On epistemic justice in career guidance

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a framework for understanding epistemic injustice in career development theory and practice. It is based on Fricker’s philosophical conceptualisation of epistemic injustice and its sub-forms of hermeneutical and testimonial injustice. The intention is to generate insights that direct us to injustices embedded in knowledge production and institutional practices that harm a person’s capacity as a knower. Moreover, the intellectual-ethical virtue of mitigating epistemic injustice and how this virtue can be enacted in the context of career guidance are discussed. I argue that epistemic justice approaches contribute to intellectual and ethical dimensions of social justice and there is a need to examine distinct forms of injustices of knowing manifested in the knowledge of career development and career guidance practice.

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Introduction

Knowing matters to people’s position in work life and their participation in society. Social justice is often understood as the socially just distribution of resources in society. One such resource could be education (Rawls, 1971). To this idea of social justice, we could add access to information; individuals’ capacity to share information and experiences is essential for being able to participate in contemporary society (often referred to as ‘the knowledge society’) (see e.g. Jarvis, 2001). The importance of access and contribution to knowledge resources raises questions about whose interpretations are recognised as valuable in society. In other words, we need to enquire into the system of knowledge production, institutional conditions, what and whose knowledge counts and in which context. In a broader perspective, in the question of access to information, social justice and epistemic justice are intertwined, and it is important to recognise different constellations of knowledge and different ways of knowing to build a more just society (Santos, 2008). This argument underpins career literature that accuses career development theories and practices of eurocentrism, misguided universalism and monoculturalism (see Sultana, 2017, 2020). Researchers (e.g. Arulmani, 2011; Sultana, 2020) urge us to take regional and local knowledge seriously in understandings of career development and to translate this knowledge into practice in career guidance. This strategy involves questioning whose knowledge and experiences are valued to challenge the master narratives that underpin assumptions of career development and career guidance.

Career guidance services offer access to knowledge and support the individual’s capacity to self-form their careers, but the acknowledgement of differences in knowledge and interpretations in self-formation deserves more attention. Career guidance practitioners (hereafter referred to as practitioners) value the ideals of social justice, but they are uncertain how to implement them in their
regulated daily work. They need a knowledge base from which to better understand and address institutional injustice that adversely influences the clients’ decisions and choices (Arthur et al., 2013). Making an impact on structural aspects of social justice, such as socio-economic equity, seems overwhelming in career development work such as professional career guidance and counselling (hereafter referred to as career guidance). However, there are ways to engage with injustices in practitioners’ daily work, for example when scrutinising knowledge transactions with people seeking guidance. In knowledge transactions, practitioners seek to get to know their clients by listening to and interpreting their experiences. In the interpretation process, the practitioner indirectly evaluates the informant’s capacity to communicate and make sense of their experiences, which influences whether they are regarded as credible in their decision-making processes. In this way, career guidance practice involves epistemic challenges and imbalances (who is believed, who is not taken seriously). As discussed elsewhere (Bengtsson, 2018), the verification of individuals’ knowing produces voices in ways not yet heard. In career guidance, this perspective requires paying close attention to the unexpected and the unfamiliar as well as the various ways that voices are manifested, and a sensitivity to verify them.

In this paper, I present a framework for understanding epistemic injustice in career development theory and practice. While educational literature has pointed to the significance of epistemic justice for social justice, epistemic justice continues to receive limited attention in the field of career development and career guidance. The intention is to generate insights that direct us to injustices embedded in knowledge production and institutional practices that harm a person’s capacity as a knower. Differences in being deemed credible as the knower affect the individual’s self-construction of careers, status in work life and participation in society. I argue that epistemic justice approaches contribute with both intellectual and ethical dimensions of social justice and that there is a need to examine distinct forms of injustices of knowing manifested in knowledge of career development and career guidance practice. For this argument, I present a framework based on the English philosopher Miranda Fricker’s account of epistemic injustice. The paper is also informed by other scholars’ responses to and development of Fricker’s ideas of epistemic injustice and other studies that discuss this perspective in educational research. In her analysis of epistemic justice, Fricker (2007) takes failure as a starting point and investigates basic epistemic injustices in dominant knowledge resources and social practices. She is particularly interested in epistemic practices and how they are evaluated and legitimised. She defines epistemic injustice as ‘wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower’ (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). The notion of ‘knower’ refers to both what someone is and what someone is able to do. The action of knowing is situational and its contribution relates to the context. Wronging occurs when a person’s information, knowledge or beliefs are not given the credibility they deserve because of negative prejudices towards the speaker.

