

Doctoral writing and the politics of citation use

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Résumé de l'article

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Article

Doctoral writing and the politics of citation USE

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Abstract

Conventions shape scholarly writing and citations practices are one set of conventions that dominate how and what we write. Yet, many of these practices naturalize exclusion and discrimination in a way that becomes normalized and, consequently, invisible. For doctoral students, learning the conventions of citing is part of developing an identity around scholarship, research and writing. In this paper, we examine our own experiences of the politics of citations to understand our socialization processes and resistances. We use an autoethnographic narrative approach to frame this qualitative study. Our findings show how citation use abounds with the contradictions and paradoxes in our doctoral writing journeys where the pressure to succeed can compromise identity-building as ethical scholars. Each of us has many needs and multiple positionalities and resisting the naturalizing grammar of citations can be complicated. Yet, once aware of the politics of citations, one cannot go back to being unaware.

Introduction

Many aspects of scholarly writing practice have deeply embedded normative formulas. Within the context of doctoral writing, these processes can be seen as a naturalizing “grammar” (De Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015, p.22). One key component of this grammar is scholarly citation use. Citations are a mechanism that arguably reproduce colonial practices that reinforce patterns of

marginalization and discrimination (Mott & Cockayne, 2017). How and who we cite can reinforce particular ways of thinking and prevailing assumptions.

The doctoral journey involves developing an identity around scholarship, research and writing (Mantai, 2019). Students learn and are guided into developing an appropriate voice for their disciplines through citation practices. In some contexts, they are socialized into making choices about how much to conform or how much they can contest these practices. Newcomers go through socialization processes as a form of apprenticeship over time as they find membership within the disciplines. This process involves working out registers, written genres, rhetorical features and so on, associated with writing in the disciplines. Socialisation also involves a negotiation of discourse practices, such as what counts as knowledge, who has authority, and what academics do as they engage in disciplinary work (Prior & Bilbro, 2012). Learning how to incorporate citations plays a role in these enculturation processes. Yet, this grammar naturalizes exclusion and discrimination and becomes so normalized, it is rendered invisible. We asked ourselves: What are our experiences of citations practices and how can we cite ethically, particularly as doctoral students? In this paper, we examine our experiences of the politics of citations to understand our own socialization processes, our assumptions, beliefs and the spaces we have available to manoeuvre. We believe this process is a valuable starting point and we use an autoethnographic narrative approach to frame this qualitative study. We are both participants and authors in the study. Kelvin and Arif are doctoral students and Cecile is their supervisor. All of us are/were international students, including Cecile who was an international doctoral student herself, and we all experienced citation practices as outsiders. We decided on a narrative approach, to make sense of our experiences since narratives “serve as a method of interpretation and reinterpretation of experience” (Garvis, 2015, p. 12). To move beyond the personal to incorporate the social, we adapted Garvis’ (2015) notion of constellation narratives to tap into the depths of our experiences.

Doctoral students’ socialisation

Socialisation is the gradual process, over time, of learning the practices, norms and values of the group one is joining. With doctoral students, the process usually begins when they enter the program and as they work through the various stages: coursework, comprehensive exams, research, dissertation, oral defence, and the professional development that institutions often offer. A further layer of enculturation involves building social networks and developing identities congruent with the discipline (Prior & Bilbro, 2012). Socialization is most often seen as something that is necessary to

be successful and the student is inevitably socialized into academic cultures. In the research literature, socialization is seen as an important factor in student experiences of the doctoral journey. Students' socialization experiences have been strongly linked to outcomes like successful completion (Roska et al., 2018). In other words, socialization experiences not only affect how a student experiences a program, but also attrition rates and success after completion. For example, Lovitts (2001) found that when students' experiences of socialisation were negative, attrition rates were higher. When students are excluded from an academic community and feel they do not belong, they are more likely to want to leave their programs (Emmioğlu et al., 2017). The point of socialization, then, is to become accepted in the academic community and to foster a sense of belonging among students (Mantai, 2019; Roska et al., 2018).

