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Community-Engaged Scholars, Practitioners, and Boundary Spanners: Identity, Well-Being & Career Development

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Foreword: Special Issue on Community-Engaged Scholars, Practitioners, and Boundary Spanners: Identity, Well-Being, and Career Development

David J. Weerts and Lorilee R. Sandmann

We write this foreword at a time of growing concern about the future of American higher education. Recent surveys indicate that public confidence in U.S. higher education has reached a historic low (Blake, 2023), with persistent skepticism about the value of a college degree (Fry et al., 2024). Compounding these challenges, the college-going population is shrinking (Bauman, 2024), and the U.S. political landscape has become more polarized, partisan, and toxic (Hunter, 2024). Amid these pressures, the very notion of the fundamental purposes of higher education is being questioned.

In this eye-opening moment, we are compelled to consider (and perhaps reconsider) the role of community-engaged scholars, practitioners, and boundary spanners in a rapidly changing society. The invitation to write this foreword has prompted us to reflect on the work we conducted on boundary spanning over two decades ago. What assumptions did we embed in our original scholarship on boundary spanning related to university–community engagement? How might we view this earlier work today? How do the contributions within this special issue broaden our understanding of community-engaged scholars, practitioners, and boundary-spanning theory and practice? What investigations remain to be explored?

Our research collaboration began in 2003 through our participation in the Kellogg Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good (later the National Forum). Hosted by the University of Michigan, the initiative was created to catalyze research and leadership to strengthen the relationship between higher education and U.S. society. Forum leaders were motivated by studies in the 1990s that sounded the alarm about trends that are now accelerating: the loss of public faith in higher education, declining public investment in higher education, and a retreat from traditions that valued opportunity, the free flow of ideas, and civic engagement (Burkhardt & Merisotis, 2006).

We began to see these growing pressures through the lens of the ecological perspective on organizations, grounded in open systems theory, which emphasizes the reciprocal ties that bind an organization (e.g., colleges and universities) with its surrounding environment (community and the broader public). We particularly resonated with Scott's (1992) discussion of symbiosis, which declared that "the environment is perceived to be the ultimate source of materials, energy, and information, all of which are vital to the continuation of the system" (p. 93). Simply put, we conceptualized our studies with the view that university–community engagement was critical to building a better society and essential to the health and survival of colleges and universities.

Guided by this broader perspective, we encountered boundary spanning as a concept that could be practically applied to understanding the organizational roles of engagement leaders and practitioners. We benefited from the work of organizational theorists who explored issues such as social boundaries, environments, and bridging strategies (Scott, 1992); the relationship between people and their environments (Kerson, 2004); the role of boundary spanners as mediators (Leifer & Huber, 1977) and innovators (Tushman, 1977); and the perception of oneness that spanners have with the organization they represent (known as organizational identification; Bartel, 2001). Among the many sources we reviewed, an article by Friedman and Podolny (1992) stood out. It introduced us to the idea that boundary spanning could be understood as differentiated functions across an organization rather than as a single role. This insight led us to develop a schematic for understanding how boundary-spanning roles manifest

within universities prioritizing engagement as an institutional practice. This schematic became the basis for our 2010 article focused on boundary spanning at research universities (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

Over the years, we have been heartened to see numerous scholars build upon our 2010 article by introducing new methodologies and applications that expand and deepen our understanding of the complex nature of boundary spanning in university–community engagement. These subsequent works have grown increasingly sophisticated and influential, nationally and internationally.

Specifically, certain research projects have enriched our understanding of the theoretical components of the Weerts–Sandmann Boundary Spanning Conceptual Framework (2010), such as power dynamics (Sandmann & Kliewer, 2012). Additionally, studies have examined the roles of boundary-spanning actors during organizational change, with implications for community–university engagement. Examples include analyses of presidential transitions (Jones & Sandmann, 2019), the creation of an organizational community engagement identity (Wheel Carter, 2021), and the advancement of an institutional model of distributed leadership (Purcell, 2014). Farner (2019) introduced the metaphor of a braid to represent the interweaving roles of boundary spanners in institutionalizing community engagement under conditions of adaptive complexity. Tino (2021) recently examined the activities of organizational boundary spanners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another body of work has explored the boundary-spanning behaviors and influences of community engagement professionals working with various external stakeholders, such as military personnel (Mull, 2016) or volunteers (David, 2014). Extending our understanding further, Adams (2014) and Davis (2018), as well as others, have investigated the perspectives of higher education organizations' external partners, stakeholders, and constituents—the other dimension of the boundary-spanner dynamic.

Various empirical methodologies, including action research, case studies, narrative inquiry, and survey research, have been employed to advance our understanding of boundary spanning in community engagement. Mull led a team in operationalizing the Weerts–Sandmann Boundary Spanning Conceptual Framework (2010) by developing and testing a survey instrument to measure community engagement boundary-spanning behaviors (Sandmann et al., 2014). This instrument applies to campus-based actors—leaders, faculty, staff, and students—as well as community-based or external stakeholder boundary spanners in different contexts. It has been translated into at least three languages and employed in studies across Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North and South America and has been adapted for use in various sectors, including business, research and development, health care administration, K-12 education, and higher education community engagement. For example, it has informed the mediation efforts between city governments, local citizens, and IT companies in Ireland (Karimikia et al., 2022). The instrument has also been adapted for professional development and training contexts, such as in Tino's (2018) professional development of teachers as boundary spanners between systems in Italy, or S. R. Laney's (personal communication, November 5, 2023) training workshop for specialists seeking to become more effective at interdisciplinary Arctic studies, or Wallace et al.'s (2019) work with Australian health services collaborating with community boundary spanners to reach marginalized populations.

These collective efforts not only underscore the versatility and applicability of the Weerts–Sandmann Boundary Spanning Conceptual Framework (2010) but also illuminate the critical role of boundary spanners in fostering resilient and adaptive partnerships that bridge the gap between academia and community, driving meaningful and sustained impact across diverse contexts and geographies.

As discussed above, the study of boundary spanning related to university–community engagement has progressed considerably. In exploring the content for this special issue, we see three ongoing contributions to this literature. First, critiques of traditional boundary-spanning models can generate new thinking about the very notion of partnerships between universities and communities. Such new thinking is illustrated in Ania Payne's calls for incorporating a beneficiary-centric view of value creation that disrupts the notion of resource-rich institutions (e.g., universities) as central to creating value in a community. Second, this special issue highlights the importance of investigating how boundary-spanning prac-

tices may be expressed differently across various models of partnership work. This perspective is exemplified in Cara DiEnno's investigation of boundary-spanning practices through a collective impact framework. Finally, there is a strong and growing interest in understanding how one's identity shapes boundary-spanning practices and relationships with the community. Several contributions in this special issue explore how personal and work characteristics relate to boundary-spanning practices (Casey Downs Mull) and the relationship between boundary-spanner roles and identity-based constructs such as race, ethnicity, gender, immigrant status, motherhood, cultural heritage, and other identities (Chelsea Wentworth Fournier, Emily Henry, Jayoung Choi, Lorinda Riley, Jey Blodgett, Jonathan Garcia). Kathryn Clements reminds us that boundary-spanning roles are demanding and require attention to one's health and well-being. In her reflective essay, she promotes ways to encourage professional and personal resilience in these challenging roles.

We envision several additional avenues for expanding and deepening boundary-spanning research in the future. For example, further research might consider how boundary-spanning roles and practices vary in stable versus turbulent environments. We propose several possible key questions: How might boundary-spanning roles, expectations, skill sets, and practices change in environments with intense economic, social, and political pressure? How does a community or region's stability or turbulence shape boundary-spanning philosophy and practice? These questions seem particularly timely as colleges and universities increasingly serve stakeholders with divergent agendas, interests, and resources. In political arenas, organizational actors operate under conditions with various rules that "shape the game to be played, the players on the field, and the interests to be pursued" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 246). Applying these political metaphors to the boundary-spanning literature, future research might explore how spanners operate under unique conditions that set the terms of their work with community partners.

Another line of future questioning is the unique challenges and opportunities posed by digital transformations in the context of boundary spanning. How do digital, virtual, and artificial intelligence environments influence the nature of boundary-spanning roles, particularly in terms of collaboration, communication, and the development of trust between academic institutions and community partners?

In closing, we are inspired by the progression of boundary-spanning literature and its contributions to understanding the people and practices that bring institutions and communities together for mutual benefit. During one of the early Kellogg Forums hosted by the University of Michigan, a prominent nonprofit and business leader, Frances Hesselbein, made this declaration about our collective work in higher education:

> This is a time for leaders. We are fellow travelers on a long journey toward an uncertain future where the challenges will be exceeded only by the opportunities to lead, to innovate, to change lives, to share the future. (Kellogg Forum, 2002)

Indeed, we are fellow travelers toward an uncertain future in higher education and our broader democratic project. However, we believe colleges and universities offer hope by cultivating thoughtful, imaginative, and courageous community-engaged scholars, practitioners, and boundary spanners who can help our institutions and communities move forward during these uncertain times.

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Introduction to the Special Issue on Community-Engaged Scholars, Practitioners, and Boundary Spanners: Identity, Well-Being, and Career Development

Jennifer W. Purcell, Darlene Xiomara Rodriguez, Diane M. Doberneck, and Jeanne McDonald

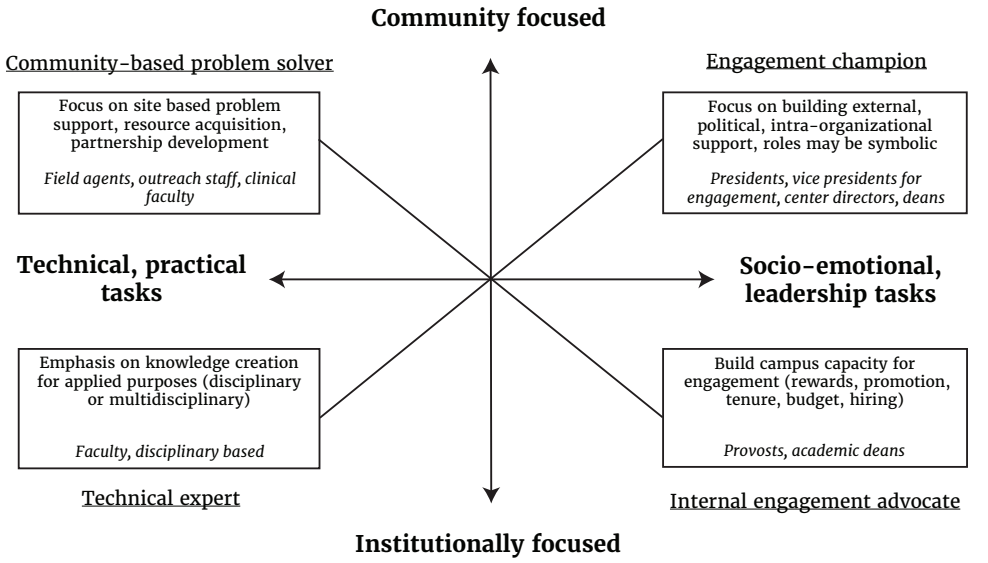
Will it last? Scholar Barbara Holland (2009), pillar of the field of higher education community engagement (HECE), posed the question 15 years ago in acknowledgment of efforts to institutionalize community engagement across higher education institutions (HEIs). She noted that diffusion of innovation related to HECE and enduring change would require iterative, ongoing cycles of organization development and leadership continuity to sustain progress. Holland argued that organizational change to advance HECE requires critical reflection on the very purpose and values undergirding the work by those actively pursuing it. The future of HECE, she cautioned, is reliant upon the process of measuring and reflecting on its implementation. Despite the proliferation of HECE, "questions persist as to whether the practice survives only at the margin of academic organizations" (Holland, 2009, p. 86).

Seven years later, Post et al. (2016) argued that *next-generation engagement*, led by a new generation of scholars, would require further commitments to change leadership. Specifically, they called for transformation of "the cultures, structures, and practices of higher education" (p. 3). Post et al. went on to suggest that a primary indicator of next-generation HECE is the increase in the number of individuals who span boundaries between the academy and the community, for whom they use the term "community connector" (p. 4). These community connectors, or *boundary spanners*, are the university-affiliated faculty, professional staff, and administrators who make community-engaged activities possible (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). The continued legitimacy and value of HECE to the academy and its partners is premised on boundary spanner activity, which is honored and refined through our collective study of and reflection on the scholarly practice. Hence, this special issue on boundary spanners is intended to celebrate the sustained efforts of boundary spanners, their continued professional development, and scholarship on the role, including challenges, opportunities, and evidence-based practices. May this contribution inspire and encourage members of our professional community as we aspire to the full potential of boundary spanning and its impact on communities and the field.

The State of Boundary Spanning in Higher Education Outreach and Engagement

Organizational boundary spanning as a concept emerged from research in the social sciences and public administration before gaining traction in the field of management. The primary goal of organizational boundary spanning is to process and convey information between organizations and represent the organization to external stakeholders (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981). Weerts and Sandmann (2010) first applied the concept within higher education outreach and engagement to develop their boundary-spanning model, which includes four primary boundary-spanning roles: (1) the engagement champion, (2) the community-based problem solver, (3) the technical expert, and (4) the internal engagement advocate (see Figure 1). The individuals who serve in these roles, *boundary spanners*, are agents of the institution whose efforts advance community-engaged activities. Boundary spanners engage in myriad tasks that Weerts and Sandmann organized by task orientation (technical, practical to socioemotional, leadership) and focus orientation (community focused to institutionally focused).

Figure 1. University–Community Engagement Boundary-Spanning Roles at Public Research Universities



Note. Adapted from "Community engagement and boundary-spanning roles at research universities," by D. J. Weerts and L. R. Sandmann, 2010, *The Journal of Higher Education, 81*(6), 632–657. Copyright 2010 by The Ohio State University.

In practice, one's dominant boundary-spanning role may shift according to the specific needs for a given project or one's position within an institution of higher education. For example, leaders in outreach and engagement in units with limited staffing may be required to function in a more generalist capacity. Subsequently, they may experience this role shift more frequently than their professional counterparts who function in a more specialized capacity as part of a larger team. Regardless of one's roles, the boundary-spanning framework provides a shared reference point for understanding and strategically planning for the behaviors, competencies, conditions, roles, and activities that bring life to outreach and engagement (Dostilio, 2017; Purcell et al., 2021; Van Schyndel et al., 2019). Boundary spanning provides an inclusive framework through which a variety of contributors may see themselves in the interconnected web of activities that advance outreach and engagement.

Everyone within an institution has the potential to function as a boundary spanner in a formal and/or informal capacity. Therefore, our usage of *boundary spanner* is an explicit acknowledgment of the inherent value and equitable contribution of each community engagement role. This special issue includes diverse voices and viewpoints intended to raise awareness of identity, well-being, and career development among boundary spanners and their full potential in HECE.

Since Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) foundational work, interest in boundary spanning in HECE has continued, as evidenced by conference themes, workshop topics, presentations, and publications. For example, in 2013 the 14th Annual Conference of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium featured research on "Boundary Spanning: Engaged Scholarship Across Disciplines, Communities, and Geography." Nearly a decade later, the Outreach and Engagement Practitioners Network (OEPN) convened its 2022 annual workshop on "The Boundary Spanner's Journey: From Roots to Wings" to honor the rich history of boundary spanning in HECE and future trajectories. Research has expanded upon Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) initial development of the boundary-spanning model for HECE to include roles within the community (Adams, 2014; Adams & Lanford, 2021; Jordan et al., 2013), measuring boundary-spanning behaviors (Sandmann et al., 2014), capacity building and faculty development (Bordogna, 2019; Duffy, 2022; Purcell et al., 2021; Van Schyndel et al., 2019), and boundary spanning within specific disciplines and fields of study (Burbach et al., 2023; Miller, 2008; Mull, 2014; Paton et al., 2014; Southern et al., 2023; Wallace et al., 2019).

Boundary spanners in HECE navigate complex roles that are further complicated by mounting pressures in the academy. For example, nationally higher education has an unfortunate public perception problem with severe, and perhaps warranted, critiques of our value and decreasing trust in our stewardship (Braxton & Ream, 2017; Gallup, 2024; Giroux, 2006). Despite continued evidence of higher education as a public good (Fitzgerald et al., 2020; Kezar et al., 2015; Pusser, 2006), public confidence in higher education is undermined by several concerns. Chief among them are political agendas informing the curriculum, curriculum misalignment with current workforce needs, concerns about the quality of instruction, political unrest, bias and discrimination, and questionable protections of free speech (Jones, 2024; Purcell & Wells, 2020; Vedder, 2019). Many institutions face financial difficulties due to decreasing public investment through federal and state allocations, declining enrollment, and rising operational costs. These budgetary changes have resulted in increased tuition and reliance on endowments to cover budget shortfalls (Boggs et al., 2021). As a result of the increased cost of attendance, student debt is rising. By 2019, student loan debt in the United States had reached approximately $1.6 trillion (Altamirano, 2024). There were also significant disparities in access to higher education among different socioeconomic groups. Most significantly, barriers to entry and completion of postsecondary education existed for students from low-income families and underrepresented minorities (McDaniel & Rodriguez, 2024; Rodriguez & Manley, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2023; Rozman-Clark et al., 2019).

Our collective challenges were exacerbated by the turbulence and turmoil induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to be compounded by the national racial reckoning (Kruse & Calderone, 2020; Reddick, 2023), attacks on democratic engagement (Daniels, 2021), and the erosion of community and civic engagement (Putnam, 1996, 2020; Shaffer & Longo, 2023). These complex challenges, or *wicked problems*, cannot be addressed without engaging external partners (Paynter, 2014; Tsey, 2019). Fortunately, boundary spanners are uniquely positioned to lead and support necessary change (Fitzgerald et al., 2017). In fact, these very individuals have supported students and communities on the frontlines through innumerable waves of tumultuous change, often without reciprocated support from their higher education community. Remarkably, boundary spanners remain in their positions and eager to advance community engagement efforts despite knowing it may cost them their own well-being. For many, these costs are outweighed by their commitment to the greater good and their belief that future generations will pay if they do not take the lead and sacrifice themselves, recognizing the consequences to society if they do not.

Flourishing as Boundary Spanners Postpandemic

The concept of this special issue emerged from the guest editorial team's shared and individual efforts to support boundary spanners during and after the pandemic. Combined, we bring nearly a century of boundary-spanning experience in HECE through practice and research. Each of us is responsible for professional development programming for boundary spanners, and we saw an opportunity to spur a revitalization effort among our colleagues (and ourselves) who expressed various states of weariness, withdrawal, and disengagement from community-engaged activity that was previously life-giving. The pervasive schism between core values, professional identities, and lived experience postpandemic was alarming. Out of concern for our scholarly community and the myriad communities served by our colleagues, we set out to learn: *What is needed for boundary spanners to experience renewed joy and flourish in their roles?*

The COVID Shift in Higher Education

The focus on boundary spanners for this special issue expands upon research conducted by Dr. Jennifer Purcell, professor of Public Administration at Kennesaw State University, and Dr. Darlene Xiomara Rodriguez, associate professor of Social Work and Human Services, also at Kennesaw State University, on women in the formal workforce during the pandemic who were simultaneously navigating parenthood and various caregiving roles. Purcell and Rodriguez's research on working mothers in higher education, which began in early 2020 at the onset of the pandemic, documented alarming trends in self-identified burnout and expressions of the symptoms that are consistent with it. This research revealed the significance of the compounded impacts of societal, institutional, and personal dis-

ruption on professional identities, career trajectories, and well-being.

Prior to the "2 weeks to flatten the curve" notification sent by government and public health officials and subsequent extensions of sheltering in place (Bender et al., 2023), there was a sense that the unfolding reality would be unprecedented. Purcell and Rodriguez zealously documented these impacts in real time and launched an analysis of over 500 pieces of gray literature, including news articles, features from popular media, and industry reports, to monitor the unfolding impact of the pandemic. As the pandemic spread, early reports confirmed their initial hypothesis that COVID-19 would have dire consequences for working women. Later in the spring of 2020, they formalized their inquiry and launched "Women@ Work," a study now in its fourth year. Time proved that yes, women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic (Purcell et al., 2022). In fact, the Biden administration claimed it was a national emergency, and news stories detailing the impact of the "Shecession" followed (Alon et al., 2022; Chakrabarti, 2020).

Soon thereafter was the manifestation of the "Great Resignation." This phenomenon included a mass exodus of women from the workforce as they struggled to maintain work–life harmony and were increasingly burning out (Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2021; Klotz et al., 2023). In spring 2021, one year into the pandemic, Purcell and Rodriguez facilitated a virtual session for their campus colleagues on the compounded challenges experienced by women faculty with caregiving roles, "Working Girl to Wonder Woman: Mothering and Meaning Making as Professors and Researchers During COVID-19." Participants later reported how helpful it was to simply hold space to grieve the former "normal" and acknowledge that what we were experiencing was anything but and certainly could not be sustained as a "new normal." As time progressed, the negative impacts of the pandemic remained, as was made clear through a series of conference and community presentations that Purcell and Rodriguez conducted to learn about the unfolding aftermath of the pandemic. Their work received the attention of the University System of Georgia's central administration, whereby in November 2022 they presented their research and recommendations to human resources and faculty development leaders from across the state to explore what changes could be made, considering the inequitable impact of COVID-19 on women in the academy, which further exacerbated preexisting inequities within the system.

Purcell and Rodriguez coined the term "the *COVID Shift*" to unpack the reality experienced by women in the formal workforce (Purcell et al., 2022). As of 2024, women continue to outnumber men in the U.S. higher education workforce. Nationwide, women make up more than half of the college-educated labor force, accounting for approximately 51% of those aged 25 and older (Schaeffer, 2024). This trend reflects a broader pattern where women have increasingly pursued higher education and entered the workforce in significant numbers (Fry, 2022). However, despite their higher representation, women are often found in lower ranking positions compared to their male counterparts. In higher education institutions, women are more likely to hold staff roles and lower ranking faculty positions, while men more frequently hold higher ranking faculty and administrative roles (Parvazian et al., 2017). Thus, despite the increase in representation of women in the formal workforce, inequity across managerial ranks remains.

The COVID Shift Among Boundary Spanners

Prompted by stakeholder feedback and adjacent conversations with their HECE colleagues, Purcell and Rodriguez sought to focus on a specific subgroup within higher education, boundary spanners, to create catalytic change across HEIs. Their affiliation with the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC) and its two signature programs, the Emerging New Engagement Scholars Workshop (EESW) and the Outreach and Engagement Practitioners Network (OEPN), led to an expanded collaboration with leaders of the two programs. In 2022, Dr. Diane Doberneck, director for faculty and professional development of the Office for Public Engagement and Research at Michigan State University and chair of the EESW, and Jeanne McDonald, associate director of the Office for Public and Community-Engaged Scholarship at the University of Colorado Boulder and past chair of the OEPN, joined Purcell and Rodriguez to explore these lingering impacts of the pandemic among boundary spanners within U.S. institutions of higher education.

When the boundary spanner–focused offshoot of the research with Doberneck and McDonald launched in 2022, it became apparent that HECE professionals and community-engaged faculty were doubly challenged by the additional layer and complexity of navigating external partnerships and the trials experienced by their community partners. Because women are more likely than men to be involved in community-engaged scholarship and research, they have a double burden in relation to boundary-spanning work. For instance, a study found that 50% of women faculty members integrated community engagement into their academic agendas, compared to 43% of men (Corbin et al., 2021). Consequently, this trend suggests that women are more inclined to take part in activities that connect academic work with community needs and public good.

Since women were primarily on the frontlines of the pandemic (Rabinowitz & Rabinowitz, 2021) as well as in the higher education system (Cicero, 2024), one could surmise that they too are the ones shouldering the load to span boundaries—at their own peril. Moreover, we noted the reluctance of boundary spanners to acknowledge their burnout or ask for help. We observed colleagues beginning to withdraw from their work and leadership roles on and off campus. In some cases, colleagues left their institutions; others exited the academy, including tenured colleagues who resigned to leave higher education altogether. More alarmingly, study participants beyond our campus colleagues shared similar experiences. Our findings were also reflected in annual College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) reports on rising levels of employee disengagement, decreased satisfaction with the higher education work environment, and increased interest in and intention to seek new professional opportunities (Bichsel & Schneider, 2024).

The *brain drain* among community-engaged scholars and practitioners is also a significant concern. This phenomenon, which was clear prior to the pandemic, occurs when talented individuals leave their positions due to various factors, including burnout, lack of institutional support, and better opportunities elsewhere (Harris, 2019). Burnout and brain drain were magnified after the pandemic. For example, in a 2022–2023 survey, 64% of faculty and instructors reported feeling burned out due to work (American Psychological Association, 2024). Notably, these negative impacts were even greater among women, gender minorities, and people of color. A global study found that more than two thirds (73%) of higher education staff experienced moderate to very high levels of psychological distress postpandemic (Rahman et al., 2024). The same report spoke to the issue of job insecurity and burnout, in which about one third (29%) of staff perceived burnout in their jobs, which was associated with perceived job insecurity and multiple comorbidities. Combined, these findings substantiate initial reports of increased stress and emerging burnout during the pandemic. Similarly, a 2020 survey revealed that almost 70% of U.S. faculty members reported feeling stressed, more than double the number in 2019 (32%; Gewin, 2021). We argue that these data highlight the urgent need for higher education institutions to address the mental health and well-being of their staff/faculty to prevent further brain drain and ensure supportive work environments.

The brain drain experienced among community-engaged scholars and practitioners resulting from the pandemic and continued flux within higher education is a threat to sustaining existing outreach and engagement initiatives and efforts to deepen and expand our impact. Our data reveal these trends are consistent across institution types. The potential threat for boundary spanners is amplified for land-grant institutions, whose missions expressly support outreach and engagement (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Several implications for outreach and engagement have emerged from our research. Burnout among community-engaged scholars and boundary spanners can have adverse effects on higher education's mission, including decreased motivation and creativity among the staff and faculty who are crucial for developing innovative community-engaged projects (Lederman, 2022; Madigan & Curran, 2021). Institutions are now experiencing higher turnover among faculty and staff due to increased burnout throughout the higher education workforce (Boyd, 2023), all of which lead to a loss of experienced faculty and staff. This turnover, and subsequent brain drain across institutions, threaten to disrupt ongoing collaborative projects and impede the continuity of community partnerships.

Boundary spanners in the academy found glimpses of joy and moments to celebrate despite the surrounding chaos of the pandemic and sociopolitical unrest in recent years. The pandemic highlighted the importance of essential workers, including those in higher education. There were moments of celebration and recognition for the dedication and hard work of faculty, staff, and administrators who ensured the continuity of education during these challenging times (Culver et al., 2023). Boundary spanners also played a crucial role in supporting students and staff through various initiatives, such as virtual wellness programs and peer support networks (Donnelly et al., 2021). Despite the challenges, boundary spanners in higher education fostered innovative collaborations. For instance, many institutions partnered with local communities to provide resources and support, such as food distribution and mental health services (American Psychological Association, 2024). The rapid shift to online learning led to significant technological advancements. Educators and administrators celebrated the successful implementation of new digital tools and platforms that enhanced learning experiences and accessibility (Aucejo et al., 2020). The pandemic necessitated a more flexible approach to education. Boundary spanners celebrated the adoption of hybrid and remote learning models, which provided students with more options and catered to diverse learning needs. Virtual service-learning gained traction, building upon earlier research extolling its utility and promise (McDonnell-Naughton & Păunescu, 2022; Purcell, 2017; Tian & Noel, 2020). Faculty and practitioners worked with community partners to find alternative ways to support engagement while responding to new and ever more pressing needs (Bharath, 2020; Krasny et al., 2021; Meija, 2020). Boundary spanners pivoted and made a path forward, demonstrating resilience and adaptability. And that is worth celebrating. Still, the experience took its toll in profound ways that continue to affect our work 4 years later. Boundary spanning has led to research and innovation since the outset of the pandemic, resulting in many advancements in public health, education, technology, and social sciences, among many other fields. Even as these achievements are celebrated within the academy and academic communities, little has been done to document how these experiences impact boundary spanners as individuals with complex, intersectional identities, until now.

