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Engaged Scholarship and Its Discontents

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Abstract

Engaged scholarship plays a crucial role in shaping collective narratives and fostering inclusive societies. This article explores the concept of engaged scholarship, highlighting both its transformative potential and the discontents that accompany it. Informed by existing literature and personal reflections, the discussion is divided into three key sections. The first section provides a concise overview of engaged scholarship and outlines the conditions that enable its practice. The second section delves into the main discontents of engaged scholarship: narrow definitions of academic work, polarised views on knowledge and truth, restrictive professional guidelines, the potential for backlash, and the risk of burnout. These pitfalls create an environment where scholars may hesitate to engage fully, despite the pressing need for their contributions to public discourse. In the third and final section, the article emphasises the moral imperative of using research for social change and advocates for the creation of supportive ecosystems to help scholars navigate the challenges of public engagement.

Keywords

backlash; Bourdieu; burnout; crisis; critical theory; engaged scholarship

1. Introduction

I am a sociologist of education. My research focuses on disadvantages and policy responses in education. For the last six years, I have investigated educational opportunities, experiences, and outcomes of African-heritage youth in Australia. I regularly find myself contemplating avenues for translating my findings beyond conventional scholarly channels and communications. I explore ways to translate my knowledge of disadvantage, discrimination, and domination into actionable initiatives that address the root causes of these social ills. I use alternative dissemination mechanisms to reach the wider public and make a positive

difference in the lives of young people experiencing vulnerabilities. This fervent desire to go beyond the confines of academia has propelled me into the realm of engaged scholarship.

At the core of public-facing engagement lies the conviction that conducting social research merely for knowledge acquisition holds limited significance. We cannot presume that our scholarly publications alone can bring about the positive societal changes we desire. While scholarly publications and communications are vital vehicles for disseminating research insights, the transformative potential of our expertise lies in its application beyond the academic realm—when we intervene in the political field where groups contend for power, influence, and control over institutions, political narratives, and policy discourses. As social researchers, we should ask if our ideas work for society. Importantly, echoing Bourdieu (2003), I would argue that if a certain group in society is unjustly treated or disadvantaged, those who think we know about this issue in advance have a moral duty to publicise the problem, advocate for change, and demand public action.

In this respect, engaged scholarship emerges as a pivotal avenue through which we can bridge the gap between academic knowledge and demand for change in the real world. In other words, engaged scholarship represents a crucial facet of academic labour that involves collaborating with communities and aims to help identify and transform pressing needs among individuals and groups facing challenges that may otherwise be overlooked (Hoffman, 2021). The argument is straightforward: Rather than confining ourselves to the boundaries of our social location, as committed scholars, we must actively seek avenues to collaborate with communities, policymakers, and advocacy groups—to engage in "public reasoning" (Sen, 2009). Engaged scholarship may take different forms: directing research attention to overlooked public issues, working in partnership with communities to generate accessible and relevant knowledge, using research findings to publicise critical problems and call for public action, and/or publicly expressing solidarity with the disadvantaged (Boyer, 1996; Cann & Demeulenaere, 2020; Collins, 2013; Doyle, 2018; Hoffman, 2021; Kajner & Shultz, 2013; Molla, 2024a). In terms of publicising overlooked public issues, engaged scholars may deliver public lectures, actively engage with the media, take advisory roles within government departments, develop policy briefs, write public submissions, and volunteer for community services.

However, from my own experiences and in the literature, it is clear that engaged scholarship is not without its discontents. Engaged scholars face numerous challenges as they navigate the boundaries between the academic and public spheres. This article aims to unmask internal and external challenges that make scholars hesitant to engage with the public. The following research question guides the article: What constrains the practice of engaged scholarship?

Understanding the challenges faced by engaged scholars is crucial for institutions to address the systemic issues that limit the broader impact of research. By identifying these obstacles, universities, and other academic bodies can develop effective support structures that empower scholars to engage more freely with public discourse and societal challenges. This recognition, in turn, ensures that research becomes more socially relevant, aligning with the pressing needs of communities and policy debates. Eventually fostering a supportive environment for engaged scholarship helps bridge the gap between academia and society, enhancing the role of scholarship in driving meaningful change.

The remaining discussion is organised into three sections. The first section briefly discusses the meaning of engaged scholarship. The second section outlines six drivers of engaged scholarship. The third section covers the challenges of public-facing academic engagement. The article closes with concluding remarks.

2. What Do We Mean by Engaged Scholarship?

The idea of engaged scholarship underscores the importance of being responsive to pressing societal issues and leveraging one's expertise to instigate positive societal transformations. Engaged scholarship is a form of academic labour that blends intellectual questions and assets with public issues and priorities (Holland, 2005). Put simply, engaged scholarship refers to a commitment to intervening in "the political field" while adhering to scientific norms (Bourdieu, 2003, 2008). It is about translating scientifically generated knowledge into practical use in the public domain. In going beyond the confines of academia, engaged scholarship combines clear methodological orientations, deep theoretical understanding, robust reflexive knowledge, and rich empirical evidence with a strong commitment to causing "the right change" in society.

When it comes to theorising engaged scholarship, two eminent figures stand out: Ernest Boyer and Pierre Bourdieu. In his influential work titled *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), Ernest Boyer (former Chancellor of the State University of New York) introduced the concept of the "scholarship of engagement." He argued that the traditional view of scholarship, which focuses solely on research and publishing in academic journals, is too narrow and limiting. Boyer (1996) stressed that true scholarship should entail "stepping back from one's investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one's knowledge effectively" (p. 16). In his vision of scholarship of engagement, Boyer (1996) stressed "the academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems, and must affirm its historic commitment" (p. 18). Engaged scholarship aims to raise awareness about tangible problems, empower people experiencing vulnerabilities, and influence policy processes. Scholars committed to causing the right change are "comfortable with a worldview that sees objectivity and activism as linked—to be intellectual and activist is to be knowledgeable, critical, passionate, and caring, all at the same time" (Collins, 2013, p. 260). They embrace advocacy as an instrument for gainful change that benefits those on the margin of society.

