



# Diversity, representation, and the limits of engaged pluralism in (economic) geography

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## Abstract

Within geography writ large, and economic geography in particular, there has been increasing interest in ‘engaged pluralism’ – defined by its proponents as lively and respectful engagement across theoretical, methodological, and topical lines – to increase diversity and build mutual respect among scholars. Drawing on feminist and postcolonial scholarship, we offer a sympathetic critique of engaged pluralism, grounded in a review of publishing trends in economic geography. Our findings reveal theoretical inertia around particular topics and paradigms, as well as low rates of publishing participation from women. We close with a discussion of engagement, reciprocity, and meaningful contact.

## Keywords

economic geography, engaged pluralism, feminist, knowledge production, diversity

## 1 Introduction

Issues of diversity in the academy are reaching a fever-pitch. Amidst expanded media coverage of harassment of and discrimination against female and racialized scholars, structural barriers to career success and advancement have been documented in all aspects of academic life, including journal publishing and citation practices (Ahmed, 2013; Teele and Thelen, 2017), teaching evaluations (Boring, 2017), grant peer review (Wennerås and Wold, 2000; Bornmann et al., 2007), conference spaces (Jackson, 2017) and letters of recommendation (Dutt

et al., 2016; Madera et al., 2009). Alongside evidence that gender and race, in particular, influence purportedly neutral, merit-based systems of evaluation, many scholars are calling for diversification in what is studied, how, and by whom (Boring, 2017; Reid, 2018). A common refrain is that diversifying the voices and bodies that are represented in academic

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institutions will equalize opportunities for identity-marginalized scholars and simultaneously expand and improve academic knowledge production. A recent analysis of the gender gap in publishing in top-ranked political science journals, for example, concluded that these journals privilege topics, themes, and methods that make male scholars more likely than female scholars to submit their work (Shames and Wise, 2017); among possible corrective actions, the authors suggest diversifying graduate school cohorts and hiring more women to teach methods.

Critical geographers have likewise raised concerns about gendered and racialized practices in publishing, citations, editorial board representation, conference participation, tenure proceedings, and the selection of keynote speakers for high-profile events (Flaherty, 2017; Iammarino and Prenzel, 2018; King et al., 2018; Mahtani, 2004). Such practices of scholarly (re)production coincide with debates over what are or should be geographers' chief analytical concerns (Hanson, 2004), with many scholars highlighting the narrow range of authors and perspectives that dominate many academic literatures and correspond with limits in intellectual inquiry and scholarship (Pulido, 2002; Mott and Cockayne, 2017). There is an ever-louder call for increased reflection about 'who gets included, who gets excluded, and why' (Maddrell, 2012: 325).

In conversation with these debates, this paper centers on an emerging proposition for navigating the contested terrains of diversity and knowledge production in economic geography and geography more broadly: the concept of 'engaged pluralism' as proposed by Sheppard and Plummer (2007) and Barnes and Sheppard (2010). Engaged pluralism is an aspirational call for lively and respectful engagement across epistemologies, methodologies, and theoretical traditions, challenging scholars to open themselves up to unfamiliar perspectives and literatures. Through this process, its proponents

argue, individual scholars can expand their understanding beyond their own situated experiences, leading to better scholarship across the field:

By engaged, we mean an open-ended attempt to learn about and learn from other approaches. By pluralism, we mean rejecting monism: the taken-for-granted idea that such engagement must result in a consensus about the best approach to a particular problem – that debates have to be resolved in favor of one position or another (or an agreed compromise). (Sheppard and Plummer, 2007: 2545)

For these authors, economic geography is an ideal discipline for engaged pluralism: in this field, 'things [can be] "with" one another in many ways, but nothing includes everything, or dominates over everything' (James, 1912: 321, quoted in Barnes and Sheppard, 2010). Barnes and Sheppard (2010) also connect engaged pluralism to diversity. The addition of non-Anglophone voices to Anglophone economic geography, they contend, will remove barriers to engaged pluralism in an 'overly introspective' field, which has 'been dominated by a narrow range of participants (males of northern European heritage)' (Barnes and Sheppard, 2010: 195). In calling for more voices to be brought to the table, they do not specifically theorize how a wider diversity of identities among economic geographers will lead to a diversification of viewpoints or an expansion in economic geographical scholarship. But a central aim of engaged pluralism is to 'recognize and connect a diverse range of circulating local epistemologies: politics of difference rather than of consensus or popularity' (2010: 193).

Since 2010, calls for engaged pluralism have echoed across geography and are now found in global cities research, critical urban studies, and debates over geographical methodologies (Brenner, 2017; DeLyser and Sui, 2014; Leitner and Sheppard, 2016; Oswin, 2018;

Van Meeteren et al., 2016). Engaged pluralism has also been invoked at conferences including the 2018 American Association of Geographers and the 2018 Global Conference on Economic Geography, and in disciplinary debates on Twitter and other social media platforms. Across these venues, engaged pluralism is becoming ‘the right way to speak’ (Ahmed, 2012: 50) about a commitment to valuing the diversity of identities and scholarship in geography; it is lauded as both a strategy for increasing scholarly diversity and a path forward through increasingly diverse epistemologies.

Amidst this growing and glowing call for scholarly openness and better listening across epistemological, methodological, and contextual difference – for ‘conversing and collaborating across dualisms’ (Holyer and Harrison, 2017: 2856) – this paper offers a sympathetic critique of engaged pluralism. The components of this concept – pluralism and engagement – in many ways ‘derive [their] value from what is already valued’ (Ahmed, 2012: 57) in critical geography. Who, we might ask rhetorically, in contemporary mores of geographical knowledge generation, would be *against* pluralism, or *against* engagement? This is precisely the reason to subject the concept, aspirational as it may be, to critical scrutiny: to deconstruct the politics of engaged pluralism, as well as the terms in which it is practiced. What about engaged pluralism allows it to be (similar to ‘diversity’) ‘the right way to speak’ and not an indictment of the structural conditions of knowledge generation in our field? How might the invocation of engaged pluralism influence geographical structures of knowledge production?

To answer these questions, we couple an empirical analysis of publishing trends in top peer-reviewed academic journals that publish research in economic geography with a critical deconstruction of engaged pluralism. We use economic geography as a case study because it is the

subfield in which proposals for engaged pluralism originated and have circulated the longest; we focus on publishing trends as an ideal terrain of practice for examining the aspiration of diversifying geographical scholarship through engaged pluralism. Publishing is a knowledge (re)production practice at the center of disciplinary power – top peer-reviewed journals are central vectors of research visibility and scholarly advancement. Through publishing, we can view some of the ‘social conditions’ (Barnes and Sheppard, 2010) that exert profound influence on the field of (economic) geography, and in which any attempt at implementing engaged pluralism will unfold.

