Toward an Etiology of Harm for Knowledge Organization: Onto-Epistemic Injustice in Classificatory Systems of Record

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Abstract: This paper traces the impacts knowledge organization systems have upon what can be known through them, the identities they create or deny, and the resulting structure of reality they uphold. We conceptualize classificatory systems of record to frame classification schemes, knowledge organization practices, and knowledge organization systems as central mechanisms for achieving institutional consensus. We define onto-epistemic injustice as a harm to knowers accomplished simultaneously through what they can or cannot know (epistemic harm proper) and also through what thereby does or does not exist (ontological harm). Whereas epistemicide is the destruction of the ability to know, onto-epistemicide is the concomitant destruction of the ability to become. Onto-epistemicide is the cumulative and compounding result of onto-epistemic injustices. Blending insights from document phenomenology with prior examinations of epistemic injustice, we undertake two comparative descriptive case studies examining how the consensus making processes of classificatory systems of record result in onto-epistemic injustice: A) The Medical Subject Headings from the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM-MeSH) and B) The Digital Collections from the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH). In locating documental experiences of knowing and non-documental experiences of becoming, our onto-epistemic injustice analysis reveals the outcomes in these cases extend beyond harming the ability to know. Rather, knower's identities

and most worryingly their ability to become are simultaneously at stake. While classification and factmaking are necessary components for structuring and recreating social reality, it shouldn't be harmful to real people.

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1.0 Introduction

In *The Power to Name,* Hope Olson rightfully observed how names composing classification schemes perform the functions of "creating an identity", and likewise, are a "means of structuring reality" (2002, 4). Knowledge organization systems (KOS) enable practices of naming, a throughline present in much of Olson's work (2018, 2000) which has gradually and notably shifted the intellectual bounds of knowledge organization (KO). It is now widely understood that KOS are not only mechanisms of knowing: they are sites where meaning is made. Indeed, KOS do not merely enable knowledge, they create it. The study of epistemic injustice directly addresses the problematic invisibility of harms to knowers. Patin et al. (2021) position *epistemicide*, or the irrevocable harm to knowers and ways of knowing, as a core concern of library and information science (LIS). In response, more sophisticated approaches and theoretical tools are needed to understand and combat epistemic injustice in KO and LIS. This precisely accommodates for the mechanisms Olson highlighted, as purely epistemic accounts of actual or potential harms do not provide enough understanding needed to effectively combat them.

This paper elaborates on Olson's insight to augment and expand the study of epistemic justice in KO. Using a comparative case study of two instances of actual epistemic harms from KOS, we trace the effects KOS have upon what can be known through them, the identities they create or deny, and the resulting structure of reality they uphold. Doing so uncovers and addresses a key lacuna in the traditional epistemic injustice toolkit: a thorough consideration of the inherent relationship between what can be known and what things and properties exist in the world. Our theoretical contribution is to augment the epistemic perspective on harms resulting from KOS, which can or cannot be known through them, with a related ontological perspective on what things and properties come to exist through them. Utilizing insights from the philosophical field of social ontology, or the study of things that exist in virtue of social consensus and practice, we demonstrate how KOS and KO professionals come to impact the creation of identity and the structuring of reality through their work. We conceptualize *classificatory systems of record*, building on recent work detailing how information systems shape social reality (Hauser 2023), to frame classification schemes, KO practices, and KOS as central mechanisms for achieving institutional consensus.

The resulting theoretical framework of onto-epistemic injustice, introduced and defined in Section 3, is applied as a supplement to an analysis of epistemic injustice. The comparative case analysis, described in Section 4, is guided by the onto-epistemic injustice framework and these motivating research questions:

- What harms arise from these KOSs?
- What potentials for and outcomes of intervention in these harms are evident?
- What harms are missed from a traditional epistemic injustice analysis of KOS?
- What are the onto-epistemic mechanisms of harm within and from KOS?

Each case is analyzed to address these questions, both individually, in Sections 5 and 6, and comparatively, in Section 7. We find the epistemic injustice analysis identifies the presence of harm, but can easily obscure its extent. We show how failures to consider the ontological aspects of harm obscures the extent of injustice possible in KOS, indicating broader ethical stakes of KO. Finally, we show how similar mechanisms of harm between cases are differentially tractable for those seeking to mitigate them.

Adopting a medical analogy, we position our contribution as etiological, concerning the *mechanisms* of harm in these cases, supplementing and enhancing the existing diagnostic tools of epistemic injustice approaches. Beyond attending to the experiential affordances of documents investigated within document phenomenology (Gorichanaz and Latham 2016; Trace 2017; Day 2022) as potential mechanisms of harm, our analysis locates specific material, tangible, and visible mechanisms of harm, at times stemming directly from what documents are made and what documental meanings are possible (or not) within each case's KOS. We conclude by surveying the implications of this approach for the possibility of restorative practices.

2.0 Theoretical background

A major theoretical challenge arising from Olson's premise that KOS "structure reality" by, in part "creating identity" (2002, 4) is accounting for how identities are created and

how created identities in KOS come to accomplish this structuring of reality. Section 2.1 briefly surveys epistemic injustice in KO. Section 2.2 highlights relevant insights from the philosophical field of social ontology, with special attention to applications of such within LIS to address this challenge. Section 2.3 surveys applications of epistemic injustice and locates them within critical theories of power.

2.1 Epistemic injustice in IS/KO

A brisk survey of prior work on epistemic injustice within the IS/KO field reveals a variety of KOS and KO applications but recurring themes of disparate impacts on knowers, contested meanings and identities, and problematic silences and exclusions. Examining "Indians of North America" subject headings, Bullard et al. (2022) argue how "the construction of the surrogate record through colonial vocabularies is [a tactic used by white settler colonialism pursues to finish the project of Indigenous genocide]. Specifically, it constitutes are form of epistemicide" (614). In discussing information wake work, Gabriel (2023) observes how "silences occur repeatedly in the archives in the form of absences, erasures, and violences, leaving barely a trace, if any, of Black life while leaving a disproportionate amount of evidence of Black Death" (2).

El Hadi et al. (2023) framed epistemicide in KO by exploring how early instances of racism, marginalization, and discrimination of the civilization of the Nile Valley in Sudan impacted its tangible cultural heritage. Ibekwe (2024) uses epistemicide and documentary injustice to reconsider the legacy of documentarian Paul Otlet in light of his white supremacist ideologies. Wicket (2024) identities metadata as a cite for critical inquiry, suggesting how relationality (Littletree et al. 2023), and radical empathy (Caswell and Cifor 2016) are core principles for future metadata design and data models supporting counter-storytelling in and across digital collections. Pineo (2023) considers issues of symbolic annihilation in relation to imprecise descriptive language around disabilities in music archives.

