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REFEREED PAPER

The Institutionalisation of the Public Intellectual

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Abstract

As the way academics work becomes increasingly specified and regulated, the role of the public intellectual, as championed by Burawoy and exemplified by Jakubowicz, is changing. Engagement with the professions and industry is being proposed as a requirement for a research-active academic. Prescriptions for the way this might happen have the potential to remove the sense of responsibility inherent in Burawoy's notion of the public intellectual and the suggested use of social media to promote new knowledge potentially dilutes the notion of 'publics' which is fundamental to the notion of the public intellectual, substituting the individual for the collective. This in turn has an impact on the kind of informed debate that can influence policy development. This paper explores the narratives of new academics as they seek to answer the questions Giddens asserted were fundamental to the creation of identity in late modernity – What to do? How to act? Who to be? It positions these narratives of identity in a broader discourse of the role of the academic in the creation of new knowledge, perceptions of the role of the university in contemporary Australian culture and the constraints of work planning and performance management.

Keywords

Academics; Activism; Public Intellectuals

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Background to the Study: Scholarship and Society

The mission of the university has developed and expanded, from an original focus on teaching and learning to incorporate research, the creation of knowledge for the sake of knowledge or for the sake of societal improvement, where there was a focus on society and its problems; and finally, the emergence of the entrepreneurial university, the notion of the partnership between the university and business or industry to work together to solve problems which will strengthen the economy (Etkowitz, 2004; Roper and Hirth, 2005).

Delanty argues that, traditionally, the university sat outside of democratic processes and outside of the flow of societal communication. It was this positioning that allowed the institution of the university to retain its autonomy, a key aspect of the creation of scholarly knowledge. He separates the work of the university from democracy and societal change. He argues that scholarly knowledge is structured, created according to a set of rules and practices which encompass the way in which its authority can be judged. In expanding his discussion of the modern university (Delanty, 2003), Delanty also argues that the academy is a site of many cultural contradictions as the emergence of the knowledge society has enabled the massification of education, the diffusion of new ideologies such as neo-liberalism and the marketisation of academic institutions.

Democracy, by its very nature, is anarchic; it is inclusive of many points of view and many types of people. Knowledge created in a democratic space will encompass many voices and be judged according to standards understood within that community, but not necessarily accepted by all members. This dichotomy confronts activist academics who are creating knowledge for the development of a strong democratic society and who are also working within the academy to strengthen scholarly knowledge within their field. In some fields the contribution to the development of a democratic society has been direct and in others, less obvious. There are thus a number of ways in which the identity of the academic as activist can be understood.

In the context of an increasingly complex set of relationships between knowledge and society, including contemporary universities, the purpose of this paper is to explore the ways in which academics as activists understand the knowledge they create, the processes they use to create that knowledge and their relationships with community-based activists. In other words, it is about the identities as knowledge creators that academics construct and how through these identities, academics address, overcome or avoid the tensions and conflicts generated by what might seem to be contradictory components of their work as both academics and activist.

Academics as Activists

To begin to understand engaged academics as activists, it is important to acknowledge possible relationships between knowledge, its creators, creation and use. Delanty proposes four types of knowledge corresponding to four types of knowledge producers: research; education; professional training; and intellectual enquiry (2001, p.8). He links these to complementary notions of citizenship, ‘cultural in so far as it has led to the preservation and

dissemination of cultural traditions among the society as a whole, and technological as a contributor to professional society, the demands of the occupational system and the extension of the equality of opportunity' (Delanty 2001, p. 50). Education and intellectual inquiry relate to cultural citizenship and research and professional training relate to technological citizenship.

Bauman (1987) focussed on societal roles and identified two roles which intellectuals have played, the legislator and the interpreter. The legislator is knowledgeable, an authoritative expert, enforcing and governed by rules and procedures, making judgements on what is 'true'; this is the ideal Enlightenment scholar. The interpreter, a postmodern figure, is concerned with communication, with the re-positioning of statements of scholarly knowledge so that they can be understood more widely in society. Yet, this figure is also an authority figure, making statements from a position of privilege. For Bauman, these roles co-exist; they are both ways of expressing expertise.

Osborne (2004) has elaborated Bauman's approach by incorporating Foucault's notions of ethics, and incorporated two additional categories, experts and mediators. He prefers to see these as epistemic forms, rather than as roles. For Osborne, the legislator is concerned more with the establishment of a social and political order based on intellectual or cultural order. The interpreter translates between different discourse communities, to bring about mutual recognition 'amidst the clash of cultures and values'. Experts produce 'forms of knowledge that will be at the disposal of the wise government of those charged with the exercise of rule' and thus can become a force for reform. The mediator on the other hand, is 'the intellectual worker as enabler, fixer, catalyst and broker of ideas'. The mediator is interested in informational ideas, in creating a culture where ideas are important as ways of making a difference (Osborne, pp. 439-441).