Doctoral socialisation through writing

Writing plays a central role in the socialization of doctoral students. The production of texts is embedded in social practice and texts become situated practices located in specific communities and contexts (Paré, et al., 2011; Paré, 2019). Within these contextual social practices, many academic writing forms and practices are tacitly understood by existing members. Plagiarism anxiety, for example, and the fear of potentially engaging in unethical activities does much to make academic writers conform. One of the key genres for socialization is the literature review chapter in the dissertation. Reviewing the existing literature is seen as an essential first step in doctoral research. The idea of the literature review is based on a particular assumption of western science, that all research builds on previous research. We pay homage to the writers before us but only those "vouched for by peers ... are taken to be authoritative" (Ruttan, 2004, p. 104). Doctoral students are rarely taught to question how knowledge is constructed through citations and most follow the authorities, legacies and lineages presented to them. For example, students rarely see the selection process behind the literature chosen to be reviewed or even the discursive nature of citations in western academic culture. Instead, citations are viewed by many to have universal characteristics which so often seem to be value-free (Thieme & Saunders, 2018). Yet citations play both a discursive and rhetorical role.

Citations are used to provide evidence to support research claims and writers cite to persuade, to argue or to convince readers. Academics also use citations to connect to academic cultures (Hyland, 2008). By citing authorities, the writer aligns with particular perspectives and, if relevant to the audience, develops credibility. If the citations are "appropriate" to the discourse community, the

writer can speak on a topic; however, “a citation unknown, out of place, from the ‘wrong’ source, or absent altogether might imply that an author does not have the right credentials and has not passed an implicit test of adequate scholarship” (Mott & Cockayne, 2017, p. 695). Referencing and citation practices work towards establishing the epistemological framework of the discipline or discourse community and are among one of the ways academic knowledge is constituted and transmitted. Consequently, citations are far from neutral or objective but tend to reproduce a range of hierarchies and inequities (Thieme & Saunders, 2018).

The politics of citations

Recently, the conversation about the politics inherent in citations has grown in volume. Sara Ahmed (2013) noted that it was not only the issue of who was cited but about:

screening techniques: how certain bodies take up spaces by screening out the existence of others. If you are screened out (by virtue of the body you have) then you simply do not even appear or register to others. You might even have to become insistent, wave your arms, even shout, just to appear. And then of course how you appear (as being insistent) means you still tend not to be heard (n.p.).

What Ahmed suggests here, is that although citations are a textual practice, this silencing has material consequences for bodies too. Those who are well cited reap material rewards in funding and employment among other accouncements. Mott & Cockayne (2017) agree that particular voices and bodies are consistently left out and citation practices create an uneven reproduction of academic knowledge. They note: “To ignore the politics of citations risks the continued hegemony of white heteromale knowledge production incongruous with the nuance and richness of other understandings and perspective” (Mott & Cockayne, 2017, p. 956). Drawing on Butler (1990), they highlight that citation use is a performative technology of power in academic contexts that reproduce inequities in the neoliberal academy. Through citation metrics and other repetitive mechanisms citations accumulate a force of authority. But as Butler (1990) has shown, these performances are never fixed but are dependent on the context in which they occur. Consequently, these practices may seem universal and unchanging but if we are to address this perception of universality, it is important to realise that these practices have the potential to change. By viewing citations as performative we draw attention to “why and how authority congeals around certain bodies and voices, and thinking through how this authority might be dismantled” (Mott & Cockayne, 2017, p. 964).

Citations practices have also been roundly critiqued by Indigenous thinkers. Todd (2016), for example, describes how Indigenous thinkers are often ignored on issues where they have expertise and questions whether there is space for Indigenous knowledge in the academy. She refers to citation practices as a “structural colonialism” that render some thinkers invisible or only seen through white eyes. The issue, she argues “is a structural one: it is a critique of systems and practices” (Todd, 2016, p. 9). These routinized structures are not harmless conventions but a systematic erasure of groups of people. Current practices of citations reproduce the system and to get ahead, one often conforms yet what becomes invisible are “the silences” (Todd, 2016, p.17). In other words, Indigenous knowledge becomes invisible in the academy. Younging (2018) in *Elements of Indigenous Style* highlights the pattern of citations to do with Indigenous issues written by non-Indigenous writers rather than Indigenous scholars and call for the need to redress this trend.

Researchers have also drawn attention to consistent gender bias in citational practices and the undervalued impact of women’s research (Earhart et al., 2020; Hart & Metcalfe, 2010). It has been noted that citation practices create persistent norms of gendered knowledge and authority (Pearse, et al., 2019). Many of these researchers have argued that the issue is not just who can be cited but what counts as knowledge is shaped by these practices. Some forms of knowledge are marginalized as particular scholars are excluded and these exclusions have material consequences in hiring, tenure, promotion and funding.

