Feminist Community Engagement Disrupted: Pathways for Boundary Spanning and Engagement During Disruption

Chelsea Wentworth, Diane M. Doberneck, Jessica V. Barnes-Najor, Mindy Smith, Jen Hirsch, and Mallet R. Reid

Abstract

Feminist community-engaged scholars and practitioners value deep relationship building with their community partners, which can be challenging during periods of disruption. Increasingly, disruptions occur at multiple levels (e.g., pandemics, civil unrest, community/campus violence, partner staffing and leadership turnover, experiences of illness or dramatic shifts in caregiving responsibilities). During disruptions, engaging partners in deep and meaningful ways requires innovation and creativity. Authors chronicle a multiyear, campuswide interdisciplinary learning community about feminist community engagement disrupted. Authors describe the ways in which feminist community engagement practices informed how the learning community was envisioned and convened and the various learning community stages over time. Throughout, authors share reflections on how meaningful this learning time and space has been and how participation in the learning community has influenced their thinking and practices. Conclusions address lessons learned useful for other boundary-spanning community-engaged scholars and practitioners and those who develop programming to support them.

Keywords: feminism, community engagement professionals, learning community, communities of care, disruptions

———◆———

As feminist community-engaged scholars, we devote ourselves to work that is deeply rooted in close-working, interpersonal relationships, often with communities historically excluded, unrepresented, overlooked, or who experience being subjects of research where they are not afforded the option of agency. This lack of agency and representation was exacerbated by the social and research shutdown of COVID-19, where researchers and community partners were separated from work that was often built on a foundation of in-person activity. This disruption resulted in challenges for all, where scholars conducting community-engaged research in a publish-or-perish environment felt pushed toward the perish side of this equation. And even more significantly, community partners found themselves at significant risk from COVID-19, and lost access to some pay and services associated with their participation in research activities.

As scholars seeking solutions to these challenges, we sought like-minded interdisciplinary and qualitative researchers and centered navigating disruption as a topic for exploration, collegiality, and to support and innovate new ways to address the challenges of community engagement during the pandemic. Three of the authors [CW, DD, JBN] created a campus-based learning community to identify strategies to adapt and sustain our feminist community-engaged projects, maintain our partnerships, and sustain the fight for social justice and equity in the face of the multiple disruptions we face currently and anticipate in the future.

Although the COVID-19 shutdown has ended, our learning community continues and has been approved with support from Michigan State University to continue through the 2024–2025 academic year. As feminist community-engaged scholars, part of our reflective learning during this time is a deeper understanding of myriad ways we face disruption now and in our future work. Therefore, we see feminist community engagement disrupted as central to how we frame our current and future scholarship and practice. In this Projects With Promise essay, we describe our work together, our definition of feminist community engagement, how learning communities can enhance our ability to span boundaries during periods of disruption, how to sustain a learning community, and the contributions this learning community has to offer the field of community engagement.

Learning Communities

Faculty learning communities have risen in popularity since the late 1990s as a way for institutions to support professional development and personal growth (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007; Lee, 2010). Some learning communities convene around institutional roles (e.g., dissertating graduate students, new department chairs); others are more topic focused, organized around wide-ranging practices, such as inclusive teaching practices, trauma-informed pedagogy, or service-learning (Lemelin et al., 2023; Richlin & Essington, 2004). Whether role-based or topic-focused, learning communities are regularly convened times and places for reading, discussion, and sharing of experiences and practices. In contrast to workshops or institutes, learning communities are "more about long-term learning, community building, and the creation of lasting change" (Gravett & Broscheid, 2018, p. 101). As a grassroots, bottom-up form of professional development, they tend to rely upon faculty to identify topics, organize meetings, and develop the community's norms and expectations. Very often, the overarching goal is to inspire action or change among supportive peers.

At Michigan State University (MSU), the central office for faculty and staff development puts out an annual call for learning community proposals each spring. Over the summer, they review proposals and select a few to support during the following academic year. Support includes assistance with publicizing the learning community, modest monetary support (for supplies, meeting space, or learning materials), and a conveners' meeting once a semester. In spring 2021, on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, a team composed of a tenure-track faculty member, a fixed-term faculty member, and academic specialists submitted a proposal for Feminist Community-Engagement Disrupted: Writing Our Scholarship Stories, a cross-role, topic-focused learning community. This proposal received support and has been renewed for 3 subsequent years.

At MSU, learning communities are sponsored by the Office of Faculty and Academic Staff Development (OFASD), which articulates only three rules: (1) Hold at least eight meetings during the academic year, (2) discuss themes important to MSU's educational mission (though topics are chosen by faculty and staff facilitators), and (3) welcome all members of MSU faculty and staff regardless of appointment type or academic discipline (see https://ofasd.msu.edu/teaching-learning/learning-communities/). OFASD's focus is on supporting communities for members of the MSU faculty and academic staff; however, from the inception of our community, we broadened our reach to include graduate and undergraduate students, and occasionally welcomed faculty from other institutions. Aligning with the learning community goals outlined by OFASD, our focus is to support the professional lives of community-engaged researchers, and therefore, we did not specifically invite community partners to the community.

