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Sociological Solutions: Building Communities of Hope, Justice, and Joy

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Abstract

In her ASA presidential address, Misra calls for making solution-oriented, community-engaged, and participatory research more central in the discipline. She argues that solution-oriented work can strengthen the discipline, clarifying the promise and importance of sociology. She first discusses how sociologists engage in solution-oriented work that they communicate publicly. She then uses her collaborative work to suggest how to design research geared toward solving social problems. She emphasizes how feminist and decolonial methods that bring sociological researchers into collaborative and participatory partnerships with broader communities can develop transformative solutions, building communities of hope, justice, and joy. After discussing sociological approaches that empower communities, she emphasizes recognizing, valuing, and centering community-engaged research in the discipline.

Keywords

community-engaged research, decolonial methods, feminist methods, participatory research, public sociology

Sociology has enormous potential to do good in the world, and sociological research has reshaped public understanding of inequality in important ways. Yet, at this time of rising authoritarianism, attacks on academic freedom, and loss of trust in science, sociology must recenter itself (Berberoglu 2020; Butler

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2022; DeSantis 2024; Hartocollis 2024; Kamola 2024; Kennedy, Tyson, and Funk 2022; Roberts Lyer, Saliba, and Spannagel 2022; Ryder 2022; Sundar 2018; Thornhill 2023). There is an increasing consensus that sociologists should use our work to create a more just and humane world, translating our insights into action (Burawoy 2005; Gamoran 2023; Hartmann 2017; Nalani, Yoshikawa, and Carter 2021; Prasad 2021; Romero 2020; Smith 2023; Watts 2017). I argue that community-engaged sociology aimed at solving social problems can help rebuild democracy, strengthen academic freedom, and foster greater trust in science (Lenette 2022; London et al. forthcoming; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006). Sociologists in the United States must learn from how sociology has been practiced in other global locations by decentering conventional academic metrics, partnering with communities, and focusing on creating a better world (Burawoy 2005, 2014; Fire and Guestrin 2019; Gans 1989; Greenberg, London, and McKay 2022; London et al. forthcoming; Romero 2020; Smith 2022).[1]

This approach can also make our work as sociologists more meaningful. As Herbert Gans (1989:15) wrote in his presidential address, "Being useful, as teachers, researchers, writers, practitioners, and as experts, advisers, and critics, will make us feel more useful—and this will strengthen the commonality of purpose among us." More recently, Adam Gamoran (2023:33) argued that this work "can help universities fortify their worth at a time when they are often attacked as being biased, out of touch, and not worth their considerable costs." I argue that the central mission of sociologists today should be to work with communities to provide opportunities for experiencing hope, joy, and justice. Critically, work done in collaboration with communities must also be centered in how we recognize and evaluate sociological work, pushing back from neoliberal models of academic production and interrupting the complicity of sociology and higher education in colonial processes (Balazs and Morello-Frosch 2013; Bell and Lewis 2023; Enslin and Hedge 2024; Gamoran 2023; London 2022; London et al. forthcoming; Montalvo 2024; O'Meara 2002; Saltmarsh et al. 2009; Spivak 2012; Stein 2022; Van de Ven 2007; Wallerstein and Duran 2006).

My vision for sociology also means stepping away from primarily critiquing societal institutions and taking the great leap into imagining and creating new structures, strategies, and solutions (Sørensen, Vinthagen, and Johansen 2023). Sociologists excel at the crucial work of identifying structural inequalities—but good sociology is also an opportunity to pose ideas for better ways forward (DiPrete and Fox-Williams 2021; Moje 2022; Nalani et al. 2021; Prasad 2021; Watts 2017). Sociologists regularly appraise existing policy solutions as reductive and individualistic without proposing more effective approaches (Prasad 2021). Building new solutions is hard, but it comes with hope.

Scholars like Duncan Watts and Monica Prasad emphasize the benefits social scientists might offer if we make our work more solution-oriented (Prasad 2021; Watts 2017). Watts (2017:2) argues that social science is incoherent because the reward structure is focused on publishing novel findings rather than developing broader understanding through cumulative advances. Watts (2017) notes that not all social science *needs* to be solution-oriented (and recognizes that some social science already *is* solution-oriented), but he argues that centering solution-oriented approaches would strengthen social science. Prasad (2021:3–4) similarly emphasizes problem-solving sociology, defining it as "sociology that attempts to use the traditions of sociological research to solve real-world problems, and uses the attempt to grapple with real-world problems as a way to reformulate understandings of society and renew or reinvent those traditions." More focused attention to solving real-world problems could advance social science knowledge by strengthening understanding, clarifying the importance of social science to the public and students, and promoting greater investment in social science research, allowing for

more ambitious projects (Watts 2017). For Watts and Prasad, rigorous problem-solving sociology is good both for the world and for sociological theory.

Solution-oriented work builds on the strengths of empirically driven sociological research that recognizes the importance of context. Due to the variety of topics and questions sociology explores and our methodological range, sociologists are well-poised to engage in meaningful solution-oriented work. Consistently, major funders like the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the William T. Grant Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation emphasize the importance of funding social science that has a demonstrable impact on the key issues the world faces (Bozeman and Youtie 2017; DiPrete and Fox-Williams 2021; Gamoran 2023; London 2022; Nalani et al. 2021; Tseng and Gamoran 2017). Thus, solution-oriented sociology is not only a strategy to strengthen the field—it is also recognized by the institutions that support our work.

In the following sections, I first consider how sociologists have communicated our research to the wider world, providing examples of my own solution-oriented work. I next argue for centering feminist, decolonial, and participatory methods in sociology, highlighting community-engaged, solution-oriented work that contributes value to both the field and society.

SOCIOLOGICAL EFFORTS TO AFFECT THE REAL WORLD

Sociologists communicate solution-oriented research findings to the world, informing policy and public understanding. Within Michael Burawoy's (2005) formulation, public sociology, or organic community-engaged work, is related to policy sociology and efforts to translate sociological knowledge for larger publics. While policy sociology is less community-centered than public sociology, it reflects sociologists' real efforts to affect the real world and is visible in the discipline. Sociologists like Tressie McMillan Cottom, Eric Klinenberg, Rebecca London, Jeff Manza and Chris Uggen, Monica White, and Adia Harvey Wingfield all use sociology to inform broader debates, making the importance of social science research visible (Cottom 2017; Klinenberg 2018; London 2019; Manza and Uggen 2008; White 2018; Wingfield 2023). These public-facing sociologists, whether building insights from big data, archival sources, or ethnographies, encourage us to consider how to better the world through our research.