2.1 Social ontology: What's made to be the case

Ontology is the philosophical study of the existence of entities and their properties. *Social ontology* specifically concerns entities and properties that exist or obtain in relation to social practices (for an introduction, see: Epstein 2024). Much of LIS concerns entities and properties that are socially ontic: libraries, works, authorship, classification schemes, public and private funding models, and government agencies like the U.S. IMLS all exist or obtain *because specific agents enact them to be so*.

Due to the centrality and tractability of actions in the mechanisms of social ontology, performative approaches that center constitutive acts of meaning are widely applied. Building upon Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts, Searle (1995, 2010) articulated an influential, performative theory of social ontology. According to Searle, social reality is underpinned by social practices that amount to *declarative status functions*. These are statements of equivalence: this counts-as that. A specific document *counts-as* some specific version of the Library of Congress Subject Headings, a specific database *counts-as* a library catalog, a specific building *counts-as* a library, and a specific URL *counts-as* a library's website. Each of these is an *institutional fact*: while the building might exist physically, it is an institution's practices of declaring it a library and the institution and its patrons' practices of using it as such that make this so.

LIS-relevant entities such as a copy of a book and the properties, such as being a library book are accomplished by specific institutional and social practices of making them so. Of the many engagements with Searle's work in LIS and document studies (e.g. Ferraris 2011; Beynon-Davies 2016), philosopher Barry Smith has been one of Searle's most perceptive interlocutors (see Smith and Searle 2003; Smith 2003; Smith and Zelaniec 2021) and has extensively examined the social ontology of documents, from contracts to battle plans to blueprints (Smith 2014, 2013; Koepsell and Smith 2014; Smith at al. 2020). Smith's work broadly expands Searle's account to more readily distinguish the differences between written and spoken language.

Given the social nature of knowledge and the rich literature on the social ontology of documents, we might understand KO, in any context, as a social ontological activity involving the intentional deployment of assumed relevant relationships (affordances) amongst knowledge objects (documents) as being representative of social reality (perception) for a given purpose (use), from which the resulting formal structure constitutes a KOS (de Fremery and Buckland 2024). A classificatory KOS functions as an information system from which facts about entities are reconciled–where users take representations of entities as being the truth of the matter, or what Hauser (2023) defines as systems of record and system-dependent truths, respectively.

2.2 Epistemic injustice and power in ko

All social power becomes part of knowledge claims: "Epistemological choices about whom to trust, what to believe, and why something is true are not benign academic issues" (Hill Collins 2022, 328). Power has long impacted our capacity to know and who is deemed a knower within our communities. In line with expressions of critical investigations of power naming, unraveling and rectifying the consequences of silences in shaping historical knowledge production and reliability of the cultural record (Trouillot 1995; Fowler 2017; Youngman et al. 2022). KO sits at the intersection of knowledge practices and power.

Several core phenomena of KO are shaped by epistemic needs. Hjørland, for instance, provides an influential and now-pervasive argument that "users' most general and fundamental criteria for relevance" (2003, 1) are epistemological in nature. However, what is, or can be known is importantly distinct from what *is*, especially within the scope of social ontology. Whereas epistemology examines knowledge production, ontology considers "what is accepted as *existing*" (Benton and Craib 2011, 5). In the domain of social ontology overlapping with KO, however, the entanglement of processes of knowledge production and what exists cannot be ignored: each information entity about something that exists itself constitutes a new extant entity and posits, at a minimum, properties of some extant entity. How might we proceed in light of this complexity?

Building upon feminist approaches to the complexities of positionality across social worlds and the ethical frameworks, we adopt a situated conception of objectivity (Haraway 1988). This standpoint acknowledges the existence of objectivity but sees it always and only accessible from specific situational positionality. Furthermore, objectivities are always underwritten by material and epistemic forms of power. Patricia Hill Collins writes, "far from being the apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why" (Hill Collins 2022, 328). The relationality of knowing with social worlds of meaning wherein life, the activity of *being*, takes place informs Karen Barad's (2007) argument that ethics, ontology and epistemology are inherently inseparable. Barad's term for the integrated philosophy this demands of us is ethico-onto-epistemology. This leads us, in turn, to the present investigation of how dominant ways of relational knowing militate against not only alternative ways of knowing but also against non-dominant ways of being. A deeper, more integrated conception of epistemicide and epistemic injustice are required to formulate appropriate and effective responses to ongoing harms and those that have yet to be recognized.

3.0 Theoretical framework: onto-epistemic injustice

Epistemicide is the systematic devaluing, silencing, or annihilation of knowledge (Patin et al. 2021; Youngman and Patin 2024b; Patin and Youngman 2022) and is the cumulative and compounding result of epistemic injustices, or a "wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (Fricker 2007, 1). A major positive outcome of research on epistemic injustice is that it has facilitated the identification of epistemically harmful states and effects, resulting in the use of epistemicide and epistemic injustice as a meta-language for understanding the intersection of power, knowledge, and erasure in LIS.

Some studies of epistemic harm, epistemic injustice, and epistemicide have proposed mechanisms for the harm, including beneficent gatekeeping and parasitic omission (Patin and Youngman 2022), fallacies (Youngman and Patin 2024a), digital exclusion (Youngman and Patin 2024b), and neutrality (Sebastian et al. 2022). Nonetheless, there has been less attention paid to the specific information practices accomplishing harm upon knowing subjects, leaving the path from diagnosis of harm to effective triage and restorative treatment obscured. The conception of onto-epistemic justice advanced in this section aims to fill this gap for the comparative case study and in future studies with similar aims.

3.1 Onto-Epistemic injustice

Onto-epistemic harm refers to cases where harm to knowers is accomplished simultaneously through what they can or cannot know (epistemic harm proper) and also through what thereby does or does not exist (ontological harm). Building out related terms in a similar way, onto-epistemicide is the cumulative and compounding result of onto-epistemic injustices. Whereas epistemicide is the destruction of the ability to know, we illustrate below how onto-epistemicide is the concomitant destruction of the ability to become. In this paper, we demonstrate how epistemic harm exists and why conceiving it as merely epistemic harm obscures some of its most harmful effects. Towards the end, we outline the possibility that all epistemic harms have ontological effects and/or mechanisms and call for future work investigating this claim. For the present paper, however, it will be sufficient to demonstrate onto-epistemic harm is active in specific cases.

These onto-epistemic definitions of harm demand a revised conception of the informational mechanism causing harm. We demonstrate how phenomenological accounts of the relationship between documents, information, and experience are suitable for establishing links between knowers who are harmed and the informational mechanisms of their harm. Amidst those applying phenomenology in document studies (Cox et al. 2017; Gorichanaz and Latham 2016; Keilty and Leazer 2017), Trace's (2017) approach is particularly fruitful for connecting the experience of knowing with its ontological enablement. Trace (2017) positions documents as material enablers of information experience. Applying this perspective to epistemic injustice implies that the experience of epistemic harm should always be traceable to a documental enabler. Inspired by this theoretical approach, the methodological approach we take is thus to seek a documental etiology of epistemic harm, the epistemic injustice it may constitute, and the epistemicide it may perpetrate.