The boundary-spanning research focus that began in September 2022 has resulted in survey data collection and community dialogues representing over 300 HECE professionals throughout the United States. Initially, we organized and hosted community dialogues promoted as "Cathartic Conversations" during community engagement professional conferences, including the Engagement Scholarship Consortium 23rd Annual Conference in East Lansing, Michigan, and the 2023 Gulf-South Summit in Athens, Georgia. Through these dialogues, we began documenting the experiences and perspectives within our professional community. Our invitation to dialogue was often met with gratitude and surprise, as colleagues were not receiving such support and willingness to listen about their experiences and concerns at their home institutions. We were overwhelmed by stories of perseverance and cautious admissions of struggle, weariness, and defeat within the very institutional systems supposedly championing their boundary-spanning work. As a result, we were further compelled to hold space for *therapeutic sharing* and *collective meaning-making*. While planning future phases of data collection, we knew the story of boundary spanning during and post pandemic was not ours alone to tell. Hence, we proposed this special issue to collect and share lessons learned with and by a broader audience while providing guideposts for further dialogue and inquiry. Based upon data collected from the Cathartic Conversations, we identified four themes that were outlined in the call for proposals for this special issue:

- Theme 1: Boundary spanner identity and intersectionality
- Theme 2: Boundary spanner next generation career pathways
- Theme 3: Boundary spanner professional development innovations
- Theme 4: Boundary spanner wellness, well-being, and career sustainability

What was initially expected to be a temporary increase in required energy and bandwidth for higher education boundary spanning has continued as new crises have unfolded and intersected with the old ones. The data are clear: The "new normal" is not sustainable, and it is taking its toll on the workforce. Resilience has worn thin, and the broader phenomenon within the U.S. workforce has significant implications

for community-engaged practitioners and researchers. As boundary spanners, we have expanded exposure to and insight on the pulse of organizations and communities. Being positioned to aid a greater number of partners, colleagues, and students also positions us for greater exposure to expanded commitments and environments that lead to burnout. When we consider the future of boundary spanning, we cannot dismiss continued burnout and disengagement among our ranks. Moreover, we must contend with how we now plan for and work toward a better future when our foundation is fractured and shifting unpredictably. Fortunately, our expertise as boundary spanners provides a roadmap for reassessing and recalibrating our efforts individually and institutionally. Our commitment to reciprocal, mutually beneficial partnerships can inform sustainable practices that align with our values.

The Future of Boundary Spanning in Higher Education Community Engagement

When we first conceived this special issue on boundary spanning, we were confident there would be wide-ranging interest among colleagues in our professional networks. However, we did not anticipate the depth and scope of submissions and the challenge we would face in narrowing selections through external peer review and our internal editorial review. The initial call for proposals generated 69 abstract submissions. Of these proposals, 37 manuscripts were invited for submission, which resulted in 25 complete submissions that were sent for peer review. With the support of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* (JHEOE) editorial leaders, we invited prospective authors to aid us in curating a peer reviewer roster specific to the special issue. Their responses yielded 62 recommended reviewers, several of whom were not already on the JHEOE's reviewer list. Thus, it allowed those new reviewers to be vetted and welcomed into the JHEOE reviewer pool, which was also a strategic act on the part of the special issue editors. Of these individuals, 38 accepted the request to review. Through the external and editorial peer review process, 11 manuscripts were ultimately selected for this special issue. Throughout this project, we were humbled and delighted to experience the commitment of our scholarly community to advance nuanced understandings of boundary spanning. This was and continues to be *joyful labor*.

As career community-engaged scholars and practitioners with long-standing participation in the field, we have observed the persistent professional commitment among our colleagues, so it should have come as no surprise that this same dedication would show up in this project. Our colleagues and collaborators have sustained each of us throughout the years, providing lifelines that proved essential since the start of the pandemic and, now, during the endemic phase of COVID-19. Our shared commitment to further cultivating this community of practice was the impetus for the special issue, because *we flourish in community*. Community-building that supports belonging and well-being undergirds this project. Following Holland's (2009) sage advice, we carefully reflected on what we hoped to accomplish with the project and which values would inform our decisions. Collaboration, equity, inclusion, and sustainability were paramount among the values we sought to embody as boundary spanners and the practices we adopted. We hope readers experience our commitment through the composition of our guest-editorial team, the processes we implemented to shepherd the intellectual contributions shared with us, and the articles featured.

We are pleased to present 11 articles that speak to these values while offering nuanced insight into the lived experiences of our HECE colleagues and community partners. Each contribution illustrates the interconnectedness and interdependence of the themes originally outlined in the call for submissions. These commitments are central to the recruitment and development of the next generation of boundary spanner practitioners and scholars. Many of our colleagues examined the evolving role of boundary spanners and ways to strengthen the profession through professional development, including strategies for improving competencies, communities of practice, and the identification of support systems. Others focused on the importance and impact of the boundary spanner's work with marginalized or underrepresented communities.

The issue opens with the research article "Assessing the Boundary-Spanning Roles of Cooperative Extension Professionals in Higher Education Community Partnerships" (Mull & Jordan), which, along with

"Spanning Boundaries and Transforming Roles: Broadening Extension's Reach With OSU Open Campus and Juntos" (Henry et al.), highlights the contributions of Cooperative Extension faculty and staff whose roles and work exemplify boundary spanning as both professional identity and practice. Indeed, as both articles attest, boundary spanners in HECE often embody the dual, interconnected identities of campus and community members.

Consideration of boundary spanners' intersectional identities must be at the forefront of planning for professional development innovations, as failure to do so undermines wellness, well-being, and career sustainability. "Nurturing Community and Resilience: Four Years of Reflection on Virtual Coworking Among Boundary-Spanning Community-Engaged Scholar–Practitioners" (Clements et al.) and "Feminist Community Engagement Disrupted: Pathways for Boundary Spanning and Engagement During Disruption" (Wentworth et al.) provide examples of targeted professional development that is responsive to a particular identity group. The author teams of these two pieces represent the same institution. Thus, this pairing of articles demonstrates how successful programming can emerge organically and be sustained by a grassroots effort for institutionalization that can coexist with formal structures to meet different needs among various stakeholders within the same university.

"Re(building) Trust with Indigenous Communities: Reflections From Cultural Brokers" (Riley & Kaneakua) and "A Call for 'Insider' Community-Engaged Research: Considerations of Power Sharing, Impact, and Identity Development" (Blodgett et al.) validate the importance of recognizing how boundary spanner identity and intersectionality impact research collaborations with community partners. Similarly, "Community-Engaged Scholars' Boundary-Spanning Roles and Intersected Identities: Korean Dual Language Bilingual Education Program in a Public Elementary School" (Choi et al.) provides an example of community-based programming through which researchers may be challenged and supported by shared identities with community partners. The case study also highlights the importance of candid and open dialogue in strengthening campus–community partnerships and research collaborations.

Recognizing and celebrating the diversity of intersectional identities enables us to next consider organizational practices that cultivate boundary spanning. For example, "Developing a Strategic "Container" to Support Boundary Spanning and Belonging Amongst Diverse Collaborators at a Land-Grant University" (Garcia et al.) introduces "dialogue containers" and appreciative inquiry, among other approaches, as strategic learning and development interventions for boundary spanners. Similarly, "Collective Impact as a Novel Approach to Seeding Collaboration for Boundary Spanning" (DiEnno et al.) provides a framework through which reflexivity and shared meaning-making may bolster university–community collaborations. The importance of reflective practice is further exemplified in "Fluid Practices of University–Community Engagement Boundary Spanners at a Land-Grant University" (Payne et al.). This piece reveals how one's understanding of their boundary-spanning practice is refined through interactive cycles of experience and reflection. This reflective essay also notes the need for continued examination of existing models and frameworks, thereby inviting scholars to further refine models as we deepen our understanding of identity, collaboration, and sustainability within the field.

Finally, in "It Takes a Village to Raise a Science Communicator" (Frans), the author skillfully and creatively provides a metaphorical heuristic for mapping the necessary support for doctoral students pursuing community-engaged research. We are especially pleased to include this reflective essay as inspiration for next-generation scholars and a call to action among established boundary spanners to provide the mentorship needed to sustain and advance the field.

These articles give voice to the lived experience of boundary spanners and honor the sustained dedication throughout the field of HECE. They reflect our collective efforts in advancing the thinking and practice of boundary spanning in HECE. Our work is not without difficulty, yet there is much to celebrate. We are therefore delighted to feature the innovative practices, research, and reframing of barriers presented in this special issue and hope it inspires next-generation boundary spanners and (re)ignites passion for our work.

In closing, we invite readers to consider how "iron sharpens iron" and investment in ourselves and our professional communities is a worthy endeavor. In *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*, Levine (2013) argued that our transformational shifts occur through "conscious development, and not just random change" that is both "relational and collaborative" (p. 61). Boundary spanners understand the importance of cultivating community, which includes our scholarly community. May our collective efforts be intentional, deliberate, and informed by an ever-expanding awareness of how we may better help one another as colleagues and citizens *flourish in community*, and may this special issue inform those efforts.

Acknowledgments

As an editorial team composed of boundary spanners with community-engaged research, teaching, mentoring, and leadership roles, we developed the call for proposals with special attention and encouragement for first-time authors. We particularly wanted to encourage reluctant authors, those who may have significant insights as practitioners but who may have never thought of themselves as authors or contemplated submitting a manuscript for consideration in a peer-reviewed journal. The articles in this special issue include research articles, projects with promise, and reflective essays, all selected and refined through multiple rounds of review. We thank the peer reviewers and authors for giving and responding to constructive feedback that has resulted in a special issue we are each proud of. Likewise, we extend our thanks and admiration to colleagues whose work was not featured. We cannot overstate the quality of work we received at each stage of review and sincerely hope to see your work featured in the future. We are grateful to have journeyed with every scholar who contributed to the project, especially Dr. Lorilee R. Sandmann and Dr. David Weerts, whose seminal work has inspired multiple generations of community-engaged research and boundary spanning. We hope this special issue justly honors your contributions to the field and impact on each of us.

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Assessing the Boundary-Spanning Roles of Cooperative Extension Professionals in Higher Education Community Partnerships

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Abstract

Cooperative Extension has a long-standing history of placing individuals in communities to lead community-wide change. These individuals are employees of the nation's land-grant universities, with significant roles and responsibilities working between and among institutions and their communities. They often must maintain dual identities and roles, bridging the university mission and community needs. This study examined the boundary-spanning behaviors and orientations of Cooperative Extension staff and found few personal or work characteristics correlated with boundary-spanning behaviors. We explain how this lack of correlation may serve to assuage concerns about objectivity in the boundary-spanning work of Extension professionals. Higher education administrators and community leaders can use this information to better orient, equip, and train these Cooperative Extension professionals to make a lasting impact through propelling objective community change.

Keywords: boundary-spanning, Cooperative Extension, competencies, boundary-spanning leadership

Higher education institutions involve numerous individuals in service, outreach, and engagement. One entity providing some consistency nationwide in higher education community partnerships is the Cooperative Extension Service. Within the modern university, the Cooperative Extension Service provides funding and a structure for engagement at federal, state, and local levels. The structure is important, as it provides the flexibility and speed to respond to needs at the most local levels yet also provides the infrastructure for statewide and national scaling of successful impact. Housed within the nation's 112 land-grant universities, Cooperative Extension employs thousands of individuals, with the majority located within the communities they serve.

The United States created the land-grant university as the "people's university and to make its knowledge and resources accessible to all" (Atiles et al., 2014, p. 60). The Cooperative Extension System provides the outreach or service component to complement land-grant universities' teaching and research missions, creating what is often referred to as the tripartite mission. Many land-grant institutions have dropped the "cooperative" and/or "service" monikers from the name of this third component of the tripartite mission. Perhaps this change is intended to modernize a dated name that no longer represents the organization's core. Perhaps the intention is to hide the critique of those in the higher education community engagement realm. Some appropriately critique Cooperative Extension as a one-way service rather than a two-way engagement (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). The two-way engagement model is based on mutual relationships between the university and the community. Cooperative Extension began as a unidirectional approach, "a one-way process by which university researchers transferred new agricultural technologies to farmers" (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008, p. 78). Others contend that Extension, when

applying best practices, may engage in service to build trust in the community, and that, in turn, local Extension staff can be critical links to construct responsiveness in a higher education institution to support the community (Atiles et al., 2014).

In 21st-century Extension work, Extension staff bring the university and the community closer together. Some argue that the county Extension educator—the boundary spanner responsible for the relationship between the university and community in the Cooperative Extension System—is simply a university agent, ready to subsume the community in the university's interests. Others could view the county Extension educator as an unsuspecting pawn, innocently drawing in the community for the university to exploit in the interests of research and teaching. To determine how these individuals truly affect the community, we explore the behaviors and activities of Cooperative Extension boundary spanners.

The purpose of this work is to investigate the boundary-spanning activities and behaviors of land-grant university Cooperative Extension faculty and staff by answering three primary questions:

1. What boundary-spanning behaviors are prevalent in Cooperative Extension faculty and staff?
2. To what extent are boundary-spanning behaviors explained *individually* by personal or work/organizational characteristics?
3. To what extent are boundary-spanning behaviors explained *jointly* by personal or work/organizational characteristics?

Literature Review

In 1862 President Abraham Lincoln signed the first Morrill Act, which provided federal funding to support postsecondary education. The national system we know as land-grant colleges and universities is present in every U.S. state and territory, with a mission to bring education to communities (Bickell, 2022). As the 1800s ushered in a new century, grassroots efforts in pockets across the country integrated university efforts with local communities. Seaman Knapp, director of the Farmer's Cooperative Demonstration work at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), began building community connections by placing USDA employees locally to connect universities to the people (Mull & Jordan, 2014).

These USDA agents connected research to education in these new roles. At the same time, local school superintendents in areas of the United States looked to universities to help round out the education of their students through partnerships (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). The Boys Club work and Girls Club work became what is now known as 4-H and is one of the largest youth development organizations in the United States and the only one connected to land-grant universities advancing the field of youth development (Mull & Jordan, 2014). These federal employees, school administrators, and university researchers and teachers paved the way for the Cooperative Extension System. Created by Congress and Woodrow Wilson with the passage and signing of the Smith-Lever Act (1914), the Cooperative Extension Service is one of the largest providers of adult education in the country and links all communities with their land-grant universities.

Extension extends or brings the university to the people through not-for-credit workshops, lectures, field days, and other experiences (Rasmussen, 1989). Cooperative Extension is and always has been a team approach connecting local and state needs and resources to the land-grant institution. It is a symbiotic relationship providing a field laboratory for universities and providing the local community with access to up-to-date, reliable information and resources that may not be readily available otherwise. Supplanting those original USDA agents, the modern Extension agent is an employee of the land-grant institution whose position may be funded by a collection of federal, state, and local funds. The Cooperative Extension employee works for two leaders, balancing the needs and desires of both the community and the university, hence spanning boundaries of institutions and communities.

The Role of Boundary Spanners

The concept of boundary spanning is not new, though its application within the higher education domain has grown over the past 15 years. One of the first authors to address the concept of boundary spanning in the education domain was Miller (2007, 2008), who leveraged the organizational development literature of authors like Thompson (1967). Miller (2008) focused

on university–school partnerships and their leaders, aptly noting that "to varying degrees all educational leaders are called to serve as boundary spanners" (p. 356). Concurrently, Weerts and Sandmann (2008) were examining community engagement within the higher education realm, introducing the valuable role of boundary spanners in building, supporting, and maintaining higher education community engagement. Subsequently, others have examined the concept of boundary spanning within higher education and academic health care (Lander, 2016), industry (Comacchio et al., 2012; Julia Vauterin et al., 2012), faculty (Purcell et al., 2020), graduate students (Mars & Moravec, 2022; Wegemer & Renick, 2021), urban 4-H Extension programs (David, 2014), and community engagement from the community's perspective (Adams, 2014).

Scott (1992) defined boundary spanning as "the bridge between an organization and its exchange partners" (p. 196). Aldrich and Herker (1977) defined the behavior of boundary spanners as processing information from various environments and providing representation to stakeholders outside the organization. Williams (2011) cited boundary spanners as "individuals who have a dedicated job role or responsibility to work in a multi-agency and multi-sectoral environment and to engage in boundary-spanning activities, processes and practices" (p. 27). Adams (2014) defined boundary spanners as "leaders who are able to bring people together across boundaries to work towards a common goal" (p. 113). Throughout the course of Cooperative Extension Service history, the local university representative in a community—who may be called Extension agent, educator, or leader—is tasked with making connections, bringing the university and the people together, interpreting language and needs between the two entities, and negotiating the resources available based on the needs. Atiles et al. (2014) stated,

> Matching the university's resources with the needs and opportunities of communities it serves is one of the most important roles of Cooperative Extension. Cooperative Extension educators assist communities to envision and realize the most appropriate development that reflects their long- and short-term goals and values. (p. 71)

They further stated that educators "represent the land-grant university at the local level and serve as liaisons between individual clientele and district or state Extension specialists" (p. 69), who are faculty members on campus. Therefore, the Extension agent, educator, specialist, or manager has served as a boundary spanner since the inception of demonstration work in the late 1800s. Cooperative Extension arguably, then, employs the largest group of university–community boundary spanners—over 8,000 community-based educators and 2,000 campus-based academic professionals and faculty (Peters, 2017).

Weerts and Sandmann (2010) emphasized the importance of boundary-spanning actors in facilitating communication, collaboration, and the exchange of resources between the organization and external stakeholders. Boundary spanners become power brokers, managing relationships and the contexts that vary among institutions. Furthermore, Weerts and Sandmann assigned categories to the higher education boundary spanner: community-based problem solver, technical expert, engagement champion, or internal engagement advocate. When represented graphically, these four categories are shown as quadrants created by two axes that Weerts and Sandmann titled "task orientation" and "social closeness," illustrating the range of roles and areas in which boundary spanners work.

Extension educators play a significant role in bridging the gap between academic institutions and the communities they serve and may engage in tasks all along both axes. Aligning with the roles Weerts and Sandmann (2010) identified, Extension educators engage in several tasks:

1. Advocacy. Extension educators serve as advocates for their communities by identifying their specific needs and concerns. They act as intermediaries who bring these issues to the attention of academic institutions and researchers.

2. Networking. Extension educators are responsible for building and maintaining networks within their communities. They are local power brokers, connecting with local leaders, organizations, and individuals, creating a bridge between the community and the resources available at universities.

3. Information sharing. Extension educators disseminate valuable information and research findings from academic institutions to the community. They translate complex academic knowledge into practical, actionable information.

As Extension educators work with the needs of the community in roles that include community-based problem solver and engagement champion, they must balance their community roles with the needs and desires of the university. Exercising their skills as technical experts and campus-based engagement practitioners, Extension employees may find that not only may the technical-practical and social-emotional leadership tasks be in conflict, but also the interests and needs of the community and those of the institution (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Extension employees, employed by the university, often rely on local, community funding for their positions (Atiles et al., 2014; Franz & Townson, 2008). This multiplicity of funding sources creates an even more delicate balance in the relationship and a unique power dynamic.

The capacity for Extension educators to process and then act on the needs of both university and the community is key to providing quality programming (David, 2014). Maurrasse (2001) found that the historical relationship between partners, the power relationships between universities and communities, and the background of the individuals greatly impacted the success of the relationship. As a community partner with a long, strong history, the Cooperative Extension System should support the Extension employee boundary spanner and community. Communities, in turn, have collaborated for over a century with the universities and have had an opportunity to develop a healthy tension on their side for achieving balance in the power dynamic. Nevertheless, the Cooperative Extension educators must continually look for new information in both the university and the community and then synthesize and apply new knowledge to fill the learning gaps for both groups (Richardson & Lissack, 2001).

With such a depth and breadth of influence, Extension boundary spanners embody an effective sample to advance theory and practice in the fluid roles of boundary spanners to advance the identity and intersectionality of these actors. Although previous research has examined boundary-spanning in the Cooperative Extension Service (Uhlinger, 1979) or described Cooperative Extension as a boundary organization between universities and communities (Prokopy et al. 2015), most studies have focused on the relationships that cross boundaries or on describing the concept of boundary spanning, and not on the behaviors of individual actors. No research has studied the behaviors of boundary-spanning actors within the Cooperative Extension Service. Because of the historical tradition of boundary spanning and the role of Extension staff, these individuals are an appropriate group to examine for boundary-spanning behaviors.

Methodology

The authors developed a questionnaire-based instrument (Sandmann et al., 2014) to operationalize the Weerts and Sandmann (2010) framework. The data captured for this study served as the pilot data for the development of the questionnaire. The data were used to determine the validity and reliability of the instrument and have yet to be explored within the context of Cooperative Extension and its boundary-spanning actors and the questions posed for this study. The four constructs (technical-practical, socio-emotional, community, and organization orientations) derived from the Weerts and Sandmann framework yielded high reliability, with an alpha of .893, .839, .923, and .907, respectively. This high reliability led to this questionnaire being used in other studies of boundary-spanning behaviors. The Institutional Review Board approved the study.

The authors compiled 949 potential respondents with unique email addresses from a southern Extension region land-grant university that was ranked as a "highest research activity" university in the Carnegie Classification and had received the elective classification for community engagement. After solicitation, 377 individuals participated, achieving a 39.7% response rate. The collected responses were exported from Qualtrics into SPSS, the data were appropriately cleaned, and scales were created for each boundary-spanning behavior. A final analysis in data preparation included determining the intercorrelation among the four boundary-spanning scales. The correlation coefficient between each pair of scales was significant but not overly so, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Intercorrelations Among Orientation Construct Scales

	n	*r*	r^2
Technical-practical with socio-emotional	268	0.76	0.58
Technical-practical with community	268	0.63	0.39
Technical-practical with organizational	268	0.62	0.39
Socio-emotional with community	268	0.60	0.36
Socio-emotional with organizational	268	0.62	0.38
Community with organizational	268	0.88	0.77

In addition to the boundary-spanning behaviors and scales—the primary objective for the initial data collection—the authors collected limited personal and work characteristics that may correlate with specific boundary-spanning behaviors.

The personal characteristics included age, gender, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, length of employment, and faculty rank. We included age, gender, and race and ethnicity to capture aspects of the human experience that impact social conditions and cannot be examined independently. We accept two limitations of our research: We included only two genders, and we allowed individuals to select their race and ethnicity according to the options USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) uses for clientele. Because of some of the challenges of USDA's classification of race and ethnicity, we decided not to include this characteristic in our analyses. We captured educational attainment by asking respondents about their highest earned degree from a high school diploma or equivalent to a doctoral degree. We also allowed individuals to respond with an "other" degree. Respondents had five options to capture the length of their employment, using 5-year increments. We offered a series of personal and work roles within Extension to capture respondents' faculty rank. Based on these roles, we created six categories to capture each respondent's faculty rank: public service representative, public service assistant, public service associate, senior public service associate, tenure-track, or classified staff. The institution has a unique classification for outreach and engagement faculty, and we used these specific ranks. We did not explicitly collect the exact rank of tenure-track faculty. We arrived at this decision due to the large number of county-based faculty in the population who are not part of the tenure-track system, but are rather in the public service and outreach faculty system.

Work characteristics included the percentage of the respondent's salary from university, county, grant, or other funds; the work location; the work setting; and several possible roles. The role types included whether assigned to a county professional role, a state specialist role, a tenure-track role, a county Extension agent role, or a county Extension coordinator role. To collect the percentage of the respondents' salary from the university, county, grant, or other funds, respondents had a bar slider of each type to total 100%. For calculation, we examined only the percentage of salary from the county to capture the perceived social closeness to the county. To capture the work location, we asked respondents if they resided in the same county where they worked. We felt that individuals who lived and worked in the same county might be more likely to engage in boundary-spanning behaviors oriented toward the community where they lived and worked. To capture the work setting, we used modified options used by USDA-NIFA, resulting in the choices rural, suburban, or urban. Finally, we captured the possible roles an individual could have within the land-grant Extension system: county Extension coordinator (the county-level administrator/county department head for Extension), county Extension agent (county-based faculty member responsible for Extension work in their assigned area), state specialist (state-based faculty member), state specialist tenure-track (including only the state-based faculty members in a tenure-track position), and county professional (a recoded variable including the county Extension agents and the exempt employees located at the county level).

Data were analyzed using SPSS 29. Question 1 (What boundary-spanning behaviors are prevalent in Cooperative Extension faculty and staff?) was addressed by rank-ordering the 32 boundary-spanning items. We calculated the mean of each item and ranked them from highest to lowest. We also grouped by construct to provide a rank order of the most used boundary-spanning scales. Question 2 (To what extent are boundary-spanning behaviors explained *individually* by personal or work/organizational characteristics?) was addressed by bivariate analyses to determine the separate predictive power. Question 3 (To what extent are boundary-spanning behaviors explained *jointly* by personal or work/organizational characteristics?) was addressed by multivariate analysis to determine the separate and combined predictive power using a forward regression method. We used a forward-loading stepwise regression.

Limitations to these methods include the inability to return to the respondents for several clarifying questions. These data were collected initially to determine the validity and reliability of the boundary-spanning scales, and other possible predictive variables may have been excluded. Additionally, as stated previously, some variables—such as gender—should be adjusted to provide a more inclusive view. The initial instrument allowed only forced responses of male or female. Because of these limitations and using only one land-grant institution within the sample, individuals should be cautious in generalizing the findings beyond the original population.

Findings

The first question focused on boundary-spanning behaviors and their prevalence in Cooperative Extension faculty and staff. Table 2 outlines all 32 boundary-spanning behaviors and their high means. The item means ranged from 3.34 to 5.58 on a six-point scale, with 1 being *never* and 6 being *always*. Of the top eight behaviors, three were socio-emotional, two were technical-practical, two were organizational, and one was community focused. Of the bottom eight behaviors, four were organizationally focused.

In examining the boundary-spanning construct scales, the mean item mean ranged from 4.40 to 4.63. These item means were relatively high. Technical-practical orientation was the highest orientation, and organizational was the lowest. Interestingly, the socio-emotional behaviors were the top three behaviors, but the construct was not the top construct in rank order. Table 3 displays the results from the boundary-spanning construct scales.

