, go on to make up a marginalized "reserve army of labour" (Giménez 2018, 132–35) who not only are forced to provide academic work at cut-rate prices, but serve to apply downward pressure on wages and other material benefits for their tenured counterparts. Citational justice, then, is directly related to struggles against both exploitation and marginalization in academia.

Powerlessness, Young's third facet of oppression, is perhaps the hardest to pin down. While powerlessness clearly occurs outside professional academic contexts, Young defines powerlessness in terms of American class society as what distinguishes professionals from non-professionals, which is relevant to questions of citational justice within academia. Young writes that "professionals are privileged in relation to nonprofessionals, by virtue of their position in the division of labour and the status it carries. Nonprofessionals suffer a form of oppression in addition to exploitation, which I call powerlessness" (1990, 56). Now, in the

[19] We must not lose sight, however, of the broader tensions between scholarship and profit/exploitation in knowledge production. See, for example Selman, Guibault, and Swartz (2024, 2–3).

[20] Bacevic's work has been directly applied to citational justice in Maja Davidović and Catherine Turner's work (2023).

[21] "Bounding," "domaining," "non-attribution," and "appropriation" are ways of limiting the ways scholars' claims are evaluated or deployed within academic discourse. Bacevic describes bounding and domaining as forms of "epistemic reduction" in that they limit or reduce the value of a knowledge claim by framing the claim as limited by the person's identity, social position, or personal experience, or by confining it to a discipline or field or to a particular domain of knowledge. Non-attribution and appropriation are forms of "epistemic erasure" in which someone's knowledge claims are either uncredited or attributed to someone else (Bacevic 2021, 1126–32).

context of Western/Northern academia, in which scholars are currently undergoing a process of proletarianization marked by increased precarity, de-professionalization, erosion of collegial governance, and the corporatization of higher education (Popowich 2024a, 2024b), we must be careful when we consider the ways power and powerlessness manifest themselves. For Young,

> The powerless are those who lack authority or power . . . those over whom power is exercised without their exercising it; the powerless are situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them. Powerlessness also designates a position in the division of labor and the concomitant social position that allows persons little opportunity to develop and exercise skills. The powerless have little or no work autonomy, exercise little creativity or judgment in their work, have no technical expertise or authority, express themselves awkwardly, especially in public or bureaucratic settings, and do not command respect. . . . This powerless status is perhaps best described negatively: the powerless lack the authority, status, and sense of self that professionals tend to have. (1990, 56–57)[22]

While all scholars and academics retain a certain amount of privilege in capitalist societies, the actual *power* they have has gradually been—and is still being—eroded. Young argues that the power of professionals is made up of three components. First, they are expected and able to acquire specialized knowledge and skills, develop their practical or intellectual capacities, and have the means for those capacities to be recognized (Young 1990, 57). Second, professionals usually have a certain amount of autonomy in the carrying out of their day-to-day work and often have authority over other workers, whereas "nonprofessionals . . . lack autonomy, and in both their working and their consumer-client lives often stand under the authority of professionals" (Young 1990, 57). Academics as a whole bear this relationship to non-academic workers:[23] they are expected and able to develop specialized skills, knowledges, and practices as well as workplace autonomy and authority in ways absolutely forbidden to most of the working class. And *within* the privileged group of academics, these dynamics of power continue to structure the field, with some scholars reduced to powerlessness in the face of others. Citational justice is concerned with the ways that dominant social groups—primarily Mott and Cockayne's "white, heteromasculine hegemony"—exercise the kind of power that Young describes over other academics *through* the mechanisms of citation.

