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LEGITIMACY, AGENCY, AND INEQUALITY

Organizational Practices for Full Participation of Community-Engaged Faculty

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Mario Gonzalez leaves campus after a full day of interviewing for a new faculty position in the School of Public Health at Land-grant University. The position is part of a series of hires in a new interdisciplinary center with faculty from the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Gender Studies. The senior faculty who run the center are particularly interested in Mario's dissertation research on the psychosocial determinants of rape. Mario has also been very involved in sexual assault prevention, informed by his research. He is excited to begin the faculty position but concerned about some of the mixed messages he received as part of the interview process. On the one hand, he heard that senior faculty were supportive of his research. On the other hand, Mario's future department chair wanted him to understand that the major criteria for tenure at the university were peer-reviewed articles and grant funding. It was fine with them if Mario became involved in what they termed service in addition to these main tasks, but he should not think that this would help his career advancement. By "service," his department chair means Mario's work on sexual assault prevention. This part of his work would need to be in addition to his research and grant writing.

Julie Liu texts a mentor on the train home from a day interviewing for a position in the electrical engineering department at the same institution. She is very excited as they offered her the position on the spot, including a large amount of funding to set up her lab and for conference travel. There is a natural mentor for Julie in the department, and while there are few women, she feels that she and her colleagues' interests are well-aligned. The likely mentor has been very successful. Julie sees a clear path for herself at Land-grant University. Her new

colleague seems particularly interested in her dissertation research on devices that assist with hearing loss in older adults and potential patent opportunities with a new entrepreneurial effort at the university.

In these vignettes, crafted from over a hundred faculty interviews I have conducted, we see two scholars starting their careers at the same institution. They are, however, having very different experiences. Julie's work is accepted immediately and legitimized for exactly what it is. She is assured that if she continues on her present path, she will have strong mentorship and easily achieve tenure. The institution is supportive of her interest in applying her research through patents and entrepreneurship. Mario, however, receives mixed messages. His new colleagues are interested in his research, but not in his engagement with campuses. Mario immediately senses that his work in traditional peer-reviewed journals will receive legitimacy and help him advance, but not his applied work. Mario and Julie are experiencing organizational practices embedded in systems of legitimacy in academe that privilege more traditional kinds of scholarship and scholars, and constrain the agency and recognition of engaged scholars and engaged scholarship.

Our college and university campuses are increasingly diverse, with more women and underrepresented faculty than ever before. More faculty scholarship is engaged, interdisciplinary, collaborative, and crafted for public, as opposed to disciplinary audiences. Greater diversity in our scholars and scholarship can be the greatest strength of a higher education system set in a diverse democracy. However, our academic institutions are not yet structured to fully include and embrace the diversity of scholars and scholarly contributions entering the higher education system. Julie and Mario are not beginning their academic careers from the same starting position.

Throughout this chapter I employ three concepts. First, I consider how academics are engaged in a profession focused in large part on earning and maintaining legitimacy within academia. Second, I consider how organizational practices set up to legitimize some work and devalue other work within higher education constrain professional agency. Third, I consider how this system sets up an inequality regime that intersects with ways that women, underrepresented minority faculty, working-class academics, LGBTQ faculty, and academics employed in field-based disciplines such as social work or education are disenfranchised. Based on these concepts, I suggest strategies that might be employed to disrupt this inequality regime of delegitimizing organizational practices. In the next section I outline the key concepts just discussed while moving back and forth between Julie's and Mario's career experiences, viewing them through the lens of professional legitimacy, agency, and inequality regimes.

Legitimacy, Agency, and Inequality

My understanding of professional legitimacy as it applies to the professoriate has been greatly influenced by the work of Leslie Gonzales of Michigan State University, who has applied organizational theory, especially new institutional theory (e.g., Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995) to the everyday microinteractions that professors have with each other and their organizations. Scott notes that legitimacy is “not a commodity to be possessed or exchanged but a condition reflecting cultural alignment, normative support, or consonance with relevant rules or laws” (1995, p. 45). Meyer and Rowan (1977) point out that as cultural resource-driven organizations, educational performance is rewarded through legitimacy, prestige, and reputation (Bastedo & Bowman, 2011; Taylor & Morphey, 2010). Legitimacy involves fitting in and gaining standing as an acceptable and viable member of a field (Gonzales & Terosky, 2014).