Feminist Community-Engagement Disrupted: Framing Our Learning Community

This learning community was established to focus on the academic partnership activities of community engagement projects conducted from the perspective of feminist principles. For many years, community engagement projects and research have been viewed as service rather than scholarship. In a 2014 literature review on engagement and academic promotion, authors noted many difficulties for academics undertaking engaged work within institutions, including confusion about the meaning of "engagement," lack of grant funding for these efforts, and no clear way of measuring or reporting research findings (Smith et al., 2014). Even with these challenges, the importance of community engagement in

the creation of scholarship has been noted across many disciplines (Ishimaru et al., 2018; Kline et al., 2018; London et al., 2020; Sarche et al., 2022). In fact, research collaborations between university- and community-based partners lead to far-reaching impacts in the community resulting from products developed by the partnership and the process of partnering (Zimmerman et al., 2019).

Further, the unique position of boundary spanners, defined as those facilitating "transactions and the flow of information between people or groups hindered by some gap or barrier" (Long et al., 2013, p. 1) has been identified as important in community-engaged scholarship efforts (Purcell et al., 2020; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Scholars who can work in academic, community, and policy contexts are necessary for the creation of knowledge useful for community members, practitioners, and policymakers across disciplines (Goodrich et al., 2020). However, the heavy communication burden of boundary spanning takes an emotional toll often paid in productivity (Needham et al., 2017). With boundary spanners playing such important roles on and off campus, finding ways to support their well-being is a goal we were uniquely suited to address through a learning community.

Feminism was central to the framing of the work of our learning community, understanding our roles as academic boundary spanners, and our approach to scholarship. Feminist research praxis attends to the ways in which marginalized voices may be silenced through structural violence, settler colonialism, and institutionalized sexism and racism (Haraway, 1988). Our approach to feminist praxis considers the entangled work of feminist theory, and the ways those theories shape scholarly endeavors, from the framing of research questions to methods, partnerships, and dissemination (Evans & Chamberlain, 2015). The work of publication and dissemination is central to feminist community engagement as we consider the power of how knowledge is circulated and reproduced (Ahmed, 2012; Wentworth & Clark, 2022). For this learning community, feminist praxis is particularly salient in informing our position as boundary spanners performing community engagement; as Ahmed (2017) wrote, "It is through the effort to transform institutions that we generate knowledge about them" (p. 93). In this way, we are alive in feminist community-engaged praxis; it is the epistemological framework we carry forward in thinking about how we respond to and create disruption.

As feminist community-engaged researchers, ideally, we codesign research with partners. However, we recognize that in reality, numerous challenges arise during implementation, and planning strategies for managing these inevitable disruptions is important to strengthening teams, building trust, and supporting community in times of need. Considering the range of potential disruptions, we draw on examples such as pandemics, civil unrest, community/campus violence, climate change and increased frequency of natural disasters, partner staffing and leadership turnover, experiences of illness or long-term health care needs, and/or dramatic shifts in caregiving responsibilities. In multiyear projects, teams may face several of these challenges over the course of their partnership. One can classify these disruptions as external to the community (e.g., COVID-19; political, community, or campus violence), internal to the community (e.g., partners leaving the team to take a new job), or within individuals in the community (e.g., illness, stressors). As feminist community engagement is itself a disruptive practice, it is familiar with the tenor, texture, context, and shape of disruption. Therefore, we are well positioned to provide insight into the means of attending to disruptions, both major and minor, in our community-engaged work. In addition, using feminist principles such as equity, deep listening, and mutual respect, the learning community became a space for scholars to learn from each other's perspectives and enhance our ability to serve as boundary spanners in our community-engaged research.

Sharing these experiences is especially salient for scholars whose research draws on feminist methods that attempt to disrupt inequities (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2007; Leddy, 2017) and prioritize the lives and multiple ways of knowing of marginalized groups (Dorries et al., 2019). These periods of disruption pose a particular challenge for feminist community-engaged qualitative researchers who draw upon valuable intensive in-person methods such as participant observation (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), interviews (Braun et al., 2017), oral histories (Srigley et al., 2018), and for applying Black feminist intersectional analyses (Patterson

et al., 2016) and Indigenous relational methodologies (Denzin et al., 2008; Smith, 2012).