Influencers of the Boundary-Spanning Construct Orientations

The second research question examined the personal and workplace characteristics and how these characteristics *individually* explain the boundary-spanning behaviors in the population of Cooperative Extension staff. Based on the predictor, we used simple correlation or *t*-tests to discover the bivariate relationships between the variables and the boundary-spanning construct scales. When the correlations were significant, we squared the correlation coefficients to receive the coefficients of determination. This statistic provides the proportion of variance in each dependent variable explained by each of the independent variables. Few of the personal or work characteristics were significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 2. Rank Order Listing of Boundary-Spanning Behaviors (n = 272)

Rank	Item language	*M*	*SD*	Construct
1	I maintain relationships with a variety of individuals.	5.58	0.82	Socio-emotional
2	I build trust with people I interact with.	5.47	0.69	Socio-emotional
3	I support others in their accomplishments and challenges.	5.29	0.92	Socio-emotional
4	I apply my skills to new situations.	5.05	1.04	Technical-practical
5	I utilize information to support the community.	4.80	1.16	Community
5	I utilize information to support the organization.	4.80	1.10	Organizational

Table continued on next page

Table 2. Continued

Rank	Item language	*M*	*SD*	Construct
7	I represent the organization's perspective.	4.79	1.14	Organizational
7	I determine solutions for challenges.	4.79	1.08	Technical-practical
9	I manage projects.	4.72	1.27	Technical-practical
9	I identify resources to support projects.	4.72	1.12	Technical-practical
11	I communicate the organization's interests to others.	4.70	1.12	Organizational
12	I translate organizational information to the community.	4.57	1.29	Community
13	I identify barriers to success.	4.54	1.14	Technical-practical
14	I develop partnerships that benefit the organization.	4.49	1.25	Organizational
15	I facilitate meetings between individuals and groups.	4.47	1.32	Technical-practical
15	I build capacity among individuals.	4.47	1.24	Socio-emotional
17	I advocate for organizational policy that supports the community.	4.46	1.36	Community
17	I develop partnerships that benefit the community.	4.46	1.28	Community
19	I identify issues in communication.	4.44	1.11	Socio-emotional
20	I identify expertise in individuals.	4.40	1.21	Socio-emotional
21	I communicate the community's interests to others.	4.38	1.23	Community
22	I design processes for projects.	4.33	1.41	Technical-practical
22	I represent the community's perspective.	4.33	1.22	Community
24	I identify expertise in the organization to support the community.	4.32	1.20	Community
25	I broker resources among individuals or groups.	4.30	1.38	Technical-practical
26	I find ways to meet community needs with organizational partners.	4.24	1.23	Community
27	I translate community information to the organization.	4.19	1.18	Organizational
28	I identify expertise in the community to support the organization.	4.09	1.23	Organizational
29	I find ways to meet organization's needs with community partners.	4.08	1.22	Organizational
30	I advocate for community policy that supports the organization.	4.06	1.43	Organizational
31	I resolve conflict among other individuals.	3.65	1.27	Socio-emotional
32	I negotiate power among individuals.	3.34	1.38	Socio-emotional

Table 3. Rank Order List of Boundary-Spanning Scales

Rank	Scale	# of items	*M*	*SD*	Mean item mean	Alpha
1	Technical-practical orientation	8	37.05	7.24	4.63	0.90
2	Socio-emotional orientation	8	36.52	6.15	4.56	0.83
3	Community orientation	8	35.58	7.99	4.45	0.92
4	Organizational orientation	8	35.17	7.55	4.40	0.91

Five of the predictor variables demonstrated a significant correlation with the technical-practical orientation construct. Age explained 2% of the observed variance in this construct. Other significant predictor variables included educational attainment, faculty rank, having the role of county Extension agent, and serving as a county professional. Four of the predictor variables demonstrated a significant correlation with the socio-emotional orientation construct. Significant predictor variables included faculty rank, having the county Extension coordinator role, having the county Extension agent role, and serving as a county professional. Four predictor variables demonstrated a significant correlation with the community orientation construct. Significant predictor variables included faculty rank, having the county Extension coordinator role, having the county Extension agent role, and serving as a county professional. Three of the predictor variables demonstrated a significant correlation with the organizational orientation construct. Significant predictor variables included faculty rank, having the county Extension agent role, and serving as a county professional. Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 summarize the predictor variables by the orientation constructs. For simplicity and ease of reading, we include only the significant predictor variables, though the test statistics are available for each of the personal and work characteristics.

Table 4. Correlations of Predictor Variables With Technical-Practical Orientation

Personal characteristics predictor variable	Test statistic			
	Test	**Results**	***p***	***r*²**
Age	Pearson	$r = -0.139$	0.024**	0.02
Gender	*t*-test	$t(264) = .026$	0.605	-
Educational attainment	Spearman	$r_s = .200$	0.001**	0.00
Length of employment	Spearman	$r_s = .004$	0.946	0.89
Faculty rank	ANOVA	$F(5, 274) = 5.543$	0.001**	-
Work characteristics predictor variable	**Test statistic**			
	Test	**Results**	***p***	***r*²**
Percentage salary from university	Pearson	$r = -0.002$	0.97	0.00
Percentage salary from the county	Pearson	$r = -0.033$	0.60	0.00
Percentage salary from grants	Pearson	$r = 0.030$	0.62	0.39
Percentage salary from other	Pearson	$r = 0.021$	0.74	0.54
Residence in the county where you work	*t*-test	$t(265) = .026$	0.98	-
County Extension coordinator role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 1.682$	0.09	-
County Extension agent role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 2.195$	0.03**	-
State specialist role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 1.020$	0.31	-
State specialist tenure-track role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 1.167$	0.244	-
County professional	*t*-test	$t(150) = -4.914$	0.001**	-
Work setting	Spearman	$r_s = -.001$	0.99	0.98

** $p < .05$

Table 5. Correlations of Predictor Variables With Social-Emotional Orientation

Personal characteristics predictor variable	Test statistic			
	Test	Results	*p*	r^2
Age	Pearson	$r = -0.023$	0.716	0.00
Gender	*t*-test	$t(264) = .591$	0.082	-
Educational attainment	Spearman	$r_s = .099$	0.107	0.01
Length of employment	Spearman	$r_s = .120$	0.05	0.00
Faculty rank	ANOVA	$F(5, 124) = 3.625$	0.004**	-
Work characteristics predictor variable	**Test statistic**			
	Test	**Results**	***p***	r^2
Percentage salary from university	Pearson	$r = -0.028$	0.65	0.00
Percentage salary from the county	Pearson	$r = -0.053$	0.39	0.00
Percentage salary from grants	Pearson	$r = -0.030$	0.63	0.00
Percentage salary from other	Pearson	$r = 0.003$	0.96	0.00
Residence in the county where you work	*t*-test	$t(265) = .591$	0.56	-
County Extension coordinator role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 2.183$	0.03**	-
County Extension agent role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 2.512$	0.01**	-
State specialist role	*t*-test	$t(269) = -.804$	0.42	-
State specialist tenure-track role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 1.337$	0.182	-
County professional	*t*-test	$t(150) = -4.961$	0.001**	-
Work setting	Spearman	$r_s = .041$	0.504	0.25

** $p < .05$

The third question asked, "To what extent are boundary-spanning behaviors explained *jointly* by personal or work/organizational characteristics?" Several multivariable relationships were examined between the boundary-spanning orientation constructs and the significant predictor variables. We desired to find the "best" explanatory model for each of the constructs. To produce these models, we performed two linear regressions for each construct: Regression 1 included all the predictors, regardless of their significance in the bivariate analyses, and Regression 2 included only the significant predictors in the bivariate analyses. This forward multiple regression resulted in 1, 1, 3, 2 models for technical-practical, socio-emotional, community, and organizational orientation constructs, respectively. The maximum observed variance for each of the models was $R^2 = .156, .131, .264, .173$, respectively. The second linear regression included only the variables with $p < .05$ in the bivariate relationships.

In examining the technical-practical orientation, including all significant predictor variables, one model was returned explaining 15.6% of the variance. This model excluded age, educational attainment, rank, and the county Extension agent position. It kept only the county professional level variable. Table 8 presents the model with all the significant predictor variables.

In examining the socio-emotional construct regression with only significant predictor variables included, the linear regression returned one model. Similar to the technical-practical orientation, it included only the county professional level variable in the best model. The model explains 12.1% of the variance. Table 9 outlines the model for socio-emotional construct.

Examination of the community and organizational orientation construct models showed that they were like the technical-practical and socio-emotional models. Of the significant variables, only the county professional level remained in the forward linear regression method. In the community orientation model, 17.7% of the variance was explained compared to 12.5% in the organizational orientation model. Tables 10 and 11 show the models for the community orientation construct and the organizational orientation construct.

When including all the variables, whether significant or not, the coefficient of determination increased moderately. For the more inclusive linear regression, 25.4%, 26.2%, 34.8%, and 31.5% of the variance was explained by the model for technical-practical, socio-emotional, community, and organizational orientation constructs, respectively.

Table 6. Correlations of Predictor Variables With Community Orientation

Personal characteristics predictor variable	Test statistic			
	Test	Results	*p*	r^2
Age	Pearson	$r = -0.055$	0.372	0.00
Gender	*t*-test	$t(264) = .768$	0.788	-
Educational attainment	Spearman	$r_s = .175$	0.004	0.00
Length of employment	Spearman	$r_s = -.002$	0.971	0.94
Faculty rank	ANOVA	$F(4, 255) = 4.227$	0.001**	-
Work characteristics predictor variable	**Test statistic**			
	Test	**Results**	***p***	r^2
Percentage salary from university	Pearson	$r = -0.098$	0.11	0.01
Percentage salary from the county	Pearson	$r = 0.101$	0.10	0.01
Percentage salary from grants	Pearson	$r = -0.034$	0.58	0.00
Percentage salary from other	Pearson	$r = -0.044$	0.48	0.00
Residence in the county where you work	*t*-test	$t(265) = .768$	0.44	-
County Extension coordinator role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 2.031$	0.04**	-
County Extension agent role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 3.57$	0.00**	-
State specialist role	*t*-test	$t(269) = 1.042$	0.30	-
State specialist tenure-track role	*t*-test	$t(269) = .601$	0.548	-
County professional	*t*-test	$t(151) = -5.652$	0.001**	-
Work setting	Spearman	$r_s = -.016$	0.801	0.98

** $p < .05$

Table 7. Correlations of Predictor Variables With Organizational Orientation

Personal characteristics predictor variable	Test statistic			
	Test	Results	*p*	r^2
Age	Pearson	$r = -0.046$	0.461	0.00
Gender	*t*-test	$t(263) = 1.125$	0.232	-
Educational attainment	Spearman	$r_s = .113$	0.067	0.00
Length of employment	Spearman	$r_s = -.010$	0.876	0.77
Faculty rank	ANOVA	$F(5, 202) = 3.745$	0.003**	-

Work characteristics predictor variable	Test statistic			
	Test	Results	*p*	r^2
Percentage salary from university	Pearson	$r = -0.070$	0.26	0.00
Percentage salary from the county	Pearson	$r = 0.076$	0.22	0.01
Percentage salary from grants	Pearson	$r = -0.012$	0.85	0.00
Percentage salary from other	Pearson	$r = 0.021$	0.74	0.00
Residence in the county where you work	*t*-test	$t(263) = 1.125$	0.26	-
County Extension coordinator role	*t*-test	$t(267) = 1.366$	0.17	-
County Extension agent role	*t*-test	$t(267) = 3.388$	0.00**	-
State specialist role	*t*-test	$t(267) = .057$	0.95	-
State specialist tenure-track role	*t*-test	$t(267) = -.442$	0.659	-
County professional	*t*-test	$t(149) = -4.796$	0.001**	-
Work setting	Spearman	$r_s = -.007$	0.911	-

** $p < .05$

Table 8. Best Model for Technical-Practical Orientation

Parameter	Unstandardized coefficients (B)	Standardized coefficients (Beta)	*t*	*p*
Age	−0.115	0.064	−1.799	0.075
Rank	0.188	1.062	0.177	0.86
County professional level	8.542	3.574	2.39	0.019
County Extension agent role	1.357	3.21	0.423	0.673
Educational attainment	−0.586	0.584	−1.004	0.318

Note. Model statistic: $R^2 = .199$; $F = 4.817$; $p = 0.000$.

Table 9. Best Model for Socio-Emotional Orientation

Parameter	Unstandardized coefficients (B)	Standardized coefficients (Beta)	*t*	*p*
Rank	0.512	0.795	0.644	0.521
County professional level	7.938	3.471	2.287	0.024
County Extension agent role	0.609	2.45	0.249	0.804
Current Extension position	−0.365	0.481	−0.758	0.45

Note. Model statistic: R^2 = .133; F = 3.838; p = 0.006.

Table 10. Best Model for Community Orientation

Parameter	Unstandardized coefficients (B)	Standardized coefficients (Beta)	*t*	*p*
Rank	1.563	0.392	1.511	0.134
County Extension coordinator role	2.813	0.162	1.28	0.203
County Extension agent role	1.209	0.075	0.409	0.683
County professional level	15.229	0.945	3.64	0.001

Note. Model statistic: R^2 = .213; F = 6.830; p = 0.001.

Table 11. Best Model for Organizational Orientation

Parameter	Unstandardized coefficients (B)	Standardized coefficients (Beta)	*t*	*p*
Rank	0.669	0.179	0.685	0.495
County Extension agent role	0.077	0.005	0.027	0.979
County professional level	7.854	0.52	2.358	0.02

Note. Model statistic: R^2 = .131; F = 5.091; p = 0.003.

Discussion

Based on the findings, it is evident that Extension staff use boundary-spanning behaviors extensively. With the mean item means ranging from 4.63 to 4.40 on the boundary-spanning scales, respondents indicated they engage in the boundary-spanning orientations between often and usually. When looking at the individual behaviors, only two items' means were below the "often" response. The two behaviors occurring least were resolving conflict among other individuals and negotiating power among individuals. These boundary-spanning behaviors occurred throughout the organization of this southern Extension region land-grant university. Because of the high extent of boundary-spanning behaviors among Cooperative Extension staff, we assert that these individuals are boundary spanners at this institution.

We need more information to determine how these behaviors may influence the identity of these employees. With such high responses on both the organizational and community orientations, we profess Cooperative Extension employees have a dual identity. This finding is not surprising, as Extension

faculty and staff work geographically dispersed from their employer and reside in the communities in which they work. This result is consistent with prior studies of the dual identities of contract workers who identify with both their employing and client organizations (George & Chattopadhyay, 2005).

Surprisingly, few personal or work characteristics correlated with boundary-spanning behaviors. Additional information is needed, however, regarding the influence of the boundary-spanning behaviors because of the surprisingly low correlations of other variables. Of the personal characteristics, only faculty rank correlated with all four of the boundary-spanning orientations. It is logical that individuals at lower faculty ranks may engage in more technical-practical tasks, and that respondents of different faculty ranks may have different orientations toward the community or the organization. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that the types of publicly engaged scholarship differ based on faculty rank (Glass et al., 2011). This study differs from Glass et al.'s in that it examined only Extension faculty and staff and concentrated on county-level faculty. As faculty ranks change, the balance of their work changes—perhaps they no longer are as engaged in the technical-practical tasks and move more toward socio-emotional behaviors such as mentoring and guiding others. Relatedly, some new tenure-track faculty inclined toward community-engaged scholarship are advised to wait until they have earned tenure. A similar undercurrent may occur even among non-tenure-track county-based faculty in Cooperative Extension, or the county faculty promotion process may encourage or discourage certain boundary-spanning behaviors.

Among the work characteristics, only roles placed on staff had a significant correlation to the boundary-spanning behaviors. If a respondent was classified as a county-based professional, their boundary-spanning behaviors and orientations were significantly correlated. County-based professionals include the county Extension agents (county faculty positions) as well as a limited number of county resource managers, a classified staff position in counties where budget limitations prevented more county-based faculty. County resource managers provided many of the same resources to the community, yet they did not have the same faculty-level job expectations such as evaluating and documenting impact. Those not included as county professionals included any county-based staff who were nonexempt employees—subject to overtime pay. These individuals typically had job titles such as administrative assistant or county program assistant. They are instrumental to a strong, functioning Cooperative Extension program, yet focused on support or direct delivery. Similar to the county resource managers, the nonprofessionals did not have responsibilities for need assessment, design, development, or evaluation of Extension programming.

For some of these same reasons, it is not surprising that the county Extension agent role was significantly correlated with each of the boundary-spanning orientations. More nuanced—and logical—was the significant correlation of the county Extension coordinator role with the socio-emotional and community orientations. The county Extension coordinator "is responsible for administrative duties such as managing the county Extension budget, coordination and oversight of the county educators and their programs, and an area of Extension programming" (Atiles et al., 2014, p. 69). The county Extension coordinator's additional responsibilities to lead and manage the county office explain the correlation with socio-emotional orientation. Likewise, the county Extension coordinator is typically dual-hatted as a county department head, which may explain the stronger community orientation. Certain positions or roles assigned within Cooperative Extension may greatly influence the social closeness. This relationship implies that these orientations may be learned rather than inherent within the individual. Previous scholarship using this same instrument indicated that boundary-spanning behaviors can be learned (Mull, 2016).

One surprising result was that resource allocation did not significantly impact the social closeness domain—the axis aligned with community and organizational orientations. A delicate balance and unique power dynamic for Extension employees who rely on local, community funding suggests that county Extension staff may be aligned more toward the community. Additionally, for decades Cooperative Extension has strived to be a *research-based, objective* source of information for individuals across the country. At times, the objectivity of Cooperative Extension staff has been questioned based

on the impact or influence of funding sources (Harris et al., 2007). Reynnells (1991) outlined several of the ethical challenges for Extension staff. For example, over the past three decades, the support from the public purse for Extension remained stagnant across the country despite significant differences among states (Perry, 2022), requiring more private support, often from large agricultural corporations or research alliances (Harris et al., 2007; Holt & Bullock, 1999). Ethical concerns emerge when private support directly for the Extension enterprise or indirectly through private, paid consulting that Extension staff may undertake may influence the objectivity of recommendations for policy, research, and practice. Our data indicate that the source of one's salary did not significantly correlate with any of the boundary-spanning construct orientations. Neither the community nor the institution orientation demonstrated significant influence. This finding bodes well for Cooperative Extension to continue broadcasting its ideal of providing research-based, objective information in the face of stagnant or changing budgets. Administrators, however, are cautioned that our results reflect only one institution, and it is unknown if more significant variations of resource allocations may influence Cooperative Extension staff.

The importance of the role of the Extension staff member—the county agent or the county educator—cannot be overstated. This study found that the role of those at the most local level within Extension embody what Hall and Broyles (2016) called "the critical link between higher education institutions and stakeholders in the community" (p. 187). Cooperative Extension staff exert influence within their community. They are significantly engaged in valuable boundary-spanning activities.

Potential exists to capitalize on these valuable boundary-spanning orientations and the evidence that boundary-spanning behaviors are learned. Investment of more significant resources in professional development may strengthen these behaviors, the orientations, and their effectiveness. Fortunately, several resources exist to support this professional development through several competency frameworks for Extension and community engagement professionals.

No consistent competencies for Extension staff exist. Donaldson and Vaughan (2022) provided the most recent compilation of Extension professional competencies from 97 prior studies. Through their scoping study, they outlined 15 Extension professional competency domains: communication, diversity and cultural competence, flexibility, interpersonal relations, knowledge of Extension, leadership, professionalism, program planning and evaluation, resource management, subject matter competence, teaching methodology and delivery, technology, thinking and problem solving, understanding community needs, and volunteer management. Recently, Dostilio et al. (2017) outlined a preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals with six domains: leading change within higher education, institutionalizing community engagement on a campus, facilitating students' civic learning and development, administering community engagement programs, facilitating faculty development and support, and cultivating high-quality partnerships. Atiles (2019) responded to Dostilio et al.'s description of the community engagement professional's competency model as fluid and preliminary by adding one additional area—working with a state's Cooperative Extension Service. Atiles supported the addition of this area by expanding on systems thinking, logic modeling, and action as needed competencies.

An examination of the competencies offered by Donaldson and Vaughan (2022), Dostilio (2017), and Atiles (2019) reveals that boundary-spanning behaviors are embedded in these competencies. Within Donaldson and Vaughan's study, boundary-spanning behaviors are in the competencies of communication (e.g., communicating an organization's interests to others, identifying issues in communications), diversity and cultural competence (e.g., translating community information to the organization), interpersonal relations (e.g., maintaining relationships with a variety of individuals), leadership (building capacity among individuals), program planning and evaluation (e.g., designing processes and developing partnerships that benefit the community), resource management (e.g., brokering resources among individuals or groups), thinking and problem solving (e.g., determining solutions for challenges), and understanding community needs (e.g., representing the community's perspective). For Dostilio et al. (2017), boundary-spanning behaviors are similarly embedded within the skills and abilities competencies of leading change within higher education,

institutionalizing community engagement on a campus, administering community engagement programs, and cultivating high-quality partnerships. Although Dostilio et al. explicitly included "able to communicate across boundaries and roles, and between internal and external stakeholders" (p. 51), we contend that the broader boundary-spanning behaviors are embedded across multiple domains.

Limitations

Because the goal of the initial data collection was to create a new instrument for boundary-spanning behaviors, the predictor variables probably do not encompass all possible or likely variables. Unfortunately, analyses will not recreate the ability to ask additional questions of the original respondents. This shortcoming highlights the importance of additional examinations using the instrument. The possible responses, too, do not allow for the most inclusive responses of variables such as a race and gender, as discussed previously. Topics of intersectionality are challenging to capture in a quantitative study, given the multidimensionality of categories such as race and gender (Bauer et al., 2021).

We restricted our study to a single land-grant university that uses a unique county-based faculty approach; however, we cannot assume that similar research with other Extension programs would have similar results. In our study, faculty rank had a significant correlation with all four boundary-spanning orientations, but we have little knowledge of what may occur in institutions where Extension staff are not in faculty roles or where county faculty have tenure-track roles.

Since data were collected, we have gained valuable insight to the boundary-spanning behaviors of those involved in higher education community engagement from the perspective of faculty members (Purcell et al., 2020), institutional leaders (Pilbeam & Jamieson, 2010; Prysor & Henley, 2017), and community members (Adams, 2014). The availability of this additional research would have enabled us to ask additional questions or to remove certain questions from this administration.

Implications for Research

More data are needed. This study focused on one land-grant university's Extension faculty and staff. Cooperative Extension, although a large organization funded nationally, is delivered through a decentralized method with 112 land-grant universities. Each institution's organizational structure is unique, and funding patterns are neither consistent nor equal across states or even within states. Prior research has highlighted changes in Extension staffing patterns (Wang, 2014), university structures surrounding county Extension staff and their tenure and promotions systems (Olsen, 2005), and varied perceptions toward scholarship (Berg et al., 2021). Future research should examine a cross-section of land-grant universities' Extension staff. In addition to possible geographic differences, comparing the boundary-spanning behaviors of Extension staff at 1862, 1890, and 1994 institutions could highlight differences, as 1890 and 1994 institutions were created specifically to support communities underserved or not served by 1862 institutions (Bracey, 2017; McDowell, 2003).

This examination found two consistent contributors to boundary-spanning orientations: faculty rank and professional level within the organization. Additional exploration is needed to ascertain the effects of faculty rank in other universities' Cooperative Extension faculty and staff. Data indicate that the higher the faculty rank, the more boundary-spanning behaviors occurred. What needs closer examination is the role of the tenure-track faculty. This study reflects this institution's unique public service faculty ranks and not the traditional tenure track. Some institutions do not have faculty members serving at the county level—do different staffing or organizational designs impact boundary-spanning orientations or behaviors? By using a national sample of Extension staff from multiple institutions, future research may uncover the relationship of boundary-spanning orientations and the various types of staffing models used nationwide.

Because no personal characteristic predictor variables other than age within the technical-practical orientation were significant, it appears that organizations can support and encourage boundary-spanning activities and that most in the role of Extension employee are going to actively engage in boundary-spanning to varying degrees.

This study also has examined only the perspective of the higher education Extension employee. It ignores the perspective of the

community. Adams (2014) highlighted four domains of the community aligned with the Weerts and Sandmann (2010) framework. A complement of this study could examine clientele of Extension and how they view their boundary-spanning Extension staff. This study found that as county faculty changed in their faculty rank, their boundary-spanning behaviors changed. Attaching a value—actual or perceived—to this change from the community's perspective could introduce several paths forward in strengthening the impact of Cooperative Extension to the community.

With the significant efforts occurring in competencies in both Extension professionals and community engagement professionals more broadly, research is needed on how administrators view these boundary-spanning behaviors, whether within these competency frameworks or as a separate competency domain. Professional development efforts like the Outreach and Engagement Practitioners Network (https://engagementscholarship.org/about/esc-partner-programs/outreach-and-engagement-practitioners-network) community of practice, a part of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium, bring awareness and an identity of boundary spanners among those who may not identify themselves that way. How does this opportunity and other efforts build awareness of the influence of boundary-spanning's continued behaviors, impact, and effectiveness? Future research should examine these opportunities and their influence on the identity of boundary spanners and boundary spanners' behaviors in bringing the university to the people.

Conclusion

Cooperative Extension remains the largest community engagement program provided solely by the nation's land-grant universities. Individuals are colocated in the community and in leading decision-making processes for programming, resource allocation, and support from the university. Some argue that staff members embedded in a community by the university may make decisions only for the university's interests; however, this study found that these Extension employees are not masked advocates only for the university in the community—driving decisions toward the organization's interests. And they are not necessarily ignorant of the power differential, innocently shepherding the community to be taken advantage of by the higher education community. Cooperative Extension staff were significantly engaged in boundary-spanning behaviors across the four domains of technical-practical, socio-emotional, community, and organizational orientations. Few personal, work, or organizational characteristics were significant in influencing these boundary-spanning behaviors. More data are needed to determine if there are other lurking variables influencing the behaviors of these Cooperative Extension staff and if other institutions would have varied responses, but at this point, through this study, it appears that the boundary-spanning behaviors of Cooperative Extension staff allow for individuals to have a dual identity, adequately representing both university and community interests.

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Collective Impact as a Novel Approach to Seeding Collaboration for Boundary Spanning

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Abstract

Responding to longstanding calls to develop institutional support for boundary-spanning faculty and staff in ways that enhance collaborative community–university engagement, our study investigated a novel, facilitated approach to building community–university collaboration derived from the collective impact framework. In particular, we present new research on faculty and staff perceptions of a collective impact process that was designed to seed community–university collaboration around pressing public problems. Through semistructured interviews, 23 faculty and staff shared reflections on their participation in the collective impact process. Faculty and staff narratives touched on four categories of boundary-spanning behaviors, including technical-practical, socioemotional, community, and organizational orientations. The presence of these categories of behaviors reinforces the centrality of boundary-spanning concepts to efforts to advance community–university collaboration. Based on this research, we recommend organizational practices that can support professional development innovations for boundary spanners to enhance public good impact.

