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Lester Pollock Room, FH, 9th Floor**

Colloquium in Legal, Political, and Social Philosophy

**Conducted by
Liam Murphy and Samuel Scheffler**

Speaker: **Wendy Salkin, Stanford University**

Paper: **Writers Are Not Congressmen**



Colloquium Website: <http://www.law.nyu.edu/node/22315>

Memorandum

From: Wendy Salkin (salkin@stanford.edu)
To: Readers
Date: October 22, 2025
Subject: "Writers Are Not Congressmen"

Dear Colleagues,

Please find below my paper, "Writers Are Not Congressmen." This paper is part of a newish project: It draws on some ideas developed and defended in my book, *Speaking for Others: The Ethics of Informal Political Representation* (Harvard University Press, 2024). In this book, I provide a novel conceptual and normative theory of informal political representatives, who speak or act for others despite having been neither elected nor selected to do so by means of a systematized election or selection procedure. This theory has implications for our understanding of representation in a variety of academic, legal, and formal political institutions. Accordingly, one of my current research projects comprises a series of papers addressing underexplored questions about representation in these fora. Other papers in this series include "**Speaking for Others from the Bench**" (*Legal Theory*, 2023), in which I examine the novel concept of *bench representation*, whereby a judge, through statements or actions undertaken during the performance of official duties, speaks or acts for a party to the proceeding before them. I argue that serving as a bench representative is a common and valuable feature of what it is to be a judge and, despite appearances, usually undermines neither the judge's impartiality nor the fairness of the proceeding. In "**Representation and Precedent**" (in progress), I consider the role of courts' adherence to precedent in rendering each lawyer who goes before a judge on behalf of a particular client a potential informal representative for future similarly situated parties.

I have included two further readings for those who may find them of interest. As "Writers Are Not Congressmen" is meant to be an independent, standalone paper, neither is required for understanding what I am up to below.

1. ***Speaking for Others, Introduction and Chapter 1 ("Audience Conferral")***. In Chapter 1, I provide an analytical framework for understanding what informal political representatives are and how they come about. An individual or group emerges as an informal political representative when and because they are treated by an audience as speaking or acting for another individual or group in a context—a practice I call *audience conferral*.
2. "**Speaking for Others from the Bench**" (*Legal Theory*, 2023): In this article, I examine the novel concept of *bench representation*, whereby a judge, through statements or actions undertaken during the performance of official duties, speaks or acts for a party to the proceeding before them. I argue that serving as a bench representative is a common and valuable feature of what it is to be a judge and, despite appearances, usually undermines neither the judge's impartiality nor the fairness of the proceeding.

I am looking forward to our discussion.

All the best,

Wendy Salkin

Laurance S. Rockefeller Visiting Faculty Fellow, UCHV, Princeton University (2025-2026)
Assistant Professor of Philosophy and, by courtesy, of Law, Stanford University

Writers Are Not Congressmen^{1, 2}

Wendy Salkin
Stanford University
salkin@stanford.edu
October 2025

Abstract. I examine the difficult moral position of public experts—like social science researchers and journalists—who voluntarily speak and write publicly about social groups, but do not intend to represent these groups. I consider whether the expectation that public experts represent groups that are the subject matter of their work interferes with their freedom of inquiry, critical distance, or appearance of objectivity; whether these interferences justify stricter separation of the roles of public expert and representative; and countervailing considerations concerning both the feasibility and desirability of doing so.

I. Expert Representatives

The aim of this paper is to make sense of a complex social role (*expert representative*) that foreseeably results from the collision of two other conceptually distinguishable but practically entangled social roles (*public expert*; *informal representative*). In this section, I discuss how expert representatives emerge, noting along the way the ethical hazards that befall parties who end up (or opt to be) in this dual role.

Many people willingly take it upon themselves to speak and write publicly about the plights of others. Some, like journalists and social science researchers, structure their lives' works around doing so. This social role and its context are characterized by the following four conditions:

- (1) The subject matter of their work is either **a particular social group** or community generally, or circumstances disproportionately faced by that group or community.

¹ For valuable feedback and helpful ideas, I thank Elizabeth Anderson, Juliana Bidadanure, Susanna Blumenthal, Elizabeth Brake, Michael Bratman, Ray Briggs, Kimberly Brownlee, Emilee Chapman, Tom Christiano, Joseph Cloward, Adrian Daub, Brandon R. Davis, Camille DeJarnett, Lidal Dror, Ayana Omilade Flewellen, Anca Gheaus, Michael Hardimon, David Hills, Adam Hosein, Roanne Kantor, Erin Kelly, Muhammad Ali Khalidi, Ty Larrabee, Moya Mapps, Lionel McPherson, Alison McQueen, Michele Moody-Adams, Karla Oeler, Serena Olsaretti, Malloy Owen, Natasha Patel, Carmen Pavel, Armando Perez-Gea, Govind Persad, David Plunkett, Kasey Rhee, Jonathan Riley, Miriam Ronzoni, Grant Rozeboom, Avshalom M. Schwartz, Tommie Shelby, Anna Stilz, Michael Thomas, Laura Valentini, César Valenzuela, Leif Wenar, Paul Weithman, David Wiens, Andrew Williams. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University; the International Social Ontology Society Annual Meeting; the Moral and Political Philosophy Work in Progress Group; Philosophy, Politics and Economics Society Annual Meeting; the *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* Workshop on Race and PPE; and the Stanford Political Theory Workshop. Thanks to everyone present on those occasions for their generous engagement with this project.

² This title comes from a Baldwin essay that I discuss below. I like this title but worry it may mislead readers. I have considered retitling the paper "Expert Representatives."

- (2) Their work (e.g., articles, books, lectures) is intended for and available to a broad **public**, rather than directed at or only available to particular private audiences or de facto insular although not private audiences like a scholarly milieu.³
- (3) The authors of the work **intend** to speak publicly about the underlying subject matter.
- (4) The authors are **theoretical authorities** about their underlying subject matter.

Theoretical authorities are experts in some area of inquiry, whose “judgments...give people reasons for belief” (Christiano, 2012; see also Raz, 1979: 8; Wolff, 1970: 6, 15).⁴ The scope of the ensuing discussion is limited to de jure or justified theoretical authorities—parties who are in fact experts, not merely believed to be. They may also, in addition, be de facto or effective theoretical authorities, insofar as their actual expertise is recognized by others. But I am not offering a theory concerning mere de facto theoretical authorities, who are believed to be experts whether or not that is so. Going forward, I will refer to these parties as *public experts*, but on the understanding that being a theoretical authority is conceptually contained in the conception of *expert* on which I rely.⁵

People tend to enter the social role described by conditions (1)-(4) voluntarily. More than that, they must sometimes undergo decades of significant training to be properly credentialed to do so. Some, like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, describe the strength of their commitment to the role to be so strong as to be thought not merely voluntary but a calling: “there was no other excuse for my being before the public except to tell about the outrages upon my people” (1970: 226). There is no question that they have “signed on” for the role in question (Hardimon, 1994: 344, 347, 357, 360, 362), at least as it has been characterized up to this point.

Frequently, parties who inhabit the social role just described come to be treated by various audiences—for instance, those groups whose plights they describe or those who consume their works—as speaking not merely about the group or its plight but, further, as speaking for the group itself as an informal representative (Salkin, 2021, 2022, 2024). How might this transition happen?⁶

³ I have elsewhere made brief remarks about what makes one’s scholarly work public (Salkin, under review).

⁴ This sense of authority is distinguishable from being in authority or having authority over—the latter two concerning practical authority, or “the right to rule” (Green, 1998). I take no stance on what sort of education, training, or experience would be required for someone to count as an expert, and use examples from both within and outside of scholarly institutions to illustrate the phenomena at issue.

⁵ Two notes here:

1. As I understand the concept *expert*, all experts are in fact theoretical authorities such that their judgments (by definition) give others reasons for belief. One concern I have about the use of the term *public expert* is that two of the key motivating examples I am using in this paper are people whose knowledge of a subject matter is such that their judgments give us reason for belief but they inhabit a role—journalist—that is not always associated with the term *expert* in everyday conversation. So, I am worried that my meaning will be obscured by the conventional limitations of the term *expert*. Yet, the term I used before this was the clunky *public theoretical authority*, and the term I used before that was the even clunkier *public-facing theoretical authority*. If in reading this you have guidance, I welcome it.
2. Some of the parties who satisfy conditions (1)-(4) are perhaps better characterized as *public intellectuals*. However, as the concept *public intellectual* admits of many conceptions (see, e.g., Chomsky, 1967, 2002; Cohen-Solal, 1987 (on Sartre); Hayek, 1949; Posner, 2001, 2002; Sowell, 2010), is normatively laden, and in some cases picks out mere de facto theoretical authorities, I will rely on my own stipulative definition to pick out all and only those parties who are in fact theoretical authorities. For the purposes of my argument, those public intellectuals who satisfy conditions (1)-(4) above, including the de jure theoretical authority criterion, fall within the ambit of my concern.

⁶ I describe this transition as though it is a simple, straightforward, linear transition whereby one day a public expert regarding some group becomes a representative for that group. This is a convenient simplification for the purpose of exposition, and the transition into a new social role is no doubt more complicated.

The public expert may begin (a) being treated by an audience as a credible source of information about the group's or its members' values, interests, or preferences. In the cases of interest, this treatment is often reasonable since they are de jure theoretical authorities concerning the group. Call this manner of treatment *credibility conferral*. An audience may further, again reasonably, (b) rely on the public expert's testimony when attempting to understand what the group's members want, value, or prefer—call this *testimonial reliance* (Salkin 2024: ch. 1).