Defining Feminist Community Engagement

We collectively worked to define feminist community engagement, and refer to our definition throughout this article:

> **Feminist community engagement is an approach to knowledge production that emphasizes intersectionality, raises critical consciousness, fosters equitable partnerships, and is grounded in social and historical context with the goal of supporting actions that upend oppressive power relations to promote social justice, equity and/or liberation.**

Achieving these goals requires communal assumptions about the collaborative process, data sharing, and the processes for building mutual trust within academic–community partnerships. This deeper understanding of what feminism brings to the community engagement spectrum, and the types of activities that can contribute to this shared understanding, is displayed in Figure 1, which we adapted from the literature (Cho et al., 2013; Clinical and Translational Science Awards Consortium, 2011; Shirk et al., 2012).
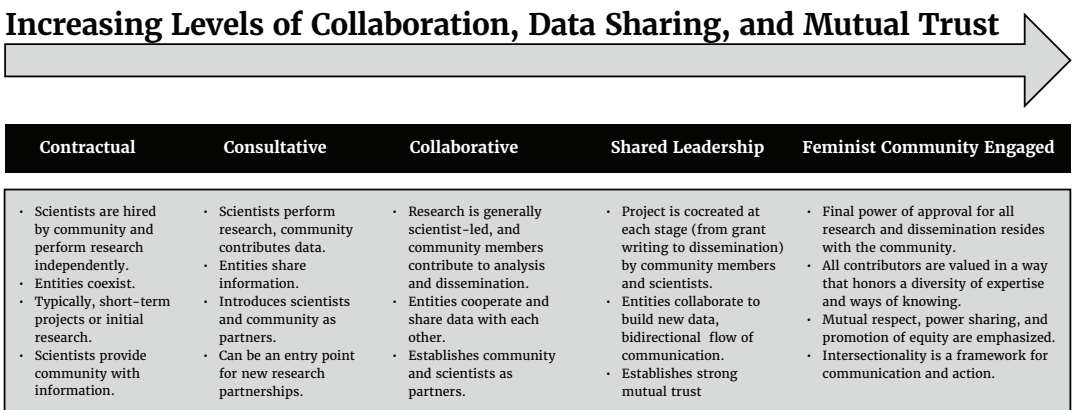
How the Learning Community Operates

Our community began in fall 2021; learning communities at Michigan State University were held virtually during that time due to statewide and university mandates. In addition to the Office of Faculty and Academic Staff Development and Office of University Outreach and Engagement publicizing our learning community, the three program facilitators advertised our learning community via email and newsletters to various campus organizations and departments with whom we are affiliated, and/or who have a mission to support researchers in community engagement or diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice initiatives. As learning communities are open to all and participation is voluntary, there was no application or vetting process. Our advertisements directed interested individuals to complete a brief online intake form so we could collect names, emails, campus affiliation, university role, and accommodation requests. We used this form to distribute a Zoom link for an informational meeting so that potential participants could learn more about the community and ask questions before committing to engage throughout the academic year. Each year we use these same methods of advertising and intake form to facilitate inclusion of new members. As many as 46 individuals registered through our intake form; up to 25 individuals join our initial meetings, with six to 15 individuals joining regular monthly meetings. Attendance fluctuates based on time of year, with lowest attendance in December and May.

Even after it became possible to meet in person, we continued to meet virtually, as we found that this modality accommodated participants who would not have been able to attend in person. Although the format

Figure 1. Approaches to the Spectrum of Community Engagement Outlining Some Primary Components of Feminist Community-Engaged Scholarship

Increasing Levels of Collaboration, Data Sharing, and Mutual Trust

Contractual	Consultative	Collaborative	Shared Leadership	Feminist Community Engaged
· Scientists are hired by community and perform research independently. · Entities coexist. · Typically, short-term projects or initial research. · Scientists provide community with information.	· Scientists perform research, community contributes data. · Entities share information. · Introduces scientists and community as partners. · Can be an entry point for new research partnerships.	· Research is generally scientist-led, and community members contribute to analysis and dissemination. · Entities cooperate and share data with each other. · Establishes community and scientists as partners.	· Project is cocreated at each stage (from grant writing to dissemination) by community members and scientists. · Entities collaborate to build new data, bidirectional flow of communication. · Establishes strong mutual trust	· Final power of approval for all research and dissemination resides with the community. · All contributors are valued in a way that honors a diversity of expertise and ways of knowing. · Mutual respect, power sharing, and promotion of equity are emphasized. · Intersectionality is a framework for communication and action.

Note. Adapted from Cho et al., 2013; Clinical and Translational Science Awards Consortium, 2011; Shirk et al., 2012.

varied across the 3 years to meet the needs of our participants, we meet for a total of 2 hours monthly during the academic year. We occasionally met during the summer months if we were working on completing a product (such as a conference presentation or manuscript). During our convenings, we share stories and experiences, and talk through ideas for writing and research using a feminist lens. We also share journal articles, podcasts, and books, and we offer shared online spaces for saving community materials.

We prioritize building relationships with each other and a space that is collaborative and safe for all. With a focus on relationships, collaboration, and equity among members, our learning community functions differently from many others at our institution. Instead of having assigned readings that are discussed monthly, we spend time learning from members about their work and lives, and what is shared from members guides how we prioritize what we do together. All members are invited to be part of collective decision-making about the direction of our communal work. Small group discussions, peer-to-peer problem-solving, and deep listening help our community address specific situations as they arise—in our personal and professional lives. Honoring the feminist principles that are core to our community has allowed us to develop collective goals and work on projects that help us attain those goals. We focus on process goals (build and maintain a safe space, make room for sharing, and engage in collective decision-making) and product goals (share scholarly resources about feminist community engagement, create scholarly products that describe feminist community engagement principles and practices).

