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The Perils of Expert Privilege: Analyzing, Understanding, and Reimagining Expertise in University–Community–Societal Relations

Sarah E. Stanlick, George DeMartino, and Sharon D. Welch

Abstract

The democratization of knowledge is liberating *and* has presented some new and difficult challenges. When everyone can position themselves as an expert, how do we create new frames of intellectual and pragmatic knowledge with integrity? How do we understand the histories of expert privilege and harm that have led us to this time of uncertainty? And finally, how do we work productively across different types of expertise to ensure that community voice, academic voice, and professional voice (and the overlapping nexus within) connect for epistemic and social justice? In this article, we explore the harm and capacity to dehumanize through expert privilege and focus on economics as a disciplinary case study. We critically examine the factors that often lead to dehumanizing practices, interrogate where our own power and privilege need to be checked and understood, and articulate/imagine community engagement practices that might bring about epistemic justice as a reparative opportunity.

Keywords: community-engaged scholarship, ethics, economics, human rights, social justice

As social scientists, humanists, economists, and practitioners of engagement scholarship, we have grown increasingly concerned about both the widening gap and the mistrust growing between academic expertise, universities, and the public. This is an especially notable disconnect as community engagement becomes a more prominent feature of university strategic plans, academic learning, and espoused values of institutions. Nonetheless, we find ourselves making and remaking the same ingrained systems of inequality that "other" and disempower community voice. From a social justice lens, the implicit biases that are held in the academy and in communities can lead to epistemic injustice—preventing many ways of knowing and forms of expertise from being honored and legitimized. We face this critical challenge: How do we, in disciplines and frameworks that are so ingrained in community, challenge the "otherness" of dehumanization and disempowerment while embracing openness to, and learning from, the harms that our well-intentioned efforts may cause others?

Although some of our work lies in challenging and reimagining systems, we must first start with a hard look inward, as individual practices can re-entrench systemic inequities. Teachers, educators, researchers, and scientists hold a place of influence on lives, knowledge mobilization, public opinion, and public policy. In addition, we, the authors of this piece, also acknowledge our privilege as White people and White academics and the responsibility of using that privilege accordingly—from following the lead when BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) experts are already doing the work and making the way to calling in White colleagues to the work in responsible ways. Epistemic injustice across community knowledge and university knowledge exists, as does devaluation of BIPOC voices within the academy. If we are to address our role in dismantling inequitable systems

and participating in reparative practices, we must first understand our positionality and capacity for good and for harm.

Our collective failures call on us to reflect, to inquire into our culpability in the perpetuation of such injustice. When we do, we find ample grounds for concern. We surface an uncomfortable truth: White academic experts hold a privilege that amplifies the recommendations and findings of their work and prioritizes their voice over those of their colleagues of color (Dupree & Boykin, 2021). This privileging, in turn, means that those who might be missing out on cultural responsiveness or local/traditional knowledge are making recommendations that are directly affecting communities of which they are not a part. This decision-making has the potential to deeply harm historically marginalized communities. To dismantle systems that perpetuate disempowerment of and indifference to the suffering of our BIPOC colleagues, friends, and community members, White scholars must confront our role in upholding them.

The privilege of Whiteness parallels and is overlaid with other sources and forms of privilege, as scholars on intersectionality have by now documented at length. For this article, we will identify one that often goes unexamined: the privilege that flows through experts across academic disciplines and other professions. Experts pursue influence on the belief that a world in which they enjoy influence will be better for all when their voices and recommendations are heard and implemented. Yet so often these recommendations come from a top-down, external view that yields unintended consequences that disempower and marginalize community expertise. Regardless of intention, the impact of disregard or ignorance of the community voice, local knowledge, and cultural context can harm and/or retraumatize communities and build new systems of inequity.

In what follows, we describe a process by which academics and experts harm communities due to arm's-length theorizing and experimentation. We begin by probing the contradictions of expert privilege, both because we find those contradictions to be deeply consequential for society (and the experts themselves) and because we think that attention to these contradictions helps to illuminate the contradictions of other forms of privilege—not least, White privilege. We take as our case the economics profession, owing to its outsize influence over public policy and community "development." We emphasize that these parallel, overlapping, and reinforcing forms of privilege influence the complicated and sometimes fraught relationships between the ivory tower and the communities that academics hope to serve. Some of these wrongs are traceable to dangerous misperceptions on the part of largely White experts in the academy with what appear to be the best of intentions, armed with the best research strategies, who define their work in terms of social betterment.

Grounding Our Understanding of Social and Epistemic Justice

The concept of social justice has many approaches, definitions, and underlying assumptions that can alter how it is understood and actualized. Tejeda et al. (2003) urged us to explicitly define the term to explain the framing that grounds one's projects and politics, for definitions and meanings are never neutral. They proposed a set of questions that must be posed to one's own definition to interrogate it: "What ideologies underlie particular notions of social justice? Who benefits from the instantiation of those notions? At whose expense are those notions instantiated?"

Historically, the concept of social justice as specifically equated to human well-being can be traced back to Plato (ca. 375 B.C.E./1974), who stated that justice is "derived from the harmony between reason, spirit, and appetite present in all persons." Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./1980) then built upon that understanding to emphasize a resource framework, whereby the inequities of resources are the sources of conflict and aggression. Over time and iteration, the base of this definition has held, while developing more explicit connections to concepts such as racial justice, which is a direct response to racist systems to form a more just society (Adams et al., 2007; Bell 2019). Emerging in the last decade are more explicit explorations of the role of higher education in social justice, focusing on the role of community–university partnerships as a developer of civic self-efficacy and change agent self-concept in marginalized youth (Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2017). The transformative potential of these relationships is great, and the need to build habits of mind and practice that help realize that potential is critical.