Keywords: collective impact, boundary spanning, community engagement, professional development

Community engagement is an essential strategy through which research universities carry out their missions of public service, social responsibility, and advancing democracy (Harkavy, 2006; Staley, 2013). University–community partnerships play a critical role in bridging institution–community divides to tackle complex societal issues in mutually beneficial ways through shared resources and collaborative action (Cook & Nation, 2016). A substantial literature addresses organizational practices, technical assistance, and structural support necessary to engage in successful community–university partnerships (e.g., Beere et al., 2011; Cunningham & Smith, 2020). Nevertheless, significant institutional and structural barriers make it difficult for faculty to act as boundary spanners to create and maintain successful community–university partnerships (Purcell et al., 2020). Indeed, a persistent critique of higher education institutions is that department structures create silos (e.g., Bass, 2022) with the potential to negatively impact transdisciplinary collaboration and equitable community engagement. For example, faculty may have limited opportunities to meet potential collaborators from other disciplines, and community partners seeking to collaborate on projects that span disciplines may face insurmountable odds against finding multiple faculty partners across departments. Given the importance of boundary spanning to community engagement, the current study explored the potential for a novel professional development opportunity focused on seeding community–university collaboration to support faculty and staff boundary spanning.

The Boundary-Spanning Model

Boundary spanners are individuals who work at the nexus of community organizations and universities to create and sustain crucial partnerships (Weerts & Sandmann,

2010). A growing literature on boundary spanners has sought to operationalize the roles of individuals who work to form and maintain university–community partnerships (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Recent work has explored competencies necessary for community engagement professionals (Dostilio, 2017); however, a less recognized but important area of exploration is how institutions can provide opportunities for skill development and general support enabling individuals to be successful and fulfilled in their boundary-spanning roles. This research requires understanding both university and community audiences, including the parlance, interests, and goals of each group, to bridge these two spaces to build productive partnerships. Such partnerships can support the historic public and civic purposes of higher education, especially in ways that are mutually beneficial and reciprocal, placing university and community voices on equal ground when collaborating to address wicked problems.

Boundary spanners can have a variety of roles across universities, organizations, or the community at large. As originally conceived by Weerts and Sandmann (2010), boundary spanning in higher education community engagement consisted of four roles at the intersection of two domains or axes: social closeness (institutional vs. community focused) and task orientation (technical-practical vs. socioemotional/leadership tasks). The four roles, positioned in the four quadrants of these domains, were Community-Based Problem Solvers (technical-practical tasks with a community focus), Technical Experts (technical-practical tasks with an institutional focus), Engagement Champions (socioemotional/leadership tasks with a community focus), and Internal Engagement Advocates (socioemotional/leadership task with an institutional focus).

Weerts and Sandmann (2010) recognized that these roles are dynamic, with some spanners exhibiting attributes of multiple roles simultaneously, and moving in and out of the four roles based on changes in responsibilities, expertise, and job titles. Subsequent work by Sandmann et al. (2014) that focused on operationalizing this boundary-spanning model altered two aspects of the original Weerts and Sandmann model. First, Sandmann et al. shifted their focus from *boundary-spanning roles* (i.e., types of people who found themselves inside Weerts and Sandmann's four quadrants) to *boundary-spanning behaviors* (i.e., the observable actions and cognitive processes these individuals engage in as they span boundaries). Second, Sandmann et al. moved away from Weerts and Sandmann's two-axes model that placed technical-practical and socioemotional/leadership as opposite task orientations and community and institutional focus as opposite social closeness. They posited that the two ends of axes may not be inversely related, and instead used four independent behavior categories to measure a boundary spanner's social closeness and task orientation. With these modifications to the boundary-spanners model, Sandmann et al. developed a survey instrument to assess the four categories of boundary-spanning behaviors and activities. Table 1 provides the definitions of the four behavior categories.

Table 1. Boundary-Spanning Behaviors Defined

Constructs	Definition
Technical-practical orientation	The degree to which an individual's behaviors focus on transforming inputs into outputs in a way that enhances the performance of an organization or group
Socioemotional orientation	The degree to which an individual's behaviors support developing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and needs of others as well as the rewards system and authority structures that exist in a group or organization
Community orientation	The degree to which an individual is aligned with the interests of the community, a unified body of individuals with common interests, external to the individual's organization
Organizational orientation	The degree to which an individual's behaviors are aligned with their own organization's overarching mission, vision, and interests

Note. From "Measuring Boundary-Spanning Behaviors in Community Engagement" by L. R. Sandmann, J. W. Jordan, C. D. Mull, and T. Valentina, 2014, *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 18*(3), p. 89 (https://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/jheoe/article/view/1137). Copyright 2014 by the University of Georgia.

Boundary-spanning behaviors require a fluid skill set that encompasses technical expertise, leadership skills, socioemotional intelligence, and advocacy skills. It also requires the ability to navigate both community and institutional contexts. Institutional characteristics also influence boundary-spanning behaviors (Mull, 2016; Sandmann et al., 2014), both negatively and positively. Such organizational dynamics include the structures, processes, and characteristics of the organization and its programs. Institutional barriers, such as siloed departmental communication, can inhibit boundary-spanning behaviors. Alternatively, policies, guidelines, and other organizational components, such as professional development opportunities, can offer the structured organizational support that can advance the diverse skill set needed for boundary spanning.

Support for Boundary-Spanning Faculty

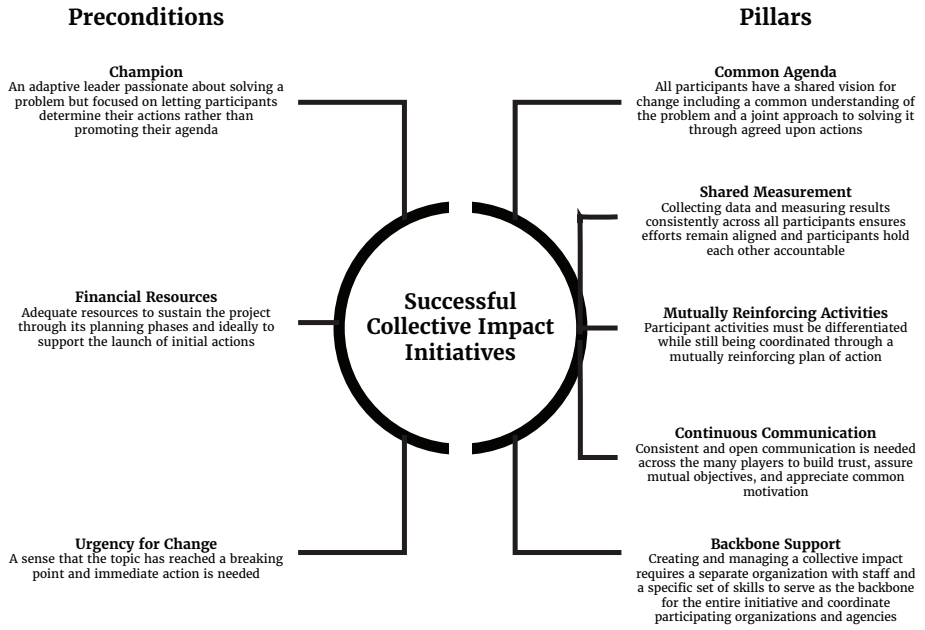
Faculty development programming focused on increasing faculty members' competency to serve as boundary spanners and advance higher education community engagement has increased. However, these programs often have limited assessment of outcomes, a reliance on one-time trainings instead of ongoing, collaborative practices, and often focus exclusively on tenure-track faculty at the expense of supporting the development of adjunct faculty and graduate students (Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2017). Furthermore, when asked directly, boundary-spanning faculty have shared challenges balancing their multiple roles (i.e., administration, teaching, research, service), aligning their roles with their ultimate passions and goals as a professional, and receiving recognition for community-engaged efforts through promotion and/or advancement, including tenure (Purcell et al., 2020). Given the fluidity and complexity of the roles necessary for successful higher education community engagement, creative and novel approaches are necessary to support faculty in developing competencies as boundary spanners.

A Novel Approach to Seeding Collaboration for Boundary Spanning

We describe a novel model for seeding community–university collaboration grounded in collective impact. Unlike many professional development models that emphasize the individual skill-building of scholars to make contributions using community-engaged methods, by adapting the collective impact framework, we sought to build the collaborative capacity of participants to produce change. Collective impact is an approach to collaboration developed in the nonprofit sector to ensure the broadest and deepest impact possible when groups come together to work toward a goal. Kania and Kramer (2011) proposed the term "collective impact" to refer to the commitment of actors from different sectors to a common agenda to solve a specific social problem. The goal of the university-sponsored collective impact cohorts was to adapt the collective impact process to enhance community engagement. The hope was to shift away from the sometimes-isolated impacts of individual projects (e.g., one faculty member and one community partner), or what Cabaj and Weaver (2016) have called a "move from fragmented action and results to collective action and deep and durable impact" (p. 1). The creation of a shared agenda for public problem-solving still allows individuals to pursue their own projects, but in concert and alignment with others to achieve stronger outcomes. The integration of collective impact and community engagement frameworks can serve as a powerful way to elevate the public purposes of higher education while achieving transformational change (DePrince & DiEnno, 2019). The five pillars of collective impact include a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Hanleybrown et al. (2012) further detailed the essential preconditions for collective impact success: a strong champion, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency about addressing the issue at hand. Figure 1 illustrates these necessities for collective impact initiatives.

The overall approach, which aligned with the organizational orientation of the boundary-spanning model, was designed to realize goals from the university's strategic plan regarding interdisciplinary collaboration for public problem-solving. The university engagement office served as the champion and backbone support for the approach, with assistance from a university strategic plan implementation committee. To launch the process, faculty, staff, students, and community members were invited to apply to join "collective impact cohorts" in fall 2018. The call described four cohorts organized around broad issues where a sense of urgency existed (a collective impact precondition)—food and housing insecurity, crime

Figure 1. The Preconditions and Pillars for Successful Collective Impact Initiatives



Note. Based on the work of Kania and Kramer (2011) and Hanleybrown et al. (2012).

and safety, migration, and sustainability—and made explicit the intention to bring together individuals across disciplines, roles, and areas of expertise. Based on individual applications, cohorts were curated to bring together people who had not necessarily collaborated previously, and two faculty coleads were selected for each cohort.

The collective impact process was designed to disrupt typical approaches to collaboration. For example, faculty may have been trained to begin projects by centering questions that are fundable to outside agencies or involve collaborators already known to them or in closely related disciplines. Instead, this approach tested a structured, collective impact process facilitated by community engagement staff to support the cohort members in identifying shared goals and building action plans, grounded in the five pillars of collective impact, over a 6-month planning phase. Each of the four 3-hour facilitated sessions held during the planning phase incorporated activities that could build boundary-spanning skills. For instance, the first session's introductions were facilitated in a way to build connections among cohort members and allow participants to determine how they might leverage the roles, networks, and expertise of every member. Participants also engaged in mapping their existing activities/projects on their topic to surface connections across their work. These activities are reflective of boundary-spanning technical-practical and socioemotional orientations. Additionally, the inclusion of community partners from the outset was intended to ensure alignment with community interests in all elements of the cohorts' action plan designs. Following the planning period, cohorts then tracked their achievements over a subsequent implementation phase. The original timeline asked cohorts to commit to 2 years of collaboration, which would have concluded at the end of 2020; however, disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis led to extending work through 2022.

The Current Study

The cohort program described above was developed based on the belief that a collective impact process could seed community–university collaboration by helping faculty, staff, students, and community members connect across disciplines and roles, build shared aspirations, and ultimately take meaningful action together. The literature on boundary spanning suggests that a collective impact process should simultaneously support faculty and staff to develop the boundary-spanning skills necessary for high-quality community-engaged work. In our roles supporting community-engaged

work on campus, this potential to build faculty and staff boundary-spanning skills seemed essential to strong institutional community engagement, given the important role that faculty and staff play in creating opportunities for community–university collaboration. For example, faculty and staff willingness to mentor students and center community partners in community-engaged scholarship is essential. Thus, we sought to examine whether the collective impact cohort program supported faculty boundary-spanning behaviors. We took advantage of data collected as part of routine research and evaluation of the new program to examine whether the collective impact process elicited discussion of boundary-spanning behaviors in interviews with 23 faculty and staff collective impact cohort members.

Methods

Study procedures were approved by a university Institutional Review Board. The 37 faculty and staff who had participated in the collective impact cohort process at any point from 2018 to 2021 received email invitations to participate in the study. Notably, there was attrition of faculty and staff from the cohorts over time, due in part to COVID-19 disruptions to the timeline. Twenty-three faculty and staff agreed to participate in a one-hour, semistructured interview, conducted by a graduate research assistant. Participants responded to open-ended questions related to the strengths and limitations of this new approach to collaboration, the impact their collective impact cohorts had on the university and the community, and how their collective impact cohort experience influenced their teaching and research practices.

Interview responses were analyzed using content analysis principles (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006). To understand whether and how participants discussed the impact of the cohort process on their boundary-spanning capacities, we conducted two analyses. First, we looked for themes that arose within each of our interview questions—description and perceptions of the collective impact process, impacts on teaching and research, recommendations, and leadership. Then, using a deductive coding process grounded in the boundary-spanning framework, we examined the interviews for the four categories of boundary-spanning behaviors: (1) technical-practical orientation, (2) socioemotional orientation, (3) community orientation, and (4) organizational orientation (Sandmann et al., 2014).

We adapted the survey items identified by Mull (2014) to measure the four constructs, the categories of boundary-spanning behaviors. These items informed the descriptions of behaviors we were looking for when coding the interviews for the four categories (See Table 2). Interview participants were not asked explicit questions about these boundary-spanning behaviors; rather, we were interested in understanding whether or how such activities and behaviors might be described by the cohort participants. Additionally, we also looked for mentions of the organizational dynamics—that is, the institutional policies, practices, or structures that had an impact on participants' boundary-spanning capacity and/or their suggestions for future support.

Practicing Reflexivity

We share our reflections on our roles in the collective impact cohort process to shed light on the feelings, opinions, and experiences that shaped our approach to this study. Two of the authors are university staff and one is a tenured faculty member and administrator; all are in positions charged with supporting the professional development of faculty, staff, and students who seek to use community-engaged methods. At the time of data collection, the fourth author was a graduate student in a position focused on assessment of community-engaged work. Collectively, the authors' work focuses on supporting individuals in building the skills necessary to perform public good work using the best practices in community engagement and to advance inter- and multidisciplinary collaboration with community partners to address diverse public issues. They have provided essential backbone support to community-engaged collective impact efforts using adaptive leadership to advance both individual and collective work. Two of the authors led the design of the collective impact cohort process, including facilitating the planning sessions.

It is essential to recognize the inherent professional biases that may arise from our roles, particularly as facilitators and designers of the collective impact cohort process. Although our experiences inform the study's design, our intention is to critically examine the experiences and perceptions

Table 2. Items Measuring Boundary-Spanning Behaviors

Construct	Item
Technical-practical orientation	• Applying skills to new situations • Designing processes for projects • Determining solutions for challenges • Facilitating meetings between individuals or groups • Identifying barriers to success • Identifying issues in communication • Identifying resources to support projects • Managing projects
Socioemotional orientation	• Brokering resources among individuals or groups • Building capacity among individuals • Building trust with people you interact with • Identifying expertise in individuals • Maintaining relationships with a variety of individuals • Negotiating power among individuals • Resolving conflict among other individuals • Supporting others in their accomplishments and challenges
Community orientation	• Advocating for organizational policy that supports the community • Communicating the community's interests to others • Developing partnerships that benefit the community • Finding ways to meet community needs with organization partners • Identifying expertise in the organization to support the community • Representing the community's perspective • Translating organizational information to the community • Utilizing information to support the community
Organizational orientation	• Advocating for community policy that supports the organization • Communicating the organization's interests to others • Developing partnerships that benefit the organization • Finding ways to meet organization needs with community partners • Identifying expertise in the community to support the organization • Representing the organization's perspective • Translating community information to the organization • Utilizing information to support the organization

Note. Adapted from *Boundary-Spanning Behaviors of Individuals Engaged with the U.S. Military Community*, by C. D. Mull, 2014, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia, pp. 78–79. Copyright 2014 by C. D. Mull.

of those who participated in the collective impact cohorts using rigorous methods. By acknowledging these potential biases, we strive for transparency and encourage a nuanced interpretation of our findings within the broader context of higher education community engagement and university–community boundary spanning.

Results

We describe the boundary-spanning themes that arose from the interviews with faculty and staff participants of the four collective impact cohorts, including overall perceptions of the cohort experiences as well as four categories of boundary-spanning behaviors (community orientation, organizational orientation, socioemotional leadership, and technical-practical skills), and the organizational dynamics that support boundary spanning.

Participants shared a strong sense of the collective impact process's potential to unite diverse university and community members to address complex and nuanced social issues in a new way. For example, one participant described the collective impact process as follows:

> This process was really thinking about the grand challenges or issues . . . [and] how we could, not only use and apply and maybe leverage expertise of various folks across campus but also working in collaboration with community groups who are already doing a lot of this work and seeing how we might align towards a common goal or purpose.

Furthermore, participants discussed the disruptive nature of the cohort approach insofar as it departed from conventional collaboration processes, which often focus on identifying the "right" people to bring together on a predefined project. They perceived this approach as original and challenging while also offering new modes of engaging diverse viewpoints, troubleshooting problems in large groups, and employing critical and adaptive thinking. Participants described the process as painful or tedious but worth sticking it out and trusting that the outcomes on the other side of the planning period were well worth the challenges.

Community Orientation

Of the behaviors relating to community orientation, the collective impact process might be particularly well-suited to support the development of the skills needed to represent the community's perspective while boundary spanning. The importance of ensuring that the community was represented, and community voices were present during all stages of the collective impact process, was a common sentiment. Participants stressed that listening to the community and ensuring that the community's perspective and expertise were represented was central to the process. As one participant said:

> I think we really deferred to community-based expertise . . . and leadership. And I so appreciated that . . . we had voices on our cohort who were constantly calling for local expertise, or on the ground expertise, or the expertise of lived experience to inform our next steps.

Participants also stressed that the collective impact process encouraged faculty to take a step back and follow the community's lead. A participant remarked, "[Projects] were driven directly by community members and partnerships . . . to kind of let go, to feel like [the university] was letting go but providing funding and some good backbone support." Another participant said they "gain[ed] confidence and ability to be able to lead from behind."

The centrality of community-identified interests and needs was then married with expertise from the university. Faculty and staff participants described how they expanded their capacity to find ways to flexibly meet community needs and to leverage university resources, both key community-oriented boundary-spanning behaviors as described by Mull (2014). One participant spoke to this directly, saying:

> I've been a [scholar] for 15 or 20 years, and this was a unique experience and one that I really appreciated. The flexibility, the ability to run a project, but to be able to pivot seamlessly throughout that project because the emphasis was on community needs rather than funder goals or proposal priorities was totally unique.

Organizational Orientation

Participants described positive institutional impacts of the cohort approach, such as supporting new, sustainable, and meaningful connections and reinforcing existing relationships among students, staff, and faculty across campus. Participants saw these impacts as long-term effects of the process that benefited the entire university. As one participant noted:

> It's brought together people from across campus who might not have otherwise had an opportunity to work with one another, and . . . there will probably be some lasting relationships, working relationships with folks . . . a potentially good outcome or impact on [the university] is seeing these working relationships flourish, which might lead to other things down the line.

Participants grew to appreciate, and in some cases became more enthusiastic about, collaborating with people across disciplines, institutions, and the community. One participant remarked:

> It's made a tremendous impact for me at [the university] in the sense that I've . . . gotten to know a lot more people across the university. I have found ways to work with people from across the university . . . [to] find projects that would bring more people together in a kind of collective impact way.

Others stated that this process has helped them find ways to meet institutional needs in collaboration with the community, especially in the context of the university's emphasis on student learning. One participant spoke specifically about how the collective impact approach "show[ed] how very local projects and local learning is also exceptionally good at teaching intercultural sensitivity and cultural humility and power and privilege."

Socioemotional Orientation

Another common theme participants reflected upon was the blurring of lines between the collective impact cohort process and other activities in which they were engaged. Participants shared how relationships were established and flourished through the collective impact process. These relationships led to a variety of activities within and beyond the cohort such that some participants at times felt unable to distinguish what activities could be uniquely attributed to the cohort. One participant said, "I have strong connections with people that I met in the cohort that have gone beyond the cohort and have been really great . . . the relationship building and network building was really phenomenal."

Such porous boundaries of projects may be a benefit in that participants demonstrate their ability to develop and maintain relationships that defy rigid categorization and instead use them to build trust and leverage expertise and support for the greatest community benefit. Identifying and allowing space for the expertise of others was an often-cited positive attribute of the process. One participant spoke favorably of the process's emphasis on "acknowledging that everyone was bringing something important to the group and trying to determine what those strengths were." Another said, "The group was really . . . welcoming additional skill and knowledge and expertise and . . . it's a beautiful thing when you can take an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary collaborative approach to a complex issue."

Participants spoke of the importance of collaborating with individuals with a diversity of expertise and viewpoints, whether reflecting lived experience, skill sets, or knowledge bases. Bringing together such individuals as part of the process helped them become more aware of how this diversity benefited their own work. Additionally, the cohort process allowed participants to develop new skills to negotiate power and navigate differences across disciplines and roles. For example, one participant said they "really appreciated the diversity of viewpoints and vantage points . . . [it] illuminat[ed] the ways that so many folks can care about a certain issue or topic area from such different vantage points."

Participants also shared advice for future cohort participants, which largely focused on socioemotional boundary-spanning skills. For example, the most common piece of advice was to join the cohort with an open mind. Participants said to "be open-minded about the process" and, "[it is important] having an open mind, knowing what skills you bring, what skills you could stand to develop," while bringing together "a group of people who are really dedicated

and capable and sort of seasoned or open to working collaboratively." Three additional recurring pieces of advice were to listen to others' viewpoints, provide input, and be flexible.

Technical-Practical Orientation

Participants drew inspiration from the design of the collective impact process itself, expressing interest in adapting the process of bringing multiple people and communities together to benefit their own work, especially teaching. A common theme expressed by participants was that they felt overwhelmed at first, but appreciated the broad scope of the process, starting with a big central idea, then diving into data, and then into action. The faculty coleads of each cohort reflected on how the experience impacted their understanding of leadership. Faculty described areas of learning and confidence-building ranging from how to facilitate diverse groups to using deliberative decision-making processes. One colead shared that they "learned how to incorporate different viewpoints and understanding how different disciplines approach issues and problem-solving." Participants described the flexibility offered in the planning process as a double-edged sword—great to have so much opportunity, but at times also paralyzing or fracturing. In the end, many participants viewed this process as an experience where they learned new collaborative skills and expressed interest in emulating the process moving forward. For example, one participant said:

> There's always talk about, you know, ensuring that everyone is participating and hearing all voices and all of that, but this process was one that really required that and there's no getting around it, you absolutely had to learn to work together and then again to evaluate everyone's strengths and differences, and so I think that's something that I can really reflect on in the classroom and leverage in some ways. . . . So that's something that's really got me thinking about different ways of bringing those types of opportunities into the classroom and the benefits that could result.

Taking part in the cohort allowed participants to gain skills in facilitating meetings between different groups grounded in reciprocity. For example, one participant said:

> I've been able to use a lot of what I've learned . . . from the collective impact cohort in talking to students about the importance of reciprocity and of making sure that the voices of the people that you're in collaboration with are heard and to really think through those power dynamics . . . being in the large cohort and watching how we engaged with community members and various other constituents helped me think through that.

Others indicated that they gained skills in identifying both barriers to success and how to overcome those barriers collaboratively. One participant stated, "There were learnings about blind spots and gaps in my own field's approach, as well as other fields," and another participant remarked, "We developed an intimate understanding of . . . issues . . . and from there, we identified . . . pain points . . . and other sort of design practices in order to identify courses of action for addressing need or pain points."

Participants also believed such boundary-spanning skills gained through the cohort experience would impact their teaching by fostering their commitment to community-engaged methods, boosting their confidence, and introducing new tools (e.g., language to describe collaboration) and experiences to share with students. The ability to apply the skills gained to new situations is a feature of the boundary-spanning technical-practical orientation. Faculty explored themes of growth and openness that would likely affect their teaching by promoting cross-disciplinary thinking and creating new ways for considering space for diverse perspectives and voices.

Participants also perceived that the cohort experience generated new projects and increased knowledge and confidence in approaching current projects. However, not all feedback reflected positive impact on research and creative work. For example, some participants expressed frustration over projects not aligning closely with their research focus. Others who were already

engaged in community-oriented methods before the cohort found less significant influence on their future scholarship.

Organizational Dynamics

The structures, programs, and processes of the university, the engagement office leading the program, and the collective impact cohort method itself influenced the experience of boundary spanning for participants. Faculty shared recommendations about the cohort process, such as increasing clarity and structure, centering community partners, and shortening the planning period. Participants also underscored the importance of backbone support. Backbone support was conceived of in several ways. Participants recognized and valued the logistical and administrative planning and the scaffolded, structured activities that brought everyone together and kept the process moving. For example, one participant said, "I really liked the way it was facilitated and it was just this perfect blend of having [the engagement office's] support to create a container and a structure but also letting the group kind of define itself."

Trust and a sense of being valued were common themes in the participants' discussion of backbone support. Participants expressed that the backbone support, which provided the structures but did not dictate the direction, conveyed an institutional belief that they could accomplish something big together. One participant said, "I felt valued in the process by the trust and freedom." Another participant noted that "the backbone support was really vital to our cohort . . . I felt like [the engagement office] was supporting us throughout the process and we were able to really live into our goals and the experience because we had that solid support." Investment from the university, in the process and the participants, reinforced this sense of being valued and trusted. One participant noted that they were "pleasantly surprised to realize that there was funding set aside." They continued to say,

> It felt like a wicked investment like, not just in a project . . . [but] investment in the process . . . and so it did feel like kind of an acknowledgment of trust in the process and what individual groups might have come up with.

Another participant remarked on all these aspects of backbone support:

> I think the selection of the leaders was really very smart and really great choices, so they really continued and didn't give up on the process and were, kept us on track. So, so that worked really well, but also that I never felt like [the engagement office] was looking over our shoulders or kind of pressuring us or trying to influence or shape the direction. And that that felt really meaningful like it really felt like, no, this is an investment in our ability to do this work with community members and with students and with other organizations and . . . I just felt really trusted like it.

This remark highlights the important role of the backbone support as an influential champion, a collective impact precondition, who trusts the people and the process and allows for the natural unfolding of the plan of action.

Boundary Spanning in the Context of COVID-19

Given the centrality of flexibility and fluidity to effective boundary spanning, it is important to note that the collective impact cohorts' work overlapped with the beginning of the COVID-19 public health crisis in 2020. Participants in the study were asked to reflect on how COVID-19 impacted their work, given the enormous effects of COVID-19 on society at large. A theme that emerged in line with the technical-practical orientation of boundary spanning was that COVID-19 substantially impacted cohorts' abilities to implement the action items they had developed in the planning phase: Community organizations had shut down for safety reasons, and in-person events became an impossibility. Although these changes were a major setback for some cohorts, others described being able to pivot and enact their plans differently. One participant said:

> We held a virtual forum. That was one of the things that our group brought to the community partners, the ability to sort of offer this experience and hosting a virtual conference . . . and it was amazing, and I think it like expanded the reach and accessibility.

Another theme that emerged, aligned with boundary spanning's community orientation, was how COVID-19 impacted the ability of continued community partnership. Participants described that cohorts were able to shift to online communication and meetings, which allowed for increased ease of communication with community partners, particularly regional community partners who weren't geographically close to the university. At the same time, participants described wanting face-to-face interactions. One participant said, "For campus or off-campus partners, it makes it easier for them to participate, but you still . . . miss something I feel by not having the in-person interaction."