Throughout our time together, the learning community has become a safe space for participants to share their vulnerability and feel supported on their journeys no matter where they are. Given MSU's focus on supporting faculty and academic staff through learning communities, and our goal to expand this support to students, the purpose of our group is to support community-engaged *researchers*. Although we were initially open to including community partners, we quickly found that these meetings were not a priority for any of our partners. Furthermore, as we expanded our discussions, participants articulated a need to focus more on support-

ing one another in our professional lives. We share practical advice about blossoming as feminist community-engaged researchers and practitioners. Participants emphasize the importance of this kind of supportive space for individual and collective meaning-making, reflection, empathy, and advising. We experience deeper engagement and collaboration in our work using feminist community-engaged principles. Central to our learning community is providing a space for discussion, reflection, and writing about our experiences as boundary spanners in the feminist community-engaged space and our diverse home departments. Therefore, our learning community provides a support structure and a forum for problem solving. We use this space to talk through struggles with institutional barriers without sharing information detrimental to our relationships with partners or sharing details about institutional or operational barriers. Table 1 displays our learning group's activities across the 3 years since its inception; these are detailed below.

Year 1

We began with a structure of monthly discussion topics and learning community goals, leaving time for reflection and community building. Relationships developed through stories about our personal and professional lives and shared feminist values. We codeveloped group norms around preparing to come to the learning space, showing respect, and addressing conflict. As we began these discussions, individuals brought related articles and book suggestions. Realizing that we needed a space to store and share these resources, group leaders made use of Zotero reference management software to manage them.

Content for subsequent sessions evolved from our discussions through consensus and emerging themes. These themes included creating community, feminism as practice, the meanings of disruption (from internal and external sources), collaboration in a feminist space and the use of language, mistakes and recovery, communication barriers and solutions, and subversive leadership—breaking norms for the greater good. We made use of tools such as a digital whiteboard (Jamboard) for developing ground rules and created an ongoing infographic to track our progress, discussion topics, and themes. We worked from our initial definition of feminist community-engaged research, which we took to mean

Table 1. A Summary of Learning Community Activities Across the 3 Years of Our Work

Activities	Year 1 (met monthly)	Year 2 (monthly)	Year 3 (semimonthly)
Conversation and support	• Introductions • Personal stories • Group norms • Meeting structure	• Introductions • Group norms • Identified writing areas • Problem solving	• Relationship building • Established writing group • Reflecting on our community
Learnings	• Infographic reflection on community goals (principles, practice, unintended consequences, creative solutions) • Shared literature	• DEI statements — literature (individual and institutional) and experiences (individual) • Continued shared literature	• Writing together • Continued shared literature • Collectively writing a definition of feminist community engagement
Products	• Zotero initiated with reading list • UURAF poster presentation (Strong et al., 2022a) • ESC poster proposal	• Early writing • ESC poster (Strong et al., 2022b) • ESC workshop and poster proposals	• ESC workshop (Wentworth et al., 2023) • ESC poster (Reid et al., 2023) • JHEOE paper proposal • JHEOE manuscript

conducting community-engaged research with the goal of upending oppressive power dynamics in knowledge production, emphasizing intersectionality, empathetic listening, compassionate responding, consideration of context, and action. Our learning community participants also mentored an undergraduate student as part of the learning community. She authored and presented a virtual and in-person poster presentation titled *Feminist Community Engagement Disrupted: Reflections on the Process of a Learning Community* at the university-wide University Undergraduate Research and Arts Forum (UURAF), outlining our first year's progress (Strong et al., 2022a). As our first year came to a close, we identified three writing areas for Year 2: engagement stories; decolonial approaches; and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Because we meet virtually, due to lingering outbreaks of COVID-19, we did not use our university-provided financial support for meeting spaces or refreshments. Instead, we contacted a woman-owned community bookstore and arranged for individual book orders to be processed and sent to learning community participants. Some choices included Jeong-Eun Rhee's *Decolonial Feminist Research*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*, and *Fieldnotes on Allyship: Achieving Equality Together*, edited by Rivers et al.

Year 2

During our second year, a few members left our community and a few new members joined, creating a final group of about 20 individuals representing multiple departments within and outside the university. The group ranged in age from the 20s to 60s in years and in rank from graduate student to professor. Although the group failed to attract significant diversity by race, being comprised primarily of White women, diversity in age and rank led to many interesting discussions. We again developed group norms using Jamboard, including deeper, more active statements around mindfulness, inclusivity, space for risk taking, colearning, and growing cultural humility.

Considering the three selected writing areas noted above, the group began discussing and writing about DEI statements from a feminist community-engaged perspective. Group members conducted a literature review to explore issues surrounding the creation of individual and institutional DEI statements; discussed the complex, and sometimes political, boundary-spanning nature of DEI statements; and prepared to write our own and provide peer review of members' DEI statements, reflecting feminist community-engagement values. One learning community member subsequently included her DEI statement in official promotion and review materials. The learning community updated the UURAF poster and presented it as a peer-

reviewed poster at the 2022 Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC) conference in Athens, Georgia (Strong et al., 2022b). Later that year, we collectively proposed a second poster and began planning a workshop for a future ESC conference.