For the purpose of this article—drawing from our own understanding grounded in the literature—we define social justice as both a conceptual framework and a call to action. With this active orientation, we affirm that rights and responsibilities exist within each of us to build that fabric of a just society. We choose to ground this not as a virtue, but rather through the social psychological definition of a set of benefits and burdens, social structures, and ethos such that:

> (a) benefits and burdens in society are dispersed in accordance with some allocation principle (or set of principles); (b) procedures, norms, and rules that govern political and other forms of decision making preserve the basic rights, liberties, and entitlements of individuals and groups; and (c) human beings (and perhaps other species) are treated with dignity and respect not only by authorities but also by other relevant social actors, including fellow citizens. (Jost & Kay, 2010)

For us to embody mutually responsible forms of community engagement, it is crucial that we address the problem of expert-induced harm. Moral questions arise in the context of professional practices and interventions that generate harm to some in order to benefit others. Furthermore, some community-engaged practices and pedagogies can put undue burdens or impositions on the very same stakeholders who are the intended beneficiaries of said intervention. All of us are concerned with harms imposed by experts on vulnerable individuals and groups—Indigenous communities, women-identifying individuals, LGBTQ individuals, communities of color, immigrants, religious minorities, working people, and others. We are concerned with the impact of professionals who achieve authority owing to their apparent monopolization of expertise and their presumed moral authority that derives from their membership in the body of professionals who commit to service to others.

To reflect on our own framing and identities, we must not ignore that we can only speak to our own experiences as White academics and the resulting harm that colleagues who look like us and have had the privilege of Whiteness can do—implicitly or explicitly—by wielding expertise. But we also must be clear, that we do not exclude the potential for all academic experts—inclusive of marginalized and intersectional identities—to both harm and repair. Dupree and Boykin (2021) called our attention to the "reawakening" stemming from protests like #BlackintheAcademy that highlighted the systemic, exclusionary nature of the academy and the ways in which predominantly White institutions (PWIs) can create structures of belonging and acceptance that demand conforming or shifting one's identity or work (p. 11). These structures are reinforced through practices such as downplaying or undervaluing knowledge of BIPOC communities and enforcing certain standards of rigor or thematic relevance that are rooted in White supremacy.

Buenavista et al. (2021) called out the systems that have conditioned BIPOC scholars to think and act in ways that are individualistic and exact harm, perpetuating a cycle that dehumanizes them and their communities. They advocate for disrupting that system through a praxis of critical race love (PCRL)—creating spaces that center voices of those who are traditionally marginalized, rather than adopting or adapting oppressive practices, and prioritizing Indigenous and local knowledge. Schaefer et al. (2021) provided, for instance, a complex and aspirational model rooted in Indigenous community-based participatory research to frame how community–university research partnerships can lead to restorative and epistemic justice. The point here is recognizing that remaking systems of oppression through re-norming and re-entrenching practices that disregard Indigenous thought, traditional knowledge, and many ways of knowing—through codifying what is or is not scholarship, as an example—does not further the cause for epistemic justice. There is much to be done and that is being done in this area, and we are speaking to one slice of how professional expertise can harm communities from our contexts and identities.

In this piece, our reflective objectives include the cultivation of (a) a deeper self-awareness of the ways in which features of our practice enable intolerance; (b) a sense of how to name injustice in ways that do not contribute to discourses of antipathy and divisiveness; and (c) a sense of how professionals can intervene responsibly as equal partners in projects of social reform rather than as privileged subjects that deserve deference.

We also call attention to our own privilege—in terms of education, race, sexual orientation, and geography. The unexamined White supremacy that undergirds many of our systems of assessment and evaluation must be reckoned with, starting with one's own position and power. We eagerly take on that critical work and engage in a larger dialogue that will hopefully continue to shape and change our educational systems and society. We are not shy to look squarely at the systems that unevenly or unfairly benefit us and ask what we could, can, and are/are not doing to dismantle those systems. That critical reflection starts with asking about the capacity to dehumanize and other through academia and what we can do to change. Active or passive, White supremacy harms communities and undermines our ability to affect the positive, asset-based community engagement we aspire to as a movement.

Further, this type of academic reckoning—to borrow the framing from the work of Seidule (2020)—can serve as part of a larger reparative structure as we try to unmake these unjust systems. Reparations, as defined by United Nations Resolution 60, are actions to be taken to account for egregious human rights violations throughout history (United Nations General Assembly, 2005). They are owed to the victims or those who bear the burden of those violations—which include in our history chattel slavery, internment, illegal or immoral land acquisition, and racist policies (e.g., Jim Crow–era regulations). Also outlined in that resolution is a fivefold strategy for remedy and reparation that includes restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of nonrepetition. Epistemic justice cuts across each of these strategies as an opportunity to give a space for voices to be recognized and affirmed, provides a forum to bear witness, recommends tangible reparative actions, informs policy and legislation to ensure understanding of systemic injustices, grapples with our shared history, and mobilizes knowledge to prevent future atrocities (Almassi, 2018; Bhambra, 2021).

Academics have a right and responsibility to pursue and secure epistemic justice within this reparative framing. We take an active, critical, and generative approach to understanding social and epistemic justice, its application, and the ongoing mobilization of knowledge for this reparative journey. This iterative and active approach can surface deep contradictions in our personal and professional identities.

On the Contradictions of Expertise: Knowing More, Knowing Too Little

Expertise inherently entails epistemic advantage: an injustice that already sets the field with knowledge-based "haves" and "have-nots." Experts are understood to possess knowledge about their subject matter and research methods that is informed by education and experience above and beyond that of the wider community. We call the resulting condition one of epistemic asymmetry—to be a professional is to *know more* than those individuals and communities that professionals target with their interventions (DeMartino, 2013; Hardwig, 1994). This asymmetry leads to a clear tension between legitimate interests and unwarranted privilege.

The professional–community relationship is taken to be characterized by a second kind of asymmetry that is just as consequential as the first. To be a professional is to take a secular oath, figuratively and sometimes explicitly. Professionals are expected to seek to promote the interests, welfare, and rights of others, over and above the promotion of their own interests. Ethicist William May (2001) referred to this duty as the "professional's covenant":

> The professional's covenant, in my judgment, opens out in three directions that help distinguish professionals from careerists: the professional professes something (a body of knowledge and experience); on behalf of someone (or some institution); and in the setting of colleagues. This summary definition highlights three distinguishing marks: *intellectual* (what one professes), *moral* (on behalf of whom one professes), and *organizational* (with whom one professes). These distinguishing marks call for three correlative virtues—practical wisdom, fidelity, and public spiritedness. (p. 7; emphasis in original)

To be a professional, then, is to live a life of service to others. Used car salespersons are presumed to serve their own interests, not those of the customer—even when they may go to great lengths to earn the customer's trust. The customer who loses sight

of a salesperson's self-interest is apt to be exploited in the exchange. Not so with the professional. The physician benefits from the dependence of their patients, but the physician is expected to enter the relationship with the patient driven above all else by the patient's rights and interests. Whereas car sales might represent an occupation, the professions represent a *calling*—one that is founded on the duty to serve those who need the professional's expertise.

