

# 'You're Getting Two For One With Me': Difficult New Sites Of Community Engagement Leadership Within Higher Education

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Résumé de l'article

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## **‘You’re Getting Two For One With Me’: Difficult New Sites of Community Engagement Leadership Within Higher Education**

**David Peacock, Katy Campbell**

**ABSTRACT** This article profiles the professional identities of two postsecondary staff leading the adaptation and adoption of the elective Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement in their institutions in Australia and Canada. It explores the tensions and frustrations, as well as opportunities, experienced by these “third space” or “community engagement professional” staff, who often struggle to find recognition of the value of their work within their institution. These staff portraits point to two sources of both personal and institutional misrecognition of community engagement professionals and the community engagement practice more generally: gender intersecting with race, and the relegation of community engagement to an external relations function that runs parallel to the core academic purposes of the institution.

**KEYWORDS** Carnegie Community Engagement Classification pilots, community engagement professionals, Australian and Canadian higher education

As postsecondary institutions are facing increasing pressure from governments, private funders, employers, and their host communities to demonstrate their value beyond the academy, they are clearly looking for evidence to validate their impacts for local as well as global communities (Hazelkorn, 2016; Benneworth et al, 2018). The Carnegie Foundation’s Elective Community Engagement Classification system – a kind of quality assurance model — has expanded beyond the United States and is now partnering with Australian and Canadian postsecondary consortia (a pilot project was ultimately abandoned in Ireland; see McIlraith et al, 2021) to expand its own impacts and to learn if and how this model can be adapted to suit other higher education systems and cultures (Simon Fraser, n.d.; University of Technology Sydney, n.d.). These pilots represent an emerging movement within higher education that seeks to bolster the relevance and impacts of a postsecondary institution’s engagement with its host communities (Benneworth et al, 2018). The internationalization of the Carnegie Community Classification system is also a phenomenon being enacted, at least in Canada and Australia as will be seen below, primarily by professionally designated staff in postsecondary institutions working in partnership with academics carrying administrative roles.

In this article, we highlight the role of two of these postsecondary staff – one Australian, and one Canadian - who are leading this work across their institutions and are collaborating

with other institutions within their country to create new and culturally relevant standards and benchmarks for the practice of community engagement. The first author is a dual Australian-Canadian citizen and has experience across both jurisdictions in the field of community engagement theory practice in postsecondary education. Through their current role within their institution leading community engaged learning, they have informed their institution's participation in the Canadian pilot. The secondary author, as a feminist scholar and senior leader in community engaged scholarship in Canada and of the U.S. movements (like the Carnegie Classification Community Engagement Classification system), has personal experience of the misrecognitions of the value of community engaged scholarship within the academy.

The article seeks to add to the existing body of research on "third space professionals" (Whitchurch, 2012) and their functions within postsecondary education, which have effectively hybridized the traditionally distinct practices of academics and managers. By providing an empirical account of the functions and identities of these third space professionals within the community engagement field, across Canadian and Australian jurisdictions, this paper advances the scholarship of "community engagement professionals" (Dostilio, 2017; Schyndel, Pearl and Purcell, 2019) and reveals the tensions, frustrations and opportunities for staff leading community engagement activity. By attending to the operations of power as they flow through racialized and gendered practices in community engagement, the paper provides new insights into the struggle for recognition and acceptance faced by many community engaged professionals, most of whom identify as women.

Finally, by listening to and amplifying the perspectives of third space professionals engaged in community engagement practice, the article recognizes their leadership and demonstrates new possibilities for professional staff within contemporary higher education (Vales & Carter, 2016).

### **Defining Community Engagement**

As postsecondary institutions in both Canada and Australia are adapting and adopting the U.S. based Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement system, it is helpful at this point to understand the Carnegie definition:

The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good. (Public Purpose Institute, n.d.)

The Carnegie classification purposes to mark out a distinctive space of practice that is not concerned with technical knowledge transfer, patents, and business development, but with the broadly socio-cultural and democratic outcomes which arise when engagement is embedded across the research and teaching functions of a postsecondary institution.

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The staff responsible in the Australian and Canadian Carnegie Pilots for leading, organizing, supporting and maximizing the value of an institution's research, teaching and service for the benefit of communities are those we are calling community engaged professionals. As will be demonstrated, these staff often face a precarity in their work, and frequent misrecognitions of their roles and value. These are the paradoxes and dilemmas (Whitchurch, 2012) experienced by third space professionals as they face entrenched work place cultures often resistant to their emerging roles.

### **Third Space Professionals**

The literature on community engagement professionals sits within a larger literature on the rise of what have been called “new higher education professionals” (Schneijderberg & Merkator, 2013). The increasing complexity of postsecondary institutions has required a heightened “differentiation and professionalisation of functions” and the emergence of new, specific knowledges and competencies not shared by all those engaging in the traditional roles of higher education (p. 53). In the European context, as Schneijderberg & Merkator (2013) note, the primary work of the higher education professional has been to prepare and support management decisions and to establish services to support the core academic work of research and teaching. Celia Whitchurch (2008, 2012) has developed the terms “third space” and “blended” professionals to describe these new positions within higher education, and to those staff, often with graduate degree training, whose work occupied spaces between or across professional and academic activity. Dostilio (2017) has helpfully summarized Whitchurch's “third space professional” as follows:

...we leverage professional and academic expertise; straddle on and off-campus environments; facilitate internal and external boundary-crossing projects; exert relational leadership that often activates networks rather than hierarchy; and maintain portfolios of work that include management, teaching, program administration, and research. (p. 6).