Financial resources were again used to support individually selected book purchases from an independent bookstore (aligning our values with expenditures). Some book choices included *Community as Rebellion* by Lorgia García Peña, *Hood Feminism* by Mikki Kendall, *A Decolonial Feminism* by Françoise Vergès, and *Anti-Racist Community Engagement: Principles and Practices*, edited by Santana et al.

Year 3

As the academic year of Year 2 ended, a subset of the learning community participants opted to continue to engage over the summer months to continue the work on DEI statements. This group was made up of the six authors here, who range from graduate student to professor and include the three conveners. This diversity of experience fostered continued depth in existing relationships and rich discussions. One of the participants wrote her DEI statement and submitted it for promotion review, informed by the learning community conversations and peer feedback. Several members wrote reflections about writing DEI statements using a critical lens to examine power dynamics of having to write them (e.g., performativity, vulnerability, hypervisibility, truth telling). The group has plans on developing this content into a paper in the future. Later in the summer, work transitioned to focus on completion of our second poster, titled *Feminist Community Engagement Disrupted: Pathways for Engaging Together During Times of Disruptions* (Reid et al., 2023), and our workshop, titled *Feminist Community Engagement: Finding Our Way Through Disruptions* (Wentworth et al., 2023), convened at the 2023 ESC conference in East Lansing, Michigan.

The overall focus of Year 3 has been to continue to build on communal projects while maintaining space for relationships and new members to join. The six members from the summer continue to attend, with an additional dozen or so individuals joining in various meetings. Based on collaborative discussions at the Year 3 kickoff, the learning community has been meeting twice a month this year. One meeting is for writing time, which can be focused on collaborative work, or used as accountability time for other members not involved in any communal projects but looking for a supportive space to write. The other monthly meeting is for discussion only, where our conversations embrace a range of topics most salient to the group at that time. Although the learning community often has a project in production, meetings continue to be started with conversations about our lives, processing recent experiences, and being together with each other in our humanity.

Two learning community members engaged in an independent project around topics from Year 2, specifically through a decolonial lens. These two members applied for and received a Flourish fellowship at MSU. The Flourish program is sponsored by the Center for Gender in Global Context (GenCen) at MSU; it takes works in progress by junior scholars and pairs the authors with an internationally recognized senior scholar expert on this topic. Each year approximately four papers, and their authors, are selected to participate, and the GenCen facilitates a workshop where the senior scholars discuss the papers and provide written and spoken constructive feedback, enabling all the fellows to learn from one another and build a supportive mentoring network. As these two members of the learning community worked on their paper for the Flourish workshop, they found some ways that the definition of feminist community engagement could be refined. They brought these ideas to the full learning community. These discussions resulted in a larger community collaborative discussion about how we define feminist community-engaged research within our learning community, which led to the definition presented in this article.

Together we submitted the proposal for this article. The writing of this manuscript has given space to continue to discuss, appreciate, and embody what we do in our community and how we do it. It has expanded our thinking on how we embody feminism in our community-engaged praxis and has fostered conversations on how we think about moving forward in sharing our work in an effort to support other scholars working in a similar space.

As we progressed in our collaborative understanding of feminist community engagement disrupted, our understanding of disruption evolved. Although the COVID-19 pandemic inspired our initial definition,

our learning community always drew connections to other types of disruptions to community-engaged work. Indeed, our members highlighted prior experiences with natural disasters, political instability, and realities of partners who change jobs or take extended family leave as disruptions requiring discussion. The pandemic simply amplified the need for resiliency strategies in feminist community engagement. As we moved further from the onset of COVID-19, our community reimagined the threat of disruptions. We understand our work exists in a time of significant instability, including funding limitations, and threats to higher education and diversity, equity, and justice scholarship. Threats to campus discourse are more salient nationally; however, threats of this nature are of particular concern for faculty at MSU in the wake of campus violence and significant disruptions to our institutional leadership over the past several years. We now recognize that there is not a single disruption that we need to plan for and respond to; rather, we have realized that we are living in a state of instability that brings broader uncertainty to the praxis of community engagement.

Reflections on the Learning Community Impact

In preparing this manuscript, we asked members of the learning community for their reflections on the impact of participating in this group. We held a reflective dialogue session with detailed note-taking that formed the initial draft of the reflection section. Later, during group time designated for reflective writing, we requested feedback and edits on this manuscript. As this was program evaluation, not research, we did not need IRB approval. All members consented to having anonymous quotes shared in this article. Foremost was cultivating a feminist space that allowed us to maintain, discuss, and improve our community-engaged research and ensure that these engagements were steeped in feminist community-engaged principles. Reframing together what is meaningful in our work was both empowering and sustaining. Additionally, we were able to draw from our interactions and lessons learned to produce academic products. In all, we were able to ethically sustain and improve our partnerships beyond this new period of academic uncertainty, and we were able to produce work that supported our academic careers.