As will be discussed in depth later, Fricker has distinguished between two forms of epistemic injustice that often interact: hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice. Hermeneutical injustice operates on the systemic level and is related to hermeneutical marginalisation, which means that a person’s (or a social group’s) social experiences are hindered from being circulated in common interpretative resources owing to prejudicial structural injustices (Fricker, 2007, p. 10). According to Fricker, hermeneutical injustice occurs when a disadvantaged or marginalised person or group lacks appropriate concepts for communicating their experiences to members of the dominant group or culture in society. This gap in communication harms their self-understanding and leads to hermeneutical marginalisation. Hermeneutical injustice may also occur when the less powerful group is able to conceptualise their experiences, but when communicating them they ‘remain systematically misunderstood by others’ (Medina, 2012, p. 207). An example of hermeneutical injustice in the present context could be undocumented migrants working in the informal economy in the labour market. Even though they may be familiar with the word ‘career’, it is likely that they use other words and connotations to talk about their experiences of making a living (cf. jobs in the informal sector in Sultana, 2020). This group of people is both disadvantaged and mistrusted in society and consequently runs the risk of having their experiences of livelihood
disregarded or misinterpreted as career construction when trying to enter the regular labour market, or in the encounter with career guidance service.

Testimonial injustice is situational and occurs in social interaction in everyday life, but also in professional encounters such as professional career guidance, which is the focus of this paper. Testimony here does not refer to witnessing in a courtroom, but it concerns the social practice of testimony that accounts for the many ways we convey information by querying, listening and telling stories in communicative activities. Testimony can offer new information and perspectives about understanding the world, but it requires both the speaker’s willingness to communicate experiences in a comprehensible and truthful way and the hearer’s willingness to listen with an open mind, and a critical reflectiveness to accept the trustworthiness (Fricker, 2007). What kind of information we give and how we tell stories depends on the context of the conversation. Institutional norms and laws, including discrimination law, regulate the context of career guidance and professional procedures frame interpersonal conversation. Testimony is conveyed in professional conversations, and for this purpose, the narrative method of storytelling is widely used. This method requires practitioners’ active listening to a client’s stories and a reflexive approach to cultural diversity and social identity (McMahon & Watson, 2013). Testimonial injustice arises when the credibility of the testimony is dismissed or disregarded because of the ways it is told, including language and manner, and the judgement is influenced by imaginations of the informant’s identity associated with social groups (Fricker, 2007). For example, in the UK, academics of non-European migrant background are less represented in higher positions in academia than native-born academics (see e.g. Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.). Imagine academics of non-European background who tell about their struggles in their academic career, perceiving that their professional degree is not properly acknowledged for positions within the academy and give examples of experiences of having their knowledge downgraded by colleagues. If the practitioner ignores the experiences told, for example by simply referring to the view that academia is a meritocracy, then they deny the informant’s capacity to interpret their experiences. When someone’s testimonial capacity is harmfully discredited or misrecognised, it affects their self-confidence of knowing. Consequently, harmfully discrediting someone’s capacity to know and to make sense of experiences affects the person’s agency in their career construction.