Clearly in Whitchurch's conception, the third space professional can be undertaking traditional academic functions, such as research and teaching, as well as managerial functions and project management, regardless of that staff person's institutional designation. Community engagement functions require staff with transdisciplinary (across academic and community knowledge cultures; see Kreber, 2009) and interdisciplinary capabilities (working through disciplinary articulations within the academy).

### **Carnegie and Community Engagement Professionals**

In the United States, the development and enactment of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement process (beginning in 2006) has further advanced the work of academic professionals in community engagement (Welsh & Saltmarsh, 2013). Weerts and Sandmann (2008; 2010), reflecting on this work and the subsequent development of scholarly

and professional community engagement networks such as the Outreach and Engagement Practitioner Network of the Engaged Scholarship Consortium (n.d.), took up the discourse of the “boundary spanner” to interpret the new roles and functions of community engagement activity. Particularly within research-intensive institutions, community engagement involves boundary-spanning activities performed by “community-based problem solvers, technical experts, internal engagement advocates, and engagement champions” (Weerts and Sandmann, 2010, p. 651). These are complex roles performed by people across differing levels of the institution; community engagement cannot be “confined to the jobs of community relations staff” (Weerts and Sandmann, 2010, p. 651.).

Dostilio (2017) describes an emerging identity and set of practices for community engagement leaders, scholars and practitioners, and administrators, and in so doing moves beyond structural analyses of community engagement units developed in response to the Carnegie classification (Welch & Saltmarsh, 2013). Dostilio and Perry (2017) define the role of the community engagement professional as “professional staff whose primary job is to support and administer community-campus engagement”, inclusive of staff directing centres of engagement who maintain active scholarly agendas (p. 1; p. 10). They are concerned with developing not only a set of knowledges and technical competencies for community engagement professionals, but also, uniquely in the literature to date, an ethics to support the professionalization of community engagement staff (Dostilio and Perry, 2017, pp. 6-8). Dostilio and Perry (2017) see community engagement professionals as “change agents” engaged in the task to involve higher education in work required to achieve the ultimate goal of “a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world” (p. 2). Community engagement professionals are “change agents who exert transformational leadership within specific institutions of higher education and within the field of community engagement more broadly”, and help to realize “postsecondary education’s civic purpose” (Dostilio & Perry, 2017, p. 2). Our research seeks to develop this scholarship, and to understand more clearly the roles and emerging identities of community engagement scholars, practitioners, and professionals, and the changes they seek within their institutions and wider communities. Our point of departure is the current roles of the staff leading the Carnegie Community Engagement Pilots in Australia and Canada, whose work seeks not only to further the tasks of faculty or staff specific community engaged scholarship and learning projects, but coordinates the scholarly and practice based work across the post-secondary institution and national field.

### **Community Engagement Professionals and Gender**

Both Whitchurch and Dostilio theorize the work of third space professionals and community engagement professionals without explicit reference to the operations of gender. Yet community engaged scholarship and practice is arguably a feminized discipline and associated with feminized disciplines like education and health care (Abes, et al., 2002). Although there is no comparable research published for the Canadian higher education field, higher education research in the United States has found that staff occupying middle-level, academic

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and managerial positions have been found to be disproportionately gendered and racialized (see Guarino & Borden, 2017; Lechuga, 2012; Hanasono et al., 2018; Miller, Howell & Struve, 2019).

Community engaged professionals are also typically engaged in heavily relational work with external partners to the university, with their colleagues, and with students. Fostering, sustaining, and developing these relationships and partnerships is core to the work of creating mutually beneficial outcomes for all participants. Yet this requires emotional labour which, as has been noted by many, is borne unequally by women (Lawless, 2018) and particularly by racialized women (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Ispa-landa & Thomas, 2019; Stewart, 2019). Emotional labour comprises the time and attitudes toward in-depth caretaking, relationship development, and relationship maintenance (Lawless, 2018, p. 88). Academic “service” work, including teaching diversity classes or working with diverse students, counselling, mentoring, service-learning, committee membership, and faculty development are all higher education workplace practices overwhelmingly undertaken by women (Harley, 2008; Lechuga, 2012; Miller, Howell & Struve, 2019; Turner, Myers & Cresswell, 1999). To better trace the emerging identities and practices of community engagement professionals, specific analyses of the operations of gender and race within the academy are required.

