

Epistemic Violence in Psychological Research: Unveiling Bias in Methodology, Methods, and the Peer Review Process

Mvikeli Ncube, PhD.

Affiliation	Abstract
University of Derby, UK.	<i>The concept of epistemic violence, which defines the oppression of knowledge systems and knowers, has become more significant when applied to psychological research. The article interrogates epistemic violence through the examination of research design, as well as methodological paradigms and methods, and the peer review process. This paper examines how mainstream psychological science creates epistemic exclusion by favouring Western positivist approaches over indigenous experiential and non-normative ways of knowing through the lens of postcolonial theory, feminist epistemology, and critical psychology. The methodological gatekeeping together with disciplinary conventions and reviewer biases operate as mechanisms that lead to epistemic marginalisation of research produced by scholars from historically excluded communities. The article suggests strategies for improving research inclusivity and epistemic justice in academic culture, including methodological pluralism, reflexive research approaches, and changes to peer review procedures. The analysis aims to advance existing efforts for psychological knowledge decolonisation and academic publishing equity enhancement.</i>

Key-words: Epistemic violence; Methodological bias; Decolonial Studies.

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Epistemic Violence: A theoretical overview

The field of psychology has recently experienced critical evaluation regarding its knowledge construction and dissemination processes. The analysis of epistemic violence as a concept stem from Spivak's (1988) work in postcolonial discourse where she defined the process of silencing subaltern voices. In the field of psychological research epistemic violence emerges because dominant research approaches and methods and institutional systems reject or diminish specific knowledge frameworks (Kessi & Boonazier, 2018). The analysis investigates the link between epistemic violence and

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psychological science methods through research design methods selection and peer review mechanisms. Systemic biases in these domains will be analysed for their impact on epistemic justice while exploring possible reform strategies (Bhatia, 2018).

Epistemic violence represents the active exclusion and devaluation and silencing of particular knowledge systems and knowledge producers. It occurs when dominant epistemologies render alternative ways of knowing unintelligible or illegitimate. In addition, when dominant epistemologies, often Eurocentric, patriarchal, or elitist render marginalised knowledges invisible or illegitimate, thereby reinforcing structural inequalities. Epistemic violence encompasses the destructive effects on people or communities which result from the suppression and devaluation and misrepresentation of their knowledge systems and ways of knowing (Ncube, 2024; Kurtis & Adams, 2015). The preference for quantitative positivist research methods and the suppression of qualitative Indigenous and community-based methodologies represents the primary ways epistemic violence appears in psychological research. The production of knowledge through hierarchies according to feminist epistemologists and decolonial scholars operates as a deeply political force which maintains coloniality and systemic inequality (Smith, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

The foundations of 'valid and legitimate' psychological research in Western scientific traditions have tied rigor to objectivity through measurement and statistical generalisation (Danziger, 1990). The epistemic framework actively excludes non-Western and experiential knowledge systems which Santos (2014) calls epistemologies of the South because they remain invisible to dominant scientific discourse (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). For example, mainstream psychological journals frequently reject community-based participatory research (CBPR) because they consider it anecdotal and lacking scientific rigor (Fine, 2012). This reflects a broader pattern of epistemic gatekeeping, where the very design of research is shaped by assumptions about 'whose knowledge counts' (Ncube, 2024).

Implications of epistemic violence on early career researchers

Epistemic injustice within psychological science has profound implications for the development of researcher identity among early-career scholars and for the broader trajectory of societal advancement. The dominant paradigms of Western positivist and individualistic epistemologies in psychology frequently work to devalue and marginalise Indigenous feminist and community-based epistemologies together with alternative knowledge systems (Adams et al., 2015; Mignolo, 2009). Systemic exclusion hampers the formation of strong researcher identities especially for early career scholars from the global south regions who face challenges in achieving mainstream academic legitimacy for their life experiences (Bhakuni & Abimbola, 2021). The epistemic disorientation creates reduced confidence and leads to their disengagement from innovative research activities and socially relevant research (Medin & Bang, 2014). The systematic exclusion of culturally situated complex problems from psychological research diminishes the discipline's capability to address these issues effectively. The field cannot effectively respond to diverse communities which leads to reduced potential for socially just interventions and equitable policy development (Spivak, 1988; Fricker, 2007). Epistemic injustice must be addressed to promote epistemic pluralism while nurturing inclusive scholarly identities and guaranteeing psychological science delivers meaningful contributions to worldwide societal growth.