To mitigate testimonial injustice that arises in the interaction between a hearer and a speaker, Fricker (2007) proposed an epistemic-ethical virtue aiming at justice. This virtue, which is the hearer’s responsibility, is based on the standpoint that injustice of knowing is not ethically defensible. In an interaction, the hearer wants to understand what is communicated and the speaker wants to be understood, but when this fails the speaker’s ability to pass on knowledge is hindered and harmed. Practicing this virtue is to correct wrongs and detecting wrongs requires critical reflexive social awareness of social identity and prejudices – including one’s own. It is important to bear in mind that prejudices are socio-culturally and historically contingent and their manifestations change. Fricker’s concepts must be placed in a context and considered in relation to the conditions that frame and control the context. The contexts of hermeneutical injustice considered in this paper are scientific knowledge resources of career development and career guidance as well as the conditions for knowledge production. For testimonial injustice, the context considered here is the socially situated practice of career guidance and its professional and institutional conditions.

The paper is structured as follows. After the introduction that places the issue of epistemic justice in the context of career development and guidance, I introduce Fricker’s theory of epistemic injustice, including its central concepts and proposals for the virtue of epistemic justice. Recent scholars’ challenges to the concept and further elaborations thereof are also considered. This is followed by a discussion of epistemic injustice in the context of career development and career guidance, and the possibility of integrating epistemic justice into the ethically based practices that shape the basis for a just career guidance. This paper contributes to literature in the field of career development and career guidance by adding the epistemic justice approach to the problematisation of the politics.
of knowledge and its ethical implications. Furthermore, this paper adds the example of career development and career guidance to the literature on epistemic justice.

**Epistemic (in)justice**

Interrogating the politics of knowledge and institutional practices is not new. They are problematised in Foucault’s theorising of the relationship between knowledge and power (Foucault, 1972). Feminist standpoint theorists (e.g. Sandra Harding), black feminist theorists (e.g. Patricia Hill Collins) and decolonial philosophers (e.g. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) deconstruct the suppression of certain social groups’ knowledge and its implications for epistemic and human agency. Another strategy for epistemological diversity is the acknowledgement of a plurality of knowledges beyond scientific knowledge (Santos, 2008). Current literature on epistemic justice offers multiple accounts to enquire into the varieties of knowledge (see e.g. Kidd et al., 2017). For the purpose of this paper, I introduce Fricker’s ideas of epistemic justice and the central concepts that she launched in her groundbreaking book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007). For Fricker (2013, p. 1331), justice is not ‘merely an outcome’, but ‘done for reasons of justice’, that is, it has a moral value. Fricker’s work is strictly philosophical and her concepts are normative. As mentioned above, Fricker (2013) builds her conceptualisation on the negative notion of epistemic injustice and departs from the assumption that the ideal of justice involves failures. Applying this perspective means to scrutinise social practices, to make visible what a just practice could be and to correct accordingly. On this basis, her proposal of the virtue of reflexive critical social awareness strives for epistemic justice. In what follows, I describe Fricker’s account of epistemic injustice and its main concepts, and other scholars’ thoughts.

Epistemic injustice co-exists with other forms of social injustice, but Fricker (2007) makes a distinction between epistemic and distributive justice. She acknowledges that social inequalities have epistemic effects, as e.g. access to education affects people’s development of knowing. Nevertheless, she insists that her main interest is to unravel forms of discrimination of someone as a knower. The typical examples of cases of discrimination that Fricker provides concern racism and sexism, but the effects of epistemic injustices could also be applied to other forms of discrimination. While the notion of ‘knower’ refers to the capacity of knowing, being a knower is also dependent on legitimately being accepted in the position of the subject in the context of epistemic practices. Being recognised as a knower is not merely a condition for people’s participation in collective knowledge production but, Fricker argues, it matters for people’s self-conception as a human being. In Fricker’s (2007) understanding, knowing – including interpretations, beliefs and enquiring – is socially situated, and language, communication skills and concepts are needed to make sense of experiences. Social norms and structures are embedded in epistemic injustice through ‘social power’, which Fricker (2007, p. 4) defines as ‘a socially situated capacity to control others’ action’ (cf. Foucault, 1972). The knowing subject is less constrained by the accuracy of what we know, but more by social imaginations of what we can know and how we enact social knowledge. In this way, the individual’s knowing is dependent on relations with other knowers for making sense of the experienced world (Pohlhaus, 2014).