For example, my collaborators and I consider how to design work–family policies for gender equity (Boeckmann, Misra, and Budig 2015; Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012, 2016; Jee, Misra, and Murray-Close 2019; Misra, Moller, et al. 2012; Moller et al. 2016). While the work is theoretically motivated, it is also practically oriented, aimed at identifying the best policies for specific contexts, and funded through the National Science Foundation and Washington Center for Equitable Growth. Policies like subsidized childcare and paid parental leaves can improve outcomes for women and their families, but cultural attitudes and gender divisions of labor within the household condition how effective these policies are. We consider how to best design policies for the greatest impact, recognizing how policies operate in different cultural contexts. The sociological insight that context matters leads us to reject one-size-fits-all policy prescriptions.

In recent collaborative work with Chen-Shuo Hong, we explore how policy and culture interact to determine employment outcomes for mothers (Hong and Misra 2023). Figure 1 provides predicted motherhood employment gaps from a multilevel model, including a three-way interaction between motherhood, policy, and gender attitudes, controlling for relevant factors. The dotted line indicates no differences between employment rates for mothers and childless women. Childcare is associated with higher levels of mothers' employment, but primarily where people already support maternal employment. The

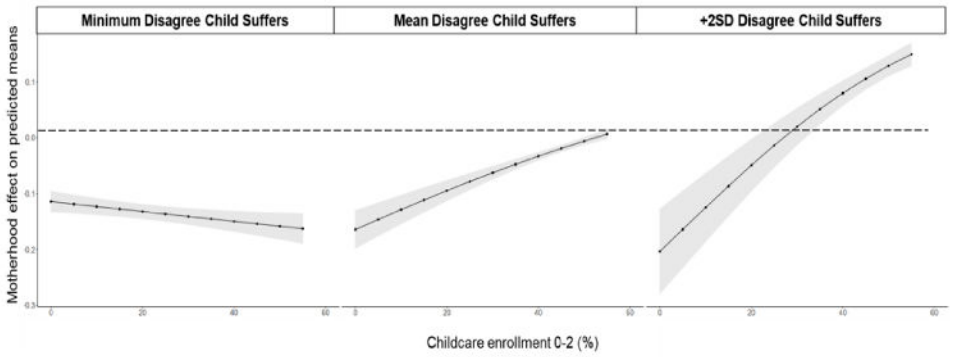

Figure 1. Predicted Motherhood Employment Gaps by Childcare Enrollment Rates (age 0 to 2) and Cultural Attitudes about Maternal Employment with 95 Percent Confidence Intervals

leftmost graph in Figure 1 shows that where people are more likely to agree that preschool children suffer if their mother works, increased childcare enrollment essentially has no effect on mothers' employment. Yet, where there is more support for preschool children's mothers working (shown in the other two graphs), as in the United States, there is a substantial increase in mothers' employment as childcare enrollment increases.

Unlike childcare, paid family leave has a curvilinear relationship to maternal employment—both very long leaves and very short leaves tend to depress employment rates for mothers (Boeckmann et al. 2015). This finding suggests the best design for parental leave is through a moderate-length leave. Yet, as Figure 2 shows, where the division of labor in the home at the societal level is very traditional, the length of paid leave has little effect on mothers' employment (left panel). On the other hand, where both men and women engage in household labor and care, moderate-length leave has a striking effect, improving mothers' employment (right panel).

Both subsidized childcare and a moderate-length paid leave policy in the United States could increase the rates of working mothers. These policies also are related to higher maternal wages and lower levels of poverty for families with children, making these interventions powerful (Boeckmann et al. 2015; Budig et al. 2012, 2016; Misra, Budig, and Boeckmann 2011; Misra, Budig, and Moller 2007; Misra, Moller, and Budig 2007; Misra, Moller, et al. 2012). In the United States, adopting these policies would have a higher payoff than in some other settings because the cultural context favors working mothers. These findings appear in social science journals, but we also publicize them in mainstream media such as the *New York Times* and The Conversation and engage with policymakers, trying to move the needle on work–family policies.

Sociologists can also undertake more institutional efforts to increase our impact. Many sociologists have engaged in solution-oriented work, for example, addressing social welfare, health and medicine, rural and urban issues, labor studies, and public policy (Bonacich 2005; Levin, Haldar, and Picot 2015; Lobao 1996; Mooney Nickel 2009; Pescosolido and Kronenfeld 1995; Sassen 2007).[2] Yet, many sociologists have also moved into programs in social work, public health, rural sociology, urban studies, labor studies, and public policy because sociology programs have not valued publicly engaged work. Rather than cutting off these connections as a discipline, we must work to reengage in interdisciplinary connections and support sociologists doing this work in both academic and applied settings. By embracing solution-oriented work, we also highlight bridges to employment in these areas to sociology students.

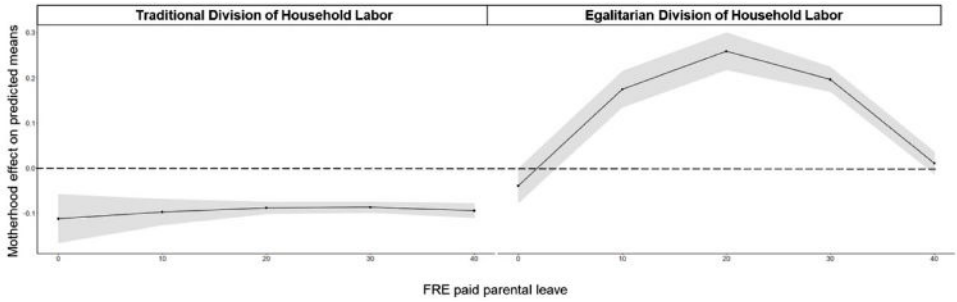

Figure 2. Predicted Motherhood Employment Gaps by Full-Rate-Equivalent (FRE) Paid Parental Leaves and Division of Labor within Households with 95 Percent Confidence Intervals

Within the United States, ASA president Adia Wingfield, *American Sociological Review* co-editor Donald Tomaskovic-Devey, and I have advocated for a Social Policy Council (SPC), a national-level council of social scientists. The White House currently benefits from expertise in science, technology, and economics, thanks to the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST), and the Council of Economic Advisors (Evans and Matthews 2018; Sargent and Shea 2017; Smith 2010), but there remains a broader need for social science expertise on policy development aiming to improve the health and well-being of the population.[3] Sociologists could be more effectively deployed to solve policy issues in state or local settings as well.

As the United States grapples with social issues such as energy transitions, housing, healthcare, immigration policy, and political polarization, it is clear that social problems require solutions that reflect a wider array of social policy expertise (Andrawes, Johnson, and Coleman 2021; Broadhead 2021; Gollust et al. 2019; Hamann et al. 2023; Ozer and Jacoby 2022; Schipper, Dubash, and Mulugetta 2021; Somer and McCoy 2019). Funding agencies, such as the National Science Foundation, can strengthen interdisciplinary research and discovery, but experts who can translate that knowledge into action are also necessary. The SPC would ensure that a broader array of scientific knowledge is included, by design, in domestic policymaking.