These two asymmetries give rise to a range of consequences. One is professional privilege. Knowing more, and motivated by the best of intentions, the professional is to be accorded a degree of autonomy. To varying degrees, professions enjoy self-governance. This entails varying degrees of control over who can enter their ranks—including what training and credentials are required to join a profession—standards of performance (including the authority to judge the quality of work of each member), expectations as concern conduct, conditions for the removal of a member from the profession, and so forth. Because of the twin asymmetries, professions claim the rights of self-governance since, it is presumed, nonexperts could not appropriately govern the profession. Self-governance is treated not as a privilege in service of the profession's members, but as a duty in service of society.

Ethicist Daniel Wueste helped to draw these features together. Describing the features of professionalism, he listed the following: (1) centrality of abstract knowledge in the performance of occupational tasks; (2) social significance of the tasks the professional performs—professional activity promotes basic social values; (3) claiming to be better situated/qualified than others to pronounce and act on certain matters, even beyond the interests and affairs of clients and in various aspects of society, life, and nature; (4) being governed in their professional conduct by role-specific norms rather than the norms that govern human conduct generally; and (5) usually working in bureaucratic institutions (Wueste, 1994, p. 11).

A particular professional ethic often arises because of the asymmetries examined here. Since experts know far more than the community at large, *experts take on an ethical burden to do what they believe to be best for those they serve*. This motivation bleeds easily and perhaps inevitably into the ethic of paternalism. The case of medical ethics is instructive. The paternalistic, physician-knows-best conception of medical practice survived intact up until the 1960s in the United States (and even up to the present in many other countries). As late as that, it was widely considered appropriate for a physician to lie to a patient or manipulate a patient to get them to do what the doctor thought best. But U.S. events in the 1960s upset this approach to medical practice. Trust in expertise began to give way in the face of movements for empowerment of nonexpert individuals. Patients' rights movements arose to challenge what were increasingly seen to be illicit medical privileges. In the 1960s, litigation led to a series of court decisions that substantially empowered the patient in the physician–patient relationship. In 1966 the U.S. FDA called for prior informed consent in medical experiments. Then, in 1972, the landmark *Canterbury v. Spence* decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals (Washington, DC) finally overturned the physician's authority in *treatment* by finding that "the patient's right of self-decision shapes the boundaries of the duty to reveal" (Sharpe & Faden, 1998). Two years later, in response to the Tuskegee Syphilis Study that inequitably and inhumanely targeted African American men, the National Research Act established Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures—where other experts must decide what are and are not reasonable research protocols before research can proceed (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). In 1978 the publication of the Belmont Report by the U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research formalized the duties of medical researchers toward research subjects. Its core principles include respect for persons (autonomy), beneficence (including nonmaleficence), and justice. These principles soon came to govern medical treatment as well. Taken together, by the 1970s "professional paternalism was increasingly challenged by the publicly and politically-forged ethos of patient self-determination" (Sharpe & Faden, 1998, p. 67). The patients' rights challenge shifted the locus of decision-making from the doctor to the patient. Sullivan (2017) reimagined the role of medical provider and their expertise as a pathway to empowerment:

> My department chairman likes to cite the Japanese proverb, "None of us is as smart as all of us." Freire reminds us that we must engage

> patients as already active knowers and problem-solvers if we are to accomplish empowerment rather than mere banking of knowledge. (p. 301)

Despite this ethical advance in medical practice, however, several professions continue to be guided at least implicitly by a paternalistic ethos even today. We explore the case of economics as a disciplinary focus and then branch outward to consider the field and movement of community engagement to further challenge our understanding of how university–scholar–community partnerships can be powerful agents of change or problematic partnerships that recreate systems of injustice.

Epistemic Insufficiency

Even as experts enjoy epistemic advantage over nonexperts, they often know far too little outside their area of expertise to do much of what they seek to do. Professionals face epistemic insufficiency. In applying treatments to individuals and groups, they often run up against the boundaries of their expertise. Beyond these boundaries lies the domain of *reparable* ignorance, defined as what they do not yet know but may someday know, and *irreparable* ignorance, defined by what they cannot in principle ever know (DeMartino & Grabel, 2020). Even reparable ignorance poses severe problems for the expert. The expert may immediately need knowledge that cannot be available until later—after the period when the knowledge was needed. What matters is whether the knowledge can be gained at the moment it is needed to formulate effective interventions. Sometimes, the knowledge can be gained only by making the decision and seeing what comes of it. The hiker lost in the woods asks, are these berries food, or are they poisonous? The hiker may only be able to find out by eating them, in which case the knowledge that they are in fact poisonous arrives too late.

Epistemic insufficiency presents enormous ethical problems for experts. An expert who faces ignorance is in a position to cause unintended and perhaps even unforeseeable harm when they apply their expertise to individual clients or to communities. The greater the influence, and the more restricted the domain of knowledge, the greater the risk of grave harm. Virtuous professionals must confront the fact that they cause harm—and that, sometimes, the harms might be widespread, deep, and even irreparable.

We posit that this condition induces severe discomfort among many experts, especially in those fields where the risk of harming is most acute. We posit further that the way the profession manages this problem is enormously consequential for the communities they serve. And we posit, finally, that sometimes professions manage the problem in ways that are disturbing and deeply damaging. To make this case, we explore next the economics profession.