## **Methods**

We provide an analysis of two staff portraits, one from Australia and one from Canada, in a purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) of our wider group of 15 participants. One woman staff member had a PhD and identified strongly as an academic. The other, male participant had an MBA and identified as a professional in external relations and communications. These two identities of the community engagement professional — a woman leader and academic struggling for legitimacy and security, and a professional leader more generally mediating between the needs of communities and the virtuous story-telling of the institution — represent two dominant experiences within community engagement leadership in Australian and Canadian postsecondary education. Together these accounts demonstrate the tensions, exclusions, conflicts and opportunities for the work of contemporary community engagement professionals.

Our study of the Carnegie Pilot projects in Australia and Canada was a part of a wider research project examining the sociocultural influences at play in the institutionalization of community engagement (University of Alberta Research Information Services, Pro00090705). We produced data for this paper through semi-structured interviews with staff from the Australian and Canadian Universities actively engaged in the leadership of their institutions’ Carnegie Classification applications. From the 16 Canadian universities and colleges participating in the Pilot, we recruited seven staff for interviews from across these institutions. Of the 10 Australian universities participating in their pilot, we also recruited eight staff. Additionally, the authors provided advice to our own institution’s planning committee tasked with producing the Carnegie application, and through this participant-observer status (Siegel, 2018) were able to make presentations on our research to both the Australian and Canadian cohorts, from whom we also sought to recruit participants. Presentations, recruitment, and

interviews were conducted in person in Sydney at an Australian cohort gathering over February 3-4, 2020 (between the bushfires and the onset of COVID-19!), while the presentation and recruitment occurred online for the Canadian Cohort on April 24, 2020, with subsequent interviews conducted online through the Canadian spring and summer of 2020.

We communicated our research plans and objectives to the scholar with responsibility for the international pilots, the Visiting Fellow of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching who was based, at the time, at the Swearer Centre for Public Service at Brown University. They acted as a kind of gatekeeper who enabled the research to progress, with the consent of staff and institutions. After a recent period of instability in governance in the elective community engagement classification (Whitford, 2022), all the Carnegie Classifications are now administered through the American Council of Education (ACE, 2022).

Each participant interviewed had institutional responsibilities for organizing the Carnegie classification work within their institution. Although all, in different ways, were performing the work of a community engagement professional (Dostilio, 2017), whose leadership was emerging from a 'third space' (Whitchurch, 2012) that blurred the lines between academic and professional leadership, they did so with particular challenges and tensions. Our 15 interviews of staff from Carnegie Pilots in both the Australian and Canadian contexts suggest community engagement leadership to be a gendered practice conducted by highly educated people, mostly located within middle and sometimes upper levels of management (unit directors and managers, deputy-vice chancellors). Four of the 15 interviewed were located in External Relations units, while in other instances staff were connected to an Engagement office or unit with structural connections to external or community relations units, sometimes connected to a Provost or Vice-Chancellor's office.

The majority are women (12 out of 15), and nearly all are highly educated (seven PhDs, six Masters, one Bachelor degree, one Diploma). Significantly for us, however, in light of the critical academic work involved through this Carnegie classification process that positions the institution for enhanced and sustained community engagement flowing from research and teaching, only two of the 15 people interviewed were defined by their institution as occupying an academic position. The vast majority of people providing a vision and policy coherence for community engagement work in Canada and Australia postsecondary institutions were professional staff.

As was noted in an internal report with Carnegie feedback to Canadian institutions after they had each submitted their institutional plans, community engagement was closely aligned with 'external relations', or 'community relations' offices and functions, and was seldom housed on the academic side of the institution, as is more often the case in the United States (Carnegie, 2021). Our access to this internal report reflected our participant-observer status within the Canadian cohort, with both authors participating on our own institution's Carnegie Pilot committee. We pick up this theme on external relations and community engagement below in our conversations with the Canadian participant, Mark.

We asked participants about their academic and professional backgrounds and how they came to lead community engagement work within their institutions. We also asked about their

aspirations for the classification work in their country, and if and how the classification process would advance their own institution's engagement agenda. A narrative inquiry method was utilized, sensitive to feminist perspectives related to power dynamics, and the experiences of institutional misrecognition (Fraser, 2000). Fraser (2000) defines misrecognition as a "social subordination in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life as a result of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as relatively unworthy of respect or esteem" (p. 23). Close attention was paid to reported exclusions in staff work, acknowledging that stories, and storytelling, is gendered (Woodiwiss et al., 2017). We traced through the interviews any alignment, or conflict, between the institutional designation of their work and position, and the participant's own identities in their work. Our presuppositions for the interviews were that professional identities are never entirely stable constructions, and are shaped by complex personal and contextual factors (Clarke et al., 2013). We were also attentive to how the structural relations of race and gender mapped onto personal identities, and how the hierarchies of the field of postsecondary institutions structured the range of academic and professional identities available for actors (McNay, 1999).

Acker's (2014) review of women's experiences in university management provided another lens for our interviews and narrative inquiry. We probed in the conversations the "persistence of 'masculinist' ways of working (Kloot, 2004; Priola, 2007); the emotional management work involved in women's leadership (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007)... women's caring responsibilities and the 'care-less' expectations for managers (Grummell, Devine, & Lynch, 2009)...(and) differences among universities in creating a climate supportive of women managers" (Griffiths, 2012; Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000; as cited in Acker, 2014, p.74.)

