

Wednesday late afternoon session Track C, Wednesday, Sep 24 2025, 14:00-15:30

Location: Seminar 5

Session: **Concepts and Definitions**

Chair: Maura Hiney

OR-67

What does fairness mean for RI and RCR codes?: A scoping review using Critical Discourse Analysis

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Currently, Research Integrity (RI) initiatives are predominantly shaped by countries in the Global North (GN). Given the influence of GN funders and publishers on global research practices, RI standards set in the GN are frequently also applied in the Global South (GS). While the GS is increasingly involved in RI initiatives there still exist a risk of ethical imperialism, where GN ethical standards are imposed as universal. This study examines if and how ethical imperialism manifests in regulatory RI documents by assessing their treatment of research fairness using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

We conducted a scoping review to collect regional, national and international RI guidelines and codes of conduct. Conducting a search of grey literature and scientific literature, we included up to 78 codes that explicitly refer to responsible conduct of research or research integrity directed at researchers. Our analysis employs CDA to assess how fairness is constructed in these documents and analyse implicit and explicit power dynamics, silences, and assumptions.

Our sample includes an uneven representation of countries: RI codes come mostly from Euro-American countries, with limited representation from Africa and Latin America. Only a few documents explicitly mention issues of injustice, such as knowledge and material extractivism, epistemic injustice, and socioeconomic inequities and precariousness.

Few codes explicitly confront colonial hierarchies, but those that do tend to come from formerly colonized nations. Some documents acknowledge non-Western knowledge systems and alternative ethical frameworks, yet many still reflect hierarchies in their language, for instance, portraying indigenous and marginalized groups as passive agents and receivers of research rather than as groups capable of conducting research.

While some RI codes integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles, their depth varies. Some documents employ "diversity" as an empty concept, while others propose concrete measures to counter discrimination and systemic inequalities.

Finally, fairness is frequently reduced to procedural mechanisms, such as fair authorship, peer review, and misconduct investigations, which, while essential, risk treating fairness as bureaucratic compliance rather than a structural transformation of research.

In general, the historical and geopolitical contexts of the countries that produce RI codes are reflected in the way fairness is framed. Some countries that have experienced imperialism and totalitarianism see science as a tool for resistance. Overall, European RI frameworks tend to emphasize fairness without justice, reinforcing procedural rather than structural visions of fairness. The CDA analysis, also allowed to focus on the language and tone of the documents, which also reveal cultural attitudes toward research integrity, with some codes expressing self-assurance and authority while others take a more reflexive and humble tone.