In the early 2000s, on the other side of the Atlantic, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu elaborated on why scholars actively engage with the public. Bourdieu (2002, 2003, 2008) described public-facing scholarly engagement as "scholarship with commitment," expressed in scientific knowledge's use to advance truth, freedom, and justice. For him, genuine intellectuals should "break out of the academic microcosm" and breach the "boundary between *scholarship* and *commitment*" (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 24). Breaking out of the academic microcosm involves transcending the confines of scholarly discourse and applying knowledge to combat societal challenges. For Bourdieu (2008), an engaged scholar is one who:

> Intervenes in the world of politics but without thereby becoming a politician, with the competence and authority associated with their membership of the world of science or literature, as well as in the name of the values inscribed in the exercise of their profession. (p. 387)

The "commitment" aspect of Bourdieu's idea of "scholarship with commitment" foregrounds the scholar's dedication to using their expertise to address overlooked but urgent public issues while adhering to values that govern the scientific field where we contend for recognition and distinction, including fairness and the pursuit of truth. Like Boyer, Bourdieu (2003) believed that engaged scholars should take knowledge "beyond the walls of the Scientific City" (p. 13). Bourdieu (2008) also underscored the nuanced distinction between "axiological neutrality" and "scientific objectivity" (Bourdieu, 2008). The tenet of scientific objectivity

underscores an unwavering commitment to impartial and unbiased scrutiny of facts and evidence in the quest for knowledge. In contrast, axiological neutrality confronts the challenge of preserving impartiality concerning values or ethical judgments. Engaged scholars strive to uphold the rigorous standards of scientific objectivity while cognizant of the inherent difficulty in completely extricating values from the research interpretation process. They acknowledge that values inevitably influence the lens through which research questions are framed, methods are selected, data are generated, and findings are interpreted. In other words, positionality matters.

Engaged scholarship is grounded in scientific norms, characterised by methodological rigour, ethical commitment, and theoretical investment. The scholarship of engagement entails intervening in "the political field" while adhering to the "rules that govern the scientific field" (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 24)—it requires a commitment to systemic inquiry, imagination, courage, and moral judgment. The researcher should "respect social reality and not distort it for short-term partisan purposes" (Bello, 2008, p. 88). In analysing and critiquing social reality, the engaged scholar works in line with the rules of scientific investigation and aims to transform undesirable conditions unmasked in the process (Freire, 1993; Harcourt, 2020; Thompson, 2016, 2024).

To put it differently, engaged scholarship recognises the dialogical interplay within theory, evidence, and argument—*tea* (Molla, 2021). In framing research problems and choosing specific methods of inquiry, we start with assumptions about the world around us and what can be known and hold specific rationales for why we engage in the practices (*theory*). Using a specific theoretical lens, we then generate data to answer research questions and understand the world of our inquiry (*evidence*). Finally, we formulate claims supported by evidence (*argument*), ideally proposing alternative possibilities that replace the undesirable status quo. In short, engaged scholarship entails choosing significant problems for research, mastering how to ask good (practical) questions, adopting empowering and participatory methods of inquiry, considering diverse perspectives to answer the questions, and putting the findings in service to pressing societal problems, such as poverty, racism, sexism, and environmental crisis.

Like other forms of advocacy work, engaged scholarship is attentive to overlooked public issues. Universities play a vital role in fulfilling their civic duty by cultivating responsible citizens and involving scholars in collaborative endeavours with the public to generate knowledge that holds significance for both them and society (Glass & Fitzgerald, 2010). Research is not conducted for its own sake but to positively impact society. Beyond documenting the lived experiences of the disadvantaged, engaged scholarship boldly ventures into the realm of questioning social imaginaries, as manifested in public policies, political programs, and collective narratives. Here to be disadvantaged is to lack genuine opportunities to achieve what one has reason to value (Sen, 2009). Scholarly advocacy work is guided by the idea that once sufficiently robust evidence is available, it can be used to advocate for change in policy and practice (Bourdieu, 2003; Burawoy, 2019; Herzog, 2024; Unger, 2024). Activist scholars produce knowledge with social action and its possibilities at the centre of attention. They press for changes in legislation and institutional practices. The aim is to raise awareness about unjust inequalities in society, empower people who live with disadvantages, and influence social imaginaries and policy actions. In essence, the emancipatory intent of engaged scholarship echoes Marx's famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx, 1845/2000, p. 173). To change the world, engaged scholars must deal with questions of power and privilege mediating access to and success in

education. They do not shy away from being political—they value speaking for and with the disadvantaged. They should raise questions about unjust inequalities in society and envision alternative possibilities.

Engaged scholarship is grounded in participatory epistemology, whereby the research participants collaborate on knowledge generation with a sense of reciprocity, mutual respect, and agency. As a methodological orientation, participatory epistemology underscores the idea that knowledge is not simply transmitted from experts to passive recipients but co-constructed through collaboration and engagement (Fischer & Gottschall, 2006; Irwin, 1995). In other words, politically engaged scholars demonstrate a commitment to respecting the rights of research participants, involving them in decision-making processes, and contributing to their struggles through their research and analysis (Speed, 2008). Engaged scholars are also reflexive. They maintain that, in social inquiry, intellectual disinterestedness is unattainable. What is rather imperative is reflexivity, which involves constant self-awareness and critical reflection on one's positionality and its potential impact on the research. As Speed (2008) put it, "maintaining critical analysis and political pragmatics in tension pushes us to continuously acknowledge and grapple with the contradictions inherent in such a project" (p. 223). Engaged scholars attuned to their biases and perspectives can make more informed decisions about research design, data generation, and analysis. Likewise, critical distance enables them to uncover contradictions and illusions embedded in unjust social arrangements. Engaged scholars engage in a continual cycle of action and reflection—they regularly deliberate on what they do, how they do it, and what the stakes are.

Engaged scholarship combines critical analysis with a clear commitment to research participants. Engaged scholars strive to strike a balance between a scientific commitment to evidence and logic and a political commitment to social justice. They uphold scientific integrity while advocating for the political causes of marginalized groups. It is imperative to note that engaged scholarship is known by different names, including "the scholarship of engagement" (Boyer, 1990), "scholarship with commitment" (Bourdieu, 2003), "public scholarship" (Said, 1996), "activist scholarship" (Hale, 2008), "activist academic" (Cann & Demeulenaere, 2020), "critical performativity" (Alvesson, 2021), and "community-engaged scholarship" (Kajner & Shultz, 2013). Even so, the essence remains the same: engaged scholars ensure their research is relevant, accessible, and beneficial to the broader community.

