Feminist praxis revisited: critical reflections on university-community engagement

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AMBER DEAN, JENNIFER L. JOHNSON, AND SUSANNE LUHMANN, EDITORS

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LEARNING ELSEWHERE? CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON UNIVERSITY–COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS FEMINIST PRAXIS

SUSANNE LUHMANN, JENNIFER L. JOHNSON, AND AMBER DEAN

Teaching not just about, but for, social change has been a core value in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) since the inception of the field. Many WGS practitioners would agree that their aim, to invoke a popular Marxist axiom, is "to not only interpret the world, but change it." Accordingly, many WGS degree programs have adopted some kind of praxis component. "Praxis" as a term and a program refers to applying and enacting ideas. Besides tracing its roots to the Marxist injunction invoked above, we note the influence of a central theorist of pedagogical praxis, the liberation pedagogue Paulo Freire (1970). Freire called for a pedagogy of "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1970/2000, 51). In this book, we use the term praxis to speak about the various ways in which WGS has sought to integrate a variety of different opportunities for experiential, community-based learning into degree programs. In a recent survey of Canadian WGS program descriptions available online, Johnson and Luhmann (2016) found that nearly half of the programs have some form of practicum, internship, community placement, or co-operative education component advertised on their websites, either as a compulsory or optional part of the undergraduate—and increasingly the graduate—degree. WGS's long-standing dual orientation toward knowledge production and action-oriented community engagement in both teaching and research has, at times, been used by critics to try to present the field as insufficiently "academic." That said, Canadian universities are undergoing a significant shift in institutional priorities in the early twenty-first century, and one of those involves an increased emphasis on providing students with opportunities for community engagement (see Dean's and Johnson's chapters in this book for overviews of these shifting commitments at Canadian universities). While co-op, practicum, and internship placements have long been part of the

disciplines in professional schools (including such varied fields as social work, law, education, medicine, and engineering), increasingly liberal arts faculties are also promoting community engagement across research and teaching. The reasons for this vary: they include a growing emphasis on universities' responsibilities toward their surrounding communities, an increased demand for labour market-ready students, and a desire to more proactively market a liberal arts education to employers, students, and their parents. In any of these scenarios, this shift toward integrating community-engaged learning into post-secondary education creates both challenges and possibilities for WGS and other liberal arts programs.

Increasingly, all liberal arts programs are being encouraged (or directed) to transform pedagogical and curricular approaches to ensure that at least some portion of student learning happens *elsewhere,* outside the traditional classroom and preferably also outside the university itself, within local or international community-based settings. While there are potential benefits for faculty, students, and communities arising from these transformations, there are also risks, including devaluing classroom learning that focuses on, for example, the close analysis and discussion of texts, or on learning theory that might not have (at first glance, anyway) an immediate application to a "real-world" context. In this book, we raise critical questions about this new emphasis on the value of *learning elsewhere,* while also staying open to the possibility that a robust approach to feminist praxis can include carefully designed and implemented approaches to community-based learning. But feminist praxis, our contributors insist, also happens *in* the classroom (see Francis' and Johnson's chapters in particular), and at times the classroom may, in fact, be better suited to providing opportunities for praxis than community-based placements that can be time-consuming and unnecessarily burdensome for everyone involved. (For more on the potential burdens of community-based learning for students, see Johnson's chapter. For the potential burdens on community organizations, see Dean's, Parkins', and Hurst's chapters in particular.) Thus we pose "learning elsewhere?" as a question not because we are opposed to the opportunities this new emphasis on community engagement makes possible for learning outside of traditional classroom contexts, but because we remain curious about how the new emphasis on community-based learning might draw attention away from praxis happening *in* as well as outside of the classroom, which may put undue pressure on WGS and other liberal arts programs to transform ourselves into something along the lines of the professional school models.

Collectively, WGS programs have much experience with developing and implementing community-based learning, and this should position them well within Canadian post-secondary institutions' turn toward increased com-

munity engagement. One might anticipate that WGS programs both benefit from and receive recognition as leaders in the provision of community-based research and teaching. But the fact is that WGS' expertise in praxis is rarely recognized when post-secondary institutions develop community-based service-learning programs or practicum components. And the new emphasis within post-secondary institutions on producing "workplace-ready" students puts WGS in, at times, an ambivalent position of having to "capitalize" on teaching feminist praxis. It appears as though we are at a crossroads, where WGS and other liberal arts programs will have to decide to what degree our approaches to praxis can coexist with—or indeed, survive within—the market-driven neoliberal university.

One of the challenges that this shift in emphasis in post-secondary education raises is the question of how (and whether) WGS approaches to praxis distinguish themselves from the approaches to "community service," "civic engagement," "volunteering," or "charity" that universities might seek to foster. How do WGS programs negotiate institutional and community expectations (and modes of institutionalization) to maintain the activist-oriented social justice frameworks we tend to be committed to (Orr 2011; Forbes et al. 1999; Bubriski and Semaan 2009)? How do WGS programs continue prioritizing the critiques of inequality, power, privilege, and identity so central to the intellectual work of the field in the face of a post-secondary push toward community engagement as resumé-building, skill acquisition, and the bridging of town-and-gown differences? How do we in WGS respond to this new emphasis on community-based learning at universities across the country, and how do we assess the degree to which this new institutional priority may potentially serve, rather than challenge, the ongoing corporatization of the university and large-scale cuts to government spending on social welfare and public services that are so central to neoliberal economic and ideological agendas? How does an increasing demand by governments, corporations, students, and parents alike for post-secondary institutions to offer workplace-relevant education and workplace-ready graduates shape and change how WGS programs institutionalize feminist praxis in our curricula? In short, how does this shift toward community engagement in the university create opportunities for WGS—or does it pose too great a threat to the field's integrity?

We are also curious about how the emphasis on "doing good" through the approaches to community-based service-learning currently being embraced by our institutions risks mobilizing a colonial and imperialist logic that downplays (or disavows altogether) the ways that academic institutions and knowledge-making have historically been, and continue to be, deeply implicated in the furtherance of colonialist and imperialist projects (for further discussion, see the chapters by Dean, Francis, and Srivastava in this book). Though

race is seldom, if ever, raised as an issue when universities pronounce community engagement or community service to be a new priority, the figure of the benevolent white saviour of colonialist logics haunts these renewed emphases on "doing good" in local and global communities, and because of the gendered nature of concepts like "service," it is a white woman who is most often imagined as the subject of this benevolent and charitable orientation to the world. This re-centring of whiteness and the figure of the white woman as saviour has a particular resonance in WGS because of long-standing debates in the field about the centrality of what Amy Brandzel calls the "whitenormative citizen-subject" (2011, 503). Critics have often raised concerns about the centrality of whiteness and the insufficient attention given to race and racism in both feminist theory and WGS programs (e.g., Moraga and Anzaldua 1981; hooks 1981, 1984; Lorde 1984; Davis 1981; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Najmabadi 2008; Mahmood 2008; Guy-Sheftall and Hammonds 2008; Maparyan 2012; and Rowe 2008, 2012), and as such, WGS practitioners are concerned about how an uncritical embrace of the post-secondary turn to community engagement might risk re-centring whiteness—and white women in particular—in the field yet again. (For further discussion of whiteness in relation to praxis in WGS, see chapters by Dean, Francis, Gotell, Johnson, Srivastava, and Parkins in this book, as well as Orr's afterword.) Thus it has become clear that the dominant rhetoric and practices of community engagement currently emerging at universities across the country might both shape and delimit the possibilities for developing, supporting, or retaining more critical approaches to feminist praxis in WGS.

These and other questions and concerns are addressed in the chapters that make up this edited collection, which brings together the work of WGS practitioners from across Canada to explore whether and how distinctions between WGS approaches to praxis and more typical service- or community-based learning approaches hold up under scrutiny. Are WGS approaches really so different? What tensions arise from the different agendas of post-secondary institutions and WGS's social justice orientation? Do WGS programs subvert or adjust to this orientation toward community engagement currently being advanced by our universities and colleges? And what creative alternatives to more traditional service learning and the practicum do WGS practitioners develop in response?