Bacevic's work on epistemic injustice and positioning allows us to understand how this kind of powerlessness is effected. Recognizing someone as an authority, Bacevic argues, has major consequences for professional progress and success within academia. As a result, the power differential inherent in academic recognition (one element of Young's conception of powerlessness) is vitally important: "Being able to (literally *in a position* to) evaluate another's epistemic claim reflects inequalities of status and power. This is not only the case in obviously hierarchical relationships (student–teacher, interview panel member–job applicant), but also, for instance, in endorsements on book covers or book reviews. In other words, the question is not *whether* someone's identity or social position influences how their work will be judged, but *how*" (Bacevic 2021, 1126). Who recognizes whom as an authority, who wields their authority in just or unjust ways, thus is a crucial dialectic within academic struggles for power, respect, and recognition. Bacevic's four types of epistemic positioning—bounding, domaining, non-attribution, and appropriation—indicate how the politics of citation is deeply bound up with questions of power and powerlessness *within* the single professional class of academic workers.

The third component of professional power in Young's account is respectability. She contends that "to treat people with respect is to be prepared to listen to what they have to say or to do what they request because they have some authority, expertise, or influence" (1990, 57). Who is listened to, read, engaged with, and cited, and under what conditions, is the clear domain of citational justice. But again, in the case of academia, the question of professional respectability cuts both ways. Scholars may belong to a "respectable" professional class while still being disrespected when not engaging at a given moment in their professional practice or in their expected professional context.[24] But scholars from oppressed groups can also be disre-

[22] This power differential is nowadays often framed as a quasi-natural distinction between "skilled" and "unskilled" labour, with "unskilled" work naturally deserving lower wages, fewer benefits, and the powerlessness of the non-professional. The idea of "skilled" and "unskilled" work has a fraught history in Marxism and has been effectively critiqued by feminist theorists who argue that the distinction is a gendered one (Dalla Costa [1972] 2019, 44; Phillips and Taylor 1980, 79).

[23] This distinction is institutionalized in the form of a structural division between instructors, faculty, and librarians on the one hand and non-academic staff on the other.

[24] A clear example of this is when respected Black scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. was arrested for "breaking into" his own home in 2009 (Ogletree 2010). Returning home from a trip to China, Gates found his front door jammed and tried to force it open with the help of his driver. A witness believed a burglary to be in progress and called the police, and Gates was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct. The arrest made national headlines and prompted a debate over racial profiling in policing. The charges against Gates were dropped.

spected *within* academia by those in power blocking their ability to be heard, listened to, and read by means of structural citational injustice.

We can return once more to Bacevic. Referring to Miranda Fricker's account of epistemic injustice, Bacevic writes that

> Fricker's argument is situated at the intersection between epistemology and ethics: who and what is recognized as a proper or equal creator of knowledge – epistemic subject – is not separate from who can be recognized as an equal participant in the public realm. In the context of academic knowledge production, however, the crucial question is how judgements of this sort situate different levels of "knowers" *relative to* other knowers and, further, how this impacts their professional standing. (2021, 1125)

Who is accorded the respect of being listened to and engaged with through the mechanism of citation is both based upon how they are *taken to be* (or not taken to be) an epistemic subject or a professional or an academic, but citation also *situates them* (or does not situate them) as an epistemic subject or professional or an academic. Either way, the oppressed scholar is powerless to effect this recognition and construction on their own; they are reliant on those with (more) power in academia to do it.

Citational justice practices—conscientious engagement with scholars from oppressed groups, for example—seek to undermine this reliance on the powerful by constructing horizontal practices of citation. Such horizontal citation practices can be used to resist what Young calls "cultural imperialism," the way in which the Global North or Western scholarship or Eurocentrism or Global English tend to dominate, exclude, and erase subaltern perspectives. Marxist theory often focuses on the ways in which the partial perspectives of dominant social groups become *hegemonic*, appearing to society as a whole as natural, universal, or common sense. In settler-colonial countries, for example, scholarship is dominated by a hegemonic logic of extraction as well as settler culture, language, and concepts more broadly, while Indigenous alternatives are Othered, demoted, denigrated, or made invisible.

Sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall bridges Marxism and post-colonial thought in this domain. In "New Ethnicities," Hall investigates the politics of representation, arguing that new conceptions of ethnicity, race, identity, and difference are needed "to set against the embattled, hegemonic conception of 'Englishness' which, under Thatcherism, stabilizes so much of the dominant political and cultural discourses, and which, because it is hegemonic, does not represent itself as ethnicity at all" ([1988] 1996, 448). In a later paper, Hall refers to Cornel West's account of the emergence of racial and ethnic difference to challenge "European models of high culture, of Europe as the universal subject of culture" ([1993] 1996, 468) as a moment in "the struggle over cultural hegemony . . . shifting the balance of power in the relations of culture" and "changing the dispositions and the configurations of cultural power, not getting out of it" ([1993] 1996, 471). The decentering of hegemonic identities and subject positions challenged previously dominant structures of power while opening space for new ways of thinking about difference and social justice.

The construction of *one* identity as the universal representative of identity as such also runs through the history of critical political thought. Young argues that societies dominated by specific groups (the ruling class, the patriarchy, or white supremacy, for example) present the partial, situated outlook of those groups as a "transcendental 'view from nowhere' that carries the perspective, attributes, character, and interests of no particular subject or set of subjects" (1990, 100). By abstracting their particular interests, dominant groups are able to present them as universal common sense, excluding, erasing, or subjugating alternative conceptions of other (class, race, or gender) standpoints.

What Marxists call ideological domination or hegemony, Young refers to as cultural imperialism, describing the ways "dominant meanings of society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other" (1990, 58–59). This erasure is oppressive because it prevents subaltern groups from presenting their experience in conditions for others to listen or read. While the other forms of oppression are central to structures of citational injustice, cultural imperialism appears to be the most widespread and pernicious form of that injustice, ranging from the dominance of the Global North over the South (Demeter 2020, 17) to the exclusion of women from equal participation in the scholarly conversation (Earhart, Risam, and Bruno 2020) and the rejection of alternative ways of knowing, conceptualizing, and expressing the lived reality of Indigenous scholars (Anderson and Christen 2019).

One reason why cultural imperialism is such a central notion for citational justice is that it is the clearest site of political struggle between dominant and subaltern groups. Young writes that contact with other groups challenges the dominant group's claim to universality. This conflict occurs simply because once an alternative, subaltern perspective gains any measure of legitimacy, the "universal" perspective of the

dominant group cannot but appear as simply one alternative out of many, losing its hegemonic power as the sole legitimate outlook. The struggle over hegemony takes places, Young writes, as "the dominant group reinforces its position by bringing the other groups under the measure of its dominant norms. Consequently, the difference of women from men, American Indians or Africans from Europeans, Jews from Christians, homosexuals from heterosexuals, workers from professionals, becomes reconstructed largely as deviance and inferiority" (1990, 59).

In terms of academic production and publishing, inferiority can be constructed in a number of ways: deviance from accepted standards of scholarship, inability to speak in "correct" academic language, departure from ideals of impartiality and impersonal or unemotional reporting of observations, "improper" use of evidence or argument, not recognizing or excluding certain kinds of citation (for example, citing Indigenous Elders or Knowledge Keepers [MacLeod 2021]) or certain genres of writing/expression. We can see how cultural imperialism is central to the practice of citational injustice in the way "only the dominant group's cultural expressions receive wide dissemination" so that only "their cultural expressions become the normal, or the universal, and thereby the unremarkable" (Young 1990, 59). Young's account of cultural imperialism is complex and nuanced, involving the internalization of Otherness, the "double consciousness" described by W. E. B. Du Bois, and the sense of both invisibility and exposure as deviant or deficient. To put it concisely, however, Young describes the injustice of cultural imperialism as the fact that "the oppressed group's own experience and interpretation of social life finds little expression that touches the dominant culture, while that same culture imposes on the oppressed group its experience and interpretation of social life" (1990, 60). Unjust citational practices are direct expressions of cultural imperialism in this sense.