Prominent examples of engaged scholars who have taken the moral responsibility of engaging with their societies and institutions seriously include (a) engaged public intellectuals, including Noam Chomsky, Frantz Fanon, and Vandana Shiva; (b) Black activist scholars: Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Connell West; (c) Indigenous critical academics such as Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz; and (d) diaspora engaged scholars: Edward Said, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Stuart Hall. The common thread that ties the works of these and other engaged scholars is the need and urgency to expose generative mechanisms of unjust inequalities and help engender fresh understandings of complex practical questions. As Edward Said put it, a true intellectual is one who (a) considers him/herself as "a thinking and concerned member of a society" that raises moral issues and (b) is strategically prepared and ethically committed to speaking truth to power, which entails "carefully weighing the alternatives, picking the right one, and then intelligently representing it where it can *do the most good and cause the right change*" (Said, 1996, pp. 82, 102, emphasis added). In essence, the engaged scholar becomes a catalyst, bridging the realms of academia and advocacy. Instead of pursuing knowledge for its own sake, the engaged scholar uses research to contribute to conditions that nurture a more just and equitable society. They tie intellectual work with civic responsibility. They use their academic expertise to support community action.

But why do scholars *positively* engage with the public? What are the driving forces of engaged scholarship? The pursuit of public-facing academic work is a deliberate effort to bridge the gap between ivory tower discussions and the lived experiences of individuals and communities. It is an acknowledgment that the relevance and impact of our scholarly activities depend on our ability to connect with the broader public. But why do we do engaged scholarship? What do we seek to achieve through public-facing academic work? This section of the article aims to answer these questions. Drawing on my experiences and the literature, elsewhere, I named six conditions that make engaged scholarship possible (Molla, 2024a): crisis and uncertainty, evidence of urgency, role expectations, researcher positionality, ethical considerations, and theoretical commitments.

Crisis is marked by a sense of anxiety, instability, uncertainty, and rupture—it represents "dramatic ruptures into the normal course of things that…call for urgent solution" (Fassin, 2021, p. 265). Crisis erodes confidence in the status quo, resulting in the urgency to return to regularity, making drastic reforms possible, and making difficult decisions acceptable. To use Friedman's (1962/2002) framing, when a crisis hits a system or society, "the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable," and those who wait in the wings with well-formulated alternatives are more likely to succeed in offering a way out (p. ix). For instance, the economic upheavals of the 1970s prompted a shift towards neoliberal policies, demonstrating how crises can pave the way for transformative ideas. Evidence of urgency can also open opportunities for engagement and generate public will and policy response. When our research reveals pressing issues that demand immediate attention, we are more likely to seek ways to address the identified problem. Translating research into practical solutions becomes a natural progression when urgency is at the forefront of scholarly endeavours. For instance, the findings of my studies showed that refugees remained invisible in Australia's higher education equity policy space (Molla, 2023; Molla & Gale, 2023). The exclusion of refugees as equity targets means that intersectional factors of disadvantage associated with the life-course trajectories of the group are discounted.

Ethical research is not extractive; it does not extract data and runs away with little or no commitment to the voices and benefits of the participants (hooks, 1990, p. 343). It uses the stories of the participants to generate benefits for them. Engaged scholarship rests on a commitment to reciprocity where benefits and knowledge flow both ways between academia and the community (Śliwa & Kellard, 2021). For instance, Australia's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research underlines the importance of ensuring *distributive* and *procedural justice* in human research: "While benefit to humankind is an important result of research, it also matters that benefits of research are achieved through just means, are distributed fairly, and involve no unjust burdens" (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018, p. 9).

Relatedly, the positionality of the scholar can be an enabler. The urge to engage may stem from one's political commitment or, more fundamentally, from one's sense of existential significance. A scholar's positionality represents their sense of location within networks of relationships (e.g., gender, class, race, age, religion, nationality, immigration status, and sexuality, as well as political persuasions, life-course trajectories, and theoretical orientations) and the worldviews and assumptions resulting from such networks and relations. As Ward and Miller (2016) noted, "the propensity for community-engaged scholarship is grounded heavily in one's identity, the context in which we live and work, and our subsequent connections to communities, people, and place" (p. 191). The commitment to engaging with the public might even get stronger when scholars identify with those on the margins of society. Being subject to a common destiny or confronting the same adversary deepens the scholar's solidarity with those on the margins of society.

My attempt at engaged scholarship attests to this reality. I am an African heritage scholar in a predominantly White settler society. I am also a father of two children attending racially diverse public schools. My positionality offers me a unique vantage point that shapes my perspective on the causes and consequences of educational disadvantage, the responsibility of society in tackling unjust inequalities, and my role in drawing attention to this pressing issue.

Public-facing engagement can be a result of role expectations. For example, the Australian Research Council (ARC, 2022) expects researchers to engage with knowledge end-users and demonstrate tangible contributions to the economy, society, culture, and public policy. Engaged scholars play a pivotal role in giving substance to the social contract of public universities, actively contributing to realising the university's broader social purpose. The fundamental pillars of teaching, knowledge production, and community engagement lie at the heart of the university's mission. Although universities continue to navigate evolving roles in the face of fast-paced technological and societal changes, they are expected to uphold their "dual role as both society's *servant* and society's *critic*" (Shapiro, 2005, p. 15, emphasis added). In this respect, the role of researchers extends beyond scholarly pursuits, necessitating a proactive engagement with non-academic audiences.

Finally, the theoretical commitments of the scholars are equally important. For instance, critical theoretical orientation is widely viewed as an enabler of engaged scholarship. Critical theory assumes that existing relations and power dynamics are not "givens to be verified" but social constructions that reflect the interests of powerful members of society (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 244). Critical theory is transformative in intent. It maintains that when actively applied and shared, knowledge has the power to shape and enhance our collective ways of acting in the world. Viewed through the lens of critical theory, engaged scholarship does not aim to reveal universal truths. Instead, it focuses on addressing specific conditions that significantly impact individuals' lives. Ultimately, scholars' theoretical orientations shape but do not dictate their engagement with the public, leaving room for creativity, reflexivity, and ongoing dialogue in the pursuit of meaningful public scholarship.