We view KOS as ethico-onto-epistemological: simultaneously and inseparably reflect and imbue ethical, ontological, and epistemological assumptions shaping how we engage in knowledge production (Barad 2007). KOS are also infor-

mation systems: they are sources of representations of entities which we take as being truthful about social reality (Hauser 2023). Together, KOS are ethico-onto-epistemological information systems: they enable certain acts of knowing and, we argue, reconcile entities through schematization to simultaneously create knowledge objects. This phenomenon foregrounds classification theory: the infrastructure of classification systems, co-constructed by agents possessing the power and authority to alter components of the system itself, shapes the location, context, or subject of any given knowledge object.

3.2 Mechanisms of onto-epistemic harm

We extend prior research on epistemicide, epistemic injustice, and epistemic harms by contrasting documental, experiential, non-experiential mechanisms of harm.

The institutional practices of document production reviewed in the theoretical background link them directly to institutional practices of memory institutions. Trace's (2017) conception of documents as the site of experience of information to link ontological and epistemic perspectives on informational harm helps. Documents, we find, cause epistemic harm by their existence, non-existence, or through mal-formation. Each of these ontological states of documents can impair the knower's ability to experience information and/or coerce them into having harmful information experiences. Augmenting prior analyses with this documental focus provides an onto-epistemic etiology of informational harm.

If onto-epistemic harms operate simultaneously on being and knowing, the common thread through each is experience. That is, both being and knowing are forms or characteristics of conscious experience. This underwrites our approach to onto-epistemic injustice through document phenomenology. To further solidify this connection, we'll start first by connecting onto-epistemic becoming to phenomenological experiences, as demonstrated through conflict around an entity represented in a CSoR, and then define the aspects of each that interact most directly with epistemic harm in KO. Though informed by document phenomenology, distinguishing documentally afforded experiences in Trace's sense from other kinds of experience enriches the vocabulary with which we can describe the lack of experience, such as the lack of commemoration.

3.2.3 Non-documental mechanisms of onto-epistemic restoration

What can the nature of experience in onto-epistemic becoming tell us about kinds of restorative acts that address onto-epistemic harms in KO? In *Time, Trauma, and Information* (2022), Ron Day investigates the informativeness of the re-experience of trauma attendant to psychoanalytic trauma therapy. As part of that investigation, he identifies a surprising category: information that cannot be documented that is nonetheless informative. Trauma therapies that seek to precipitate the narrative reconstruction of a self capable of agency despite the rupture of self attendant to trauma. For the patient undergoing such therapy, the traumatic event is experienced again (or, in some conceptions, for the first time, since the self that originally experienced the trauma was ruptured by the event). Despite the fact that the narrative "that enables this therapeutic recovery is not-documental, Day argues, it is informative. From the perspective deployed in this paper, narrative trauma therapies are onto-epistemically restorative. They reconstitute the knowing subject, enabling both knowledge and a new form of existence. Although this is not a form of restorative justice typically available in KO, it usefully highlights aspects of restorative justice that might be accomplishable through other means. We begin attending to onto-epistemic restoration in our cases through a discussion on the impact of the resolved conflict around the entity, the truths created in the process, and the material harms inflicted through CSoR so as to identify and adopt alternative strategies for reparative critical-social KO.

3.3 Classificatory systems of record

The reality-creating force of KOS is both an exercise of power and a kind of performative accomplishment. KOS' offer knowledge objects as facts, features of the world that make propositions true or false, rather than propositional statements representing knowledge objects or their properties. This makes them systems of record, which Hauser (2023) defined as "information systems containing facts, rather than propositions." The facts contained in systems of record are not claims but rather real states of affairs that can be used to ground system-dependent truths.

When KOS functions as a CSoR, they produce facts grounding classification-dependent truth. This form of system-dependent truth creates knowledge that becomes the novel properties about classified entities: an assertion of facts about an entity imbued with power and authority by a representation sustained within a KOS. Classification is thereby a performative realization of ethico-onto-epistemological commitments composing the KOS, an even more powerful source of potential harm than latent "interests and theoretical assumptions" (Hjørland 2023, 1544). We contend that the performative nature of factmaking and truthmaking accomplished through CSoR is poorly understood and must be a central concern of critical KO.

4.0 Case Methodology

In LIS research, case study enables "[...] a comprehensive understanding of the event under study but at the same time to develop more general theoretical statements about regularities in the observed phenomena" (Fidel 1984, 274). Comparative case studies help us describe "what is unexpected about [our phenomenon], and why and to whom does [the phenomenon in question] matter[s]" (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, 6), aligning with our research goals. According to George (1979), the comparison "deals selectively with only certain aspects of the historical case [...] and structured because it employs general questions to guide the data collection analysis in that historical case" (61–62). The selectivity of comparative case studies allows us to locate epistemic injustice in divergent KOS application contexts, giving broader transferability to our findings.

In this work, we follow Bartlet and Vavrus's Comparative Case Study (CCS) approach (2017). CSS adopts a critical theoretical stance, centering forms of power and sources of inequity, well-aligned with prior work in KO and the concerns of this investigation. Following CCS, our analysis "tracing the phenomenon of interest in a study across sites and scales" (6), with special attention to "relations of power" (8). Guided by tracing and sensitized to power relations, comparison proceeds across three axes of potential difference in the cases: location, scale, and time (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, 15). Questions listed in Table 1 were used to more finely trace the phenomenon of interest within and across the cases using the terms of onto-epistemic injustice. Social ontology provides an account of what entities and properties come to exist or obtain because of institutional and/or societal consensus.

4.1 Selection of Cases

For this investigation, we selected two CSoR for closer examination in comparative descriptive case studies: A) The Medical Subject Headings from the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM-MeSH) and B) The Digital Collections from the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH). In both cases, institutional consensus are the sources of actual or potential harm, that consensus is challenged, and the challenge to consensus is addressed, or not, by the institution responsible for the development and deployment of the KOS.