We also gained a sense of community during a time of isolation. This newfound community of scholars allowed us to sustain our ability to serve as boundary spanners in our community-engaged research, even when some activities were put on hold. In fact, the learning community mirrored our own community-engaged work, in sharp contrast to the sometimes competitive, high-pressure, and hierarchical academic units or departments to which we belonged. One learning community participant noted, "It's so valuable to have colleagues who understand the particularities of maintaining relationships on campus, in communities, and among all the groups. It's a relief not to have to justify this work in this group."

There were also benefits of having learning community members who spanned different disciplines, ages, and ranks. Rather than being siloed, each of us brought unique perspectives, different resources, and varied lived experiences, both personally and professionally. One member mentioned that meeting with those who share your passion, especially those newer to the field, prevented cynicism. "When the whole group looks just like you, you tend to spin a negative story. Having diverse partners helped me to see challenges from different perspectives." Another member noted, "When I'm struggling with processing a difficult situation in this work, I can't just show up to our unit meetings to discuss it. I find that this group provides a forum for rich discussion." A third member noted,

> When disruptions happen in my community partnership, as they sometimes do, it was very helpful to have a group to talk things through with. I was able to identify strategies for addressing the issues with others who also believe in feminist community engagement approaches.

Finally, group members felt valued. Whether coming from a position of activism or theoretical scholarship, each member felt welcomed, and our combined strengths moved our individual and collective work forward. Much as with leading community engagement projects, participation in this community helped normalize our struggles and helped us learn more wholistically, exploring our lives as whole people. As one member commented, "Our humanity comes first. We are following joy not because it's

an outside expectation. We can be productive in a different way. . . . it's a process difference that helps facilitate our work. That process makes ALL the difference."

Learning Community Next Steps

Over the past 3 years, our Feminist Community-Engagement Disrupted learning community established itself as both an intellectually productive space and a community of care for feminist community-engaged boundary spanners. By grounding our learning community in feminist practices, we have fostered nonhierarchical collaborations across disciplines, roles, ranks, and experiences. We have worked to foster trust and support through storytelling, making time and space for listening among learning community members. We have redesigned our learning community in response to changing needs, wants, and schedules. In looking forward, we see the Feminist Community-Engagement Disrupted learning community widening the circle of participants and continuing to evolve as participants support one another's intellectual, emotional, and communal growth. We are approved as an official MSU learning community again in the 2024–2025 academic year.

Lessons Learned—Learning Communities for Feminist Community Engagement on Your Campus

For feminist community-engaged scholars and practitioners, consider forming a group of like-minded folks to examine the joys and challenges of this approach to community engagement, especially during times of disruption (broadly defined). Remember to convene your learning community (formally or informally composed) to address the intellectual, emotional, and community aspects of how we conceive of, navigate through, and make meaning from the disruptions we experience in our community-engaged scholarship and practice. Provide space for talking about both easy and challenging experiences, camaraderie, support, and sharing advice within the group. Tapping into the wisdom, experience, and care of the group is invaluable for processing difficulties, especially when those conversations are risky in competitive home departments or with others who lack understanding of the boundary-spanning nature of community-engaged work. Slow down and listen deeply. Put aside notions of

"wasting time" and "not being productive" when shifting the group's norm away from these common academic mindsets toward more of a "thinking it through together" and being with each other approach. The work of being in community—building rapport and relationships—results in the trust, collaboration, and inclusivity that form the foundation of collaborative work. Being in community is critical work and can facilitate success in more "traditional" academic measures (e.g., journal publications and conference presentations).

As the group forms, cocreate and revisit the ground rules for participation, and collaboratively identify shared focus points for common work, while acknowledging that individuals may work on related pieces on their own too. Principles of feminist community engagement should not only be the subject of the group but inform its operating principles. Our humanity as community-engaged boundary spanners comes first in a community of learners. Recognize that the process may unfold and take different organizational shapes as the group's needs change, but the underlying core commitments—to breaking down hierarchies, addressing oppressions, becoming more of our whole selves—will likely remain the same. The development of these spaces takes intentionality, transparency, and communication among the leadership team. It is also important to model collaborative decision making, invitations to join and active inclusion of members, and acceptance of community members as their whole selves.

For institutional leaders responsible for supporting community-engaged scholars and practitioners, consider convening a learning community focused on feminist community engagement on your campus. The community-engaged scholars' approach and focus on their communities often puts them at the institutional margins (Buchanan et al., 2021). Invite noted feminist scholars as well as academic staff, postdocs, and graduate students to be involved, because inviting participants across academic ranks and positions embodies feminist community engagement principles. Provide support for publicity and scheduling, as well as a budget for meeting space, snacks, or supplies, and then allow the learning community members to codesign how they want to meet and what they want to focus on. Stepping back from a top-down, administratively driven approach follows best practices for interdis-

ciplinary, topic-focused learning communities and coincides with feminist community engagement principles. Therefore, emphasize to group conveners and participants that you appreciate and support the values of a learning community: that the process of building relationships and establishing a community of care has priority equal with or greater than a focus on productivity (i.e., getting out conference proposals, grants, and papers). Communicating this perspective at the beginning and reinforcing it throughout the learning community's time together will help counteract the pressure for productivity and create the space necessary for your campus's feminist community engagement learning community to flourish in meaningful and sustaining ways.