We recommend the SPC be committed to evidence-based analytic approaches, evaluating and debating the quality of evidence before making policy recommendations. The SPC should produce an annual report reflecting the issues and areas that the American people report as of greatest concern, such as the influence of money in politics, healthcare costs, education, crime, and immigration (Pew Research Center 2024). SPC members might differ on strategies for change, but empirically informed deliberations could lead to important interventions. Institutionalized in the executive branch, the SPC would make the nation's goals clearer for its people, while strengthening the country's commitment to scientific analyses of the processes, policies, and mechanisms to achieve these goals. Bringing sociologists and other social scientists into these discussions is critical.

As ASA President, I spearheaded the community-facing Value of Sociology Initiative, which provides resources to sociologists that help us clarify the value of sociology to our students, colleagues, and communities. The initiative allows sociologists and former students to describe how their work has made a difference in the world. Sociologists have highlighted their solution-based research in expanding fair housing, access to healthy

food, workplace safety, and mental health services (American Sociological Association 2024). Through this initiative, the Association helps sociologists write op-eds, meet with legislators, and also access resources when they face attacks for their work as sociologists. In the next section, I discuss my collaborative work on inclusion solutions in the academy, as an example of how to design solution-oriented work.

INCLUSION IN THE ACADEMY

Studying inclusion in the academy has led me to engage in solution-oriented sociology. In collaboration with our faculty union and Provost's office, my colleague Jennifer Lundquist and I worked to solve problems for faculty with care responsibilities. We fielded a survey and conducted focus group interviews to consider time allocation across different forms of faculty work and care responsibilities. We used that data to bargain for policies aimed at supporting our caregiving faculty members, but the research also revealed substantial workload inequalities within the workplace by gender, race, and rank (Lundquist, Misra, and O'Meara 2012; Misra, Lundquist, and Templer 2012). That work led to new scholarship and practical efforts to address workload inequalities across many academic workplaces.

In one project, funded by the National Science Foundation ADVANCE program and led by education scholar KerryAnn O'Meara, we used action research to develop solutions for the problems of faculty workload inequity we had identified. Women and faculty of color are more likely to be doing work that is less recognized in rewards systems, and this affects their careers (Griffin and Reddick 2011; Hirshfield and Joseph 2012; Joseph and Hirshfield 2011; Misra, Lundquist, et al. 2011; Misra, Lundquist, and Templer 2012; O'Meara 2016). We believed this could change. We set up an experiment in which we conducted pre-test and post-test surveys of faculty members. Departments could apply to work on "workload equity"; half were assigned to the treatment, and the other half to the control (although they received the treatment in the next cycle) (O'Meara et al. 2018).

We then brought departments together to discuss their workload equity problems, providing them with tools for identifying inequities and ideas based on existing institutional policies that address workload inequities. Each department created a workload team, with faculty from different ranks, to think through workload challenges and develop policies to address those challenges. We met again and again in windowless rooms for 18 months, with tremendous learning across the groups. The project leaders were there to support their work, but we learned from our participants and drew from their insights to develop a better understanding of not only how to diagnose workload equity issues, but also how to fix them. The experiment was a success. The departments that engaged in the trial made progress and felt better about workload equity in their units from pre-test to post-test and compared to control departments (Misra et al. 2021; O'Meara et al. 2018; O'Meara, Lennartz, et al. 2019). The participatory action design of the work was critical, as our solutions are better when we engage with the communities most affected by inequalities (Moje 2022)

We developed a report and a workbook of policies available through the American Council on Education and consulted with dozens of universities on how to solve a problem that was once seen as intractable (Culpepper et al. 2022; O'Meara et al. 2021a, 2021b; O'Meara et al. 2018; O'Meara, Misra, et al. 2019). This project demonstrates the power of collaborative, community-engaged work. And while workload equity remains a difficult, challenging problem, many departments have benefited from their engagement in solving these issues. That is hopeful work, work aimed at creating more just departments and communities in the academy.

My collaborators and I have also used organizational theories to help identify solutions to academic inequalities by race, gender, and nationality. We were funded by the National Science Foundation ADVANCE program not only to study inequalities in

higher education but also to help "transform" institutions to become more equitable. This research also reveals how to design collaborative solution-oriented work.

I discuss two articles with collaborators, one that approaches inclusion more traditionally and then another solution-oriented piece, to help identify how we can shift our approach to research to solve challenges (Misra, Kane-Lee, et al. 2024; Misra, Mickey, et al. 2024). We interviewed women of color across 17 different departments and matched these participants to a man of color, a white woman, a white man, and any nonbinary folx in the same department and at the same rank who we also interviewed. This design allows us to understand how race, gender, and nationality shape experiences for faculty at the same rank and in the same departments. Our sample of 62 people is about half people of color, half women and nonbinary people, and half people born outside the United States. Throughout this research, I regularly met with women of color to talk through what the data were showing, following Gans's (1989:11) advice from decades ago that our research must be reality-checked by "the people we study," and such steps should be "intrinsic parts of our research procedures."

In one article, we focus on the experiences of faculty of color, considering how faculty in the twenty-first century, in an era of DEI, still experience substantial exclusion and exploitation in their jobs (Misra, Kane-Lee, et al. 2024). We theorized three different processes. First, we conceptualized *overinclusion*: how faculty of color are asked to do more work, and work that is devalued in promotions, such as mentoring and service—leaving them less time for more valued activities, such as research, as well as less choice about what they would like to do (Griffin and Reddick 2011; Hirshfield and Joseph 2012; Joseph and Hirshfield 2011; Misra et al. 2021). For example, Mariana (foreign-born, Latina) showed us how overinclusion creates challenges for faculty of color:[4]

> I get over-included. And it's a burden. And it's the tax of . . . making it through tenure and being a woman of color . . . and then on top of it . . . I am an informal and formal advisor to more students than I can count. It's fantastic. It keeps me going. But it's unrecognized . . . it's like you're now on steroids, whatever unrecognized labor is like now.

Mariana worried that if she pulled back from this work, it would have a detrimental effect on her promotion to professor. Most administrators would not allow a department to assign a higher teaching load to faculty of color—but do not intervene when faculty of color are assigned higher service loads or experience higher mentoring loads. Mariana not only does extra work, but that work is unrecognized, which is particularly detrimental because her departmental colleagues do not feel the same expectations she does as a woman of color. Overall, we found that women of color were the most likely to report experiencing overinclusion, although other faculty members we interviewed reported that they witnessed other faculty, often identifying faculty of color, being overincluded.