### *Portraits of Two Community Engagement Professionals*

**Akinya: Manager of Community Engagement.** Akinya is a manager of community engagement at an urban, "innovative research university" in Australia and reports to a senior deputy Vice-Chancellor (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020). Born and educated in West Africa, Akinya pursued post-graduate work in the United States before coming to work in Australia. She brokers partnerships for community engaged learning at her institution and assists the university in strategically thinking through its extensive community engagement initiatives and commitments. Akinya provides, she says, a 'critical data source' for the Carnegie application, recording initiatives and practices from across her university, and co-chairing a university-wide engagement network. She holds a PhD in Educational Policy from the United States, focused on service-learning pedagogies, and is now studying for a second PhD in the social sciences.

In our interviews with her, Akinya consistently identified as an academic, despite the fact that she was designated by her institution as a professional staff person as she conducted her Carnegie-related work. Positions that have spanned the academic and professional divide have been a feature of her employment within higher education in Australia. She describes the somewhat arbitrary nature of these designations as follows:



A job I held prior to this one...as a curriculum advisor, there I was a professional staff. And prior to that, I did the same work for another institution, even though I was classified there as an academic director of programs. It was pretty much the same job, just different institutions, different classifications... regardless of the fact that in the engagement space, you are both doing such similar things - connecting with partners, organizing things. (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020)

This “role ambiguity” (Smith et al, 2018) Akinya describes relates not so much to a staff person’s insecurity about their competence in undertaking the activities themselves, but rather how the they are being (mis)recognized by the institution though an institutional designation at odds with their own identity in their work. The institutional designation of one’s work does not always align with how one understands their own identity within the institution. Three interviewees of the 15 identify differently to their institutional designation: a man in a senior executive position is ascribed as an academic within his role, while he identifies himself as a professional. On the other hand, two women identify as either a “pracademic” or academic, while being ascribed as professional staff. The experiences of these two women, including Akinya, describe a misalignment of their work and self-identity with that which their institution affixes.

Akinya suspects that some of this misrecognition of her academic abilities through the institutional professional designation comes about because of her gender and race. She noted:

One... of the things that I’ve found quite interesting is that intersection between being female and being of African descent. So half the time, you’re not really sure which one to point a finger at, but you do know sometimes they’re both at play. Sometimes it’s one at play sometimes it’s the other at play. (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020).

Akinya interprets the lack of recognition of her capabilities by her institution according to her gender. While in her case, race and gender intersect for her in ways she experiences negatively, it is gender she attributes most to her exclusion.

I think that gender role ... has been the primary reason for a lot of my exclusions or lack of recognition in some areas... there’s almost an expectation that this is a profession that’s more inclined towards females and in many platforms you will find there are more females represented in that space than there are males. (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020).

Working together in complex yet powerful ways, gender and race-based discrimination is understood by Akinya as leading to misrecognitions from her colleagues and institution.

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Akinya tells the following story about her experience of the “boys club” working against her desire for an academic appointment as a community engagement expert:

I found (it) quite curious...that I did the exact same workload as did my male colleague. When it came to decisions ... that my position be transformed, or recognized as an academic appointment, which my male colleague enjoyed...I was told that it would not be considered at this point in time because enough favours had already been done. It was a role that was sitting with the main decision making powers - well, in ... the boys' club. What was quite explicit here was that it was not about the role, but about who the social connections were. Since I'm not in the boys' club, I was excluded from a number of conversations that are made (there). My male colleague who performed a similar role to what I was performing in my community engagement space, continued to enjoy the benefits of his work being classified as academic work. Whereas my work was considered professional, and I attribute that primarily to gender and the exclusion from spaces where these conversations as to who gets recognized and who doesn't get recognized. (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020).

As a woman of West African descent, Akinya also sees race as contributing to her experiences of misrecognition and “tokenizing” in her work, intersecting with these primary gender based exclusions.

I was selected to lead a project on inclusion of African diaspora...I had done some work in that area just a few months before that particular appointment. And I was a natural fit because of my African descent. This experience highlighted the whole tokenistic approach – taking race and giving you the sort of currency that is needed to support a rhetoric, as opposed to the deeply integrated need to function and recognize people of different races. I ended up working quite a bit on frameworks for inclusion and that sort of thing. But... this never went anywhere. This is yet another area where I cannot quite put my finger on whether the issue was based on race or whether the issue was anything other than race. But one thing that was clear was that my selection to prepare that project was due to my race, which in many ways was an advantage. But in some ways it was a tokenizing, versus the project being able to stand on its own two feet and actually be taken as an objective project in and of itself. (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020).

Akinya understands her appointment as a tokenistic gesture by the institution instead of a genuine attempt to recognize the ongoing work of social inclusion, and to institutionalize this function through an academic and ongoing appointment. She further describes this “tokenism”

as simply “checking boxes as opposed to actually recognizing the sort of power and potential knowledge that they bring to the table” (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020).

