

Scholar activism and activist scholarship

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Food justice is an ideal condition of equitable access to healthy food and ownership of the means of production and exchange of the food by the communities that consume the food. This concept informs several evolving social movements *called* food justice. Some examples of food justice activities include urban agriculture; addressing lack of food access; nutrition and food system education; and community development. Not all of these activities are led by the people they intend to serve. Such projects can never fulfill the ideal of food justice. They bear more in common with the alternative food movement than the food justice movement. At best, they constitute *nominal food justice*. Nevertheless, the proliferation of applications of the ideal has two important impacts: first, an expansion of activist work and scholarship on “food justice”; and second, mystification of the meaning of the term.

While it may be easier for scholars to gain entree with activists doing nominal food justice, it is important that scholar activists hold each other accountable to high ethical standards, even if this inhibits or slows our scholarly processes. Furthermore, scholar activists often work with activists, benefit tremendously from relationships with these individuals and their organizations, and build scholarly work on them. Activists often possess tremendous knowledge about the food justice field, but they build this body of knowledge more slowly, often through greater personal sacrifice, with fewer opportunities for engaging in scholarship, and with less recognition than their scholar counterparts. This dynamic results in extractive research practices even when scholars attempt to avoid this outcome.

We have some ideas about how to prevent this outcome and change research dynamics and would like to engage in conversation with activists and scholars in the panel. This discussion will focus on the ways to create safe spaces for activist and scholars to engage with each other on an equitable basis; how to legitimize activists' work as research; reciprocal relationship dynamics between activists and scholar activists; conditions and resources necessary for activists to engage in scholarship; and scholarship foci that advance food justice activism.