In this way we understand the praxis component as a productive site for studying how WGS and other liberal arts programs negotiate the changing landscape of post-secondary education in Canada, and how our programs position themselves vis-à-vis the demands that these changes make on all academic units. Elsewhere, Johnson and Luhmann (2016) argue that in the self-descriptions of WGS programs online, the goal of feminist teaching for social change sits side by side with the claim they are preparing students for

the labour market. Here we draw from and elaborate on some of this previous work, but further research is needed to more fully understand the extent to which the WGS praxis component becomes a site of collision between feminist activist aspirations and the new managerialism and goals of workplace readiness so evident in the neoliberal university. In this collection, we offer some examples of how programs and individual instructors adapt creatively to changing post-secondary agendas without submitting fully to the neoliberal, entrepreneurial agenda of the contemporary university. But contributors also query the tensions arising from efforts to distinguish and maintain WGS' commitments to a feminist praxis directed toward social justice within the context of these changing post-secondary priorities, as well as an increasingly depoliticized non-profit sector (on the latter point, see Gotell's and Muzak's chapters in particular). Together, the chapters in this collection explore how (and whether), in the context of an ongoing struggle for survival and relevance, WGS programs are changed as universities change and appear to be moving away from the historically broad liberal arts education at the undergraduate level toward an increasing emphasis on workplace readiness and the employability of graduates.

The Neoliberal University as Context

Neoliberal policy approaches affect post-secondary education in Canada as the culture of post-secondary education has been shifting under the broader influence of neoliberalism (Newson and Polster 2010, 2015). Neoliberalism affects both the organization and funding of university education at federal and provincial levels as well as the strategic research and teaching goals of individual university administrations. Prominent among these shifts is governmental underfunding of education and a corresponding increase in tuition rates (CAUT 2012a); the devolution of full-time faculty positions into part-time casual labour (CAUT 2012b); and the overall devaluation of any degree program that cannot be said to lead directly to a specific job in the paid labour force upon graduation and, more specifically, that is not located in academic fields thought to lead to the development of new products and services, such as the sciences, engineering, and health (Newson and Polster 2010). Less prominent, but equally problematic, is the way in which education-related services, including everything from food and cleaning services to the private medical insurance on psychological counselling services, have been steadily parceled out on a contract basis to private corporations over the last twenty-odd years (Reimer and Ste. Marie 2010, 139, 149). Furthermore, the trend toward handing upper-level administrative positions over to those whose credentials are no longer Ph.D. but rather M.B.A. marks a significant shift in the academic culture of Canadian post-secondary institutions toward managerialism (Newson and Polster 2010).

In a global context, especially in contrast to those countries considered to be "developing," Canada is rather fortunate to have enjoyed the protection and support of post-secondary education by the state for so long following the Second World War. Intergovernmental organizations such as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC), among others, have increasingly become "major sites for the organization of knowledge about education, and have created a cajoling discourse of 'imperatives of the global economy' for education" (Rizvi and Lingard 2010, 79). This discourse has supported policies on financial austerity for education in the world's poorest countries, where the World Bank has frequently required states to download the full fee for the delivery of post-secondary education to the student in order to receive loans that support the functioning of the rest of the state apparatus. Globally, states have largely been absent from the responsibility of subsidizing all levels of education (whether primary, secondary, and tertiary), and in many countries education is traded as a service that can be commodified at any number of levels (Tomasevski 2006; Rizvi and Lingard 2010). The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) documents that "[b]etween 1981 and 2011, the proportion of university operating revenue provided by government sources has declined from 84% to 55% while the proportion funded by student tuition fees has increased from 13% to 37%" (2013–14, 1). Canadian provincial governments continued to fund, on average, about 65 percent of the cost of university education in 2009; though that has decreased from 90 percent in 1979, Canadian students might even consider themselves fortunate in comparison (CAUT 2012a).

Provincially, the funding relationships between governments and universities is complex, and subject to political whim. For better or worse, it is worth considering the rapprochement of provincial government policy and the everyday activities of universities suggested in some recent election platforms. For example, in Ontario the Progressive Conservative Ford government has promised to expand the role of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HECQO), a policy and research organization at arm's length from provincial government, to include a complaint and investigation process related to free speech in Ontario universities (Ontario Progressive Conservatives, 2018). In the platform, the Conservative government promises to tie provincial funding to universities' ability to maintain an as-of-yet undefined concept of free speech. The few details available suggest that the results of individual high-profile complaints about pro-life advocacy and pushback on the use of gender-neutral pronouns by students and employees have been the basis for this promise, and could be used to discipline other aspects of university functioning.[1]

Universities in other parts of the world have long since learned to operate as private enterprises in terms of the policy structure, goals, and values attached

to their degrees, and now Canadian universities are in the process of having to do so as well. The impacts of these shifts are most evident in the critiques of the university advanced by both student and faculty organizations. Organizations like the Canadian Association of University Teachers, numerous part- and full-time faculty unions across the country, and student general assemblies have been the most vocal in making clear the impacts of increased tuition and decreased essential resources, such as fewer full-time faculty, as demonstrated in Quebec in 2012 (Marshall 2012).

Predictably, the question of post-secondary education's applicability to the knowledge-based job market has captured the attention of administrators, students, and university marketers alike. This preoccupation is itself indicative of the encroaching managerialism of the institution. There is no shortage of interest in university education. One large UNESCO study says there has been "a 53% increase in the global demand for university in the last 10 years" (cited in Miller 2010, 200). But what exactly is this demand for? Despite some evidence from the UK that employers outside the professions and trades prefer to train their own employees (Parker 2003, 533), many universities are trying strenuously to demonstrate that a university degree is a direct job-entry qualification. Indeed, it already is. Statistical evidence shows that humanities graduates have comparable rates of employment to graduates of other types of college and university education (Walters and Frank 2010). Nevertheless, university administrations and policy experts have developed the notion that every student must arrive on the job market with directly transferrable skills and that certain fields, such as the liberal arts, cannot possibly hope to address this need without major adjustments. The conclusions of the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, known simply as the "Drummond Report" for its author, suggest that the transformation of universities can partly be accomplished through the institutionalization of work placements and internships prior to graduation (Drummond 2012). And this is one of the strategic directions that, for example, the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta is taking, having created in recent years both a co-op and an Arts-specific work experience (AWE) program. The latter aims at "connect[ing] students, employers, and community as a first step in achieving individual, educational and organizational success." AWE aims to be a launch site for Arts students to explore both "engaged citizenship" and "career opportunities" in "a supportive environment which builds student confidence in their abilities to achieve academic and career success," while "demonstrat[ing] the value of an Arts degree on and off campus."[2]

In Ontario, the recommendations of the Drummond report have come about in the context of proposed major restructuring in the public sector economy to reduce the provincial deficit, and in the process require universities to

streamline their offerings. For example, in their survey of "the new baccalaureate programs in Ontario universities that have been approved over the past six years, about 90 percent have titles that suggest a *career orientation*" (Clark et al. 2009). The liberal arts have come under scrutiny in this context for not producing students as proto-professionals with a specific job title awaiting them. Public criticism is heaped upon the liberal arts for creating a failed middle class, as suggested below in an editorial response to the students' general strike in Quebec in 2012 (the strike protested the threatened gradual retraction of provincial funding from post-secondary education):

> The protesters do not include accounting, science and engineering students, who have better things to do than hurl projectiles at police. They're the sociology, anthropology, philosophy, arts, and *victim-studies* students, whose *degrees are increasingly worthless* in a world that increasingly demands *hard skills*. The world will not be kind to them. They're the baristas of tomorrow and they don't even know it, because the adults in their lives have sheltered them and encouraged their mass flight from reality. (Wente 2012, emphasis added)

It has been suggested that students increasingly think of themselves as consumers and expect their education to be a made-to-order product (Brulé 2004). Some have even developed typologies of commodification to describe the neoliberal university environment. For example, Brian Miller (2010) lists several modes of commodification that include: universities as a point of sale for credentials or a skill set, and a university education as a step toward ever more voracious consumption through increasing one's future earning power.

Administrators and faculty of WGS programs are sympathetic to the reality that students face a pared-down learning environment rich in private-sector-sponsored technology but short on full-time faculty, as well as increasingly tremendous debt post-graduation. Those who run WGS programs also feel the pressure to address more directly the context of fear and anxiety about future youth unemployment. Youth unemployment in Canada stands at 14.7 percent for those in the fifteen-to-twenty-four-year age range, double that of Canada's total jobless rate; in 2012, 27,000 fewer youth were currently employed than in the year prior (Penhorwood 2012). Though these rates are holding or even slightly improved—at least for students planning on returning to school in the fall semester—they are still very high (Statistics Canada 2017). This is the context in which students make decisions about which courses to take and what program of study to commit to. And this is the context in which WGS programs undergo curricular reform.