To set the stage, the next section begins with a survey of disciplinary debates about the nature of contemporary economic geography. Our subsequent review of the engaged pluralism literature argues that this concept focuses more on the practices than the politics of knowledge production. From there we review two key scholarly prescriptions for how knowledge production should proceed in such an environment: engaged pluralism and feminist philosophies of knowledge production; proponents of engaged pluralism claim the latter as a central influence. We then analyze what was published under the banner of economic geography in high-impact geography journals from 2002–17, finding that publishing in the field is narrower and more homogenous than often claimed. There are clear poles and peripheries in the type of economic geographical scholarship published in top outlets, pointing to unacknowledged, unbalanced terms of scholarly engagement that presently preclude the aspirations of engaged pluralism. While the intention of engaged pluralism is admirable, we conclude that a philosophy of knowledge production based on pluralism is insufficient without being grounded in an anti-essentialist definition of diversity, a clear vision of the meaning and terms of ‘engagement’, and a commitment to changing the discipline’s most powerful institutions.

## II Literature review

### *I Description: Economic geography as a restless landscape*

Over the past 40 years, economic geography has often been described as a field on the move, defined by its diversity, propensity for change, and cross-pollinating relationships with other disciplines (Foster et al., 2007). Barnes (2011: 178) writes that

change has been incessant, the field continually reinventing itself. It makes for an exciting, dynamic, open subject, one that never looks back and is a frequent conduit for new ideas into the rest of human geography.

The notion that Anglophone economic geography is a diverse and open-ended field must be understood in the context of the sub-discipline's history, which has seen a rapid expansion beyond its original concerns with spatial science and industrial location (largely in Britain and North America) as scholars, limited by the explanatory power of existing approaches, became interested in a broader range of theoretical approaches, topics of study, and ways of knowing. Qualitative methods have been legitimized as a means of studying the economy (Schoenberger, 1991), and new theoretical paradigms emerged, including Marxism (Harvey, 1982; Walker and Storper, 1981), feminism (Massey, 1984; McDowell, 1991; Gibson-Graham, 1996), regulationism (Tickell and Peck, 1992), cultural economy (Amin and Thrift, 2004; Gibson and Kong, 2005), and relational approaches (Bathelt and Glückler, 2003; Jones and Murphy, 2011). Feminist geographers in particular have exposed theoretical and analytical blind spots in the field's understandings of the social relations of economic space and capitalist globalization, the subjects and categories of economic processes, and the spaces in which these processes occur (Massey, 1984, 1994; McDowell, 1991, 1992; Gibson-Graham, 1996; Katz, 2001a, 2001b; Nagar

et al., 2002). More recently, many scholars of the economy have brought attention to how capitalism and racialization are fundamentally imbricated (Gilmore, 2007; Bonds, 2013; Pulido, 2016). As Larner (2016) argues in her review of how feminism(s) have changed economic geography, contributions such as these demonstrate the centrality of categories of social difference to processes of capitalist accumulation, globalization, and development (see also MacLeavy et al., 2016).

A wide range of perspectives are now considered *de rigueur* in the sub-discipline of economic geography, with major overviews (e.g. Clark et al., 2018; Sheppard et al., 2012) celebrating the field's plurality of theoretical and epistemological traditions. The table of contents for the most recent edition of the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Economic Geography* (Barnes et al., 2016), for example, equates work that might have previously been considered to be happening at the fringes of economic geography, such as feminism, with the importance and influence of work in areas such as global production networks. Celebrating the field's multiplicity, Barnes et al. (2008: 4) declare that

there is now an unprecedented diversity of approaches to economic geography among geographers, with the creative surge in poststructuralist, feminist, and cultural economic approaches (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Oberhauser, 2003; Thrift, 2000), and a related turn to ethnographies and discourse analysis.

Many contemporary attempts to describe what economic geography is, or what the field is about, foreground notions of diversity and openness. Peck and Olds (2007) use the metaphorical description of a 'donut' to characterize economic geography as a field that eschews a central canon or paradigm(s), and Peck (2012: 119) deems economic geography a 'rudely (and for the most part productively) decentered enterprise'. Barnes et al. (2008: 5) argue that

there is no longer a single core or ‘center’ even of Anglo-American economic geography, but a differentiated terrain of debates, emergent questions, fashionable topics, and enduring concerns . . . it is not easily bounded, nor can it be easily located within a dominant methodological or theoretical schema; it is fidgety and somewhat unruly, and hardly ever unified or cohesive.

Similarly, Clare and Siemiatycki (2014: 4) note that ‘economic geography has, over the past two decades, become a diverse field marked by a plurality of different theoretical, methodological, and topical interests’ and emphasize in their argument that the fragmented nature of the field is an asset, not a problem. In these characterizations, openness and centerlessness are framed as a path to greater diversity of scholarship, but again the mechanism of change is underspecified. This may be linked to wider cultural associations with the idea of diversity – something that is taken as broadly positive, but also highly abstract. Ahmed (2012: 136) identifies something similar in how vision statements and normative policies about institutional diversity initiatives often result in little actual change: ‘the idea that equality and diversity should be mainstream becomes an implicit argument that it is *already* mainstream’ (Ahmed, 2012: 136).

Many descriptions of economic geography as theoretically plural and open have coincided with the (re)discovery of economic geography by orthodox economics (cf. Krugman, 1998). This has strengthened the relationship between the two fields in some circles and strained them in others (Amin and Thrift, 2000; Clark et al., 2018; Yeung, 2001; Peck, 2005; Barnes et al., 2012). Uniting some scholars within economic geography is a desire to transcend what Aoyama et al. (2011: 124) lament as an ‘identity . . . [that remains] something of a tacit knowledge only understood by the insiders’. Proponents of engaged pluralism and many of their sympathizers, however, see a looser identity as crucial to the field’s ability to remain theoretically plural.

Peck (2012), for example, uses the metaphor of the ‘island’ to describe economic geography and other strains of heterodox economics in relation to the ‘mainland’ academic hegemon of orthodox economics. On the island, the ‘local intellectual culture is characterized by a decentered, but somewhat bounded, pluralism, notable for its capriciousness and diversity’ (2012: 115), a benefit to living as the disciplinary ‘other’ of orthodox economics. He prescribes an ‘energetic form of heterodox practice’ to shore up the island against conceptual drift and incursions from what Barnes and Sheppard (2010: 202) jest is ‘the bad monist world of formal economics’.

However exhilarating these David-and-Goliath debates about the relationship between economic geography and the ‘new’ geographical economics, attention is also needed to how characterizations of economic geography affect conduct *on* the island. Assembling research and theories into narratives to characterize a discipline, after all, is a central way in which said discipline is ‘performed’ (Barnes, 2002: 490). It is thus important to analyze not simply *descriptions* of economic geography as centerless but also *prescriptions* for how individual scholars and the discipline as a whole should navigate these conditions. The next section assesses engaged pluralism as such.

## 2 Prescriptions for a centerless field

The early 2000s were full of prescriptions for the future of economic geography. These range from Amin and Thrift’s (2005) anti-Marxism and vague calls for heterarchy within economic geography to Yeung’s (2003) rejection of cultural economy, Murphy’s (2008) calls for expanding empirical analysis beyond advanced industrial economies, and Sunley’s (2008) pleas for a return to institutionalism and critical realism against the relational approaches blooming across the field. These interventions and others influenced the field in myriad ways. Engaged

pluralism, however, seems to be what has stuck as a point of convergence for scholars across many intellectual divides. In its original guise, engaged pluralism responds to the early 2000s debates about economic geography's relationship with the field of economics and also offers a prescription for how economic geographers should work across their own field's 'manifold paradigms and fashions' (Barnes and Sheppard, 2010: 207). Its architects warn against the theoretical monism they identify with formal economics and instead propose embracing economic geography's polyvalent, diverse, and plural tendencies to expand the methodological, theoretical, and empirical breadth of the field. Barnes and Sheppard (2010: 195) propose that researchers with very different beliefs can 'plurally engage with one another' through what the authors call 'trading zones'.