The Privilege and Perils of the Economics Profession

Economics represents a paradigmatic case of the perils of professionalism and expert-induced harm. Economists certainly know more than others about their field of expertise. The epistemic asymmetry here is vast, such that even other highly qualified professionals in the academy find it difficult to interpret and judge economic analysis. A notable epistemic obstacle is the extreme "mathiness" in which the profession undertakes its work and communicates its findings (Romer, 2015, p. 89). Moreover, economists monopolize knowledge in an area that is taken to be of central importance to society. How the economy functions affects every one of us. Economists therefore expect a degree of deference by policymakers and the public. Indeed, since the founding of the American Economic Association in the late 19th century, the profession has worked hard to increase its influence over matters of public policy (DeMartino, 2011). In that campaign the profession has been very successful—successful, that is, until the 2016 election and the ensuing casting out of experts from positions of power.

But economists face an extraordinary degree of irreparable ignorance, as a long list of economic iconoclasts have warned us. The list includes eminent economists such as John Maynard Keynes, Frank Knight, and G. L. S. Shackle—and more recently, Deirdre McCloskey, Julie Nelson, Nassim Taleb, David Ruccio, and Jack Amariglio, to name just a few. The critics make a series of claims about the limits to economic expertise. One is that economics is largely oriented to knowledge of the future. We want to know about economic relationships, flows, and outcomes so that we can exploit this knowledge to craft policy interventions today that will bring about good

outcomes tomorrow. However, as all these critics have emphasized in one way or another, the future is simply unknowable. We cannot ever know the full range of effects of today's interventions on tomorrow's world. Even the best economic interventions, then, crafted by the most qualified and virtuous economists using the most advanced techniques, are apt to induce all manner of unintended effects, many of which will be harmful to others. *Econogenic* (economist-induced) harm is an ineradicable feature of economists' practice.

A second cause of econogenic harm deserves mention and, unlike irreparable ignorance, has attracted much attention by the profession. Economic interventions affect many people all at once. Even a local, municipal-level economic policy intervention can affect hundreds of thousands of people directly, and millions more indirectly. National and international policy interventions affect many more. A multilateral trade initiative, for instance, can impact billions of people. The problem is, as economists have recognized for well over a century, that economic interventions almost always have disparate effects—harming some even while benefiting others. This principle applies to small-scale, municipal interventions, and its import grows as the scale and reach of an intervention expand. And the harms can be and too often are deep, long-lasting, and even fatal—especially for those communities that are most vulnerable. The case of economic austerity illuminates the relevant risks (see Blythe, 2013; Stuckler & Basu, 2013).

How has the profession dealt with this problem? The simple answer is that it has come to embrace what philosopher Howard Radest (1997) referred to as "moral geometry" to evaluate policy initiatives that will induce both harms and benefits. Moral geometry involves resolving fraught ethical issues by solving simple math problems. For instance, the Kaldor-Hicks compensation test urges economists to support any policy where the gains to the winners exceed the losses to the losers. This test provides the ethical grounding for cost–benefit analysis, which is the chief implement in the economists' toolkit for assessing policy. The use of cost–benefit analysis to adjudicate policy requires a set of extraordinary assumptions about pricing nonmarket goods, like health and even human life, that have been subjected to extensive critique by critics of the profession. For present purposes, we want to emphasize that moral geometry permits the profession to view itself as fulfilling its moral mandate to promote social welfare in the face of even severe hardship that economic practice can and sometimes does induce. Gains to the "winners" from policy interventions are too often taken as sufficient to justify even egregious harms to the "losers," and within these transactions, those roles and labels are made concrete.

Moral Exclusion

We submit that recognition of the fact that economists harm as they seek to help is apt to induce cognitive trauma among the most self-aware economists—and even to immobilize them since acting can and so often does generate harm. One way that some in the profession seem to have managed this trauma, we worry, is to engage in moral exclusion of those who are apt to be harmed by economists' preferred interventions. Susan Opotow (1990) famously defined moral exclusion this way:

> Moral exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as *outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply*. Those who are morally excluded are perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving. Consequently, harming or exploiting them appears to be appropriate, acceptable, or just. (p. 1; emphasis in original)

When moral exclusion is successful, the professional comes to exhibit "moral indifference," where the suffering of others is taken to be necessary, natural, or unavoidable—and therefore undeserving of moral concern (Pemberton, 2015).

We find evidence of these processes in economics. Here we can give one stark example that we offer as indicative of a much wider tendency in the field. Through the 1980s and 1990s the world's most influential economists advanced a political project to liberalize economies the world over, especially in the global South and then in the former Soviet Union. This project amounted to social engineering on a world scale—to nothing less than a revolution in economic arrangements. At the time the profession exploited not only the authority derived from its epistemic advantage, but also the influence that came from its institutional

power—its influence over the decisions and actions of the world's leading economic ministries and the chief multilateral agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank. The operative ethic was that the countries targeted for neoliberal reform were in crisis, that economists were uniquely qualified to diagnose and prescribe, and that unlike the self-interested political and civic leaders in these societies, economists were driven by the unimpeachable duty to serve others, not themselves. Armed with these precepts and authority, the profession promoted dramatic, immediate economic transformation. Economists knew that some would be harmed, even severely, by the transformation. However, they presumed to know that the effects would be short-lived, and that soon societies would be better off on account of the economists' interventions. Little attention was given to the limits to economic expertise—to the extraordinary degree of irreparable ignorance that the profession faced as it undertook to initiate a global economic experiment (DeMartino, 2011).

Knowing that there would be victims who would resist the transformation, leading economists advocated for immediate "shock therapy" to complete the job before those who would be harmed could organize to resist. Jeffrey Sachs deserves mention in this connection, though his views were widely shared by the leading lights in the profession (see Murrell, 1995). Sachs advocated to policymakers in Russia and elsewhere that the economic transformation should happen all at once, before opposition could take root (Angner, 2006; Sachs, 1992; Wedel, 2001). The advice to officials in transition economies was, in the words of Sachs, to "figure out how much society can take, and then move three times quicker than that." To drive home the point, Sachs cited approvingly the words of a Polish economist: "You don't try to cross a chasm in two jumps" (Sachs, 2019, p. 236). In Poland in 1989, he assured nervous legislators that "the crisis will be over in six months" (Wedel, 2001, pp. 21).