WGS Praxis Between Service and Activism

Given the wealth and diversity of institutionalized praxis and community-based learning opportunities in Canadian WGS programs, surprisingly little critical literature exists that reflects upon this curriculum component in the specific contexts of these programs either from a feminist or gender perspective or in the context of current trends in Canadian post-secondary education more broadly.[3] The same cannot be said for the American context, where an extensive body of literature analyzes the university-organized WGS praxis component. An even larger body of American literature is concerned with the role of what is called "service-learning" in the wider university. In part, the lack of Canada-specific critical literature can be explained by the fact that the broader term "community service-learning" (CSL), meaning the integration of work in and with the community into university learning, is still a relatively new concept for Canadian post-secondary institutions, while it has been around in US post-secondary education for at least two decades, during which it has received presidential support, first by the Clinton administration, and later from the Obama administration.[4] However, just like their US counterparts, Canadian WGS programs have been early practitioners of institutionalizing community-based learning initiatives (Naples 2002c).

Given the wealth of the (overwhelmingly) American body of literature addressing community service learning broadly and WGS community-based learning specifically, a complete literature survey is impossible. In the following, we draw out some of the more problematic assumptions underlying the literature and bring into view the more helpful reflective critical engagements with community-based learning initiatives. The wider US literature on community service-learning asserts a whole range of associated benefits of such approaches to learning, many also embraced by feminist literature. For students, community involvement is thought to make theoretical material more relevant—by providing "real world contexts" (Dugger 2008, 1; also Evans et al. 2006)—enhancing variously their academic skills and social character; communities are presumed to have their needs met; and universities can improve their community relations (Bubriski and Semaan 2009). Seemingly, it's a "win-win" situation for all. Needless to say, much of the literature is rather enthusiastic about the benefits of community-based learning, with critical responses and approaches few and far between.

Common to the feminist literature is the assumption of a quasi-natural affinity of WGS and community-based learning, probably due to the widely circulated origin story of academic WGS as having emerged as the "arm" or "academic wing" of the second-wave women's (liberation) movement (Dugger 2008; Washington 2000). From this, many WGS practitioners continue to take for granted a specific activist WGS mandate and make activism the

raison d'être of the field. Accordingly, merely teaching *about* feminism or "raising feminist consciousness" is considered insufficient by many. Some, like Nancy Naples, even charge the institutionalization of Women's Studies in the academy with "constrain[ing] the development of collective political action" (2002c, 387). More widely shared, however, is the self-understanding that in WGS, "we teach not only to educate our students, but also to enable them to use this knowledge to work for social justice" (Williams and Ferber 2008, 47). To do so requires us "to teach students to merge feminist theory with social action in order to transform systemic gender, class, and race inequalities" (Bubriski and Semaan 2009, 91). Within this view, the WGS community practicum, internship, placement, action project, university-based community service learning, and co-op program becomes invested not only with promoting, but actually accomplishing transformative learning that targets (structural) change—a rather grand expectation, to say the least.

One issue with the field's deep attachment to activism, as Catherine Orr has pointed out, is that activism is "an ill-defined, endlessly-elastic term." Another is that this activist orientation is often "used in punitive ways to chastise WGS practitioners whose scholarly projects or theoretical orientations stray too far from the practical—and thereby political…application that activism is said to represent" (Orr 2012, 90). The elasticity of the term means that nearly anything can qualify as "activism," and a distinction between charity, volunteerism, and social justice work is often missing. At the same time, certain forms of community engagement—such as the daily struggles that marginalized people must engage in to survive—are rarely recognized in these terms, as forms of activism in their own right (Orr 2012, 87–89). Orr suggests that the less obviously or immediately political is frequently lost or devalued in this insistence on the field's activist roots as its founding principle (97). Building on Orr's analysis, we suggest that when WGS practitioners devalue the less immediately or obviously political this risks a collusion with the neoliberal reduction of university learning to its "use value." The emphasis on the greater "use value" of certain forms of learning over others is central to the technocratic and corporate evaluation strategies employed in the neoliberal university, and thus is something we might want to resist rather than embrace. Margot Francis in this collection offers one example of doing so, when she fundamentally refuses to turn to learning *elsewhere*, now so popular in post-secondary education, in order to incorporate praxis as an element of students' learning. Instead, Francis makes the case for recognizing "feminist praxis *inside* the classroom" (131). Rather than engaging students in street activism or placing them with community organizations to learn "about 'others' who are presumably not in the university," she engages in a feminist praxis that challenges settler colonization within her teaching and among her students, right in the classroom.

Francis' arguments add to an interesting and ongoing dialogue about (political) urgency in WGS, which for some practitioners drives the need for the curricular institutionalization of praxis components *outside* of the WGS classroom. The shifting political climate of the last thirty years, marked simultaneously by the neoliberal attack on the welfare state, increased privatization, and larger global/local interdependence, makes community service learning within WGS a political necessity today, some argue (see, e.g., Barber 2012). For others, institutionalizing community engagement has a compensatory function: to make up for the loss of what once were vibrant larger social movements and the (presumably) decreased involvement of WGS students (and faculty) in community activism today (Forbes et al. 1999; Bubriski and Semaan 2009). However, whether WGS students today are truly less engaged in "activism" than previous generations is certainly debateable. Judith Taylor's essay in this collection focuses her critical lens on students, many of whom turn away—prematurely, in her view—from feminist non-profit organizations because they fail to recognize the constraints they operate under, dismissing them too quickly as insufficiently "political." Encountering the limits of social change in non-profit contexts is also explored in Joanne Muzak's chapter, but here the challenges faced by these organizations are framed within the wider neoliberal agenda that limits the political or activist work of frontline organizations, especially when they rely on corporate and government funding dedicated to increasing women's "employability" and market participation, something that should not be foreign for students themselves who are increasingly asked to see university education primarily as a means to a job. But Muzak's students also begin to see the many complex forms that activism can take, and although these varied forms are not always as politically "pure" as Taylor's students might desire, they represent change nevertheless. Read together, Taylor's and Muzak's students seem to support quite different notions of what constitutes social change. In Muzak's introductory class, for example, students appear to be less rigid than Taylor's upper-level students who are more deeply "trained" or "disciplined" in/by WGS, and their more advanced critical analysis, something we pride ourselves on in our field, might not have prepared them sufficiently for bearing the dilemmas that community organizations face when muzzled by neoliberal politics. Reading Muzak's and Taylor's chapters together also allows us to think about the kinds of suggestions and critiques students bring back to community organizations, and how organizations may or may not be (able to be) interested in the kinds of insights students can offer—just as students sometimes might be too hasty and harsh in their assessments of the limits of the organizations.

Taylor also alerts us to how the low status of frontline feminist community work might hold little appeal to students who have embraced the promise of

upward social mobility that a post-secondary degree is presumed to provide. Sarita Srivastava's chapter in this collection offers an interesting counterpoint on students' commitment to community and activist engagement. She describes an impressive range of activist projects that her students organize as part of their WGS degree. Srivastava's insistence on having students organize their own projects, as opposed to having them organized for them by an internship or CSL office, raises interesting questions about how developing their own praxis projects might produce a different sense of ownership over what students do. In any case, taken together, all of the essays in this collection make more complex any simple lament that today's students are "less engaged." Instead, these essays provide insight into the conditions which structure students' attachments or detachments from community engagement and activism. In the Canadian context, as Muzak (2012 and in this volume) reminds us, the conservative government under former Prime Minister Harper, after coming into office in 2006, systematically defunded women's (and any other) advocacy organizations that opposed the government's socially and fiscally conservative agenda. Subsequently, Canadian non-profit organizations struggled with strict regulations about the use of federal funds for research, advocacy, or lobbying, which in turn shaped the kinds of work organizations could and could not do over the past decade. While the Trudeau Liberals have been reviewing and changing some of these funding regulations, more research is required to assess the long-term effects of the defunding of advocacy under the Harper Conservatives. As a consequence of the long-standing ban on advocacy or political participation, feminist non-profit organizations necessarily became more depoliticized and were increasingly called upon to provide social services instead of political advocacy or activism. Further, as Lise Gotell points out, neoliberal policies often compel non-profits "to adopt an individualized and depoliticized lens" (2009, 2) for social problems, gendered or otherwise. This, together with insufficient numbers of available placements in feminist non-profits, even in many large urban centres, means fewer opportunities for students to observe actual activist or advocacy work during community placements. Instead, community placements may lead to students mistaking social service work, as important as it may be, with work that targets the very social structures that perpetuate social inequalities and injustices.