It is only a short step from these manners of treatment to others through which an audience may come to confer on the public expert the status of informal representative for the group that is the subject matter of their work. The manners of treatment by which an audience confers this status include (c) *ascription*, whereby their statements are ascribed to the group or its members, treated as though made by the group or its members themselves, and (d) *invitation*, whereby the party is invited to stand in for the group or its members when the group's members' interests are at stake in a given forum (Salkin 2024: ch. 1).⁷

No longer merely a theoretical authority reporting on the group or its plight to broad audiences, they are foisted (sometimes unwillingly or even unwittingly, Salkin, 2021, 2024) into the position of spokesperson for the group—representing its members and being expected to voice their values, interests, and preferences. Yet it should not surprise us that audiences treat knowledgeable parties who intentionally produce work expressly for public consumption by those audiences as speaking for the groups that are the underlying subject matter of that work. We might even think that the audiences' treatment is reasonable (or, at the very least, understandable) in these cases.⁸ Public experts often produce work for the express purpose of conveying the group's members' values, interests, preferences, perspectives, experiences, or circumstances to broader audiences. Naturally, this leads audiences to look to those public experts for insights about the group and perhaps even to regard

⁷ As I discuss in (Salkin, 2024: ch. 1), I consider each of conditions (a) to (d) to be individually sufficient manners by which a party may be conferred the status of informal representative by an audience. On my view, one becomes an informal representative for a group *G* when and because one is treated as speaking for group *G* in at least one of these four manners. Yet some are skeptical that (a) or (b), either individually or jointly, would be sufficient to make it the case that a party is rightly considered to be speaking *for* a group rather than *about* a group. One might object that (a) and (b) simply make someone an *effective* public theoretical authority, not necessarily an informal representative. In reply: The border between speaking *about* and speaking *for* is porous (see Alcock 1991) such that, even if one does not want to countenance (a), (b), or their composite as manners of treatment sufficient to make it the case that the so treated party is in fact speaking *for* another, one should countenance that these manners of treatment often occur alongside (c) and (d), which may seem more centrally related to our pretheoretical notions of speaking for. In any event, I myself think of *speaking for* as picking out a spectrum of related phenomena (Salkin, 2024: ch. 1, forthcoming). At one end of the spectrum, there is a narrow, restrictive sense of speaking for that is familiar from, for instance, law: one party, *A*, is authorized by another party, *B*, to, in effect, stand in for *B* in certain contexts and for certain purposes such that, in those contexts and for those purposes, *A*'s statements are imputed to *B* as *B*'s own statements. In these cases, it is also common for *A* to intend to fulfill this role. So, in such cases, for an instance of speaking about to become an instance for speaking for, the speaker must be authorized by the party to be spoken for and usually the speaker intends to speak for the authorizing party. At the other end of the spectrum, there is a different, more permissive sense of speaking for, according to which the activity may be undertaken unintentionally or without the authorization of the spoken-for party, or both. One speaks for another in this sense when one speaks in their place (Alcock, 1991: 9; Mansbridge, 2011, 628).

⁸ In saying this, I am not committing to the view that it would be reasonable for audiences to view *all* parties that satisfy conditions (1)-(4) as speaking for the group as the group's representative. There may be further facts about a party that satisfies conditions (1)-(4), like their known animosity towards the group, their adversarial position vis-à-vis the group, or their active and public ambitions to undermine the group's aims, that would diminish how reasonable (or understandable) it is for an audience to regard them as speaking for the group.

them as willing to speak for groups that are the subject matter of their expertise. And, unlike many of the people who find themselves thrust one day, to their considerable surprise, into the role of spokesperson for an entire group, often on objectionable grounds (see Salkin, 2021, 2024: ch. 2), public experts are often aware of their audiences and their platforms and, so, can (and it seems to me should) reasonably expect that work they intentionally produce for broad public consumption will lead audiences to confer upon them this further status of informal representative.

We may think of the transition they face as one of going from a position of solely theoretical authority or go-between (reporting on the group or its plight to broad audiences) to a position of practical go-between (speaking on the group's behalf).⁹

Sometimes, these roles fit together well. Both roles ask their inhabitants to serve as testimonial go-betweens—ferrying messages from one group to another. Discussing Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois (2011: 374) characterizes the role of the testimonial go-between this way: “Washington...was a sort of clearing house for information, speaking to the White people concerning Colored folk and speaking to Colored people concerning White folk....[H]e was the voice and visible representative of the Colored people.” Similarly, Wells-Barnett (1970: 87-419) toured women's club circuits to tell mostly white audiences about the plight of Black Americans in the United States, describing herself as “only a mouthpiece through which to tell the story of lynching” (Wells-Barnett 1970: 231, see also 313). Arlie Hochschild regards herself as a “translator of the radical right” for progressive readers she sees as her target audience (2020: 7:40-7:44). When one is a go-between, one is in some sense replacing someone else—stepping in for them (Alcoff, 1991: 9; Mansbridge, 2011: 628; Pitkin, 1967: 8-9). That this is so means that there is a defeasible responsibility to express the message of the communicating party accurately.

Some balk at anyone, public expert or not, having a responsibility to speak publicly for a group as that group's informal representative. Speaking for others is commonly viewed to be, among other things, burdensome for the speaker and dangerous for the group (Alcoff, 1991; Salkin, 2021, 2022, 2024). Concerns about this relationship are even more acute when (i) the person treated as speaking for the group is reluctant or unwilling to do so (Davis, 2016; Hayat, 2022; Salkin, 2021, 2024) but (ii) the group would benefit from or even relies on someone to speak publicly on its behalf, perhaps because the group is oppressed or marginalized or otherwise lacks adequate formal representation (Alcoff, 1991; Salkin, 2022, 2024). Although in most cases it is not only reasonable but appropriate for a would-be representative to refuse to fulfill the responsibility to speak publicly for the group for which they are treated as speaking, there are some cases in which refusal can be inapt and the refusing party criticizable—for instance, parties who publicly announce their willingness or intention to represent a group should reasonably expect that their announcement may elicit conferral of informal representative status by their audience (Salkin, 2024: 60-62, 101). One question is whether public experts in particular can reasonably refuse when the subject matter of their work is that same group, and if so on what grounds they may do so.¹⁰

⁹ As I have argued elsewhere, some informal representatives may even become practical authorities with respect to those they represent (Salkin, 2024: ch. 3).

¹⁰ Although I gesture at some answers to this question in the conclusion, I do not directly address this question here. I have removed a long discussion of the responsibilities of parties in the dual of *expert representative* and what grounded

Why worry about the interaction of these two roles? Here are a few reasons:

First, although it is foreseeable that public experts will often be treated as speaking for the groups whose plights they document, it would be inapt to say that they intend to become spokespersons for these groups. In fact, many public experts inhabit institutional roles the mandates for which include adherence to principles seemingly at odds with the informal representative role. For instance, some institutional roles inhabited by public experts are mediated by professional codes of ethics that counsel impartiality, neutrality, or objectivity (see, e.g., American Sociological Association [ASA], 2018; Society of Professional Journalists [SPJ], 2014, 2023)—principles at least *prima facie* at odds with the expectation that they do or even may speak in a representative capacity for the groups whose circumstances they study.¹¹

Second, although we may confidently say that many public experts do not intend to speak for the groups they study, we cannot straightforwardly conclude that they have been conscripted to do so (Salkin, 2021, 2024: ch. 2; see also Hardimon, 1994: 347-348). Unlike other private parties, these public experts elect to speak and write about particular groups for public audiences. They do not attempt to keep themselves out of the public eye totally. In fact, we may even want to say that some public experts invite the conferral of the status of informal representative (Salkin, 2024: 60-62).

Third, these parties' public expressions sometimes diverge in both aim and impact. Public experts often aim to use their positions for descriptive purposes: to inform broad audiences about the lives and circumstances of those about whom they write and speak, and communicating about these accurately is of fundamental importance (see, e.g., American Association of University Professors [AAUP] 1915, 1940, 1964, 2009; Chomsky, 1967; Rivers, 1992; SPJ, 2014, 2023). By contrast, informal representatives, whose aims often include advocacy for or negotiation to achieve the represented group's ends, may have instrumental reasons not to prioritize accuracy or open disclosure over other strategic goals they may have to advance the represented's interests.¹² Moreover, informal representatives, unlike public experts, are often imbued with the power to change the normative situation of those for whom they speak. For instance, their statements may concede positions or outcomes the represented group would not have wanted to. An authorized informal representative can sometimes make commitments on behalf of those they represent that give the represented reasons to comply (Salkin, 2024: ch. 3).

The expectation that a public expert speak for the group that is the subject matter of their work (call this *the representation expectation*) thus gives rise to a number of conflicts and concerns for those who rely on their statements, those who are the subjects of those statements, and the public experts themselves.

The twin aims of this paper are (1) to identify and distinguish particular individual and social

those responsibilities in the interest of trying to focus on the prior question of how the two roles that comprise this composite social role even fit together. Still, I would be grateful for guidance on this further question.

¹¹ Many people who are in the relevant target social role (*public expert*) are in corresponding institutional roles, and that fact can complicate the analysis beyond ways that I already acknowledge in this paper—for instance, they may receive credibility by virtue of their institutional role. Moreover, there may be competing obligations between their institutional role and their social role that should bear on my discussion.

¹² For instance, an informal representative may have good reason to present a particular image of what the represented group is like that covers over or ignores variety within the group. See Salkin 2024: 194-197 on strategic occlusion.

perils that arise from the convergence of these two roles—concerns that should make all of us wary of their habitual collision, and (2) to consider what these perils tell us about this dual role (*expert representative*), including whether it should continue to exist (and whether we have any control over whether it does).¹³

To explore the relationships between these two roles, I identify and distinguish several concerns we might have about the expectation that public experts serve as representatives for the groups that are the subject matter of their work. I proceed as follows: In §II, I consider the expectations that give rise to this dual role as well as some expectations that groups have of its inhabitants—the latter are meant to sharpen the point of the conflict between the two roles by making concrete their dueling demands. In §III, I discuss chilling effects, broadly conceived—in particular, impingements on the public expert's freedom of inquiry (§III.A), the difficulty expert representatives have taking critical distance from their subject matter (§III.B)—and, again to sharpen the conflict, the unavoidable need public experts have for proximity and access to (and their subsequent dependence on) the groups that are the subject matter of their work (§III.C). In §IV, I turn to the conflict between earning public trust (which often requires the appearance of objectivity) and earning the trust of the group (which requires proximity that often undermines the appearance of objectivity). In §V, I discuss the seeming inevitability of the overlap between these two roles, the value of this overlap, and a particular bind faced by ingroup public experts, who seem especially likely to be forced to represent the group that is the subject matter of their work because of their own membership in the group. In §VI, I restate the core problem and then consider some preliminary routes to resolve it, including subsidiary interests, extramural utterances, skepticism concerning objectivity, and audience responsibilities.