The second process we identified is *active exclusion*. Research on faculty of color has identified this issue for decades (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Kennelly, Misra, and Karides 1999; Misra, Kennelly, and Karides 1999; Settles, Buchanan, and Dotson 2019; Turner, González, and Wong (Lau) 2011). Active exclusion explains why highly qualified people are not offered jobs, not offered good jobs, receive fewer resources for their work, or face greater challenges being promoted. Diego (Latino, foreign-born) is in a supportive department, but serving on a college-wide promotion and tenure committee taught him this is not true for everyone:

> In certain departments, there is a white, completely crazy, completely predominant male, and part of their culture also. I can see that it is difficult for a woman to pass that filter, and 90 percent men and no women professors, so that person could have trouble being promoted from assistant

> to associate. Exactly the same if you are the only person of color—color in a very broad way—Latino, African American, or even from Asia.

Diego's experience led him to believe that in less diverse departments, women or faculty of color face greater challenges to promotion. In addition to difficulties with promotion, faculty of color described challenges in accessing tenure-stream jobs, as well as resources and space for their research. As with overinclusion, we found that women of color were the most likely to report experiencing active exclusion, although other faculty, like Diego, witnessed the process in action.

Finally, the third process we identified is *passive exclusion*. Here, exclusion is still central but reflects a lack of engagement. For example, faculty of color may be left out, not consulted in departmental decisions, not mentored the way white colleagues are mentored, or not included in research collaborations or networks (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Settles et al. 2019; Turner et al. 2011). Kerri, a Black, foreign-born woman, mused about the challenge of passive exclusion:

> [Y]ou learn to draw a line where, in my case, it's whether this is a Black thing, this is a Black and woman thing, [or] this is just science. [*laughs*] And you have to be truthful to yourself. . . . You can't lie to yourself and tell yourself it doesn't; it makes a difference.

Kerri understood that recognizing how passive forms of exclusion play out is important to staying sane. We found that women of color often described being left out of mentoring and opportunities to collaborate on research, as well as having their intellectual insights ignored on research teams.

Another common form of passive exclusion occurs in how departments make decisions. This form of passive exclusion appeared to affect both men and women of color. As Man-Soo, a foreign-born Asian man, related:

> Effectively, members from certain backgrounds tend to rather be silent or quiet, or less talkative. . . . But for some important matters, I think, [the] Department Head or some system should find ways, to find a way to hear their voices . . . to be absolutely very frank and honest, rank matters, but it's more about race. . . . I can say that, you know, certain ethnicity group of faculty do not participate in the active discussion. . . . So then, is that the problem of the faculty who don't speak, maybe, but the culture, the atmosphere is not engaging, and we cannot say that's their fault.

Man-Soo clearly stated, "rank matters, but it's more about race." Throughout the departments we studied, we found many examples of how faculty of color felt disengaged from decision-making processes in their departments, with both men and women of color recounting experiences of being left out of important decisions.

This article, published in *Social Problems*, is traditional "inequality discovery" sociology. We compare experiences by race, gender, and nationality and find that faculty of color, and particularly women of color, face multiple challenges as faculty members (Misra, Kane-Lee, et al. 2024). We further analyze those challenges, identifying different forms of inequality, and which groups are most affected by these processes.

Another study using the same data is significantly more hopeful (Misra, Mickey, et al. 2024). We explored three different kinds of departments, starting from something of a puzzle in our data. While like in most studies of "climate," women of color were generally least happy, and white men most happy, in their departments, that was not entirely consistent across our respondents. Because we had four different perspectives on the same department from faculty at the same rank, we found cases where experiences were similar across race, gender, and nationality. In some departments, everyone felt mostly included, or, more frequently, marginalized. This department-level finding led us to learn some interesting things about inclusion.

For example, Chang, a foreign-born Asian man, saw his department as particularly inclusive, especially for foreign-born faculty, noting, "that kind of diversity of different experiences is definitely appreciated in the department . . . as international scholars, we don't feel any problem with exclusion." Chang's colleague Tiana, a foreign-born Black woman, felt similarly and talked about the warm environment in their department: "If your door is open, people will just step in and continue the conversation." Their colleague Carol, who is white and foreign-born, also saw the department as supportive, saying that feeling is beginning to "spill outside of the department a little bit now." Wyatt, a white U.S.-born man, also saw the department as collegial but worried this may not be true for everyone: "This is probably where there's also inequities because it's sort of, you know, do you feel comfortable or entitled to knock on people's doors or access people?" Importantly, while Wyatt understood challenges to inclusion, his colleagues did appear to "feel comfortable" reaching out to other faculty. All four faculty members described a rich culture of mentoring in the department that led to a feeling of intellectual engagement and collegiality.

On the other hand, in some departments, everyone feels marginalized. These departments provide less support, leading their faculty, regardless of race, gender, or nationality, to feel excluded. For example, Clara, a white, foreign-born woman, was the only one in her department who felt supported, noting that when she has questions about something she is working on, she can "often" call on "people I know quite well but who aren't directly in the same field." Gabby, a Black U.S.-born woman, had more trouble identifying mentors at the institution and instead reached out to her postdoc mentor at another institution: "Within the department, I don't know, that's a harder one to think of who I would go to." Min-Ho, a foreign-born Asian man, explained that he does not reach out very often: "I have asked people in my department . . . to take a look at [papers or grant proposals], but I really feel bad, you know, taking up their time . . . it's really hard for me to ask that kind of favor." Zach, a U.S.-born white man, also felt unsupported: "Initially, I did approach people. I wouldn't say that the results were stellar, and I think I've more-or-less got the advice to just shut up and do my work." In this marginalizing department, Zach, like Gabby and Min-ho, felt left to his own devices, trying to identify how to meet expectations at the university.

Of course, many departments fall in the middle of this study and reflect more expected inequalities, where, on average, white men are more likely to feel included and women of color feel more excluded. But if our goal is to help identify processes that lead to inclusion, the study design allowed us to identify some of the solutions associated with inclusive departments. Inclusive departments share certain components. For example, they tend to be compositionally diverse, working to ensure the department is diverse by race, gender, and nationality (Wingfield 2020). The environment is also supportive and friendly, with informal mentoring and engagement with colleagues about research, teaching, service, and advising students. Colleagues and chairs frequently check in with faculty members and appear invested in their success, celebrating new publications, grants, and honors. Finally, when conflicts happen—as they do in all three types of departments—the department addresses them head-on. For example, after a heated faculty meeting about hiring, people apologize and reaffirm their commitment to being in an inclusive department. They make amends; they repair fractures; they do not allow conflicts to grow like a cancer. People explicitly appreciate and protect collegiality in their department.