In essence, Fricker situates epistemic injustice in everyday interactions where we transfer knowledge and make sense of our experiences. It is in these social situations, which also occur in institutional practices, that people run the risk of being given less credibility than they deserve as knowers (Fricker, 2007). Credibility is normative and shapes certain ways of being deemed trustworthy in historical and social-cultural context. The judgement of trustworthiness relies on certain markers made from general social assumptions concerning the competence and sincerity of knowing and interpreting reality (Fricker, 2007). As Anderson (2012) points out, some markers are prejudicial while others, for example education, are legitimate. Social groups who are educated share knowledge resources and gain access to the marker of trustworthiness. It does not mean that we can assume in advance that those who are uneducated or not yet educated suffer from
epistemic injustice, since educational resources are available (Kotzee, 2017). Rather, their knowing is not recognised as a valuable resource in, for example, public debates, policy and higher education. However, their knowing gains recognition in the social grouping to which they belong.

Fricker’s account of epistemic justice provides analytical tools for studying subtle mechanisms around whose knowledge is trusted or distrusted in social situations. It is not the excellence or the accuracy of knowledge that is in focus, but the judgement of credibility of someone’s capability of conveying knowledge and positioning them as a credible informant or not. In knowledge exchanges, some know more about an issue or problem than others do. The engagement with epistemic justice is a matter of making the judgement of credibility as proportionate as possible rather than arriving at equal distribution (for an extended discussion on credibility, see e.g. Medina, 2011). The sub-forms clarify how epistemic injustice is a specific kind of injustice.

**Testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice**

These two sub-forms of epistemic injustice – testimonial and hermeneutical injustice – are upheld and justified within institutions as well as all cultural and social practices. According to Fricker, they are silencing; not necessarily intentionally but as a result of misinterpretation and structural identity prejudices. In other words, pre-conceived ideas about a person or a social group influence the acknowledgement of their capacity of knowing.

Typically, testimonial injustice takes place in interactions between a speaker and a hearer, where the judgement of trustworthiness can be unfair when it comes to both content and communication. For example, it could be that the speaker is unable or unwilling to use recognised ways of speaking, and the hearer assumes that the speaker is not competent to communicate knowledge, their lived experiences or their beliefs. Furthermore, the content of knowledge and experiences could be unfamiliar to the hearer and lead to misinterpretation. Imagine, for example, practitioners lacking knowledge of career challenges faced by people who identify themselves as transgender. They experience discrimination in hiring processes, unsafe workplace culture and anti-transgender attitudes from colleagues that affect their well-being. If the practitioner’s judgement of the credibility of the person identified as transgender is influenced by anti-transgender prejudice, the hearer may not acquire knowledge that informs the interpretation of told experiences. Consequently, the informant’s experiences related to their identity are ignored or misinterpreted. Being wronged is not a matter of simply failing to be understood occasionally, but rather concerns the connection of systematic dismissal or misinterpretation of the knowledge and experiences of some persons due to negative prejudices towards their own or their group’s social identity. The failure to achieve credibility because of identity prejudices harms the speaker and puts them in a disadvantaged position. To be systematically ignored, discredited or denied a voice could be deeply harmful, in particular when the speaker internalises the credibility deficit which affects their self-trust as a knower (Fricker, 2007, p. 55).