Cultural imperialism is the context, in Young's thought, for the oppression of structural violence. In this view, whether or not violent acts take place, while important, carries less political significance than the social context of violence—that is, what makes potential or actual violence acceptable as a systemic social practice (see Butler 2021, 4). This distinction is crucial to Young's thought because violent acts may be perpetrated independently of structural oppression and so cannot in and of themselves bear the political weight of social justice. We can then connect the concept of harm with Young's structural violence, neither of which require actual violent acts in any given context. Violence is systemic, Young writes, when it is "directed at members of a group simply because they are members of that group"; it is social when it is a fact of social life "that everyone knows happens and will happen again" (1990, 62). In other words, there are social situations in which people are led to expect violence, perhaps even consider that violence is "called for": "Group violence approaches legitimacy, moreover, in the sense that it is tolerated. Often third parties find it unsurprising because it happens frequently and lies as a constant possibility at the horizon of the social imagination. . . . Repressive violence has a rational, albeit evil, motive: rulers use it as a coercive tool to maintain their power" (Young 1990, 62).[25] Violence in this sense is a structure of oppression rather than an individual or collective expression of anger.

Young's distinction between actual acts of violence and the structural and social conditions of violence are important for considerations of citational justice. It would be hard to argue that bias in citations *constitutes* violence, but there is a stronger claim to be made that the oppression wielded through citational injustice can help create the structural and social conditions for violence and harm. The devaluation or denigration of particular social groups *through* the five faces of oppression, as they manifest themselves in unjust citation practices, can easily lead to situations in which universities become "institutions and social practices [that] encourage, tolerate, or enable the perpetration of violence against members of specific groups" (Young 1990, 63), even if they do not act violently themselves.[26]

Applying Young's five criteria to citation helps to unearth the ways certain practices may be considered unjust without reducing oppressed groups to some kind of essential nature or claiming that any group's oppression is worse or more fundamental than any other. As she explains, "the presence of any of these five conditions is sufficient for calling a group oppressed. But different group oppressions exhibit different combinations of these forms, as do different individuals in the groups" (Young 1990, 64). This gesture towards intersectionality helps us to think through the various ways different groups may be affected by one or more of the five faces of oppression.

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[25] Stuart Hall et al.'s model of the thresholds of societal tolerance—permissiveness, legality, and extreme violence—offers a sociological account of the way violence is systematic and social in this sense ([1978] 2013, 221–23). This model is important in that it explains the way oppression can escalate societal response in particular cases.

[26] Traditionally, universities have rhetorically positioned themselves as sites of rational activity at the opposite pole to violence. Recently, this positioning has been exposed as a sham by universities' violent responses to pro-Palestinian campus protests across North America, for example at the University of Alberta (Bartko 2024; Scace 2024), though sanctioned violence against students was a major component of anti-colonial and anti-war protest in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Conclusion

Young's work is rich and full of interesting paths for further research. Her account of the emancipatory potential of a politics of difference provides a useful argument against the idea, often promulgated by the right, that the left has recently abandoned a commitment to universality, even if her notion of the value of recognition—widely adopted in the 1990s by political philosophers trying to account for, say, multiculturalism and group politics in multiethnic nations like Canada—has now been thoroughly critiqued by both feminist and Indigenous scholars.[27] Her notion of political responsibility is worth investigating in the context of today's "culture wars," in which responsibility is often confused with blame (Young 2011, 172–73). This article has, I hope, given a sense of one small part of Young's political philosophy, one which allows for a progressive conception of citational justice that moves beyond the distributive paradigm.