Inclusion, it turns out, pays a lot of dividends, and it pays those dividends not only for faculty of color but also for white faculty members. Truly inclusive spaces are good for everyone, and there are practices we can adopt to create more inclusive spaces (Misra, Mickey, et al. 2024). Our article captured how sociology can be used to identify solutions to

problems of exclusion rather than just identify barriers to inclusion. Yet we published it in a higher-education journal in hopes that our findings would be put into practice by higher-education practitioners, seeing this outcome as less likely in sociology journals.

In this section, I have pinpointed strategies to accomplish more solution-oriented research, including research methods that allow participants to identify both problems and their solutions. Crucially, designs that allow context to vary let us see where solutions to social problems may already exist. As a methodologist, I believe how we carry out our research has critical implications for its use in the real world. In the next section, I emphasize how learning from feminist, decolonial, and participatory methods strengthens the sociological endeavor.

FEMINIST, PARTICIPATORY, AND DECOLONIAL METHODS

We have to do the work to identify inequalities before we can identify more equitable approaches. But I worry that we too often stop at identifying the disjunctures, the inequalities, and the brokenness of our world. We do not see ourselves as equipped to use our knowledge in conversation with the communities we work with to develop new solutions. Yet, I believe sociologists have the tools to do so.

As a feminist and as a methodologist, I suggest we build on participatory action and community-engaged methods to envision a different, more community-focused discipline (Balazs and Morello-Frosch 2013; Barnes et al. 2016; Borda 2006; Chevalier 2019; Freire 1970; Greenberg, London, and McKay 2020; Leavy 2022; Lenette 2022; London 2022; London et al. forthcoming; Moje 2022; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Smith 2023; Warren et al. 2018). These methods can identify potential real-world solutions; indeed, our community partners engage with us because they need and want solutions. Partnering with communities can also give us more confidence about using sociology to make a difference.

As such, I adopt an epistemological approach to knowledge production that builds on feminist and decolonial methodologies, even as it is at odds with some traditional approaches to empirical research. Feminists have long called for epistemological approaches that undo the divide between expert and participant (Bhavnani 1993; Collins 2000, 2019; Devault 1996; Harding 1986; Misra, Curington, and Green 2020; Naples 2012; Smith 1990). Similarly, participatory research builds on decolonial frameworks of epistemology (Borda 2006; Fanon 2007; Freire 1970; Lao-Montes 2007; Quijano 2005, 2024; Sørensen et al. 2023; Spivak 2012; Stein 2022). The contributions of feminist decolonial thinkers provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the production of knowledge (Connell 2014; Espinosa-Miñoso, Lugones, and Maldonado-Torres 2022; Harding 2008; Lugones 2010; Mohanty 2003; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991; Rege 1998, 2014; Rivera Cusicanqui 2012; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Smith 1999; Thayer 2009; Wynter 2003). As one example among many, Sharmila Rege (1998:WS45) argues about Dalit feminist standpoints in India, "the subject of its knowledge is embodied and visible (i.e., the thought begins from the lives of dalit women and these lives are present and visible in the results of the thought)."

Building on this work allows us to link U.S. sociology to sociological traditions from other parts of the world, where the relationship between academia and activism looks different. It also draws from work being done in disciplines like Anthropology, Public Health, and Education (Atalay 2012; Gamoran 2023; Gubrium and Harper 2013; Harper 2012; Lenette 2022; London et al. forthcoming; Martínez and Ruelas-Thompson 2022; Mitchell 2018; Mosavel et al. 2005; Wallerstein and Duran 2006). My colleague in Anthropology, Sonya Atalay, has a 30-million-dollar National Science Foundation Science and Technology Center grant, "Braiding Indigenous Knowledge and Science around Climate Change," to develop methods for knowledge production that center

Indigenous people, provide mentoring and training for Indigenous scientists, and retrain Western-trained scientists in ethical methods of knowledge co-production (Atalay 2023). This work recognizes the critical knowledge and practices of Indigenous peoples that can help us better understand the effects of climate change and how to mitigate some of these issues. Importantly, by centering Indigenous knowledge and experience, we are making science more inclusive and effective and are less likely to offer climate change solutions that bypass, ignore, or further harm Indigenous peoples or the land.

As Mary Romero (2020) noted, there is some irony that the beginning of sociology in the United States, as carried out by researchers like Anna Julia Cooper, Irene Diggs, W.E.B. DuBois, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, was community-focused (Cooper 1892; Diggs 1953; DuBois 1899, 1935; Wells-Barnett 1895), but this work was marginalized for much of the twentieth century and only recognized widely in the past few decades (Deegan 1988; Lengermann and Niebrugge 2006; London et al. forthcoming; Morris 2017, 2022; Prasad 2021; Romero 2020; Smith 2022; Treviño 2012; Vásquez 2024; Wright 2017). Community-engaged work also reflects the work of reformers like Jane Addams, Grace and Edith Abbott, and Florence Kelley, early sociologists engaged in community work around education, criminal justice, labor rights, public health, and arts—research that was treated for much of the twentieth century as too applied to be "real" sociology (Abbott 1910, 1917; Addams 1910; Deegan 1988; Kelley 1896, 1905; Lengermann and Niebrugge 2006). At times, efforts to apply sociological understanding to solve problems have been viewed as challenging the legitimacy of sociology as a social science (Nielsen 2004; Tittle 2004), but those concerns are less prevalent now. And importantly, scholars of color and women researchers continue to be drawn to community-engaged work (London et al. forthcoming) as powerful, meaningful work that aims to challenge and change the status quo.

Feminist methodology starts from the notion that social research should promote social justice, even as it recognizes that research can harm or exploit research participants (Devault 1996; Harding 1986; Leavy 2022; Romero 2020; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Sprague 2016). It highlights the importance of lived experience in developing knowledge, even as it acknowledges that knowledge is always partial (Bhavnani 1993; Collins 1986, 2000; Connell 2014; Devault 1996; Harding 1986; Rayaprol 2016; Smith 1990; Sprague 2016). It questions whose knowledge is recognized and who speaks for whom (Bhavnani 1993; Collins 1986, 2000; Connell 2014; Espinosa-Miñoso et al. 2022; Harding 2008; London et al. forthcoming; Lugones 2010; Mohanty 2003; Mohanty et al. 1991; Rayaprol 2016; Smith 1990). These priorities lead feminist researchers to level hierarchies and give research participants more control and power in the research process (Devault 1996; Harding 1986; Leavy 2022; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Smith 1990).