This misrecognition, and even suspicion, of Akinya came from other non-academic staff in the institution as well. In fulfilling the role of a community engagement professional with an academic background, Akinya also notes how for some she was not “really” a professional:

A lot of (my) colleagues...were professional staff and we worked very well together. But when you get into the formal setting, academics would say, “Oh, professional staff do this,” and professional staff, they always had snide remarks about academics. And so they’d make a snide remark and then they look at me...,”Okay, but we’re not talking about you”. There’s also a particular culture around you being of greater value as an academic and you being of lesser value as a professional staff. And because I had my doctorate...I mean, every breath of me reeks that of an academic - I really felt the brunt of it where you would then have even another professional staff member just trying to put you down... (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020).

Akinya expresses feelings of frustration of not really being part of the team, or recognized by her professional peers. This is the difficulty of those boundary-spanning community engagement professionals – they are often misrecognized on both sides of the academic/managerial divide. Akinya’s presence among her professional colleagues, alongside her (apparent) strong academic identity, causes mistrust from her professional colleagues, who see in her someone unlike themselves. We suspect race and gender also operate here to Akinya’s detriment, in addition to the cultural differences between those the institution designates as “academic” and then “non-academic” or “support staff”.

An academic, with extensive community-based experience, can bring many strengths to a professional position within higher education. Akinya describes this as the university getting double the value for her work:

You’re getting two for one with me...you’re getting a professional staff, everything that comes with that plus with the added benefits of academic thinking. So you have an academic hat on and a professional staff on...I think a lot of institutions are getting a lot of (two-for-one) nowadays, because when I look at the position title itself for the job, it really does not require a doctorate. But a lot of them are being filled by people who have doctorates. (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020).

Akinya recognizes here that, on the one hand, a PhD in contemporary higher education is not sufficient for being employed as a tenured or continuing academic appointment. Yet universities are employing people into these professional positions because they have higher degrees, even a PhD, because there is a recognition that they bring value to the institution.

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It is also because in the case of community engaged scholarship and practice, the institution knows that the work requires advanced knowledge of the purposes of higher education. The disjuncture seems to be that this value is not attributed, institutionally, to the staff person in the role. It is likely that by not employing someone like Akinya in an academic role, the institution would be saving money over time. The Carnegie classification pilot process requires community engaged professionals with a high degree of professional project management skills. Yet it also benefits from staff such as Akinya, who have the academic sensibilities and capabilities to be able to articulate the value of community engagement within the academy.

As an academically trained woman of West African descent managing community engagement and coordinating her institution's Carnegie pilot application, Akinya still experiences a suspicion of her academic bona-fides. In a particularly condescending example of this behavior from colleagues. Akinya notes:

A lot of times I would propose things and I'd be told, "No, no, you're punching above your weight." ... I got a lot of government funding for some of the service-learning programs that our students do. But then as soon as I changed over in terms of reporting lines, the person who came in next was very restrictive and would make remarks like, "How did you get permission to even apply for that as a professional staff member?" So he would forget that I'm actually a doctor by, right...you can call me whatever you want, but you cannot take my nominals away from me. (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020).

One of the core institutional distinctions among classes of employees in an academic institution, especially the more research-intensive institutions, is whether staff are authorized to apply for, and then hold, external research funds. Akinya proved she was successful at doing this, expressing her view that it was core to her role. In most institutions of higher education, this policy does turn on whether one has a PhD. There are many contract instructors with doctoral degrees that also cannot apply for, and hold, external research funds. These ambiguities and arbitrary applications of policy are prevalent in the world of community engagement professionals in contemporary higher education. These misrecognitions and refusals to validate successful work can take their toll on staff, and lead to a heightened sense of frustration and precarity.

Neither professional enough, nor academic enough, despite progress towards a second doctorate, Akinya's experiences are not unique to community engagement staff occupying a still indeterminate, risky third space (Whitchurch, 2012) in higher education.

Akinya's experiences resonate with those found in Acker's (2014) study of women university leaders. There, the micropolitics in higher education placed lower middle managers, especially those reporting to males, in "helper" roles where they encountered higher expectations for caring and unrecognized "glue work" (Acker, 2014, p. 79). Akinya's academic managers rely on her to lead the work of engagement yet misrecognize it as "helper" work.

Still, what attracts people like Akinya to these roles is the creative possibilities they afford, and the enjoyment of working on interdisciplinary and cross-institutional projects.

I like it quite a lot just simply because of that latitude it gives you to bring in your thoughts around this sort of creative space and creative environment and just how we can then work together on things. This particular project [Carnegie classification] has been a good one. (Akinya, interview, February 6, 2020).

As a community engagement professional working on high level strategic planning around community engagement, Akinya both enjoys the creativity and freedom within her work, while at the same time experiences the frustrations of institutional and inter-personal misrecognitions of her role and capabilities.

Since we interviewed her, however, Akinya has moved on from her Carnegie work, now supporting a work-integrated learning agenda for her institution. She did manage to negotiate an academic appointment as a “consultant”.