About the Authors

Chelsea Wentworth, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Office of Medical Education Research and Development (OMERAD). Her research uses a feminist community-engaged lens to examine hunger and nutrition security, patient/provider/community communications, and the social determinants that impact health outcomes for children and their families. Chelsea earned her MPH in behavioral and community health sciences and her PhD in anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh.

Diane M. Doberneck, PhD, is the director for faculty and professional development, Office for Public Engagement and Scholarship, University Outreach and Engagement (UOE), Michigan State University. Doberneck's community-engaged scholarship has focused on rural community and economic development and more recently, community engagement in conservation and stewardship. Diane earned her PhD in community and organizational resource development from Michigan State University.

Jessica V. Barnes-Najor, PhD, the director for community partnerships in the Office for Public Engagement and Scholarship at Michigan State University, is a developmental psychologist with a specialization in applied developmental science. Barnes-Najor's work focuses on establishing research partnerships and identifying supports for increasing community capacity for engaging in research. Jessica received her PhD in psychology from Michigan State University.

Mindy Smith, MD, MS, is a clinical professor in the Department of Family Medicine, College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University and honorary associate in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. Her recent work focuses on elevating the patient voice in patient-oriented research and health care transformation partnerships between patients, health care professionals, and provincial health care authorities in British Columbia, Canada.

Jen Hirsch, LMSW, APHSW-C, is a third-year doctoral student at Michigan State University and clinical social worker. Jen's research interests derive from their experience as a clinical practitioner in health care, and they are focused on humanizing and person-engaged qualitative research. They earned their MSW in 2013, where they received interprofessional education in the health care field.

Mallet R. Reid, LMSW, is a PhD candidate in ecological-community psychology at Michigan State University. His work focuses on feminist community-engaged research and clinical approaches to address addiction and trauma. Additionally, Mallet is interested in a strengths-based, feminist approach to investigating substance use in clinical and social settings, and explores how substance use can be beneficial for people's lives.

References

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Duke University Press.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Gray, D. (Eds.). (2017). *Collecting qualitative data: A practical guide to textual, media and virtual techniques*. Cambridge University Press.

Buchanan, N. T., Perez, M., Prinstein, M. J., & Thurston, I. B. (2021). Upending racism in psychological science: Strategies to change how science is conducted, reported, reviewed, and disseminated. *American Psychologist, 76*(7), 1097–1112. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000905

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 38*(4), 785–810. https://doi.org/10.1086/669608

Clinical and Translational Science Awards Consortium. (2011). *Principles of community engagement* (2nd ed.; NIH Publication No. 11-7782). Community Engagement Key Function Committee, Task Force on the Principles of Community Engagement, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention & Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S., & Smith, L. T. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies*. Sage.

DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2011). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Dorries, H., Henry, R., Hugill, D., McCreary, T., & Tomiak, J. (Eds.). (2019). *Settler city limits: Indigenous resurgence and colonial violence in the urban prairie West*. Michigan State University Press.

Esposito, J., & Evans-Winters, V. (2007). Contextualizing critical action research: Lessons from urban educators. *Educational Action Research, 15*(2), 221–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790701314775

Evans, E., & Chamberlain, P. (2015). Critical waves: Exploring feminist identity, discourse and praxis in Western feminism. *Social Movement Studies, 14*(4), 396–409. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2014.964199

Glowacki-Dudka, M., & Brown, M. P. (2007). Professional development through faculty learning communities. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development, 21*(1–2), 29–39. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.10277

Goodrich, K. A., Sjostrom, K. D., Vaughan, C., Nichols, L., Bednarek, A., & Lemos, M. C. (2020). Who are boundary spanners and how can we support them in making knowledge more actionable in sustainability fields? *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 42*, 45–51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2020.01.001

Gravett, E. O., & Broscheid, A. (2018). Models and genres of faculty development. In B. Berkey, E. E. Roundtree, P. M. Green, & C. Meixner (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing faculty development in service-learning community engagement: Exploring intersections, frameworks, and models of practice* (pp. 85–106). Stylus.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575–599. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066

Ishimaru, A. M., Rajendran, A., Nolan, C. M., & Bang, M. (2018). Community design circles: Co-designing justice and wellbeing in family–community–research partnerships. *Journal of Family Diversity in Education, 3*(2), 38–63. https://doi.org/10.53956/jfde.2018.133

Kline, C., Asadian, W., Godolphin, W., Graham, S., Hewitt, C., & Towle, A. (2018). From "academic projectitis" to partnership: Community perspectives for authentic community engagement in health professional education. *Engaged Scholar Journal: Community-Engaged Research, Teaching, and Learning, 4*(1), 79–96. https://doi.org/10.15402/esj.v4i1.310

Leddy, L. (2017). Dibaajimowinan as method: Environmental history, Indigenous scholarship, and balancing sources. In J. Thorpe, S. Rutherford, & L. A. Sandberg (Eds.), *Methodological challenges in nature-culture and environmental history research* (pp. 93–104). Routledge.