Participatory and community-engaged research similarly upends power dynamics between researchers and those they study, democratizes science, elevates the insights and knowledge of community members, and makes findings more useful for both community members and policymakers (Balazs and Morello-Frosch 2013; Bell and Lewis 2023; Call-Cummings, Monea, et al. 2024; Lenette 2022; London 2022; London et al. forthcoming; Moje 2022; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Wallerstein and Duran 2006). Building from a Freirean perspective, this work recognizes lived experience as knowledge and expertise, which can build reciprocal and respectful relationships with communities and collapse artificial boundaries of who can create knowledge (Freire 1970; Lenette 2022; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006). This work also emphasizes the importance of attending to local contexts; because all social life is relational and produced by people interacting in specific locations, solutions must also be contextualized (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2019). Community-engaged work ensures this attention to context.

Community-engaged work can increase the public's influence on what knowledge is produced and deepen public understanding of social science research, while avoiding extractive practices that do not benefit the community (Bell and Lewis 2023; Lenette 2022; London et al. forthcoming; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Wallerstein and Duran 2006). Truly participatory methods require meaningful participation from research design through dissemination phases, collaboratively negotiated ethical discussions, collective outputs, and practical strategies based on the findings that benefit the community (Lenette 2022; London et al. forthcoming; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006). As Balazs and Morello Frosch (2013) argue, this work strengthens the "rigor, relevance, and reach" of science—the quality of our work, whether it asks the right questions, and how it is translated into useful tools. As Tseng and Gamoran (2017:1) emphasize, "There is no inevitable trade-off between producing rigorous research and producing research with relevance for the real world." Community-engaged research is not less scientific or less "real" than other forms of sociology.

Yet such work is not easy. It requires substantial time and effort to build long-term relationships and trust that recognize the goals and needs of both communities and researchers (Balazs and Morello-Frosch 2013; Bell and Lewis 2023; Call-Cummings, Monea, et al. 2024; Gamoran 2023; Lenette 2022; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Wallerstein and Duran 2006). As Bell and Lewis (2023:314) suggest, the epistemic equity necessary for successful collaborations requires sociological researchers to engage in reflexivity and humility while recognizing and respecting their community collaborators. London and colleagues (forthcoming) argue that community-engaged research is committed to reciprocity and mutual benefit, attends to ethics and true collaboration, focuses on social justice outcomes and community action, and is more likely to be multidisciplinary, use mixed methods, and engage in partnerships with varied organizations. Research design is more challenging as it reflects the questions and strategic needs of the community and the researchers—but this makes the work more grounded and effective.

In making this call for a sociology more deeply engaged with its publics, I am reiterating calls from Burawoy (2005) on public sociology, but I am also approaching these questions 20 years later and at a moment where authoritarianism is on the rise globally, academic freedom is under attack, and trust in science itself has dramatically weakened (Berberoglu 2020; Butler 2022; Kennedy et al. 2022). I claim that participatory and community-engaged models aimed at solving social problems can build democracy, strengthen academic freedom, and foster greater trust in science (Lenette 2022; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006). At the same time, I suggest these approaches as a strategy that all sociologists can engage with, whether in academic or non-academic positions. I provide some community-engaged and participatory approaches that I believe should be centered in twenty-first-century sociology.

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH

Many community-engaged sociological projects inspire me. In this section, I discuss community-engaged, solution-oriented approaches that I believe strengthen the work of our discipline. Each of these projects shows a different approach to community-engaged work, whether in Asia, Africa, North America, or Latin America and the Caribbean. Some projects are embedded within nongovernmental organizations and support transformative participatory work around environmental justice and labor rights in specific contexts. Several of these projects show how to build community-centered research with youth and students that connect campuses and communities in empowering rather than extractive ways. Others show how academics can engage fruitfully with communities outside the academy through their research and advocacy, learning from and building capacity for societal transformation.

Kalpavriksh, an environmental NGO led by Indian sociologist Ashish Kothari, has carried out a variety of projects, including the Sandhani project in Kachchh, Gujarat, which engages 600 weavers, or vankars (Kothari 2014, 2019, 2023; Kothari et al. 2019). Youth are involved in participatory video-making, and elders and a women's collective are also engaged in the project. Sandhani explores the challenges for the vankar community, including threats to their livelihood due to machine-woven textiles that imitate Kachchh patterns, a marginalizing caste status as Dalits, and strong patriarchal norms that limit opportunities for women and young people. Yet reviving and sustaining traditional Kachchh crafts, including handloom weaving using local organically grown cotton, has led to global markets, economic mobility, greater gender and age diversity among weavers, and more young people staying in the community (Kothari et al. 2019).

Sandhani engages the community in research on challenges—like inequalities between entrepreneur weavers and workers, ongoing patriarchal norms, environmental issues due to increased global markets, and less sustainable consumption patterns (Kothari 2019, 2023; Kothari et al. 2019). The participatory nature of this work allows vankars to co-produce knowledge about the issues they face, to better understand and plan for the future of their community. Through this project, the NGO developed an assessment tool that can be used in other places, the alternative transformation flower: each petal is a check box for transformative processes such as ecological integrity and resilience, social well-being and justice, direct and delegated democracy, economic democracy, and cultural diversity and knowledge democracy (Kothari 2023; Kothari et al. 2019). Sandhani is part of a larger global project on community resistance to extractivism, "the Academic-Activist Co-generation of Knowledge on Environmental Justice or ACKnowl-EJ," funded by the International Social Science Council (Kothari et al. 2019).

Another exciting project is Ntokoza Yingwana's work with the African Sex Workers Alliance (Yingwana 2018; Yingwana, Walker, and Etchart 2019). Through a feminist participatory-action creative arts workshop, Yingwana develops a collaborative conversation about what it means to be an African feminist sex worker among sex workers from many different African countries. The sex workers both recognize Westernized concepts of feminism and claim their own understanding of feminism as empowering in the African context. They describe how being a sex worker is innately connected to being a feminist—making choices for themselves (Yingwana 2018).

For example, Jolly described how at age 17, her family asked her to marry her rapist; when she refused, she was forced to leave her home. Becoming a sex worker allowed her to take back her agency (Yingwana 2018; Yingwana et al. 2019). The women co-produce knowledge about being sex workers, recognizing the challenge of negotiating and (re)negotiating with both patriarchy and feminism. As Yingwana (2018:293) recounts, being an African sex worker means

> embodying a political identity that intersects with multiple social dimensions . . . finding a language of feminism that speaks most honestly to the nuances of selling sex in Africa. It is therefore important for other feminists (especially those who are pro- and anti-sex work) to be aware of the intersectionalities (and contradictions) that African sex worker feminists embody, as this will allow for engagements that are far more constructive.

Yingwana's work illustrates how a community can co-create knowledge that helps build toward greater justice, creates hope for the future, and brings joy, creativity, and connection.