Given the absence of historical precedents for economic transformations of this scale, the reformers subjected countries to a grand economic experimentation without sufficient knowledge—let alone the permission—of those who would be most harmed by the interventions. Driven by the paternalistic ethic, economists enacted policies and designed institutions that they surely believed to be in the best interests of these communities. Shock therapy was intended to get the job done before the likely victims could push back. The justification was clear: The economist has the virtue and expertise necessary to do what is best for those impacted by the intervention. No one else could be entrusted to make the right decisions.

In some cases, the resulting harm was severe. A prominent study reported in *The Lancet* found that Russia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia suffered a tripling of unemployment and a 41% increase in male death rates between 1991 and 1994, immediately following privatization (Stuckler et al., 2009). Factoring out other determinants, the researchers concluded that there were direct linkages between the programs and an array of irreparable harms. Between 1991 and 1994, life expectancy in Russia dropped by as much as 4.7 years overall and by 6.2 years for men (Angner, 2006). More recently, Stuckler and Basu (2013) found that "ten million Russian men disappeared in the early 1990s." These were relatively young men who were thrown out of work in industrial cities across Russia immediately following privatization of the enterprises where they worked. Stuckler and Basu found that in comparison with those Central and East European countries that pursued a more gradual transition to the market economy, Russia and others that were subjected to shock therapy suffered severe erosions in public health, with the effects on mortality noted above.

A second feature of the push for neoliberalism was the campaign to secure new "free-trade" agreements that would open the world economy to international competition in markets for goods and services. By the early 1990s an oppositional movement had arisen in the United States, Canada, and beyond. The "fair traders" demanded that any new trade agreements (such as the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization) ensure protection of labor, human, and women's rights, along with strong environmental standards. The movement induced a quick and sharp backlash by leading trade economists. This case is significant for our purposes since trade theorists have known for close to a century that trade liberalization induces uneven effects. In this case even the proponents of free trade recognized that

many would be harmed by the policy intervention. Paul Krugman was among the most vocal free-trader critics of fair trade. He argued famously that the fair traders were deceitful—claiming to defend the rights and interests of those in poorer countries as a guise to protect their own self-interest—or ignorant of basic economic principles. As he put it (Krugman, 1997), "In short, [fair traders] are not entitled to their self-righteousness. They have not thought the matter through. And when the hopes of hundreds of millions are at stake, thinking things through is not just good intellectual practice. It is a moral duty."

Elsewhere (Krugman, 2001) he argued against fair trade as a "serious position," speaking to a culturally relativistic understanding of acceptable conditions for workers. He affirmed, "Third-world countries . . . can't have those export industries unless they are allowed to sell goods produced under conditions that Westerners find appalling, by workers who receive very low wages. And that's a fact the anti-globalization activists refuse to accept." Krugman reiterated this critique repeatedly up until 2007, when he changed his mind and came to endorse the fair-trade position (see Krugman, 2007). By then, unfortunately, the free-trade agreements he had pressed for during the 1990s had wrought substantial damage, especially by promoting income inequality in the liberalizing economies (Autor et al., 2016; Goldberg & Pavcnik, 2007).

With others, we submit that the misuse of expertise in economics helps to account for the illiberal turn in U.S. and world politics over the past decade (See DeMartino, 2018). In our view, leading economists, driven by the best of intentions and exploiting the privilege that expert authority granted them, induced widespread and deep harm for many they purported to serve. Driven by a paternalistic ethos, they did not feel the need to engage respectfully with those who would be targeted by their interventions. In so doing, we further submit, the profession helped to engender the foot soldiers for the rejection of expertise that recent "populist" politicians have exploited to pursue their various illiberal projects.

We end this short discussion of the profession with one final claim. Economists wielding their expertise find it appropriate to *experiment on* those they purport to serve. Given the severe epistemic limits they face, after all, all economic policy interventions are experimental in nature. What is missing here is collaboration as equals between economists and those on whom they experiment. Professional privilege has been taken as a warrant to impose preferred policy interventions. Missing, then, is a partnership in which economists *experiment with* those they purport to serve. Missing here, too, is full recognition of the autonomy and integrity of communities who will bear the brunt of economic interventions. We fear that in these respects, the economics profession exhibits attitudes and behaviors that are associated with other forms of privilege—such as White privilege that affects our participation in the academy, and in our work that bridges the gap between the ivory tower and outside communities. To that matter we now turn.

Community-Engaged Research and Learning: The Problem and the Solution

Identifying the Tensions in Community Engagement

Using economics as a case study, we can easily see how discipline-specific experts can cause harm simply by providing a detached set of recommendations for policy or initiatives that disempower, degrade, or destroy communities. A more nuanced or quietly complicated context for us to evaluate is that of community engagement. Community engagement can be a practice or strategy by which economics, sociology, or any other discipline can be understood, spread, or implemented. However, community engagement can also be examined as a field that itself has professional norms, ethics, assumptions, and a scholarship that critically examines its practices.

Despite best intentions or dedication to social justice aims, some of the most prominent examples of dehumanization by experts in communities come from the place we least expect it: community–university partnerships. At its most innocuous, a detachment from reality or impact leads to a "relevance gap" of research in which what is precious to the researcher or the field is of little use to society at large (Beebeejaun et al., 2015). The example here is of work that is so far afield from what is needed in communities that research is perceived as a flight of fancy or a rarefied individual experience. At its worst, community engagement

that is not grounded in participatory ethics and community voice can cause true harm: psychological, structural, economic, health, to name a few. Beebeejaun et al. pointed to two distinct challenges—the public value model that is rooted in a "do no harm" mentality that allows for minimal harm if a larger good is being produced (research governance—by whose standard?) and the emerging models of participatory action research that leverages reflexive and generative models across stakeholders to bring about public good (research practice). In this tension, we find the power to either move communities toward more thriving or undercut their autonomy and efficacy. Much like the delineation between "not a racist" and "antiracist," one must take an active orientation to do no harm rather than to adopt a neutral or virtuous position assuming piety through good works. Community engagement that can dehumanize includes community-as-lab paradigms, grant "partnerships" with consolidated decision-making power, absence of community voice in publishing and presentations, dysfunctional rescuing, White savior narratives, and other disempowering structures where the community is an add-on versus the catalyst.