Lee, V. S. (2010). Program types and prototypes. In K. J. Gillespie & D. L. Robertson (Eds.), *A guide to faculty development* (2nd ed., pp. 21–33). Jossey-Bass.

Lemelin, C., Gross, C. D., Bertholet, R., Gares, S., Hall, M., Henein, H., Kozlova, V., Spila, M., Villatoro, V. T., & Haave, N. (2023). Dismantling disciplinary silos: A faculty learning community facilitates interdisciplinary teaching development. *The Journal of Faculty Development, 37*(2), 7–16. https://www.ingentaconnect.com/contentone/magna/jfd/2023/00000037/00000002/art00007

London, J. K., Haapanen, K. A., Backus, A., Mack, S. M., Lindsey, M., & Andrade, K. (2020). Aligning community-engaged research to context. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(4), Article 1187. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17041187

Long, J. C., Cunningham, F. C., & Braithwaite, J. (2013). Bridges, brokers and boundary spanners in collaborative networks: A systematic review. *BMC Health Services Research, 13*(1), Article 158. https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-13-158

Needham, C., Mastracci, S., & Mangan, C. (2017). The emotional labour of boundary spanning. *Journal of Integrated Care, 25*(4), 288–300. https://doi.org/10.1108/JICA-04-2017-0008

Patterson, A., Kinloch, V., Burkhard, T., Randall, R., & Howard, A. (2016). Black feminist thought as methodology: Examining intergenerational lived experiences of Black women. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research, 5*(3), 55–76. https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2016.5.3.55

Purcell, J. W., Pearl, A., & Van Schyndel, T. (2020). Boundary spanning leadership among community-engaged faculty: An exploratory study of faculty participating in higher education community engagement. *Engaged Scholar Journal: Community-Engaged Research, Teaching, and Learning, 6*(2), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.15402/esj.v6i2.69398

Reid, M. R., Wentworth, C., Smith, M., Barnes-Najor, J., & Doberneck, D. (2023, October 4–5). *Feminist Community Engagement Disrupted: Pathways for engaging together during disruptions* [Poster session]. Engagement Scholarship Consortium Conference, East Lansing, MI, United States.

Richlin, L., & Essington, A. (2004). Overview of faculty learning communities. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 2004*(97), 25–39. https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.130

Sarche, M., Malone, L. M., Hoard, L., Barnes-Najor, J., Cameron, A., West, J., Barofsky, M., & The AIAN FACES Workgroup. (2022). Perspectives of Region XI Head Start federal, research, and program partners in carrying out a national study of American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start children, families, and programs. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 69*(1–2), 239–253. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12542

Shirk, J. L., Ballard, H. L., Wilderman, C. C., Phillips, T., Wiggins, A., Jordan, R., McCallie, E., Minarchek, M., Lewenstein, B. V., Krasny, M. E., & Bonney, R. (2012). Public participation in scientific research: A framework for deliberate design. *Ecology and Society, 17*(2). https://www.jstor.org/stable/26269051

Smith, K. M., Else, F., & Crookes, P. A. (2014). Engagement and academic promotion: A review of the literature. *Higher Education Research & Development, 33*(4), 836–847. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2013.863849

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.

Srigley, K., Zembrzycki, S., & Iacovetta, F. (Eds.). (2018). *Beyond women's words: Feminisms and the practices of oral history in the twenty-first century*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Strong, A., Wentworth, C., Doberneck, D., Barnes-Najor, J., & Howard, H. (2022a, April 8). *Feminist Community Engagement Disrupted: Reflections on process of a learning community* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBSOPlYikOE

Strong, A., Wentworth, C., Doberneck, D., Barnes-Najor, J., & Howard, H. (2022b, September 22). *Feminist Community-Engagement Disrupted: Reflections on the process of a learning community* [Poster session]. Engagement Scholarship Consortium Conference, Athens, GA, United States.

Weerts, D. J., & Sandmann, L. R. (2010). Community engagement and boundary-spanning roles at research universities. *The Journal of Higher Education, 81*(6), 632–657. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2010.11779075

Wentworth, C., & Clark, D. (2022). Language, publication, and the advancement of feminist praxis. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society, 29*(3), 1100–1120. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxab044

Wentworth, C., Smith, M., Reid, M. R., Barnes-Najor, J., & Doberneck, D. (2023, October 4–5). *Feminist community engagement: Finding our way through disruption* [In-person workshop]. Engagement Scholarship Consortium Conference, East Lansing, MI, United States.

Zimmerman, E. B., Haley, A., Creighton, G. C., Bea, C., Miles, C., Robles, A., Cook, S., & Aroche, A. (2019). Assessing the impacts and ripple effects of a community–university partnership: A retrospective roadmap. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 25*(1), 62–76. https://doi.org/10.3998/mjcsloa.3239521.0025.106