In underscoring the evolving role of scholars as both knowledge creators and active participants in addressing complex societal issues, Eatman (2012) declared: "The arc of the academic career bends toward publicly engaged scholarship" (p. 25). However, it is imperative to note that not everyone values public engagement (see Figure 1). Many scholars advocate for *non-engagement*. In *Save the World on Your Own Time*, Stanley Fish famously argued that the primary responsibility of academics is to focus on their core duties of teaching and research, rather than seeking to change the world through activism or political engagement. Fish (2008) contended that higher education's role is purely academic, centred on imparting knowledge and fostering critical thinking, rather than becoming a platform for social or political transformation. He advocated for academics to keep activism outside the university and focus on scholarly pursuits, ensuring a clear separation between personal ethics and professional responsibilities. Similarly, in *Let's Be Reasonable*, Marks (2021) argued that universities should promote intellectual inquiry and reason, rather than serving as vehicles for political change or social justice movements. Other scholars, including Wells (2018), Macfarlane (2012), and Ellis (2020), echoed Fish's stance, maintaining that academia should remain focused on scholarship and refrain from advancing ideological agendas.

A critical observer would argue that the reluctance of some scholars to engage with social or political issues may be less about an inherent commitment to neutrality and more about the ways they have been shaped

by their particular social contexts. In other words, a commitment to non-engagement may in part reflect the socialisation of the scholars. According to Bourdieu (2000):

> Those who like to believe in the miracle of "pure" thought must bring themselves to accept that the love of truth or virtue, like any other kind of disposition, necessarily owes something to the conditions in which it was formed, in other words, a social position and trajectory. (p. 3)

In this respect, the idea of being a detached scholar committed to "pure" academic work could be viewed as a marker of social position and a means to conserve the status quo. While the notion of detached scholarship may appear to uphold values of objectivity and rigour, it can be critiqued for ignoring the social responsibilities of intellectuals, limiting diverse perspectives, and missing opportunities to use academic knowledge for the public good.

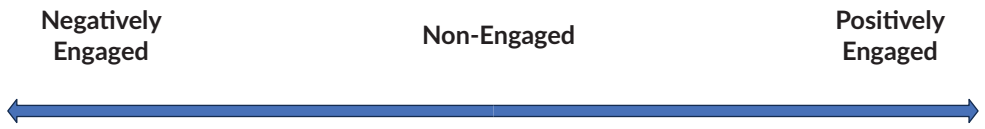

Figure 1. Continuum of scholarly engagement.

Even more concerning, not all engaged scholars have consistently aligned themselves with the principles of justice, human dignity, freedom, and solidarity. Throughout history, we found *negatively engaged* scholars who sided with those in power, actively contributing to the perpetuation of injustice, suffering, and oppression. For instance, in the 17th and 18th centuries, leading intellectuals in the West not only justified but also profited from the institution of slavery (Jordan, 2012), and prominent champions of the Enlightenment played significant roles in promoting racism (Molla, 2024b). Many German intellectuals supported the Nazi genocidal agenda by promoting pseudo-scientific theories (such as eugenics and racial hierarchies, which legitimised the persecution and extermination of Jews and other minorities in Europe) and helped to shape policies that facilitated the Holocaust (Goldhagen, 1996). As historian Omer Bartov aptly observed:

> To legitimize themselves in a modern world, antisemitism, Nazism, and genocide all needed two crucial elements: *a scientific stamp* and *a legalistic sanction*. Antisemitism could not have achieved the support of both the masses and the elite, the mob and the school teachers, without being made part of an elaborate racial theory allegedly tested and proven by the most prominent authorities in the fields of human sciences. [It] was the scientists who gave an academic garb to racism or, rather, invented scientific racism as a modern version of pure and simple prejudice and fear of the other. [T]he Holocaust, the systematic "extermination" of human beings would have been unthinkable without the medical profession's "detached" evaluation of these human beings as not only inferior and therefore unworthy of life, but as positively dangerous to the national Aryan body and therefore doomed to quick and efficient, yet of course wholly unemotional, elimination. The same can be said about the legal profession….[M]odern antisemitism would be inconceivable without the collaboration, indeed the active participation, of the legal system….Thus, while the doctors sanctioned murder, the lawyers legalized crime. It is a legacy with far-reaching consequences. (Bartov, 1996, p.68, emphasis added)

On the eve of the Second World War, some European scholars also openly supported the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia, offering ideological justification for colonial aggression (Simon, 2009). Western scholars, writers, and artists have also been complicit in constructing and perpetuating harmful stereotypes about the Middle East and North Africa, as Edward Said famously argued in *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). Even today, some scholars lend their expertise to right-wing populist movements, using their knowledge to reinforce exclusionary and divisive ideologies (Tismaneanu & Iacob, 2019). Further, Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway in *Merchants of Doubt* demonstrated how influential scientists, often linked to conservative think tanks and industries like tobacco or fossil fuels, failed to fully inform the public about major threats such as tobacco smoke, acid rain, and climate change (Oreskes & Conway, 2010). Rather than challenging the status quo, they cast doubt on scientific consensus to obstruct regulatory actions, which underscores the consequences of disengagement. This pattern of intellectual complicity with power underscores the complex and often problematic relationship between scholarship and social justice.

3. Pitfalls of Engaged Scholarship

Engaged scholarship has the potential to cultivate deeper relationships between scholars and communities, enrich teaching and learning experiences, and drive meaningful social change—but it also encounters significant challenges (Diener & Liese, 2009). There is a tension between the desire to bridge the gap between research and community needs and the institutional constraints, professional norms, and personal motivations that complicate this effort. The term "discontents" in the title of this article acknowledges the frustrations, conflicts, and ethical dilemmas that can arise in the pursuit of engaged scholarship. Scholars navigate a landscape rife with contradictions—where the desire for meaningful impact clashes with institutional policies, funding priorities, and disciplinary norms that may undermine their engagement efforts. The rise of polarization and scepticism towards expertise further complicates the legitimacy and impact of scholarly engagement, challenging public trust in academic institutions.

In other words, engaged scholarship is risky (Cottom, 2012). Making efforts to place one's research in service to social change comes with challenges. For instance, the conventional metrics of scholarly success often prioritise traditional forms of academic output, such as peer-reviewed publications and grant income. In a climate where divergent and polarised views on truth and knowledge constitution prevail within and outside academia, engaged scholarship is also marked by the challenge of earning trust. Further, the very act of challenging existing power structures and advocating for social change may attract resistance and hostility. As such, engaged scholars often face the potential exposure to backlash from antagonistic forces within the public sphere. In short, the challenges of engaged scholarship are intricately woven into the fabric of securing legitimacy in a university system where what counts as scholarship is narrowly conceived, increased anti-intellectualism in society, the risk of burnout, and weathering potential backlash from those resistant to change. This section briefly discusses each of these points.