Sheppard and Plummer (2007) present engaged pluralism as a means to constructively engage across different ontologies and epistemologies. They draw on feminist philosopher Helen Longino (2002) in their normative call for rigorous and equitable engagement across difference, calling for debate that is 'constructive and reflexive' (Sheppard and Plummer, 2007: 2548). Likewise, Barnes and Sheppard (2010) draw from feminist scholarship to acknowledge the difficulties of this mission, noting that the 'different perspectives to be engaged are often unequally empowered from the outset, and that strategies must be devised to circumscribe such power asymmetries to enable engaged deliberation' (Barnes and Sheppard, 2010: 195).<sup>1</sup> As such, those who call for engaged pluralism in economic geography are certainly not naïve about the difficulties of pursuing it. Barnes and Sheppard (2010: 199) note that pluralism has traditionally failed to address how 'the very terms of engagement can still marginalize [excluded] voices even after speakers gain a place at the table'. The challenge, according to Barnes and Sheppard (2010), is to change the social conditions in which engaged pluralism is

practiced. Both sets of authors maintain that the potential benefits of pursuing an additive strategy of openness and discerning incorporation of other perspectives outweigh the potential downsides and risks. The social conditions that underlie these calls – which feminists have long critiqued and which we argue are the conditions of possibility that define how engaged pluralism is implemented – are thus of primary interest in the remainder of this paper.

Feminist critiques identify the shortcomings of dominant approaches and propose new directions, stretching the field beyond existing theoretical boundaries and analytical categories (e.g. Massey, 1984; Gibson-Graham, 1996; Katz, 2001b). In a recent special section on feminist economic geography, contributors Larner (2016) and McDowell (2016) argue that much of the research done in economic geography still tends to follow the economic actors that society and formal institutions deem to be the center of the economy. Despite feminist economic geographers' success at identifying the fundamental relationships between such processes as economic production and social reproduction, these authors note that economic geographical research on women, categories of social difference, and non-traditional and informal employment relationships are still largely framed as outside stalwart disciplinary traditions like industrial restructuring. This is despite more than 25 years of feminist economic geographers' rigorous evidence showing how dominant approaches to economic restructuring explain the transition of only a narrow portion of the economy in a small number of places (Smith, 2016; Winders, 2016).

Furthermore, as noted by Hierofani (2016) and McDowell (2016), the bulk of work on 'alternative' economic indicators and processes is still conducted by women. Larner (2016) highlights the contradiction: if (critical) economic geography's professed project is to question the latent structures, relationships, subjectivities, and categories that support mainstream institutions and

are most visibly and commonly associated with what is 'economic', the categories brought to the fore by feminist critiques must be incorporated by *all* economic geographers, not just those working in a feminist sub-literature. In the 2016 American Association of Geographers conference session that led to the special section, seven feminist economic geographers called for the entirety of economic geography to center categories and themes including gender, race, and social reproduction – not as optional add-ons, but as necessary components of any economic geographical analysis. In this, contemporary feminist critiques of economic geography join calls across critical human geography to center questions of power and categories of social difference in geographical analysis and to critique the narrow range of perspectives that dominate the field (McKittrick and Peake, 2005; McKittrick, 2011; Pulido, 2002; Derickson, 2017). These critiques are in contrast to contemporary calls for engaged pluralism in that they prescribe that *all* economic geographers must rethink their central categories of analysis, including in ways that are attentive to the 'residual' forms of difference in economic activities (Buckley and Strauss, 2016).

### 3 Practicing engaged pluralism: What is gained and for whom?

Barnes and Sheppard's (2010: 207) wish that engaged pluralism within economic geography might '[become] an exemplar for the wider discipline' is increasingly coming true. Calls for engaged pluralism exist in evolutionary economic geography (Hassink et al., 2014), agenda-setting pieces for economic geography as a sub-discipline (Jones and Murphy, 2011; Clare and Siemiatycki, 2014), debates over qualitative geographical methodologies (DeLyser and Sui, 2014), global cities research (Van Meeteren et al., 2016), and critical urban studies (Leitner and Sheppard, 2016; Brenner, 2017; Oswin, 2018). The travels of engaged pluralism

illustrate the concept's attractiveness to a wide range of scholars. Here we raise two central concerns about the possibility for a normatively 'good' practice of engaged pluralism. These concerns have to do with what we see as limited critical reflection about engaged pluralism's actual conditions of practice and with the limited range of scholars making these calls.

First, extant critiques of engaged pluralism within economic geography focus on the potential loss of disciplinary cohesion and raise concerns about how economic geographical knowledge produced under pluralist conditions will be received outside the field (e.g. Muellerleile et al., 2014). These discussions have so far not prioritized critical reflection about how knowledge production under engaged pluralism will or should work *within* the discipline. Writing from the context of global cities research, however, Johnson (2016: 274), offers one of the few critiques of how calls for engaged pluralism work in practice: '[engaged pluralism] still suggests a tolerance of difference by those who remain in the position of power to admit or reject' the dominant assumptions of research in the field. With engaged pluralism proposed across multiple areas of geography as a way forward for knowledge production, such inward-facing critique is sorely needed. What are the power relations inherent in the politics and practice of engaged pluralism?

Returning to Barnes and Sheppard's (2010) own reflections about the social conditions necessary for engaged pluralism brings us to our second point: there has been little reflexive critique about the *sources* of calls for engaged pluralism. We might ask, following Roy (2016), for whom does economic geography feel full of openness and possibility? For whom does it feel closed and impenetrable? In reading the summaries above, readers may have noticed that calls for engaged pluralism – as well as descriptions of economic geography as an open and plural field – come from what appears to be a relatively small group of

scholars, many of whom are part of shared intellectual projects within geography. In its travels as well, engaged pluralism seems to have particular (through certainly not exclusive) appeal to white, Anglophone, well-cited, and largely male scholars, many of whom are senior in their fields. This tells us something about the (implicit) understanding of diversity linked to engaged pluralism: it is a diversity rooted in valuing the *presence* of a plurality of approaches and identities. While both Sheppard and Plummer (2007) and Barnes and Sheppard (2010) name several difficulties inherent in achieving a ‘truly’ engaged pluralism, actionable strategies for addressing these difficulties through correcting disciplinary imbalances of power between, for example, men and women, senior and junior scholars, white and racialized scholars, or any number of uneven social conditions, remain to be specified. Instead, prescriptions for engaged pluralism have largely centered on the need for individual scholars to become better listeners. While a worthy intellectual project for individuals, this prescription cannot address structural imbalances of power between and within scholarly disciplines. Peck (2012) makes this point exactly in his reflections about the relationship between orthodox and heterodox economics. In summarizing the likely outcome of attempts at ‘engagement’ without attention to the power imbalances between the two fields, he notes that ‘realistically, colonial absorption [of heterodox perspectives] is a more likely outcome than any form of “conversation” on the part of orthodox economics’ (Peck, 2012: 114). Why would attempts at practicing engaged pluralism within economic geography without attending to the politics of knowledge production be any different? Peck’s (2012) and others’ (e.g. Plummer and Sheppard, 2006) reflections on the limits of pluralist engagement with the field of orthodox economics suggest the need to be attentive to what calls for pluralism look like when they are

operationalized. Despite the possibility of good intentions on the part of more powerful gatekeepers, an engaged pluralism built on a willingness to include is likely to be extremely uneven in practice.