Legitimacy is a helpful concept to understand the current situation of engaged scholars because it underscores how academics have created hierarchies in regard to faculty contributions (Gonzales & Terosky, 2014). Deephouse and Suchman (2008) note that professional legitimacy is conferred by professional endorsement, such as through appointment type, tenure, and awards. The concept is multidimensional as academics strive to earn legitimacy and organizations engage in practices to confer it (Gonzales & Terosky, 2014). Legitimacy is of everyday concern for engaged scholars, as much research has shown engaged scholars are advised to spend less time on engaged work and more time on traditional scholarship to move up in systems of academic legitimacy (Jaeger & Thornton, 2006; O’Meara, 2002, 2011a, 2011b). Engaged scholars “are regularly warned against putting scholarship in the service of struggles for social justice, on the grounds that however worthy, such a combination deprives the work of complexity, compromises its methodological rigor and for these reasons, puts career advancement at risk” (Hale, 2008, p. 2). This is a form of legitimacy surveillance. Although the status of community engagement differs greatly by institutional type (Ward, 2003), most four-year institutions operate within higher education fields and norms where community engagement is considered less central or core—less legitimate—than more traditional forms of scholarship.

In recent years I have written on my own and with colleagues about the concept of agency in graduate student and faculty careers (O’Meara, 2015a; O’Meara, Lounder, & Hodges, 2013; O’Meara, et al., 2014; Terosky, O’Meara, & Campbell, 2014), as well as used the concept in my own practice, guiding organizational change and faculty development efforts related to gender equity. The concept of agency has been studied in many social

science disciplines and fields, including sociology, psychology, human development, and organizational behavior, and from feminist, cultural standpoints, and realist approaches (O’Meara, 2015a). I refer to *agency* as the ability of faculty members to assume perspectives and take actions to achieve goals that are meaningful to them (O’Meara, 2015a; O’Meara, Campbell, & Terosky, 2011; Campbell & O’Meara, 2014). Agency is content-specific, and here I focus on agency to advance in a career within an institution and field. Agency is facilitated and constrained by, and in general emerges from, organizational environments (Bourdieu, 1985; Giddens, 1979). Agency is area-specific (e.g., agency in professional pursuits or agency in work-life balance) and is enacted in specific social contexts (e.g., fields, departments, gendered universities). Archer’s (2000, 2012) critical realist theory of agency further observes that an individual’s sense of agency, such as the desire to craft a career of engaged scholarship, is very much a part of and linked to his or her personal and professional commitments, emotions, and passions. Faculty sometimes go along with, sometimes resist, and sometimes negotiate with legitimacy systems that do not regard their community engagement as legitimate or worthy of recognition (Gonzales, 2014). Gonzales (2014) points out that many engaged scholars enact emotional commitments with their work, and are motivated by identities and values in direct opposition to the rules and power systems of legitimacy. Thus, systems that constrain engaged scholarship as a form of faculty work also constrain the agency of engaged scholars as people.

Unfortunately, the recruitment experiences reflected in the vignettes about Mario and Julie already reflect key elements of what Joan Acker (1990, 2006) refers to as *inequality regimes*. Inequality regimes are perpetuated and embedded in everyday practices, as described eloquently by Acker (1990, 2006) in the case of gender and race, but whose framework I have also used to describe inequalities for engaged scholars (O’Meara, 2015b). All organizations have some level of inequality embedded in their organizational practices. Acker observes that inequalities tend to include, but aren’t limited to, the following categories: (a) the division of labor and representation of scholars in higher positions; (b) symbols, language, and images that reinforce labor divisions; (c) interactions that enact dominance and submission; (d) gendered ways of thinking about work that seep into identity; and (e) organizational logic, systems of evaluation, and management that favor male preferences and characteristics. For example, Julie’s new colleagues affirm her research agenda, but only part of Mario’s scholarly agenda is affirmed. Mario’s department chair explained that the evaluation system would not consider his engagement to be legitimate faculty work and thus rewarded with tenure. In this way, a division of labor was created wherein traditional research and

people undertaking it would be rewarded, and engaged scholarship and people involved in it would be disadvantaged. Throughout this chapter I apply this concept of inequality regimes to examine how engaged scholars are disadvantaged, and traditional scholars advantaged, by organizational practices that convey legitimacy in higher education institutions.