The question at issue is not whether or under what circumstances it is reasonable or permissible to confer the status of informal representative on others generally,¹⁴ but instead what reason we have to worry about public experts in particular being subject to this representation expectation.

The concerns contemplated here suggest that there is good (although certainly not dispositive) reason to strictly separate the roles of public expert and informal representative, and may even give us all shared forward-looking reasons to bring about their eventual disentanglement by, among other things, discouraging audiences from conferring the status of informal representative on public experts. Yet, notwithstanding aspirations to foster social norms that shield public experts from the representation expectation, there are countervailing considerations that make trouble for each of these concerns—trouble that arises out of the convergence of conditions (1)-(4). Accordingly, in the interest

¹³ There is a further question concerning the moral responsibilities of parties who inhabit this dual role, discussion of which I have removed from this draft in the interest of space. I am interested in exploring this question in a future draft or companion paper.

¹⁴ Elsewhere (Salkin, 2024), I do answer this question, providing the *audience conferral permissibility test*: An audience may not treat a given party, R, as speaking or acting for a given group in a context unless the audience concludes that (1) it is reasonable to believe that R has requisite knowledge to speak or act for the group in the context (the *reasonableness condition*), (2) R is willing to speak or act for the group (the *self-appointment prong*), (3) R has or would have the authorization of the group for whom the audience would treat them as speaking or acting (the *group authorization prong*), and (4) there is no presumption against audience conferral to be rebutted or, if there is, the presumption has been successfully rebutted (the *rebuttable presumption prong*). These four conditions are difficult conditions to meet.

of building a coherent dialectic, I will pair each concern about the representation expectation with the countervailing consideration that is most relevant to it. Naturally, there will be cross-cutting considerations between these—where that is so, I will note them. Here is a chart:

Challenge	Countervailing consideration
Expecting public experts to serve as representatives has chilling effects, impinges on their freedom of inquiry, and limits their ability to take critical distance from their subject matter (§§III.A-B).	Public experts studying particular groups depend on these groups to produce their work. They must be proximate and have access to these groups, which can lead to expectations from group members and outside audiences that they will speak on the group's behalf when relevant (§III.C).
Parties who inhabit the role of expert representative risk marring their appearance of objectivity, which can in turn cause public audiences to lose trust in them (§IV).	Proximity to group members and commitment to their aims are required for building trust with group members, or at least make doing so easier (§IV).
This dual role appears to be inevitable. Yet the mandates of the two roles that compose it often conflict (§V).	Some possible remedies? (§VI): 1. Follow AAUP guidance on subsidiary interests and extramural utterances of private citizens. 2. Reject objectivity. 3. Rely on individual commitments to truth telling. 4. Shift moral burdens to audiences.

To ground this discussion in some concrete examples, I consider three parties who are public experts about particular groups who have themselves reflected on what the role requires of them—Arlie Hochschild, Wesley Lowery, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Both Wells-Barnett and Lowery have produced rigorous empirically grounded journalism about injustices faced disproportionately by Black Americans—for Wells-Barnett, lynchings in the American South; for Lowery, police killings of Black people, particularly men and boys, throughout the United States—aimed for public consumption by audiences in the United States and abroad. Similarly, Hochschild employed the methods of her discipline, sociology, to interview and report on the lives of Louisiana Tea Party members who, she argues, take up political convictions seemingly at odds with their interests, and feel themselves disrespected, disregarded, or misunderstood by Americans living in other parts of the country whose ideological commitments they do not share. Each has also been treated by various public audiences as speaking for the groups they study—that is, their statements are ascribed to the groups about which they write and speak; they are regarded as credible sources of information about the group's values, interests, or preferences; audiences rely on their testimony when attempting to understand what the group's members themselves want, value or prefer; and they are frequently invited to stand in for the group or its members when the group's members' interests are at stake in a given forum. And although they themselves accept these invitations and answer the questions asked of them, they first occupy

roles not of activists or advocates, but of theoretical authorities about the underlying subject matter.¹⁵

The questions I raise here are, of course, not new questions. Anthropologists, sociologists, journalists, and documentarians (among others) have been critically reflecting on their own representative relationships to their research subjects for decades (see, e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1991, 2015, 2016; Alcoff, 1991-1992; Budabin, 2015; Clifford, 1983; Jackson, 2013; Lee, 1998; Narayan, 1993; Nzinga et al., 2018; Rabinow, 1985; Richardson, 1988, 1990; Rodrigues and Game, 1998; Ruby, 1991; Small, 2015; Vargas-Cetina, 2013; Visweswaran, 1994; Willner, 1980). My aim here is to collect and distinguish different concerns we might have about the overlap of these roles.

II. Expectations

Public experts tend to be keenly aware of their public platforms, their audiences, and how those audiences regard their public-facing work. Some examples: Lowery (2021: 55:52-56:25) reflects on “the role of Black journalists” as “ombudsmen” concerning discussions of race within their particular news organizations and the industry more broadly, and as storytellers for those “stories that other people are unwilling to see and to tell.” A core and repeated feature of Hochschild’s (2016) narrative is that she, her interviewees, and her audiences (including and especially “people who despise the radical right” [2020: 6:53-7:39]) are aware of her position as a progressive Berkeley professor (2016: 16, 29, 30, 33, 88, 121, 124, 125, 158, 171, 232, 236, 242, 244, 248, 249). She reflects on how her ideological distance from her interview subjects (Louisiana Tea Party members in particular and members of the “radical right” more generally) will make her more accessible or credible to her audiences. Wells-Barnett (1970: 35-37), too, recognizes her relationship to her audiences, as when she asked Rev. F. Nightingale, the owner of the *Free Speech and Headlight* newspaper of Memphis to sign an article Wells-Barnett had written criticizing the Memphis schools in which she was working as a teacher, since she (presciently) foresaw that, left unsigned, the article would be attributed to her and she would lose her teaching position.

Often, public audiences treat public experts as speaking for and not simply about the group that is the subject matter of their work—treatment that confers on them the status of informal representative.¹⁶ Given their awareness of their public platform, public experts should reasonably expect that they will be conferred the status of informal representative. (In fact, Wells-Barnett [1970: 226] did, describing herself as “an instrument that had been chosen to” “tell about the outrages upon my people.”) Specifically, public experts whose work satisfies conditions (1)-(4) can (and ought to) foresee that, when they speak about the group on Fox or MSNBC or make a speaking tour of the women’s club circuit across the United Kingdom, their statements will often be imputed to the groups they study and document. Their awareness of their public platforms chiefly distinguishes such figures from other experts (like “pure” researchers), whose intended audiences often tend to be their own intellectual milieus rather than broad audiences. That they should reasonably expect that they will be

¹⁵ If other examples occur to you—particularly of parties who satisfy conditions (1)-(4) and who have written about or otherwise publicly reflected on their dual role—please recommend them to me.

¹⁶ And even if you do not share my view about how people become informal representatives (perhaps you think it is voluntary—on this, see Salkin 2024: ch. 1), you may still share the impression that people who are public experts are often *expected* to represent those who are the subject matter of their work, whether or not you agree that they in fact come to inhabit this representative role just by dint of audience conferral. Much of what I say in this essay will be relevant to this mere expectation, as well.

put into the position of informal representative for the group that is the subject matter of their work does not however explain why they have any reason whatsoever to fulfill the duties that otherwise attach to the role, particularly when, as I discuss below, the role of informal representative threatens to obstruct the realization of several values seemingly fundamental to the public expert's role.¹⁷

Outside audiences are not the only parties with expectations of public experts. The groups that are the subject matter of their work have expectations of them, too. Often they are treated as representatives by the groups themselves. Members of these groups then sometimes expect public experts to modify their public attestations to better concord with the group's concerns and aims—expectations that, if satisfied, can imperil the public expert's role in a variety of ways, discussed below. Consider two such expectations: *omission* and *staying on message*. Public experts are sometimes asked (and sometimes acquiesce to requests) by group members to omit information from their public attestations about the group. Arlie Hochschild (2016: 22), for instance, agreed to dissociate ashamed Tea Party advocate interviewees from their own or close family's acceptance of personal benefits from major government services. By contrast, sensing the danger of omission in her own case, Wells-Barnett (1970: 220) “indignantly refused” an omission request from a visiting delegation of Black men “to put the soft pedal on charges against white women and their relations with black men”:

I explained to them that wherever I had gone in England I found the firmly accepted belief that lynchings took place in this country only because black men were wild beasts after white women; that the hardest part of my work had been to convince the British people that this was a false charge against Negro manhood and that to forsake that position now, because I was back in my own country, would be to tacitly admit that the charge was true, and I could not promise to do that.

Both Hochschild and Wells-Barnett openly acknowledge that they faced omission requests and provided reasons for their acquiescence or refusal.