Hermeneutical injustice is structural, and it is relative to the society in which it takes shape. It manifests itself by enhancing or restricting access to interpretative resources within a dominant knowledge order. Certain knowledge and experiences are made invisible, silenced, not properly listened to, misinterpreted or ‘excluded from the pooling of knowledge owing to structural identity prejudice’ (Fricker, 2007, p. 162). Fricker describes this exclusion as ‘a gap in collective interpretive resources [that] puts someone at an unfair disadvantage’ (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). In other words, hermeneutical injustice leads to some speakers not being able to make themselves intelligible and being unable or using the collective hermeneutical resources (e.g. concepts and forms of communication) or use them inadequately for their experience. However, we must ask in what context this occurs and identify the form of silencing – whether it is being excluded in advance from participating in communicative exchanges, or participating but only with some sources of information (Fricker, 2007, pp. 130–133). Exclusion from the production and dissemination of knowledge that would have value for the participant leads to hermeneutical marginalisation (Fricker, 2007, p. 153). Ignoring
the experiences of marginalised groups and their contribution to knowledge, Fricker (2013) underlines, runs the risk of depriving them of equal participation in social knowledge circulation and is a loss for society.

The virtue of epistemic justice

Fricker (2007) argued that everyone has a responsibility to resist testimonial injustice by interrogating structural prejudices and individual prejudices. Clearly, prejudices exist in society and they do not just disappear, but the harmful effects of prejudices should be mitigated. For this endeavour, Fricker advocates the cultivation of virtue for individuals to address testimonial injustice in particular.

Being a virtuous hearer is about exercising critical reflexive awareness of the impact of prejudices and ‘the impact of their own social identity on their credibility judgement’ (Fricker, 2007, p. 91, italics in original). Fricker describes:

> When the hearer suspects prejudice in her credibility judgement – whether through sensing cognitive dissonance between her perception, beliefs, and emotional responses, or whether through self-conscious reflection – she should shift intellectual gear out of spontaneous, unreflective mode and into active critical reflection in order to identify how far the suspected prejudice has influenced her judgement. If she finds that the low credibility judgement she has made of a speaker is due in part to prejudice, then she can correct this by revising the credibility upwards to compensate. (p. 91)

To know when, where and how much someone is wronged in a harmful way, the virtuous hearer should engage in active listening to another person and be alert to what is said and shared to discover new experiences and understandings of the world. This practice requires an open-mindedness and a perceptive sensibility that aims to correct for prejudicial injustices that the informant may encounter. This sensibility involves the ability to shift from spontaneous to reflective rational judgement of trustworthiness (Fricker, 2007, p. 71). However, identity prejudice does not merely concern individual perceptions, but structural identity prejudices exist in hermeneutical resources and affect ‘the ways in which a given society makes sense of the world’ (Dotson, 2012, p. 12).

There are limits to contesting structural forms of hermeneutical injustice, which require social equality, in general, to prevent new forms of hermeneutical marginalisation from arising (Fricker, 2007). Instead, Fricker addresses how hermeneutic injustice manifests itself in testimonial situations. The virtuous hearer should enact an alertness or sensitivity to the possibility that the difficulty one’s interlocutor is having as she tries to render something communicatively intelligible is due not to its being a nonsense or her being a fool, but rather to some sort of gap in collective hermeneutical resources. (Fricker, 2007, p. 169)

Thus, the hearer should be critically aware that the failure in intelligibility should not be ascribed to the speaker. Instead, the struggle for making her communication intelligible is hampered by the interpretative resources dominating the social context. Being a virtuous hearer would then imply being aware of the impact of interpretative resources on depriving someone of their position as a knowing subject.

No single theoretical conceptualisation can explain all problems, and Fricker’s account of epistemic injustice has not passed without critical remarks. For this study, I mention a few scholars who credit Fricker’s work but raise some critical remarks. One criticism concerns the individual virtue of reflexivity and whether it will be sufficient to counter deep-seated prejudices that operate structurally within institutions. Anderson (2012) argued that epistemic injustice upheld by formal and informal structures requires structural intervention, and individual epistemic virtues can therefore only be partial in correcting them. Accordingly, she argues that the system that upholds hermeneutical injustice must be changed. Similarly, Pohlhaus (2017) remarked that epistemic injustice cannot be reduced by participation in the production of knowledge and interpretative practices if serious and systematic failures in trust prevail, for example in institutions. Medina (2013) objected to the reference to a single common hermeneutical resource and calls for more attention to various hermeneutical resources that enable epistemic friction.
To wrap up, Fricker’s account of epistemic justice extends our understanding of epistemic injustice and has given rise to a range of philosophical studies that enrich the problematisation of this phenomenon. In addition, Fricker’s ideas of epistemic injustice are applied in empirical studies in various professional contexts, for example education and social work, and studies of workplaces. The ongoing expansion of literature on epistemic injustice is important; however, there is no space to elaborate on various evolving concepts and arguments that spring from or contrast Fricker’s ideas of epistemic justice. In the next section, I discuss the usefulness and limitations of the framework of epistemic injustice and the possibility of pursuing epistemic justice in career guidance.