If engaged pluralism is to be the clarion call of economic geography, there has been little discussion of ‘methodological legislation’ (Poon, 2003) – how will engaged pluralism be recognized or assessed? Those calling for engaged pluralism have thus far taken a *laissez faire* approach to this question – again operating at the level of the individual scholar – by suggesting that letting a metaphorical thousand flowers bloom will result in a rich and varied trajectory of knowledge production (Sheppard and Plummer, 2007; Barnes and Sheppard, 2010; Jones, 2016). We use the term *laissez faire* to highlight how the system of knowledge generation under engaged pluralism as proposed would continue to operate: no central arbitrating body would oversee or enforce pluralism or engagement and scholars would continue to produce research through existing channels (e.g. journal and book publication or conference presentations), with individuals ostensibly committing themselves to a spirit of greater openness to perspectives outside their own. Simandan (2011), in contrast, argues that pluralism risks producing spurious or diluted scholarship and offers error statistical theory as a way to scrutinize the integrity of knowledge being produced under the banner of pluralism. While Simandan’s call has gained little traction, the *laissez faire* approach, characterized by a liberal politics wherein all scholars are assumed to have equal potential to be heard and recognized, is proliferating within economic geography and beyond.

Given engaged pluralism’s relative novelty within economic geography, there are only a few examples of direct applications, which tend to follow the approach of blending and adding perspectives. Hassink et al. (2014) take up engaged pluralism by examining the strengths



and limits of evolutionary economic geography relative to other approaches, such as geographical political economy and relational economic geography (see also MacKinnon, 2012). They attempt to enhance, rather than overhaul, dominant approaches by searching for perspectives that will complement existing paradigms rather than reinvent the sub-discipline. This search for complementarity and enhancement, rather than synthesis, is also evident in Jones's (2016) assessment of pluralism as a way to address theoretical weaknesses or blind spots. Here engaged pluralism represents a blending of various approaches or theories in order to ensure 'better' coverage overall. Both of these (nascent) approaches to engaged pluralism fail to heed Barnes and Sheppard's (2010: 208) caution that 'inclusive trading zones need to be actively established'.

Fortunately, a critical assessment of engaged pluralism need not be confined to analyzing the best practices suggested by its various proponents. In the next section, we examine the actual conditions of knowledge production by using a bibliometric approach to review what has been published under the banner of economic geography in the past 15 years and to pinpoint any 'theoretical inertia' (Smith, 2016) present in the contemporary field.

### III Economic geography, 2002–2017

Our approach to analyzing publishing trends in economic geography engages Barnes's (2004: 571) observations that 'intellectual networks and alliances' have a constitutive effect on the emergence of dominant disciplinary narratives or 'truth spots' (Haraway, 1991: 191). We look to the authors and intellectual networks that operate within economic geography to define what the field entails. Following approaches in geography (Bodman, 1991, 1992, 2010; Kanai et al., 2017) and in other fields (Whitehand, 1985; Paasi, 2005; Foster et al., 2007; Martin

et al., 2012; Van Meeteren et al., 2016), we use bibliometric analysis to generate a quantitative literature review of 15 years (2002–2017) of 'high impact' publications within economic geography. The beginning of this period corresponds to a renewed interest in the history of economic geography emanating from proponents of engaged pluralism (e.g. Barnes, 2002) and also follows on the early 2000s proliferation of new prescriptions for the field.

Bibliometric analysis is a common tool for identifying disciplinary paradigms, citation patterns, publication foci, and landscapes of knowledge production. Particularly germane to this paper, bibliometrics have recently been used to demonstrate uneven landscapes of knowledge production in scholarly disciplines (Martin et al., 2012; Kanai et al., 2017). Our survey of 15 years of publishing in economic geography is intended to capture the research and approaches being foregrounded in academic journals as top work in the field. We compiled our initial dataset using Elsevier's SCOPUS database, the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature. We coded and categorized the data both manually and through the assistance of qualitative research software.

In order to capture economic geography publishing in journals specific to the sub-discipline, as well as to explore more generalist journals publishing a significant proportion of work in this field, we undertook a combined quantitative/qualitative review of the literature in two phases. The first phase used SCOPUS to locate research articles in the past 15 years with the term 'economic geography' in the title, abstract, or article keywords, confining our results to journals that are either geography journals or interdisciplinary journals that publish geographical research. Once we identified an initial list of publications, we included only research articles in journals that published at least 40 articles with 'economic geography' in the title, abstract, or article keywords between 2002 and

2017: the *Journal of Economic Geography*, *Economic Geography*, *Regional Studies*, *Environment and Planning A*, *Geoforum*, and *Progress in Human Geography*.<sup>2</sup> Based on their high impact factors and influence in the field, we also included articles published in the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers*, and the *Cambridge Journal of Economy, Society, and Regions*.<sup>3</sup> The decision to include a second set of journals with high impact factors was made because an article in a top discipline-specific journal is often a de facto requirement for scholars seeking employment and tenure, meaning that these journals have enormous influence over the production of ‘top’ scholarly knowledge and the legitimacy of scholars aspiring to be recognized within the field (see also Mott and Cockayne, 2017). As such, journal editors face an imperative to publish research that makes a ‘splash’, rather than simply ‘ripples’ in a field (Wrigley and Overman, 2010; Simsek et al., 2013).

Dataset 1 is comprised of recent articles identified by their authors as economic geography, while Dataset 2 includes all research articles published from 2002–2017 in the two dominant, eponymous journals of the sub-discipline of economic geography: *Economic Geography* and the *Journal of Economic Geography*. Our rationale for selecting these two journals for another round of analysis is that everything published in their pages is considered economic geography by both authors and the journals’ editorial boards. *Economic Geography* specializes in research that makes theoretical advances to the discipline; it is consistently a top publication in the field and was ranked third out of all geography journals (79) in the 2016 Thomson Reuters rankings. *JEG* began in 2001 as an effort to bring together research in geography and economics, particularly the latter’s fledgling sub-discipline of geographical economics. *JEG* ranked 5th in geography and 16th in economics in 2016. Between their

eponymous foci and high impact factors, it stands to reason that these journals are key institutions for setting norms for the field of economic geography.