In Hochschild's case, the specific individual identities of interviewees seem unnecessary for the point she aims to make: even those who are very critical of U.S. government services (Tea Party advocates) willingly accept the benefits of those services or are close to others who do. By contrast,

¹⁷ For background: I have argued (Salkin 2024: ch. 2) that a person conscripted into the role of informal representative has grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of the duties that would otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence at least when (1) the audience's motivations for seeking an informal representative generally, or reasons for treating this conscripted party in particular as speaking for a given group, are demeaning, degrading, or require the informal representative to violate their self-respect, or (2) satisfying the duties would be unduly burdensome for the conscripted informal representative. Conscripted informal representatives must aim to fulfill their duties as a representative only when (a) they have significant power to influence, and (b) either (i) they lack grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of duties that would otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence or (ii) their grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of the duties are outmatched by the represented group's need for their representation, in particular; and must disavow the role only when (a) they have significant power to influence, and (b) either (i) they lack grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of a duty to disavow that would otherwise accrue to them by virtue of their power to influence or (ii) their grounds to reasonably reject the ascription of a duty to disavow are outmatched by the represented group's need for them to disavow. However, I am not convinced that we should think of *voluntary* public experts who *elect* to study a particular group or issues that otherwise have special bearing on a particular group as *conscripted* into the role of informal representative, given their awareness of the habitual link between satisfying conditions (1)-(4) outlined at the start of this paper and being expected to represent the group that is the subject matter of their work.

Wells-Barnett faced a request to omit information that, in her view, would require her to tacitly affirm a falsehood. Yet Wells-Barnett (1970: 41) evidently did not oppose omission requests as such, herself criticizing Booker T. Washington for writing in the *Christian Register* “that it was asserted that ‘two-thirds of the Negro preachers of the south were morally and intellectually unfit to teach or lead the people.’” Although Wells-Barnett allows that Washington may have “told the truth,” she nevertheless objects “that it was a wrong thing for him to have made that criticism in a white paper so far away from home. When the people needed such criticism, I felt he ought to have done as we did—tell them about it at home rather than tell our enemies abroad.” Wells-Barnett criticizes Washington not because he spoke publicly in a manner critical of Black American preachers, but instead because of the audience before which he expressed his criticisms. Sometimes requests are not for total omission but instead for selective public expression before some audiences but not others—in this case, before the represented group itself (see Salkin, 2024: ch. 5). Yet even such requests for selective omissions can produce a chilling effect (§III).

Other expert representatives describe an expectation to stay on message—that is, to communicate publicly in a manner “which is in accordance with a planned or intended message” (OED Online, 2022). Journalist Wesley Lowery is regarded as an expert on race and law enforcement in the United States. He has also been widely regarded as speaking for communities beset by police violence (Lowery, 2016: 130, 224; Lowery, 2020a¹⁸). Lowery received sharp criticism from local ministers and activists for his 2015 *Washington Post* article about community policing in Fresno, California, discussing weekly block parties held by the police department (FPD) for (at that time) twelve years “that...helped spur a drop in gang crime” (2016: 130). Although some complaints—“boosterism” and “failing to see that racial profiling, surveillance of activist groups, and allegations of corruption...were the way many Fresno residents knew their police force” (2016: 130)—could have been voiced against anyone who had written the article, other complaints concerned not merely the substance of the article but expectations of Lowery, in particular: “When we heard that you were in Fresno writing about FPD, we community activists got extremely excited. We thought that someone finally saw what was going on here with Fresno PD and City Hall....We were completely wrong” (2016: 131). Lowery received the latter feedback not because the piece was inaccurate or poorly researched, but because his past reporting on police had set an expectation about how he in particular was likely to cover police.

Both the expectations to omit and to stay on message can be reasonable expectations to have of one’s representative.¹⁹ Yet it is not clear whether in the normal course of things these are reasonable expectations to have of a public expert, as they are at odds with other values we have reason to preserve, which I consider in the coming sections. Whether these expectations are reasonable

¹⁸ When Stephen Colbert asks Wesley Lowery to “explain what’s meant by ‘Defund the Police’” (2020a: 7:59-8:03), Lowery responds in a way that seems to straddle the line between theoretical authority on the subject matter and a mouthpiece for the Defund the Police movement (2020a: 8:07-9:40).

¹⁹ It does not follow from the fact that these are reasonable expectations to have of one’s representative that one’s representative must always satisfy these expectations. It is sometimes the case that our representatives act well by acting in ways that do not reflect our expressed preferences. On the longstanding debate concerning whether representatives should act as delegates or trustees, and contemporary developments of and departures from that discussion, see Dovi and Salkin (forthcoming).

expectations depends on what we think of the relationships between these roles.²⁰

III. Chilling Effects

To begin, there is the ground-level concern that the representation expectation will affect what public experts are willing to produce. In “Many Thousands Gone,” James Baldwin (2012) objects to the expectation that an author informally represent a group whose members’ lives or circumstances are the subject matter of their work: “that artist is strangled...who has...as [Richard] Wright had, the necessity thrust on him of being the representative of some thirteen million people. It is a false responsibility (since writers are not congressmen) and impossible, by its nature, of fulfillment.” Ta-Nehisi Coates (2017) similarly laments the expectation that he speak publicly for Black Americans, the group that is the subject of his public-facing work:

Obviously I write, and I write for the public and I want my thoughts considered, I want my writing considered. But I didn’t ask for a crown. And that’s kinda what has happened honestly, to be straight with you. Because with that comes assumptions about what you’re saying and what you’re supposed to do. You lose some of your freedoms as a writer. You lose your ability to be curious in public, because you have a crown on now — you’re supposed to have the answers. It is probably the most regrettable development, personally, for me out of the past eight years.²¹

Baldwin and Coates share the concern that the representation expectation has a chilling effect on what authors produce,²² tantamount to being “strangled,” burdened by “assumptions about what you’re saying and what you’re supposed to do,” and losing one’s “ability to be curious in public.”²³

So described, this chilling effect is distinguishable from more familiar chilling effects that concern one’s fear of actual or threatened negative feedback from or retaliation by a public audience (e.g., cancellation, boycotting, no-platforming). Instead the chilling effect described here is generated simply by the party’s own awareness that they are treated as speaking for the group that is the subject

²⁰ These expectations to omit information or otherwise mold one’s research and reporting in response to the requests of the group one researches raise issues for each of the considerations that will be raised below: freedom of inquiry (§III.A), the critical distance required for the role of the critic (§III.B), and objectivity and public trust (§IV).

²¹ Baldwin and, arguably, Coates raise the question whether it is possible for one person to speak for very large and heterogeneous social groups (see also Du Bois, 2011: 374). If by “speaking for” a group of millions, we mean that the speaker gives voice to the many and varied interests of all group members, this is of course an impossible task. However, that is not usually what we mean by “speaking for” in contexts in which those to be represented are very large groups. Instead, we mean that the speaker (or writer) gives public expression to the group’s shared, politically salient interests—not all of them, and often the speaker will have to make difficult decisions about which interests to express when (Salkin, 2022, 2024). Moreover, the question of the feasibility of speaking for very large groups is not a special problem for public experts; accordingly, I shall set it aside.

²² I am drawing on Baldwin (on Wright) and Coates here not because they are public experts—although they may well be (see note 4)—but because they each provide a characterization of the tension between the roles of author and informal representative that strikes me as similarly apt for the tension between the roles of public expert and informal representative.

²³ Both Baldwin and Coates also raise the question whether the representation expectation is burdensome for the author himself. Although I think the answer to this question is certainly “yes,” as this consideration falls somewhat outside the core of my present inquiry, I shall set it aside. (In a previous version of this paper, I discussed the benefits and burdens of this dual role for its inhabitant at some length. I have removed that discussion from this draft.)

matter of their work. This chilling effect can be particularly acute for public experts who are also members of the group about which they are experts (call these *ingroup public experts*), who may, for instance

- (i) feel special responsibility to fellow group members, particularly if their group is subordinated and they worry that a misstep will lead to misunderstanding or retaliation by more powerful public audiences—this can be true even if they do not believe the public audiences should treat them as informal representatives;
- (ii) fear that the group about which they speak will feel particularly betrayed if that group is harmed by a public audience who treats the public expert as an informal representative, and will be more motivated to cancel the ingroup public expert (a sort of “apostasy” fear);
or
- (iii) have particular concerns about being cancelled related to their ingroup public expert speech because it may undermine relationships with fellow members of the subordinated group that they distinctively value.

I will return to the special case of ingroup public experts below (§§V-VI).

There is also another sort of chilling effect generated not by the public expert’s own internal awareness that they are being treated as a representative, but instead by requests made by members of the group, like those described above (omission and staying on message).

These chilling effects and their various sources are cause for concern for public experts themselves, as they can squelch experts’ sense of their freedom of inquiry and prevent them from having critical distance from their subject matters—concerns discussed below. Yet each of these is also a concern for broader publics: Freedom of inquiry is justified by, among other considerations, its value to the public (§III.A). Similarly, there is broad public value in the presence of critics, who are knowledgeable about the circumstances of given groups but whose distance enables them to provide alternative perspectives that challenge mainstream views (§III.B). The fact of a public experts’ willingness to curtail their public speech in response to group pressure or preference can in turn jeopardize public trust in the expert’s objectivity (§IV). Finally, even aside from the consideration of each of these values, there is the basic fact of the loss of all that the public expert may otherwise have produced but for these chilling effects. Yet, each of these considerations is met by a countervailing one generated by the special circumstance of the public expert’s particular subject matter: namely, a group on which they depend, to whose members they must have access and be proximate, and by whose members they must be trusted.

A. Freedom of Inquiry

The representation expectation may impinge on public experts’ sense of their freedom of inquiry. To allay a confusion: Much discussion of freedom of inquiry is specific to the context of higher education and many public experts are employed by institutions of higher education. However, neither is my reason for discussing the freedom of inquiry. Many public experts have no role within a university. Instead, I focus on discussions of freedom of inquiry because many of the values that ground freedom of inquiry are relevant and instructive for our understanding of expert representatives’ difficult position.