Lise Gotell's chapter in this collection offers a smart approach to using community service learning and placements within community organizations as an educational tool to help students recognize and experience the impact that neoliberal policies and political constraints have had on the work of feminist community organizations. Gotell's endorsement of the pedagogical potential of learning about neoliberalism's effects through community placements is productively in tension with early American Women's Studies scholar

Bonnie Zimmerman's caution that an emphasis within WGS on placements and volunteer activities "may actually reinforce current power structures and relations by taking on some of the work that used to be considered the responsibility of the state" (2002, 188). Canadian educator Don Dippo (2005) similarly asks us to consider whether community placements—by feeding our and our students' illusions of doing "something"—inadvertently advance, rather than challenge, the "neo-conservative fantasy" that volunteer work can replace the welfare state. In her chapter in this collection, Amber Dean raises similar questions about whether students released into communities en masse to "do good" might actually risk doing harm to the very communities they are foisted upon to help.

While anxieties over the present state of politics mixed with a nostalgic longing for a lost activist feminist past might animate much of the WGS praxis literature, the critical voices cited above should remind us that community-based learning should not always be equated with activism. Assuming that a WGS praxis component is "activist" simply because it requires students to learn from/with communities or engage in activities outside of the traditional classroom seems faulty—as is assuming that broadly practised community service learning is incapable of spawning activist commitments among students. Whether WGS praxis constitutes activism or charity might, in fact, depend upon the audience and student preferences.[5] Indeed, WGS' exemplary "community involvement" is also strategically employed to demonstrate the field's continued (now civic) relevance to university administrators looking at WGS programs with the budget axe already in hand. Case in point here is one of the editors' universities, where a new graduate WGS program received public approval from the provost precisely for its mandatory community *service* component, an approval that certainly did not laud this component for its feminist activist agenda. Rather, the community service component received the provost's support because students' community engagement is perceived as enhancing the university's claim to work for the "public good" while also making our graduates more intelligible as "workforce-ready," thus seemingly increasing the value of the program to the public.

WGS and the Community

In the US literature on community service learning and WGS, some practitioners worry whether students' work assignments sufficiently correspond with community needs, or whether they risk draining further resources from already overburdened organizations (Forbes et al. 1999); others rightly wonder how to distinguish short-term charitable, status-quo-preserving work from sustainable interventions into larger structural inequality. Certainly, the amount of time spent in the community setting and the kind and extent of reflection taught

in university courses that accompany the praxis component matter greatly. In our experience, the praxis components of WGS programs most often follow the tendency in the wider practice of community service-learning to create partnerships with formal non-governmental or charitable organizations, rather than with more grassroots or activist-oriented groups or networks. The reasons for this are myriad, including at times a reliance on a university's CSL office to establish the placement options to begin with. But community-based learning in WGS need not always rely on partnerships with established organizations (see the Francis, Johnson, and Srivasta chapters in this volume for examples of alternative assignments not reliant on such formal partnerships; see also Dean 2007; Naples 2002b, 2002c). However, most contributors to the book focus on the more common scenario of partnerships with feminist non-profits, reflecting on their benefits and potential challenges.

WGS programs with a deep theoretical commitment to challenging hierarchy and transforming unequal relations of power may be well suited to initiate meaningful relationships with community partners where, even if the individual students are somewhat transitory from year to year, the institutional commitments of the program to the host organization buoy up a substantial relationship of trust. Two chapters in this collection, by Rachel Alpha Johnston Hurst and Ilya Parkins, take up the question of whether and how community-based learning actually benefits the community. The two articles do so from quite different perspectives and in significantly different contexts. Parkins' students created a memorial project for the families of women who had been murdered in their community, while Hurst's students translated theoretical concepts central to the work of a specific community organization into digital media form, for the organization to utilize in their work. Read together, these two chapters open up the question of whether communities benefit from the placements, training, and projects they provide to students in productive ways, while still leaving open the question of whether praxis components in WGS build sustainable relationships with community groups, especially in contexts in which programs are pressured to deliver experiential learning outside the classroom with limited resources and under serious time constraints.

Another concern arising in the literature is the question of whether a short-term excursion into marginalized communities and populations can effectively rework students' grasp of the roots of marginalization, or whether the practicum becomes a trip to "the other side of the tracks" with the risk of reinforcing the racist and classist presumptions it seeks to challenge. Recalling the role of community service in the criminal justice system as a "punishing pedagogy," Forbes et al., for example, are skeptical of compulsory service learning because "forced volunteerism…is at best an exercise in observing otherness and at worst a missionary expedition" (1999, 162). In these authors'

minds, the promise that community service provides students with experiences of the "real world," of "different people…presents volunteerism as a way to experience and uplift the unknowing underprivileged" (162). A less scathing view considers that even successfully changed consciousness does not necessarily amount to larger structural change. And, encountering differences and inequality in the community, not unlike learning about it in the classroom, does not guarantee attitudes of identification, empathy, or solidarity with those who suffer. It may just as well lead students to a refusal of those "too saturated with injury," as Judith Butler reminds us (1993, 100). Such a refusal might well be at stake for the students Taylor observes in her chapter in this collection.

Is Praxis Learning in WGS Really So Different?

The mostly short-term community involvement proffered in praxis courses and assignments may promise meaningful learning experiences and the acquisition of new skills (or at least a line on the CV) to university students, serve the self-understanding of the instituting program, and raise universities' public image. But the question remains: what, if anything, makes feminist praxis different from other internships or traditional service learning? Sheila Hassal Hughes' suggestion that only the latter "tend[s] to signal professionalization and self-advancement" is not really persuasive (2008, 37), since Johnson and Luhmann's (2016) research on the web-based self-representation of WGS programs suggests an emphasis on these potential benefits of praxis components as well. Indeed, the very desire to neatly distinguish "problematic" mainstream service learning from "critical" feminist praxis is neither borne out in the literature nor in the content analysis Johnson and Luhmann undertook of the web descriptions of praxis components in Canadian WGS programs.[6] While we might want to claim that feminist praxis institutionalized in the WGS program has a distinctly different genealogy that squarely places it within intersectional and structural analyses of power and engages in dissident citizenship, the contributions to this collection paint a much more complex picture. As Johnson and Luhmann (2016) discovered, some WGS praxis-based course descriptions certainly emphasize activism, but others underline the professionalization and career advancement that internships and service learning offer to students. While these might be strategic representations that reflect an effort to prove the field's ongoing relevance in the contemporary neoliberal university, the question remains: how do programs negotiate their activist aspirations, assuming they have them, with the demands for job preparation and workplace readiness so central to current neoliberal post-secondary education agendas?

WGS program pages utilize a wide spectrum of different terms to name and promote the specific qualities of the praxis components they offer: some

speak of "volunteer opportunities," others of "on-the-job training," "practical experience," "working in the community," and/or "activism." Certainly, these different terms connote significantly different values, with "volunteering" being evocative of charity work, and "activism" of social change. Other seemingly neutral terms such as "practical experience" and "working in the community," nevertheless are energized by a hegemonic valuing of the practical over the theoretical, where "community" is often equated with the "real" world and "university" with the illusive "ivory tower." Thus, even apparently neutral terms risk widening the very gap between theory and praxis, between university and community learning, that the praxis component seeks to overcome. However filtered the complexity of the relationship between theory and praxis may be at times on WGS program pages, Johnson and Luhmann (2016) distinguish three distinct approaches to the relationship of theory and praxis in program descriptions: The first, *the exposure to praxis approach,* imagines that students will learn from organizations through observation; for example, they will learn "how to do activism." In the exposure model, the organization is presumed to know and the student in need of knowledge. The second, *the application approach,* reverses the relationship between students and organizations. Students are assumed to bring feminist theory and knowledge, acquired in their university education, to the organization. A third approach, more humbly and perhaps more usefully, emphasizes that the practicum is a site of *integration and synthesis*, meaning that in the practicum or placement course, students are supposed to integrate knowledge acquired in course work with what they learn at the organization. Alternatively, the purpose of the practicum course is described as a process of reflecting upon the experience of field-based learning in the community. Some program descriptions do not link theory and praxis in any discernible way. Maybe the "practical (work) experience in Women's Studies" seems so self-evidently valuable and intrinsic to the field that it requires no further elaboration. Besides the three different approaches to the relationship of theory to praxis (exposure, application, and integration/synthesis), WGS program web pages also suggest different approaches to skills training. These definitions offer some insight into how WGS programs imagine themselves responding strategically to neoliberalism. Training is broadly imagined as the practice of knowledge acquired in WGS alongside other skills gained in a liberal arts education (such as questioning, writing, communication, and research skills) with a strong emphasis on refining these skills in a "real-life" workplace. Thus skill descriptions are emphasized differently: *job skills training*, *research skills training*, and *training in feminist activism*. An emphasis on WGS praxis components providing training in job skills promises that the WGS practicum will yield a "high quality resumé," "contacts" and a set of other seemingly marketable skills. A second approach to skills training

in WGS praxis components emphasizes research skills or knowledge production, while a third approach sees praxis components as skills training for feminist action/activism. However, even WGS praxis components and community engagements that are explicitly "activist" can become another line on the CV, or another marketable skill, thereby illustrating once more the "elasticity" of the term, as noted by Orr (2012).