After assembling the two datasets, we undertook a frequency analysis, focusing only on author-selected article keywords, using the qualitative analysis software NVivo 11. Keywords were examined in context and manually grouped together. Keyword analysis is a technique for exploring thematic trends in scholarly research; with the advent of digitized databases of scholarly output, keyword analyses are used to discern authorial and topical trends in published social scientific research. Kaplan and Mapes (2015), for example, use keyword analysis of dissertation research undertaken by US-based geography graduate students to draw conclusions about the topical spread of the field (see also Kanai et al., 2017). We focus on keywording because it captures the major topical and theoretical foci of a piece of research. In addition to a frequency count, each keyword was manually and individually analyzed in context, with similar keywords grouped together. Our purpose in reviewing *what* is being published is to determine the topical or thematic range of geographical scholarship on the economy.

We also counted the number of female and male authors<sup>4</sup> publishing economic geography research in these journals, also identifying authors who published more than once in the journals considered in our two datasets. A bibliometric analysis of publishing data allows a (crude) analysis of (strategically essentialized) gender identity, but does not allow analysis of many other crucial axes of authorial identity. There are no doubt multiple other forms of structural exclusion and self-exclusion affecting identity-marginalized scholars that are not captured in our analysis. The purpose of examining the gender breakdown in the publishing record is to bring attention to some of the dominant ‘perspectives and voices being given space or

attention' in economic geography (Pugh, 2018: 2). This allows us to identify the gender of scholars most able to have their scholarship recognized and published in the sub-discipline, similar to other examinations of gender disparities in single-author and co-authored articles (e.g. Fine and Shen, 2018). Furthermore, given that economic geography has historically been a male-dominated field, the visibility (or lack thereof) of women's contributions to top journals offers a glimpse into how the composition of field has, or has not, changed over time.

#### IV Publishing trends in economic geography

Our findings highlight two aspects of economic geography publishing from 2002 to 2017: the voices and actors who are active within the sub-discipline and the content of the work that those individuals are publishing. Understanding the range of scholarship being published allows us to assess whether the preconditions of pluralism are being met, before even beginning a discussion of whether 'engagement' might be a viable path forward. The purpose of reviewing *who* is being published is to understand the existing range of scholars active in the field, either by consciously identifying their work as 'economic geography' (Dataset 1) or by publishing in the two leading economic geography journals (Dataset 2). Taken together, a review of these two dimensions of publishing practice provides a view into the current conditions under which engaged pluralism might be operationalized.

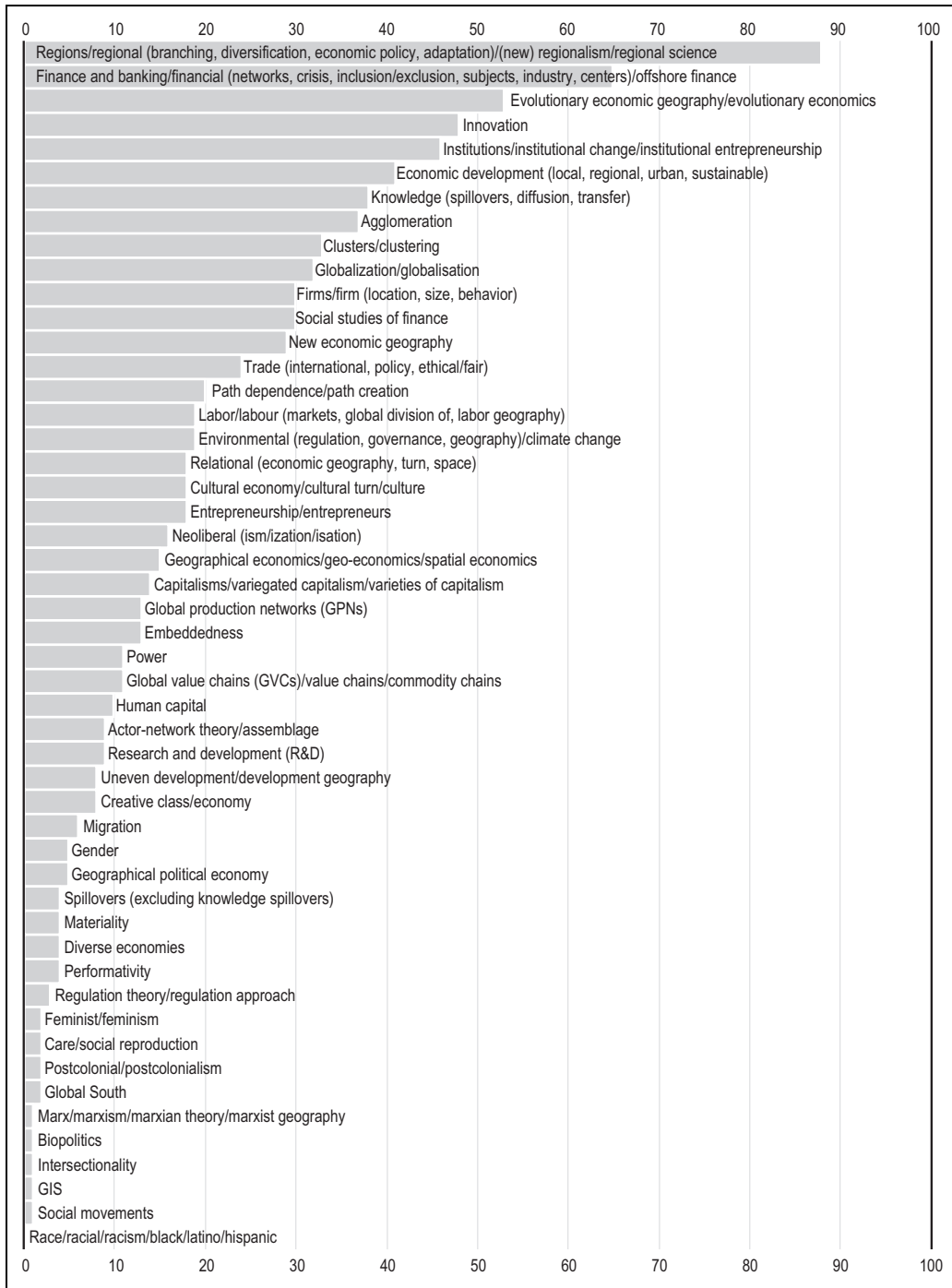
##### *I Content of economic geography*

A review of frequently and infrequently used keywords allows us to determine the topical spread of the field (Kaplan and Mapes, 2015) with the expectation that a plural field should exhibit both diversity in topics and some balance in representation across research areas and