A final theme that emerged related to community orientation was how COVID-19 underscored the necessity of the work they were doing. One participant expressed, "I think it brought more urgency to it," referring to the cohort's chosen issue. Another said, "Grand challenges that have a lot to do with structured inequalities are really heightened, were heightened in this moment . . . and continue to be." Overall, boundary spanning in the context of COVID-19 challenged faculty's boundary-spanning capacity in unique ways, leading to innovations in community partnership.

Discussion

Twenty-three faculty and staff shared reflections through semistructured interviews on their participation in a novel collective impact cohort process designed to advance community–university collaboration. The interview protocol, administered as part of program evaluation and research into this new program, was not explicitly designed to assess the boundary-spanning model. Nevertheless, participants' comments touched on all four categories of boundary-spanning behaviors articulated by Sandmann et al. (2014), including technical-practical, socioemotional, community, and organizational orientations. The presence of these categories of behaviors reinforces the centrality of boundary-spanning concepts to efforts to advance community–university collaboration. Furthermore, boundary-spanning concepts were relevant even in the context of activities affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Participant reflections demonstrate the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and underscore the importance of flexibility to sustain resilient community–university partnerships.

The reflections shared by participants have several implications for both theory and practice going forward. First, the presence of boundary-spanning behaviors in the participant narratives suggests that infusing elements of the collective impact process into community engagement trainings and opportunities can help faculty and staff develop the skills needed for high-quality boundary spanning. The responses from cohort participants described above offer invaluable insights to guide future collaborations. The 6-month planning phase emerged as a cornerstone of colearning, offering a "foundational" process for each cohort's work together. Because the planning phase gave time for teams to form relationships and spend significant time creating a common agenda and shared measurement before diving into action, cohort participants' boundary-spanning behaviors and skills across the four categories were enhanced.

In addition, boundary-spanning concepts can provide important checks on collaborative approaches adapted for university–community collaboration. For example, the collective impact process has been critiqued for favoring work by nonprofit organization staff over community members' lived experiences when addressing community issues (Cabaj & Weaver, 2016). A core skill for authentic community engagement boundary spanning is to honor the knowledge, skills, and traditions of community-based experts (Purcell et al., 2020). Thus, bringing the boundary-spanning framework into conversation with the collective impact process has the potential to bring attention to issues of power and the centrality of community voices in community–university collaboration. Indeed, the study results demonstrate that faculty and staff recognized changes in their own understanding of the importance of ensuring that community voices were central to the cohorts' process.

Although it is certainly clear that community engagement boundary spanners should possess adequate skills to center community voices, it is equally important to know how to network, connect, and leverage university expertise and resources. Engagement opportunities that provide ways for internal actors to align efforts, such that they might provide better value and greater impacts in

collaboration with communities, are needed (Smith et al., 2017). The faculty and staff narratives revealed that the cohort process supported faculty and staff to build connections across departments and disciplines to accomplish the work of the cohort—and beyond. Indeed, the narratives reflected ways that faculty and staff viewed themselves as having developed the important organizational orientation skills and behaviors of boundary spanning to support collaborative work more broadly. Although participants found it challenging at times to maintain continuous communication and identify shared measurement within their collective impact processes, they ultimately described gaining a deeper familiarity with other university actors and an increased ability to work together to advance community-engaged collaborative work.

Of course, advancing collaborative work requires socioemotional skills, particularly in terms of building authentic relationships. The data from this study reflected the potential for the collective impact process to foster socioemotional skills, particularly in terms of recognizing and valuing the time that building meaningful collaborative relationships requires as well as the importance of shared activities. For example, the narratives revealed that faculty and staff found the pace of the planning phase to be frustratingly slow on occasion. Nonetheless, participants also viewed the time that the cohort process allowed for relationship-building to be a highlight of the experience. Further, the socioemotional orientation skills and behaviors of boundary spanning were fostered through the cohorts' intentional focus on planning together and aligning participant activities. Collective impact's emphasis on mutually reinforcing activities makes space for individuals to contribute their engaged work in a coordinated way through an intentional plan of action, which inherently calls for skills in negotiating power and resolving conflicts.

Beyond the socioemotional orientation, participants reflected on a diverse set of skills related to the technical-practical orientation of boundary spanning, including their ability to identify and address issues to maximize impact, such as barriers to success, communication processes, and management of projects. The facilitated planning process of the cohorts emphasized the pillars of collective impact, including consistent communication that builds trust and collecting data to measure results and assess impact. Because the facilitators provided backbone support and led activities for each cohort to guide them in developing their common agenda, shared measurement strategies, and identification of continuous communication structures, it is not surprising that the skills and behaviors of the technical-practical orientation of boundary spanning were cited so frequently. Such skills not only supported faculty and staff participants' work within the cohort, but had reverberations for their teaching, scholarship, and other engagement projects, deepening their ability to serve as boundary spanners. However, some of the faculty who were already experienced in using community-engaged methods found the collective impact process to have less significance for their future scholarship, an aspect that suggests a potential drawback of the collective impact approach in fostering boundary-spanning leadership among seasoned faculty members.

A vital feature of successful collective impact initiatives is backbone support, or what Cabaj and Weaver (2016) referred to in their paper advancing "Collective Impact 3.0" as *containers for change*, the infrastructure required to ensure change is possible. Engagement offices often fill such a role, helping to mobilize resources, cultivate relationships, establish measurement practices, support aligned activities, and, with input from multiple stakeholders, determine a guiding vision and strategy for engagement across a university. Such backbone organizations walk a line between strong leadership and "behind the scenes" work that allows participants to own the success of the initiative (Hanleybrown et al., 2012). Our findings reaffirm the centrality of such containers or offices not only in collective impact efforts, but also in supporting the boundary-spanning capacities of faculty and staff. In this way, engagement offices may serve as the influential champion, a precondition of collective impact, in addition to providing backbone support.

Finally, the narratives revealed practical considerations for the future use of collective impact processes to advance community–university collaboration. For example, the 6-month planning phase emerged as a cornerstone of colearning, offering a "foundational" process for each cohort's work together. Because the planning phase gave time for teams to form relationships and spend significant time creating a common

agenda and shared measurement before diving into action, cohort participants' boundary-spanning behaviors and skills across the four categories were enhanced.

Limitations

We examined boundary-spanning behaviors in the context of interviews collected for program evaluation and research on faculty and staff experiences of a collective impact process; however, several limitations should be considered in interpreting the results. First, we interviewed 23 (62%) of the 37 faculty and staff who participated in cohorts; thus, the perspectives of a sizable minority of cohort members are not reflected here. That limitation is mitigated to some degree by the research focus, which was on whether the cohort process supported boundary-spanning behaviors. Second, the semistructured interviews were not designed to investigate the specific concepts articulated by Sandmann et al. (2014). Thus, this data set offered an opportunity to explore ways in which boundary-spanning concepts emerge in faculty and staff reflections following a professional development experience designed to advance community–university collaboration. We are able to comment on the centrality of boundary-spanning behaviors given the concepts emerged without prompting, though we are not able to draw conclusions about the frequency or impact of boundary-spanning behaviors in the collective impact cohort process. Third, we focused on interviews with faculty and staff because of the nature of the data set available, so community perspectives on boundary-spanning as it relates to faculty and staff development are absent.

Future research could address these limitations. Additionally, to address the potential drawback of the collective impact process that this research encountered with experienced community-engaged faculty, further investigation could focus on the efficacy of the cohort model in promoting boundary-spanning leadership relative to participants' previous familiarity with community engagement. Such research could explore whether providing additional leadership opportunities in the collective impact cohort process for experienced faculty, such as serving as faculty coleads, leads to additional boundary-spanning technical-practical skills and significant influence on these faculty members' future scholarship.

Summary and Conclusions

Faculty and staff participating in a collective impact cohort process designed to advance new collaborations for public problem-solving described positive changes in their perceptions of and confidence about their boundary-spanning capacity for successful community–university engagement. Research on their perceptions of the process revealed several key practices for institutions seeking to support boundary spanners, including the importance of backbone support from community engagement staff and a structured process to facilitate authentic collaborative planning and action. Furthermore, these data reinforce the centrality of boundary-spanning concepts to higher education efforts to seed community–university collaboration.

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

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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 supporting 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.

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Spanning Boundaries and Transforming Roles: Broadening Extension's Reach With OSU Open Campus and Juntos

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Abstract

For over 100 years, Cooperative Extension has served communities through local Extension agents with expertise in such topics as agriculture, youth development, and family and community health. In 2008, the Oregon State University Extension Service launched a pilot (Open Campus and Juntos) to broaden Extension's reach by placing agents with "boundary spanning" expertise inside communities to address disparities in educational and economic opportunities. Open Campus and Juntos span three university–community boundaries: cultural dissonance between higher education and communities, particularly for Latinx families; the disconnect among community colleges and universities in supporting transfer students; and the silos among traditional Extension content areas to build programs addressing community needs. Impacts include 7,200 students and family members served through Juntos, increased high school graduation rates for Juntos students, additional transfer support for 1,500 community college students, and the creation of multiple centers providing broadband access in one of Oregon's most rural counties.

Keywords: boundary spanners, Latinx, rural, Cooperative Extension, college access

Cooperative Extension (Extension) has over 100 years of history in partnership with land-grant universities in the United States, working in a third space that is not strictly academic nor professional (Whitchurch, 2008). Early Extension programs were primarily offered in rural communities and focused on farming and animal production, but additional programs quickly developed to address broader community needs, including 4-H youth clubs, home economics, health and nutrition, natural resources, and community development (Gould et al., 2014; Peters, 2002). In Oregon, Extension programming has been intentional about staying relevant to our core partners, while also innovating in order to address community needs that may fall outside the traditional Extension content areas or audiences.

During the 2008 Association of Oregon Counties annual meeting, a novel plan was proposed to extend additional Oregon State University (OSU) resources into the communities most impacted by the global financial crisis of 2008 to help with economic development, educational training, and workforce development. In response, OSU Extension launched a pilot program, Oregon Open Campus, placing "boundary spanners" inside rural communities and rural community colleges. Since then, Oregon Open Campus has developed into two distinct programs, currently named Open Campus and Juntos, that collaborate with local partners to provide community-based activities that include college and career

pathway programs, youth development for rural and Latinx families, and support for economic development projects. The vision of both Open Campus and Juntos is centered on Extension agents as experts in "boundary spanning," meaning professionals who live in the middle, between the university and local needs in communities (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Open Campus and Juntos teams come with a distinct set of skills in convening, partnership-building, and an intentional focus on designing culturally relevant approaches to serving communities. As higher education boundary spanners, Open Campus and Juntos coordinators are embedded in communities to identify and mitigate systemic boundaries between our communities and higher education specifically around (a) college and career access, (b) degree completion support, and (c) community engagement. This article provides a reflective exploration of how Open Campus and Juntos expanded the conventional role of an Extension agent, the program offerings and target audiences stemming from this initiative, and plans to keep growing the program in a sustainable and meaningful way.

The Need for Open Campus and Juntos

Oregon students encounter a number of barriers and boundaries on the path to higher education, beginning with high school completion. Oregon's high school graduation rates are among the lowest in the country, with lower completion rates for students of color, rural students, and students of low socioeconomic status (Table 1). These high school completion disparities for marginalized students are persistent, historical, and well-documented in the U.S. educational system (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021). Degree completion is associated with increased economic well-being; those without a high school degree have higher rates of unemployment and earn less money than individuals with degrees (NCES, 2021; USDA Economic Research Service, 2019).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the State of Oregon

Category	Year	Statistic
Demographics		
Rural population[a]	2020	20%
Latinx population[b]	2021	14%
Latinx population in K-12 schools[c]	2022	25%
Education		
5-year high school graduation rate[d]	2021	85%
Rural high school graduation rate[b]	2021	82%
Urban high school graduation rate[b]	2021	86%
Latinx high school graduation rate[b]	2021	82%
Economically disadvantaged high school graduation rate[d]	2021	80%
4-year college degree or greater[b]	2021	35%
Rural 4-year college degree or greater[b]	2021	25%
Urban 4-year college degree or greater[b]	2021	39%

Note. [a] U.S. Census Bureau, 2022. [b] Ford Family Foundation & OSU Extension Service, 2023. [c] Oregon Department of Education, 2022b. [d] Oregon Department of Education, 2022a.

Beyond high school, postsecondary options also present historic and systemic challenges for students. Colleges and universities in the United States were created to serve White Christian men (Thelin & Gasman, 2003) and have ties to the displacement of Native peoples from their land and the labor of enslaved people (Lee & Ahtone, 2020; Wilder, 2013; Yosso et al., 2009). This history may not be as overt in 2024, yet Bonilla-Silva (2010) argued that a "new racism" is just as present in more subtle ways. Systemic boundaries in predominantly White institutions, such as Oregon State University, present cultural barriers for students of color, including relatively few faculty of color, persistent microaggressions, a lack of institutional cultural awareness, and "institutional, implicit and blatant acts of racism from students and professors alike" (Banks & Dohy, 2019, p. 119).

The location of colleges and universities can also serve as a physical boundary. Oregon is a geographically large state, with nearly half of the population located within the Portland metropolitan area (Portland State University Population Research Center, 2023), whereas 10 eastern counties have population densities of less than six people per square mile (Oregon Office of Rural Health, 2023). Ruiz and Perna (2017) noted that students' proximity to a college or university positively affects college choice, number of college applications submitted, and likelihood of college enrollment.

Higher postsecondary educational attainment is also associated with higher earnings in both rural and urban areas (USDA Economic Research Service, 2019). The Oregon Longitudinal Data Collaborative (2022) reported on one cohort of students with 2019 median wages of $23,419 per year for non-high school-completers and $44,455 per year for students with graduate degrees, even with the latter group having fewer years in the workforce. Appreciating the positive economic impact of higher education while recognizing the disproportionate barriers for students of color and low-income and rural students led Open Campus and Juntos to center postsecondary access in our work.

Boundary Spanning Highlights and Impacts

In response to these barriers and boundaries affecting students and communities across the state, OSU Extension expanded the content-specific role of an "Extension agent" to create flexible faculty positions in communities. These Open Campus and Juntos coordinators focus on spanning boundaries between campus, community, and education institutional type to collaboratively solve community and individual challenges. Subject matter expertise, traditionally framed within a content area (youth development, agriculture, etc.), is an essential competency for an Extension agent (Berven et al., 2020; Donaldson & Vaughan, 2022; Lakai et al., 2012, 2014), with the subject matter typically learned as part of the professional's college degree (Berven et al., 2020). In contrast, Open Campus and Juntos coordinators do not share a common academic background, but rather are subject matter experts in boundary spanning, including community convening and relationship building. Open Campus and Juntos span three university–community boundaries:

- the cultural dissonance between higher education institutions and communities, where college-access programming and community relationships should fully honor the identity and cultural wealth of students and their families (Yosso, 2005),
- the disconnect among community colleges and universities to support transfer students in the context of Oregon's systems of higher education, and
- the silos among traditional Extension content areas and OSU programmatic specialties to build programs addressing community needs.

Open Campus and Juntos provide a number of programs across the state that support our strategic goals while spanning these boundaries. Initiatives that exemplify boundary spanning with proven impact on Oregon's education and economic landscape include the OSU Juntos program, community college partnerships, and rural community engagement and broadband access.

Juntos, meaning "together" in Spanish, is a college and postsecondary access program delivered in Spanish and designed for Latinx students and their families. The name reflects the program's core values of

engaging the entire family and education partners. The program addresses the cultural dissonance among higher education, K–12 school systems, and Latinx communities. Juntos was introduced in Oregon in 2012 when OSU Extension and community partners were seeking to raise high school graduation rates and improve disparities in educational outcomes for Latinx students (López-Cevallos et al., 2020), who make up a growing share of Oregon's K-12 enrollment (Table 1). Particularly in rural areas of Oregon, schools and school districts may not have sufficient culturally or linguistically appropriate materials for the growing Latinx population, resulting in lower parent engagement with schools and lower sense of belonging for both students and parents on the postsecondary pathway (OSU Extension Service, 2022).

Community-based Open Campus and Juntos coordinators deliver the Juntos curriculum, engage with local Juntos program facilitators, provide student mentoring, organize community events, and cultivate a wide variety of local partner relationships. These activities utilize coordinators' expertise to create high-impact solutions for students who are vulnerable to boundaries within the educational system and between communities and institutions. Through the work of these coordinators, Juntos has served over 7,200 participants in Oregon, is active in 40 communities, and works in partnership with school districts, community colleges, and local partners. Juntos students have a 92% high school graduation rate, which exceeds the 2021–2022 five-year cohort completion rate of 84% for all students and 81% for Latinx students (Oregon Department of Education, 2022a). Participants also maintain over 90% postsecondary access following high school, which includes enrollment in community colleges, universities, trade schools, and apprenticeships.

Open Campus and Juntos coordinators also work closely with community college students throughout the transfer pathway. Oregon community colleges provide educational opportunities that are often more geographically and financially accessible to students (Hodara et al., 2019). In Oregon, only 25% of community college students report that they are not able to meet their college costs, compared to 47% of public university students (Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2023). Many students begin at a community college to reduce financial costs of college attendance (Ma & Baum, 2016). However, community college students who want to transfer to a university must navigate additional and complex systems of higher education (Meza & Blume, 2020). Eighty percent of students who begin at a community college desire to transfer; however, only 10–15% will ever complete a bachelor's degree (Jenkins & Fink, 2016; Shapiro et al., 2018). Barriers to transfer student success include loss of credits during transfer (Jenkins & Fink, 2015), lack of information or personalized support (Fay et al., 2022; Jenkins & Fink, 2015), and a low sense of belonging at 4-year institutions (Shaw et al., 2019). Furthermore, college completion and transfer rates are the lowest for historically marginalized students, particularly students of color, rural students, and students of low socioeconomic status (Meza & Blume, 2020; Shapiro et al., 2017). In an effort to work collaboratively on solutions, Open Campus and Juntos created a boundary-spanning transfer support system with coordinators that are coemployed between OSU and a community college. Based in communities, these coordinators provide local transfer advising support and direct connections to OSU and other transfer resources. Since 2009, Open Campus and Juntos have served 1,500 transfer students in half of Oregon's community colleges (OSU Extension Service, 2022).

Finally, Open Campus and Juntos navigate across boundaries of the traditional Extension content areas and the specialized programmatic domains of OSU to design and implement programs. For example, a program was developed in response to a community need for internet access. Inequitable access to broadband in rural communities is linked to disparities in many programmatic domains, including technology, health care, education, and economic well-being (Early & Hernandez, 2021). Grant County is among the most rural counties in Oregon, with a population of 7,174 people located over a large geographic area, and higher unemployment rates and much lower job growth rates than the state average (Ford Family Foundation & OSU Extension Service, 2023). With the goals of providing access to more educational, health care, and job opportunities, the Open Campus coordinator led efforts to create CyberMills, which are physical locations providing critical broadband in a county where only 17% of people

have access (Ford Family Foundation & OSU Extension Service, 2023). The Open Campus coordinator convened partners around this critical economic issue, normally not addressed through Extension programming, and secured over $1,000,000 in grant funding, resulting in two CyberMill locations with over 700 registered users and an average of 30 daily entries. Users credit CyberMill with providing access to resources (e.g., online learning, telehealth, remote work) that would not otherwise be available.

Conclusion

Reflecting on lessons learned, Open Campus and Juntos offer proof-of-concept that expanding the definition of an Extension agent can successfully engage new communities with innovative programming. Open Campus and Juntos programs have achieved measurable impacts in empowering Latinx students and families around postsecondary education along the entire K-12 pathway, expanding support for community college transfer students, and increasing the strength of relationships across the boundaries previously identified. This work has resulted in sustained collaboration with partners including K-12 systems, community colleges, other higher education institutions, and a wide variety of community organizations, governmental entities, and foundations across the state.

In response to the success of Open Campus and Juntos, these programs were elevated in late 2023 to be part of a new standalone unit within OSU Extension, allowing for the addition of new programs, funding mechanisms, and flexibility to streamline processes to support additional community members and students. In addition to adding a director of OSU Juntos and a director of OSU Open Campus, a third director of OSU Native American and Tribal programs was hired in 2024 to support the growing Extension initiatives with Native American/Alaska Native and Tribal communities. These three directors will continue building culturally relevant and community-based teams, while also providing collective leadership for college and career access, student success, and community engagement.

Open Campus and Juntos also continue to refine data collection and long-term evaluation methods to better measure student, family, and community outcomes and impacts. Steps taken to further these goals include the adoption of a customer relationship management system for collecting student data, developing a set of metrics for all high school seniors in our program, and determining longer term student outcomes in a variety of ways (e.g., personal outreach, National Student Clearinghouse data, OSU and community college student data systems).

Along with growth comes the need for sustainable funding. Open Campus and Juntos have diversified funding over the last 10+ years, including university funding, shared positions with community partners, and grants. Future goals include a permanent financial investment from the state legislature for Open Campus and Juntos growth and a presence in all 36 counties in Oregon.

The OSU Open Campus and Juntos programs have shown how Extension can broaden the traditional role of Extension agents by creating "boundary spanning coordinators." These coordinators still dive into the risky but innovative third space (Whitchurch, 2012), but with an expanded definition of a subject matter expert. This expansion is more than semantics; it is a profound philosophical shift that places relationship building, cocreation, culturally relevant practices, reciprocity, and community engagement at the heart of Extension. As evidenced throughout this article, boundary spanners have effectively connected diverse communities, community colleges, and universities, ushering in a new era of collaboration and mutual benefit. As Oregon continues its journey toward greater equity and prosperity, the Open Campus and Juntos programs stand as a testament to the power of fostering meaningful connections among education, communities, and opportunity.

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A Call for "Insider" Community-Engaged Research: Considerations of Power Sharing, Impact, and Identity Development

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Abstract

The transgender community is rich with wisdom about how to live authentically, embrace duality, and embody intersecting identities, but our stories have been widely missing from or misrepresented in research. "Insider" community-engaged research offers a framework for boundary-spanning researchers to blend their "insider" and institutional knowledge to redress the harm of erasure through power sharing and community building. We offer vignettes from boundary-spanning researchers and participants to unpack the question, *what becomes possible when research is conducted by, with, and for one's own community?* We detail the significant methods and processes that positively impacted participants and provide implications for fellow researchers.

Keywords: community-engaged research, transgender, intersectionality, qualitative, power dynamics

[This] feels like research for the trans community rather than research of the trans community for cis people . . . trans people want to hear about [this] because it's for them. It's about the trans community. It's by the trans community. It feels like a collaboration of experiences.

—Finnley, a participant

The transgender (trans) community is rich with embodied wisdom about how to live authentically, embrace duality and fluidity, and span intersecting identities. In 2023, the first and second authors conducted a qualitative community-engaged research (CEnR) study to document this wisdom. This study was our response to today's anti-trans sociopolitical climate and was grounded within the trans community's needs and interests. Specifically, we wanted to know how trans people in Western Oregon with diverse gender, racial, and sexual identities navigate the pressures to conform to White, heterosexual, and binary gender expectations when socially transitioning (e.g., changing their name, pronouns, gender identity). This research project brought together trans researchers and trans participants, demonstrating what is possible when research is conducted *by*, *with*, and *for* one's own community. The powerful nature of this experience led us to form a collective, including researchers (first, second, and final authors) and participants (second through fifth authors). The opening quote captures the beginning of this collaborative journey; what follows is a reflexive account of the study methodology and resulting experiences from the perspective of participants and researchers.

As a collective, we meet regularly to continue learning from one another, reflecting on lessons learned inspired by our "insider" (i.e., member of the community being studied) approach to research, and identifying creative means of dissemination to ensure that participants and the broader community continue to benefit from this work. Data from our study, coupled with

collective reflections on our process, have led to unique insights with methodological implications that can serve as an example of how to redress academia's history of extraction, marginalization, and erasure of many communities (Gaudry, 2011; Rosenberg & Tilley, 2021.) A thematic analysis of interview data underscored the overwhelming importance of spending time in community for holistic, intersectional identity development. This finding, which echoes and builds on previous identity development literature (e.g., Devor, 2004; Rosenberg & Tilley, 2021), emerged early on, so we intentionally let it inform our evolving community engagement practices, the formation of our collaborative, and the recommendations we share for others to integrate community knowledge into their research practices (e.g., structuring interview environments to nurture comfort and safety).

In this article, we strive to model through example the potential for research that is grounded in shared identities and guided holistically by a community's wisdom. We blended principles from CEnR and critical qualitative research (CQR) to design a study that, by definition, attempted to confront social inequalities that trans people face with the hope of facilitating change (Bhavnani et al., 2014; Cannella & Lincoln, 2015; Korth, 2002). Our methodological approach ultimately fostered intersectional identity development, irreplaceable community connectedness, and soulful findings that aim to give back meaningfully to our community. In this article, our collective weaves current CEnR and CQR literature with vignettes as a call for more insider CEnR with institutionally marginalized communities. This article is a methodological process paper, an example of "insider" research, a collection of participants' reflections, lessons learned from researchers, and a felt analysis (Million, 2008) of why insider CEnR, from our perspective, best nourishes the needs of the community by investing in the participants themselves.

Insider Community-Engaged Research: An Example

The purpose of this article is not to share this study's research findings in detail (we invite you to read them here: Blodgett, 2023). Instead, the purpose is to share examples of how leading with an insider perspective shaped our methodology, created uniquely positive experiences, and deepened our intersectional identity development. Participants and researchers wrote their own vignettes, reflecting back on their experiences, to demonstrate the impact of these decisions. We synthesize relevant literature as well as offer reflections from our collective, share implications for fellow researchers, and argue for the need for insider leadership within CEnR.

Being an Insider and Intersectionality

For this study, we defined being an "insider" as having a shared identity within the trans community. We are always insiders *and* outsiders to the communities we are studying. When and how researchers and participants decide on a level of insider/outsider is dependent on each person's vulnerability and visibility, the research and interview questions, and more. For example, consider the insider/outsider complexities for White-presenting people of color or folks with nonapparent disabilities. Our place on the insider/outsider continuum is rarely static—it is a bidirectional meaning-making process that is not often verbalized. An in-depth discussion of the complexities of defining one's position as an insider/outsider or somewhere in between is beyond the scope of this essay but has been well-documented elsewhere (e.g., Kerstetter, 2012; Rosenberg & Tilley, 2021). Instead, the foundation of our discussion rests on how transness was the necessary connection to each other's shared language and embodied understandings about living under (and in resistance to) oppression that served as a bridge between me (first author) and participants.

The study that inspired this reflective essay was conducted as the first author's doctoral dissertation. Given the first author's leadership throughout the project (including conducting interviews), when "I" is used, this denotes the direct experience of the first author. Because of the collaborative nature of this work, "we" will also be used when reflecting the views and experiences of multiple authors and the larger collective.

On Being a Boundary Spanner in Academia

I (first author) experienced being an insider and outsider in academia in unique ways as a White queer and trans person as well as a first-generation college student at the time the study was conducted. I also spanned the boundaries of a social science researcher and a gender studies scholar by blending

theories and methods from one field (e.g., intersectionality and decolonizing methodology) with those of another (e.g., critical qualitative inquiry). Through this specific intersectional training, I learned to lean into my history of activism and community service to conduct justice-oriented research that tends to power dynamics and benefits my community (i.e., critical qualitative research; Koro-Ljungberg & Cannella, 2017).