Johnson and Luhmann's (2016) preliminary analysis of the web-based descriptions of praxis components in WGS seems to support the concern that the character of community engagement in WGS might be changing from outright activist aspirations that initiated the first wave of integrating practicums and community engagement in WGS programs, to a rhetoric of promoting WGS praxis and community engagement in terms more reminiscent of the neoliberal agenda that drives universities to become centres for job preparation. Under the current pressure to make all liberal arts education intelligible to both communities and government, the rhetoric of praxis threatens to make skills training for the so-called real world the primary goal of *all* community engagement, whether in WGS or the wider university. However, we have to keep in mind that Johnson and Luhmann's (2016) research focused on analyzing the program descriptions on the web, which offer only the "public"—and often strategic, but also somewhat generic—face of WGS programs. This collection of chapters by WGS practitioners reflecting upon what they do and what happens when they teach or supervise praxis components offers a range of much more complex perspectives on the state of feminist praxis in Canadian WGS programs, perhaps even more so because we have asked practitioners to do something quite difficult; namely, not just provide us with the "heroic tales" and feminist success stories about the transformative work we do in the field. Instead, we asked contributors to think critically about their community-engaged or experiential teaching, and about the challenges involved in integrating "learning elsewhere" in WGS programs. This is not an easy task. A public, reflexive analysis of what we do in WGS continues to be challenging because of the defensive position many of our programs consistently find themselves in. But also, more personally, to openly analyze the shortcoming of one's approach to community-engaged learning, institutionally or in the classroom, feels risky. Thus, we applaud our contributors and their willingness to take these risks.

Throughout this collection, we intentionally work with a capacious understanding of what constitutes praxis. Accordingly, the chapters collected here represent a wide range of contexts and formats of praxis and community engagement within WGS programs. These range from community-based learning as an option within introductory WGS courses, to the mandatory inclusion of a praxis component in an upper-year undergraduate course. Increas-

ingly, a praxis component can also be found in graduate courses. Some authors reflect upon teaching WGS courses in partnership with their institutions' well-established community service-learning centres or practicum placement services, which match students directly with non-profit community organizations (see the Gotell, Muzak, Taylor, and Hurst chapters); others analyze student-initiated and run activist projects (see the Srivastava and Dean chapters) or praxis learning *in* the classroom (see the Francis and Johnson chapters) while still others risk reflecting seriously on the limitations—and sometimes the outright failures—of their approaches to praxis (see the Parkins and Hurst chapters).

All of the contributors challenge the far too common binaries of praxis/theory and community/university, which WGS practitioners have simultaneously challenged and reinstituted in fiercely fought disputes within the field (Orr 2012). One concern is with how these binaries construct both praxis and the university in the process. By contrasting an alleged "real-world" community always imagined outside of the university to the fantasy of the university as a rarefied "ivory tower," the university risks being imagined as a supposedly safe, gated community rather than as a site of complex social and power relationships and deeply entrenched inequities, injustices, and exclusions (see the Hurst and Dean chapters in this book). At the same time, "community" and "praxis" become imagined as the only "real" that matters. What is lost in these constructions are the complex ways that all of us are positioned differently across a diverse range of communities, within and outside of the university, and how these communities are all sites of co-education, dialogue, and relationality, as well as tension and inequity. In her chapter, Jennifer L. Johnson further questions the new emphasis on instituting praxis through learning elsewhere, which passes over the daily praxis of students' everyday lives and seemingly fails to understand that all of us are always already "elsewhere" as citizens, parents, employees, and so on.

Providing further evidence of the ways *elsewhere* is difficult to pin down, we note the complex intersections of learner experiences in WGS programs where the learner can simultaneously be a member of the "community" and also the "university" expert. There are likely many examples across Canada, but one instance of this played out during the writing of this chapter, where students from a Women's and Gender Studies distance education program at Laurentian University collaborated with students from Wilfrid Laurier University's Faculty of Social Work. The students met through the Walls 2 Bridges program, which brings university and incarcerated learners together as peers under the guidance of a university instructor and the government-employed educators at a women's penitentiary (http://wallstobridges.ca/). In this program, social work students and inmates at a penitentiary take a class together onsite in the educational facilities at a prison for university credit, challenging the common binaries of praxis/theory and community/university through its

philosophical goals and praxis (Pollack 2016). In this case, several of the learners were WGS students who had been studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree by distance education. Given their subject position as student inmates, they were unlikely to have had the opportunity for experiential learning *elsewhere,* and were more likely positioned as the people social work students would ultimately come to "help" on placement. Who *should* be considered the expert in such a setting: the students who have been incarcerated but are already adept at discussing feminist theories of power and de-colonization? Or the students of social work whose growing critical knowledge of social work theory is greatly enhanced by these interactions? On the one hand, the WGS students had been taking core WGS arts-based courses on gender and violence, feminist theory, and colonialism, so they could simultaneously be positioned as knowledgeable about their own experiences as incarcerated women and about these theories. The social work students, on the other hand, could be understood as both learners in their own field and the subjects of the incarcerated WGS students' experiential learning. When Jennifer L. Johnson was invited to attend a meeting of the class and meet the WGS students for the first time, it was evident that this vibrant learning group consisted of many "experts," something made possible by the political awareness and analytic concerns inherent in the pedagogy of Walls 2 Bridges.

Taken together, the chapters in this collection also put those of us doing or thinking about instituting community-based learning in WGS *elsewhere* on notice. The authors offer us much to work with in order to deepen our understanding that the novelty and excitement of community-based learning must not preclude us from doing the difficult, reflexive, and critical work that feminist knowledge production demands. And while this collection works with case studies from within WGS programs, the issues authors discuss also apply to critical approaches to community engagement in numerous other disciplines. All of the authors speak to how important the classroom remains as a site of critical reflection, of thinking carefully and critically about the kind of doing that *learning elsewhere* entails. One concern in instituting community-based learning is certainly that the urgency of the "real" issues students experience in their placements, internships, and co-op settings will come to dominate the more careful, less certain, more critically reflective work that feminist theorizing requires. All of the chapters in this collection highlight the importance of the conceptual, theoretical, and reflective work we do in the classroom, suggesting that community-based learning never happens only, or even primarily, *elsewhere*. While the question of whether feminist praxis in WGS is really so different remains up for debate, what all the chapters in this volume make clear is that the critical, reflexive, intellectual work of our field must be applied with equal measure to its praxis components, or we risk too

much capitulation to and collusion with the neoliberal university. But they also make clear that feminist praxis in WGS, whether occurring in the classroom or elsewhere, can be strengthened only by analyses that employ the critical tools of feminist knowledge production so well honed in our field. And perhaps it is this openness to subjecting our own praxis to feminist critique that truly establishes WGS as in the vanguard of developing critical approaches to community-based learning within and beyond the post-secondary classroom.

Notes

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1 The Progressive Conservative Party promises to expand the role of HECQO to include a complaints and investigation process about free speech. This platform promise appears to be based on the following two cases: https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-documents-reveal-new-details-in-lindsay-shepherd-wilfrid-laurier/, and https://thevarsity.ca/2018/02/28/court-rules-in-favour-of-utmsu-in-lawsuit-with-anti-abortion-student-group/.

2 See https://www.ualberta.ca/arts/student-services/arts-work-experience/prospective-awe-students.

3 Exceptions here are Muzak (2012) and Parkins (2014). The latter is reprinted in a revised version in this collection. For an extensive bibliography of the existing community service-learning (CSL) literature, go to https://cloudfront.ualberta.ca/-/media/arts/departments-institutes-and-centres/community-service learning/documents/reports/2015-03-24-canadian-csl-studies-resource-base.pdf.