Early Career

It is the year before the tenure decision, and Mario and Julie are each preparing their tenure case materials with committees. Mario has been encouraged three times by committee members to revise his list of potential reviewers because the names he submitted are not from institutions of the same prestige. Mario is frustrated because he wants to submit names of engaged scholars in public health who will appreciate his work on bystander interventions to prevent sexual assault. However, many of the faculty doing this work are his rank or at institutions of lesser prestige than his own. Also, department committee members are concerned that too many of the names that he submitted are other faculty of color who may be perceived to be his close friends. Mario has also been discouraged by feedback he received about including information on an important grant he had been awarded. Colleagues have not approved of some of his publication venues. Yet Mario intentionally positioned his work in these practitioner-based journals for maximum impact with those who are engaged in sexual assault policy and prevention work.

Julie, however, is relatively sure she will sail through the tenure process. She received a career award from the National Science Foundation and has been publishing in the same journals as her adviser and mentor. Julie was recently invited to be an associate editor of their major journal. The individuals chosen as reviewers are all individuals at the same or more prestigious institutions who know Julie's mentor and work and whom she has met at professional conferences.

In the opening vignette we saw inequality present in colleagues' reception to Julie's and Mario's scholarship. Before they even arrived on campus, however, Julie and Mario would likely have had different resources and opportunities available to them in graduate school. Many engaged scholars struggle to find good mentoring and career sponsorship in graduate school—both of which are critical to building successful careers (Eatman, 2012). Although the institution was attracted to the cutting-edge, interdisciplinary aspects of Mario's research, faculty there cautioned him that the reward system might not follow their enthusiasm for his work. Early in their academic careers, we see the organization setting the limitations, constraints, and opportunities by which Julie and Mario can accrue legitimacy and recognition, and even job security, based on the direction of their scholarship.

Mario and Julie's institution clearly value peer-reviewed publications, regardless of whether the research in them will reach the practitioner audiences that can act on that knowledge to improve the public good. When Mario ventures outside these norms, he is situated as "not fitting" and loses some academic currency that must be compensated for somewhere else in order to succeed. As shown in previous research, Mario might add to the cachet and prestige of his community engagement by obtaining significant grant funding, prestigious appointments in the policy world, awards, or public acclaim for this work (O'Meara, 2011b; Saltmarsh, Wooding, & McLellan, 2014). However, he is doubtlessly working from a deficit situation because his institution has delineated clearly what counts as legitimate scholarship and legitimate reviewers. There is a lack of fit between their criteria and Mario's work, reflected further in a lack of sponsorship by his department colleagues, mentoring, and clear pathways for professional development. Alternatively, Julie just needs to do the work that her mentors trained her to do, and although she may face constraints as a woman in a male-dominated field, they will not be based on the nature of her scholarship or its assigned legitimacy, network, and resources.

Mid-Career

It has been five years since Mario received tenure and promotion. He is in his office considering two very different assessments of his contributions since joining the faculty. The first is a department merit review letter in which Mario was awarded "low merit" in research because of the number of peer-reviewed articles he published last year in top journals. The second is an invitation to join the advisory council of the President's Commission to stop violence against women on college campuses. In the announcement of the President's Commission, Mario's research on young men and bystander prevention is one of only two research studies cited. Mario's engaged research is the guiding force behind the most effective prevention program being used now at over 600 college campuses.

Julie, however, has just been offered institutional funding for a new line of research, and she is considering whether she wants to pursue this or spend a year as a program officer at the National Science Foundation. Both would advance her career and her ultimate plans to become full professor and department chair, and her mentor and colleagues in the department support both options.

Many factors support agency in faculty work. One factor is feeling like you can see multiple pathways to achieve your goals, rather than only one pathway (O'Meara, 2015a; Terosky, O'Meara, & Campbell, 2014). The reward system that Mario lives in provides only one legitimate pathway to recognition for scholarship. This constrains his sense of career agency—how he thinks about

advancement in his field and what he can do to achieve it. A caveat is important. By having tenure, Mario is in a privileged position. He has job security, unlike many engaged scholars he knows in non-tenure-track positions. Mario can ignore the merit review system and keep his job. However, Mario's department reward system constrains his sense of career agency and chance to advance within the university leadership by not recognizing his scholarship. His work will receive less visibility, resources, and recognition. Julie's agency is enhanced by seeing multiple pathways to professional advancement that fit with her professional goals and sense of identity as an academic.