Similarly, researchers have found that racial exclusion is deeply shaped by citation practices. A recent study of citations in 12 journals over a 26-year period clearly shows that academics of colour are sharply under-represented in citations and that citation practices “reproduce institutional racism” and “produce a hierarchy of visibility and value” (Chakravartty et al., 2018, p. 257). This trend is seen as “citational segregation” where citing authors prefer to cite others of the same group (Chakravartty, et al., 2018, p. 260). They argue that academics are socialized into performing these practices through routinized habits which render them invisible.

The geo-politics of knowledge and publishing is another area where citation practices have been widely critiqued. Canagarajah (2002) is particularly vocal about the challenges of scholars working on the periphery of the global system. In his critique of current scholarly publishing practices, he exposed inequalities in the way academic knowledge is constructed and legitimized. He argued that the knowledge domination of the west has led to a marginalization of the global south. Canagarajah (2002) adds that in addition to knowledge domination, there is also an appropriation of knowledge coming from the global south: local knowledge does not become legitimized in the eyes of the west

until it is written about by someone from the west. The role of conventions, including referencing, favours those from the centre and works to exclude those writing from the periphery. Consequently, citations play a large role in this geo-politics of knowledge.

Closely tied to this critique is the research around linguistic privilege. Knowledge produced in certain locations and mostly in English becomes more valuable than other knowledges and languages (Müller, 2021). Corcoran (2019) has shown how legacies of linguistic bias dominate the peer review process and that journals and editors often play gatekeeping roles in perpetuating inequities when it comes to publishing. Getting cited is important for academic writers to contribute to academic debates but the ability to speak with authority is not geographically even because of linguistic privilege and the political nature of knowledge production. Inclusions and exclusions of those cited create epistemic privilege (Müller, 2021). This naturalized, often invisible, gatekeeping nature of the geopolitics of citations is part of the “colonial present” according to Müller (2021, p. 6). Intersectionalities of race, gender and language often provide multiple blows for marginalized writers. Even if a person of colour follows the rules for academic language and the discourse of appropriateness, they often experience a racial positioning that frames their linguistic practices as deficient. Consequently, it has been argued that academic language is not an objective linguistic category but rather a racialized ideological perception (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Linguistic practices can be stigmatized even if the writer/speaker conforms to standard practices because the white native speaker is the model posed as the norm. Flores and Rosa (2015) argue that it is not language proficiency that is really being judged but racial proficiency in a society that positions how language practices are heard by the “white listening subject” (Flores & Rosa, p. 156).

The COVID-19 pandemic as well as the Black Lives Matter and other social movements have turned the spotlight on academic contexts and the ways in which structural inequities perpetuate certain frameworks and epistemologies. As Poe (2022) argues, academic writing has come under scrutiny within this context of reflexivity. It is tempting and easy enough to “to take a ‘quick fix’ approach,” but to engage with structural epistemic change requires much more (Poe, 2022, p. 163). One has to “unwind the layers of inequity” that through practice and history have become invisible (Poe, 2022, p. 163).

Engaging the politics of citations

It might be argued that iniquitous citational practices are performed in unintentional ways, and that inequality is produced by the ritualistic citation of certain thinkers. These patterns are, then,

entrenched through habit, systems and metrics. Yet there is little question that whiteness and other privileges are institutionalized through these practices. For doctoral students and doctoral education, how do we challenge these entrenched citational legacies so that students who do not fit into privileged categories feel they have a voice in academia? As Ahmed (2012) suggests, how do we begin to see “what does not ordinarily come into view” and even once these restrictions come into view, how do we prevent them from being “kept out of view” (p. 178)? De Oliveira Andreotti, et al. (2015) argue that while there are different tensions, complexities and paradoxes in the process of decolonisation and dismantling normalising grammars, resistance is possible but challenging. It is challenging, not least because neoliberal education is “driven by the desires of educational consumers to feel good, to look good and to be affirmed as ‘doing good’” (De Oliveira Andreotti, et al., 2015, p. 25). Mott & Cockayne (2017) suggest a conscientious, deliberate, engagement with citations. Deliberate citation practices involve deliberately noticing who one cites, and explicitly deciding who to cite, including authors from the global south. Similarly, research on citing trans studies and attempts to make trans scholars more visible raises important question: What social relations are expressed in these citation practices? (Thieme & Saunders, 2018). They argue for a concept of a scholarly community of care where citations reflect relations that sustain marginalized scholars’ abilities to work in the system. The Citation Practices Challenge (<https://citationpractices.tumblr.com/>) organized by Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández provides techniques and tips to redress the erasure of thinkers and people who are marginalized by these practices. In this paper, we want to explore our own experiences with citations as a way of beginning our own engagement with these debates.