4 For details of the history of service-learning in Canada, see the web page of the Canadian Alliance for Community Service learning: http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/welcome_what_is.htm. For the US history, see the National Service learning Clearing House: http://www.servicelearning.org/what_is_service learning/history.

5 On student preferences for charity over activist work, see Bickford and Reynolds (2002).

6 Certainly, some authors draw a distinction between charity and social change work; however, feminists are not the only ones to do so (see, e.g., Marullo and Edwards, 2000).

FEMINIST PRAXIS /
FOR CREDIT /
UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

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COLONIALISM, NEOLIBERALISM, AND UNIVERSITY–COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: WHAT SORTS OF ENCOUNTERS WITH DIFFERENCE ARE OUR INSTITUTIONS PRIORITIZING?

AMBER DEAN

In 2011, the president of McMaster University (where I currently work as an Associate Professor of Cultural Studies and Gender Studies) declared Community Engagement (CE) one of our institution's top new priorities (Deane 2011). Similar declarations are occurring at post-secondary institutions across Canada, demarcating a noticeable turn to community-engaged research, teaching, and learning that has intensified over the past decade or so.[1] For many of us at McMaster, President Patrick Deane's emphasis on improving undergraduate education and on our "obligation to serve the greater good of our community—locally, nationally, and globally" was met with optimism, even enthusiasm, about what these changed priorities might make possible for scholars committed to collective struggles for greater justice (2011, 5). My own enthusiasm has since been somewhat dampened, however; in fact, the similar rhetoric used to support this new emphasis on CE at universities across the country has led me to reflect on the degree to which this turn to CE as an institutional priority might serve, rather than challenge, the ongoing transformations of the university and large-scale cuts to government spending on social welfare and public services so central to neoliberal economic and ideological agendas. Further, the emphasis on "doing good" through CE mobilizes a colonial and imperialist logic of benevolence that risks downplaying (or forgetting altogether) the ways that academic institutions have historically been, and continue to be, deeply implicated in the furtherance of colonialist and imperialist projects. I argue, then, that the dominant rhetoric of CE currently emerging at universities across the country

might both shape and delimit the possibilities for more ethical encounters across difference through community-engaged research, teaching, and learning conducted in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) and other related (inter) disciplines in the liberal arts. By questioning some of the assumptions about "The University" and "The Community" that seem to underpin this dominant rhetoric, its reliance on colonial logics becomes clearer and the insidiousness of neoliberal governmentality in this recent turn to CE is also exposed. But lest it seem as though I am advocating a total abandonment of CE, I conclude by exploring how engagement with feminist, post-colonial, and Indigenous theorizing might provoke CE practices that are critically reflexive about the sorts of encounters with difference they are likely to produce—practices that invite faculty and students to recognize ourselves as implicated participants in *collective* struggles for greater justice.

As Wendy Brown reminds us, neoliberalism is not just a "bundle of economic policies" (2005, 38), but is also a form of "governmentality—a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one that produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and a new organization of the social" (37). Brown is concerned with the *political* implications of a neoliberal governmentality that "*extends and disseminates market values to all institutions and social action*" (40, emphasis in original). For my purposes, it is neoliberal governmentality's effects on popular understandings of individual responsibility and agency that holds the most significant implications for how teachers and students may come to understand our*selves* differently through practices of CE. For example, Brown insists that "[t]he model neoliberal citizen is one who strategizes for her- or himself among various social, political or economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options" (43). While shifting understandings of post-secondary education as primarily for the acquisition of marketable skills, and of students as consumers in this education "marketplace" are much discussed of late, at first glance it appears that a commitment to "doing good" through practices of CE might work *against* some of these changing understandings of what a university education represents. But I suspect, in fact, that the opposite may be true: that the widespread turn to CE on university campuses may instead facilitate the production of the sort of "model neoliberal citizen" that Brown describes above, a citizen-student who views CE primarily as an opportunity to increase the value of one's degree than as an invitation to engage in a collective struggle with others (often from quite different social and cultural locations) to alter forms of injustice in which we are all—albeit differently—implicated.

Part of my initial optimism about this turn to CE as an institutional priority arose from how I imagined it might be strategically mobilized to lend added support and legitimacy to my own efforts to bridge community-based

organizing and activist work with my academic responsibilities of research, teaching, and service.[2] As discussed in the introduction to this book, projects and initiatives now launching under the auspices of CE have a long history in WGS, where a commitment to bridging theory/practice and university/community divides can be traced back to the field's founding (Orr 2011; Zimmerman 2002). However, as Catherine Orr notes, WGS approaches to CE typically involve "social justice frameworks that distinguish engagement from 'service' or 'volunteering,' where too often issues of power and privilege go unquestioned" (2011, 10). As a result, the terminology and dominant rhetorics of CE are often eschewed in WGS in favour of "the language of social justice and activism," and one might be optimistic that institutional commitments to community or civic engagement can be harnessed to further the activist-oriented research, teaching, and service often associated with WGS (Orr 2011, 22). However, my own efforts to engage undergraduate and graduate students in collective struggles for greater justice through activist-oriented assignments have led me to question the degree to which the oft-assumed more politicized and social justice–focused approaches of WGS can be disentangled from the dominant rhetorics and frameworks of CE that are emerging—or indeed, whether they were ever so different in the first place.[3]

At certain times, students' projects in response to a range of activist-oriented assignments have left me hopeful about the possibilities of integrating forms of collective struggle with academic agendas. However, at other times they have been a source of anxiety, frustration, even sheer terror. My students most often approach such assignments by positioning themselves as "experts" (or, at least, as privileged knowers) about a particular issue or problem, charging themselves with raising awareness about the suffering or struggles of people they tend to view and often represent as less fortunate "others" in dire need of their benevolence, charity, or philanthropy. It seems to me that this is entirely consistent with models for social responsibility that cohere with neoliberal governmentality, for students view themselves as deploying their superior (entrepreneurial) skills to "develop" or "improve" others who are largely imagined as the authors of their own suffering. Wendy Brown suggests that those who "fail to navigate impediments to prosperity" are understood, under neoliberal governmentality, as living "a mismanaged life": widespread social injustices that privilege some and disadvantage others become signs of individual failure (2005, 42). This understanding of injustice as caused by individual failings and alleviated by individualized solutions seems to underpin several projects my students have undertaken. For example, one group of undergraduate students aimed to raise awareness among the student population about women living in poverty. They proceeded to set up displays on campus that primarily highlighted statistics

about women's poverty levels in Canada and encouraged other students to make donations to a local women's shelter. At least two assumptions seemed to underpin their project: one, that women living in poverty are not among the ranks of post-secondary students; and two, that the poverty of these (non-student) "other" women could best be alleviated through charitable donations rather than structural change, representing an individualized and highly entrepreneurial response.

A lack of awareness about collective forms of struggle for greater justice also shapes the sorts of projects my students propose. Another group of white undergraduate students, for example, planned to raise awareness about rape in Democratic Republic of Congo by dressing up in "African costumes" and participating in a local charitable fashion show—and they thought their performance might be enhanced by painting their skin black (readers will no doubt be relieved to know this project was modified, at the proposal stage, thanks to intensive intervention by a very skilled graduate teaching assistant). This act of sympathetic benevolence rooted in racial privilege is but the starkest of numerous examples of such "othering" practices that have arisen in student projects. In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag eloquently summarizes my concerns with such projects when she writes:

> So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. [Let's] set aside the sympathy we extend to others…for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may—in ways we might prefer not to imagine—be linked to their suffering, as the wealth of some may imply the destitution of others. (2003, 102–3)

David Jefferess similarly argues that through such benevolent approaches to social change, "[c]onflict and poverty are dehistoricized; our relation to the suffering of Others is defined in terms of benevolence—our compassion and decency—rather than in terms of material interconnections" (2011, 80). In other words, sympathetic or benevolent approaches to social change are not innocent. In fact, Jefferess argues that these approaches frequently "do more harm than good" (80) in that they perhaps make it even more difficult to identify how the privileges of some connect to the suffering of others.