4.1.1 Case A: NLM-MeSH

Case A examines the process of consensus around revisions to the NLM-MeSH. Specifically, we attend to the onto-epistemic dilemmas arising from the use of the term "Blacks" to replace the former entry titled "African Continental Ancestry Group." By foregrounding the establishment of institutional consensus (deployment of the historically problematic pluralization "Blacks" as a term by NLM-MeSH), contested consensus (pushback from MeSH users), and revised consensus (NLM-MeSH correction to "Black or African American" terminology as of 2023/04/26), Case A is fertile ground for locating onto-epistemic harms related to

Institutional Consensus Around Entity:
Main Issue: What happened during an interaction with the system?
Why and to whom is this important?
What agents are involved? (*whose consensus matters, institutionally?*)
Source of Power: What social practices and/or consensus were there?
Inscriptive Agency to Direct Power: What documents/document acts were there? (Smith 2014)
Contesting Consensus Around Entity:
Were there notable rebuttals or responses?
Which agents responded and when?
Who could contest and how?
Revision of Consensus Around Entity:
How was consensus revised, resolved, or repaired?
How did responses inform this resolution?
Which agents strove for or resisted revision?
Harms Inflicted:
Theoretically-coded chronology: Was damage done? Was epistemicide enabled?
Inflicted epistemic injustice: What **documental experiences of knowing** were or were not afforded?
(E.J. effects of power/potential harm/potential site of restoration)
Inflicted onto-epistemic injustice: What **non-documental experiences of becoming** were acknowledged or ignored?
(O-E.J. effects of power/potential harm/potential site of restoration)
What kinds of harms are missed without an ontic component?

Table 1. Guiding Questions

discriminatory racialized misrepresentation. The status of MeSH as a CSoR is clear: only agents with specialized knowledge and institutional control possess authority to alter MeSH entries, although users may recommend suggestions or corrections. The longtime use of MeSH amongst medical researchers for searching literature (e.g,, Lowe and Barnett 1994) indicates agents utilize MeSH to derive, group, and reproduce knowledge about represented entities, essentially process of fact recreation.

4.1.2 Case B: Alabama Department of Archives and History's Digital Collection

Case B examines the Alabama Department of Archives and History's (ADAH) Digital Collections and their treatment of Huntsville Civil Rights Movement leader Dr. Sonnie W. Hereford III. We attend to the issues emerging when searching for information about him in the ADAH Digital Collection, noting a lack of uniformity across entity labels and the absence of materials relevant to his work in Huntsville's desegregation efforts. The ADAH has operated since 1901 as the "first state-funded historical agency in the United States [...] and was established to collect and preserve the historical materials of the people of Alabama, and to use that material in sharing their stories" (ADAH 2024a). The ADAH serves the State of Alabama as the "principal repository for materials ranging from official government records to papers, photographs, and recordings created in the private sector. It also serves as an educational center by offering programs, resources, and training for educators, government officials, students, researchers, and history enthusiasts" (ADAH 2024a). As a CSoR, the ADAH digital collections serve as an accessible authoritative source for knowledge about topics and events from which users may assert historical knowledge claims about Alabama. Only ADAH employees possess the agency to alter contextual information about material records viewable by the public online Despite his contributions, Dr. Sonnie Hereford III's presence in ADAH repositories is ambiguous, resulting in detrimental consequences for honestly remembering his role in the Huntsville Civil Rights Movement.

4.2 Broader significance

The broader field of LIS has struggled to reconcile issues of race and racism. Two decades ago, Honma wrote that "libraries have historically served the interests of a white racial project by aiding in the construction and maintenance of a white American citizenry as well as the perpetuation of white privilege in the structures of the field itself" (2005, 4). This was a motivation for Furner's (2007) early application of Critical Race Theory to examine how KOS can more equitably account for diverse communities. These marginalizations persist within KO and have spawned an important and still-growing body of literature (e.g., Littletree and Metoyer 2015). Adler and Harper (2018, 52) argue "classification and the organization of information are directly connected to issues surrounding social justice, diversity, and inclusion" by explaining that both "political and epistemological aspects of knowledge organization are fundamental".

Within KO, these harms are not relegated to issues of race only but are well documented across spaces. We see the harms related to contemporary debates on LCSH/DDC/DSM: "Illegal Aliens" (George et al. 2021); "Indians" (Duarte and Belarde-Lewis 2015; Pettitt and Elzi 2023), "Christianity" (Khan 2004), episemantics (Hauser and Tennis 2019), Indigenous religions (Comaromi and Satija 1985), Eurocentric White framings with international implications (Yeon et al 2023), Non-Western languages (Kua 2004), and queer subjects (Billey et al 2014; Bone and Lougheed 2018; Cox et al 2017; Drabinski 2013; Ewing 2019; Fox 2016). Whether through the use of self-imposed categories to enact descriptions signaling aspects about our identity (e.g. gender, sexuality) or when browsing online information resources or digital repositories and memory institution catalogs, our often unfettered reliance on KOS for conducting fact-finding about entities and their properties warrant ethical concern.

4.3 Authors' positionality

The complexity of racial and identity-based harms, epistemic and otherwise, necessitates collaborative insights. One author is a subject of the harms described in Case A, while directly and personally knowledgeable of the circumstances of Case B. The other authors do not have similar positional relationships to the cases. We found that this blended positionality was an asset during the case analysis, as it enabled us to accomplish both a highly situated analysis of specific harms and locate broader relevance to similar harms broadly required by studies of epistemic justice and social justice. Future work will take up the lived experience of harms perpetrated by onto-epistemic injustice in KO and historical commemoration practices, which is core to the stakes and motivation of this paper but constitutes a distinct scope of research.

5.0 Case A: NLM-MeSH

Established in 1954 and revised across the early 1960's, the MeSH thesaurus has operated as "a controlled and hierarchically organized vocabulary [...] used for indexing, cataloging, and searching of biomedical and health-related information. MeSH includes the subject headings appearing in MEDLINE/PubMed, the NLM Catalog, and other NLM databases." (NLM 2024). With more than 30,000 entries as of April 2024, the Cataloging and Metadata Management Section (CaMMS) at NLM uses Medical Subject

Headings (MeSH) for assigning subject headings to materials in all formats. (NLM, 2024). The process for user input and suggestions is enabled through their website where users are able to both "make suggestions for new MeSH vocabulary" but also to make "corrections" if a mistake is found (NLM 2024).

5.1 Institutional consensus

In 2022, NLM-MeSH introduced several terminological revisions related to minority populations, namely including the replacement of "African Continental Ancestry Group" with "Blacks", a documental act undertaken by MeSH subject specialists endowed with inscriptive agency over the CSoR by the NLM as the regulatory body. The main issue concerns the problematic use of racialized pluralization in the context of medical information organization, as Flanagin et al (2021) discuss: "race and ethnicity are social constructs, without scientific or biological meaning", and likewise, "racial and ethnic terms should not be used in noun form [...] the adjectival form is preferred [...] because this follows AMA style regarding person-first language." Sigelman et al. (2005, 429) similarly observe how "racial labels have long been associated with majority-group attitudes toward minority-group members, and minorities themselves have changed their preferred terminology over time". The power to change group labels and refer to social groups warrants closer examination.