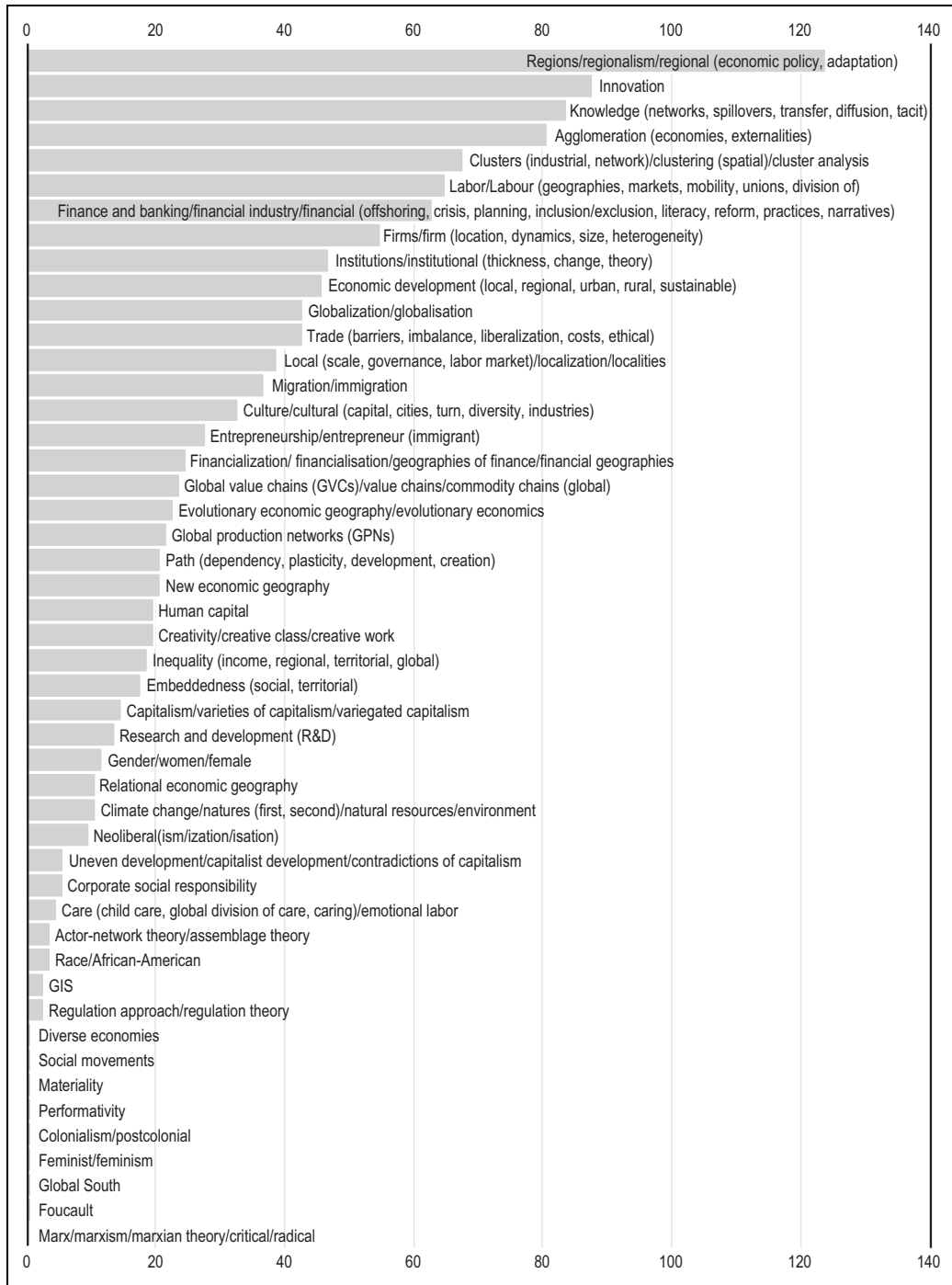
paradigms. In addition to illustrating the most common keywords to emerge out of the dataset (not all keywords are included in our results, as many were specific to industries or study sites in ways that were not instructive about the field at large), we also searched for keywords that were included in the table of contents for the most recent edition of the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Economic Geography*. Figure 1 displays the results of the keyword analysis for Dataset 1, which included 487 research articles; Figure 2 shows the results for Dataset 2, which had 811 research articles.

While there are some differences between the keywords appearing in Figures 1 and 2, there is considerable overlap when it comes to the most and least common topics, showing that regardless of the journal, there is consistency over time and across journals in the scholarship that is published as 'economic geography'. A small handful of research paradigms see strong representation, and the most frequently used keywords across the two datasets reflect the key concerns in the field in the 1970s (e.g. industrial location, labor geographies, agglomeration, clustering) and their legacies (e.g. innovation, knowledge transfer, and firm behavior). The fact that keywords pertaining to the regional scale are most common across both datasets illustrates the long shadow of regional studies and the popularity of the regional scale of analysis – a scale that is sometimes removed from 'on the ground' reality and is often studied through quantitative analysis. The boundedness of this publishing record suggests that instead of an 'absent center', the sub-discipline of economic geography is oriented around certain key themes and topics.

Furthermore, many research areas and topics are underrepresented in the publishing record. Largely absent are keywords that would point to the economic processes and practices that feminist economic geographers and feminist political economists have shown to be essential to understanding the economy, including topics



**Figure 1.** Frequency of a sub-set of keywords from Dataset I, economic geography publications in nine top journals: *Journal of Economic Geography*, *Economic Geography*, *Regional Studies*, *Environment and Planning A*, *Geoforum*, *Progress in Human Geography*, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers*, and the *Cambridge Journal of Economy, Society, and Regions*.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 2.** Frequency of a sub-set of article keywords from Dataset 2: *Economic Geography* and *Journal of Economic Geography*.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1.** Gender breakdown of publications in the field of economic geography, 2002–2017.

	Total Authors	Total Men	Total Women	Total Unidentified
Dataset 1	615	455 (74%)	158 (25%)	2 (<1%)
Dataset 2	1084	817 (75%)	262 (24%)	5 (<1%)

like care, diverse economies, intersectionality, race, and feminism. These themes and approaches are increasingly recognized by the wider sub-discipline, as evident in recent economic geography handbooks' chapters on social justice, feminist economic geography, diverse economies, subalternity, and the economic geographies of race (Leyshon et al., 2011; Barnes et al., 2016). Our results show that what is being published in top journals is actually narrower.

During the 15-year period that we examined, there are only a few instances when keywords related to race, gender, or social justice co-occur with the keyword 'economic geography' in Dataset 1; since this dataset is a subset of the broader publishing record, this may simply indicate that authors are choosing to label their work as 'economic geography' without also choosing to label it with identifiers that indicate a topical, thematic or methodological focus beyond the dominant research paradigms. Asking the same question of Dataset 2, which is a complete survey of research articles in the field's eponymous journals, reveals that publishing in this field is fairly limited in scope. Both datasets, of course, only reflect articles that made it through the publishing process; they do not account for articles that authors decided not to submit to economic geography journals or, for Dataset 1, not to label as economic geography. Further, these datasets also do not peer into the 'black box' of the publishing process and therefore do not capture and cannot address how the submission, peer review, and revision process partially produced this record.

This 'actually existing' boundedness is the present condition of economic geography

publishing. To our minds, a field that is practicing engaged pluralism would exhibit both diversity and evenness of keyword representation. There is certainly a breadth of keywords but not an evenness of topics across the two histograms, and the skew at the tops of Figures 1 and 2 tends toward keywords that indicate quantitative and macro-scale studies (see Cockayne et al., 2018). In a centerless field, or one practicing engaged pluralism, we might expect to see similar representation for keywords that tend to be used by distinct groups of economic geographers, but reflecting a larger range of economic processes (e.g. both agglomeration *and* care/social reproduction).