Understanding the Engaged Scholar

Activist academics are also referred to as engaged scholars. The idea of the engaged scholar can be understood in the context of the popularization of knowledge, both through user-generated content and through the use of digital channels. With the increase in access to a variety of forms of communication available online, people have been able to access scholarly knowledge both directly and through secondary sources. In the early days of the debate, Whitley (1985) was concerned that this popularisation of knowledge may devalue the work of scholars because the public knew nothing about the way that knowledge is produced and verified and were incapable of judging its value. This view has largely overwhelmed by the acceptance of the notion of the information society, where a key skill of educated people is acknowledged to be the ability, at some level, to evaluate sources of information (Zuccala 2010), although to some extent, the proliferation of social media and 'fake news' has again raised questions about how the general public can judge the value of the information they find through the Internet.

The current concern with impact, particular in policy development, also brings a spotlight to the work of the engaged scholar. The process of policy-making is an area where the focus on research-based evidence has been very strong, and where interactions between

academics, bureaucrats, politicians, activists and citizens have become increasingly complex. In the 1990s, when a focus on evidence-based policy development was developing, the academic was conceptualised as someone with expert knowledge, who provided advice to government and to industry (Goldfarb 1998). In this role, the academic put forward a rational-logical, evidence-based argument which could be seen as value neutral and whose findings were more likely to be taken as impartial and, therefore, more valid than those of someone known to be partisan. Gradually, a new discourse emerged in the development of public policy where new practices of activism and citizen participation became evident. The ideal position was the move to a situation where scholarly knowledge, local knowledges and the knowledge gained from experience would have equal input to a knowledge based approach to social change (Delvaux & Schoenaers 2012).

The notion of the engaged scholar was also addressed by academics, from their position with the university, in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Michael Burawoy, the president of the American Sociological Association, stated that he wanted to ‘bring ... sociology into conversation with publics’ (2005, p.7). He explained that the ways of doing this can range from being a commentator in the media on issues relevant to sociology to working closely with a local group, trade union, or community-based organization. James Arvanitakis, now the Pro Vice-chancellor Research & Graduate Studies at Western Sydney University, wrote a blog post listing three themes in the literature on being an activist-academic: that research-based teaching is a form of activism; that research itself is a political process and it is important to limit the gap between movements for change and academia, especially when an individual may be involved in both activities; and that reflective thinking is important, and should be used to create spaces for progressive change and social solidarity, avoiding the paralysis that may come from fear of ‘not doing the right thing’ (Arvanitakis 2008). Professor Jenny Onyx, now Professor Emerita of the University of Technology Sydney, identified three roles that the University plays in its engagement with community (2008), including advancing knowledge, brokering or mediating power relations to facilitate collaborative actions and acting as a site for intellectual deliberation.

Investigating Activist Scholars

We, the authors of this paper, were members of a research centre, the Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Research Centre (CCS) at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), whose focus was the engagement of scholarship in questions of social change. In this context, we were aware that academics who also saw themselves as activists confronted the dichotomy Delanty identified and that they sought to find a balance between activism and the academy. This anecdotal observation of our colleagues and of other activist scholars whom we met at seminars and conferences eventually led to the formulation of a research question: How do academics who are also recognised as activists bridge these two lives, the life of the academic and the life of the activist?

To explore this question, Giddens’s proposition that it is no longer possible to adopt pre-determined roles in society and we have to create our own identities was central. Giddens posed three questions, fundamental to the creation of identity in late modernity: ‘What to do?

How to act? Who to be?' (1991, p. 70). In his view, self-identity is not a set of traits or observable characteristics. It emerges from a person's own reflexive understanding of their biography. Adopting this approach, with its focus on identity and reflexivity, facilitated the emergence of rich data through which to understand the complexity of factors that influence the understandings that academics have of themselves.

Methodology

The data for this paper were collected between 2014 and 2016, as part of the broader project noted above. They answer Giddens's questions of what to do? How to act? Who to be? Data have been collected systematically from many academics who have self-identified as activists. These data have come from a variety of sources including discussions, newsletter and newspaper articles, websites and email correspondence. For this study, twenty academics, drawn from that larger pool, agreed to provide responses to an additional set of questions, focussed directly on questions of identity and knowledge creation and from the responses, usable data was gathered from thirteen academics. Among the thirteen, there are participants who have fewer than three years' experience as academics and those who have more than thirty years'. There are men and women. Although the majority of the participants are in the social sciences broadly defined, there are participants from the sciences/engineering and from the humanities. Although most participants are Australian, there are participants from other countries and cultures. They are all known as activists, although some, like Professor Andrew Jakubowicz, in whose honour this Festschrift issue is published, are reluctant to claim this identity.