According to the “1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure” (AAUP), academic freedom is valuable insofar as it promotes the three “purposes for which universities exist,” two of which are relevant to our discussion here,²⁴ namely:

First, “to promote inquiry and advance the sum of human knowledge,” which requires “complete and unlimited freedom to pursue inquiry and publish its results” (AAUP, 1915). For the freedom to be unlimited, it must be such that “no fairminded person shall find any excuse for even a suspicion that the utterances of university teachers are shaped or restricted by the judgment...of inexpert and possibly not wholly disinterested persons outside of their ranks” (AAUP, 1915; see also Moody-Adams, 2015)—intoning not just a concern about actual but even merely apparent encroachments on the freedom of scholars’ inquiries. The “Declaration” continues: “it is highly needful, in the interest of society at large, that what purport to be the conclusions of men trained for, and dedicated to, the quest for truth, shall in fact be the conclusions of such men, and not echoes of the opinions of the lay public.”

A similar concern arises for expert representatives, whose perception by public audiences can be marred by the public’s suspicion that their utterances are “shaped or restricted” by the pressures placed on them by the groups for whom they come to speak. Yet for those experts whose subject matter is a group—and often a group with which they of necessity have intimate association and close proximity (§III.C)—it is hard to know how they might defend against the suspicion that their utterances are shaped by the judgments of interested parties. Their work depends for its substance on, among other things, the judgments of interested parties (namely, the groups that are the subject matter of their work). And even if this general suspicion might be dispelled, there remain more specific pressures, as discussed above.

Second, “to develop experts for the use of the community,” specifically the need for “experts in [the economic, social, and political sciences], to advise both legislators and administrators” (AAUP, 1915). Such an expert must be able to both “pursue his investigations” and “declare the results, no matter where they may lead him or to what extent they may come into conflict with accepted opinion” (AAUP, 1915). The usefulness of such experts to legislators and administrators depends on “their complete confidence in the disinterestedness of his conclusions” (AAUP, 1915). The “Declaration” continues that these experts must “not be in a position of dependence upon the favor of any social class or group” and that they be disinterested and impartial (AAUP, 1915).

Here, again, there is a question concerning the extent to which an expert whose subject matter is a given group can avoid “a position of dependence upon the favor of any social class or group” insofar as their work essentially requires the cooperation of the group that is the subject matter of their work.

Yet the responsibilities of scholars are not primarily to legislators or administrators, nor to the accretion of the “sum of human knowledge,” but “to the public itself,” for whose benefit and in whose interest they undertake “the quest for truth,” unfettered from “any motive other than their own scientific conscience and a desire for the respect of their fellow experts” (AAUP, 1915)—a public whose trust may be lost if the expert’s quest for truth is diverted by commitments to a conflicting role.

²⁴ The third one is “to provide general instruction to the students” (AAUP, 1915).

B. The Role of the Critic Requires Distance from One's Subject Matter

It is important for at least some public experts to stand apart from society, and to be its critics—such figures need to be able to maintain enough distance from their subject matters to be critical of those subject matters, to be “outsiders” (or even in “the condition of exile” within their society), per Edward Said (1994: 52-53). Similarly, reflecting on the value of academic freedom, Moody-Adams (2018: 56-57, citing Kateb, 1991) says that “the willingness to ‘stand apart’—to live with some sense of alienation from certain communities of which one is a member—is important for productive exercise of the capacity to reflect critically on the norms of one’s community. Feeling apart actually seems indispensable to the project of asking whether in conforming to familiar norms, one might have become inattentive to—or complicit in—serious injustice.” Perhaps one of the most intractable conflicts between the role of the public expert and the role of the informal representative is the need for (at least some) public experts to have adequate distance from their subject matters to be critical of them. Yet the mandate to stand apart, to be an outsider, to maintain one’s distance, is especially challenging for public experts whose work concerns a particular social group, and more challenging still for those public experts who are treated as speaking on that group’s behalf.²⁵

C. Proximity to, Access to, and Dependence on the Group

Whereas Hochschild emphasizes her ideological, social, and personal distance from her research subjects (perhaps to garner trust from her readers by appearing objective), both Wells-Barnett and Lowery reflect extensively on their proximity to, personal relationships with, and associative obligations to the communities that are the subject matter of their work—obligations that they themselves describe as partly explaining why they write about the groups that they do.

Lowery reflects on his personal proximity to the people and circumstances that are the subject matter of his work, noting that many regarded him as an insider at the protests in Ferguson (2016: 3-4, 11, 58, 151).²⁶ Lowery benefits from being viewed by his sources as proximate—activists and community members trust him, inform him of goings-on, give him exclusive access to breaking news (2016: 160-162). But they do so because he is close to them. By his own account, he is sympathetic to their causes and communicates with them freely and personally. This sort of access and proximity makes much of his work possible. But he acknowledges the dangers of these proximate relationships, and notes attempts to achieve some (even limited) distance from his sources: “cover[ing] them critically” (2016: 160), avoiding using DeRay Mckesson “as an official, on-the-record source” (2016: 161).

Yet so far as the role of the critic or outsider depends also (and perhaps moreso) on one’s self-conception—as Kateb, Moody-Adams, and Said’s respective characterizations suggest it might—it matters too what the public expert believes of their own relationship to the subject matter of their

²⁵ One might defuse this particular concern by pointing out that both formal and informal representatives of particular groups are sometimes critical of the groups they represent. My concern in this section is not so much whether it is possible for expert representatives to be critical (surely it is, at times) as to point out a tension between the role of the distanced social critic that we expect some public experts to play and the role of informal representative that they are also often expected to play.

²⁶ Many viewed him as an insider because he arrived in Ferguson earlier than many other journalists (2016: 3) and because he was arrested (2016: 3-4, 11); at least one as an “outsider” because he would eventually leave (2016: 58).

work. On this point, both Wells-Barnett and Lowery reflect on their shared group membership with those about whom they write. Lowery emphasizes his experiential access to what it was like for many of his sources—he reports understanding their circumstances, to some extent, from the inside.²⁷ Wells-Barnett focuses more particularly on having a shared fate with those who are the subject matter of her work (see, e.g., 1970: 276), discussing her subject matter and its motivating aims as “my people” (1970: xvii, 21, 57, 63, 69, 105, 149, 179, 209, 226, 227, 241).

The features of their relationships that give Lowery and Wells-Barnett their intimate access to those who are the subject matter of their work—features that make their work possible—are the very features that prevent them from “standing apart” and taking on the role of “outsider” that might allow them to play a more critical role.

The question whether they enjoy freedom of inquiry and independence of judgment in their research is more complex. There is some awkwardness in asking about freedom of inquiry when the relevant freedom is meant to be from one’s subject matter rather than from external institutional constraints. In one sense, a public expert has freedom of inquiry so long as they are not beholden as an institutional matter to constrain their inquiry to be in accordance with the dictates of their subject matters’ requests. Yet, in another sense, it is obvious that there is a limitation on the extent to which any public expert whose subject matter is a particular group can have true independence from that group—it is their proximity and access to the group that allows them to do their work at all.²⁸ This limitation concerns how public experts decide to conduct and present their research if they want to maintain good relationships with the groups they study. This limitation, however, is arguably a feature of any public experts’ work on a particular social group—it is not a restriction on their freedom of inquiry so much as it is a consideration that all experts on particular groups face in deciding how to conduct their work. But that is also not the core inquiry here.

Another concern, the one that motivates this paper, is that these public experts end up with an often unsought further role (informal representative). That unsought further role impinges on their freedom to pursue their work in a way that is distinct from merely considering what the group’s members might want. Finding themselves in the role of group spokesperson, they must consider whether and how their public-facing statements about the group will be imputed to the group and, accordingly, may need to formulate their statements in response to pressures external to their expert role. Or, to put the point differently, their “utterances...are shaped or restricted by the judgment...of...not wholly disinterested persons.” Yet the source of *this* restriction is not simply the public expert’s own sense of their responsibilities to their research subjects, but rather the result of an audience’s forcing the expert into the role of spokesperson.²⁹

Finally, as both Lowery and Wells-Barnett discuss, for some public experts who are treated as

²⁷ Examples: “the talk” about how to comport oneself around police (2016: 78), the recognition of one’s Blackness as a salient feature of one’s identity (2016: 17, 81), the recognition that ‘it could have been me’ (2016: 17, 83, 125, 176-177).

²⁸ In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that public experts’ freedom of inquiry is *infringed* by their research subjects. Yet there are impingements on their inquiries built into the relationships they have with their research subjects.

²⁹ On my view of audience conferral, the audience that confers the status *informal representative* can be a nongroup audience, an audience comprising group members only, or a mixed audience of group members and nongroup parties. Yet I think the concerns about public experts being forced into the role of informal representative are greatest when the conferring audience comprises nongroup parties.

speaking for the groups that are the subject matter of their work, there are yet further sources of limitations on their abilities to really inquire (or if not inquire, to report on the results of their inquiries) freely—namely, (1) their own respective senses of their associative duties to the groups about and for whom they write and speak, and (2) the expectations generated from without concerning what they will do in their roles, like these: “[T]here arose a united protest from my people. They seemed to feel that I had deserted the cause, and some of them censured me rather severely in their newspapers for having done so. They were more outspoken because of the loss to the cause than they had been in holding up my hands when I was trying to carry a banner” (Wells-Barnett 1970: 241). Similarly, Lowery notes: “My fundamental professional obligation was to fairness and truth. Among those truths, however, were these: I’m a black man in America who is often tasked with telling the story of black men and women killed on American streets by those who are sworn to protect them” (2016: 17). Both address a concern not yet discussed—namely, whether the seemingly stark clash between the abstract demands for independence required for freedom of inquiry and the distance required of the critic, on the one hand, and the expectations generated by group membership and associative obligations, on the other, distinctively befalls people who become public experts concerning groups of which they are themselves members. I return to this consideration in §V.

IV. Objectivity and Trust

A clarification at the outset: Although they are related, the question whether the representative role imperils an expert’s appearance of objectivity is distinguishable from nearby questions concerning, for instance, whether public experts whose subject matter is a particular group should even aim for objectivity where by this one means to require the experts’ detachment from their subject matter or value-neutrality regarding their inquiry (see Anderson, 2024). My concern here is not whether public experts in fact lack objectivity, nor even really what objectivity is or requires, but instead whether failing to give the appearance of objectivity imperils public trust in experts. This concern about an expert representative failing to appear objective can be robust across a variety of different conceptions of objectivity.