Methodology

We chose an autoethnographic narrative approach to explore our experiences. The use of an autoethnographic design acknowledges that although we tell individual narratives, these stories are shaped by and inform prevailing discourses and cultures (Guyotte & Sochacka, 2016). Within this approach, the meaning a person makes of an experience is important (Riessman, 2008) and narratives “serve as a method of interpretation and reinterpretation of experience” (Garvis, 2015, p. 12). Despite its appearance of easy access, a narrative methodology can be a complex project. The participant writer-speaker has multiple stories to choose from and the stories told may project identity or meaning without revealing all. Indeed, people often construct stories to promote a preferred self, to protect a vulnerable self and to perform a required self. Yet, narratives can be the

way we develop “processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong” (Riessman, 2008, p.8). In addition, Frank (2010) has argued that stories do not only represent “truths” - they act. In other words, when we tell a story, we are not only constructing a world but we are creating a being that begins to act independently of the story maker. Not all stories have the same power, but they all have the potential for powerful actions. Consequently, stories can serve as actions of resistance. Although they may appear individual, they are often tied to collectives or assemblages. These ideas of stories as mobile actors suited our purpose and our awareness journeys.

To move beyond single narratives and to capture some of the complexity of our experiences, we adapted Garvis’ (2015) notion of constellation narratives. Garvis (2015) suggests that narratives and interpretations of experience within a context are not fixed but are continually moving and, as such form a constellation - a grouping - of experiences. To access a grouping of experiences, we each wrote the following narratives:

- 1) *Temporal narratives*: What has been your experiences of citation practices in the past, present and future? What are your beliefs about citations? Has this changed?
- 2) *Personal narratives interacting with the social*: Write about a piece of writing (or reading) where you noticed something or something triggered concern about the citation practices – be specific, quote from your text, use this to describe an “event” of citation practices.
- 3) *Personal narratives in place and time (context)*: Write about being a doctoral student/supervisor and citation practices? What concerns do you have? How much choice to disrupt practices do you think you have? Have you cited deliberately? Do you feel this is the space to resist existing practices?

These narratives allowed us a sensitivity to unfolding, changing stories (Garvis, 2015). Writing multiple narratives also allowed us to engage in deep reflexivity and a critical suspiciousness of our own taken-for-granted assumptions (Clark & Dirks, 2008). Once the narratives were written, we engaged in a process of analysis, coding and collaborative debriefing. The purpose of our analysis was to generate “a set of stable concepts that can be used to theorize *across*” the narratives (Riessman, 2008, p.74, italics in original). Following Merriam & Tisdell (2016), the first round of coding involved open coding where we read the responses and developed lists of keywords to compare. The second round of coding was analytical coding where we re-read the narratives and, using the keywords, developed categories. In the third round, we returned to the narratives and confirmed evidence for the categories and developed meta-themes. In the following section, we outline the results of the analysis of our narratives¹.

International scholars, immigrant scholars, international students

In some ways, what drew us together on the topic of citations was that we all were or are international students or scholars. Kelvin is from Barbados and is a full-time doctoral student at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). As he notes, “I spent 15 years as an instructor at a university, teaching first-year undergraduate writing courses in expository and argumentative academic writing, and technical writing”. Arif came to Canada as an international student from Chittagong, Bangladesh to pursue a bachelor’s degree in international relations and development studies. He finished his undergraduate and master’s degrees and became a Canadian citizen. He began working in the internationalization of higher education field and worked for six different Canadian universities: “In the process, I have (re)discovered intersections of my many identities. Currently, I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education and an international student immigration advisor at MUN. I identify as queer and use he/they pronouns”. Cecile is a professor of Education, and doctoral supervisor to Kelvin and Arif. She is from South Africa originally, and completed her Masters and PhD as an international student in Canada before returning to South Africa. Much later, she joined the faculty at MUN, as an immigrant and international scholar “My experiences in the global south, particularly years of teaching in a highly racialized context made me aware of the politics of citations”.