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns across the data. From this process, four key themes emerged: sphere of influence; relationship to other activists; research methods used; and focus of impact. The length of time each person had been an academic was also included as a key factor as was a word sketch to encapsulate how the individual expressed their own sense of how they were known.

Findings

Participants in the study have a clear sense of how to answer the question of 'who to be?' They use phrases such as 'as a researcher' or 'as a teacher of citizens' or 'an applied researcher' or 'an activist'. They identify activities such as 'writing', 'advocating' and 'policy reform' or 'law reform'. They value the opportunity as an academic to 'speak without restraint' or to be able to contribute to professional practice or community debate by researching and writing on topics which are seen as useful. Each has a clear sense of who they consider to be their peers, identifying 'other scholars in the field', 'likeminded people including non-academics' or 'community partners'.

From the answers to these questions and without prompting, their intended spheres of influence are clearly identifiable: policymakers, members of the area of professional practice, other academics and the educated public. Some see themselves as being part of a team with other activists and practitioners to create new knowledge: 'I have certainly benefited from the cultural mentorship I have received from my colleagues at [a community-based professional

centre]’. Others stand apart: ‘I think activists occupy a different position on the political spectrum to scholars.’ Their audiences vary from other academics to members of the public, although there is a strong emphasis on policy makers. ‘I use my role as associate editor of [...] journal to steer research in a particular critical direction’; ‘I endeavour to reach a wide audience through writing opinion pieces’; ‘I wrote for environmental educators’; ‘I try to produce work that will be potentially of use to practitioners and policy makers’.

The methods and techniques they use may come directly from the academy, emphasising ‘rigorous empirical analysis’ or be informed by professional practice ‘I undertake qualitative and mixed methods research ... [and] with that information, I develop tailored interventions’ or community expectations ‘My methodological preferences have always been towards action research and capacity-building’. They are aware of the kind of impact their work has, as the following quotes show: ‘My work is quoted in literature reviews done by peak bodies ... [and] practitioners frequently ask for my articles to inform their practice’; ‘I like to engage in knowledge creation that is perhaps slightly off the mainstream ... to provide an alternative understanding to the dominant constructions of [the topic under investigation]’; ‘I want to make sure that my work ... can have a positive influence on the society in which we live’; ‘A UN report cited my paper as the basis for a policy change.’

Each participant expressed clearly their perception of their relationship with the academy, the institutional form of the university. Three positions emerged: maintaining the focus on scholarship which could be used outside the academy; seeing the identities of activist and academic as separate; establishing a judicious collaboration with others, inside and outside the academy. These are exemplified as follows: ‘[I have been] careful to maintain an academic profile’; ‘[There are] ways in which I can marry the two roles’; ‘Having community and industry partners was a real boon’. However, these positions were not without their difficulties. Whereas most participants noted that they were able to work within the policies of the university, perhaps engaging in a measure of self-censorship, with their work being ‘tolerated but not highly valued’, at least one described a conflictual relationship, with a sense of ‘being in trouble everyday’. A Freudian slip of the finger in an email from one participant is perhaps telling in this regard; this participant intended to write about ‘missives’ to staff from senior management, but wrote the word ‘missiles’.

Some participants referred to shifts in research policy at the government level to bring a focus onto research outcomes. Again, while some found that ‘the rat wheel is sped up every year’, or that their work is ‘less and less valued’, others found that their research-based activism and their partnerships with community organisations are ‘respected and appreciated by the university’, for example through the conferral of an award, or the granting of special funding or the appointment to a university-level strategic development working group.

The data collected from various sources showed the extent to which the participants in the study engage with the media, through radio, television and newspapers, through blogs and public events, including for a few participants, acts of civil disobedience. They are advisors, board members and spokespeople. Only one person indicated a reluctance to engage with the media: ‘I don’t want to sully my own voice.’

Analysis by gender and by field of study showed no pattern, but a clear pattern did emerge when academic experience was used as a sorting mechanism. Creating one dichotomy between those who were new to working in the academy and those who were experienced, and overlaying a second created from participants' views of themselves as being first and foremost scholars or first and foremost activists, gave interesting insights into the data.