5.2 Contesting consensus

NLM faced widespread criticism for adopting outdated discriminatory terminology rather than person-first language, as social media responses to the revisions garnered significant attention, many interrogating why and how such harmful changes could be permitted (Roth 2022). In response, a collective 726 medical library workers and information professionals penned a letter to the MeSH committee at NLM, later circulated on Medical Library Association channels. The signatories expressed shock and dismay at the MeSH revisions: "The use of this terminology is not only concerning for information professionals but creates great harm for our users as well as those in the profession. "Black" as a term used to denote racial identity is a proper adjective; not a noun" (Fox et al. 2022, 3). The signatories expressed dissatisfaction with prior efforts to resolve problems arising from recent terminological revisions:

> As in the past, when library workers reached out through emails and submission forms to the MeSH Committee to ask that this terminology be changed, they were met with a lack of any thoughtful response or indication that the committee understood the trauma such terminology would inflict. The responses, when they were not just an acknowledgement that the request was received, most times felt scripted and did not answer the concerns being addressed (Fox et al. 2022, 3).

In doing so, the signatories further observed the lack of care and cultural competency exhibited in adopting new terminology revisions:

> Recommending that the outdated term "Negro" be used is not acceptable, especially not in 2022, and this was a missed opportunity to write a respectful definition in the scope note as opposed to simply listing discoverable terms lacking necessary context. Utilizing cultural humility in the creation of scope notes would assist in making these both discoverable and respectful (Fox et al. 2022, 3).

The signatories made two requests of the MeSH Committee, included 1) "Immediately updating the MeSH "Blacks" to an appropriate and correct term (e.g. "Black people") and including a definition in the scoping note that accurately represents the identities of those being attached to the subject heading" (Fox et al 2022, 4) and to adjacently "update scope notes of race-specific terms to inform PubMed users that race is socially constructed and is not considered a biological concept" (4). To mitigate the possibility of future issues related to terminology revisions, the signatories further recommended strategies for ensuring increased transparency and documentation around the editing process, consulting paid experts for review and improvements to identity-based MeSH terms and facilitating opportunities for feedback and training (4). In ending their letter, the signatories acknowledge how "terms like "Blacks" and others that have been identified should not be allowed in such a space and calls for changes from the information professionals utilizing these resources should not go ignored" (5). In response to signatories, NLM publicly acknowledged the seriousness of the issues presented:

> We are mindful that MeSH is designed to facilitate discovery of literature as it is publish over time. MeSH descriptors must therefore be reflective of terminology used in scientific studies with history and scope notes that aid in understanding how to search across timelines as terminology changes to ensure comprehensive literature search results (MLA 2022).

However, the assertion by NLM that descriptors must be reflective of terminological use in scientific studies is almost immediately contradicted:

> In 2022, NLM modified MeSH terms related to population groups to better align with standards for race and ethnicity promulgated by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for use across Federal agencies and adopted by the National Institutes of Health (MLA 2022).

According to this response, readers may wonder whether MeSH terms are actually indicative and reflective of bias in scientific literature, bias in language preferences of federal agencies, or both. Subsequently, NLM offered to engage in dialogue with concerned MeSH users as "a broader NLM effort to end structural racism and promote racial equality and inclusion at NIH and within the larger biomedical research enterprise" (MLA 2022).

A rebuttal to NLM's response expressed disappointment on behalf of the signatories: "we are disappointed to read that rather than addressing the specific concerns outlined in the letter and signed by over 700 librarians both within North America and the world, the justification for existing practices was the general response received" (MLA 2022). Pointing to the *Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity*, Mulaski and Weeks on behalf of the signatories (MLA 2022) suggest "there are opportunities for ensuring that problematic terminologies are not the representative terms used in controlled vocabularies even when pointing to federal guidance", specifically referencing the term "Black or African Americans" as compared to "Blacks" used by MeSH. The correspondence concludes with an eagerness to engage in collaborative feedback to facilitate changes to MeSH.

5.3 Revision of consensus

The collaborative dialogue between the collective of medical library worker signatories and the NLM-MeSH committee resulted in terminological revision and institutional consensus. As of 2023/04/26, MeSH revised "Blacks" to "Black or African American" as the latest change since varied uses of the terms "Negroes" from 1963 to 1975, "Blacks" from 1976 to 2003, "African Americans" from 2004 to 2022. "Black People" is also available as of 2024. MeSH revised the scope notes as follows:

> A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa [...]. In the United States it is used for classification of federal government data on race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity terms are self-identified social construct and may include terms outdated and offensive in MeSH to assist users who are interested in retrieving comprehensive search results for studies such as in longitudinal studies.

5.4 Harms Inflicted

While epistemicide was interrupted through the establishment of revised consensus, we observe the damage articulated during the process of contesting consensus as the latest offense in the persistent history of anti-Blackness across information settings: "The enactment of anti-Blackness through policy, processes, and procedures has long exacerbated the injustices that members of the Black community experience throughout their epistemological development" (Patin et al. 2023, 17-18). The harms demonstrate the necessity of an ontic lens with which to understand the messiness of terminological relationships as indicative of larger social, cultural, and historical contexts and the result of agential cuts shaping how we are and exist in the world. The ontic lens extends solely beyond misrepresentation and inclusive terminology, instead directing us to consider how the dynamics of absence and exclusion denies the existence of Black People, and likewise, only allows for modes of existing aligned with epistemologies underpinning the structuration of the CSoR.

5.4.1 Epistemic injustice and documental experiences of knowing

Epistemologically, the MeSH term "Blacks" functioned as the documental enabler by which editors and users of MeSH represent and group evidence about Black people. From the afforded pluralization of Blackness as an acceptable mode of referring to social groups, the documental enabler justified a lack of individuality as an acceptable way of knowing about Black people, and imbues epistemic authority upon "Blacks" as the de facto name for use across informational settings. The descriptive power enacted by and through MeSH enables varieties of epistemic injustice: the devaluation Black user representations about themselves when interacting with the system may constitute a dismissal of how they see themselves; users are forced to adopt "Blacks" as the preferred language rather than other search terms; the acquisition of learning resources through MeSH is restricted to those who use term "Blacks" in searching; the actual subject term is misrepresentative and inaccurate. The site of restoration becomes the CSoR itself, where inclusive terminology could mitigate the possibility for harm during system interaction.

5.4.2 Onto-Epistemic injustice and non-documental experiences of becoming

Onto-epistemologically, the MeSH term "Blacks" reflected an exclusion of agency over how one is represented and a dismissal of Black people as worthy of individual consideration. In doing so, the denial of Blackness as a valid way of

being in the social world and the adoption of racist dominant-group ideology as the most acceptable and appropriate way of being in the world are acknowledged as non-documental experiences of becoming made possible through MeSH. The non-documental experiences of becoming were enacted through "Blacks" as the documental enabler. Indeed, the MeSH controlled vocabulary employed a vocabulary of control, by enacting a dominant discourse about Blackness and representation of Black people underpinned by racist ideology.