North American-based sociologists are collaborating in participatory and community-engaged practices that build hope in both students and the communities they serve (Barnes et al. 2016; Berard and Ravelli 2021; Christensen 2024; Cunningham and Kingma-Kiekhofer 2004; Shostak et al. 2019; Smith 2023;

Soyer et al. 2023). These scholars ensure the community is involved in identifying the research questions, doing the research, and framing the findings. By connecting graduate and undergraduate researchers with local middle and high school students, these projects provide opportunities for younger students to see themselves as researchers and leaders, creating bridges to college (Call-Cummings, Keller, et al. 2024; Call-Cummings, Monea, et al. 2024; Greenberg et al. 2020, 2022; London 2022). College students learn how to use their skills for work in a meaningful career, with some taking jobs post-graduation with community partners (Greenberg et al. 2020). This work links the university to the community in ways that create meaningful, long-term bonds, and demonstrates the importance of social science research to equitable futures. This is hopeful work that clarifies the importance of sociology to our communities.

The Community Initiated Student Engaged Research (CISER) model developed by Steve McKay, Rebecca London, and Miriam Greenberg at UC-Santa Cruz has carried out multiple projects, including one focused on tenants facing the affordability crisis called "No Place Like Home" (Greenberg et al. 2020, 2022; London 2022). This project involved an interdisciplinary team of faculty, over 200 students, and four local community organizations. In addition to collecting survey and interview data from renters—a hard-to-reach and vulnerable population often ignored in policy discussions—they also engaged in bilingual tenants-rights workshops and forums on renters' experiences, cosponsored by public officials and attended by community organizations and community members. Students could learn and practice skills such as carrying out in-person surveys and interviews, managing and analyzing data, creating visual documentation, digital storytelling, and mapping. The forums, newspaper articles, radio stories, and an interactive website they created helped change the conversation about tenants' needs in the area. Students gained experience, relationships, skills, and a deeper understanding of research and sociology (Greenberg et al. 2020).

Amy Best and collaborators at George Mason University have developed multiple formidable participatory action projects with young people (Best 2007; Best and Kerstetter 2020; Call-Cummings, Keller, et al. 2024; Call-Cummings, Monea, et al. 2024). One project focused on how microaggressions affect students' mental health, also identifying strategies schools can take to address these problems. Youth collected interview and survey data with the support of university students and faculty, finding that although microaggressions affect all students, young Black women were most deeply affected. These researchers used "fast methods," for example, a texting blitz of three questions to friends, family, and social media contacts asking, "(a) Have you ever experienced a racial microaggression? If so, could you share it with me? (b) How did you respond or resist the racial microaggression?" (Call-Cummings, Monea, et al. 2024:92) In publications, the researchers presented both the data and how the youth researchers analyzed the data, noting "we believe young people's knowledge can stand on its own and should not be repackaged in academic jargon, as this changes the knowledge generated in crucial ways" (Call-Cummings, Keller, et al. 2024:20). This interdisciplinary group of collaborators also runs a free Summer Institute in Anti-Racist and Decolonizing Research Methods for graduate students in the social sciences.

In another example, University of Calgary sociologist Pallavi Banerjee works with the Youth and Anti-Racism Integration Collective on a critical intersectional collaborative project centering the lived experiences of immigrant and refugee youth to re/imagine pathways toward more equitable futures in Canada (Banerjee, Sengupta, and Graduate Researchers of YARI-Collective 2023; Dutta, Sengupta, and Banerjee 2024; Sanyal et al. 2024). Banerjee and her collaborator Pratim Sengupta bring together newcomer youth to co-create simulations, games, animations, and musical compositions that make visible feelings of hope, loss, and pain

tied to their experiences of becoming refugees and migrants who resettle in Canada. Through their focus groups, storytelling sessions, and co-design projects, including a garden and three large-scale public installations, the YARI youth express their experiences, including with violence, imagine an anti-racist future, use their home languages in academic spaces, and inform the work of resettlement agencies for how to create more welcoming futures for immigrants (Banerjee et al. 2023; Dutta et al. 2024; Sanyal et al. 2024). This community-engaged approach to research is what twenty-first-century sociology should be: using sociological understandings to work in community toward justice.

Brittany Battle, a community organizer and sociologist at Wake Forest University and cofounder of the Triad Abolition Project, is also doing inspiring work. Battle has won a wide array of awards for her scholarship/activism and published articles in leading journals, showing how the child support system threatens and punishes parents in ways that reflect gendered, racialized, and classed logic around parental financial responsibility, rather than supporting children (Battle 2019, 2021, 2023). She shows how the carceral logic of this system, incarcerating parents for missing child support payments, does a disservice to children. Parental incarceration disconnects parents from their children and contributes to greater inequality by limiting their opportunities to support their families both financially and emotionally. Battle uses her understanding of this dysfunctional system to engage with other activists and the Forsyth County, North Carolina, community. Together, they work to build systems that truly support children and families (Battle 2022; Battle and Powell 2024). She works to build a joyful community that centers care, shows up to protest unjust killing and incarceration, takes part in marches and community education, and promotes civic engagement in city councils and county commissions (Battle 2022; Battle and Powell 2024). With her collaborator, Uriel Serrano, she argues, "There is no better way to move toward social justice-oriented academic scholarship than by framing all aspects of our work to be in direct service of dismantling oppressive systems in the pursuit of liberation" (Battle and Serrano 2022:359).

Participatory and community-engaged research can help create joyful communities, even when communities come together to address painful inequalities. There are many scholars whose joyful work has inspired me (e.g., Combs 2023; shuster and Westbrook 2024; Siegel 2024; Westbrook and shuster 2023). Tannuja Rozario grounded her work in a community of Indo-Caribbean women in Queens, NY, who have been working toward reproductive justice as well as freedom from domestic violence through community-building (Rozario 2023). Rozario explored the puzzle of why women from countries like Guyana and Trinidad come to the United States for reproductive healthcare, exploring the networks of care in the larger community that give women greater power over their reproductive health. While her work also exposes how class inequalities, patriarchy, colonialism, and racism shape these women's journeys, she notes the powerful effect of women's connecting and organizing, both back in their homelands and in New York (Rozario 2023). As a founding board member of the South Queen's Women's March, Rozario and collaborators have created a joyful space where they organize together as a multigenerational movement to strengthen their community (South Queens Women's March 2024). The close ties between Rozario and the organic communities she works with have strengthened her research (Rozario 2023).

Using participatory methods, Juliana Góes explores how Afro-descendant movements in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, a Black-majority city, organize urban communities as alternatives to Western modernity (Góes 2022, 2023). She started her work by holding meetings with members of the groups to discuss the research proposal and design and then participated in their meetings, general assemblies, self-education seminars, cultural events, protests, community-based projects, land occupations, and other activities related to the

self-organization of their communities. These were spaces of community and joy, even as they were spaces of debate and protest. These Afro-descendant movements have their own knowledge-production structure based on ancestrally lived experience and popular education. In participatory workshops, Góes presented her data and analysis, and community members shared their studies and experiences. By fostering spaces of mutual exchange, she avoided subjugating the communities' knowledge to academic understanding. These conversations were a space of creative tension, an exchange of different understandings of how to reach Black liberation. As Góes (2023:21) notes, "the dialogue with these communities has affected, challenged, and changed everything I knew as a scholar and activist on decolonization."