This study's research aims were born out of my involvement in my local queer and trans community as well as my own and my coresearcher's (second author) lived experiences. Our aims were further supported by research showing that trans people of color and nonbinary trans people are particularly pressured to conform to the gender binary because of White supremacy, heteronormativity, and the overly emphasized medical model of transition (Barbee & Schrock, 2019; Darwin, 2020; Desmeules-Trudel et al., 2023; Fiani & Han, 2019). Having spent years deeply supporting the transitions of other trans people in our community, my coresearcher and I noticed that, as a community, we were having many of the same conversations and experiences over and over again: How do we deal with the incessant pressure to conform in a society that intends to erase us? How can we genuinely come to know ourselves and our communities when the pressure to conform makes us feel like we are not cis-, queer-, trans- or anything enough in nearly every space we enter? Many of us find ways to cope, but the specifics of what we must cope with and which institutions pressure us most are tied to our identities. These concerns, we knew, were what our community wanted to talk about, so the aim of this research project became to understand (a) how the pressure to conform to the gender binary emerges for trans people as they socially transition and (b) how their gender, race, and sexual identities uniquely shape their experiences.

Embodied Knowledges

In this study, I applied an intersectional (Combahee River Collective, 1981) and felt (Million, 2008) theoretical perspective to critically document how the pressure to conform to (cis)gender stereotypes—and resisting that pressure—shaped transgender young adults' intersectional lived experiences. With the establishment of intersectionality and felt theory has come an institutional recognition that the composition of our identities and lived and emotional experiences creates unique embodied understandings of the world we live in (Combahee River Collective, 1981; Crenshaw, 1991; Million, 2008). Indigenous scholarship and activism call embodied knowing "felt knowledge" (Million, 2008). Felt or embodied knowledge can mean knowing without having the language to name *what* you know or emotional learning that invents new language. For example, I would posit that new and emerging transgender identity terminology could be considered a kind of trans felt knowledge.

Coresearcher Partnerships

Shared trust and a common understanding of living in a society that was never built with the trans community in mind was the foundation on which I formed meaningful connections and engaged the community. Recognizing the intersectional identities that were not shared was equally critical to acknowledge, and it was fundamentally (and methodologically) imperative to collaborate with community members who had identities different from my own. I invited the second author, an international Hispanic college-aged binary trans man, to be my coresearcher. Our partnership as coresearchers was an application of this study's critical approach that emphasized a nonhierarchical collaboration with participants (Levitt et al., 2017). We designed this study hand-in-hand. He defined his role on the project, exercising his agency to lean into our collaboration as a thought partner and lean out when he was not available or interested in a particular phase of the research. For example, he was not interested in analyzing data using qualitative software. Instead, we took long walks where we discussed emerging findings and cocreated meaning. The second author's story is a great example of what becomes possible when research is conducted *with* the community:

> I was in my junior year of undergrad when I was invited to be a co-researcher. I have never seen or worked with someone who I could relate to or look up to that held the same identity as I do. Being in spaces that are not the trans community, especially academia, can feel isolating and hard to navigate. Academia is exclusive enough, even for those who don't hold identities that are marginalized. Nonetheless, being a co-researcher in a study led

> by another trans person made me feel free enough to dive into exploring and expressing who I am. I knew my voice mattered because I was making decisions and having input about the research that mattered. I got to receive two years of mentorship through the research process where Jey taught me what recruitment and within-community research meant, how to identify meaningful research questions, and ask the right interview questions to answer those research questions, and now that is giving me a leg up as I start my Master's program in a related field.

Community collaborations can take many forms, and other critical and community-engaged scholars suggest strategies like taking implicit bias training and engaging in consistent reflexivity to facilitate healthy coresearcher partnerships (Andress et al., 2020; Bhavnani et al., 2014; Gaudry, 2011). Ours was transformative for both of us, and a rich area for power sharing, including mentorship, research training, and decision-making power (Andress et al., 2020). By sharing the knowledge—and thus power—that I had about qualitative research and the broader academia system from my perspective, the second author grew to better understand his own career goals, creating the possibility for future collaborations and resource sharing.

When we (first and second authors) started working together, we immersed ourselves in the literature on trans people. We found examples of research that honored our stories (e.g., Cuthbert, 2019; Kichler, 2022; Stone et al., 2020; Sumerau et al., 2019). These studies were exemplary. Research often treats our diversity monolithically, as if we were one community, one experience. Although becoming more visible, stories of trans people on the asexual/aromantic spectrums, trans people of color, and trans people from cultures that already recognize more than two genders (e.g., Two-Spirit and Hijra people) are still vastly underrepresented (Ripley, 2020). Particularly missing are sensitive, intersectional portrayals of these stories wherein their transness does not eclipse the rest of their intersecting identities (Bowleg, 2013; Cuthbert, 2019). Whitewashing and other forms of silencing have replaced a rich chorus of diverse voices with a more "streamlined" trans narrative that often conflates transness with struggle, hardship, and illness (Burnes & Chen, 2012). The need to center these voices has been identified by the trans community and gender studies scholars alike (GLAAD, 2023; Moran, 2023).

In the context of this study, we developed a different way of listening to the transgender literature as insiders than our colleagues who did not share our trans identity. We know the impact that academic erasure and exclusion can have, so we found creative ways of working hand-in-hand with our community. As this research came into focus and we grew more confident in our felt knowledge about the significance of community connectedness, we recognized that being boundary spanners meant identifying and integrating methodologies that allowed us to live values of shared power and honoring of community.

Integrating a Community Engagement Framework

The project that inspired this essay did not start with community-engaged research named as the guiding framework. CEnR is a term used broadly to describe the process of working with a community to ensure the community's perspectives are embedded throughout the research process. Community engagement came naturally to us as insiders, but learning about CEnR as an already established framework complemented the language and frameworks we were familiar with at the time (e.g., applied and translational, feminist and antiracist research practices) and guided our strategies for how to uplift, affirm, and involve our community from a critical perspective. With grounding in activist participatory research and Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy and empowerment education (e.g., Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988; Wallerstein et al., 2020), CEnR that is participatory (e.g., community-based participatory research; CBPR) is rooted in praxis that aims to shift the narrative and power dynamics away from researchers as all-knowing "experts" and participants as "subjects" to be studied. CEnR from a critical perspective aims to do just that: affirm the inherent expertise of individuals and communities; share power; and honor participants' humanity, autonomy, and leadership throughout the research (Mikesell et al., 2013).

Our approach to community engagement mirrors Key et al.'s (2019) CEnR framework, particularly the notion that the level

of community engagement moves along a continuum from community-invested to CBPR. In this way, CEnR has the potential to mitigate the harm of extraction (taking from a community for perceived academic benefit) and instead to contribute to meaningful research that affirms and benefits a community in a way they value. Our engagement with the community, including study participants, increased as our study progressed. In the following section, we describe our strategies and process for how we blended our felt knowledge as insiders and the wisdom from our community to adapt our methodology.

Methodology

This study was deemed exempt by Oregon State University's institutional review board in fall 2023. The study was under the leadership of the first author for their doctoral dissertation with support from faculty advisors who recognized the critical need for insider leadership and intentionally played supporting roles. Every decision has been and continues to be informed by the trans community, including participants. As insiders and boundary-spanning researchers, my coresearcher and I designed a qualitative research project that prioritized the needs and interests of our community, particularly those whose voices have been institutionally underrepresented, including Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other trans people of color, trans femme people, and sexual minorities.

The present study began with a CQR approach, which is a contemporary feminist genre of qualitative research that aims to confront social inequalities in hopes of facilitating change (Bhavnani et al., 2014; Cannella & Lincoln, 2015; Korth, 2002). Conceptually, this meant our study was responsive to the sociohistorical/political context; accountable to participants; and deeply concerned with understanding the influences of power—who has it, who is denied it, and how power imbalances are reproduced, undermined, and resisted (Bhavnani et al., 2014; Cannella & Lincoln, 2015). The conceptual nature of our CQR approach proved to be well-suited to guide our analysis and development of interview questions, but we quickly found that more intentional community engagement was necessary to move from theory to meaningful impact. Our insider and boundary-spanner knowledge are what helped us bring flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness to our methodology. Our community engagement practices merged with our critical qualitative approach, so our research could move fluidly across the continuum of CEnR approaches (Key et al., 2019) from community informed, at times, to a CBPR project. In the following section, we share specific examples that demonstrate the impact of our insider critical CEnR approach on participants.

Participant Recruitment

We stayed tethered to the community's interests and need for comfort and safety by understanding what it took to conduct a study that really mattered to them. In response, our recruitment flyer included a huge pride flag, the first author's nonbinary pronouns, and an explicit note that we wanted to prioritize hearing from trans people of color. We displayed our flyers where we knew queer and trans people liked to spend time in our community, such as our community's favorite bars, coffee shops, and a dedicated LGBTQ+ hair salon. We knew the when, where, and who was hosting for LGBTQ+ community events (e.g., drag shows) where we could hand out flyers. We introduced ourselves to community members. A member of our collective (fourth author) reflects on how seeing evidence of our investment in our community on our flyer made them want to participate. As a trans fem, asexual, Arab and White person, they have plenty of experience navigating the pressure to conform to identities they are not:

> When I saw the opportunity to participate in a study about being pressured to conform—one whose flier said that they specifically wanted to hear from trans people of color—I wanted to challenge the self-doubt I had about my identities and put myself out there to find community. As a trans fem person, I was still raised to embody "traditional" masculine gender roles; being queer, I was still told to love the gender "opposite" to me; and as a half-white half-Arab person, I was still told to live as a white person. I saw this interview as my chance to be "enough"—trans enough, queer enough, Arab enough.

The sentiment described in the above quote was echoed by most participants: Being interviewed by another trans person meant "finding community." For the fourth author

and other biracial participants, they also needed an insider to the trans community who would intentionally elevate QTBIPOC (queer, trans, Black, Indigenous people of color) voices. The risk inherent in sharing one's precious and personal story (which some noted they had not previously spoken out loud) pointed them toward community where they could be their whole selves. This result would not have been possible had the research been conducted by an outsider or without a commitment to decentering Whiteness.

Engaging Diverse Voices (Demographics and Sample)

We had been cautioned by other researchers that obtaining an "adequate" sample size would be time-consuming and especially challenging in the trans community. This advice, while sensible and common, came from researchers who neither did within-community research nor identified with the trans community, and it ultimately did not apply to our study. In less than 2 weeks, 100+ trans community members had completed our study's interest form and demographic questionnaire. Our demographic questions remained completely open-ended to reflect the changing sociopolitical landscape regarding our country's conception of race, ethnicity, and gender categories (Orvis, 2023), and was critical to ensure that diverse voices would be represented.

We were successful in recruiting a diverse sample in large part because of our responsiveness to the community and our insider status. Although I (first author) was eager to hear from every prospective participant, I systematically selected and interviewed 20 trans young adults with diverse identities (i.e., no two participants shared the same combination of gender, racial/ethnic, or sexual identities) to meet the needs of the proposed study. In brief, 45% of participants self-identified as multiracial; 25% identified on the asexual/aromantic spectrum; and most had unique gender (60%) and sexual (74%) identities not shared with other participants.

Creating a Sense of Belonging and Comfort

Interview Location. Interviews took place in person (n = 13) in a university library study room or over Zoom (n = 7). We prioritized privacy and accessibility when choosing an interview location yet anticipated that library study rooms would be a symbol of power and hierarchy. We rearranged the furniture and decorated the room to be warm and welcoming. When participants arrived, they saw the first author's well-loved pride flag hanging on the wall. They were welcomed into the space by a trans researcher and offered refreshments and fidget toys to create a comfortable environment that honored neurodiversity. Every participant played with the fidget toys and nearly all commented on how "queer and comfortable" the room was, creating a much-needed sense of belonging.

The interview location was a creative site to gain richer data while extracting less from participants. The influence of interview location on rapport, including being a symbol of power, has been well documented (Bjørvik et al., 2023). More recently, attention has been given to how participants' experience of the interview location and setting can serve as important data itself (Leverentz, 2023). Queering the environment (e.g., bringing fidget toys, pride flag) led to more comfort and rapport, reduced harm, and richer data. We invite others to consider what might you be "taking" from participants in any study, and how can you use the interview location to give back in small yet meaningful ways.

Before the Interview. Showing up for an interview is a vulnerable act, and in our study, that vulnerability was palpable. Before beginning, we almost always started with conversations about how "gay" our outfits were. This was not planned, but it immediately broke the tension. We were quickly smiling and sometimes even doing a theatrical hair flip. This is how queer and trans people talk to each other; it is certainly not how researchers are trained to interact with participants. Fashion continues to be deeply relevant to and ingrained in queer and trans culture (Batista & Guedes, 2023; Carbone, 2021), but I did not need research to know this. Many in-person participants brought up how their pronoun pins, binder, cuffed sleeves, leather crop top, or denim jacket with patches was an intentional choice for this interview (I wore my gayest outfits, too). But in the next breath, most participants offered some sort of backstory about being worried that they did not *really* qualify to be part of the study (they did). In an instant, it felt as though imposter syndrome and gender dysphoria had merged in an academic environment, and I knew what they were saying to me: I don't know

if I even belong here. I then watched each of them visibly shrug their shoulders and say they reminded themselves that, of course, they belonged here because I was trans, too. These interactions were just a few seconds long and were captured only in jottings and memos, but I knew we had just built the trust necessary to talk about the topic of this study, being made to feel not "trans enough." I reassured them that they certainly belonged, and I was happy they came.

I managed to both stay grounded in my communal LGBTQ+ identity during our brief exchanges about fashion and question what I had been taught about "professionalism" as a researcher. A positive thing about being an LGBTQ+ person and a qualitative researcher was that it helped me embrace the duality of this method and our shared cultural experiences. The response from my community and the richness of our interview conversations were my compass for knowing that our methodology was working. For other researchers, regardless of identity, how can you stay grounded in your shared humanity with participants rather than as interviewer/interviewee in the moments before an interview?

Conducting Interviews as an Insider (and Outsider). When conducting interviews, I shared with participants that I was a first-generation student finishing my doctorate program and that I was a White, queer, and nonbinary trans person from a rural town. Because our research was about trans experiences (albeit through an intersectional lens), it did make it easier to feel like insiders. There were times, however, when I slid along the insider/outsider continuum even within the same interview. For example, in some interviews with Two-Spirit participants, we discussed how transness is deeply embedded in Whiteness. I am familiar with this topic because I have learned about it in a classroom and can easily find relatable representation. Several participants brought this up but would start by saying, "No offense, but most nonbinary representation looks like you." I would agree, responding lightheartedly, using humor and honesty to bridge our racial differences and diffuse discomfort. Their openness, my nondefensiveness, and our shared familiarity with this intersection of gender and ethnoracial identity, though qualitatively different, created trust. Our conversations then could move on, focusing almost exclusively on their experiences. Decentering Whiteness is an ongoing task for White researchers, and I would recommend incorporating antiracist research practices as we did, such as those recommended by Goings et al. (2023).

One-on-One Interviews. I began by asking participants to describe what they learned from traversing binary boundaries of gender, and for 2 hours we talked about their other influential identities, their most treasured experiences as trans people, and how they wanted this research to benefit our community. Here, the third author identifies as a Hispanic queer trans man and reflects on his experience as both a participant in this study and a researcher at his job:

> Right away, I notice I'm being interviewed by someone with nonbinary pronouns. It was a really big deal to see that because there is a sense of safety that comes with simply seeing another person's pronouns. Even so, I start to anxiously anticipate being asked the typical "what-kind-of-transgender-are-you" questions, like "How did you know you were trans?" Those kinds of questions usually come from people who are not transgender. In all my experiences as both a participant and a researcher, I have learned that when I am questioned by researchers who do not share or understand my identities, instead of being able to share my story, I have to explain and justify my existence as a trans person.
>
> During this interview, I was asked about all parts of me—my other identities, my feelings, what I wanted the researcher to do with my story. In other studies when I was asked, "How did you know you were trans?" I could only talk about my experience coming out. It is so easy to misrepresent trans people and other institutionally marginalized people when researchers do not prioritize connecting with the community they are researching. Throughout the research process, we became a collective of trans people, participants, and researchers who use our connections, platforms, and energy to creatively uplift each other's voices.

Sharing identities and authentic moments of connection, whether through humor, mutual language, or a shared fashion sense, was clearly important for participants' interview experiences. As the third author describes, knowing to avoid questions that "other" our shared and unique experiences led to a completely different experience than he has had with other researchers.

Memoing and other reflexive strategies helped me reflect on my positionality, including the limitations of my perspective as a White queer trans/nonbinary person. I needed time to learn how to decenter Whiteness as an interviewer without overly putting that burden on participants. I learned that rapport and shared identities gave me more mental space as a researcher to know how and when to take up space and when to leave space in an interview. Ultimately, I fell into a "listen more and talk less" approach with my participants of color who had a lot to say about their experiences with race, whereas I had to push some of my White participants to think more deeply about how their Whiteness shaped their experiences. When I was read as an insider (especially with regard to gender or sexuality), I had to push participants to elaborate when they would stop short of explaining something by saying, "You know." Usually, I did know, but having that discussion helped us both name and unpack their experiences. For other researchers wanting to engage in CEnR, what other strengths do you have for connecting with participants? How can you be your authentic self and encourage participants to do the same?

Meaningful Dissemination and Lasting Collaboration

In most studies, the interview and "extraction" of data from participants is where the relationship ends. Critical and CEnR principles encourage extending that relationship to include member checking (e.g., review of findings by participants; London et al., 2022). We learned how to do more to engage participants when drawing conclusions or sharing findings so we could maximize the impact of this work. I welcomed participants to attend my dissertation defense and invited them to share creative ideas for how a defense could be meaningful or useful for them. Many participants were also artists, so the defense became a platform to share participants' and other trans community members' artwork (and Instagram handles on request), further offering an opportunity to network as artists and connect with others in the community. In this way, my defense became another opportunity to benefit the community through shared power.

Power sharing is a practice from critical and CEnR approaches and can be achieved in creative ways that are ideally participant driven. To create an environment where participants drive power-sharing opportunities, we recommend regular check-ins, including normalizing and making comfortable participants' decision to step back and/or recommit without judgment, perceived or otherwise. Researcher-driven power-sharing practices are also powerful. We echo strategies similar to those of Andress et al. (2020), for example, who suggested tending to three specific areas: implicit bias (increasing awareness through implicit bias training), structural competency (awareness of systemic imbalances and risks), and positionality (becoming aware and transparent about the power inherent in one's position and the risk of perpetuating harm, dominance, and supremacy within relationships and research).

Moving into praxis, I asked if and how participants would like to stay connected, and several expressed interest in doing so, noting they were looking for new community connections and/or were curious about research, so we formed our collective. The collective has been an act of intentional power sharing. Through our collective, we learn from one another, offer support, brainstorm creative avenues for dissemination, and discuss our individual personal and professional goals. As our relationships have deepened, we have opened up to each other about new meaningful impacts of our collective on our lives:

> Between forming this collective and beginning to write this paper, another series of bombs were dropped on Gaza, a place where I see myself, my family, and my community reflected. I felt comfortable enough within our collective to continue to come together to write and connect, even though, as a Levantine Arab, I have been grief-stricken while watching the violence escalate. Knowing that that part of who I am is represented in this project and collective is important to me but knowing that it does not have to represent my whole experience has been revitalizing. (Fourth author)

The fourth author found a sense of belonging, healing, and community within our collective, where they are welcomed and affirmed for all of who they are. Another member of our collective (fifth author) noted that "there isn't a replacement for a community like this. This is a group that finally works for me and my energy levels." These impacts would have gone unnoticed if not for the time we have spent together as a collective. In fact, similar positive impacts might be happening in other studies but may be left out of discourse without continued community and participant involvement. We ultimately created something more than what they (and we) knew to be possible within the constraints of academia.

A Call for More Insider Community-Engaged Research

To honor the lessons learned from participants in this study, we are calling for more insider CEnR with all institutionally marginalized communities, particularly within queer and trans communities. High-quality community engagement that is sensitive to a community's needs can be deeply meaningful to everyone involved, regardless of identity. For us, being LGBTQ+ insiders served as a natural antidote to some of the common roadblocks to implementing successful CEnR approaches, including time spent establishing trust (beyond a general sense of rapport) and understanding a community's needs/interests. Elevating insiders as leaders in CEnR is particularly meaningful because of the felt connection for participants in being with and represented by community (e.g., participants' trust in a trans researcher led to a sense of belonging before the interview), as underscored by the second and third authors. It can also protect against unintentional yet harmful "data extraction" and help to facilitate sensitive representation, as noted by the third author. Our call is echoed by other researchers, particularly feminist and gender studies scholars such as Rosenberg and Tilley (2021), and in this essay, it is echoed by participants themselves.

Implications Beyond Research

Our call for insider CEnR is also a call for a shift in what is valued by academic/research institutions, particularly the need to invest in nonacademic means of dissemination with the greatest felt impact on communities. Universities must recognize and respect communities in this way to remain relevant to them (Bell & Lewis, 2022). Acknowledgment of this need is beginning to emerge, providing a roadmap for translating well-intended structural changes into impact (e.g., funding agencies requiring grant proposals to include academic and nonacademic dissemination; Bell & Lewis, 2022; Grant & DaViera, 2023). To do so, however, the necessary elements for building and maintaining such relationships must be more generally recognized. Aspects of such recognition include (but are not limited to) grant timelines (e.g., building in time for the "invisible labor" required to do this work well), allowable expenses, and value in promotion and tenure requirements. Importantly, this shift in university priorities would also be an investment in researchers who are from the historically underestimated communities they are working within.

Conclusion

In this reflective essay, we share lessons learned from a study conducted by, with, and for the transgender community, with a focus on our identities and use of boundary-spanning methodology. We learned that insider-led research facilitated trusting, nonexploitative, lasting relationships with participants, resulting in research- and non-research-related benefits. We also were reminded of ever-present challenges, particularly the task of White researchers to decenter Whiteness in their research and scholarship and elevate QTBIPOC voices. We recommend ongoing self-education, reflexivity to align values with actions, creative and meaningful power-sharing practices, and other antiracist research practices (e.g., Goings et al., 2023) to help translate positive intent into positive impact. Establishing our collective has helped us remain deeply accountable to our community and maximize the impact of this and future studies for the communities we represent. The vignettes included throughout this essay offer everyone an inside glimpse into what became possible for our intersectional identity development and sense of belonging. This study adds to a small but growing body of research that affirms and centers the diversity of identities and experiences within the trans community.

In this article, we argue that trans insider leadership helped break down institutional barriers that could have otherwise limited trust and risked perpetuating further harm.

With an initial grounding in CQR, intersectionality, and felt theory, we increasingly blended CEnR language and approaches to deepen our community engagement and power sharing. As we learned more, we did more, a process that we recognize is ongoing. Without this approach, we argue that the authenticity and richness of our findings would not have been possible. We hope our lessons learned about insider representation and cultivating meaningful, trusting, and collaborative relationships with the community can be broadly applied by researchers, educators, policymakers, human service professionals, and others of all identities and positionalities. Ultimately, everyone deserves to see representation of themselves as leaders and in the history that research writes. This representation must begin with a sense of responsibility to communities.

About the Authors & Author Contributions

***Jey Blodgett (they/them), PhD**, earned their PhD in human development and family studies from Oregon State University. They are passionate about applied social justice research that is responsive to a community's needs and interests. Their research interests focus on gender socialization and intersectional identity development, specifically how systems of power and oppression influence LGBTQ+ people's experiences.*

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Developing a Strategic "Container" to Support Boundary Spanning and Belonging Amongst Diverse Collaborators at a Land-Grant University

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Abstract

This essay reports on engaging academic and community partners whose positionalities spanned diverse lived experiences and power structures. Using groundwork from several literatures, we reflect on developing, nurturing, repairing, and expanding a container as a critically reflective space for experimenting with new ways of being and doing. A well-curated and nurtured container creates processes and spaces where group members feel they belong; they commit to practice a shared set of agreements, and work through interpersonal and organizational conflict that will inevitably arise. The container can be an instrument for identity, organizational, and tactical boundary spanning. As a microsystem, a container can mobilize collective engagement when team members reflect diverse identities, hierarchies, and roles within the academic system and partnering communities. Theorizing the container as an opportunity structure for boundary spanning may help those advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) within academic land-grant institutions, university–community collaboratives, and community-based organizations.

Keywords: boundary spanning, community-engaged scholarship, social justice movements, faculty diversity, land-grant universities

In this essay, we describe how to develop, nurture, repair, and expand a "container" as a critically reflective space for experimenting with new ways of being and doing. A *container* is defined as a group of people who develop an agreed-upon set of norms and a common purpose (Human Impact Partners, 2024). We borrow the term "container" from its use in social justice community organizing (Human Impact Partners, 2024) and in dialogic organization development (Corrigan, 2016). The idea is to hold intentional space for "innovation or collective learning to take place around complex and emergent issues, including strategic planning, social innovation, conflict resolution, and working with organizational culture" (Corrigan, 2016, p. 31). A well-curated and nurtured container creates processes and spaces where group members feel they belong; they commit to practice a shared set of agreements, and work through interpersonal and organizational conflict that will inevitably arise (Human Impact Partners, 2024). We theorize the container as an instrument for boundary spanning that may be helpful to those advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) within academic land-grant institutions, university–community collaboratives, and community-based organizations.

The ability of academic and community partners to mobilize within and across identities, organizations, and tactics may

depend on having opportunity structures (Roberts, 2009) where boundary-spanning groups can build community together and develop strategies to achieve common goals. The concept of political opportunity structures in social movements gives us insight into how social transformation has a greater chance of succeeding when a favorable configuration of power among actors exists within a system. This configuration includes alliances across hierarchies, availability of resources to mobilize action, conflict among those in power, and shared grievances during a moment of historical openness to participation in social change (Kriesi, 1995). These opportunity structures may affect social transformation through boundary spanning by facilitating the development of relationships and coalitions among diverse collaborators. We advance this scholarship by applying the metaphor of a container for intentional boundary spanning as an example of an opportunity structure that facilitates the development of relationships among diverse collaborators and communities.

The creation of the container as an opportunity structure was facilitated by student activism, historical openness to dismantling racism and systems of oppression, and funding to support DEIJ work to redress historical injustices that contextualize our institution and its relationship with surrounding communities. For context, Oregon State University (OSU) is one of the original land-grant universities, espousing public education, applied research, and public outreach and engagement within its core mission. Although a thorough accounting of OSU's racialized history is beyond the scope of this article, we cannot separate the history and mission of the land-grant institution from the context of state-sponsored Indigenous dispossession nationwide and its contemporary impacts on communities in Oregon (Nash, 2019). The Morrill Act of 1862 directed the Oregon state legislature to designate Corvallis College as Oregon's land-grant institution by receiving 90,000 acres of federal lands taken from the Klamath, Coos, Lower Umpqua, Siuslaw, and Coquille people (OSU Extension Service, 2023, para. 4). This dispossession helped to fund the OSU educational system, as well as research centers and extension services established by the Hatch and Smith-Lever Acts (Nash, 2019). Because of this history, OSU can support its present-day land-grant mission of education (with campuses established in Corvallis and OSU–Cascades in Bend), applied research (through an agricultural experiment station with eleven branch stations across Oregon), and public outreach (with faculty from OSU Extension Service working in all 36 counties across the state). In these and other ways, OSU's historical context shapes present-day university–community partnerships.