**Mark: Director of Community Engagement.** Mark, a white male, directs a community engagement centre at a Canadian university. He reports to a Vice President of External Relations. If Akinya’s disposition is academic in bearing, Mark’s is that of a professional. He began his work in the postsecondary sector as student recruiter and gained an MBA in partnership and business development. Mark has a vital leadership role in the Carnegie Pilot process, both within his institution and beyond. He describes the classification process as it has unfolded in his institution in the following way:

It is a very long, robust set of questions that really encourage people and institutions to explore possibilities in partnership in a pretty significant way. [Our] submission, for instance, is going to be over 100 pages of work. In some places it’s reporting out some things but in most places it’s about identifying that there are places, there are lots of gaps in [our] infrastructure, for instance, when it comes to supporting community engagement and the opportunities that come with it that need to be addressed for the institution do this well and respectfully with community. (Mark, interview, September 30, 2020).

Mark’s institution has invested in employing a full-time staff person to write the Carnegie application. This staff person takes advice from an advisory committee that Mark participates on to represent the community engagement unit he leads. Although not all participating institutions in Carnegie pilots have been able to mobilize these institutional resources for the work, those that have done so have signaled their intention to centre community engagement within the institution.

In his current role, Mark defines his purpose as follows:

The leadership role that I have at the university is really around supporting people, supporting partnerships and working to grow [our university’s] capacity for community engagement that enriches scholarship and offers opportunities

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for community-engaged learning. (Mark, interview, September 30, 2020).

Many so called “non-academic staff” define themselves, and are defined by their academic colleagues and institution, as providing support for others. They are “support staff”. While for Akinya this support function tended to diminish her status within her academic collaborations, for Mark, this support is understood and experienced as leadership. It is leadership producing positive outcomes for communities via community engaged learning and community-based research. As a community engagement professional, Mark sees his role and identity as both supporting community engagement and practicing it. When we asked him whether his outreach and engagement unit did community engagement work directly, or supported others to do so, he responded as follows:

I would characterize it as both. There are particular initiatives that we steward directly with personnel in the office. (For example) we run a centre...called the [Corporate sponsored and named] Community Engagement Centre that has...35 different partnerships and approximately the same number of programs in place. We have one person in the office that manages that entity. But we also direct a number of incentive-based programs to encourage others at the university take part in building partnership including a seed fund that allocates approximately \$120,000 per year to around 20 partnerships per year. (Mark, interview, September 30, 2020).

The work involves building the capacity and structuring incentives for community engaged learning and research to be taken up by others to create and sustain partnerships serving public ends. It also involves adroit relations with organizations seeking to contribute philanthropic or corporate social responsibility funds to boost the work. The tradition of philanthropic giving for community engagement is more developed in North America than in Australia, even if there is less of this tradition in Canada than the United States. Strong links between community engagement and the advancement, alumni and external relations units, however, sometimes can create a suspicion from academics over the academic merit of certain engagement activity. Particularly in research-intensive institutions, competitively won research grants and income are the gold standard, and philanthropic support, while often vital to sustaining community engagement, has less prestige for the academy. That is a core role that Mark attends to as a community engagement professional, structuring community engagement as a core mission of the institution and preventing it from being reduced to an exercise in brand reputation and management. When describing the origins of his position, Mark notes:

...community engagement has been seen...as residing in the Vice-Provost External Relations portfolio, even though there’s all kinds of really good and really important community partnership work happening between specific faculty members and community in a whole bunch of different ways... But

this was an opportunity to put community engagement at the front of folks who are in the Vice Provost Academic and Vice Provost research portfolios in a way where they had control to mobilize things, so that community engagement could be further socialized as a way to enrich teaching, learning, research and creative activity. [This involves] the combination of community partnership work together with scholarly work in recognition of both academic knowledge, but also of community knowledge and the ability to bring those knowledge forms together to provide options for partnership and co-creation. (Mark, interview, September 30, 2020).

As a community engagement professional, Mark positions his work squarely as serving the academic work of the institution. From his interview with us, Mark noted that he and his team “build the infrastructure” for a coordination of community engagement beyond the work already taking place in the faculties to “offer opportunities to enrich the mission of the university when it comes to academia and research” (Mark, interview, September 30, 2020). Mark describes the motivations for his work as follows:

My interest in working in community engagement is to look for opportunities for knowledge mobilization, learning and research that results in differences in communities, which are supportive of the people in those communities (Mark, interview, September 30, 2020).

While community engagement activity serves the academic mission of the institution it secondarily, for Mark, supports the institution itself.

When asked specifically whether community engagement was a strategic branding exercise for this institution, Mark explains:

If [institution] is able to engage in this in the right way... the reputational aspects associated with being... a leading community-engaged university will come in time as well. But the exercise is not one of trying to build our brand first; from my perspective it's about building partnership with communities and then your organizational brand follows that. You might get a different answer if you ask people in our marketing communications department and external relations but we're working on them too (Mark, interview, September 30, 2020).

Mark expands on the tensions within the academic side and marketing side of community engagement within his institution:

The realities of being an office of community engagement within the Vice Provost external relations group, which also includes the university's communications and marketing group, a big group compared to any other

department, is that the communications and marketing folks are always thinking about [our institution's] reputation and brand and stewarding brand and reputation. Whereas our [community engagement] office's point of view or perspective is that we want to spend time with partners and in partnership to give voice to those partners and to our university at the same time, equally, and to the best of our ability. To tell those stories together (Mark, interview, September 30, 2020).