For many public experts whose work concerns a particular group, there appears to be a tension between earning public trust and earning the trust of those who are the subject matter of their work, at least when the former requires the appearance of objectivity and the latter requires proximity that undermines the appearance of objectivity.

Our trust in public experts (what trust there is³⁰) depends on the belief that they will speak and write truthfully about their subject matter, and carry out their investigations independently and objectively (see, e.g., AAUP, 2009; ASA, 2018; SPJ, 2014). Yet when these same parties are conferred the status of informal representative—treated as speaking for rather than merely researching and reporting about the groups that are the subject matter of their work—this new status may lead audiences (including the very audiences that have conferred on them that status) to regard them as partial to those groups in ways that jeopardize their appearance of objectivity, rendering their public

³⁰ [Add citations on distrust of public experts.]

statements untrustworthy or otherwise not credible to their audiences.³¹ Unsurprisingly, this perception can in turn diminish their credibility as an expert, reducing the public's trust in them. One may view this particular clash between the role of the public expert and the role of the informal representative as dispositive: these roles should be strictly separated and so, as far as possible, not inhabited by the same individuals. But that is too quick.

Public experts about particular communities or groups develop their expertise partly through their personal proximity to them and their relationships with their members. It is their proximity and the relationships of trust such parties cultivate that makes their work possible in the first place—a point emphasized by Hochschild, Lowery, and Wells-Barnett alike (see also Anderson, 2024³²). “Much of my job as a reporter consists of desperate and, more often than not, failed attempts to convince people with no reason to trust me that this is exactly what they should do” (Lowery 2016: 50). As discussed, Lowery has developed his expertise on the communities he writes about partly through being personally proximate to them and cultivating relationships with their members (2016: 3-4, 11, 151)—community members trust him and keep him informed (2016: 160-162) in part because of his proximity. And for some research subjects, the need to develop trust is set against a backdrop of deep distrust of others who have attempted to tell their stories in the past (Hochschild, 2016; Lowery, 2016: 50-51).³³ Many of Lowery's sources came to him because they trusted him. And they trusted him partly because of the community and identity-based associative ties they shared with him (2016: 16).³⁴ Those relationships of trust led to other such relationships, as Lowery came to be known as “a reporter who covers policing and justice” (2016: 224). So designated (Coates, 2017: “you have a crown on now”), Lowery received more and more materials from “mothers and widows of those who have been killed by officers” and “[e]nvelopes from inmates stuffed with legal filings and police reports” (2016: 224), and came to have special access to those on whom he relies to tell the stories he does.

Wells-Barnett recounts traveling to Cairo, Illinois, after Frog James was lynched (1970: 309-320). Meeting with “about twenty-five representative colored people of the town that day,” Wells-Barnett (1970: 313) recalls what she told those in attendance:

³¹ There are, of course, different ways of being partial. It seems reasonable to want experts about particular groups to care about them at all, and likely we want them to not be detached from the public import and relevance of their work. However, there are others ways of being partial, like being biased toward, that we may see as in conflict with the sort of objectivity that the expert's role often demands.

³² “In social scientific inquiry, emotional engagement with the subjects of study may be necessary both to elicit and interpret behaviors of scientific interest. Ethnographers may need to win the trust of their subjects to get them to open up, and to achieve rapport with them to gain understanding. ... Anthropologists must cultivate personal relationships of trust with native informants to gain access to the natives' situated knowledge of their cultures.”

³³ “Netta was deeply suspicious of the media, not unlike many of the families and friends of police shooting victims I had encountered before. So often, distrust of police was matched, if not exceeded, by deep suspicion of the media—and very often that suspicion was born from a moment in their past. And in my experience, a man or woman who has been burned or betrayed by the media wants one thing. Not a correction, or a rehabilitative article: they want to be heard, to be able to explain the injustice they believed was dealt to them so that their pain is validated.” (Lowery 2016: 50-51).

³⁴ “The young leaders behind many of the protests often trusted me because we could have been classmates or childhood playmates—in some cases, we had been” (2016: 17). “The young activists knew me and, it seemed, for the most part trusted me—even when I covered them critically or wrote things they wished I hadn't. They knew I was talking to most of the other young activists; they all felt they should be talking to me, too. There was a fundamental honesty in our interactions, lacking the quid pro quo of so many of my past source relationships. These activists knew I cared about getting the story right, and because of that, they trusted me” (2016: 160).

I said I had come down to be their mouthpiece; that I correctly understood how hard it would be for those who lived there to take an active part in the movement to oust the sheriff; that we were willing to take the lead in the matter but they must give me the facts; that it would be endangering the lives of other colored people in Illinois if we did not take a stand against the all too frequent lynchings which were taking place. I went on to say that I came because I knew that they knew of my work against lynching for fifteen years past and felt that they would talk more freely to me and trust me more fully than they would someone of whom they knew nothing.

Wells-Barnett suggests to her sources and interlocutors that she believed they were more likely to trust her and therefore to speak more freely with her because they knew she was an expert on lynching but, further, because they knew that she was committed to their cause.³⁵ Public experts will find it difficult to tell the stories of people who do not trust them enough to speak openly with them or otherwise “clue [them] in” to the inside details of their circumstances (Lowery 2016: 161).³⁶

Yet, being so close to those about whom one speaks and writes can make one an easy target for skeptics to discredit one’s objectivity. Lowery’s proximity to the communities he covers—his sources and the subject matter of his expertise—have made his reporting an easy target for skepticism and discrediting, causing some to question his objectivity and so, too, the integrity of his work (2016: 71-72, 107, 116-117).³⁷

One way to characterize the tension described here is as a tradeoff between the appearance of objectivity (and the public trust that may depend on the appearance of objectivity) and proximity (and the group trust that results from this proximity). So stated, it appears that the public’s interest is in a public expert prioritizing the appearance of objectivity so that they can trust the public expert, but that the group’s interest is in the proximity that would allow them to trust the public expert *even if* it means jeopardizing the appearance of objectivity. But this, too, is too quick: The public has an interest in the public expert having *enough* proximity to the group to develop trust with group members that would enable the public expert to get the information they need to provide the public with information about that group. (So stated, this makes the public expert’s trust-building with the group seem merely instrumental to their and the public’s ends—but of course that is not the only reason to build trust

³⁵ This passage is also of interest because it recounts another instance of the ambiguous role that public experts sometimes play—Wells was both in Cairo to make an account of what happened to Frog James (as a public expert) and to speak on behalf of the Black citizens of Cairo in an attempt to oust the sheriff in which they themselves would struggle to safely participate (as an informal representative). On the dangers of self-representation and the need to have others speak in one’s place, see Salkin, 2024: 224, 232-233.

³⁶ Difficult but not impossible: It could be that a particular public expert could effectively produce accurate work about a group without the group’s trust in the event that they have relationship with a reliable informant from within the group, or some other method for getting accurate information from the group without garnering the trust of its members.

³⁷ He has been criticized for “marching with protesters” (2016: 71) and much else besides. Lowery reflects both generally on “the media’s unique discomfort with activists who cross into journalism” (2016: 107) and on the ways that his proximity to the protests and activists (whether actual or merely apparent), has affected the reception of his work (2016: 71-72, 116-117). Despite his awareness of this skepticism and discrediting, Lowery himself does not seem concerned that the roles of public expert and informal representative are sometimes inhabited by the same person. He describes himself as having a “much more complicated view” of journalist-activist overlap (2021: 56:31-56:38).

with the group's members; it is however seemingly a requirement of being able to deeply research and report on the group to broader audiences.) Conversely, many groups have an interest in a broader public being aware of their members' plights and circumstances, and the public's trust in the party who reports on these seems often to require the appearance of objectivity—meaning that the group's members also have an interest in the public expert appearing objective *enough* to garner public trust. (So stated, this makes the public expert's appearance of objectivity seem merely instrumental to their and the group's ends—but of course that is not the only reason to aim for the appearance of objectivity.) For the public expert's part, they have interests that point in both directions.

Here, again, there are two sorts of concerns that are worth disambiguating. First, there is the question whether, given the sort of proximity such an expert must develop in order to cultivate relationships of trust with the group, simply being a public expert whose work concerns a particular group undermines the appearance of objectivity. This seems like it is an unavoidable feature of being a public expert whose work concerns a particular group. Yet it is tempered by the considerations just discussed—namely, that the public and the group both have interests in both the expert's appearance of objectivity and the expert's relation of proximity to the group. But second, there is the further question whether the public expert who is foisted into the additional role of group representative ends up appearing to lack objectivity whatever they do, in ways that not only prevent them from gaining public trust but may eventually jeopardize widespread confidence in their expert *bona fides*. And it is this further feature of their role, whereby they become a spokesperson and thereby lose say over the sort of role they play in their relationships with both the group they study and the audiences to which they report, that is of special concern.

V. Inevitably Overlapping Roles

Public experts who satisfy conditions (1)-(4) are often conferred the status of informal representative by audiences who treat them as speaking for groups that are the subject matter of their work.³⁸ Something stronger than this can be said—namely, that (i) the dual role of expert representative is inevitable in societies like ours, given the norms we currently have, and (ii) it is currently infeasible to fully separate the roles.

Yet it is not merely to be reluctantly expected that public experts will routinely be conferred the further role of informal representative, there are reasons in favor of this outcome. Given that informal representatives are inevitable in societies like ours (Alcoff, 2016; Dahl, 1989; Du Bois, 1903; Mansbridge, 1980; Salkin, 2024; Young, 2000), there is good reason to consider whether it is valuable that they be experts about the group, rather than “arrogant loudmouths” (Young, 2000: 125) or “half-trained demagogues” (Du Bois, 1903).