The historical trauma (Mendez-Luck et al., 2015) resulting from Oregon's sociopolitical legacy of White supremacy presents a major challenge for recruiting and retaining faculty of color and those marginalized by intersecting systems of oppression, such as racism, colonialism, sexism, ableism, classism, and transphobia. Faculty diversity and community-engaged scholarship are interrelated (Strum et al., 2011; Watson-Thompson & Thompson, 2023). Women and faculty of color are more likely to integrate community engagement into their academic and research agendas (Corbin et al., 2021). In recognition of these challenges, the College of Health (COH) was one of seven schools and programs of public health funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in the Transforming Academia for Equity (TAE) initiative. The availability of resources provided the opportunity to assemble a guiding team to examine how historically entrenched structural racism and oppression have impacted our college's policies and culture. By attending to historical trauma, we can realize the promise of our land-grant mission to be responsive to health and wellness inequities across communities in Oregon (Burton et al., 2021).

This reflective essay is grounded in literatures describing boundary spanning from two perspectives: academic–community engagement and social movements advancing social justice. According to Weerts and Sandmann (2010), boundary spanning provides a basis for connection between those working within an organization and external partners to "process information from the environment and provide external representation to stakeholders outside the organization" (p. 634). They highlight the importance of "reciprocal relationships with community partners for mutual benefit" (p. 634). The ability to nurture equitable partnerships with communities requires the development of an internal culture of belonging (Mahar et al., 2013) and boundary-spanning leadership skills (Van Schyndel et al., 2019).

In their theoretical review of boundary spanning in social movements, Wang et al. (2018) identified three axes where spanning can occur: (1) identity boundaries, (2) organizational boundaries, and (3) tactical boundaries. First, collective identity can be constructed based on shared lived experience and holding a common objective. Spanning identities can describe the potential for solidarity among people who experience diverse forms of systemic oppression due to racism, colonialism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, and classism. Second, organizational boundaries (Aldrich & Herker, 1977) can be spanned when organizational ties result in short-term cooperation focused on events or long-term, "enduring coalitions" with partners (Wang et al., 2018). These sustainable partnerships are based on nurtured trust and can facilitate sharing knowledge and coordinating resource distribution. Third, spanning across tactical boundaries describes how "repertoires of contention" (e.g., ways of protest and transformation) are shared across movements (Wang et al., 2018). Tactical boundary spanning can characterize how academia and community partners learn from each other and how transforming academia for equity can borrow tactics from community mobilization. For example, by further developing the metaphor of the container, we are practicing tactical boundary spanning by applying repertoires of contention used in social justice movements.

As an opportunity structure, a container designed for boundary spanning may develop its composition and practices to bridge identity boundaries, organizational boundaries, and tactical boundaries. The container can serve as a *microsystem*—a manageable subset of people that reflects the composition of the broader academic system, bringing together students, faculty, administrators, extension faculty and staff, and community-based leadership. When the container is intentionally developed to support relationships among members with positions across the roles and hierarchies within and beyond the institution, it facilitates boundary spanning in the shared decision-making process.

We propose four ways that the container is a useful heuristic for developing, nurturing, repairing, and expanding engagement. First, by intentionally choosing the group composition of the container to span across identities, hierarchies, and influence, the container is developed as a *space for experimenting* with ways to rearrange and transform academia into a system that centers equitable community engagement. Second, the container is a *critically reflexive instrument* that allows us to nurture reciprocal and caring relationships within the group, which translates to reciprocity in how we engage the broader system. Third, the container should be *repairable, elastic, and refashionable* for authentic growth. Fourth, the container facilitates tactics to *expand buy-in for cocreated transformative action* from elements of the broader system reflected by group members within the container.

Developing the "Container": Group Composition and Power Dynamics

Intentionally attending to group composition and power dynamics when building the container is critical to creating a space for experimentation. In this section, we first discuss how the group composition of the container can be intentionally boundary-spanning, allowing for a diversity of viewpoints and thus new ways of engagement. Next, we discuss how the container can be leveraged to disrupt the existing power dynamics found within academic institutions, which in turn allows for boundary-spanning engagement and innovation.

Because we viewed the container as a microsystem, the composition of our group was intentional in identity boundary spanning (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) by including members with varying lived experiences, from and engaging with minoritized and underserved communities as well as having diverse spheres of influence. Our team included individuals holding diverse roles within our college (students, faculty, administrators), the university (research centers, faculty senate leadership, extension leaders, student leaders), and partners working with communities (e.g., institution led by and serving people of color and Cooperative Extension). Our team also included members from both overrepresented and underrepresented communities in academic spaces, with intersectional identities across race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and ability. From different vantage points in the academic system, group members brought a rich, embodied understanding of how institutional policies affect our communities within the college, university, and state (Million, 2008). We intended for this level of boundary spanning in our spheres of influence to facilitate the implementation of recommendations de-

veloped through the project. The diversity of lived experience with systemic oppression and the inherent power differentials represented within our guiding team both facilitated and challenged our capacity for boundary spanning.

Our initial efforts as a team centered on building trust, mutual respect, and cultural humility (e.g., the idea that one will never fully comprehend another culture, that cultures complement each other, and that all cultures bring forth unique assets). However, boundary spanning processes and boundary spanners are entangled in societal power relations (Collien, 2021), with institutional structures and constraints replicating these power relations. This dynamic "confers privileges, security, resources, and decision-making power in accordance to where one is located within the academic hierarchy" (Osei-Kofi et al., 2010, p. 334). Early on in our efforts, it became clear that focusing solely on group composition was not enough. To achieve a space for experimenting with ways to rearrange and transform academia as a system, we had to build a "container"—an opportunity structure for our collective work to grapple with power dynamics within the group.

To start the process of building our container, we established a set of community guiding principles (i.e., ground rules) that were intended to disrupt power hierarchies and encourage diverse perspectives. Applying a community mobilizing tactic adapted from *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown (2017), these guiding principles emphasized, among other things, a culture of learning, care for community and self, leading with good intentions and attending to impact, and engaging tensions while not indulging drama. The guiding principles centered on individual, interpersonal, and group processes that encouraged critical self-reflection and fun (e.g., we declared a collective love for snacks and naps). A key to boundary spanning is investing in relationships before tasks (Aungst et al., 2012). Our early time together included collaborative art projects, an exchange of affirmations, and regular round-robin check-ins (e.g., how are you practicing joy?). We checked in emotionally with each other during walk-and-talk meetings or sitting over coffee or tea. Taking time to attend to our container countered the typical sense of urgency to get to work and be productive, which can be pervasive in daily practices within higher education.

To disrupt the existing power dynamics, we coupled our community guiding principles with a decision-making model based on consensus building (Dressler, 2006). Consensus is neither compromise nor unanimity—it weaves together everyone's best ideas and key concerns with a commitment to finding solutions that everyone can actively support (Seeds for Change, 2013). In practice, adopting a consensus-building model meant that decision making began with discussion among all team members. From that discussion, proposals emerged, were modified, and finally voted on. The vote included options to *Agree* ("I'm all in"), *Agree with Concerns* ("I have some concerns that have already been discussed but still support the proposal"), *Stand Aside* ("I have reservations that have already been discussed that keep me from supporting the proposal but do not want to stand in the way"), *Block* ("I have significant concerns that have been shared, and I do not feel the proposal should move forward"; Seeds for Change, 2013). For some on our team, this process meant acknowledging and relinquishing power and authority defined by academic culture, titles, and degrees. For others, this meant holding new power and voice not typically accessible to them in an institutional setting.

Efforts to build creative spaces of collaboration through the negotiation of interests, meanings, and norms allow for the unveiling of various types of boundaries and related differences in interests (Collien, 2021). Our container provided a supportive space founded on trust that allowed for boundary-spanning engagement and innovation. The creativity necessary for boundary spanning does not easily mesh with the traditional structures and power dynamics often found within academic institutions (Aungst et al., 2012). With the use of a container, we experimented with alternative ways of being and working together within an academic system to test in a small form what we wanted to see on a larger scale in our institution, communities, and society.

Nurturing the Container as an Instrument for Critical Reflection and Trauma-Informed Assessment of Institutional Climate

In this section, we describe how the container can provide the infrastructure for a trauma-informed, asset-based assessment of institutional climate. Nurturing the container in this way builds capacity to navigate

tensions that emerge during the development of a collective definition of equity and belonging and a shared understanding of how racism and systems of oppression affect how our institution engages communities. Utilizing consensus-based decision-making, with a reliance on community guidelines, team members self-reflected and articulated what experiences informed either the inclination to break with traditional research practices with a history of extraction (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021) or the desire to shift away from a deficit-based lens.

Because most team members were trained primarily as researchers, our perspective was to develop an evidence-based action plan drawing on stories of oppression to transform our college. We had developed a sampling frame, initial categories of inquiry, and interview questions when several of us on the team who were students and faculty of color voiced concerns that a traditional research approach that extracts stories of oppression was inappropriate. Below, we describe our journey to collectively understand the need for an asset-based approach to this work as we integrated the various embodied knowledges from members of our guiding team.

Using the container as an instrument for critical reflection, we identified three primary concerns as well as a solution. First, we found ourselves wondering, although seeking evidence to legitimize action is a common practice in public health, was it our task to prove that racism and systemic oppression existed in academia? We heard the voices of many team members who had previously participated in surveys, interviews, and group discussions about their personal experiences with both racism and systemic oppression. Some expressed concern about the lack of action that resulted from previous climate surveys, underscoring that asking again would be "retraumatizing" and "taxing."

Second, we wrestled with the ways that traditional (e.g., deficit-focused) approaches to inquiry could threaten the trustworthiness of our data as well as harm participants. For example, because our college is housed in a predominantly White institution, with very few faculty of color, responses to direct questions about experiences with racism and oppression in the workplace could have been traced to individuals, increasing their vulnerability and risk. Creswell and Poth (2018) agreed:

> To study one's own workplace, for example, raises questions about whether good data can be collected when the act of data collection may introduce a power imbalance between the researcher and the individuals being studied . . . researchers can jeopardize their jobs if they report unfavorable data or if participants disclose private information that might negatively influence the organization or workplace. (p. 154)

Therefore, the initial sampling frame that focused on faculty and students of color and posed questions eliciting stories of oppression would not only increase the risk for those experiencing oppression but would also produce untrustworthy data. The container provided a brave space for guiding team members to voice concerns about the way climate assessments had been previously sampled and conducted.

Third, the primary focus on trauma would unintentionally corroborate deficit-based narratives of people of color, minoritized, and underserved communities (Jacob et al., 2021), whereas the opposite is revealed in their collective strength to navigate systemic oppression. Rather than taking the traditional approach that unduly increases identity strain (Brown et al., 2020; Fox Tree, & Vaid, 2022; Vargas et al., 2022) and cultural load (Jimenez et al., 2019) by asking people of color to recount their trauma, we chose to adopt appreciative inquiry: an asset-based approach that would start by highlighting the richness of people's contributions to advancing health equity and cultural pride.

Appreciative inquiry (*Introductory Guide to Appreciative Inquiry*, 2023) aims to *discover* "what gives life" to a system, *dream* about "what might be," *design* "what should be," and work toward a *destiny* of building "what can be." Through interviews (n = 30) and a Qualtrics survey (n = 100), we asked about meanings of, experiences with, and institutional factors that enable equity and belonging. Our asset-based questions are outlined in Table 1 and synthesized findings in Table 2. Apart from the synthesized information provided in Table 2, we do not include excerpts from those data because they were collected for internal purposes only and did

Table 1. Asset-Based Questions Focused on Equity and Belonging

Belonging	• What does belonging mean to you within the college? • Describe a moment when you felt like you belonged as a member of the college community.
Equity	• What does equity mean to you? • Describe a time when you felt equity mattered in the college. • What conditions or attributes made it possible for equity to matter in that instance? • How have you applied equity in your work in the college? • What contributions have you made to promote equity?
Closing	• Are there any future actions you would like to see from the college? • Is there anything else you would like to add?

Table 2. Meanings of Equity and Belonging in Our College

Equity	Belonging
Fairness and justice as central to all aspects of our work	Mattering; being seen and valued; having a voice; treated as a contributing member
Community partnerships based in reciprocity; systems that nurture relationships and collaboration	Being included in projects; invited to collaborate in scholarship and teaching; being offered professional development opportunities
Accessibility and affordability	Mentoring; finding a community of care, support system
Transparency and accountability	Mutual respect, finding shared humanity
Redressing historic and current harm, especially in relationship with Indigenous communities and communities of color	Holding space with people who share identities, lived experience, and/or goals; affinity groups
Self-determination; multiple ways of being and knowing	Joy, having fun together, laughter, humor

not require review by an institutional review board.

Through the survey and interviews, participants reported positive experiences—collaborative moments when they belonged and mattered and instances where equity was central to engagement—and voiced ideas for future actions. We also learned about tensions that left some feeling isolated and unseen. Using appreciative inquiry shifted power dynamics by taking a relational approach to open conversations and making space for participants to tell their stories in the way they chose. Our thematic analysis of the survey and interview responses then informed a set of provocative propositions, statements that "bridge the best of 'what is' with participants' intuition of 'what might be'" (Center for Appreciative Inquiry, 2024, para. 9; see also *Introductory Guide to Appreciative Inquiry*, 2023). These statements framed our plans for institutional transformation. This approach honored alternative ways of listening, learning, and knowing. This honoring was not possible without the reciprocal and caring relationships formed within the group and the use of the con-

tainer as a critically reflexive instrument to hold our boundary-spanning space.

Repairing a Ruptured Container to Achieve Authentic Growth

Because our conceptualization of the container necessarily includes members who span identity and organizational boundaries, the container is vulnerable to challenges associated with power imbalances. The sustainability of a well-nurtured container requires the anticipation of tension and conflict. Repairing a ruptured container involves incorporating processes that guide conflict resolution and attend to power imbalances inherent in academic hierarchies. In this section, we describe scenarios where strategies to repair a ruptured container were utilized. Using the container as a support allowed our group to address conflict, ultimately leading to authentic growth.

Although we intentionally created a community of care (Scully, 2021), challenges to the integrity of our container required us to work collaboratively to repair and refashion it. For example, in our second group retreat, the external consultant facilitating our discussion tasked us with an activity intended to identify partners in our college across a continuum of solidarity and allyship. The proposed activity for identifying collaborators in our college who may be more resistant to implementing new equity-based programs generated contention in our group and tested the integrity of our container. During this process, a White team member with institutional power perceived that the activity was not well articulated, causing them to feel uncomfortable engaging in the activity. Although the individual shared their discomfort with the consultant in a side conversation, the consultant continued with the activity. Power differentials that mapped onto the traditional academic hierarchy within our group revealed themselves when a person of color with less institutional power, who believed they were following the instructions given in the activity, was impacted by what they perceived as disapproval by the White individual with more institutional power and subsequently experienced a trauma response. The rupture of our container reverberated through the group, straining the sense of trust we had worked hard to develop.

In this case, negotiating a solution largely fell on the two team members who were involved in the conflict. In a situation when individuals have disproportionate power and privilege, more facilitation support from the outside consultant and other team members with institutional power would have better facilitated the healing process. Rebuilding required the individual with more power to understand and attend to the impact of their actions, and it required all of us to remember and reinforce the primary purpose of the group's work—to address inequitable power dynamics and institutional practices to transform academia.

The example above illustrates how unintentional fallout from hierarchy and inequitable power distribution must be considered in ongoing boundary-spanning interactions to avoid undermining the goals of the process. Boundary-spanning processes and boundary spanners themselves are entangled in societal power relations, with obstacles to learning and collaboration related to racism, classism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, and intersecting systems of oppression often remaining invisible (Collien, 2021).

Having team members whose boundaries spanned power hierarchies and elements of lived experience led us to ask, Who among us has the privilege of being comfortable while crossing boundaries for community-engaged work? For some team members who have experienced and embodied oppression within academia firsthand, further discussions about how to transform it felt "taxing" and somatically uncomfortable, yet a sense of urgency to change systemic problems drove them to continue engaging. The embodiment of discomfort was not optional for those with lived experiences of oppression and racism (Johnson, 2015). For others, the lack of lived experience with intersectional marginalization granted them the privilege of choosing when to engage in discomfort (Boovy & Osei-Kofi, 2022; Cabrera, 2017; Johnson, 2015). Looking back, as we sat together in that space during the retreat, we witnessed visible differences in the embodied experiences across our diverse team. Reflecting on those differences pushed us to lean into learning together about the importance of genuine, intentional allyship from members of the dominant group and to begin considering how to build those capacities.

The rupture and repair of the container was an experiment into how we can transform existing systems and dynamics and grow through them. As a group, we revisited and added to our community guiding prin-

ciples to grow stronger through experience. Within this moment of repair, the container as a microsystem illustrated what a more equitable system may look like. In future boundary-spanning work, it may be beneficial to craft structures and strategies to address conflict within the container from the beginning of the team-building process. Although boundaries are constantly negotiated in the context of politics and power (Collien, 2021), conflict does not need to be inherently deal-breaking. Using the container as a support to address conflict as it arises may allow us to institutionalize new ways of interacting, generating a capacity for equity-based boundary spanning.

Expanding Our Container and Broadening Our Engagement to Mobilize Buy-In for Cocreated, Transformative Action

Working within the container can facilitate the engagement of collaborators external to the container, the development of tactics for engagement, and the sustainability of partnerships with community organizations. In this section, we provide three examples of how our container facilitated buy-in: (1) utilizing tactics from popular education models to work across institutions, (2) intentionally expanding the container to include leadership from community-based organizations, and (3) utilizing the impact of the container to mobilize buy-in and interest to join a community centered on expanding boundaries.

Utilizing Tactics From Popular Education Models to Work Across Institutions

One way that organizational and tactical boundary spanning (Wang et al., 2018) can occur is by working across academic systems with DEIJ teams at different universities (i.e., container-to-container learning). Working across institutions allows learning about how others are navigating social and political contexts, as well as strategies they have used to engage and mobilize action with their networks. Because they are on a similar journey but have an outsider perspective, teams at peer institutions can provide valuable feedback on internal processes. The group dynamics that developed from our use of the container allowed us to more effectively work across academic systems and engage in peer learning.

Using Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1992), we experienced container-to-container learning and tactical boundary spanning, which allowed for new learnings and reflections through imaginative play and solidarity. Theatre of the Oppressed is a popular education method developed by Brazilian Augosto Boal in which communities develop scripts about collective problems, identifying their settings, key actors, conflict, and resolution. Boal wrote, "Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it" (p. xxxi). As practiced, Theatre of the Oppressed is performed before community members to present critical problems related to inclusion/exclusion in societal systems. The process includes performing the skits several times: (1) The skits are first performed as written; (2) then, the skit is performed a second time, and the audience is prompted that (a) any audience member may stop the performance at any time (by shouting "Freeze") and (b) the person who freezes the performance can propose an alternative to the scene as initially performed; the community member can provide verbal instructions to the actors, or the community member can "tap in" and join the performers to show the alternative as the skit progresses.

The situation our guiding team brought to the peer-learning workshop is described in "original scenario" in Table 3.

Theatre of the Oppressed allowed us to experiment with different ways of engaging our college leadership. This example highlights the utility of the container in two ways. First, by sharing with containers at peer institutions and using imaginative roleplay to develop strategy, we learned the importance of engaging the college leadership in solidarity as a full team, rather than continuing the top-down approach of relaying messages between college leadership and students as previously practiced. Second, having a container that included collaborators from various components of our academic system facilitated this type of engagement. The fact that we were such a diverse group of boundary spanners created accountability and transparency and made us stronger when presenting our ideas before the college leadership. Everyone—students, administrators, faculty, and extension specialists—having a seat at the table facilitated synchronous engagement among constituencies.

Table 3. Modifying Engagement Through Theatre of the Oppressed

Original scenario
Players: Two faculty members leading TAE, students calling for change, college leadership team (e.g., Dean/ Associate Deans)
1. Students remind the faculty members leading the TAE team that nothing has changed after they wrote letters demanding action in response to the murder of George Floyd and the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the students called for mandatory training of all faculty.
2. The two faculty members schedule a visit to the college leadership team *to relay* student concerns and demands.
3. In meeting with the two faculty members, college leadership asks questions about "evidence-based and high-quality trainings," but is unable to commit to requiring existing trainings for leadership. There is talk of forming a subcommittee to consider the request.
4. The TAE leaders report back to the students and face further frustration at the lack of action.
Scenario With Solidarity Driving Engagement
Players: Members of the TAE guiding team in solidarity, including students, faculty, administrators, college leadership team
1. College leadership team invites TAE leaders (who were the original two faculty members from original script) to present draft action plan during their regular ongoing meetings.
2. The two faculty members bring the situation to the whole TAE team (container) and to peer teams from other universities working through similar issues.
3. TAE team together decides that rather than having two members relay the message from the entire guiding team to the college leadership team, *the message is stronger when delivered together in solidarity*.
4. TAE team schedules meeting with the entire team, invites college leadership to attend with the entire team (container).

Intentionally Expanding Our Container to Include Leadership From a Community-Based Organization

Organizational boundary spanning can also be practiced when the container intentionally includes leadership from community-based organizations (CBOs) who work with minoritized and underserved communities. As a team, we hoped to chip away at the harm produced by centuries of racism, colonialism, and exploitation (Clinical and Translational Science Awards Consortium, 2011) to move toward the realization of our land-grant mission (i.e., a university for all communities in Oregon through education, research, and outreach). By including and compensating the executive director of Casa Latinos Unidos, a local CBO serving Latino/e communities, we practiced developing the type of equitable systems of engagement that is critical to our land-grant mission. Although guiding team membership was limited to one CBO leader, their inclusion intentionally reflected community partnerships as an important component of the container as a microsystem. Having a voice within that microsystem, the community partner shared in decision making, which was integral to building mutually beneficial relationships. We recognized that building relationships with each CBO that is engaged should be multifaceted and sustainable. Therefore, relationships should be deepened with each CBO that is engaged by the container to avoid developing shallow relationships that may become exploitative.

Expanding our container allowed for facilitating community-partner boundary-spanning roles in the university, cultivating a reciprocal relationship (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Specifically, the relationship with the CBO represented within our container extended beyond participation in TAE. We collaborated with them writing several grants and in service-learning programs that would inspire youth to transform society. For example, the Youth en Acción program, funded through a grant from the Oregon Health

Authority Youth Advisory Council, increased capacity among minoritized and underserved high school youth using youth participatory action research (YPAR) approaches such as photovoice. Through our partnership with this CBO, we have expanded our work with other external partners, such as the Oregon School-Based Health Alliance (OSBHA). The new partnership with the OSBHA led to bringing the "Joining Our Youth (JOY): School-Based Health Services Conference" to the OSU, which bridges academia with communities.

Utilizing the Impact of the Container to Mobilize Buy-In and Interest to Join a Community Centered on Expanding Boundaries

The container supports bidirectional boundary spanning, generating opportunities for conversation between those working within and outside the container. Two opportunities to expand the container arose as new collaborators were attracted by our impact, and as we became aware of the need for collaborators from across university campuses. First, a colleague reached into our container seeking feedback for a project to include DEIJ efforts in the promotion and tenure process. This faculty member lacked lived experience and confidence to serve as an ally, but held institutional power, sought support, and became a member of our team. The faculty member was positioned to advocate for improving the language in the faculty handbook on the inclusion of DEIJ work in promotion and tenure. Our container buoyed their role as an ally to advocate for stronger university DEI policies. Consequently, the container enabled us to form new impactful partnerships and cocreate resources that will support faculty engagement in DEIJ. Second, a colleague with expertise in developing a culture of belonging from the OSU–Cascades campus expressed interest in expanding engagement in their community partnerships and in distinct but proximal contexts.

In expanding the boundaries of the container by adding two new members, we confronted the challenge of integrating new members into a team that had already invested time to develop its culture, formed bonds, and grown together. Still, the container provided a framework to encourage mobilization and expansion, providing a set of guiding norms and processes that allowed for a feasible bar for entry while maintaining a high standard of conduct within the group. As the container shifts and expands in boundaries, the nature of the work evolves. The container keeps us centered, even as the team and its work change and evolve.

Conclusion

In summary, we reflect on the application of the container for intentional boundary spanning as a useful tool for DEIJ teams organizing in solidarity toward equity and justice. We conceptualized the container as a microsystem that reflected the components of the larger academic system. Drawing on the literature describing boundary spanning in social movements, Table 4 summarizes how our container provided an opportunity structure (Roberts, 2009) for boundary spanning along identity, organizational, and tactical axes (Wang et al., 2018). To hold the complexity of our diverse experiences, our team utilized a container to build community and develop strategies to achieve common goals. The container was a space to which we could belong, reflecting research that indicates the importance of groundedness for belonging (Mahar et al., 2013). The examples in this essay provide opportunities for professional growth and lessons learned about the intricacies of boundary spanning in practice. The tactical strategies presented were essential for boundary-spanning wellness, well-being, and career sustainability.

A container can be used to mobilize buy-in and expand boundaries to broaden engagement opportunities. The container facilitated an environment for equitable engagement through relationship building, experimentation, and cooperative action. A well-nurtured container provides a space to test new ways of being together. By disrupting existing hierarchies and power dynamics within the container and as we engaged beyond the container, we accounted for historical context and implemented trauma-informed approaches. Key strategies that began to redress the history of racism and systemic oppression that characterize how academia relates to surrounding communities included developing a meaningful relationship with a Latino/e-led CBO (e.g., including their executive director on our guiding team), collaborating with leaders in Cooperative Extension to develop an action plan, and engaging in peer-learning across academic institutions through popular education (e.g., Theater of the Oppressed). The container provided the context, processes, and practices that facilitated bridging in these relationships across organizational boundaries.

Table 4. Summary of Axes of Boundary Spanning Using Container Approach

Identity	Organizational	Tactical
• Diverse lived experiences; • Diverse sources of power; • Diverse roles; • Diverse spheres of influence across components of the academic system and community partners	• Extending reciprocal relationships with community-based organizations, campuses, and Cooperative Extension; • Learning across containers with DEIJ teams at peer universities	• Community guiding principles; • Trauma-informed assessment to develop shared definition of equity and belonging (appreciative inquiry); • Conflict resolution, reflection on power imbalance, and attending to harm; • Consensus-building model of decision-making; • Reciprocal relationships practiced within container (e.g., sharing joy, community of care); • Experimentation with new ways of being and doing (e.g., Theatre of the Oppressed)

To successfully use boundary spanning for equity requires that we intentionally acknowledge the history, mission, and location of the institution. To achieve the potential of the land-grant mission, including access to public education for all, applied community-engaged research, and public outreach and engagement, demands that we grapple with the contemporary impacts of a shared history of systemic oppression. This history creates the present-day conditions and exemplifies why boundary-spanning processes and boundary spanners are entangled in societal power relations (Collien, 2021). By continually acknowledging how this history is embedded in our relationships, power dynamics, and institutions, we can disrupt harmful hierarchies and exclusionary practices that limit diversity efforts, redress the injustice that is inextricably tied to our origins, and realize our land-grant mission.