3.1. Academic Narrowness

Nicolas Kristof opens his widely cited 2014 *New York Times* piece with this line: "Some of the smartest thinkers on problems at home and around the world are university professors, but most of them just don't matter in today's great debates" (para. 1). He argues that the academy tends to:

> [Foster] a culture that glorifies arcane unintelligibility while disdaining impact and audience. This culture of exclusivity is then transmitted to the next generation through the publish-or-perish tenure process. Rebels are too often crushed or driven away. (Kristof, 2014, para. 6)

Academic narrowness can inhibit public engagement. What counts as useful and usable knowledge by our universities influences what we do as researchers. In the context of marketized higher education systems, the value placed on public-facing engagement is minimal and uncertain. Universities and funding bodies urge us to account for impact and engagement in our research (e.g., ARC, 2022). The persistent call for "impact and engagement" notwithstanding, in many cases, the system does not properly account for or value public engagement. The existing reward structure of the academic research enterprise elevates citation counts and other related metrics. To what extent do promotion committees in universities acknowledge the value of engaged scholarship? Do our academic peers and funding agencies recognise the importance of scholarly advocacy work?

Within academia, there is a long-standing positivist tendency to separate knowledge from action, theory from practice, and the researcher from the practitioner. Positivism hides the connections between knowledge and authority; under the pretence of impartial objectivity, it enforces the beliefs, values, attitudes, and cultural influence of those in power (Molla, 2021). It denies the theoretical assumptions that inform claims of truth (portraying truth as simply an assortment of isolated facts) and decouples knowledge from the conditions of its production (Saltman, 2022). The dominance of positivism as a mode of knowledge production and the intensification of datafication means rich qualitative accounts of the lived experiences of the disadvantaged are likely to be further marginalised or ignored. Engaged scholarship deviates from the positivist norm of maintaining distance and neutrality and challenges the "hierarchy of knowledge."

Scholarly agency is a function of organisational environments. There will be no effective and sustainable engaged scholarship without an engaged university. As sociologist Raewyn Connell noted, a good university is a responsive and responsible university that is "fully present for the society" that supports it (Connell, 2019). A good university is not simply an economic machinery; instead, it produces socially relevant knowledge and engages with urgent matters (e.g., environmental and humanitarian crises) and complex issues such as injustice, racism, domination, and exploitation. In this respect, it seems that nowadays, the university is primarily tasked to produce knowledge that is of economic value. There is a broad consensus that, with the consolidation of the neoliberal university, the academic role has been narrowed in favour of economic goals. Restrictive audit culture diverts scholars' attention from meaningful, community-oriented research towards activities that yield quantifiable outcomes (Shore & Wright, 2024). The emphasis on quantifiable metrics—such as publication counts, citation rates, and grant acquisition—to assess academic performance undermines community-oriented research. Scholars are increasingly disengaged from important public issues of their time. Those who resist engaging directly with the public may see their contributions merely as critical intellectual discourses. Bourdieu (2003) refers to this narrow framing of engaged scholarship as "campus radicalism," an academic propensity that confuses "revolutions in the order of words or texts for revolutions in the order of things, verbal sparring at conferences for 'interventions' in the affairs of the *polis* [public life]" (pp. 19–20).

The issue of academic narrowness is also closely linked to hierarchical knowledge systems dominated by Western perspectives that marginalise alternative epistemologies (Connell, 2020; de Sousa Santos, 2015,

2018; Spivak, 1988, 1999). In *Southern Theory*, Connell (2020) underscored that much of the prevailing academic discourse is shaped by Western perspectives that often overlook or marginalise the experiences and knowledge of those in the Global South. Likewise, using such concepts as "epistemicide" and "cognitive empire," de Sousa Santos (2015, 2018) problematised how Western modernity has devalued various ways of knowing as non-scientific, particularly those from colonised peoples. Similarly, Spivak (1988, 1999) contended that dominant narratives frequently obscure the voices and experiences of marginalised groups, especially in postcolonial contexts. She asserts that the subaltern—those outside hegemonic power structures—struggle to articulate their realities within dominant discourses, which often misrepresent them. When hierarchical knowledge systems dominate, disadvantaged groups often struggle to fully articulate their lived experiences—they are affected by what Fricker (2007) refers to as "hermeneutical injustice." When the dominant epistemic system fails to acknowledge the knowledge of marginalised groups, it perpetuates the cycle of invisibility and disenfranchisement.

Engaged scholarship has the potential to rectify epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007; Serman & Goguen, 2019) by fostering inclusive knowledge production that values diverse epistemologies. To this end, engaged scholars must acknowledge the inherent power relations within knowledge systems, actively listen to those on society's margins, and take responsibility for amplifying the diverse ways of knowing that have historically been silenced.

The commodification of knowledge within contemporary universities presents significant challenges for public-facing engagement. The neoliberal university expects scholars to carry out most of their advocacy efforts during their personal time. Engaged scholarship often faces a pervasive undervaluation within university management circles, often relegated to the status of an extraneous or peripheral pursuit (Peterson, 2009). The intrinsic worth and impact of engaged scholarship, which integrates academic pursuits with real-world applications, are unfortunately not accorded the recognition they deserve within the administrative framework of many educational institutions. This undervaluation may stem from a narrow perspective prioritising traditional academic metrics such as research publications and grant funding over the broader societal contributions that engaged scholarship can generate. This constitutes a systematic suppression of an activist mode of knowledge production and application. In a way, we face what Burawoy (2019) refers to as "the paradox of public engagement—the simultaneous claim of its impossibility and its necessity" (p. 27). Anna Bartel and Debra Castillo open their edited collection, *The Scholar as Human*, with the following insightful observation:

> There are two great and immiscible tides affecting faculty life in the early twenty-first century: *publicness* and *specialization*. The publicness tide would sweep faculty work toward ever-greater public engagement and purpose, while the forces of academic specialization drive faculty toward more rarefied, often particularized, often short-lived, and "productivity"-oriented ways of knowing and doing. (Bartel & Castillo, 2021, p. 1, emphasis added)

There exists a dialogical interplay between institutional support and impactful public engagement. Engaged scholars draw on their academic achievements to earn symbolic capital outside academia. That is to say, for scholars to productively engage with communities, they need to have recognition and legitimacy within the academic field. With the right volume of symbolic capital, engaged scholars authoritatively call for attention in the public space (Molla, 2019). Some view academic specialisations as "the royal road to

efficiency in intellectual as in economic life" (Stigler, 1984, p. 12). For others, the increased focus on specialisation encourages academics to concentrate on more niche, often highly specific, short-lived, and productivity-focused approaches to knowledge and practice (Bartel & Castillo, 2021). When scholarship is narrowly conceived within the university system, engaged scholars will likely have diminished symbolic capital (signified by a lack of respect and recognition for their work) within their field of practice. Their public engagement may not fit with promotion and other forms of performance audits. For example, writing about the Canadian context, Changfoot et al. (2020) reflected on how engaged scholars face challenges in meeting demands for tenure and promotion. The impact is cyclical. Without promotion and recognition, scholars might struggle to engage with the public impactfully. In addition, given the precarity of academic employment, not all scholars can afford to engage in activities that do not directly contribute to their career prospects.