Late Career

Mario and Julie are now in their 50s and in a generative time where they enjoy giving back. Julie is now a full professor, department chair, and editor of one of the major journals in her field. Because of the status she has acquired as an academic, she is able to mentor and support new academics coming up through the system. Julie is invited to serve on the most prestigious committees on her campus and in her field, which means she has a strong, respected voice at the table when decisions are made regarding promotion and tenure, hiring, allocation of resources, and new research directions in her field. Julie's research received a patent and brings both Julie and her department revenue from industry applications.

Mario's work has also brought him great joy and satisfaction, though he has not gone up for full professor. Instead, he committed himself to policy work and the development of a new center that studies and increases awareness about sexual assault and prevention of violence against women. His work is constantly cited in his field, and he regularly receives awards and is covered in the popular press. Although he has published traditional research studies on this work, he decided not to emphasize this line of inquiry. It just was not as important to him when he thought about the imprint he wanted to have on the field. Mario's department reward system prioritizes international recognition over domestic impact, and peer-reviewed articles and research over work directly changing what is happening in the world, so his colleagues have not encouraged him to go up for full professor. Mario has mentored many other engaged scholars in his field and helped them to get positions in academe, though he has warned them to find jobs in less research-intensive environments if they want to do the work he does.

By late career Julie has experienced a series of accumulated advantages supporting her professional work, whereas Mario has survived many accumulated disadvantages. Returning to the concept of inequality regimes, we see these differences in many forms. Most of the people with whom Julie is working are in powerful positions at the university and have similar traditional research interests and status. The same images of the successful academic that helped

to define *fit* for Julie do not align with Mario's full talents and contributions as a scholar or his advancement. Although Mario assumed agency to resist institutional norms and pressures to change the substance of his work, and he has enjoyed tenure there, it has come at a cost. The academic career is a cumulative one. In the last third of it, status and voice are accorded to those who have advanced. Mario has less ability to have his voice heard because he is less often invited to the table.

Implications: Organizational Strategies to Disrupt Inequality Regarding Engaged Scholarship

In this brief space I have tried to outline multiple ways in which institutions constrain faculty agency in pursuit of community engagement. Namely, legitimacy systems devalue community engagement in graduate school training and socialization and hiring processes. Tenure processes maintain narrow definitions of *scholarship* and assign a prestige litmus test to reviewers. Resources to support scholarship in general flow toward the more traditional STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields and not to scholars involved in field-based, interdisciplinary areas where community engagement is common. This system promotes and reproduces an inequality regime for engaged scholars for the following reasons:

- The system creates a situation in which fewer faculty in higher ranks and more prestigious institutions are engaged scholars.
- The campus valorizes traditional research accomplishments and provides fewer resources to engaged scholarship.
- Engaged scholars are continually negotiating with other faculty and administrators with more legitimacy, power, and resources.
- Engaged scholars are encouraged to think about their engagement as something they do for personal reasons and their "real work" as the traditional scholarship that informs engagement.
- Everyday reward system criteria—merit pay, campus awards, disciplinary awards, and professional achievement markers—are bestowed upon those involved in the most traditional scholarship.

Higher education institutions are not the only organizations and fields that trade in legitimacy and create inequality regimes. We are just very good at it. We have created tiered systems of higher education institutions through ranking systems—distinct categories of valued academics through tenure and non-tenure-track systems—and looked the other way as diverse faculty are

not welcomed into many disciplines, higher ranks, and prestigious appointments. Likewise, research applied for profit is heralded above research engaged to address social problems. The story told here about engaged scholarship is connected to all of these other stories of insiders and outsiders, and of spoken and unspoken higher education priorities.

I have focused intentionally on extreme examples to highlight important issues using these three concepts of agency, legitimacy, and inequality regimes. Obviously, these issues can be, and often are, more subtle. Furthermore, engaged scholars sometimes do not know if the struggles they are experiencing are the result of their pursuing engaged scholarship or because they are young, female, a person of color, or a first-generation entrant to academe. In addition, most interviews I have done with highly successful engaged scholars show the high intrinsic motivation fueling their efforts as well as deep satisfactions gained from true partnerships with community members and others in nonprofit and policy organizations (O'Meara, 2012). In other words, many engaged scholars disregard the systems that disregard them, investing more fully in the work and the community partners where they find meaning and know they are making important contributions. However, it doesn't have to be this way.

