

***A Brief Note on Defining Expertise: A Reply to Grundmann***  
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I thank Professor Grundmann for his reply to my review of *Experts: The Knowledge and Power of Expertise*. He has given me a good reason to think more about my response to the book in the first place, and to explain my comments—particularly my vague note that the book was not provocative—more thoroughly. Grundmann and Stehr's book, my review, and Grundmann's reply highlight a problem bound to haunt scholarly communities as young and interdisciplinary as science and technology studies: what one branch takes as a conclusion so well established that it need only be alluded to, not argued, another takes as so unreasonable that it can go without mention for precisely the opposite reason.

In his reply, Grundmann states that the book's purpose is to define the role of experts, which he says in his reply is “necessary in order to clarify some of the contested (and convoluted) debates of recent.” Experts, the introduction states, are members of the “knowledge-based occupations” (x) whose knowledge services are sought by “clients.” The remainder of the book describes their characteristics, societal roles, and argues that experts do not constitute a new social class. But I remained, back in that first chapter, unconvinced of the definition on which the rest of its arguments are predicated. Grundmann and Stehr speak of the expansiveness of how they define expertise compared with others who make expertise the privilege of science alone. For them, the important argument is against more conservative positions—expertise as a characteristic of a smaller group—and against reactionary tendencies to focus on the marginalization of lay perspectives without characterizing expertise in the first place. For me, and perhaps for other readers, the more important defense is instead against definitions of expertise that are more liberal because they do not rely on specific pre-existing social structures but, for instance, on the discursive construction of knowledge.

From this perspective, the book is not provocative insofar as it fails to offer a new, and perhaps newly compelling argument for why expert-as-knowledge-professional remains the most defensible position in light of alternatives to be found in the various branches of science and technology studies, anthropology, and rhetoric, for example: expertise as enactments or performances of community standards of knowledge-making (e.g. Beaufort 2000; Carr 2010; Epstein 1996; Kleinman and Vallas 2001; Sillitoe 2003) or expertise as mastery of the persuasive functions of a discourse (e.g. Eisenhart 2006; Langlois et al. 2011; Lyne and Howe 1990), and above all expertise as a limited and fluid capacity of many people under some circumstances rather than a transactional property of a specific set of professions (e.g. Haraway 1997; Mol 2002; Perrault 2013). The book appears to have little to say to feminist science studies, or material semiotic theories rejecting reliance on pre-established social structures, or other approaches embracing multiplicity and hybridity.

From epistemological perspectives which do not take knowledge as absolute and universal, expertise is always defined with respect to a given knowledge community (Carr 2010; Lyne and Howe 1990). Knowledge communities negotiate what claims are accepted as valid through the rhetoric—the persuasive properties of its discourse—of

their shared texts (Bazerman 1990; Latour 1999). Within a community, a speaker is identified as a master of the body of valid community knowledge and as an insider who knows how to manipulate the institutional logics of valid knowledge production through their use of explicit and implied intertextual references to deeper strata of the discourse—their recognition of the discourse conventions through which knowledge is made and recognized (Foucault 1972; Fish 1980; Bazerman 1988). Expertise, consequently, is a discursive performance that registers as authoritative knowledge to members of the relevant community. Such performances may in theory be issued by anyone under appropriate circumstances, and the multiplicity of circumstances make all expert performances situated and limited.

Given that definition, expertise is not dependent on a client seeking information. But even if we assume that it is, an appropriate question may make anyone an expert who can reply with an expert performance employing insider discourse—terminology, explicit textual references, genre features—that their “client” recognizes as marking an authoritatively knowledge-making discourse. My grandmother may be an expert on making babka when she issues a textual performance that carries markers of authority in speaking about traditional Polish baking, even though my grandmother worked as a bank technician and not in a knowledge-producing occupation. The utility of this point of view, and the reason for preferring it over a definition that limits expertise to a narrow set of professions, is that it avoids automatically and definitionally privileging the select forms of knowing legitimated by the institutional structures of the “knowledge-based occupations” defined in any one way. Expertise can then be a tool for understanding how knowledge is performed in many settings without assuming or imposing Western “rationality” (Watson-Verran and Turnbull 1995).

I suspect that those who accept its definition of expertise as uncontroversial may indeed find *Experts* a useful clarification of the core characteristics of experts and the roles they do and do not play in society. But the book may, again, be of less value—perhaps even less provocative—for those left wondering in the introduction what happened to the rest of the debate.

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