3.2. Anti-Intellectualism

We live in an era where expertise is increasingly questioned or even attacked, and opinion is often valued more than knowledge. With the rise of identity politics, authoritarian tendencies, and the pervasiveness of social media, the post-truth denial of facts complicates the work of the engaged scholar (Giroux & DiMaggio, 2024; Thompson & Smulewicz-Zucker, 2018). Anti-intellectualism refers to the increasing mistrust toward expertise in society (Herzog, 2024; Nichols, 2024). The expansion of higher education, rapid technological advancements, open access to the internet, and widespread social media use have given people unprecedented access to information. These societal gains, however, have eroded trust in experts and crippled informed public debates. As Nichols (2024) observed, the democratic spread of information has paradoxically brought about a wave of misinformed, resentful citizens who disparage expert knowledge and intellectual achievement. Polarised views about the constitution of knowledge and truth make the task of engaged scholars difficult. In this post-truth paradigm, objective facts and empirical evidence influence public opinion and policy decisions less than appeals to emotion, personal beliefs, and subjective narratives (Fischer, 2021). For those who live in a post-truth reality, opinion is received as legitimate, and emotional considerations trump factual presentations.

Critical theorist Wendy Brown characterised the public devaluation of knowledge and scholarly work as a form of nihilism that has shaken the foundations of science and progress (as exemplified by champions of "alternative facts," flat earthers, climate change sceptics, and anti-vaccine campaigners; Brown, 2023). As the politics of disinformation deepens, there is an increasing tendency for people to claim to be entitled to their facts. Widespread scepticism toward expert knowledge might result in a crisis of credibility that diminishes the impact of engaged scholarship. Of course, the trend should worry all of us, but more so to those interested in influencing public opinion through our research. In what has come to be known as the post-truth political space, emotional or ideological appeals often trump evidence-based reasoning. As Saltman (2022) observed:

> Growing inequality, precarity, and crises of agency have caused many people to succumb to the assurance of certainty offered by fundamentalisms and authoritarianism. Fundamentalist religion and market fundamentalism provide false guarantees of certainty grounded in dogma. Authoritarian leaders promise false security in exchange for an abdication of liberty. Around the world, Strongmen mystify the causes of inequality; scapegoat the vulnerable; attack science, education, and truth; and offer themselves up as identifications with strength. (p.viii)

In some corners, the outright opposition to scholarly advocacy work is not related to questions of 'epistemic authority' (Zagzebski, 2012). Instead, the scepticism stems from the argument that valuable knowledge should not be used to call for action (Wells, 2018). For example, Wells (2018) argues: "Academics who believe that their ideas should rule society merely because they are true have misunderstood the division of labour in a democracy" (para. 13). For him, engaged scholarship is nothing but "people demanding attention for their opinions, rather than an independent truth machine that serves democratic deliberation" (para. 15). Obviously, I utterly disagree with Wells' position. Scholars should not refrain from engaging in the public sphere and using their expertise to contribute to positive social changes. Their role in building consensus based on knowledge is critical. A world that lacks a shared reality is doomed to fragmentation and chaos. Without a commitment to truth, society becomes fractured and polarized, undermining the very foundations of communal life. Demiryol (2023) articulates the dangers of anti-intellectualism and the need to tackle it as follows:

> The attack on reality in our contemporary world is an attack on our political community….When we lose this common world, we are fractured, divided, polarized—not a community anymore. Indeed, the truth cannot save us, but without truth, we cannot be saved. The common world upon which we can rebuild our trust in our political institutions, science and experts, our democracy, and even each other depends on truth. We need to safeguard it. (p. 122)

To reiterate, within academia, there is a long-standing positivist tendency to separate knowledge from action, theory from practice, the researcher from the practitioner. Outside academia, there has been widespread cynicism about what counts as truth (the so-called post-truth positioning). My position is that, despite increasing societal distrust, we should not refrain from the critical work of informed advocacy. Our claims and strategies may not be perfect—no scientific endeavour is perfect or complete. What matters is that the claims and strategies draw on sound methodological, theoretical, and empirical grounds. Further, in making informed claims, we should be reflexive about our assumptions, goals, social locations, and the privilege associated with our positionality.

3.3. Professional Rules and Academic Norms

Professional rules and ethical guidelines often play a significant role in shaping scholars' engagement with public affairs. While these regulations aim to maintain professional integrity and objectivity, they can inadvertently create barriers that hinder academics from participating in critical discussions that affect society. Take the case of the American Psychological Association's (APA) Goldwater rule, which exemplifies how professional guidelines can inhibit timely interventions and discussions that may be crucial for public understanding. Section 7.3 of the *Principles of Medical Ethics with Annotations Especially Applicable to Psychiatry* (American Psychiatric Association, 1973/2013) reads:

> It is unethical for a psychiatrist to offer a professional opinion unless he or she has conducted an examination and has been granted proper authorization for such a statement.

This restriction exemplifies the tension between maintaining professional ethics and fulfilling a civic responsibility to inform the public about, for instance, potential risks associated with leadership styles that may have detrimental mental health consequences. The reluctance to engage publicly, even when pressing issues are at stake, demonstrates how professional rules can limit the scope of scholarship and its impact on

societal matters. Following Donald J. Trump's first ascent to the presidency in 2016, there was a surge of interest in assessing his mental capacity and state. However, many psychologists and psychiatrists were constrained by professional ethics, which prohibited them from diagnosing individuals they had not personally evaluated (American Psychiatric Association, 1973/2013). As a result, a significant number of these professionals refrained from commenting on Trump's mental health.

