



Reading summary

Zembylas, M. (2024). On the entanglement of epistemic violence and affective injustice in higher education: A conceptual analysis. *Higher Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01247-5>.

Critics of the ongoing colonialism of knowledge production and legitimation, and of the Eurocentric academic system, have drawn attention to 'epistemic violence'. Epistemic violence has been conceptualised by different theorists as the project of constituting the colonial subject as other, the imposition of Eurocentric modernity through colonialism and market globalisation, or the processes by which privileged groups ignore or silence the voices of oppressed people. It is clear that epistemic violence reproduces old and creates new inequalities and other forms of injustice. Recent scholarship has also turned attention to 'affective violence', which is harm inflicted through emotional or psychological means that perpetuates inequality and oppression. 'Affective injustice', a fairly new concept in the literature, highlights the ways in which oppressed people are denied credibility in emotion formation and expression as well as interpretive resources for understanding their affective experiences. This article reflects on the connections between epistemic violence and affective injustice and considers the implications for knowledge production and legitimation in higher education.

Closely related to the concept of epistemic violence is the concept of epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice refers to the unjust treatment of individuals or groups in their capacity as knowers, while epistemic violence turns attention to the epistemic practices that are harmful to the capacity of these individuals or social groups to engage in knowledge production and legitimation. Universities have been criticised for perpetuating epistemic injustice in several ways, including undervaluing the contributions of students and academics from marginalised groups. A response to this problem is intellectual decolonisation, which entails efforts to challenge the legacy of colonialism within higher education by dismantling the intellectual

roots of academia, namely, what and how knowledge is produced, taught and legitimated. However, such change is complex and requires fundamental structural changes. It also requires efforts to tackle the affective dimensions of epistemic violence in higher education.

The harms of epistemic violence in higher education should be reconceptualised as 'epistemic-affective violence'. Epistemic violence, such as rejecting non-Western knowledge systems, directly impacts the emotional and psychological well-being of marginalised scholars, constituting a form of affective injustice. Recognising that epistemic violence is entangled with affective violence makes a difference in how injustice is conceptualised more generally in higher education, and adds nuance to strategies to address this injustice. Calls for greater reflexivity and introspection to dismantle power and privilege in higher education are not enough because addressing epistemic-affective violence in higher education will require structural and political changes that go beyond intellectual decolonisation. The article considers the examples of global university rankings and affective activism.

In order to create spaces and infrastructures for legitimating traditionally marginalised ways of knowledge production, we need to develop new affective economies that recognise marginalised people's ways of being and feeling in the world. This does not mean disregarding existing methods of knowledge production, but rather allowing for a plurality of ways of knowing that transcend dominant knowledge boundaries and reflect a more inclusive approach to knowledge production.

Take-home messages

Intellectual decolonisation is not enough: Intellectual decolonisation is not sufficient to overcome injustice in higher education; new affective economies are also needed.

Structural and political change: Welcoming a plurality of knowledges and ways of producing knowledge in academia will require structural change and political commitment.

Strategies to counter affective-epistemic violence in higher education: To counter affective-epistemic violence in higher education, scholars need to recognise affective injustice within their institutions, refuse to support it, unlearn their privilege, and foster inclusive forms of knowledge production, teaching and learning.