These examples highlight the many topics and approaches that community-engaged research can take. Whether addressing questions of environmental justice, sex work, the housing crisis, racial microaggressions, the experiences of immigrants, the carceral system, reproductive healthcare, or Black liberation, these researchers have worked collaboratively with their communities to create grounded understandings of their experiences. Such work builds democratic movements, as communities are engaged both in the research process and in using research to identify their challenges and build the solutions they see as most helpful.

CONCLUSIONS

I hope these examples are inspiring. Given this good work, the question is why participatory and community-engaged work has not been centered in U.S. sociology. One important answer is that it has not been recognized or rewarded (Balazs and Morello-Frosch 2013; Bell and Lewis 2023; Gamoran 2023; London 2022; London et al. forthcoming; O'Meara 2002; Saltmarsh et al. 2009; Smith 2022; Van de Ven 2007). Neoliberal models of academic production emphasize citation counts and other metrics that are usually divorced from impact in the real world (Bell and Lewis 2023). Both universities and the discipline must rethink our structures to recognize and reward engaged research more effectively, not only valuing (inter)disciplinary knowledge but also valuing how this knowledge is applied (Gamoran 2023; O'Meara 2002).

There is an inherent contradiction in that community-engaged work often requires greater investment and has a larger effect on the world but counts less in academic rewards systems. Community-engaged work is often measured as "service" rather than "research," and is thus devalued in scholarly communities (Bell and Lewis 2023; Gamoran 2023; London et al. forthcoming; Saltmarsh et al. 2009). Leaders in less well-funded two-year and four-year institutions may be more likely to value community-engaged work, but this work occurs across academia (Heasley and Lapointe Terosky 2020; Purcell 2014; Smith 2023). Whereas university outreach allows academia to maintain control over knowledge production, community-engaged work threatens that control (Bell and Lewis 2023). At the same time, community-engaged work bears a stigma of being less "generalizable," as it tends to be more attentive to the specifics of the local community context—critical to successfully creating change (Bell and Lewis 2023). As a result, some academic leaders and colleagues may not count community-engaged work toward earning a degree, tenure, or promotion, thus marginalizing this work (Bell and Lewis 2023; Hartmann 2017; London et al. forthcoming; Misra 2023; O'Meara 2002; Smith 2022). Given that this work often appeals to first-generation scholars and scholars of color, this epistemic exclusion further affects efforts to diversify the field (London et al. forthcoming; Settles et al. 2022).

Tenure and promotion committees and sociology programs must rethink how they count and value community-engaged work. This rethinking includes changing the structure and culture of how evaluations are done, at the level of faculty governance and at higher administrative levels (Gamoran 2023;

O'Meara 2002). The American Sociological Association, led by Heather Washington and Carolyn Vasques Scalera and funded by the William T. Grant Foundation, has been working with teams at three universities on a project focused on including community-engaged work in tenure and promotion evaluations (Washington, Vitullo, and Vasques Scalera 2023). Departments reflect on their institution's mission, how it connects to the community, and how to assess community-engaged work not only as service but also as research and teaching. The Sociology Action Network is working on disciplinary guidelines that will likely appear in 2025, mirroring the American Sociological Association's guidelines on valuing public communication of research findings (McCall et al. 2016).

In addition to problems in evaluating community-engaged work, I believe there is also a fear of overreaching. We do not want to pretend to be able to do things we cannot do. In the town of Amherst, where I live, we are working on a plan for reparations (Lord et al. 2023). How can we possibly make reparations for the centuries of enslavement, displacement, discrimination, death, and the constant grind of anti-Black racism? The African Heritage Reparation Assembly did historical research, created open forums, and met with the community to develop a plan for repairing past harms committed by the town against Black people, including repair for anti-Black structural and communal racism. They made 12 recommendations. So far, the town has pledged only two million dollars to the reparations fund and has yet to fully fund that two million (Merzbach 2024).

I am endlessly infuriated with the town for not doing more. And yet, what is the alternative? Not to work toward reparations? Massachusetts U.S. Representative James McGovern has suggested that Amherst's efforts offer a potential blueprint for the country (Merzbach 2023), and while I think, "heaven help us," I also think what a difference it would make if every community in the state, in the country, across the globe, made reparations (City of St. Louis Reparations Commission 2024).

Sometimes, we have to make that leap into the unknown to take from our work not only what it reveals about the inequalities in our world but also what it might suggest about strategies to heal the world. When I ask sociologists what brought them to the field, I consistently hear that they want to make a positive difference in the world (Prasad 2021; Romero 2020; Smith 2022). And we do that in a variety of ways. We do that by pushing within the agencies and nonprofits where we work, helping students develop their sociological imagination and encouraging their work toward change, researching things that can positively affect our world, and working with community organizations, unions, and other advocates to support and empower communities. We do all of these things with hope, and here I want to refer to Mariame Kaba's argument that hope is a discipline, it is a decision to keep getting up, struggling, and holding fast to a vision of the possibility of change, even when it is hard (Kaba 2021). And it is hard.

Building on the brilliant work of many others, I want to push sociology as a field into working directly with communities to co-create a more equitable, more just world (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Burawoy 2005; Collins 2010; Glenn 2011; Ladner 1998; Morris 2022; Romero 2020; Strong 2019). Our research helps identify what is missing, but it can also point a way forward. What I think sociologists can bring is a new way to intervene. Those interventions need to be grounded in sociological theory, as well as historical, quantitative, and qualitative empirical evidence, but they also require deep engagement with the communities we are trying to help (Gamoran 2021, 2023; Tseng and Gamoran 2017). And it is that engagement that brings joy to our work. This kind of solidaristic approach, not working separately or from above but as comrades in struggle, is what leads us toward a better world. And that better, more hopeful, just, and joyful world is possible, but it needs us, sociologists, in the fray.

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Notes

1. We must also recognize, of course, that colonial and neoliberal practices from the United States and other wealthy Western nations have shaped practices in other global locations, as reflected in, for example, global rankings that reinforce global hierarchies (Enslin and Hedge 2024).
2. Indeed, the fact that I am in a public policy school, as well as in a sociology department, has given me more opportunities to do publicly engaged work.
3. For example, as of 2018, PCAST never had more than two social scientists at one time, and these members were drawn from economics, education, law, or psychology (never sociology), although the council averages approximately 25 members (Evans and Matthews 2018).
4. All names in this section are pseudonyms.

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