Citations and socialization

What we found, through the analysis of our narratives, is that despite some niggling initial questioning based on our positioning as international students/scholars, citations played a crucial role in our socialization process. Arif, for example, was confused about citing but tried to follow the rules and did what was necessary in his undergraduate and master’s years: “I have spent most part of my undergraduate and master’s studies on learning the style and intricacies of citations without giving any thoughts to the impact and politics of citation” (Arif). Similarly, Kelvin recognized that there were implicit rules to citations but he wasn’t sure what they meant. He recognized citations as epistemology but always at an implicit level: “Although I realized the politics of citation at some level before I finished my undergraduate degree, I cannot say that I could articulate it clearly if challenged to do so” (Kelvin).

Cecile was aware of the geopolitics of publishing particularly the difficulties of publishing from the global south, and moving to Canada as an international scholar created new awareness.

Publishing in the North American context required citing different authors than previously. She found herself conforming to this normalizing grammar to fit in and to accommodate the new environment: “The politics of citations dropped into invisibility under the pressure to conform” (Cecile). One often does not voice any questions because one does not want to be seen as a trouble-maker and acceptance renders the politics invisible.

What came across clearly from our narratives, from the three rounds of coding, were several mechanisms of socialization through citations: 1) Imitating; 2) Making claims to authority; and 3) Avoiding plagiarism. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

At the simplest level, we imitated other, more established writers in an attempt to fit in and to sound more “academic.” Imitating here is taken to copy or to follow. Kelvin explained it best when he wrote:

I tried to cite sources to prevent myself from sounding stupid...[I did this by] starting to mimic the way I saw essays were written by critics, thereby making my essays seem more scholarly... I wanted to sound scholarly, so I knew I had to stay away from citing just anyone off the Internet... I realized the problem of verifying authorship and expertise early on.

What is implicit in this is the socialization process of citing the “right” authors to sound more like a scholar. As Arif noted, one of the lessons he was schooled into was that the “individual [writer’s] contribution is not the focus [of their writing]”. Even if you had an opinion, you were quickly tuned into the language of the academy through the eyes of certain writers and suppressed any personal questions because they seemed to expose one as being different. Cecile noted: “I realised that I didn’t belong to any of these [academic] lineages and that I really didn’t ‘speak’ the same language as many of them... but I tried to fit in...I learned who to cite and I cited them”.

We also used citations to make claims to authority, as Kelvin noted: “I realized citations helped me to establish credibility in what I was saying”. Seeking credibility is a strong socialization instrument. We are told to cite to provide evidence for our claims and the citation provided establishes the credibility. Arif perceptively noted that: “A students’ primary responsibility is to know what is there to be known, as prescribed by the instructor”. The instructor shapes what is credible and what counts as important.

A further mechanism for socialization was the ever-present spectre of plagiarism: A threat that seems to hang over international students in particular. We all received that message especially loudly:

“Citation is a critical aspect of academic integrity in higher education” (Arif)

“Citation was important to avoid plagiarism” (Kelvin)

“The politics of citations become invisible under the pressure to adhere to conventions and to not plagiarise” (Cecile).

These mechanisms of socialization conveyed implicit messages that were reinforced through assessment. Many of these implicit rules were learned without knowing why they existed. Arif commented that citations were not something he thought about, he did what was asked of him during his undergraduate and master’s degrees. Kelvin concluded his narrative on a citations event he described where through assessment, “I got the hint: I should be using more recently published material”. These systems have a controlling presence that is even more powerful because they are often not explicit.

Growing awareness and deliberate citing

Deliberate citing involves making conscious decisions on who to cite for reasons of equity and inclusion. Both Kelving and Arif experienced a growing awareness of the politics of citations and the role of the writer in perpetuating certain inequitable practices. Kelvin, as an undergraduate, used citations to imitate established scholars, understood citations as authority, and recognized the implicit rules but often did not know what they meant. He realised early on that aligning oneself with a perspective through citations was important. He also understood that there was an implicit hierarchy of sources. He recognized that understanding the implicit rules was important for his confidence as a writer. As a graduate, Kelvin began to see his own voice in opposition to citations and now he is more aware of the politics of citations and is prepared to notice who he cites:

I realised that my lecturers ... approached literature from a postcolonial perspective, and I could do well in part by supporting points using sources that in some way fit into a postcolonial perspective. If I was including writing from someone whose perspective fit within dominant, white, imperialistic perspective, it should be for the purpose of writing a rebuttal to it.