We need institutional leaders and faculty to diagnose micro and macro inequalities in how diverse forms of scholarship are recognized. Transforming these organizational practices to support the full participation of Julie and Mario is critical to the future of higher education. *Full participation*, as conceptualized by Susan Sturm (2007), includes equal opportunity to participate in the work of the university, realize one's capabilities, and have equal voice. This requires *architecture for inclusion*, or organizational structures and conditions that support diverse faculty and forms of scholarship (Sturm, 2007).

We need interventions (institution wide and department focused) that disrupt or dismantle organizational practices that reinforce inequalities and help faculty navigate and craft meaningful careers in higher education organizations. In Table 6.1, I provide a checklist of key ways that institutions of higher education have begun to disrupt field norms of legitimacy and acknowledge and support engaged scholarship. This list is not meant to be exhaustive; there are many ways to approach this topic, but I have noted strategies here that are known to support scholars' status, legitimacy, and career advancement. For example, provosts, deans, and department chairs who wish to have truly engaged faculty and institutions need to examine whether engaged scholars have a voice at the table when resource allocation is discussed, and whether this voice is limited by academic rank or position. Peer networks provide a place for intellectual engagement, strategies,

TABLE 6.1
Regarding Engaged Scholarship
Does your department, college, or university have . . . ?

<p><i>Key Ways to Regard</i> Awareness and Visibility</p>	<p>Systematic and transparent data collection on engaged scholarship via</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Work environment surveys <input type="checkbox"/> Student evaluation data <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty activity report data <p>Campus awards for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged scholarship, teaching, and service <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged departments <input type="checkbox"/> Innovative engaged curricular commitments <p>Marketing and publications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Positioning engaged scholarship on the Web, via YouTube clips, and in campus publications such as reports to the board of trustees and alumni
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(Continues)

Table 6.1 (Continued)

Key Ways to Regard	Does your department, college, or university have . . . ?
Reward Systems	<input type="checkbox"/> Job descriptions that emphasize diverse scholarship <input type="checkbox"/> Diverse scholarship valued in promotion and tenor: via definitions of scholarship, criteria, documentation, peer review <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching and service valued in promotion and tenure <input type="checkbox"/> Training for promotion and tenure committee chairs on newer forms of scholarship <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum of Understanding for faculty with interdisciplinary and engaged roles regarding their evaluation <input type="checkbox"/> Annual faculty reports that allow faculty to get credit for engaged scholarship, mentoring, other kinds of service <input type="checkbox"/> A place for engaged scholarship in the official university CV form <input type="checkbox"/> Merit pay criteria that rewards engaged scholarship
Networks and Peer Support	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty development programs (e.g., in-house or cross-campus programs, typically 12 to 15 faculty who meet once a month) <input type="checkbox"/> Formal and informal mentoring programs and opportunities for faculty to connect with community partners <input type="checkbox"/> Writing retreats and assistance with grant-writing; help finding good places to submit articles on engagement projects
Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Stipends or course release for engaged research or course development <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative assistance (e.g., work-study student hours, vans) <input type="checkbox"/> Assistance developing partnerships; contracts with community partners
Decision-Making	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty council that meets regularly and advises campus decision-making on engagement and resources

and professional growth for engaged scholars and are necessary scaffolding to support this work. Promotion and tenure criteria, merit pay, and annual faculty report accounting all need to value engaged scholarship as legitimate, prized faculty activity.

Institutions that receive the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement—a distinction for institutionalizing a commitment to community engagement—have made much progress in moving their academic cultures in this direction (Saltmarsh et al., 2014). However, even very engaged institutions allow inequalities to remain in reward systems through “deliberate indifference.” In other words, even when espousing commitment to faculty community engagement, the institution is not walking the walk inside their reward systems. The institution is, in fact, undecided as a culture.

Engaged scholars must find ways to craft meaningful careers even while their institutions are undecided or are making needed changes to scaffold the work. Given that their academic homes will not always be hospitable, it is more important than ever for engaged scholars to form strategic social networks. Such networks can create their own sense of fit and legitimacy, support individual and collective agency, and create systems that support equity.

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