As a community engagement professional navigating his institution's dual imperative to create compelling stories of its virtuous involvements in community and to create meaningful partnerships generating mutually beneficial impacts, Mark straddles the practices of a marketer and a partnership developer; external relations and the practices of community-based research and learning. He does so with a self-confidence and security not often afforded a racialized, female "support staff" like Akinya (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). We asked Mark explicitly about whether he felt his leadership in community engagement had been accepted and recognized at least in part, both institutionally and nationally, because of his gender and race. Mark answered as follows:

Within the Canadian Pilot Cohort of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification and within my own institution, I am one voice of a large and diverse group of constituents who are working together to center and value EDI [equity, diversity and inclusion], reciprocity, and Reconciliation in learning, discovery, scholarship, partnership and change (Mark, personal correspondence, April 13, 2022).

Although admirably humble in perspective, given Mark's influence within the Canadian field, his response also displays a reticence to acknowledge and/or lack of awareness of how gender and race structure the career possibilities of community engagement professionals. We return to this point in the discussion below.

Nonetheless, emerging as a crucial leader of community engagement within his institution, and having become a director of community engagement, Mark ultimately identifies with the impacts of community engagement for communities:

And so the cherry at the end of things for us is a stronger relationship and a stronger partnership with a community group, whereas for the marketing communications folks the cherry is [the institutions] reputation, how we're doing in the rankings, that kind of thing (Mark, interview, Month Day, Year).

It is this identification of "community first" ethic that aligns Mark with Dostilio and Welch's (2019) conception of the community engagement professional, in his case within a non-academic, external relations portfolio.



## Discussion

The experiences of these two community engagement professionals leading their institution's Carnegie community classification applications reveal several tensions, conflicts and opportunities within their work. They point to some of the difficult sites of new community engagement leadership in contemporary higher education.

First, there is a precarity to the work of the community engagement professional, even when that staff is in a continuing position. Since we conducted the interviews, six staff (of the 15) have left their positions for other roles in their institutions or moved to the not-for-profit sector. Akinya has moved from community engagement to a position in work-integrated learning, although Mark has further secured his position as a leader within the Canadian Carnegie Pilot. Clearly the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on all participating postsecondary institutions in the past two years or so, and the resources for inter-institutional collaboration of all kinds have been harder to come by. The community engagement agenda, however, remains as vital to local communities as ever, with not-for-profit sectors in particular facing major restructuring, financial and human resource challenges. The pandemic saw frozen international student revenues, and declining government supports for postsecondary institutions in Australia (Zhou, 2021), and at least for some of the Canadian provinces such as Alberta (Lambert, 2021). Community engagement activities face increasing internal competition for scarce resources from faculty and executive leadership. In times of austerity, community engagement work is an easy target for institutions seeking to rationalize their operations. Its status as "core work" for the institution has often been contradicted in times of resource constraints, despite the rhetoric of senior executives. If community engagement is to be an institution-wide mandate and woven into research and teaching practices, and not simply "third mission" (Carl and Menter, 2021), it will need to be recognized as core academic work for the institution.

Second, the leaders of community engagement through the Carnegie pilots have been primarily women, and sometimes racialized women, which has both reproduced community engagement as a traditionally feminized field of practice and compounded at least some staff's experiences of misrecognition and the devaluing of their work within the institution. It has also contributed to the perceptions of community engagement as lower status work within the institution. As Akinya had told us above, although she brings a "two for one" value to her institution through her academic abilities and project management competency in her engagement of diverse communities, she was consistently devalued and questioned in her work. This moves beyond simply a paradox and dilemma (Whitchurch, 2012) for the community engagement professional to a case of racist and gendered discrimination, and exploitation, from the institution. Contemporary universities clearly need people such as Akinya, with her competent mix of academic insight and professional capacities with diverse communities, to create the social license and local community goodwill for much of their research and teaching that has less obvious connection to local taxpayers and those who have no higher education. The ability to create mutually beneficial partnerships for the benefit of both the academy and its host community and society is needed by institutions. Yet, in Akinya's case, the value

created by the community engagement professional is being siphoned off to the institution without sufficient return to the staff member. Although community engagement professionals are genuinely concerned with not exploiting community partners through their work, their own labour seems at risk of being taken for granted. While the exploitation of non-tenured or, in Australia, non-continuing academic workers is common, it is the academically trained, community engagement professional who seems particularly vulnerable given their field's low status within the academic community.

