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# Citation Justice

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## Introduction

Citation justice is a movement focused on realigning the “systematic under citation of works by women and other marginalised groups in various research fields”. [1] More radically, it could be described as “...the act of citing authors based on identity to uplift marginalized voices with the knowledge that citation is used as a form of power in a patriarchal society based on white supremacy.” [2] Citations play a key role in the careers of academics, as they are used to determine career advancement and remuneration. The playing field, however, is not equal. Western white male voices dominate; they are more often cited, even in areas where they might not have cultural lived experience; they more often self-cite; and they uphold epistemological hierarchies. In 2017, Dr Christen Smith (a black anthropologist) was paraphrased at a conference but not credited for her work. A month later she attended another conference wearing a t-shirt that said “Cite Black Women” and kickstarted the collective of the same name. This is citation justice in action; a movement which is growing in prominence. This poster presents some of the ideas and actions that Lancaster University Library are taking forward under the banner of citation justice.

## What ‘Citation Justice’ means to us:

Considerable work has been undertaken at Lancaster University Library in the area of decolonising literature searches and engaging staff in discussions relating to anti-racism. This has evolved into ideas including promoting the practice of citation justice.

When conducting literature searches, or compiling reading lists, a major issue for citation justice is that scholarly output with high citations tends to gain greater attention. Whilst good for those authors, this in turn means that the publication landscape for some subject areas is vulnerable to a skewed representation. Authors may be excluded if they are early in their career, less able to pay expensive publishing fees, and have less visibility despite having extremely valuable scholarly contributions and impactful work.

This problem is deepened by the availability of resources and databases that universities can access. Many popular databases are known to have poor coverage of the Global South [3], including language bias. By purchasing more databases and encouraging the use of multiple databases including free, Open Access databases, we allow more research to be discoverable and therefore citeable. We hope this begins to tackle citation injustice, but we would like to be reactive, proactive, and supportive of current reading list practices, as detailed in our project idea.

At Lancaster University, there is pride for projects undertaken but we recognise the huge opportunity which exists to promote citation justice globally and embed this as the norm remains.



## Case Study: Literature Searching

Whilst working with Health and Medicine students and researchers, we discussed Systematic Reviews extensively and encouraged ‘Search Strategy Testing’. This is where a search is tested so that it includes ‘Gold Standard’ papers: highly relevant papers that you would expect to see in the results.

However, we found that these strategies did not always retrieve expected papers and some students searching particular subjects reported no evidence and insufficient papers for a review.

## The Problem? Open Access and Grey Literature

Searches were insufficiently sensitive for some topics as many Lancaster researchers were from Global South countries and were researching Global South topics.

Promoting established Western ‘best practice’ search methods for systematic reviews reduced the impact. For instance, there was no element of “serendipitous searching” and the visibility of many Open Access papers was curtailed.

Authors from the Global South may find it difficult to publish in major journals indexed in databases, and so may rely on OJS-indexed journals [3][4] or Grey Literature for the dissemination of research findings.

**Was it possible that we were unknowingly reducing the visibility of Global South authors?**



## Theory & Method



**Ongoing:** Evaluation methods for content coverage and gaps. Can we identify where a reading list is not diverse and representative?

**Step One (Creating a ‘Gold Standard Search’):** Using best practice, systematic literature search methods, and a wide range of traditional, Open Access and Grey Literature search engines, we can produce a comprehensive ‘weather report’ on a module topic. This could include reports on key journals and Grey Literature sources and the most prolific countries publishing in the area.

**Step Two:** Compare course readings against this ‘Gold Standard Search’ to identify gaps.

Use this to drive engagement with Citation Justice, Decolonising and Reading List updates as a valuable “offer” from the library service.



## Action Taken



- We reviewed and purchased new resources that enabled researchers to search Grey Literature and Open Access material. This includes our subscription to Overton.io and Policy Commons
- We now index Open Access and Policy Commons within our library catalogue (‘OneSearch’)
- We produced a new Grey Literature guide, based on ‘Best Evidence’ from the research and library communities [5]
- We produced a new decolonising literature searching guide in collaboration with academics from ‘Decolonising Lancaster University’ [6]
- We embedded links to our decolonising guidance in our literature searching and systematic review protocols

## In practice?

### Presently:

- We are able to evaluate a resource list using present subscriptions and resources that index OJS databases, and are able to highlight where a journal readings might not be representative.
- We are also able to offer some guidance on prolific countries publishing Grey Literature via Overton.io and Policy Commons, and continue to promote these new Databases.

### A possible ongoing approach. Citation justice in action!

- Reactive? Benchmarking all new reading lists to identify modules with less diverse readings and promote new resources? Useful to target promotional activity and discussion, but can easily be ignored.
- Proactive? Working with academics to improve readings and alert where readings are not diverse? Could possibly be unwelcome and difficult if not a subject specialist?
- Supportive? Offering a citation ‘Weather Report’ where academics can request reading lists are proofchecked & that they include representative references. A possible middle ground of offering a valuable service, and reducing academic workload while supporting module redevelopment.

## Long Term Aims:

**Citation Diversity Statements:** We will collaborate with our academic colleagues to advocate for and facilitate the uptake of citation diversity statements.

**Community engagement:** We will develop a programme of activity, including workshops, seminars, and outreach to departments to educate and engage our academic colleagues in the principles of Citation Justice.

**Embedding Citation Justice within our Library Strategy:** We will aim to facilitate a culture change in which Citation Justice is embedded in our library’s strategic approach and in which colleagues are encouraged to consider how their role contributes to this. We will achieve this by advocating for citation justice to be embedded in our Library vision for 2030. This will help us to ensure the sustainability and longevity of our approach that lasts beyond our time at the institution.

**Collaboration and partnerships:** Citation Justice cannot be achieved hastily or in isolation. For just practices to become the norm, local, national, and international organisations and institutions must collaborate to share good practices, learn from one another and encourage each other when obstacles arise. We will be proactive in forging partnerships and sharing our resources and approaches openly.

**Education:** We will develop a programme of activity and resources to support academic colleagues to embed Citation Justice principles into undergraduate teaching.