Kelvin continues:

I find it ironic that higher education institutions in many other countries, in which anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic research and advocacy is done, and many of which have their own scholarly publishing mechanisms, simply follow the bibliographic conventions decided upon by scholars mainly in the US and UK instead of deciding on their own.

Arif gained awareness through his work experience after his Master’s degree. He began to question the epistemological bias in citations because of working as an internationalization practitioner: “My

work with international students, faculties and student affairs professionals have made me think about epistemological biases in the western higher educational institutions” (Arif). He started to question who gets cited and why:

In my research, all key authors in the field of internationalization of higher education are white and mostly white male. ...Recently, I read some of the new work of two key authors in the field. While I recognize that in a “hierarchy of knowers” they have reached a place in academia where they do not need to cite much but I was perplexed by their choice to write about the Internationalization of Higher Education – definitions, critiques, counter definitions – all – without once citing any racially marginalized scholars (Arif).

Arif now takes a strong social justice position and has decided to engage in deliberate citing.

Cecile straddles the challenging space of writing teacher where she explains these implicit rules to students to help them succeed while at the same time trying to make them aware of the politics of citations:

I often deliver workshops for graduate students how to use citations. I’m always warily conscious of teaching “rules.” I know students often want the “quick-fix” because they don’t have time to spend on these process-type issues.

Yet, she recognizes the imperative of citation awareness: “Citations work subversively and entrench certain inequities and regimes of thinking and need to be brought to the surface of doctoral student awareness.”

During the process of writing this paper, both Arif and Kelvin challenged themselves to cite deliberately in the next paper they wrote in their doctoral program. Arif, although he was worried about both his academic and professional career, used deliberate citing in a doctoral seminar paper. “There were quite a few struggles”, he noted:

It was difficult to identify those who are systematically absent in citations. In the absence of an author’s positional statement, it is difficult to identify who considers themselves belonging to any equity deserving groups. There is a lack of Canadian literature on Internationalization of Higher Education which is published by visible minority groups. I did not find too many scholars in my field who are non-white and could cite only a few coloured and Indigenous scholars but still, engaging with their work was important.

Despite the challenges, Arif is determined to cite with social justice in mind. There are still many actions that can be taken to cite deliberately: “We live in “a world of too much wrong” and one must be courageous to try to minimize these wrongs.

Kelvin, who is new to Canada, feels that the risks are potentially too high at this point:

I feel initiating deliberate citation practices to be too risky for me to undertake at this time. While others who have already gained credibility, respect and a track record may be able to try it, I have a sense that I am trying to demonstrate knowledge of conventions, and key authors and important debates within my area of focus. I am aware that various discussions on the same narrow topic can develop along different trajectories based on differences in paradigms, chronology, and socio-political contexts. Showing ignorance of these in academic contexts can have embarrassing and frustrating consequences where examination and publication are concerned.

This pragmatic approach reflects the tensions and vulnerabilities many doctoral writers experience. Yet, once the door is opened, it's difficult to move backwards, as Kelvin notes:

Still, having a greater awareness of the politics of citations, particularly how it benefits those cited as it shows others engaging with their work, and coming from a background in postcolonial literary studies, I think that I am more inclined to include scholarship coming out of places other than the United States and Europe. In the courses I have done, to satisfy a requirement towards obtaining my doctorate I have included scholarship from around the world, including from the Caribbean from where I come. I feel it not only demonstrates my awareness of global voices on my area of focus, but it at times identifies where I am coming from intellectually and culturally.

Tensions, contradictions and commitments

In this paper, we explored our own experiences of citations practices. Our purpose was to find a way to navigate the challenges with citations we had experienced as outsiders/international students and scholars. We asked ourselves: What are our experiences of citations practices and how can we cite ethically, particularly as doctoral students? Our narratives show that we were subjected to strong structures of conformity through our citation practices. We feel this process of socialization was alienating for us as international scholars especially when we felt that we did not belong. Like many other students, we experienced enculturation as a one-way transmission into a context of social control rather than a process of empowerment or a space where we can grow individually. Our experiences show that conventions do ideological work and because we want to succeed and there are high stakes involved, these conventions serve to reproduce and entrench social relations of power. Our narratives also indicate that conventions can also regulate, especially when coupled with evaluation. As Lillis (1997) has suggested, conventions regulate what you are allowed to say, how

you are allowed to say it, and who you are allowed to be. Even the “insignificant” conventions, such as only citing peer-reviewed publications, can serve to marginalize some writers because only specific, writer-reader relationships are allowed (Lillis, 1997). Consequently, we, like others, tended to edit out the diverse iniquitous, racialized, global south content of our lives. We found like Prior & Bilbro (2012) that these ritualized practices accompanied by evaluative discourses created spaces that were quite restrictive and normative.