The adoption of "Blacks" by MeSH inherently legitimized the dehumanization of Blackness, while worsening the potential for stereotyping: If a medical article on heart disease amongst African Americans is categorized under "Blacks", are users browsing literature using MeSH terms empowered to make the subsequent knowledge claim: "Blacks get heart disease"? When such asserted claims are made possible through the status of MeSH as a CSoR, could MeSH then justify the use of the term "Blacks" because it reappeared in the literature? At first glance, MeSH appears to hold the capacity to perpetuate its representations. In adopting "Blacks," MeSH did not simply misrepresent Black people or increase search difficulty but rather denied their existence through the adoption of a term empowered by racist epistemologies. Further, does revised consensus around "Black or African American" further suggest an entity represented may either be "Black" or "African American"? This discursive shift further suggests an absence of personhood altogether.

The ontic power enacted by and through MeSH enables varieties of onto-epistemic injustice: the term "Blacks" counts as medically sufficient, and ideally representative for MeSH, constituting a process of speaking for Black people and denying any kind of testimony to emerge; Black people are not treated as individuals in medical context; "Blacks" is the only permitted language for Black people to search for themselves in the system; If the term "Blacks" counts as medically valid in MeSH, medical professionals with racist ideologies or opinions are subsequently empowered; As a CSoR, MeSH ultimately legitimized the false status of the term "Blacks" as a proper term usable across social contexts, especially in medical settings, creating a forced representation about Black people treated as valid and truthful to social reality.

The site of restoration becomes the complexity of interactions occurring before interactions with the construction and use of the CSoR, including how we train medical professionals and classification professionals with cultural competence, humility, and historical awareness.

6.0 Case B: ADAH digital collections

Dr. Sonnie W. Hereford III was a medical doctor and a prominent leader in the Civil Rights Movement in Huntsville, Alabama. Dr. Hereford helped organize the Community Action Committee with the goal of integrating Alabama. Dr. Hereford, friends, and family were among the first Black Alabamians to integrate restaurants, public bathrooms, roller skating rinks, and hotels in Alabama (Curnel 2016; Hamlin 2019). Dr. Hereford sued the Huntsville Board of Education, and after winning, his son Sonnie W. Hereford IV became the first Black child to enroll in a previously all-White school (Cashin 2015).

The ADAH is the historical repository for the State of Alabama; however, when searching for information about Dr. Hereford in 2019, only one result was located within this CSoR. The ADAH serves the State of Alabama as its historical repository and is tasked to collect and make available materials representing "Alabamians of all walks of life and reflect the state's diverse history" typically through artifacts, archival materials and reference materials (ADAH 2024c, 2). While a variety of documentation available online details institutional composition (ADAH 2024d) and governance (ADAH 2024b), their controlled vocabularies and collection development guidelines are unavailable. This complicates our ability to see how decisions and revisions are made.

6.1 Institutional consensus

For this case study, this search was completed in July 2024. Immediate issues emerged with a lack of clarity around subject headings. Searching in the ADAH for "Dr. Sonnie W. Hereford III" the most complete representation of his name yielded zero results. The search terms were modified several times with varying results (see Table 2). Across the search terms used, a total of 5 results were attained. Of the 5 results, one is about Sonnie W. Hereford II (his father), one is about Sonnie W. Hereford IV (his son), one is for Dr. Sonnie W. Hereford III & Sonnie W. Hereford IV, and two are about Dr. Sonnie W. Hereford III.

None of the items included in ADAH's digital collection are primary documents about the Civil Rights Movement, or the role of Dr. Hereford or his family played in changing history. The first result is a World War I military service record for Dr. Hereford's father. Three other results are media requests from the *Huntsville Times* to use his photographs as part of their news stories. The only result relating to Dr. Sonnie Hereford is from a collection of photographs by Jim Peppler where he documents a 20th Anniversary celebration of the Brown versus Board of Education result/win/case. These two photographs are the only entries found in the collection treating Dr. Hereford as a subject

using disambiguated terms as subjects for the photographs: "Hereford, Sonnie W., 1931-2016" and "Hereford, Sonnie W., 1957-". The subject entries, while hyperlinked, do not connect to any other entries' results. These subject headings do not include titles or suffixes III vs IV, creating ambiguity. When there is no agreement, the search is further complicated. The focus of this search was for the ADAH's digital collections, searching the catalog for "Sonnie Hereford" returns two results: the Jim Peppler Collection and a physical copy of Dr. Hereford's book, *Besides the Trouble Water*. His name is cataloged in the physical archive as "Sonnie W. Hereford" without dates.

6.2 Contesting consensus

In 2020, ADAH acknowledged its intentional participation in distorting Alabama's racial history:

> The State of Alabama founded the department [...] to serve a white southern concern for the preservation of Confederate history and the promotion of Lost Cause ideals. For well over a half-century, the agency committed extensive resources to the acquisition of Confederate records and artifacts while declining to acquire and preserve materials documenting the lives and contributions of African Americans in Alabama (Murray 2020).

Section 41-6-13 of the 1975 Alabama Code, entitled "Collection, etc., of data as to Alabama soldiers in war between states", affirms this observation: "The department [ADAH] shall make special effort to collect data in reference to soldiers from Alabama in the war between the states, [...]." The ADAH statement reaffirmed the state's recommitment to pursuing " a fully inclusive story of Alabama's role in the American experience" by proposing objectives such as facilitating public dialogue, enhancing diversity through recruitment, and modeling responsible stewardship of historical materials (Murray 2020). This acknowledgment suggests the material gaps and naming issues surrounding the presentation of Dr. Sonnie Hereford III are consequences of a prior lack of care enacted through institutional priorities.

There is much documented evidence about the contributions of Dr. Sonnie Hereford III, namely: a memoir (Hereford III and Ellis, 2011), a federal desegregation lawsuit (Hereford v. United States, 2014), a named elementary school, local community exhibitions and scholarship (Hamlin 2016; 2019; Curnel 2016; Murray P. 2020; Odom and Waring 2022), media coverage (Southern Poverty Law Center 2018), and records housed at Calhoun Community College's Center for the Study of Southern Political Culture. Despite these efforts, the ADAH does not point to these or other relevant collections.

In response to the omissions and lack of clarity around recognizing the contributions of Dr. Sonnie Hereford III, a community-led coalition of civil rights leaders, historians, and engaged citizens organized in an attempt to provide coverage. This resulted in the establishment of Rocket City Civil Rights as a community non-profit working to "archive, advocate and assist in social reform rooted in Huntsville's contribution to the Civil Rights Movement. Truth, integrity and accessibility are our guiding principles to advance our mission through exhibitions, education and civic engagement" (RCCR 2022). In response to ADAH acknowledgement and RCCR's formation, scholars have suggested that the omissions and disambiguation around Dr. Sonnie Hereford III and his contributions reflect an interruption of acquiring accurate knowledge about Alabama history (Patin and Youngman 2022) resulting in incomplete stories about local histories (Smith and Patin 2024).