Those relatively new to the university, who had been appointed on the basis of their new PhD or perhaps because of a postdoctoral fellowship, saw themselves as learning the ways of the academic world and felt the need to publish in peer reviewed journals with high citation rates. They were likely to have a high profile in some aspect of social justice broadly defined and to describe their relationship with other activists as one mediated by their scholarly knowledge which has had or will have an impact on policy, as well as on other scholars. Those relatively new to the university who had been appointed after a successful career in a professional field, or with a strong reputation as an activist, tended to see themselves as developing the profession through teaching, inculcating a sense of professional moral responsibility to use professional skills for a better world.

Those experienced in the university sector, who saw themselves primarily as activists, were employed at a relatively senior level in the university. They had a high profile in their area of activism, and had a reputation for working collaboratively with their community outside of the university. They used inclusive research methods, shared authorship, published in peer reviewed journals and in community newsletters and described their relationship with other activists as one of collaboration in the creation of new knowledge and understanding, which is often used for charting a new direction for the organisation and for policymakers. The impact of this work is on the community itself, or the work of community members, including volunteers, and potentially on broader policy. Those experienced in the university sector who saw themselves primarily as scholars were currently at various levels within the academic hierarchy and all were in the social sciences broadly defined. Each had a reputation for advocacy and reform, and they saw themselves as using the networks of the academic world and the networks of professional world to spread the message and lead to change. They described their relationships as an activist with other activists and a scholar with other scholars and they convened community activities and scholarly seminars, they wrote for government, the profession, the academy and sometimes for the general public. They consider that the impact of their scholarly work is on the work of other scholars and on policy.

Discussion

The findings shed light on the complexity of answers to the questions of 'who to be?', 'what to do?' and 'how to act?' (Giddens 1991). They show that length of experience as an academic and professional background as an activist are likely to influence the way that academics create their identity and respond to the conflict between knowledge creation in the university and in society for social change.

We see that these academics reflect differently on the question of knowledge and expertise in society. The more experienced believe it is important to work with their community-based colleagues, in a capacity-building role, where those less experienced emphasise the importance of concentrating on learning how to create scholarly knowledge, leaving it up to practitioners and policy-makers to work out what is relevant to them and how to use it. Each of these positions acknowledge that scholarly knowledge works according to a particular set of rules and processes, as distinct from the ‘anarchic knowledge of democracy’. Those who are more established as academics were better able to demonstrate expertise in knowledge of the academy and knowledge of democratic processes.

The methodologies used to create new knowledge seem to show approaches to knowledge creation that are not solely based in the academy. It seems not uncommon for activist academics to consider their fellow activists as partners in the exploratory process. While it is true that those using qualitative methodologies, particularly those following a critical approach or a feminist methodology, are likely to engage some level of partnership with their community-based partners, on the other hand it is uncommon to find the kind of partnership that carries over into the joint publication and dissemination of results and outcomes. In this process, it seems likely that community partners are willing to accept the incorporation of their knowledge and to adapt to the norms and standards of the academy in the gathering and recording of their own knowledge and expertise (Delanty 2001).

In considering the target of the new knowledge created by activist academics, participants in our study reflect on their impacts in society and all believe that to some extent they have control over the processes of making an impact with the new knowledge they have created. New academics from practice will use it to teach students who will be entering the professions of which they are a part. Some established scholars will have collaborated with partners who were in a position to share the creation of the new knowledge and for whom the new knowledge is potentially useful, whereas others will have the kind of reputation or profile that gives them access to policy-makers or that allows them a voice in the media. The new academics who have come through the PhD route, with no solid reputation in practice or activism on the other hand, will need to see their new knowledge adopted first by someone, before they can expect to have social impact.

From a democratic perspective, it would be encouraging to be able to say that community-based partners and other activists are the targets of the new knowledge and that social impact – small changes towards a ‘good and just society’ - are what matters. However, in this context of ‘research excellence’ where the outcomes of scholarly work are measured through publications, citations and contribution to international rankings, these structures are bringing about an insidious change, as Collyer (2013) and other academic have pointed out (Flood, Martin and Dreher, 2013, Couture, 2017). These academics have explored the tensions that exist for academics as they seek to be activists and academics. They note the links between the ranking of universities, the type of research as well as the impact factor of the journals in which academics are strongly encouraged to publish their work. Studies using qualitative approaches, engaging community-based activists as partners are less likely to be published in so-called prestigious journals and less likely to be cited by other scholars and

therefore less likely to contribute to a university's international ranking or to the reputation of an academic. While there is a strong move to formalise notions of social impact, young activist academics are being actively encouraged to think about ways to raise the citations to their research outputs. In other words, the target of the new knowledge of academic activists is currently, more than ever, other academics and in particular, those who will refer to it in their own work and those involved in policy-making, with greater or lesser degrees of influence.