The late physician and anthropologist Paul Farmer described the archetype of the "White liberal" (WL)—a very specific type of positivist, problem-solving progressive who believes that "problems can be fixed without any cost to themselves" (Kidder, 2009, p. 40). Most who read this article will be able to spot the characteristics clearly: those who consider themselves learned, progressive in their politics, well-intentioned in their heart, and utterly oblivious to their role in inflicting harm or upholding unjust systems. But this is not a binary or an individual character flaw. We see examples of the tendencies associated with WLs throughout higher education. Most of us in the academy, including (we hasten to add) we three authors, are easily seduced by these features of professional practice. We are often pursuing projects, performing research, or making policy recommendations with good intentions for community or societal change with insufficient humility or recognition of the perils of privilege. Farmer and his colleagues bemoaned WLs' inability to reflect, sacrifice, and change in the face of complex systems with clear ethical implications. What underpins these ideas is White supremacy and privilege and colonial legacies. There are assumptions in the models of many well-meaning White folks that recreate the very structures they believe they are working against and perpetuate narratives that are at best derogatory and at worst dangerous.

Long before Farmer identified this phenomenon, Illich (1968/n.d.) delivered a scathing rebuke to such do-gooders in his seminal speech to the Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects (CIASP) in Cuernavaca, Mexico. He railed against the one-sided "giver" identity of volunteers working outside cultural contexts that they understood and prescribing solutions technical and philosophical. Programs such as the Peace Corps and Engineers Without Borders (EWB), as well as initiatives such as medical volunteering or external expert-driven assessments, have given us some shocking stories of mishandling of community knowledge, harm, and cultural misinformation—from the engineering solutions that disrupt social norms to medical practice for unskilled volunteers in the global South (Sullivan, 2016). At the same time, EWB has given us some important lessons in expertise, from the students who articulated that they saw their community partners as expert teachers to the ethical challenges they faced that caused a transformative shift in their self-identity around community responsibility (Litchfield, 2014). Again, this is not to point out an inherent evil in the partnerships that have such hope for change, but rather a call to continually reflect and reorient our compass toward the values of justice that must hold up this work for it to meet the goals we so desperately assume we are working toward.

J. K. Gibson-Graham (Katherine Gibson, Australian National University in Canberra, and Julie Graham, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, who wrote as a single persona from 1992 until Graham's death in 2010) has described a new political imaginary. They analyzed, nurtured, and celebrated the reality, opportunities, and challenges of community economies. People all over the world are finding ways of shaping their economic lives to recognize the power of interdependence, not a "common being" but a "being in common." J. K. Gibson-Graham described the ways in which people embody interdependence in such economic practices as employee buyouts in the United States, worker takeovers in the wake of economic crisis in Argentina, the anti-sweatshop movement, shareholder

movements "that promote ethical investments and police the enforcement of corporate environmental and social responsibility," the living wage movement, efforts to institute a universal basic income, and social entrepreneurship. These are all part of a community economy "that performs economy in new ways."

J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006) built on the insights of queer theory and political and feminist theory and organizing, emphasizing that shared questions often lead to different answers. Just as there is no one way to be a feminist, there is no single way to perform economic relations justly. There are, however, salient questions, choices to be made in each situation. Here the economy becomes the product of ethical decision-making, different ways of answering the same questions: "What is necessary to personal and social survival? How social surplus is appropriated and distributed? How social surplus is to be distributed and consumed? How is a commons produced and sustained?" (p. 88). In making these choices, Gibson-Graham made a claim as startling as that of there being no preferred model of economic justice: *It is as difficult for workers to live within community economies as it is for owners*. For all of us, the challenge of new forms of subjectivity, sociality, and interdependence are "best shaped by practical curiosity as opposed to moral certainty about alternatives to capitalism (p. 159)."

Identifying the Areas of Opportunity in Community Engagement

Although community engagement has its share of challenges, it has also provided us ample space to innovate and grow with regard to more counternormative, inclusive, and just practices. Thus, we ask: What are the alternative structures to break this cycle of expert-induced harm? How do we identify privilege and work to mitigate it in our work? And, finally, how might we design more equitable, inclusive, and transformatively reciprocal relationships that identify the expertise across contexts (university, community, disciplinary, etc.)?

Identifying structures of White supremacy and privilege, colonialism, and bureaucracy that sometimes confound our work, we look to promising practices that could hold the key to more humane scholarship and community engagement practices. These include democratic community engagement (DCE) and democratically engaged assessment (DEA), appreciative inquiry, radical mutuality, Fair Trade Learning (FTL), and an increased call for and examples of decolonized learning and assessment practices. We seek new thinking on artifacts of "expertise" such as assessment and theoretical model creation, as well as "found pilots"—projects, practices, or events in which the future is already beginning to show up—to amplify and share to the larger learning community. Thinking of practical steps toward addressing and actively dismantling some of these unjust systems, we offer the following suggestions:

1. Name and challenge colonial, technocratic, or White supremacist conventions and privilege in our work and our fields.
2. Address democratic versus technocratic engagement explicitly and adopt more democratic frames of engagement.
3. Adopt a mindset of appreciative inquiry, radical mutuality, and humility in our work to bring about epistemic justice.
4. Reimagine and reclaim structures we often accept without question, such as assessment, scholarship, and data.

For each of these action steps, we elaborate below on their characteristics and framing. We conclude each section with a critical reflection question for scholar–practitioners to focus on their own work and ask what can be done to further practices of justice.

Name and Challenge Colonial, Technocratic, or White Supremacist Conventions and Privilege in Our Work and Our Fields

Regarding the self-work that must be performed to develop this capacity to challenge, name, and interrogate our systems and ourselves, Daly (1978/2016) described a related process of "learning innocence," noting that the root of the word innocence is *innocere*, "to not harm." In author Welch's work, she reflects on Daly's conceptual framing:

> "Not harming" is something we learn, a continual task that expands as our ability to affect the lives of others expands. We will always need to learn innocence. As our social worlds change and our individual responsibilities change, there will be more opportunities for harm, thus the necessity of learning again how to respect and honor the life around us (Welch, 2000, p. 174).