## 2 Voices and visibility

Whether an author designates their scholarship as 'economic geography' in their title, abstract, or keywords (Dataset 1), or publishes it in an economic geography-specific journal (Dataset 2), the gender makeup of scholars publishing in the field (as single or co-author) is very similar – approximately one-fourth of authors are women. Dataset 1<sup>7</sup> included 615 unique authors – 455 male authors, 158 female authors, and 2 authors whose gender identity could not be confirmed. Dataset 2<sup>8</sup> contained 1084 unique authors – 817 male authors, 262 female authors, and 5 authors whose gender identity could not be confirmed (see Table 1).

Gender imbalances in publishing grow exponentially when we consider who repeatedly publishes in top journals in the field. This is vital for establishing a coherent research identity, influencing who is perceived to be a contributing member of the sub-discipline in ways that

**Table 2.** Individuals who are repeat publishing in the field, broken down by gender and number of repeat publications. Publications can be single or co-authored.

	Women Publishing More Than Once	Women Publishing 3+ Times	Women Publishing 5+ Times	Women Publishing 10+ Times
Dataset 1	30	9	3	1
Dataset 2	43	16	1	0
	Men Publishing More Than Once	Men Publishing 3+ Times	Men Publishing 5+ Times	Men Publishing 10+ Times
Dataset 1	114	67	25	1
Dataset 2	207	80	25	5

have bearing on editorial board placements, leadership positions, and tenure and promotion decisions. The 15-year span captured by our datasets is one in which many authors would have major career arcs. Within the time period analyzed in Dataset 1, only three women who identified their work as economic geography published five or more times (Kendra Strauss, Jane Pollard, and Sarah Hall) and only one woman published five or more times in Dataset 2 (Nebahat Tokatli), while 25 men published more than five times in each dataset. For authors publishing three or more times, which might be considered a more ‘reasonable’ number of publications in top journals in 15 years, the divergences are even more glaring: for Dataset 1 there are seven times as many men as women; for Dataset 2 there are five times as many (see Table 2).

### V Squaring publishing trends with engaged pluralism

What is being published in economic geography journals and labeled as economic geography – and by whom – provides a window into the socio-institutional conditions under which the aspiration of engaged pluralism might be pursued. Our findings belie the notion that economic geography is a centerless and diverse field. While other disciplinary practices may

have broadened in the past 15 years, journal publishing – a key institution of disciplinary reproduction – continues to revolve around a narrow set of topics and authors.

The gender gap in publishing in economic geography may mean that women are publishing their work elsewhere, and likely also reflects the male-dominance of the field. The gap may also be partially explained by who does and does not label their work as economic geography. One possibility is that male-identified scholars may feel more entitled to claim a disciplinary identity by labeling their work as economic geography and submitting it to economic geography journals. Labeling one’s work is not as simple an act as it might first appear; it is an exercise in claim-making that has consequences for who feels they have a right to publish their work under the moniker of economic geography. If scholars do not see authors like themselves, the topics that they study, or methods that they use, represented in core economic geography journals, they may not view themselves as ‘doing’ economic geography and may therefore be unlikely to label their research as such. Disparities between the gender breakdown of groups like the American Association of Geographers Economic Geography Specialty Group and our observed publishing trends reinforce this point.<sup>9</sup> This also illustrates some limits to our keywording analysis of Dataset 1, which only captures scholars who have published

in top geography journals and chosen to label this work as economic geography.

One unexpected finding is that our datasets include minimal publications from many of the (largely white) female-identified economic geographers who are often cited as trailblazers in the field (Barnes and Sheppard, 2010; Barnes, 2018), including Linda McDowell (1 article), Doreen Massey (no publications), Erica Schoenberger (1 article), and J.K. Gibson-Graham (1 article). McDowell and other senior female economic geographers have undoubtedly influenced the field in important ways. But our findings raise questions about how McDowell, other women, and other scholars who do not identify as male are labeling their work, as well as where they are choosing to publish it. There appears to be a gap between recognizing female scholars as top contributors to the field of economic geography and systematically and substantively publishing the research of women and other non-male-identified scholars in top economic geography journals. While articles cannot be published if they are never submitted, in taking the publishing record as evidence of the state of the field, these absences suggest a highly gendered publishing terrain in which proponents of engaged pluralism cannot presuppose an even field of engagement.

Furthermore, just as the scholars most regularly invoked as women at the cutting edge of economic geography are white, our results show that if a woman manages to be one of a few to publish multiple times in top journals, she is also likely to be white. This illustrates the interlocking hierarchies at work in knowledge production in the field. Future research into pluralism and diversity in publishing should conceptualize how race and other axes of personal and scholarly identity relate to what topics – and which researchers – live at the core of the field.

Our keyword analysis illustrates that a core venue of knowledge production in economic geography is decidedly less-than-plural. While

proponents of engaged pluralism might argue that the concept is not linear – that is, engagement need not simply follow from pluralism but might in fact produce pluralism – these results suggest that economic geography has far to go before it could be characterized as a diverse and centerless field. Another valuable avenue for exploring what the scope and composition of the publishing record might suggest about the possibilities and limits of engaged pluralism would be to explore the quality of ‘engagement’. While operationalizing ‘engagement’ poses difficulty, one approach could include a social network analysis that maps authorship to show who publishes with whom, or to analyze which concepts are frequently linked and how they are connected to other concepts. The difficulty of defining what ‘true’ engagement looks like is taken up next, in the conclusion.

## VI Conclusion

Barnes and Sheppard (2010) acknowledge that there are preconditions to engaged pluralism, noting that, ‘once social inequality and prejudice reach certain thresholds engaged pluralism is unattainable’. Their proposed path forward is to challenge the social conditions underlying engaged pluralism; this is the project pursued by our paper. Our analysis of journal publishing illustrates that the preconditions required for engaged pluralism are not being met in scholarly publishing, a venue at the center of disciplinary knowledge (re)production. From a political standpoint, we have argued that the aspirational nature of engaged pluralism might sidestep concrete efforts to bring structural, institutional change to economic geography. As concerns are raised across geography about theoretical narrowness (Pulido, 2002; Werner et al., 2017), the limits to scholarly dialogue (Hawthorne and Heitz, 2018; Rose-Redwood et al., 2018), and the future of economic geography specifically (James et al., 2018),



working towards a more equitable terrain for knowledge production has the potential to be a shared project across scholarly constituencies. In the spirit of working toward this normative vision of a more inclusive and equitable (economic) geography, we focus our concluding remarks around scholarly engagement and structural change. To enable a broadening of disciplinary practice and a reevaluation of previously marginalized scholarship, calls for engaged pluralism must address the forces that allow economic geography to reproduce as a sub-discipline with only marginal change to its institutions over time.