Mark's success in community engagement leadership as a white man is significant. Our reading of the literature and careful attention to our interviews suggest that race and gender may be significant in Mark's success in leading community engagement. Put another way, Mark's, obvious abilities for the work have been bolstered by their face-value acceptance by others, and their lack of second guessing of these competencies and exercise of leadership. In feminized professions, such as the field of community engagement professionals, men can sometimes perform their masculinity in a way that accrues advantages ("masculine capital", Huppertz and Goodwin, 2013). That Mark does not name or recognize this in his own career should not be surprising, nor interpreted unduly harshly on his professionalism. As Berger, Benschop & van den Brink (2015) have noted, "[p]ractising gender...is usually routine, nearly invisible to practitioners, and difficult to see or name overtly. The level of reflexivity with which gender is practised varies for different people (men and women) and is context-dependent" (citing Martin, 2001; p. 560). As Akinya narrated above, and as Einarsdottir, Christiansen, & Kristjansdottir (2018) have explained:

Women believe their gender reduces opportunities for professional development; they are seldom consulted in connection with major decision making, and because of their gender, they are not offered the most attractive types of work, promotions, or pay increases. (p. 4).

Perhaps unlike Mark, Akinya does not have the privilege to ignore the operations of power working through her gender and race.

Third, the community engagement professional is likely to face various misrecognitions and devaluations in their work if the practice of community engagement is aligned too closely with external relations. As was astutely observed by Mark, above, when community engagement becomes entangled with public relations and marketing, it risks becoming, and being seen by the academy as becoming, a crass form of brand and reputational management. Without embedding the community engagement function across research and teaching and learning, as well as "service", community engagement will have no academic legitimacy, and remain a marginalized activity within the institution. Community engagement professionals, regardless of their academic talents, are also more likely to become ignored or devalued in their work. Mark clearly was a successful leader of community engagement within his institution. This may have been because he did not have a PhD and did not identify as an academic, proving less of a competitive threat to other academics. Further research may assist here. Certainly Mark saw

his role as bridging the institution's academics and marketers to both create and extol the virtues of the impacts of authentic community engagement for all partners. Still, Mark's experience suggests the community engagement professional will need to have a clear-eyed understanding of the differences between institutional self-promotion and strategic competition and creating impacts for communities.

Finally, this ethical commitment to place communities first in the work of a community engagement professional came through strongly in all our interviews. This finding supports the research of Dostilio (2017) and Dostilio and Welch (2019), who regarded this ethical commitment as flowing from their "critical commitments" crucial to a community engagement professional, such as the ability to infuse practice and scholarship with examinations of power, privilege, and equity. This search for social justice and inclusion for communities remains a core, distinguishing feature of the community engagement professional within the wider class of new "higher educational professionals" (Schneijderberg & Merkator, 2013). It also creates a deeper affinity with the habitus of most academics than with other roles within the institution. Creating mutually beneficial partnerships for greater social impact requires, especially within Australia and Canada — both settler/colonizer societies after all — commitments to epistemological justice and a decolonizing of academic thought to create space for Indigenous academic and professional leadership on campuses. This remains a core challenge for community engagement professionals as they adapt the Carnegie classification for community engagement to local cultural contexts.

### **Conclusion**

This article has advanced the scholarship on community engagement professionals through examining new, contested sites for community engagement leadership in Australian and Canadian postsecondary institutions. The Carnegie Pilots, designed to provide a framework for adaptation to further the institutional goals of community engagement practice in both jurisdictions, has provided us a unique moment to study the practices, identities, struggles and opportunities for contemporary community engagement professionals. Their work to construct, organize, measure and account for institutional community engagement outcomes is an essential task in postsecondary education. We have shown how this work is being taken more seriously through the Carnegie Pilots, on the one hand, yet also in some cases, on the other, remains tangential to the core academic work of the institution. Our two staff portraits have shown how race and gender intersect with the lower status of community engagement practice in mutually reinforcing ways. When women (and especially racialized women) lead institutional engagement efforts, they can experience resistance and even hostility. Our interviews suggest professional men are more likely to experience success in their leadership of engagement, and less explicit resistance to and acceptance of this leadership. This seems more likely when community engagement leadership becomes support of academics and their work, rather than an academic practice in itself. More research is needed here to confirm this finding.

Although a challenging experience for many community engagement professionals, leading and managing community engagement efforts for an institution can also be a rewarding

role. Both Akinya and Mark, as they lead their institutions in the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification process, expressed their enjoyment of their roles that traversed many traditional boundaries within higher education — campus and community, academic and professional — and the brokering of collaborations across disciplinary divides. Being a community engagement professional means having increased freedom to enter diverse spaces both on and off campus, and to form relationships beyond those possible in traditional departmental and faculty structures within the university and across universities. The staff were involved in modes of engagement which sought to specifically highlight and promote community based knowledges and practices to the campus. As these positions and careers develop, community engagement roles will be enticing to those seeking to make meaningful changes to their communities. If campus leaders can become more creative with recognizing the contributions of community engagement professionals to the campus, and sustain their career trajectories, they will enable high quality people to support their social impacts and improve community goodwill for the institution.

Much research remains to be done in order to understand more fully the distinctive roles these staff play, and the identities they forge and have forged upon them. More theoretical work is needed to trace the connections between the relations of power among the fields of gender, race, and the hierarchies of postsecondary institutions themselves and how they interact in complex ways to produce and impact community engagement professionals' identities. More empirical study on the 'churn' of community engagement professionals through projects and into other areas of institutional work, or into other careers, would also be useful for understanding the unique challenges and opportunities for this much needed and yet still emerging practice.

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