Highlights

Epistemic violence represents the active exclusion and devaluation and silencing of particular knowledge systems and knowledge producers. It occurs when dominant epistemologies render alternative ways of knowing unintelligible or illegitimate.

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Methodology as a site of epistemic exclusion

Methodology functions as the theoretical framework for research practice which presents a critical site where epistemic violence occurs. The institutional domination of positivist and post-positivist paradigms in psychology has resulted in quantitative methods achieving priority status. The prevailing system restricts both the research questions that can be investigated along with the types of evidence that can be accepted as credible (Fanon, 1963; Gergen, 2001).

Methodological monism rejects interpretivist and Indigenous and critical approaches which use relational and contextual analysis and focus on subjective experiences (Wilson, 2008). These research approaches hold exceptional value for studying psychological phenomena affecting marginalised communities because they link subjective experiences to cultural environments with mental and emotional states. The field continues to dismiss these methodologies through their classification as "soft science" or "unscientific" which maintains epistemic hierarchies (Teo, 2018).

The implementation of standardised instruments in research leads to methodological violence against contextual and participatory data collection approaches. The extensive use of psychometric tools created for Western populations when applied to non-Western cultures demonstrates methodological imperialism (Berry, 1989). Such practices apply a general psychological construct framework that fails to consider cultural uniqueness which results in distorting local meanings.

The lack of acceptance towards narrative, autoethnographic and arts-based methods which offer deep insights into marginalised experiences exists because these approaches do not conform to scientific writing conventions and replication standards. The exclusion of alternative research methods creates a narrow scientific understanding of complex human phenomena which hinders innovative exploration (Reddy, Ratele, Adams & Suffla, 2021).

The peer review process as epistemic gatekeeping

Peer review functions as a mechanism of epistemic violence despite its purpose to maintain quality and rigor. Reviewers unintentionally implement dominant scientific paradigms which lead them to evaluate submissions through their preferred methodological and theoretical frameworks (Tennant et al., 2017). The bias against conventional frameworks and decolonial and feminist and critical perspectives proves particularly harmful to research.

Research evidence reveals that reviewers use unfamiliar citations and untraditional writing styles and innovative research approaches as indicators of poor academic work instead of recognising epistemological differences (Hirschauer, 2010). The practice of evaluation serves to suppress alternative epistemologies and drives scholars from historically marginalised backgrounds to avoid submitting their work which perpetuates epistemic inequality (Teo, 2018).

Institutional and structural contributors to epistemic violence

The reinforcement of epistemic violence stems from institutional factors which operate independently from personal prejudices. The current academic system rewards studies that demonstrate conventional findings which are replicable and statistically significant while impact metrics and funding priorities shape these decisions (Ioannidis, 2005). Research methods pluralism becomes less favourable when dominant scientific standards become the preferred research approach. Editorial boards of influential academic journals tend to consist of members who lack both demographic and epistemological diversity which restricts their publication choices (Roberts et al., 2020).

Toward epistemic justice in psychological research

Multiple levels of the research ecosystem require systemic changes to eliminate epistemic violence. Psychology should adopt methodological pluralism as an essential value because various research questions need distinct epistemologies and methods. Journals together with funding agencies should

support research that includes multiple approaches and gives voice to historically excluded communities (Reddy, Ratele, Adams & Suffla, 2021).

Second, research practices need to integrate reflexivity as an essential requirement that makes scholars evaluate their positionality alongside their assumptions and research consequences. The process is especially vital when researchers conduct studies across cultural borders or in community settings.

Third, the peer review system must undergo revisions to remove prejudice along with enhancing its inclusivity standards. The research should incorporate open peer review processes alongside anti-bias training for evaluators and the integration of reviewers from various epistemological backgrounds. The academic norms can shift over time through scholarly capacity building and mentorship programs that support non-dominant methodology users. (Yasan & Keleş 2025).

Conclusion

Psychological research experiences epistemic violence because Western positivist epistemologies received historical advantage. The research continuum reveals its presence in question framing as well as methodological choices and peer review procedures. Psychological science needs to actively dismantle structures that exclude epistemic participation to create an inclusive and just field through critical examination of its foundational epistemological beliefs. The adoption of pluralistic approaches along with reflexive practices in publication systems provides a pathway toward both epistemic justice and psychological knowledge democratisation.

Acknowledgements

Declaration of conflict of interest

The author declares no competing interests.

Funding statement

The study was not funded by any organisation.

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