EPISTEMIC EXCLUSION: A FORM OF ACADEMIC GATEKEEPING OF FACULTY OF COLOR

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Epistemic exclusion of faculty of color (FOC)

The perception of certain scholars and types of research as lacking value and illegitimate
Epistemic exclusion: a tale of two biases

**Bias #1**
Prejudice toward marginalized individuals

Norms against prejudice toward people, but not scholarship

Devaluation of the scholarship of FOC

**Bias #2**
Legitimate scholars follow disciplinary norms

FOC work outside disciplinary norms because of marginalized social position

FOC are not legitimate scholars
How epistemic exclusion works as gatekeeping

- Rejection is done by those in power
  - Dominant group members who have been successful by engaging in “traditional” or “mainstream” scholarship
- Those with epistemic power establish and maintain disciplinary norms
- The system is designed to benefit the privileged
- System disparately harms faculty of color

Berenstain, 2016; Daukas, 2006; Dotson, 2012, 2014; Pohlhaus, 2017
A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF EPISTEMIC EXCLUSION

What is the nature of epistemic exclusion?
Method and Sample

- 118 tenure-track faculty members from Research I university
- Qualitative Study: 1-2 hour interviews
- Demographics
  - **Sex**: 56 Females (48%), 62 Males (52%)
  - **Race**: 30 Black (25%), 26 Hispanic (22%), 6 American Indian (5%), 56 Asian (48%)
  - **Nativity**: 53 Born in U.S. (45%), 65 Born outside U.S. (55%)
  - **Rank**: 42 Assistant (36%), 35 Associate (30%), 41 Full (35%)
  - **Field**: 76 STEM*-related (64%), 42 non-STEM (36%)

* STEM = Science, technology, engineering, & mathematics
Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

1. Read Transcripts
2. Open Coding: Attach meaning to phrases or sentences
3. Axial Coding: Organize Codes into Categories
4. Coding of Transcripts by 2 Coders (inter-rater reliability) = .89
5. Organize Categories into Themes
SEEING EPISTEMIC EXCLUSION

Formal and Informal
Epistemic Exclusion

Formal Hierarchies
- Shifting Standards: Evaluation criteria are unclear and changing
- Grants: Funding confers value
- Outlets: Outlets determine value
- Quality: What scholarship is valued?

Informal Processes
- Lack of Recognition: Accomplishments are overlooked and minimized
- Lack of Legitimacy: Scholar role is questioned, must be proved repeatedly
- Lack of Comprehension: Scholarship not understood and not of interest

Settles & Buchanan, 2019
Settles, Jones, Buchanan, & Dotson, under review
Lack of Quality: Work on Disciplinary Margins

- Biased
- Lacks objectivity
- Me-search
- Not generalizable

Analytical Method
Margins
Topic
Problem-focused
Populations
Consequences of Epistemic Exclusion

- **Individual Workplace**
  - Adjusted scholarship
  - Productivity
  - P&T decisions
  - Pay

- **Individual Psychological**
  - Dissatisfaction
  - Lack of belonging
  - Uncertainty
  - “Crazy”

- **Institutional**
  - Faculty turnover
  - Reputational harm
COUNTERING EPISTEMIC EXCLUSION

Institutional policies and practices
Where Epistemic Exclusion Plays a Role
Implications and recommendations

■ Gatekeeping creates barriers to faculty diversity
  - Produces disciplinary inertia
■ Have explicit conversations about disciplinary values and norms
  - Disciplinary bias trainings
■ Valuing work on the margins
  - Reconceptualize work at the disciplinary margins as cutting-edge
  - Shift policies and practices to reflect these values
  - Awareness of appropriate metrics for evaluation of scholars working on the margins
■ Reduce defensiveness of scholars working in the center
  - Novel approaches do not detract from contributions of such work
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