The analysis above indicates that pluralism does not abound in top journals that publish economic geography. What might a 'truly' pluralistic field look like? While Barnes and Sheppard (2010) argue that proximity combined with a spirit of openness will ideally lead to cross-pollination and epistemological diversity within economic geography, increased pluralism risks becoming an empty signifier if it is taken for granted as a common goal without critical reflection. Claims of pluralism and aspirations to become more pluralist thus require more specificity: what exactly is being claimed when a field is described as pluralistic, and for what purpose is this label applied? 'Ostensible' (Barnes and Sheppard, 2010: 194) indicators of pluralism, such as disciplinary handbooks claiming that the field contains a wide range of epistemologies, do not capture overt hierarchies in what kinds of research are submitted to top journals, which research makes it through peer review, how this research is labeled, and by whom it is authored. Also needed is more clarity in the linking of diversity and pluralism: does diversity entail the inclusion of underrepresented populations, diversity in research topics and paradigms, or something else?

Barnes and Sheppard's (2010: 207) normative, aspirational vision of engagement is 'passionate argument among recognized adversaries (albeit not enemies), with all voices

empowered, intellectual hegemony always up for grabs, and new differences emerging'; engagement '[does] not mean agreement, let alone convergence, but . . . a willingness to listen and to take seriously other people's ideas' (2010: 209). If this is to be a goal for the future, the abstraction of engagement must be deconstructed, its practices and (often implicit) politics teased apart. Our review of the recent intellectual history of economic geography shows that engagement has mostly been practiced as a form of recognition, which feminist and anticolonial scholars have shown is rooted in structures of domination between the 'recognizer' and the 'recognized' (Coulthard, 2014). As Ahmed explains,

the logic exercised here is one of 'welcoming' . . . To be made welcome by an explicit act of address works to reveal what is implicit: that those who are already given a place are the ones who are welcoming rather than welcomed, the ones who are in the structural position of hosts. (Ahmed, 2012: 42; see also Derrida, 2000; Staeheli, 2008)

Working toward a more engaged economic geography means reimagining our institutions in ways that move beyond 'recognition' or 'conditional hospitality' (Derrida, 2000: 73; Taylor, 1994). Asking women and other marginalized scholars to 'lean in' (Sandberg, 2013), submit more work to economic geography journals, and label their work as economic geography is clearly not the solution. While expanded representation, or the inclusion of diverse perspectives, may be an important step toward a more plural field, simply arguing for a more 'diverse' set of perspectives to be represented in publishing or teaching will not disrupt the existing balance of power in the sub-discipline. In considering what constitutes engagement and exploring the desired outcomes of engaged pluralism, we could turn to Valentine (2008: 333), who makes a comparison between simple proximity and 'meaningful contact'. Meaningful

contact requires that one's beliefs about and understanding of the world are actually 'destabilized' upon interaction with an other, potentially leading to social transformation. Meaningful contact involves closely reading and dialoguing with – instead of merely citing – scholarship that differs from one's own epistemology. This form of engagement should not be characterized by institutional accommodation of identity-marginalized individuals and groups (Coulthard, 2014; Ahmed, 2012), but by upending previous forms of recognition and valuation.

It follows that engagement is linked to both politics and practices. Performative acts like stating a commitment to broadening the representation of an editorial board or submitting authors must be matched with practices and institutional changes that reinforce and reify those commitments. This is precisely why a liberal, *laissez faire* approach to engagement and pluralism, as characterized by the current culture of competitive individualism in academic knowledge production, is insufficient. A lack of diversity in any institutional context is a structural problem that requires structural solutions, including changes to practice, attitudes, and norms.

There is pragmatic possibility for institutional reform. For example, tracking author gender and keywords – as we have done here – can be a means to visualize trends in a journal's portfolio of scholarship, and could also be useful for tracking reviewers. Journals already track their submissions' countries of origin and could add additional data points to confront how their existing practices reinforce gender and other hierarchies, as the journal *Nature* has done (Editorial Board, 2017). *Regional Studies* is an example of a journal concerted working to diversify its editorial board and pool of accepted authors (Iammarino and Prenzel, 2018). As journal publishing is only one venue of scholarly reproduction, practices designed for more direct engagement must be also be reformed – and this

work has already begun in attention to the structure of conference sessions, make-up of panels' participants in state-of-the-field debates, and the aims of academic mentorship programs.<sup>10</sup>

*Laissez faire* engaged pluralism is premised on accepting academia's culture of liberal, competitive individualism at face value, in which action is oriented at the scale of an individual scholar who must commit to better listening and more engagement. We recommend, rather, turning this lens inward, asking ourselves what we have been given to get where we are. We must recognize that one's ability to live out engaged pluralism depends on one's position within the discipline. For us, it means acknowledging that, while we are three women at the beginning of our careers, we also benefit from our institutional affiliations, our whiteness, and countless other traits and advantages that have allowed us the privilege of 'engaging' in this and other debates in geography. Acknowledgement of these topologies of power and positionality illuminates the state of mutual dependency in which all scholarly production takes place. This brings with it a responsibility to reciprocate what we have been given, beginning an active effort to dilute the power of the 'center' by transferring some of the power to those outside this lineage.

Feminist and decolonial scholars show us that liberal politics and individual actions are ultimately insufficient for the transformation of institutions. Creating new and oppositional institutions that resist the existing system requires work, not just better listening. While this work can be transformational for identity-marginalized scholars in some conditions (Coulthard, 2014), we must guard against the many situations in which it is instead an additional burden - identity-marginalized scholars should not be made responsible for transforming the field. This work demands radical practices, meaning collective, collaborative actions that reject an individualized practice of engaged pluralism and operate in opposition to essentialized visions of diversity. It must be grounded in

a dialogical – rather than signaling – politics of engagement.

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### Notes

1. Similar calls for intellectual openness have been made in fields such as international relations, where Lapid (2003: 130) asks 'is there an intellectually viable middle ground that carries the promise of dialogue and deliberation (but not necessarily consensus or synthesis) across deeply divisive ontological, epistemological, and axiological lines?'
2. Economics journals *Regional Science and Urban Economics* and *Papers in Regional Science* were the other

two journals with over 40 articles in the 2002–2017 study period.

3. This journal was founded in 2007 and therefore has a null dataset for the period from 2002 until its founding; our query spans its entire publishing record, but captures an abbreviated period of time relative to our larger dataset.
4. We acknowledge that these binary gender categories will not capture the full spectrum of author identities. Gender data were drawn from our personal knowledge and from Google searches for faculty webpages and biographies to identify authors' first names and preferred pronouns.
5. The first row, which looks at keywords related to 'regions', excludes the following, which are considered in other categories: regional development, new regionalism, regional science, regional innovation, regional agglomeration, regional path creation/dependency, and regional clusters.
6. The first row, which looks at keywords related to 'regions', excludes the following, which are considered in other categories: regional development, regional migration, regional inequality, regional innovation, regional agglomeration, and regional clusters.
7. Subset of publications from 2002–2017 from *Journal of Economic Geography*, *Economic Geography*, *Regional Studies*, *Environment and Planning A: Economy & Space*, *Geoforum*, *Progress in Human Geography*, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers*, and the *Cambridge Journal of Economy, Society, and Regions*.
8. All publications from 2002–2017 from *Journal of Economic Geography* and *Economic Geography*.
9. In 2017, the American Association of Geographers Economic Geography Speciality Group had 165 female members (93 non-student, 72 student), 279 male members (187 non-student, 92 student), and 255 members who decline to state gender (85 non-student, 170 student). Data were provided by the AAG membership office.
10. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

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