Search Term	Amount and Types of Search Results
"Sonnie Hereford"	5 results – SWH II Army service record – photographs from the 20th anniversary of Brown vs. BoE – 3 Huntsville Times Newspaper media requests
"Dr. Sonnie Hereford"	2 results – 2 Huntsville Times Newspaper media requests
"Sonnie W. Hereford"	1 result – photographs
"Sonnie W. Hereford III"	1 result – photographs
"Dr. Sonnie W. Hereford III"	0 results
"Sonnie W. Hereford IV"	1 result – photographs

Table 2. Searching for Sonnie Hereford

6.3 Revision of consensus

Crocker (2022) noted how "since its statement of recommitment, the archives has tried to accelerate efforts to seek out more artifacts reflecting the presence of Black people in Alabama history [...]. Another important element of the archives' effort [...] is making some of the records it already has, easier to use." Yet, despite previous efforts across local and state contexts, records are still missing, and incorrect terms are still used. This is especially concerning considering how in 2009, ADAH indicated African American experience in Alabama during the Civil Rights Movement as level 1 highest priority for collecting (ADAH 2009 4).

Twelve years later, their 2021 Strategic Framework lists active acquisition efforts, which include both race relations and school integration. The efforts since the Recommitment Statement were reported on in their 2021 Trustee Minute meeting notes "including digitization projects involving Alabama Supreme Court case files and the governors' papers of the Civil War and Reconstruction era" and the development of a "digital exhibition on the African American experience from Reconstruction to 1980" (ADAH 2020). Additionally, they are working to "provide outreach on career opportunities to students at Alabama HBCUs" and most critical to this work, working to "review and update language used in agency catalog records and finding aids" (ADAH 2020, 4).

While larger structural efforts are necessary, they do not necessarily account for perpetuation of recurring instances of individual harms, particularly as it relates to the continued absence of Dr. Sonnie Hereford III. The contemporary Alabama political landscape further complicates ADAH efforts at reparative collecting and description, including threats of reduced funding looming over the ADAH (Stephenson 2023a; 2023b). An arrival to consensus remains a future ideal.

6.4 Harms inflicted

Epistemicide is ongoing. Searching ADAH digital collections for information about Dr. Sonnie Hereford III instead yielded glaring historical omissions and classificatory ambiguity harmful to producing knowledge about him and recognizing his existence as worthy for inclusion in Alabama history. The lack of care in digital stewardship, further exacerbated by an institutional history of suppression and exclusion of Black history, indicates a failure of ADAH to provide reliable historical knowledge and to uphold its institutional credibility. Despite present work on epistemic injustices, the lack of correction by ADAH indicates we have items and information about Dr. Sonnie Hereford is irrelevant. Attention to the ontic consequences of ADAH reveals how neither Hereford is treated as relevant to Alabama history by the agents with system authority, indicating a delegitimation of Dr. Sonnie Hereford through a lack of care for his entity clarity and a lack of objects.

6.4.1 Epistemic injustice and documental experiences of knowing

Epistemologically, there exists a plurality of search terms serving as documental enablers by which editors and users of ADAH Digital collections locate evidence about Dr. Sonnie Hereford III. Each term affords different ways of referring to Dr. Sonnie Hereford III: honorifics, initialisms, suffixes further complicate what kinds of evidence can be found. This problem is inherently episemantic: the retrieval of what exists in ADAH digital collections (aroundness) is limited by how the entity is described (aboutness). The descriptive power enacted by and through interactions with ADAH enables epistemic injustice: Only certain ways of referring to Dr. Sonnie Hereford III are useful for retrieving information about him, albeit limited; the fact that there is no presence of primary documents about Dr. Sonnie Hereford III means the system does not recognize him, or his accomplishments, as worthy of inclusion in the historical repository; the CSoR treats the entity as unimportant and there are no documents to support his relevance, shaping how people can learn about him. This exclusion and devaluation are examples of testimonial injustice, curricular injustice, and commemorative injustice.

6.4.2 Onto-Epistemic injustice and non-documental experiences of becoming

The lack of access to the collection development policies, controlled vocabularies, and other policies around subject authority impacts our capacity to interact with these CSoR in more meaningful ways. Our ability to know and grow through that documentation and the study of these policies is an onto-injustice leading to a direct consequence of knowing.

The lack of clarity around Dr. Sonnie Hereford III as a specific entity makes it difficult to point to him as an historical figure. The system asserts Sonnie (which one?) is only relevant in relation to these five entries in the system of record. The authority and legitimacy of the historical repository allows one to assume the knowledge around the subject is complete, comprehensive, and compelling. The lack of the name/representation for the entity called "Sonnie hereford" perpetuates a lack of documentation, a lack of findability, a lack of care. The CSoR moves beyond saying what we know about Sonnie does not matter, but rather tells us that Sonnie does not matter.

The legitimacy of the ADAH trickles down to how we treat history and its historical markers. The CSoR omission

trickles down to everyday interactions with history. If CSoR with authority to imbue an entity with reverence fails to do so, it establishes a precedent which others can point to as being not necessary to know, that is, Sonnie does not count as historically relevant to the Civil Rights Movement, despite evidence to the contrary existing outside the institution.

7.0 Discussion

Despite the contrasting shapes of institutional consensus across Case A (professionalized) and Case B (politicized), we note how ultimately the same unquestioning meaning-making practices happen in response to an imposition of institutional fact-making, the outcomes of which are often unquestioningly adopted into meaning making practices as a result of the institutions status as a trustworthy source of information. Yet, without the agency for contesting consensus, the unquestioned adoption of institutional facts about entities fundamentally changes the scope of social reality around the entities in question.

These two cases share meaningful aspects of import to onto-epistemic injustice, including the potential or actuality of harms, centrality of KOS in the site, and a contested consensus surrounding the identity of black Americans. Following Bartlet and Vavrus's CCS (2017), the balance of discussion traces the phenomenon of interest across axes of location, scale, and time, with a particular sensitivity to themes of power.

7.1 Contrasting case outcomes

In Case A, we demonstrated the circumstances and onto-epistemic consequences of the term "Blacks" in MeSH, revealing the fact-making role of MeSH in the medicine domain by demonstrating how descriptive control over medical documents shapes the semantic scope of medical knowledge itself. Several classification-dependent truths emerged about Blackness and Black patients as epistemic consequences of an imposed institutional consensus. The actions of this CSoR implicitly determined could be known about Blackness and Black patients by constructing an entity asserting a privileged epistemological frame of reference: what is known is only what is worthy of being known. The use of the term "Blacks" by MeSH reflected an assertion about Blackness directly shaping what it means to be a Black patient in contexts of medical care. This act directly altered social reality: what a Black person is, was, and could become or be treated as medically emerged as a result of how the CSoR defined them as an entity.