One example of that ongoing work can be seen in the Summer 2020 training offered by Academics for Black Survival and Wellness. The training, an open-access weeklong intensive offered to anyone who wished to attend and commit to the work, was an opportunity for participants to critically reflect upon and retool their own teaching, advising, and scholarship with a justice-focused lens. Learning networks such as these, where scholars are explicitly called in to question their own privilege and initiate action steps toward antiracist teaching and research—and learn to intentionally choose not to harm—are crucial to transforming the system.

This transformation also hinges upon talking about the work and our partnerships in ways that are asset-based and appreciative. In Tuck's (2009) open letter, she implored the larger community-engaged research community to move past the "damage-centered" research, or the research that aims to bring about positive change by surfacing narratives of pain and holding oppressors accountable. Her central thesis is that this type of research concretizes narratives of pain that, although intended to bring about positive change, end up doing more harm by reinforcing narratives of disempowerment and vulnerability. It oftentimes positions the researcher as the creator of solutions and external force of good, and the community as a recipient.

To counter this giver–recipient paradigm attitude, we can look at the work of organizations such as Amizade and the work of authors Hartman et al. (2014) on the concept of Fair Trade Learning. Fair Trade Learning (FTL) is a framework that upholds reciprocity as the key value of partnerships and cultivates those partnerships through intentional service, learning, and civil society participation (Lough & Oppenheim, 2017; Dostilio et al., 2012). Fair Trade Learning, in opposition to the Krugman example in our economics case study, is a process by which community partnerships can be intentional about shared goals to transform communities together. In this connection we again find inspiration in the revolutionary work of J. K. Gibson-Graham (1996, 2003, 2006) and those working in the community economies tradition. Here, emphasis is placed on the formation of hybrid research communities that put experts in genuine partnership with other community members, opening them up to the vulnerabilities and risks academics too often impose on others (DeMartino, 2013).

Critical Reflection Questions: Do the programs that I participate in include pathways for community partners to be equally enriched by the partnership as I am? Am I changed by the relationship with my community partner? What are our shared goals that we are working toward? Are my daily habits and decision-making changed by what I learn in partnership with the community?

Address Democratic Versus Technocratic Engagement Explicitly and Adopt More Democratic Frames of Engagement

As the field has developed and has become an entity to be studied more concretely, models have emerged to frame our thinking about the work. Palmer (2014) provided a useful framework to help us understand the habits that underpin democratic systems, acknowledging certain tensions that must be held concurrently and productively to contribute to a flourishing democracy. One such tension is the tension around different viewpoints, motivating interests, and values that oftentimes clash in our work within and as part of communities. For community engagement work, the main tensions arise around deficit-based and asset-based approaches to research, inquiry, and action. Community engagement can run on a spectrum from technocratic to democratic, whereby different levels of community voice, shared governance, goal-setting, and democratic practices are observed in the relationships between "experts" and community (Saltmarsh et al., 2009). Transformative relationships—as opposed to transactional relationships—were contrasted by Enos and Morton (2003) as partnerships characterized by bound-up goals, growth, and change that were possible only because of that relationship, rather than a simple transaction of needs. Further, Mitchell (2007) described the type of critical social justice lens that can be affirmed in such partnerships that lead to not only learning outcomes, but also a shift in worldview where community must take precedence in one's decision-making, voting, and life choices.

Critical Reflection Questions: Are all the partners I work with freely able to say no? What power dynamics are at play in the partnership that might influence partners at the table? What is the motivation for doing this work? Do mechanisms exist in our work to address the tensions that arise?

Adopt a Mindset of Appreciative Inquiry, Radical Mutuality, and Humility in Our Work to Bring About Epistemic Justice

Another way in which we can address and transform our practice is by cultivating habits of mind and practice that Freire (1970) called conscientization, or critical consciousness. If we as "experts" can develop a more critical awareness of ourselves, our work, and our social reality, it becomes second nature to address and bring to light those choice points and break those structures of oppression. We need to enter our partnerships asking: Who has "expertise"? What are we doing well? How do we do more of that? Adopting an appreciative inquiry, rather than a problematizing lens, reaffirms the health of the community and messages that there is something worthwhile here of which we are all a part (Ludema et al., 2006).

Here we can draw on the work of the social ethicist and coauthor Sharon Welch, who points us to the important work of Black activists, writers, and scholars, articulating the difference between an ethic of risk and an ethic of control. She described the challenge to Euro-American ethics—control, agency, responsibility, and goodness—when, in writing and scholarship, African Americans share their experiences that flagrantly contradict these held values. She characterized the ethic of risk as containing three elements: a redefinition of responsible action, grounding in community, and risk taking. She elaborated:

> Responsible action does not mean the certain achievement of desired ends, but the creation of the conditions of possibility for the desired social ends, the creation of a matrix in which further actions . . . are possible, sustained, and enabled by participation in an extensive community, a community that offers support in struggle and constitutes the context for work that spans generations. (Welch, 1999, p. 48)

We must engage in ongoing learning and cultivating understanding for the mechanisms that continue to harm our communities and our colleagues. If we center epistemic justice—the process, practice, and valuation of all voices as worthy and capable—we can begin to take proactive steps to promote inclusion and reframe who creates knowledge (Fricker, 2013).

Beyond the question of "who is credible?", Schmidt (2019) extended our understanding of epistemic justice as a participatory process, noting that social injustices such as racism, sexism, and classism have undercut community members' participation in the creation of knowledge. Catala (2015) strengthened the link between epistemic justice and democracy, emphasizing that the only way to undo "hermeneutic domination" (a form of epistemic injustice in which one type of knowledge has primacy) is through equality, legitimacy, and accountability in our roles as knowledge mobilizers. If we appreciate and legitimize more ways of knowing and skills of evaluating and interrogating the information that comes to us, we practice the core of democratic and deliberative dialogue.