In considering the ways these academics reflect on their processes of creating new knowledge and the people they focus on doing this, we gain insight to the ways in which activist academics find balance between the potentially chaotic world of new ideas in democracy and the structured knowledge of the university, created according to a set of rules and practices which encompass the way in which its authority can be judged. Four ways of doing this emerge. Each acknowledges the challenge of creating knowledge both within the academy and in society, and each has a defined purpose with a chosen audience. The first of these ways is being a teacher who encourages students not only to know the rules of scholarship and professional practice but to engage with them or even challenge them, in other words, to encourage their students to take a critical approach to knowledge and its creation. The second is the public dissemination of scholarly knowledge, finding ways to make academic knowledge more broadly accessible, especially through writing for practitioners or contributing to *The Conversation* and thus addressing a broad educated audience. The third is using expert knowledge and skills, especially in research methodology, to develop authoritative knowledge which will be of use to the wider society through the efforts of policy makers and practitioners. The fourth is using scholarly knowledge to solve problems in society, enabling and facilitating solutions in a context where the flow of ideas is important.

There are some similarities here with the epistemic forms identified by Bauman (1987) and Osborne (2004). However, instead of appearing as ideal types in an abstract context related to the creation and flow of knowledge in a society, these are the practical ways that academics, from differing backgrounds and with differing levels of experience in the university sector create the links between the university and their particular concern with societal change. They provide answers to Giddens's questions of what to do and how to act.

Inside/Outside Academia: Andrew Jakubowicz

This contribution to the *festschrift* for Professor Andrew Jakubowicz reports also on an interview with him conducted in late 2017, which provided some interesting insights on the public intellectual from an academic marking the formal end to his career. He explained that he did not like to attach the concept of activist to the concept of scholar, because for him, every scholar is engaged in some form of praxis. He acknowledged that the ideas of the scholar have to be 'right for the times', noting the influence of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the student leader in Paris in May 1968. In his 'younger and more strident days', he would have argued, following Marx's Thesis on Feuerbach, that the challenge is not to understand the world but to change it, although he noted that 'as you mature, you recognise that change may

not happen quite as you expect'. When Michael Burawoy's paper was published in 2005, Andrew found that the notion of the public sociologist was a useful way for him to 'reframe in retrospect' his approach to scholarly work. In discussing the creation and dissemination of scholarly knowledge, he labelled it 'an exciting process', but one that can be 'scary' as 'people get angry with you' when your expertise leads you to propose options that may not be popular. He learned how to position his scholarly knowledge and avoid being 'too much out there' and to acknowledge that the significance of scholarly work and its impact on policy change may take many years to be recognised. As he said of the project, *Making of Multicultural Australia*, 'I've been working on it most of my life'. In discussing the changing constraints of universities and their policies, he referred to a study he carried out at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where older academics were more easily able to engage with the creative aspects of scholarly work, whereas the younger ones put their emphasis on scholarly outputs, as there was not much time to do other things, once teaching and other responsibilities were taken into account.

Andrew recognised the structures and rules which prevail in the life of an academic within the university, and the need to 'perform as a standard academic' if you want 'to have a stable place in the system'. He noted: 'I don't know how to do anything else.' He did not see the structures and rules as a barrier to innovation and social change, because 'people with a creative flair will find a way to work within [the constraints of the system] and this in turn may well improve the quality of activism'. He added, 'Your place in the world is going to be based on how well the knowledge you create is integrated into the world in which you live. ... I enjoy seeing ideas worked out in the real world situation'.

Conclusion

Those questions of 'who to be?' 'what to do?' and 'how to act?' are providing answers which can give some direction to those wishing to resolve the dichotomy which Delanty identified. Existing models of the role of activist academics within the university and discussions on the role of university education in developing active citizens with an understanding of what a just society might be like seem curiously outmoded in the light of our data. Some, perhaps older, academics may see this as an unfortunate by-product of the corporatisation of the academy. Despite intergenerational differences, this study has shown that academics who are engaged scholars are finding ways to link their scholarship with their concern for social change.

The responses of the participants in our study suggest that the ways in which an activist academic is recognised may change, as the context of the university changes, including work planning, performance management and other forms of managerialism. The label of public intellectual may fall out of favour; but, as Andrew Jakubowicz has demonstrated, academics who have reflected on Giddens's questions of who to be and how to act will find ways to exemplify their version of an engaged scholar.

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