Our experiences show that writing in academic contexts is a key mechanism for socialization into discourses and practices. Yet, as Roska, et al. (2018) suggest, socialisation is not experienced uniformly by all students. A negative socialisation experience can mean feeling othered or not belonging. Students who miss out on positive experiences, for any number of reasons “struggled to make or find their place in academic programs” (Roska, et al., 2018, p. 732). Socialization for doctoral students from marginalized groups is even more complex and often inequitable, with students reportedly less positive about their socialisation experiences (Felder, Stevenson & Gasman, 2014). When socialization is an experience of racial inequities rather than one of enculturation and belonging, it can be fraught with many conflicts in values and epistemology. These racial experiences serve: “to shape perceptions about the academic environment and notions of success at the doctoral level” (Felder, et al., 2014, p. 23). Our narratives reflect many conflicts in values and epistemologies.

Throughout the process of this study, we found ourselves continually engaging with tacit and invisible components of writing. We show how, through writing, we unquestionably imitated more established scholars and to learn the complexities of the disciplines and discourses we engaged in. Citing, in particular, shapes what a writer can write about, not least because the writer has to write about what others have said (Thompson & Pennycook, 2010). When only specific, “appropriate”, writer-reader relationships are allowed in academic contexts, we create the conditions for conflicts in values and epistemologies. If we bring these naturalizing grammars into view, we can begin the process of change.

Our narratives also show the tensions and material pressures that exist in the contexts in which we work. The infrastructure of financial demands, workplace requirements as well as evaluative structures created ongoing frictions for us all. We each felt the pull of conformity versus resistance and felt challenged in our choices. We questioned how much choice is available to us given the structural constraints on “choice” in academic contexts. Is it possible to introduce the idea of choice as a political construct where “choice” means not only resisting the prevailing power dynamics, but also reconstructing and repositioning a marginalized identity? Although citation practices can

cement existing norms they can also be used to resist entrenched hierarchies of knowledge production. As much as language can socialize and conform, it can also be used to resist. As Paré (2009) noted, language is a technology that can be used to *do* things. In other words, writing is social action. This is where, as writers, we can make language work for us. Perhaps, the way through these tensions and contradictions is a critical-pragmatic approach (Corcoran & Englander, 2016). A pragmatic approach would be uncritical socialisation into citation practices and adoption of conventions. Alternatively, a critically pragmatic perspective would be to acknowledge the politics of citations and the potential harm. To discuss issues of epistemology and ideology as well as inequity and exclusivity with regard to citation practices so that writers can assess their options and make informed decisions about resistance or conformity and the related consequences of either path.

We struggled with the dichotomy of conformity or resistance because they seemed to be the only choices available to us, but perhaps we can learn from Indigenous scholars, like Smith (2012), and reframe citations as a mechanism for “making connections and affirming connectedness” (p. 149). Perhaps through our citing practices, we could see ourselves in a relationship that is collaborative where we engage in conversations. In this way, we ensure that our “activities connect in humanizing ways” (Smith, 2012, p. 150). To do this, we need to “unlearn” (Poe, 2022, p. 168) the idea of individual writers who own ideas and who are in competition with others over those ideas. Perhaps citing could be a way of practicing gratitude and humility – an act of acknowledgment and recognition of academic exchange and dialogue.

In discussing how we would move forward in our own writing worlds, we thought we could continue to have conversations with other members of the university community, with librarians, faculty, and administration, for example. Advocating for in-house style manuals as well as manuals such as APA to include more inclusive citation practices would be an active step we could take. We aim to continue to have discussions with classmates and advocate for senior faculty, supervisors, and administrators at our university to ally with graduate students and pre-tenured faculty to promote and use tools that increase access to research such as the Open Journal Systems (<https://pkp.sfu.ca/ojs/>) and other open access venues. We also found Citation Practices Challenge (<https://citationpractices.tumblr.com/>) invaluable for support and ideas. We will also continue to be citation-aware and to make deliberate decisions about inclusivity in citations.

Endnotes

1. Apart from editing for clarity, we decided to use the language of our narratives to recognise that our Englishes vary.

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