Notwithstanding the forgoing concerns about having a public expert about a group speak for that group as its representative, there are clearly advantages to having the same party simultaneously inhabit both roles—they are knowledgeable, have access to the group, are often trained in trusted

³⁸ Even if you disagree that this is how informal representatives come about (perhaps you think they must voluntarily undertake the role), you may still be able to agree that public experts who satisfy conditions (1)-(4) frequently face the pressure of the *representation expectation* from both the audiences before which they speak and the groups that are the subject matter of their work. That agreement is sufficient to warrant the concerns about free inquiry, critical distance, objectivity, and public trust that I have discussed in the forgoing.

research methods. Furthermore, although they may face local pressures to act in manners that diverge from the values of disinterestedness, independence, critical distance, and objectivity, these local pressures are often set against a backdrop of their own internalized endorsement of (and reckoning with) their responsibilities to act in accordance with them—a point of tension amply treated in their own reflections on the matter (see, e.g., Hochschild, 2016; Lowery, 2016, 2020b, 2021; Wells-Barnett, 1970).

Yet, the claim that these roles inevitably overlap is truer for some than for others. There is a bind that appears to be faced especially and perhaps distinctively by ingroup public experts. Coates (2017) characterizes this bind, as it affects Black American public experts about Black American communities, as “an unfortunate tradition in this dialogue of quote-unquote ‘race relations’ in this country where people are selected at various moments to be spokespeople, for what right now is a community of 40 million people.” This accords with Lowery’s aforementioned acknowledgment: “But my role, I knew, was different. My fundamental professional obligation was to fairness and truth. Among those truths, however, were these: I’m a black man in America who is often tasked with telling the story of black men and women killed on American streets by those who are sworn to protect them but who historically have seen and treated those men, women, and even their children as anything but American” (2016: 17). This in turn echoes Baldwin (2012)’s caution in his discussion of Richard Wright. And Baldwin’s caution reflects Du Bois’s caution concerning this “unfortunate tradition” when describing Washington’s ascendance:

Thus by 1905, to upwards of 90,000,000 people and largely to the rest of the world, Mr. Washington was the one person to be consulted concerning the Negro problems in America and race problems everywhere. He was a sort of clearing house for information, speaking to the White people concerning Colored folk and speaking to Colored people concerning White folk. From 1905 to 1911 he was the chief political advisor on racial appointments to Presidents of the United States and to state officials. He was the recognized leader in Negro industrial development. He was the treasurer of funds, temporary and permanent, set aside by philanthropists for the help of the Negro race; he was the voice and visible representative of the Colored people. (Du Bois 2011: 374).³⁹

The distinctive bind faced by ingroup public experts is this: They are often, by dint of their shared experiences or even the fact of their shared group membership, more easily able to have both the proximity to and trusting relationships with fellow group members that are requisite for research concerning that group. They are then, by virtue of their group membership (perhaps) or their expertise (perhaps) conferred the status of informal representative for that group by some audience. Finally, their objectivity is called into question, whether because of their group membership, their representative role, or both, perhaps even by the same audience that conferred on them the status of representative in the first place. One may then ask why, under these circumstances, one would enter

³⁹ Likely written in 1935, see Brown, 2011: 360-362. For a longer discussion of Washington’s assumption of the role of informal political representative for Black Americans, see Salkin, 2024: esp. ch. 1.

the role of public expert in the first place.

Wells-Barnett recounts an exchange with her son in which she explains her reluctance to go to Cairo, Illinois to cover the lynching of Frog James. “I don’t see why I should have to go and do the work that the others refuse.” Her son replies, “Mother if you don’t go nobody else will” (1970: 311). “Anyone in the country could have done it. But it fell to [Wells-Barnett]. Because no one else was willing to” (Lowery, 2021: 58:00-58:08). Wells-Barnett both reported on lynching and spoke out against it precisely because no one else was willing to do it: “the tradition of black journalism is that you do the work the other journalism won’t do” (Lowery 2021: 1:00:38-1:00:45; see also Wells-Barnett 1970: 21, 311). Black journalists end up doing work that others will not, and so are specially burdened by the demands of this dual role (Lowery 2021: 54:22-57:10; Wells-Barnett, 1970: 41). However, the point generalizes to ingroup public experts for minoritized groups generally, many of whom report feeling called to tell the stories of their own groups when others will not, or will not in “the right way” (Lowery 2021: 25:19-25:21).

Yet while these factors—group membership, proximity, audience conferral of representative status, and the party’s own felt need for someone to play the role—explain how people end up serving as expert representatives, particularly for minoritized groups, even more particularly for minoritized groups of which they themselves are members, none of this explains how to resolve the seemingly indissoluble conflicts between the expectation that they serve in this dual role and the values that this dual role seems by its very nature to undermine.

VI. Conclusion

Here is a restatement of the core problem:

1. Public experts who satisfy conditions (1)-(4) are often expected to speak for the groups that are the subject matter of their work as those groups’ representatives.
2. The expectation that these public experts serve as representatives for the groups that are the subject matter of their work interferes with their function as experts by having chilling effects on what they are willing to produce, constraining their freedom of inquiry, making it more difficult for them to take critical distance from their subject matter, and imperiling their appearance of objectivity (thereby lowering public trust).
3. It is desirable to have informal representatives give voice to the values, interests, and preferences of social groups in large-scale societies like ours, and it is in any event inevitable.
4. Given 3, it is desirable that informal representatives for groups be experts rather than nonexperts. So, there is good reason not to separate the roles of public expert and informal representative (§§III.C, IV). Furthermore, there are reasons to be skeptical that we could even if we wanted to (§§I, V).
5. But given 2, the role of informal representative threatens to undermine the public expert’s ability to fulfill their role as a public expert. So, there is good reason to strengthen social norms that more strictly separate the roles of public expert and informal representative. (§§III.A-B, IV).
6. Even if it were both desirable and possible to more strictly separate these roles in the future, we

still have to reckon with the present situation in which these roles are not yet separated.⁴⁰

Can any resolution be found? Two possible avenues of resolution comes from the AAUP.

Subsidiary interests: Although scholars' "primary responsibility to their subject is to seek and to state the truth as they see it," they "may follow subsidiary interests" so long as "these interests...never seriously hamper or compromise their freedom of inquiry" (AAUP Statement on Professional Ethics 1966, 1987, 2009). Granting for the purposes of argument that the role of informal representative does constrain the public expert's freedom of inquiry in some meaningful way (although above I consider whether perhaps this characterization is inapt), I am not sure that treating the role of informal representative as an interest subsidiary to the role of public expert will be successful, because the roles are at least in cases like those contemplated here so intimately entangled that it would be difficult to say what is done in the interest of one that might not also be done in the interest of the other.

In fact, one may well question whether it is indeed the case that that scholars' "*primary* responsibility to their subject is to seek and state the truth as they see it" (emphasis mine). On such a view, one might say: What is wrong with a picture on which a scholar uses their writing, scholarship, and position to advocate for justice and their group's interests? On a strong version of such a picture of the scholar's role, the primary responsibility is advocacy, and so it takes wide scope with respect to subsidiary interests like researching and reporting the truth. This sort of strong version of an alternative picture concords well with examples like Wells-Barnett, who seemingly became an expert in order to be a good representative for the group—making it, at least in the mind of the expert themselves, subsidiary to that representative end. For experts who themselves conceive of their role this way, that may go some way towards dissolving the conflict because it answers the question of priority: expertise is in the service of representation, and threats to their role as expert are acceptable consequences by their own lights. There is a further question whether, in making the role of expert subsidiary to the role of representative, they themselves violate, say, an institutional commitment to scholarship. But there is no internal question for them about to what role or to which parties they have their primary responsibilities. A more moderate version of this alternative picture of the scholar's role is probably closer to accurate for many scholars in particular (and many experts more generally) who willingly take up the role of informal representative: There is no context-independent priority between truth-seeking and advocacy. On this more moderate alternative picture, the scholars' judgment of their primary responsibility to their subject—truth-seeking and truth-stating or advocacy (when they conflict)—has to be evaluated by that scholar at a time, and with all relevant considerations available to them in view.

Yet for those public experts who find themselves foisted into the role of informal representative, there is a question about the extent to which it is within their control to make this further unsought role subsidiary to their primary scholarly, journalistic, or other expert commitments. Some may effectively dissociate themselves from the representative role, quell the representative

⁴⁰ Elsewhere I have argued that discouraging audiences (including all of us) from conferring the status of informal representative requires, among other things, the moral education of audiences (Salkin 2024: 83-92). However, as I have noted above, it may be that it is not all-things-considered best to strictly separate the roles of public expert and informal representative, particularly if you are convinced that (1) informal representation is inevitable, and (2) the alternative to expert representatives is nonexpert representatives.

expectation of audiences and the groups alike, and successfully affirm their independence of judgment and objectivity. But I am both skeptical of many public experts' ability to do so effectively and skeptical that, even if they could, they have a responsibility to disavow the role (Salkin, 2024: ch. 2).

Extramural utterances: Notwithstanding the scholars' responsibilities to truth, legislators and administrators, and the public generally, the AAUP has long recognized that scholars have latitude in their "extramural utterances" grounded in "the political rights vouchsafed to every citizen" (AAUP, 1915; see also 1940, 1964-1965, 1966, 1987, 2009). Specifically, they should not "be debarred from giving expression to their judgments upon controversial questions" and "it is not...desirable...that their freedom of speech, outside the university, should be limited to questions falling within their own specialties. It is clearly not proper that they should be prohibited from lending their active support to organized movements which they believe to be in the public interest" (AAUP, 1915).

Even so, the AAUP does recommend some minimal constraints on scholars' speech qua "private persons" (AAUP Statement on Professional Ethics 1966, 1987, 2009): "When they speak or act as private persons, they avoid creating the impression of speaking or acting for their college or university."⁴¹ One might think that this requirement comes close to answering the question how an expert representative should preserve the integrity of their role as a public expert while also at other times serving as a representative for the group that is the subject matter of their work. So long as the expert representative clearly and unambiguously states to relevant audiences when they are serving in a representative capacity and when they are instead just speaking for themselves (in either their expert or private capacity), ambiguity and confusion can be avoided.