Throughout this article, I have insisted that citational injustice is unjust in specific ways, as enacting or contributing to oppression and domination within capitalist society. Although she does not focus on it, Young was writing at a time when neoliberalism had just gained a hegemonic foothold in the Global North in the wake of the Reagan and Thatcher periods in the United States and the United Kingdom and was given fresh currency by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The final obstacle to the victory of neoliberal capitalism came with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the year after Young's book appeared. In the academic environment, the combination of government austerity (i.e., defunding public services), free market fundamentalism, and corporatization of public organizations began the long process of commodification of higher education that is still with us and still incomplete.

If we consider the corporatization of universities in combination with the explosion of knowledge production brought on by the expansion of the World Wide Web beginning in the late 1990s, we find a condition in which actually reading scholarly works becomes more and more difficult due to "information overload," while at the same time reading becomes instrumentalized, falling under the capitalist logic of efficiency and reduction of labour-time. Strategies like "extractive reading" (Srigyan and McLachlin 2023) and suggestions for how to read more selectively or how to read to distill some empirical "content" from the narrative "form" (e.g., "how to gut a book") have become widespread, and students and researchers are forced into adopting these alternatives to reading simply in order to try to stay on top of the mountains of material now available to them. More and more research is published, including poor-quality research published by so-called "predatory publishers," and now much of it is becoming AI generated, and so more time has to be spent winnowing what is worth reading from what is not. Amid this complex dynamic of scholarly production and consumption, actual *reading*—conscientious engagement—often gets lost, an impossible luxury in a world where, as noted above, citations are currency.[28]

It is no wonder that authors from the Global North, who are already cited more, continue to get cited more; it is no wonder that researchers and scholars from subaltern communities, whose work may not perfectly fit the algorithms that surface recommended readings (often themselves using citational metrics), become harder and harder to find. Algorithms themselves, produced by or for corporations in the Global North and West, encode the same biases that lead to citational injustice in the first place, cementing a vicious circle of domination and oppression that lies like a cancer at the heart of contemporary higher education.

If, as I want to propose, reading is one of the main forms of conscientious engagement, then one approach to redressing citational injustice must simply be more and wider and broader reading, but also—and this sounds paradoxical only because capitalism is itself contradictory—reading less, more narrowly, but more deeply. And if no one has the capacity for that amid the time-, workload-, and attention-pressures of contemporary academia, then the struggle must be to transform academia. The goal of such a transformation would not be to return academia to some spurious golden age of leisurely research beyond the profit motive but to move it forward into a landscape in which the various strands of social justice are not kept separate but are understood as an interlocking whole, a complex totality of social and political relationships.

In conclusion, I want to link the injunction to read more with a comment on generative AI that has gained currency in recent months. Among intense competition for time and attention, the glut of AI-generated texts, from article summaries to articles themselves to children's books, has led people to ask in what sense it can possibly be worth reading what no human being felt worth writing. Generative AI tools

[27] The political theory of recognition has a complex history in Canada, where it developed as an attempt to manage tensions between subaltern groups and the Canadian state in the 1980s and 1990s, primarily in the work of Charles Taylor (1992) and James Tully (1995). Recognition developed out of the communitarianism that arose in the post-Rawls landscape of liberal political philosophy. Over time, recognition began to be seen as inadequate to deal with the demands of marginalized and oppressed groups, for example Indigenous people (Coulthard 2014) and women (McNay 2008).

[28] This does not even touch on real contemporary concerns around the collapse of literacy itself among secondary and post-secondary students (Winter 2022; Socol 2024; Ruvelcaba 2025).

in the academic space tend to focus on the abolition of reading and writing as conscious practices embodying the very kind of conscientious engagement that teaching and learning ought to be about. The invention of non-existent citations by "hallucinating" AI tools suggests the way in which the abolition of practices that use citation to engage with the conversation of scholarship, not to mention the erasure of authorship involved in AI training, will sidestep the entire question of citational justice by abolishing the practice of citation itself. Following Young, we must decide for ourselves whether to accept the passive injustice of an AI-corrupted world or conscientiously work towards changing the structures of justice of liberal capitalism itself.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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