In Case B, we demonstrated the circumstances and onto-epistemic consequences of the entity "Dr. Sonnie Hereford III" as represented and attended to by ADAH. By demonstrating how descriptive control over entities relevant to the African American contributions to the Civil Rights Movement in Huntsville, AL, we understand how ADAH shapes the historical knowledge about Alabama itself. The ambiguity around Dr. Sonnie Hereford III results in classification-dependent truths shaping what is remembered about Dr. Hereford's life, which reshapes meanings of place, time, and identity. The actions of this CSoR to determine what was worth remembering about Dr. Sonnie Hereford III reflects an implicit indication as to what it means to be in Alabama, here and now, and what Dr. Sonnie Hereford III means to Alabama, then and now. The ongoing consequences of ADAH actions directly alter social reality: what Alabama is, was, and could become historically emerges as a result of how the CSoR treats the entities they steward.

One difference in the evaluation of our cases is around resolution, or lack thereof. Whereas Case A investigates a single incidence, Case B is ongoing. This denotes a difference in the magnitude of harm happening between the cases. In Case A, we see an injustice that was identified and corrected within the span of a year. In Case B however, we are confronted with a legacy of marginalization and intentional racist practices, procedures and policies exacerbating harm with generational repercussions, what the Patin et al. (2021) call the third harm.

The mechanisms of consensus revisions differed across cases. The motivation for the revision in Case A was external as NLM-MeSH was called out to make the revisions. Whereas in Case B, the ADAH intentionally owned up to its inherited legacy of problematic policies and procedures. External pushback worked in Case A because of the collective power used to demand change. Likewise, owning up does not always work if the efforts feel performative. For example, in Case B, the ADAH has acknowledged numerous times since at least 2009 that they needed to focus their attention on collecting materials relevant to Black Alabama. However, there is very little reporting to understand to what extent these efforts have been successful. There is also a power differential at play within the ADAH case, as the institution has to report directly to the government of the State of Alabama and is beholden to its laws and policies which dampen equity goals.

7.2 Comparing case mechanisms

Across both cases, institutions retained inscriptive agency over the CSoR, which were faithfully enacted in each site. Both included a fact making as a legitimation process (transparent in MeSH, or subtle in ADAH) pointing to the power of epistemic authority in ensuring only certain ways of knowing are allowed to become. This authority does not just impact the institutions the CSoRs are a part of but instead, in both cases, reaches beyond and has a broad impact. The decisions made within these CSoRs, impact the insti-

tutions around them. This impact points to jussive trust making enabled because of the social position of the CSoR within adjacent infrastructures. In Case A, other organizations or individuals such as insurance companies, doctors, or PubMed point to MeSH indicating those entities have to believe what MeSH says is true.

Documental experiences afforded reflect the effects of power, which can lead to harm but also to restorative approaches. The accomplishment of social practices and consensus, as observed across both cases, is a form of power with the capacity to develop more power once consensus is established, giving inscriptive agency to anyone who can change the CSoR and direct consensus, such as subject specialists or record stewards. This ability to document or to direct document acts constitutes both inscriptive and descriptive agencies resulting in the development of new non documental modes of being, the traces of which emerge as documental enablers that cyclically facilitate new meaning making practices and processes.

7.3 Cyclic onto-epistemic injustice

By supplementing the ontological gaps in epistemic injustice in instances across KOS, our epistemic injustice analysis has revealed the deeper, harmful dynamics of how properties, objects, and identities left out shape social reality. Consequently, we derive new insights about the ontic dynamics of the cycle of interrupted knowledge development (Patin and Youngman 2022): In any given ethico-onto-epistemological state, knowers interacting with CSoR – whose mechanisms of consensus result in the production of harmfully framed entities – risk exposure to onto-epistemic injustice, enabling a dismissal and denial of their existence potentially resulting in mal-epistemology as "a cognitive state grounded in the irreconcilable disagreements between internal propositional attitudes (belief) and external expressions of reality" (Youngman and Patin 2024a, 6). Without revised consensus resulting in person-centered entity representations and culturally cognizant fact-finding structures, we argue, CSoR will continue to self-reproduce classification-dependent truths reflective of dominant ethical frameworks, privileged ontic viewpoints, and epistemological regimes shaping how knowers interact with social reality. Interrupting cyclic onto-epistemic injustice is necessary to pursue a restorative social reality. Consider the words of Malcolm X: "Progress is healing the wound that's below."

8.0 Conclusion: toward restorative critical-social KO

> Our systems have value. They have done our housekeeping for decades if not centuries or millennia. They are part of our vernacular realities. We may consider them the found objects of our art and the focus of our work. To understand their shortcomings is the basis for developing their potential. That potential is the power to name (Olson 2002, 239)

Our investigation begins to augment onto-epistemicide and onto-epistemic injustice as critical imperatives for KO and LIS. Without understanding the complexities of ontic mechanisms of informational harm in KOS – specifically how categories and classifications are performatively constituted – critical KO cannot anticipate and address the full range of harms and possibilities for restoration active in KOS and the memory practices they shape. While our initial descriptive accounts offer foundational observations for explanatory theorizing, the emergence of a predictive holistic etiology of harm and targeted restorative justice agenda relies on collaborative effort across KO and LIS.

Future research on the nature of onto-epistemic injustice enacted through CSoR must consider both their embeddedness in everyday interactions and the assumptions underpinning their power to shape social reality, ranging from singular instances of labeling to processes of consensus on Wikipedia and related social media platforms. Several promising connections could inform alternative theoretical frameworks for investigating the etiology and full extent of epistemic harm, including social epistemology (e.g. Budd 2002), but is outside the present scope. Alongside examinations of the practices and powers of resistant classification systems, we must apply sankofic interventions (Youngman and Patin 2024b) and reparative storytelling (Smith and Patin 2024) to redress onto-epistemic harm while holding space for the process of becoming by foregrounding an ethical commitment to combating violence through language (Tennis 2013). LIS education is a powerful remedy and site of restoration: emerging and continuing professionals must possess awareness of how institutional legacies shape modern cultural practices (Turner 2020), commit to pursuing cultural competence and humility (Overall 2009; Cooke 2018), and understand the power and importance of prioritizing personhood, relationality, and responsibility in KO practices (Duarte and Belarde-Lewis 2015; Littletree et al. 2020).

The stakes for KO are high. Without intervention, onto-epistemic injustice is relentless. Yet, pointing to injustice and changing terminology does not fully rectify the consequences of material harm: it persists because it is systemic. Onto-epistemic injustice is analogous to a compromised immune system co-opted to do something harmful, despite its intention to simply organize. While classification and fact-making are necessary components for structuring and recreating social reality, they should not be harmful to real people. Our onto-epistemic injustice analysis reveals the harms in these cases not only obviate the ability to know but also

knowers' identities and, most worryingly, *their ability to become* are simultaneously at stake. We must do better.

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