Towards epistemic justice in career guidance

Knowledge resources of career development are constructed and shared in theory and practice, policy, organisations and by individuals. For the purpose of this study, the discussion of epistemic justice focuses on the production of knowledge resources on career development in the academic field and the enactment of knowledge and interpretations in career guidance practice. The context and situation are considered, as is the fact that professional activities differ from everyday encounters.

Knowledge resources and hermeneutical justice

Scientific knowledge production of career development lacks diversity of knowledge (see e.g. Sultana, 2020). This problem has been addressed in different ways and requires us to interrogate how actual knowledge systems work. It is seldom a total exclusion of varieties of knowledge, beliefs and interpretations within dominant knowledge resources, but rather a partial exclusion that obstructs the dissemination of knowledge that makes certain knowledge, beliefs and interpretations unintelligible (Fricker, 2007). A common strategy is to bring in diverse perspectives in research as a way to extend the knowledge base, but it is important for the researcher to avoid the problem of ‘speaking for others’. Another strategy is to produce alternative publication circuits to challenge the dominance of the global North in academic knowledge production (Collyer, 2018). In both cases, the challenge for improving knowledge diversity is that the ‘othering’ of knowledge remains.

The postcolonial perspective aims to decolonise knowledge by uncovering the way that knowledge is constructed, positioned and disseminated (see e.g. Santos, 2010). Drawing on de Santos (2008) ideas of ‘epistemologies of the south’, Sultana (2020) argues for discursive spaces for the periphery to speak and share context-based knowledge and experience. Scientific and lay knowledge coexist in these spaces and open up new perspectives that bridge different knowledge and traditions with conceptual and methodological approaches. Emphasising the significance of the local context and conditions of people’s experiences of life, work and well-being, Sultana (2020, p. 8) draws attention to the multiple voices and ‘context-responsive knowledge’ that informs actions and ways of being. The lens of hermeneutical injustice helps us uncover dominant knowledge and interpretations and identify those forms that are systematically rendered irrelevant or inadequate through silencing or ignorance. For injustice to be visible, people in a disadvantaged position must express the prejudicial dismissal of their knowledge and experiences in a specific context (Anderson, 2012). These expressions may take the shape of resistance, including silence towards a dominant colonial culture that historically has silenced them. An example from literature in early childhood education is illustrative. When the non-indigenous scholar encountered young Sámi children and asked them to explain a word in the North Sámi language, a boy answered: ‘You are not Sámi, you won’t understand anyway!’ (Johansson, 2021, p. 52). The children’s refusal raised the scholar’s critical self-awareness of how to do research and made him let go of explanation to, instead, listen to the children’s expressions as decolonising practices.

Thus, research can make epistemic injustice visible. In this regard, we should pay attention to how indigenous people’s perceptions of the world and philosophical ideas of Confucianism and Ubuntu
influence people’s ways of understanding their life experiences and how they construct their careers (Hue, 2008; Watson et al., 2011). Why is it important? Because polyvalent knowledge helps people to examine the intelligibility of their interpretations and the misinterpretations made in communications with others who do not share these experiences (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013). The pursuit of hermeneutical justice requires a collective responsibility to find out what the interpretative gaps might be and ‘to interrogate the limits of our interpretative horizons and to expose ourselves to interpretative challenges that may require extending or transforming the interpretative resources available to us’ (Medina, 2012, p. 216). To enhance interpretative pluralism in knowledge of career development is then a question of being open for disagreement and daring to deal with the unknown. Furthermore, to identify the interpretative gaps in the field of career development is a shared (individual and collective) responsibility that includes universities, publishers, researchers and practitioners.