Yet it is very difficult to effectively reject the role of informal representative, as it is a role conferred by audiences. This places some constraints the public expert's ability to "indicate that they are not speaking for the" groups that are the subject matter of their work. National media "anointed leaders" of the protests in Ferguson (Lowery, 2016: 62, 88, 154, 157); Wells-Barnett describes herself as "an instrument that had been *chosen* to" "tell about the outrages upon my people" (1970: 226, emphasis mine).

Furthermore, the inquiry here is somewhat different from inquiries at the heart of freedom of inquiry. There, chief concerns include scholars' rights "to determine the content of research and publication" (Moody-Adams, 2018: 36, on AAUP, 1915) and "to speak or write as citizens...free from institutional discipline or censorship" (AAUP, 1940; see also Moody-Adams, 2015: 101; Moody-

⁴¹ Interestingly, an older AAUP endorsed more substantive restrictions on scholars' private speech:

1. Norms of decorum: "a peculiar obligation to avoid hasty or unverified or exaggerated statements, and to refrain from intemperate or sensational modes of expression" (AAUP, 1915).
2. Their "minds" should be "untrammelled by party loyalties, unexcited by party enthusiasms, and unbiased by personal political ambitions," although it would be "highly undesirable...if...no member of the academic profession should ever be called upon to assume the responsibilities of public office" (AAUP, 1915).
3. "When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution" (AAUP, 1940).

Adams, 2018: 36). So described, these are rights scholars have to pursue their intellectual endeavors free from fear of undue institutional interference, reprisal, or rebuke. By contrast, often the forms of interference (if they can be called that) that expert representatives face emerge from within the groups that these parties come to represent. They are earnest requests to “soft pedal on charges against white women and their relations with black men” (Wells-Barnett 1970: 220) or to dissociate Tea Party advocates from the fact of their use of government services (Hochschild 2016: 22). So, although there is some family resemblance between the notional “freedom to be curious in public” that Coates laments losing, on the one hand, and the right to determine the content of one’s research and publication and to speak as citizens without fear of institutional reprimand, on the other, the latter is more specific than the former—more focused on what a university or other institution whose aim is research and teaching may and may not do. By contrast, the former concerns restrictions on the expert representative’s inquiry, but not violations of their rights to freedom of inquiry, in particular. Rather, in cases concerning expert representatives, the sources of constraint are not the institutions that facilitate one’s research, but rather the very subjects of that research.

A final limitation on the guidance we may find from discussions of freedom of inquiry is this: The AAUP’s guidelines identify the distinction between the scholar’s institutional role and the personal freedom they should enjoy in their individual role as a private citizen. Yet one cannot draw a similar line in the case of the expert representative, as both aspects of their dual role—the voluntarily undertaken public expert role; the consequent sometimes nonvoluntary representative role—are already inherently public facing and difficult to cleave apart in any event.

Objectivity: By some accounts, the concerns I have raised about objectivity are inapposite. For instance, Lowery (2020, 2021) and others (see, e.g., Wallace, 2017, 2019; Schmidt, 2024, noting a long tradition of objectivity skepticism) have questioned the value of objectivity in journalism. Given concerns about objectivity, we might as a society want to reckon with the expectation of objectivity in journalism. Perhaps the Society of Professional Journalists will take up Lowery (2020)’s recommendation “to abandon the appearance of objectivity as the aspirational journalistic standard, and for reporters instead to focus on being fair and telling the truth, as best as one can, based on the given context and available facts.” So far, they haven’t (SPJ, 2014), although they have acknowledged the question (SPJ, 2023). As it stands, there are existing professional ethical codes that require objectivity of their adherents—those codes constitute commitments that professionals in their respective fields agree to as a condition of serving in those roles. So, it would be hasty, I think, to say that Lowery has no obligation to give due consideration to his professional commitment to objectivity—a point over which he himself has wrestled in his public speaking and writing (Lowery, 2016, 2020b, 2021). Whatever we think the fate of objectivity should be in journalism or social scientific inquiry, there is reason to think that the appearance of objectivity is valuable. Lowery himself points out that his close personal relationships to those about whom he has written have allowed his skeptics to raise concerns about whether the content of his reporting can be trusted. He further acknowledges that he has more than once faced a choice between attending to these personal, proximate relationships and being viewed as a reliable source of information from his broader audiences.

Even so, there is some reason to be skeptical of the instrumental value of the appearance of

objectivity—and maybe even to view the appearance of objectivity and public trust as orthogonal in some cases: If, for instance, one thinks that the public's lack of trust is caused not by an apparent lack of objectivity but by something else (for instance, general misunderstandings, ideology), then it is misguided to appeal to the value of public trust to justify the need for an expert to appear objective. And, going in the other direction, a public audience may well trust an account that is openly partial—whose author makes their partiality manifest as a way of being honest with their reader or listener. (One may go further and question whether partiality of a certain sort is even incompatible with objectivity [Anderson, 2024].)

Yet insofar as the appearance of objectivity plays an important role in fostering public trust in both many of our institutions and actors conducting work under the auspices of those institutions, there is some reason to think that public experts should aim to appear objective. Still, when it is the fact of their unsought representative role that makes them fail to appear objective, it is hard to say what such a public expert should (or even could) do to appear to be objective when the source of the skepticism as to whether they are is a role that they themselves did not seek and from which they will have difficulty dissociating themselves.⁴²

Individual Commitments to the Truth: In Wells-Barnett's own reflections on her approach to this dual role, she seems to offer a solution that dissolves some of the apparent difficulty of the role. Although she is explicit in her conviction that she undertakes the reporting work that she does for fellow Black Americans (1970: xvii, 21, 57, 63, 69, 105, 149, 179, 209, 226, 227, 241), the work that she regards herself as primarily beholden to do for them is to research and report on the truth (1970: 57, 62-63, 69, 86, 101, 110, 113, 135, 151, 152, 155, 190, 210). Many others regarded this as her objective, too (1970: 92, 191). Lowery (2016: 17) expresses a similar disposition, although not without some ambiguity.⁴³ Hochschild's "Appendix C: Fact-Checking Common Impressions" begins with this brief meditation on truth: "Often I felt that my new friends and I lived not only in different regions but in different truths. I would leave an interview wondering myself what the facts really were. So below I offer statements that I frequently heard, as well as the facts, as researched by Rebecca Elliott, based on the most recently available data, the sources of which are found in the endnotes" (Hochschild, 2017: 254). Yet it is not clear how far individual expressions of commitment to pursue and relate the truth to broad public audiences will be in allaying concerns by those audiences that other commitments will impinge on the expert representative's ability to do so.

Audiences: Notwithstanding this possible amelioration in cases where individual expert representatives expressly commit themselves to the truth, it is clear that there will be difficult questions faced by anyone who faces the dueling demands of this dual role. Yet it is less clear that the moral burdens of this dual role should fall squarely on its inhabitants, at least when such parties are conscripted into the role by audiences or compelled by associative obligations to take up work that

⁴² Elsewhere, I have myself (Salkin, 2023) questioned whether justifications can be found for judges' sacrificing their apparent impartiality in the interest of restoring the fairness of a proceeding. So, I acknowledge that the fact that a value tends to be important to the fulfillment of a role does not settle the question whether a particular individual inhabitant of that role has all-things-considered reason to promote that value over others, even from within the perspective of the role.

⁴³ "My fundamental professional obligation was to fairness and truth. Among those truths, however, were these: I'm a black man in America who is often tasked with telling the story of black men and women killed on American streets by those who are sworn to protect them" (2016: 17).

others will not. After all, in cases like those faced by Black journalists, they are often compelled by a sense of duty to report on race and racism, because no one else is doing it (Lowery, 2021: 54:22-56:24). Then, they are on those grounds (along with their group membership⁴⁴) discredited by their conscriptors for (purportedly) lacking objectivity. As I have discussed elsewhere (2021, 2024), there is in general a rebuttable presumption against expecting people from subordinated social groups to speak for these groups. However, that rebuttable presumption is complicated in cases that involve public experts, because they have willingly undertaken a public-facing role, often (as is the case for the two examples discussed here) expressly in the interest of the group about which they speak and write. So, if the general presumption is that members of subordinated social groups should not be expected to speak for the groups to which they belong, or at least not expected by nongroup audiences to do so, then perhaps the presumption is rebutted when the group member opts to take on such a public-facing role with the publicly expressed intention to do so for the benefit of the group. But perhaps even that is too quick. Because one may opt to take on a public-facing role and publicly express an intention to do so for the benefit of a particular group, but even then, if one is a member of a subordinated social group doing so, one is no doubt more likely than other public experts who are not members of subordinated social groups to be, for that reason, prejudicially regarded as untrustworthy (Lowery 2016: 104-107, 154), biased, partial, or lacking objectivity. So, even when the presumption is rebutted, we may still reach the conclusion that the expectation that a particular member of a subordinated social group not only speak publicly about but also speak for that group is unreasonable in view of its sheer burdensomeness.

Among the main arguments in favor of preserving the dual role of the expert representative is that, given that there will be informal representatives, it is better that they be experts than not. Moreover, public experts who satisfy conditions (1)-(4) should reasonably expect that they will end up in this dual role. Still, it is difficult not to share Coates's lament that such figures do not have more "freedom to be curious in public," not to worry about the loss of social critics who require distance to reflect our society's injustices back to us, and not to think that it would be valuable for public experts to enjoy the trust of the public they aim to teach. The question whether to separate the roles is moot so long as audiences lack the sense to stop conferring the role of informal representative at all but have enough sense to confer it on knowledgeable parties. Accordingly, it is only through changing the habits of audiences that one may undermine the tendency for public experts to end up also representing those who are the subject matter of their work.

⁴⁴ "The role of the press in the civil rights movement also points to our larger failure as a nation to validate and trust the black experience. Why did it take white reporters writing for white audiences to finally address the inequities that black communities had for decades been fighting? Was the lens of whiteness required for the nation to accurately recognize the black experience?" (Lowery 2016: 154).

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