Given that the dominant rhetoric of CE encourages students to frame their projects through benevolent, sympathetic impulses, it is not surprising that these are the sorts of projects they most commonly propose. But I find myself repeatedly surprised that, despite my best efforts to design courses and assignments that seek to problematize benevolent, charitable approaches to

addressing social injustices—aiming to historicize such impulses and situate them in relation to histories of colonialism, imperialism, and the racial logics they rely upon—*my students frequently continue to embrace and advocate such approaches, even at the end of the course.* I suspect this speaks to how powerfully the dominant rhetoric of CE itself supports and advocates such approaches, but also to how this dominant rhetoric both draws on and supports the pervasive and insidious discourses of self-interested entrepreneurship characteristic of neoliberal governmentality, as well as the discourse of benevolence that so often props up colonialist and imperialist projects (see Razack 2004; Jefferess 2011). My undergraduate students in particular often have little or no previous learning about histories of collective struggle, such as slavery abolition, civil rights, decolonization and Indigenous sovereignty movements, feminist or queer struggles, or other forms of anti-racist struggle. Although simply being made aware of these histories of collective struggle and complex solidarities is obviously not a guarantee that students will come to question their benevolent and frequently othering approaches to engagement, their utter lack of such awareness does likely make these sorts of proposals more common.

Despite my struggles with benevolence in students' approaches to their projects, I do believe that CE *can* be transformative, in the sense that at its best it might facilitate the "face-to-face encounters with others" that Gayatri Spivak insists are necessary for any sort of collective struggle (in Ahmed 2000, 178). But attention to the *sorts* of encounters brought about by these forms of engagement is necessary for the development of CE practices that attempt to avoid reinforcing the "strangeness" of others, particularly those "others" who are the least privileged and most marginalized (and thus often sought to be on the receiving end of CE practices). As Sara Ahmed observes, "[t]he assumption that we can tell the difference between strangers and neighbours…functions to conceal forms of social difference" (2000, 3). In other words, some bodies are more likely to be recognized as "strangers" than others. Whether we associate strangers with danger or welcome them for their unique differences, we "turn the stranger into something that simply *is*," which "*cuts 'the stranger' off from the histories of its determination*" (5, emphasis in original). Such "stranger fetishism," for Ahmed, risks producing encounters through which "[t]he journey towards the stranger becomes a form of self-discovery, in which the stranger functions yet again to establish and define the 'I'" (6). This is, of course, a version of the same sort of logic that underpins colonialism; as Ahmed goes on to insist, "the colonial project was not *external* to the constitution of the modernity of European nations: rather, the identity of these nations *became predicated on their relationship to the colonised others*" (10, emphasis added; see also Razack 2004 on this point).

Margaret Himley, drawing on Ahmed, explains that service learning (as a practice of CE) involves "figuring and approaching the stranger," and it "emerge[s] within colonizing impulses and practices":

> Service has roots in the volunteerism of white middle- and upper-class women…where these hopeful and idealistic (and perhaps naïve) volunteers went out into poor and working class neighbourhoods to improve the material and moral lot of the less fortunate they found living there. (2004, 419)

Himley is optimistic that the embodied encounters made possible through service learning might productively "agitate us, teachers and students alike" by inciting "a recognition not just of the stranger *but also of the social and historical conditions that produce that recognition*" (434, emphasis added). I am curious, however, about how some of the key assumptions about "The University" and "The Community" that underpin this recent turn to CE might hamper any potential it holds for assisting us in identifying the social and historical conditions that cause us to recognize ourselves and others in particular ways.

"The University" and "The Community"

While acknowledging that communities can be based on geography, interest, affiliation, or identity, the McMaster Community Engagement Task Force recommended that "McMaster focus primarily on its neighbouring communities," while also recognizing our connection to "the global community" (2012, 4–5). This attention to what we mean when we talk about "the community" seems important, given that much of the literature on service learning and community engagement has, as the task force acknowledges, neglected to consider or consult communities about the desirability or benefits of community engagement practices, focusing instead on the benefits of CE for students and universities (2012, 4). Yet, questions about how to define "the university" or why universities must be prompted to engage in CE are seldom asked, other than the occasional vague gesture to the university's reputation for ivory tower elitism. Most of the rhetoric about CE embedded in official documents and strategic plans suggests that universities have civic responsibilities for serving less fortunate "others" or for "doing good," while communities are primarily framed as having unmet needs.[4] While there is much discussion about how CE practices must value reciprocity and be mutually beneficial to the university and the community, there is very little discussion of why these values need to be explicitly stated: namely, the university's long history of exploiting various communities, in particular communities of colour and Indigenous communities, in the interests of controlling the production and reproduction of knowledge for its own benefit

(and too frequently, in the interests of white supremacy). Let me unpack some of the assumptions about "The University" and "The Community" that seem to me to underpin this new turn to CE:

1. The Homogeneity of "The University"

The turn to CE as a strategic priority rests on the assumption that the university is first and foremost an entity separate from the community. I suspect this assumption continues to inform the dominant rhetoric of CE because of the very real physical and structural barriers that often do separate universities from their surrounding communities; yet, while I understand and even sympathize with why this assumption is made, it remains a source of frustration for many of us who have never viewed our lives in the university as existing somehow outside of, or separate from, the rest of our everyday existence. This assumption reproduces, rather than challenges, the elitism universities are often accused of, and sometimes produces outcomes that are comical (such as when a non-profit organization I worked with agreed to take on some students for a CE project recently and I found myself positioned as a representative of "the community" whom a student seemed to presume was in dire need of her superior research skills). Indeed, the dominant rhetoric frames the university as the site of privilege when it comes to CE, while the community is framed as the site of underprivilege and "otherness." These assumptions can cause serious dissonance for students and faculty who do not always seamlessly occupy or come from backgrounds of privilege, adding to our "imposter syndrome" or sense of non-belonging within the university. Here, I am reminded of a student who recently resisted a CE assignment that required students to participate in a walking tour of our inner city aimed at familiarizing students with the extent of the neighbourhood's poverty (I presume in the interests of conveying to them the importance of requiring university students to go out and "do good" in the community). This particular student had relied upon many of the social services the tour was drawing attention to, and understandably did not relish the thought of having to revisit these sites with a group of gawking (albeit likely sympathetic in the most benevolent sense) classmates.

I think that this assumption about the university as a homogenous site of privilege has quite a lot to do with how approaches to CE are increasingly framed through the emerging dominant rhetoric as opportunities for students and faculty to demonstrate compassion, benevolence, philanthropy, and good citizenship by giving back to a community *that we are simultaneously framed as both separate from and superior to.* Even when discussions of CE locate universities within their geographical communities (as the McMaster CE task force does), there still remains a sense that the university is a separate entity from the community and must now become a "better neighbour," in a

sense, by giving back. Perhaps Margaret Himley puts it best when she writes, "regardless of a student's actual economic status or social identity, the dominant version of the rhetoric of community service may position each and every community service student in a privileged way" (2004, 430). In this version of CE, students and faculty have resources, and communities have unmet needs; students and faculty are knowers, and their community counterparts can benefit from their wisdom; students and faculty are accomplished, and people in communities need improvement. Given this framing, it will continue to be extremely challenging to "disrupt the binary relationship that has been falsely created between the 'University' and the 'Community,'" as the task force at McMaster proposes, because the dominant rhetoric of CE *relies* on this binary in order to rationalize its importance and its value (2012, 11).[5]

The university is also imagined in the dominant rhetoric as a site where CE could become equally valued and practised widely across campus as a result of being declared a strategic priority, without any acknowledgement of the vast differences—ideological, methodological, and epistemological—that persist across, and even within, various faculties and disciplines. This assumption fails to acknowledge widely differing commitments to (or even interest in) collective struggles for greater social justice across the university, and denies the investments of the institution itself in maintaining the status quo. Unless the dominant rhetoric of CE shifts—so that critical questions about what makes this turn to it necessary in the first place become central to its discussion, framing, and practice—I am increasingly doubtful that much about the "regimes of the normal" at the university is likely to be shaken by this new priority (Warner 1993, xxvii).

2. The Homogeneity of "The Community"

While I appreciate the definition of community at my university, and also tend to agree that there are good reasons to focus on a geographic community with proximity to the university in question, not enough work has been done to acknowledge the differences and disparities *within* "The Community" as it is framed by the dominant rhetoric of CE. And although efforts are being made to imagine the community as including governments, other professionals, and (with relish) the "business community" (a point I will return to shortly), I argue that the community in the CE paradigm is imagined primarily as poor, disenfranchised, marginalized, and too frequently racialized as "other." These are the groups most often viewed as the logical beneficiaries of service from privileged members of the university. Curiously, though, it is only very rarely acknowledged that the members of the community to whom the university reaches out in order to design and implement its CE projects are *not* actually these intended

beneficiaries, but the helping professionals who *serve them* (Rosenberger 2000, 40–41). I have noticed a strong tendency to collapse the distinction between community-based service providers and the people that they serve in discussions of CE, as though we imagine that these service providers can, and should, speak for (and will necessarily represent the best interests of) the communities they themselves serve. In a world where, increasingly, accessing any form of social assistance means submitting to various forms of social surveillance and control, this seems like a significant ethical concern that is currently under-addressed in discussions about CE.