**Knowing and social power in career guidance**

To understand how the ethical dimension of knowing can be enacted in career guidance practice, it helps to localise testimonial practices in situations of transferring knowledge and in contexts where individuals enact their cognitive capacities. Career guidance is predominantly a service in education, but unlike education, the role of career guidance is not explicitly to foster epistemic justice. Nevertheless, being a knower is important for the self-construction of careers and life-design (Savickas, 2012). Schools are spaces where the reproduction of structural epistemic injustice occurs, and the reproduction also occurs in other places providing career guidance services, for example public employment services or communities.

The implications of testimonial injustice for career guidance practice addressed here concern wronging and harm in the conversation between the practitioner and the individual who gives information about their situation, experiences and competences. The conversation is typically a knowledge transfer where the informant is the speaker, and the practitioner is the hearer, and together they seek to make sense of the information. It is vital to treat the speaker as an informant and not a client because in doing so, the epistemic agency of the informant is recognised. It is from this recognition we can inquire into beliefs of knowing and whose capacity to know is trusted. When considering epistemic justice, person-centred career guidance and the narrative method of listening and understanding a person’s information and telling of experiences is more complex than it appears. The conversation in career guidance is an interpersonal relation of knowledge exchange based on mutual trust. Knowledge exchange is a power relation that involves judgements of trustworthiness of the one who speaks, what is said, how it said and what it is possible to say in a discursive order. Listening to and interacting in the story that is advanced, the practitioner might give more or less credibility to the informant’s trustworthiness of knowing and making sense of their experiences. It affects one’s self-confidence in the capacity of constructing one’s career and life. This is not a problem, unless deep-seated prejudices underpin the deficit of credibility and hinder informants from using their experiences to identify their abilities and construct a career or good life conditions. Imagine a career guidance conversation with a young person placed in compulsory care and treatment who talks about their experiences and competences using sub-culture words, communicates in anger, and whose future plans are to avoid being ‘locked-up’ again. The way the story is told is unfamiliar to the practitioner and common methods do not work in this conversation. The discrepancy in communication evokes a critical social awareness of both the informant’s access to interpretative resources and the social imaginaries of detained young people, and especially boys, as being risky persons.

A limitation in the conceptual literature on epistemic injustice is that it is primarily concerned with adults and rarely with children or young people. Since career guidance in schools involves interactions with pupils, we need to pay specific attention to how epistemic injustice manifests itself in testimonial exchanges involving young people. What kind of knowing subject can young
people enact? Given that the notion of knower denotes the capacity to produce, communicate and use knowledge based on reason and lived experience, young people have less knowledge and experience than adults do. This power asymmetry is not unjust. It becomes unjust, however, when our judgements of a young person’s credibility as a knower is less than they deserve due to prejudices towards their age (Fricker, 2007). To compensate for pupils having less experience, it is the responsibility of teachers, and in this case career guidance practitioners, to enable pupils to be capable as knowers and inquirers (Walker, 2019). Ensuring this for every pupil is a challenge. For the individual situation, it is helpful to consider the thoughts of Murris (2013, p. 258) that ‘thinking with children’ implies ‘being open as a teacher to what I have not heard before and resisting the urge to translate what I hear into what is familiar’. This attitude also applies to adults in situations when communication is complicated, considering that Fricker (2007) suggests open-mindedness in the practice of epistemic virtue.