Even so, in the case of Trump, few scholars dared to break the rule. For example, over 30 scholars and mental health experts prioritised their "duty to warn" over the principle of professional neutrality, collectively issuing a warning about the president's "unnatural state" (Lee, 2019). Their assessment was published in the book *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump* (first published in 2017 and updated in 2019 by Lee). The experts outline how Trump exhibits traits that could be harmful to democracy, such as narcissism, impulsivity, and lack of empathy, and raise concerns about his mental fitness for the role of President of the United States (their warning appears to have gone unheeded as Americans have just re-elected Trump as their leader).

Further, academic norms of neutrality often inhibit engaged scholarship by discouraging scholars from taking a position on contentious issues. These norms are based on the belief that scientific objectivity requires value neutrality, leading scholars to withhold their perspectives even in areas where their expertise could have a significant impact (Colombo, 2023; Pielke, 2007). For many researchers, particularly those in the natural sciences, adhering to this expectation of neutrality can result in a reluctance to engage in public debates, due to concerns that doing so might compromise their credibility or be seen as biasing their research. While upholding scientific integrity is undoubtedly important, the expectation of neutrality can prevent scholars from contributing to crucial public debates, especially those requiring urgent responses, such as the climate crisis, growing inequality, misinformation, and unfreedoms. As I argued elsewhere (Molla, 2024a), socially relevant knowledge cannot be axiologically neutral—knowledge aimed at contributing to the public good is inherently value-laden.

Professional rules, such as the Goldwater rule, can significantly constrain scholars from engaging with the public. While professional rules aim to uphold ethical standards and prevent unfounded diagnoses, they can inadvertently restrict experts from contributing their insights on pressing societal issues. Scholars may feel compelled to remain silent on critical matters, fearing professional repercussions or a breach of ethical conduct, thus limiting their ability to inform public discourse (Colombo, 2023; Lee, 2019). The consequences of such restrictions can be particularly pronounced in areas of significant public concern, such as climate change. When experts refrain from sharing their knowledge and perspectives, the public is left without essential insights that could help contextualise complex issues. Without scholars actively engaging in these debates, there is a risk that public policy may be shaped by less informed voices that sustain unjust socioeconomic arrangements and repressive political orders.

3.4. Backlash

Intellectual work entails "passionate engagement, risk, exposure, commitment to principles, vulnerability in debating and being involved in worldly causes" (Said, 1996, p. 109). Engaged scholars see it as their responsibility to speak the truth to power; they use their privilege to unmask structures of injustice and call for changes that benefit the disadvantaged in society. They are courageous. Roberts and Wood (2007) define intellectual courage as "an ability to perform intellectual tasks well despite what one takes to be

significant threats" (p. 76). In other words, intervening in the "political field" can expose scholars to backlash from hostile forces on the broader public. For Bourdieu (2008), "scholarship with commitment" is likely to trigger a backlash from within and outside academia:

> To intervene in the public space means exposing oneself to *disappointment*, or worse, *shocking* those in one's own world who, choosing the virtuous facility of retreat into their ivory tower, see such commitment as a lack of the famous "axiological neutrality" that they wrongly identify with scientific objectivity, and in the world of politics, all those who see such intervention as a threat to their monopoly, and more generally, all those whose interests are threatened by disinterested intervention. (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 386, emphasis added)

The pushback may arise from individuals, organizations, or institutions that resist engaged scholars' research, advocacy, or social justice efforts. The threats to intellectual courage range from loss of job, friends, and reputation to bodily harm and persecution. Depending on the context of engagement and the issues they advocate for, scholar-activists may have to endure character assassination and even physical intimidation. For instance, as documented by Chomsky (2017), scholars such as Bertrand Russell, Randolph Bourne, Thorstein Veblen, and Eugene Debs were punished for opposing their respective governments' military aggression. Scholars in politically repressive contexts have limited or no right to freedom of advocacy—a pointed critique aimed at those in power may lead to overt political retaliation.

To echo Bourdieu (2000, 2008), the pitfalls of engaged scholarship partly arise from the tensions between the scholarly field and the political field, which operate under different logics of practice. In academia, peer critique is expected to be measured, reasoned, and constructive, governed by norms of intellectual rigour, transparency, and mutual respect. Scholars engage with one another through disciplined debate, valuing evidence and thoughtful critique. However, the political field operates differently. Public debates are often shaped by the need to assert dominance, win arguments, or push ideological agendas, leading to more hostile and contentious exchanges. There is little room for nuanced discussion, and dissenting voices are often met with aggression, undermining efforts to foster mutual understanding. This hostile environment poses challenges for engaged scholars. While they are accustomed to reasoned critique within academia, engaging in public debates can expose them to personal attacks and threats, which stifle open discourse. A stark example of this occurred following Hamas's attack in 2024 and Israel's military response in Gaza. Many scholars who called for a ceasefire or criticised the Israeli government's genocidal actions were swiftly accused of antisemitism. The public sphere allowed little space for balanced critique, suppressing dissenting voices and confining individuals to a suffocating silence.

Unsurprisingly, those unsettled by the questions or proposed solutions of engaged scholars are likely to resist and push back. Even in liberal democratic societies such as Australia, it is not easy to engage in scholarly advocacy. I learned this the hard way. In the last few years, as I tried to engage with the public, I faced backlash from different directions. In 2019, based on the preliminary findings of my research, I wrote a piece for *The Conversation*. The core message of the article was that poor educational outcomes of African heritage refugee-background students could be attributable to their traumatic life course and racial stigma at school. The reaction shocked me. I faced racist backlash. I was criticised for being ungrateful and not appreciating how people squander their opportunities. In rejecting the pervasiveness of racism as a problem, many readers reacted in a racist way. The hostile responses may imply that doing racism is more acceptable than discussing it as a social ill.

When I emphasized the importance of African youth taking vocational training opportunities seriously, I was accused of holding deficit views toward the group. Striking a balance without upsetting either side is challenging. This tension underscores the difficulty of addressing complex social issues in a nuanced way that acknowledges both systemic barriers and individual agency. However, I firmly believe that engaged scholarship is too crucial to ignore. Denial allows individuals to evade responsibility and perpetuates existing problems; this must be actively challenged. Importantly, there should be no moral barrier preventing newcomers from critiquing the host society. Immigrants, like myself, should not shy away from offering constructive criticism to ensure that society strives to fulfil its ideals of justice, dignity, and freedom.