Similarly, although there is apparently little to no research to support the assumption that CE inherently provides something of value to the community, this does indeed seem to remain a key assumption underpinning the dominant CE rhetoric. For instance, few advocates of CE seem to imagine that there might be significant risks of harm to the community on the receiving end of CE. Those implementing CE projects could here take counsel from some of the evaluative work that has been done in humanitarian and global development contexts, which highlights several harms, or risks of harm, to the communities receiving services or support. According to David Jefferess, for example, the impulse to "do good" (via "voluntourism," for example) "constitutes a new form of colonial paternalism and often harms the host communities" (2012, 22). Jefferess summarizes these harms (documented in the work of several critical development scholars) as follows: "Volunteers are frequently untrained and often not competent in the labour they perform," such that houses, wells, or other physical structures intended to benefit a community fall apart, quickly need repair, or become unsafe; "projects can fuel conflict among and within communities"—by partnering with certain organizations or agencies over others, for example, universities might further entrench local animosities or competitions for scarce resources; "projects focus on the symptoms of poverty rather than its causes," primarily through approaches to charity and aid that fail to attend to the structural conditions through which poverty in some places or for some people becomes naturalized; "volunteers often take the place of local labour" (see also Zimmerman 2002 on this point); and "projects often reinforce neoliberal policies that weaken governments and allow foreign donors to determine social policy" (2012, 22). Similar harms are undoubtedly also a risk of CE, even when practised in communities local to our universities. Thus, the neoliberal and colonial/imperialist impulses underpinning this widespread turn to CE should, at the very least, make us cautious about the development and implementation of such projects, as well as about how we talk about and represent the importance and value of CE as an institutional priority.

The Insidiousness of Neoliberal Governmentality

At a 2012 panel on the turn to CE (one of the "Big Thinking" events at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, sponsored by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and composed of various deans and VPs advocating for CE), one panellist seemed quite excited to pronounce that of course community can mean many things, including "the business community." While he did not elaborate, I would interpret his comment as suggesting that CE practices that contribute to the everyday advancement of global capitalism and further the facilitation of market-driven values into all aspects of social life can and should be considered as valuable a form of CE as practices that focus on challenging the myriad injustices produced and reinforced by our current economic system. At my most cynical, I imagine that this will result in CE projects the university "serves" the business community with by providing free labour and/or the free development of products of monetary value, while the business community in turn comes to further appreciate the value of making financial donations to its new partner. Indeed, in a 2012 issue of *Academic Matters*, an article that ostensibly had nothing to do with CE mentioned a recent case in the US in which a university designed a course that had, as its central goal, the creation of a website and advertising campaign for a consortium of companies, where the CEO was an alumnus and major university donor (Ginsberg 2012, 25).

It concerns me that there seems to be very little discussion about the ethical quandaries involved in practising CE with the for-profit business "community." Even in the more traditional model of CE as serving a community's needs, we need to be asking about the ethics of providing such services via university students at a moment when vast government cuts are decimating the public sector. Non-profit and charitable organizations, as well as public services in the health, education, and justice sectors, are increasingly unable to meet the needs of the communities they are intended to serve, and could easily become reliant on universities that compel their students to attempt to fill the roles of laid-off workers if we are not paying attention. In other words, the university might contribute to advancing neoliberal transformations of the public sector by offering students private credentialing for undertaking work formerly done by public sector workers. Both through the increasing interest in developing partnerships with for-profit businesses and industry, and by stepping in to fill the void created by a massive reduction in public and social services, the turn to CE furthers neoliberal ideologies and economic reforms. But really, one has to wonder if furthering neoliberal agendas is perhaps what governments have in mind by encouraging this turn to CE in the first place. It is no coincidence that there was such an upsurge in the development of service-learning programs in the economically strapped early 1990s in the US, while we

witnessed the same sort of transformation in Canada at the exact same moment as the ideologically driven neoliberal restructuring of the public sector under former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government.

Engaging with Feminist, Post-colonial, and Indigenous Theorizing: Possibilities for (More) Ethical Encounters

An advertisement for the same "Big Thinking" panel on "Research, Education, and Service to the Community" held at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in 2012 conveys a clear sense of what haunts the university's recent turn to CE. For Avery Gordon, "haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (1997, 8). Gordon is interested in projects tracking "that which makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time," and in forces that "cajol[e] us to reconsider . . . the very distinctions between there and not there, past and present" (6). Although this panel ostensibly had nothing to do with Indigeneity, an advertisement for the panel featured a photograph of Haida artist Bill Reid's well-known sculpture *The Raven and the First Men* overlaid by text that proclaims: "Research preserves our culture, and research builds communities." This claim and image mark the absent-but-still-seething presence of colonial imaginaries in the dominant rhetorics of CE. The affirming claims of the advertisement are haunted by the absent presence of a history (and present) in which Indigenous communities are not only "preserved" and "built" but also appropriated, exploited, and decimated in the name of research. While certainly some Indigenous communities benefit from particular approaches to research, many communities have also been forced to reclaim control of their languages, cultural products, knowledges, and stories from anthropologists, scientists, historians, and literary scholars (it is telling, for example, that the text of the "Big Thinking" panel advertisement that overlays Reid's sculpture is printed in English and French, but *not* in Haida or any other Indigenous language). It is the tendency to idealize the "preserving" and "building" functions of CE while conveniently remaining silent about the exploitative and harmful, even violent ones, that concerns me. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith insists,

> From the vantage point of the colonized . . . the term "research" is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. . . . The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized people. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. (1999, 1)

This history of the exploitation and harm that can arise from universities' "engagement" with marginalized and colonized communities is precisely what haunts the dominant rhetoric that frames CE as a practice of purportedly harmless benevolence: these histories are always *present,* even in the face of efforts to vanquish and/or depoliticize them.

What might the scholarship and practice of CE gain by engaging with feminist, post-colonial, and Indigenous theorizing? If we concede that the university has a long (and ongoing) history of doing various communities harm, then perhaps it might be beneficial to examine the current move to CE in relation to theorizing and activism arising from transnational feminist organizing, politicized approaches to reconciliation, and decolonizing struggles. What we might gain from grappling with insights from these approaches is recognition of the futility of trying to define a community in advance of a shared struggle, and an acknowledgement that the "we" of any community *is the very thing that needs to be worked toward.* Many transnational feminist theorists have long acknowledged, for example, that "full ethical engagement" with others is actually not a possibility at present because any alliance across differences is necessarily shaped by deeply entrenched injustices and inequalities (Spivak in Ahmed 2000, 178). Instead, Ahmed emphasizes "the intimacy of the political and the ethical as ways of achieving 'better' relationship[s] to others" (2000, 179), and for her, "the 'we' in such a collective politics is what must be worked for, rather than being the foundation of our collective work" (180). Thus, the work of transnational feminist alliances necessarily involves "remaking *what it is that we may yet have in common*" (181, emphasis in original). By refusing either to collapse or essentialize differences, Ahmed emphasizes the difficult work of building communities premised on greater justice. Such alliances require "a proximity that does not allow merger, benevolence or knowledge" (178)—in other words, we cannot assume to be, become, or know the "others" with whom we might build such alliances, nor can we assume that our actions will necessarily "do good." Similarly, Andrew Schaap, a political theorist of post-colonial reconciliation, argues that there is a problem with "representing community as the given end of politics rather than a contingent historical possibility that conditions the possibility of politics in the present" (2007, 26). As he elaborates, "the conflicts of the past can only be 'resolved' and community thereby 'restored' by a reductive representation that silences political objections that question how such a 'we' is possible in the first place. Yet it is precisely the possibility of such questioning that is the enabling condition of a reconciliatory politics" (26). Indigenous theorists Marie Battiste and James [Sákéj] Youngblood Henderson advocate an engagement with Indigenous epistemologies that both acknowledges the risks of "cognitive imperialism" but also recognizes the important contributions of Indigenous knowledge