**The epistemic-ethical virtue implications for career guidance**

Engagement in epistemic justice involves a responsibility or ethical virtue to correct for the wrong and harm of the speaker as a knower in a situational moment. Regarding the ethical role of career guidance, ethical principles help career guidance practitioners to make judgements in their daily work. These principles commonly include mutual trust and respect in the career guidance interaction, the autonomy of each person’s decision-making, awareness of conflicting values, beliefs and worldviews, and avoidance of stereotyping and discrimination (IAEVG, n.d.). For Fricker (2007, p. 75), ethical principles do not help the virtuous hearer ‘to arrive at her credibility judgment’. Instead, this judgement rests upon a perceptive sensibility that implies that the practitioner negotiates how one understands the world with different and contrasting ways of experiencing it.

Intellectual-ethical virtue is individually enacted in transactions with others. This is a challenge, given that narratives through which knowing arises are infused with social-imaginative perceptions and emotions that influence both the practitioner and the informant. Reflexive critical social awareness, which also is sought in the account of norm criticism (Wikstrand, 2019), is the guiding principle for self-reflection with regards to the reproduction of prejudices and norms in language and activities in career guidance practice. Epistemically virtuous practices involve correction, open-mindedness, active listening and critical self-awareness. Thus, when harmful wronging or misrecognition occurs in career guidance activities, it requires a correction. In my understanding of the acknowledgement of knowing, the correction must be proper and not only merely be accepted, but also be sincere. An open-minded attitude involves the recognition of the informant as both a receiver and a giver of knowledge in professional interactions. Career guidance education trains practitioners in active listening and self-reflection, but it cannot be reduced to a tool for managing epistemic injustice. To be a virtuous hearer, pro-active listening is a practice of sensibility for trustworthiness, and this is situational in the interpersonal encounter with the informant (Fricker, 2007, p. 71). Certainly, some practitioners cultivate critical social awareness and are sensitive to the credibility a testimonial deserves, but it also is dependent on the practitioner’s will. If this virtue is to be incorporated in the career guidance profession, it is reliant on other practitioners’ enactment of the virtue. In this way, epistemic virtue is cultivated both through extensive individual experience and through the socialisation process within the profession. Both ways of cultivation require supportive conditions within institutions and opportunities for ethical learning (Anderson, 2012).

**Concluding thoughts**

This paper has introduced a framework for epistemic justice in career development theory and practice. Through Fricker’s conceptualisation of epistemic injustice, I have problematised distinct forms of injustices of knowing that are manifested in knowledge of career development and in career guidance practice. The epistemic justice perspective brings with it critical awareness of the concepts
and assumptions that lay the ground for scientific knowledge resources of career development. This perspective contributes to the discussion of diverse configurations of knowledge used to understand the world, which is a question of social justice (Santos, 2008; Sultana, 2020). It is also important for the circulation of knowledge in educational and labour market systems, where people’s capacity to participate is put to the test.

Everyone’s ability to communicate their experiences and the importance of being recognised as a credible knower are taken seriously in Fricker’s ideas of epistemic justice. Fricker’s suggestions to counter-act testimonial injustice place a strong emphasis on individual responsibility, but collective actions and favourable conditions must be in place to perform this virtue (Anderson, 2012). Given that educational and employment systems are spaces of political interventions driven by economic rationales of efficiency and result-oriented goals, institutional conditions affect the possibility of working towards epistemic justice in career guidance. The commitment to epistemic justice is also framed by formal obligations, informal rules, professional habits and responsibilities to which the practitioner is accountable. However, there are ways forward. The ethics of epistemic justice could be grounded in the curriculum and in pedagogical practice that acknowledges conflicting views and opens up for new learning opportunities (see e.g. Murris, 2013; Walker, 2019). However, caution must be raised that integrating epistemic virtue into the curriculum could be regarded as a solution for epistemic injustice in career guidance. If we are to take epistemic injustice and its negative effects seriously and want to make career guidance as epistemically just as possible, our responsibility needs to become deeply grounded in the profession and the conditions of workplaces need to be changed accordingly. Indeed, epistemic justice is not easy to practice and enact. However, a conceptual framework provides an entry point to explore injustices in knowledge production and harmful misrecognition of people’s information in interpersonal career guidance, and highlights our shared responsibility of altering this.

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**Notes on contributor**

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