3.5. Burnout

A commitment to being a force for good often carries a high price: the risk of emotional burnout and lethargy. In the absence of supportive environments that enable engaged scholars to achieve their goals, exhaustion and disconnection become inevitable (Han, 2015; Pines, 1994). Engaged scholars may encounter burnout or fatigue due to the emotional and time-intensive nature of their work. Balancing the demands of academic responsibilities with ongoing community engagement requires intentional self-care strategies and institutional support to ensure the sustainability of the scholar's commitment to societal impact. Addressing these pitfalls requires ongoing reflection, adaptability, and a commitment to ethical and equitable practices in engaged scholarship.

Public-facing engagement may also expose scholars to professional isolation, institutional constraints, and rigid disciplinary boundaries (Young et al., 2010). We can shield ourselves from backlash, burnout, and isolation by building alliances, seeking support from like-minded colleagues, and capitalising on other sources of resilience in the face of adversity. Constant exposure to the realities of societal inequities and injustices can take a significant toll on their well-being. Witnessing or experiencing the suffering of marginalized communities can lead to feelings of sadness, anger, frustration, and even helplessness (Van der Kolk, 2015). Moreover, engaging in activism and advocacy requires continual emotional investment as scholars navigate complex power dynamics, confront systemic oppression, and strive to amplify the voices of those marginalized by society (Young et al., 2010). This emotional labour can lead to burnout, fatigue, and compassion fatigue, where scholars may find themselves emotionally drained and struggling to maintain their motivation and effectiveness in their work.

Institutional constraints also pose significant challenges for engaged scholars. Academic institutions are often governed by rigid structures and norms that prioritize academic rigour and scholarly output within narrowly defined disciplinary boundaries. This can create barriers for scholars seeking to integrate activism and advocacy into their research and teaching. Institutional policies, such as tenure and promotion criteria, may not adequately recognize or reward engaged scholarship, leading to concerns about career advancement and job security. Moreover, limited resources and funding opportunities for research that addresses social injustices can impede the ability of scholars to pursue their advocacy work effectively. These institutional constraints can create frustrations and dilemmas for engaged scholars, forcing them to navigate a complex landscape where their commitment to social change may conflict with the expectations and requirements of academia. Additionally, the advocacy work undertaken by engaged scholars may challenge the status quo and face resistance from colleagues or institutional leadership who are hesitant to disrupt established norms or power structures (Cann & Demeulenaere, 2020; Collins, 2013). This can further

exacerbate feelings of isolation and make it difficult for scholars to find allies and collaborators who share their commitment to social change.

In her insightful essay on ethical considerations in refugee research, Lynn Gillan asks: "Is there an ethical imperative to act on the findings of refugee and asylum seeker research (in particular ways)?" (Gillan, 2013, p. 23). In my research, I take advocacy as a key element of ethical expectations of critical research. My research did not aim just to understand issues or circumstances. It had a practical purpose. Some members of the public who critiqued my engagement were quick to remind me that I am an immigrant who should be grateful for the opportunities I have. I wonder if there should be moral impediments that prevent immigrants like myself from criticizing the host society in order to help it live up to its own ideals of equality and freedom.

Before closing this section of the article, I would like to make a couple of more points. Firstly, engaged scholarship involves addressing complex social issues and communicating findings to various audiences, including policymakers and the public. Balancing nuance and simplification is crucial for ensuring that the research is both accurate and accessible. But striking the right balance between preserving the nuance and depth of scholarly content while presenting it in a simplified manner can be challenging. Translating complex scholarship without diluting its richness requires skills and practice. Secondly, the inherently political and contentious nature of engagement means that it will be messy. Engaged scholars should not anticipate full control over how their work is construed, as its interpretation may be altered, whether with or without their agreement. The complexity of measuring and assessing impact poses a third challenge. Engaged scholarship aims for tangible outcomes and positive societal change, but the metrics for success can be elusive and context-dependent. Scholars may encounter difficulties quantifying their work's impact, leading to challenges in securing funding, institutional support, and broader recognition. Finally, public discourse operates under distinct rules compared to academic discussions, introducing unfamiliar tactics and participants for those who opt to engage (Hoffman, 2021). Hence, those entering this realm should be ready to navigate the intricacies of public debate, acknowledging the potential for distortion and the unique dynamics at play.

4. Concluding Remarks

Engaged scholarship involves adhering to scholarly standards while actively participating in the public sphere to create beneficial changes for marginalized communities. The core position is that once sufficiently robust evidence is available about an issue, it can be utilised to advocate for change by raising public awareness, empowering people experiencing vulnerabilities, and influencing policy processes. For instance, when our research on educational disadvantage generates fresh knowledge about persisting inequalities and policy silence, we may not have an ethical alternative to becoming engaged. Our research should create conditions for the disadvantaged to interpret and comprehend the broader structures producing injustice and precarity.

But what makes engaged scholarship possible? What are the drawbacks of public-facing scholarly engagement? These questions inspired the present article. It names the possibilities and pitfalls of engaged scholarship. Whether and the extent to which scholars engage with the public depends on various factors, including responsiveness to crisis, evidence of urgency, positional alignment, institutional expectations, ethical considerations, and critical theoretical orientations. However, public engagement comes with its challenges. Academic narrowness, anti-intellectual tendencies, potential backlash, and the risk of emotional

burnout present significant obstacles to effective and sustained engagement. As bastions of independent thought and critical inquiry, universities frequently emphasise the value of connecting scholarly work with broader societal issues and fostering partnerships with industry and community; the actual evaluation processes for tenure and promotion tend to prioritize traditional metrics of academic success, such as peer-reviewed publications, grant acquisition, and citations. Achievements in public scholarship and community engagement often receive insufficient recognition. Likewise, academics are privileged to have a voice protected by enterprise agreements, academic regulations, ethical codes of conduct, and University Acts. However, criticizing the powerful in society still carries risks.

To thrive in the face of obstacles, as Professor Stewart Riddle aptly advises, we should find what sustains us. From my experience, immersing ourselves in what we love doing can be helpful (Riddle, 2017). By absorbing ourselves in what resonates with our core values and aspirations, we can fortify our commitment to the cause we are passionate about. Equally important, we should not be afraid of failure. As the saying goes, anything worth doing is worth doing poorly at first. Locating a supportive ecosystem that shields us from undue distractions is another way of sustenance. Supportive environments could encompass a network of colleagues and mentors who share our passions and offer encouragement. In essence, finding what sustains us is not just a response to adversity but a strategic approach to cultivating a resilient anchor and flourishing in the face of difficulties.

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