It is also critical to affirm that transformation comes only from community–university–society partnerships that are exercising full participation opportunities for all stakeholders. From shared governance to co-authorship and shared credit, our practices and our decision-making must match our espoused values (Bandy et al., 2017; Stanlick & Sell, 2016). One exemplar of work exhibiting governance, credit, humility, and advocacy is the Racial Democracy Crime and Justice Network that administratively sits at the Ohio State University. Through that network, scholars, thinkers, and experts (broadly defined) come together to "collectively undertake research and related initiatives geared to exploring the implications of crime and justice processing for citizens' participation in a democracy" (Rutgers School of Criminal Justice., n.d., para. 1). Work within the prison system and with those who are currently incarcerated is attributed to a collective title, rather than individual names, to protect those who participate but also to reaffirm an identity of a team working together toward policy and social change on some of our most intractable issues.

In each of these examples, we see the "walking the talk," as Clayton urges in so much of her writing and work within the field. Clayton et al. (2014) noted the design implications for such an orientation, naming the practices of democracy that cultivate empowered scholars, actors, and learners. Specifically, they noted that the doing of democracy "requires an investment in people and a fundamental belief that everyone has valuable knowledge, skills, and

attitudes that can contribute to advancing our communities" (p. 23). Walking alongside our community members, practicing the skill sets and mindsets of reciprocity, and developing meaningful collaborative partnerships are essential to remaking the systems of injustice we see.

Critical Reflection Questions: Am I walking the walk in my work? Am I solo-authoring or solo-presenting at conferences? Is my community partner present in the dissemination and celebration of the work? Have I considered my role as the oppressor and the power that my title, position, or identity holds? How will I mitigate that oppression and use the power and privilege toward just aims?

Reimagine and Reclaim Structures We Often Accept Without Question, Such as Assessment, Scholarship, and Data

Finally, we note that so much of our underlying systems—from grant funding and reporting to assessment and reporting expectations—are rooted in positivist, paternalistic, or inflexible systems that reaffirm roles and assumptions that can disempower communities.

One example of a systemic framework to rethink those systems comes from the research team Assessing the Practices of Public Scholarship (APPS), a research group sponsored by the U.S.-based national organization Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life. The collective of practitioner-scholars from a variety of disciplines and contexts works toward social change through service-learning and community engagement. They confront this question: How can we do our work, inquire into our work so as to better understand and improve it, and tell the stories of our work—of our scholarship, our art, and our communities—in ways that are more inclusive, informed by values, and engaged? They have provided a framework, democratically engaged assessment (DEA), to help reimagine assessment in ways that are values-engaged, collaborative, and transformative. By operationalizing a framework of values to guide that evaluation and assessment, the APPS team has provided a set of questions and processes that help to democratize and call in more voices to the process. Through this process, the goal is to include more and diverse perspectives on community-university partnerships and community initiatives to counter those pain narratives that Tuck (2009) lamented. It also reminds us of the ethic of risk, as mentioned above, and the transformative capacity of continually learning to mitigate harm and engender other ways of knowing. Bandy et al. (2017) noted the risk of counternormative practices that upset tradition through storytelling, narrative, assessment, and critical reflection. They affirmed the risk that scholar-practitioners take when moving outside what is "counted" in terms of quantitative and qualitative data to describe success or achievement in community-engaged initiatives. However, they also concluded that this risk is one worth taking, and by challenging those normative structures, and doing so while recognizing the privilege of experts, of Whiteness, and of positionality, scholar-practitioners can use that privilege for positive, empowering ends.

Critical Reflection Questions: What practices in my own work remain unchallenged? What unexamined bureaucratic forces within my context impact my work and my own behaviors of harm? What voices are missing in my practice and my work? How can I cultivate more practices that expand my own lens and check my assumptions?

Conclusion

Expertise is a tenuous and contradictory condition that entails moral and technical privilege that is far too easily abused. Expertise also entails responsibility that reaches far beyond acting with good intentions, in the service of others. As educators, researchers, and citizens, we must not only be aware of the potential for abuse, but actively examine the ideologies, ethics, and structures that lead well-meaning experts to do damage to those they purport to serve. Further, by dedicating our work to epistemic justice and the pursuit of more reciprocal knowledge communities, we not only bolster confidence and trust bonds within our communities, but also refine the very nature of how we understand our world and our place within it. If we do not, we are doomed to repeat or stand as accomplices to the types of injustice that we have seen intensify in recent years based on distrust and misinformation.

Philosopher and social activist Grace Lee Boggs with Professor Scott Kurashige (2012) summed up our collective responsibility to face these challenging times:

> Our responsibility, in this watershed in our history, is to face the past honestly and do the things

> necessary to heal ourselves and our planet. Healing our society will require the patient work not primarily of politicians, but of artists, ministers, gardeners, workers, families, women, and communities. It will require new forms of governance, work, and education that are much more participatory and democratic than those collapsing around us. It will require enlarging our vision and decolonizing our imaginations (p. 164).

We must not be a part of the continuing cycle of oppression by expertise, but rather cultivate the humility to keep questioning our own understandings, our power and privilege, and our role in upholding versus dismantling systems of oppression. In this piece, we aimed to reflect upon the ways in which we can cultivate a deeper self-awareness, a sense and capacity for interrogation of these deficit narratives and divisive discourse, and a path forward for professionals to intervene responsibly and with integrity. Although the potential for experts to do harm is high, that outcome is not inevitable. Rather, we find that there is great capacity for transforming these practices and our systems into more inclusive, democratic spaces that enable the empowerment of all stakeholders toward transforming communities and our world.

About the Authors

Sarah E. Stanlick *is an assistant professor in the Department of Integrative and Global Studies and the director of the Great Problems Seminar at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. She was the founding director of Lehigh University's Center for Community Engagement. Her research and teaching focus on community-engaged learning and research, collective impact, public interest technology, and transformative learning.*

George DeMartino *is a professor of international economics at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies of the University of Denver. He is the codirector of the MA degree in global economic affairs (formerly GFTEI). His research and teaching engage questions of ethics and economics, including the ethical foundations of economic theory and policy, and professional economic ethics.*

Sharon D. Welch *is an academic scholar, social ethicist, and author of six books on ethics, theology, politics, religion, and spirituality. After having served as provost and professor of religion for 10 years, she is currently affiliate faculty member at Meadville Lombard Theological School. She is the author of numerous popular books on issues of ethics, theology, politics, and social change.*

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