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Fluid Practices of University–Community Engagement Boundary Spanners at a Land-Grant University

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Abstract

Research on higher education community engagement (HECE) rarely places university or institutional voices in conversation with the community partners' voices. Boundary-spanning frameworks such as Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) for universities and Adams's (2014) for community partners help boundary spanners, but such models draw boundaries between community and university spanners and the beneficiaries of their work. Contrary to a resource-based view of value creation, which posits that organizations with more resources create more value, beneficiary-centric views see the beneficiary as central to value creation (Lepak et al., 2007). In this essay we incorporate a beneficiary-centric lens into HECE boundary-spanning practices to advance a critical theory of value creation that considers for whom, for what, and to what effect beneficiaries may create value (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010). We advocate for an integrated framework that unites university and community partners and places the beneficiary at the center of all engagement efforts.

Keywords: community engagement, beneficiary voice, university boundary spanning, community boundary spanning, public engagement

Land-grant universities have historically led higher education community engagement, since land-grant institutions were "founded to serve the public through their education, research, and engagement work, [and] they provide life-changing education to students, advance society-shaping innovations, and engage communities to tackle our most stubborn challenges" (APLU, 2023, para. 1). Aligning academic research and teaching to tackle community challenges requires boundary spanners, understood here as individuals who can represent the university in the community and represent the community in the university (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). A wide array of practitioners, educators, advocates, and leaders identify as boundary spanners and must navigate the intersection of knowledge, practice, and community dynamics as they operate in a "third space" between academic and professional spheres (Whitchurch, 2013). Two authors of this essay identify as higher education community engagement boundary spanners, and two authors identify as community boundary spanners, and all four of us are deeply committed to our double lives where we seek to advance the civic mission of our land-grant university while advancing change in our community. Each author has written a portion of this essay individually to unpack our distinct relationships to our boundary-spanning practices.

Weerts and Sandmann (2010) outlined four types of higher education boundary spanners in their formative boundary-spanning framework—the community-based problem solver, the engagement champion, the technical expert, and the internal engagement advocate. Weerts and Sandmann acknowledged that these four types of spanners do not occupy blunt categories and may lean toward one direction or another;

however, their framework focuses only on academic boundary spanners. Recognizing this gap, Weerts and Sandmann called for further boundary-spanning research that is community-centric and examines how community partners build bridges to institutions. In response, Adams (2014) created a framework for community spanners in engaged partnerships, identifying four roles that community boundary spanners may fit into: the engaged employee, the reciprocity recipient, the community champion, and the connection champion.

Adams's (2014) model starts to illustrate the ways that community spanners contribute to boundary-spanning activities, responding to critiques that community-engaged scholarship has a disproportionate focus on the university partner. However, we argue that even when community-engaged scholarship does include community voices, community partners' perspectives are often not in conversation with university partners' perspectives. These existing boundary-spanning models represent university and community goals as divergent; the models fail to align community and university priorities within the same framework, even though in practice, university and community spanners must be in alignment in order to accomplish the shared goals of their mutually beneficial partnerships. We find potential alignment in the theoretical concept of the beneficiary. In this essay, we advocate for an integrated framework that merges the Adams (2014) and Weerts and Sandmann (2010) models, emphasizing the need for a beneficiary-centered, practice-based approach. In doing so, we propose reimagining the boundary-spanning framework, placing the community's benefits at the forefront of university partnerships.

Literature Review

In this literature review, we will briefly outline current work on boundary spanning in higher education community engagement (HECE) before expanding our scope to the concepts of organizational change and leadership. Emerging from fields of management studies in the 1970s, boundary spanning has been understood using an insider/outsider framework in which the primary goal has been to communicate internal priorities to an external audience. Boundary spanners may also serve as external representatives of their organization's mission, values, and priorities (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). Boundary-spanning practices have been described as functioning at both the organizational and individual levels, and those who practice them inhabit influential roles within their organizations (Friedman & Podolny, 1992; Williams, 2012). There have been several efforts to categorize boundary spanners in HECE based, in part, on individual competencies and motivations, including the seminal work by Weerts and Sandmann (2010), who distinguished boundary-spanning roles based on a community or university focus and leadership or practical task orientation, as well as more explicitly competency-based roles defined by Williams (2012) and profiles as described by Van Meerkerk and Edelenbos (2018). Historic and emergent scholarship on HECE competencies was synthesized by Purcell et al. (2020), providing a foundation for future work on engaged practices from the competency-based perspective.

The concept of the organization, as one of the two dominant contexts within which boundary spanning is discussed, has the potential to shift discussions of boundary spanning to allow for more fluid frameworks for boundary-spanning practices. Since early writings in organizational studies, scholars have recognized the organization as a space for praxis (Thompson, 1967). More recent work has continued to advance the question of how organizations maintain their competitive advantage through changing circumstances, referred to as the organization's "dynamic capability" (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2008). In this view, organizations serve as an agreement or relationship between publics, in line with what scholars in public relations call an organization–public relationship (OPR; Cheng, 2018). To view organizations in this manner is to commit to a social constructionist epistemology, where knowledge is coproduced through social relations, and through which the organization can be understood as a discursive formation between publics holding agreement. This framework for understanding the organization as discursively produced is also seen through a critical lens whereby the organization reflects power relations. To consider boundary-spanning practices in this way recognizes a more fluid set of relations constituting community organizations, organizations of higher education, and emergent organizational forms, formal and informal.

Similarly, theoretical developments in leadership studies have the potential to challenge competency-based paradigms of boundary-spanning roles and advance critical frameworks for boundary-spanning practices. The practice of boundary spanning has been understood as a function of leadership since early scholarship (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). Because it is a contextually dependent practice, theories of boundary spanning should also recognize work in the field of leadership studies, which has problematized entitive, competency-based models of leadership to advance relational models of leadership and models of leadership-as-practice (Carroll et al., 2008). Pertinent to the practice of boundary spanning in HECE, contemporary work on leadership also explores how specific entities or practices in organizations can best position an organization to adapt to changing conditions so that it may survive in the face of complex challenges, including wicked problems. The complexity leadership framework for organizational adaptability offers one perspective on how change emerges through complex adaptive systems (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018), which can be understood as networks of semiautonomous agents who interact in ways that produce systemwide patterns influencing future interactions through feedback loops (Dooley, 1997; Eoyang & Holladay, 2013; Lichtenstein, 2014). Individuals experience complex adaptive systems relationally. In line with much engagement literature, leadership scholars recognize systems of power and view knowledge as emerging from leaderful community practices rather than flowing unidirectionally from institutions of higher education to the community (Raelin, 2011). By considering leadership as practice, competency-based engagement paradigms can become practice-based paradigms from which knowledge emerges from within community settings (Carroll et al., 2008).

Although advancements in organizational and leadership studies have significant implications for boundary-spanning frameworks, the phenomenon of cross-sector collaborations reveals a theoretical gap that may be bridged by centering a particular public, the beneficiary, and the way their voice is represented in the organizational praxis. This development would have implications for leadership and organizational theory and practice for the development of mutually beneficial cross-sector collaborations, including HECE activities. To develop a concept of the beneficiary within HECE frameworks is to recognize a sense of value produced within and by HECE and recognize that stakeholders garner value from boundary-spanning activities, often in unequal and inequitable ways (Lepak et al., 2007). Beneficiaries are themselves valuable, contributing to the production of value by organizations, but are often ignored or underutilized (Coff, 1999). Contrary to the resource-based view of value creation, which posits that those organizations with more resources create more value, beneficiary-centric views see the beneficiary as central to value creation (Lepak et al., 2007). By incorporating a beneficiary-centric lens into HECE boundary-spanning practices, our work continues to advance a critical theory of value creation that considers for whom, for what, and to what effect beneficiaries may (or may not) create value (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010, p. 600). With a more developed concept of beneficiary voice in the field of organizational adaptability, scholars and practitioners may apply a critical leadership framework in the context of cross-sector collaborations, including boundary-spanning practices involving HECEs. In the next section, we share insights from our unique experiences bridging university and community domains, advocating for boundary-spanning models that prioritize beneficiaries' voices in order to build truly impactful and genuine campus–community relationships.

Incorporating Fluidity Within Boundary-Spanning Models

Prioritizing Beneficiaries in Our Community-Engaged Work

Beneficiaries of Veterinary Community Outreach

As a veterinarian and postdoctoral fellow at a land-grant institution, I, Ronald Orchard, have an ethical obligation to provide for my animal patients. However, I am ultimately working with a human to make decisions regarding diagnostics and treatment plans based on the role of the animal and the resources of the human. I am primarily a small animal veterinarian focusing on companion dogs and cats; however, colleagues of mine focus on animals for commercial or competition purposes. In any of these practice contexts, these animals are "central to the value creation" of the community engagement. Due to the limited, albeit still present, agency of these animals, it would

be inappropriate to refer to them as community partners or clients, but still they benefit from the partnership.

I have taken an oath "to use my knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through protection of animal health and welfare." Historically, this gave us the concept of One Health, a public health framework that saw the connection between healthy people, healthy animals, and healthy environments. The concept has now evolved to One Welfare, which works in concert with One Health. The emphasis for this new phrase was to increase inclusivity, because One Health was criticized for still being focused on humans. One Welfare also emphasizes positive affective states, not just a bare minimum of being healthy. The new triad is now animal welfare, human well-being, and environment conservation.

In practice, I provide essential health care services to animals and One Welfare transdisciplinary teams. A beneficiary of my work may be a practitioner of a different discipline who is able to have a breakthrough with a pet owner solely because of the trust I built and shared. A beneficiary may be the employer who hires one of my pet owners after receiving job placement assistance at our One Welfare event. A beneficiary may even be the local ecosystem that gains biodiversity from fewer free-roaming, unowned cats thanks to spay and neuter.

These types of spay/neuter programs can also be viewed through a public health lens. The cats that are seen by programs like this often receive treatment for intestinal parasites, which could be acquired by humans via fecal to oral transmission. Additionally, these cats are vaccinated against the rabies virus. The United States has seen greater success than other countries in controlling this disease in part due to programs where animals are vaccinated concurrently with spay or neuter.

Recognizing the reach of work like this does not just give us a more accurate understanding of our impact, but also allows us to foster new partnerships. When I am able to explain to human medical practitioners the big picture motivations for our work, like ecology and public health, it begins to open their minds to the potential for partnership. This practice orientation creates the conditions for a space to vision creatively. Moving from a competency-based analytical framework (Williams, 2012) focused on individuals' causality and performance to one where cause and effect are acknowledged as the product of a team allows us to more accurately describe the work (Carroll et al., 2008). Recognizing multiple beneficiaries allows me to build transdisciplinary partnerships more effectively than if I were to share a narrow view of my practice. This broader view then expands our options for funding opportunities. Many of the grants that I have received have been awarded because of the multidisciplinary focus of our work, which has sometimes made our work eligible for funding opportunities historically unavailable to us. By reframing our work's focus on these pluralistic beneficiaries, we can more accurately share the scope of our work, increasing the opportunities for our scholarship and society.

Beneficiaries of Social Work Partnerships

My story as a social worker and community partner starts with a simple invitation that was extended to me, Cassidy Moreau. In May 2022, I was approached by a friend to come speak to veterinary students taking a community outreach elective course that he taught. What came of that simple visit evolved into a beautiful partnership between me as a social worker and Dr. Orchard, a veterinarian. The original plan was simply to share my experiences of working with unhoused individuals to help veterinary students with limited experience working with disenfranchised populations—such as those in a lower socioeconomic class, those with substance use, as well as those living with severe and persistent mental health diagnoses—be better able to communicate and work with these populations. Many of these students had limited exposure to the populations described. The hope was that sharing my experience would give insight to students to see and hear a perspective they had not heard before.

However, when viewing the partnership between me and Dr. Orchard through a beneficiary-centric lens, it is clear that many groups benefit. Students gain essential knowledge and skills from my expertise as the social worker, which enables them to work effectively with populations they might not typically encounter. This experience not only impacts these communities positively by being served by compassionate, empathetic veterinary students, but also enriches the students' future professional practices, allowing them to influence even more communities. Additionally, the

communities that the students engage with benefit from their inclusive practices, by being seen and validated as clients worthy of access to care for their animals regardless of their circumstances, which helps them to reflect positively on the university's ability to provide practical, inclusive, real-world training. This partnership goes beyond a transactional relationship; it is mutually beneficial, with each interaction creating value for all involved.

Similar to the partnerships described by Le Ber and Branzei (2010), where value creation is significantly enhanced by involving beneficiaries, our collaboration ensures that both students and the communities they serve are actively engaged in the process, leading to more meaningful and impactful outcomes (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010).

Beneficiaries of Community Writing Partnerships

I, Ania Payne, first began incorporating community-engaged projects into a course that I teach, Workplace Writing, after realizing that such a course could not adequately prepare students to write for a workplace without an experiential learning component. Courses in technical writing—especially at a land-grant institution—have always been a good match for service-learning partnerships due to the practical nature of the course. For technical writing students, "not even the best-written case study or end-of-textbook-chapter-exercise can duplicate the rhetorical complexity that comes from a real human reader trying to solve a problem using a real document" (McEachern, 2001, p. 211). Like McEachern, I initially viewed my students as the beneficiaries of this collaboration, envisioning that the experience of writing and editing documents for these animal shelters, food pantries, wellness coalitions, and community housing developers would provide them with a more valuable experience than they would ever get out of a traditional course.

The first semester of these collaborations functioned on a clientlike model, and the students acted as consultants to their nonprofit partners. The nonprofit clients set a few parameters for the projects, but the students were largely self-directed and presented their final deliverable to their clients at the end of the semester. Afterward, I asked the nonprofit partners to evaluate the students' projects and learned that some of the clients found the students' work valuable, particularly if their organization had flexible guidelines for their written documents. However, many clients mentioned that they were happy to have the experience of mentoring and working with students, but were ultimately unable to use the students' projects because these documents had formatting inconsistencies or did not accurately represent the organization's work, mission, or brand. The students, however, seemed less concerned about their project's usefulness to the organization, and were mostly satisfied if they received a decent grade and got new experiences from working with their nonprofit partners.

Noticing how much time and energy our nonprofit partners were investing in the students, often without getting a usable document in return, I redesigned the project with the nonprofit's staff and community recipients centered as the beneficiaries. Instead of collaborating with four nonprofits a semester, I cut the partnership down and focused on one organization, Habitat for Humanity of the Northern Flint Hills. After several meetings with Habitat's development manager, we arrived at a project that would actually add capacity to the organization: having the students interview and write profile articles about the Habitat homeowners, staff, and board members, rather than having students create more brochures that just filled their dusty filing cabinets. Reenvisioning the project to place the interviewee—the Habitat homeowner, board member, or staff member—as the project's beneficiary, ensured that the community partner played a significant role as a cocreator and coeditor in this newest iteration of the project.

Refocusing the project to place the community partner at the center, rather than the student, resulted in more articles that Habitat could actually share on their social media platforms, and this reframing did not detract from student learning at all. In fact, in final reflections, students recounted how writing this closely with their community partners raised their project's stakes significantly, since they knew that their interviewee would be reading and editing each draft of their article. When the community partner is located solely as an ancillary component to an engagement model, the partnership may replicate what Arnstein (2019) called "consultation" on the ladder of citizen participation, wherein powerholders "restrict the input of citizens' ideas" (p. 28). Unfortunately, many

of my early community partnerships placed my partners on the consultation rung of Arnstein's ladder, since my students and I controlled much of the direction of these early projects. But by refocusing the project on the community beneficiary and involving Habitat staff, board members, and homeowners as active participants who cowrote their profile articles *with* my students, my community partner's level of engagement moved to the top of Arnstein's ladder, toward "citizen control," since the community shared ownership in writing and editing their narratives. In the end, Habitat staff received articles that accurately portrayed their homeowners', board members', and staff members' voices, and the students learned valuable lessons in collaborative community writing.

Connecting Beyond Boundaries: Building Genuine Campus–Community Relationships

Cultivating Trust and Creating Enduring Relationships

As a veterinarian and a postdoctoral fellow at a land-grant institution, I, Ronald Orchard, focus on creating the curriculum and pedagogy for a clinical course called Community Outreach. In this course, senior veterinary students practice veterinary medicine in nontraditional environments, working with populations historically excluded from the benefits of a veterinarian–client–patient relationship. In order to accomplish this mission, this course exclusively works with community partners. We currently have agreements with over 40 partner organizations spanning four states.

My role as boundary spanner in veterinary community outreach extends beyond the immediate benefits of animal health care. In Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) model my role would be categorized as a "technical expert," performing technical-practical tasks with an institutional focus. However, I will argue that assigning this category is an oversimplification; I am both institutionally and community focused, but my focus may tend more toward the community. I recognize the importance of cultivating trust and the need to build enduring relationships with the communities I serve. Whether I am working with a community deeply rooted in agricultural traditions or one shaped by urban complexities, the ability to adapt my approach to align with the specific needs and cultural nuances of each setting is paramount.

In order to build trust, I must understand the layers of beneficiaries my work touches. One example is our work with the Santee Sioux Nation. With their reservation abutting the Nebraska–South Dakota border, it is nearly 70 miles to the nearest veterinarian. We were recruited to work with the tribe thanks to the hard work of one tribe member who works in environmental health. Building trust with this community partner meant aiding in grant applications through writing and data sharing. It also required a willingness to speak with the elders of the tribe to receive approval.

The first two times we came to work with the tribe, the participation was lower than expected. We received many visitors, answered many questions, but did not see as many tribe members as the environmental health officer knew were seeking services. By the third visit something changed and we were busier than ever. The data we collected at that visit showed us three important themes toward building trust with this community: among the community, the power of word of mouth; for us, the importance of follow-through and consistency. A tribe member with a positive experience tells another and transfers some amount of trust for us. Trust is essential for the enduring relationships required for lasting, substantial change at the heart of community-engaged scholarship (Henisz, 2017; Ninan et al., 2024). Trust can be seen as the ultimate manifestation of power (Lukes, 2005; Ninan et al., 2024). By saying we will do something, like return a pet to its owner after spay surgery, we developed loyalty. Showing up at consistent, predictable intervals indicated to the tribe members that this was not a "one and done, feel good event" for us, but we were committed to their community. Understanding and utilizing the power of these beneficiaries is crucial to fully realizing the potential of our work (Coff, 1999; Le Ber & Branzei, 2010).

Even when just looking at this single community partner organization, we can see how a framework with a taxonomy and codification for beneficiaries aids in trust building. In my work, developing this trust is not merely a by-product of my veterinary skills; it is a testament to a commitment to understanding and respecting the cultural intricacies that shape the perspectives and decisions of the individuals I interact with.

Listening to Beneficiary Voices

As the executive director for a Habitat for Humanity affiliate working in Northeastern Kansas, I, Joshua Brewer, am a community housing developer and, in that capacity, organize for social change that empowers low-income residents of my community. Habitat for Humanity International is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) best known for its integrated home construction and mortgage finance operations. Habitat for Humanity affiliate organizations are governed by a local board of directors and perform construction, repair, and mortgage operations in compliance with Habitat for Humanity International policies. I serve as the executive director of an intermediate-sized affiliate in northeast Kansas in a region home to Kansas State University, a historic land-grant institution, and Fort Riley, a large U.S. Army base. In my capacity, I identify as a boundary spanner, responsible for creating and stewarding partnerships, including several partnerships with educational institutions. In my role, I am focused on a clear mission that all of my neighbors have a decent place to live, which guides my decisions. In our most significant boundary-spanning community development efforts—Front Porch Conversations and the Workforce Solar Housing Partnership—we partner with faculty members committed to engagement practices that are mutually beneficial and reciprocal. In both cross-sector collaborations, we seek to empower the beneficiary of our work through pragmatic processes of voice making (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010).

Front Porch Conversations is a neighborhood-level series that operationalizes the Habitat for Humanity Quality of Life Index for Neighborhood Revitalization. This conversation series was the result of a consultation with a Habitat board member who works as a faculty member at Kansas State University. Together, we reviewed the objectives of Neighborhood Revitalization and developed a document called the Front Porch Development Procedure to define roles in the conversations and to ensure that neighbors' voices were appropriately represented. This document functioned as both a mode of development and a mode of inquiry using asset-based community development and participatory action research approaches (Brewer & Kliewer, 2023). The Front Porch Conversation Series engages neighbors to surface community assets so that our agency can join with partner agencies to advance community development alongside or by the neighbors themselves. Our team at Habitat for Humanity of the Northern Flint Hills has also partnered with faculty member Ania Payne from the Kansas State University English Department to incorporate community writing into the Front Porch Conversations, which will be published using an ArcGIS StoryMap.

In each case, the beneficiaries of our work—neighbors and skilled trades students—are at the center of our collaboration with educational partners. Each beneficiary has a voice in the process and shapes the outcomes by their actions. For example, in the Workforce Solar Housing Partnership, students design and construct the homes. Students also address affordability in ways that are important to them, which privileges their values over those of the university or the nonprofit organization within which I work. By centering this particular beneficiary, we have developed homes that are more energy efficient, more durable, and more attractive for community members who will purchase these homes. Similarly, when we engage neighbors in a Front Porch Conversation, our facilitation model centers the neighbor and the gifts, dreams, and concerns that those neighbors may hold. For example, when we pursued a community redevelopment project in a small community, we chose to begin our work by purchasing and demolishing a derelict property across from an elementary school because the neighbors identified that school as the most significant asset in their community and housing as their primary concern. Had we centered our organization as the primary beneficiary or the university as a beneficiary, we would have chosen differently.

These examples speak to a tension that I find between my experience working as a boundary spanner and the Framework for Community Boundary Spanners in Engaged Partnerships (Adams, 2014). In both cases, our nonprofit practitioners worked in coalition with neighbors, university faculty, and students while centering a community-based beneficiary in one case and a student beneficiary in the other. As a community-based boundary spanner and a practitioner of asset-based community development, I see our work as being focused on particular groups who realize value through our partnership, rather than being community *or* university focused. Although those groups may be affiliated with university or com-

munity groups, a model that accounts for beneficiaries and their voice would better reflect how I see my boundary-spanning partnerships.

Incorporating Fluidity Within the Boundary-Spanning Models

Evolving the "Technical Expert"

As a veterinarian, I, Ronald Orchard, am deeply committed to delivering vital health care services to animals in need. Situating back within Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) boundary-spanning literature, I most comfortably operate within the technical expert and community-based problem solver roles. In doing so, I become a bridge between the academic knowledge accrued during my veterinary training and the real-world challenges faced by communities and the partner organizations striving to help. These partners possess attributes described within the Weerts and Sandmann model, and in my experience they have done more to build external political support, or provided more site-based problem support, than those whose jobs assign them such roles at certain institutions. Our communities and the work should be the "bounds" of this scholarship. Admittedly, this model is useful for academics to study academia, which is why, of the four roles described, a community partner does not neatly fit into any. The discourse within this scholarship has evolved to the point where editors of journals focused on this work yearn for the voices of community partners. We need contemporary models adept at describing the nuanced, and not so nuanced, roles these collaborators play.

My sense, as someone working as hard as possible to reify the commitments of a land-grant institution, is that Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) scholarship reflects a bygone era. Hoffman (2016) argued that two forces, social media and demographic shift of scholars, have brought about a sea change. On the one hand, social media has opened the discourse to include historically excluded perspectives, for better and for worse; on the other, the demographic shift has ushered in scholars with a focus on seeking more impact from their work rather than checking the boxes required for tenure and promotion.

Adapting to this twofold change does not mean giving up entirely on Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) model, but it does mean shifting its focus to practitioners and the beneficiaries of their work. "Scholars suffer from an equal inability—or at times even an unwillingness—to span boundaries and translate their work for those who can most benefit; those who will take it and make it real: practitioners" (Hoffman, 2004, p. 213). Although this quote does not convey the reciprocity in knowledge-sharing, it is crucial to community-engaged scholarship. As Wowk et al. (2017) recommended, we need "institutional frameworks that offer more detailed guidance on engaging in complex issues, deepening collaboration with researchers outside of an institute" (p. 4). In the context of their work, "outside" means community partners and beneficiaries.

One recommendation I have for modifying Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) model is to evolve the role of technical expert. For one, as the framework stands, it implies a knowledge dynamic that is incongruous with our tenets as community engagement professionals. We believe that the community also creates knowledge, even technical knowledge, worthy of study and dissemination. Just within my work, the community partner veterinarians have all shown me acceptable alternative diagnostic and therapeutic strategies. My interdisciplinary partners, such as social workers, have given me frameworks for explaining phenomena I see in practice but lacked the language to accurately analyze. My grassroots partners have taught me more about community organizing than any structured course. My Indigenous partners have allowed me to embrace other ways of knowing within my scholarship. As an accomplished technical expert, I give permission to disavow the notion that to be a technical expert is to be "without the strongest social integration skills." On the contrary, my social skills are the attribute that has allowed me to become the effective technical expert and practitioner that I am. The term "technical expert" can be retired and either moved under community-based problem solver or given an updated view of engaged "knowledge creation." As Hoffmann (2016) discussed, if academics are permitted the disciplinary tunnel vision that was the context for Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) "technical expert," "irrelevant" work with limited to no practical applications is developed.

Empowering the Community Partner

After bringing me, Cassidy Moreau, on as a community partner to serve as a social worker for students, faculty, and patients

of the institution's community veterinary services, Dr. Orchard proposed growing the student experience to empower them to develop more skills, including effective communication and basic trauma-informed approaches to care. Eventually, I began to help build a new curriculum that would empower and educate students to work with marginalized populations. Drawing from my social work expertise, I incorporated social work frameworks and person-centered approaches into the curriculum, offering students unique opportunities to learn different methods of working with marginalized individuals. This interdisciplinary approach was a novel addition to the veterinary medicine curriculum at Dr. Orchard's institution.

We adapted my role as a community partner to contribute directly to the university's efforts. Instead of focusing solely on students partnering with community organizations to serve broader community needs, we invited community partners into the university to enhance its capabilities. This shift challenges the model of Weerts and Sandmann (2010), which primarily views the university as a boundary spanner giving to the community, overlooking the reciprocal potential for community partners to significantly contribute to the university itself.

Reflecting on Adams's (2014) model of community engagement roles, it is evident that community partners may find themselves fitting within this framework, as it emphasizes the dynamic roles individuals play in fostering community connections and leadership. However, the model still has gaps. For instance, my role involves providing leadership, strategic direction, and trust-building, aligning with the "community champion." I help veterinary students understand and engage with disenfranchised populations, developing their skills and empathy. Simultaneously, I foster meaningful interactions and relationships between the students and the community, ensuring a reciprocal and impactful partnership, which aligns with the "connection companion." Recognizing the potential for partners to occupy multiple roles simultaneously and adapting these boundary-spanning frameworks to reflect this complexity would enhance these models' applicability to community partners, while also capturing the reciprocal nature of community–university partnerships.

Aligning Knowledge Creation With Community Goals

After 7 years of including nonprofit partnerships in the Workplace Writing course that I, Ania Payne, teach, it has become evident that community-based learning partnerships will only waste a community partner's time if the assignments being taught do not align with the community partner's goals. Planning a community-based learning project with a nonprofit partner early on, before the semester begins, has been the best way to ensure that my community writing projects will actually meet our beneficiary's goals. However, planning a community-based learning project without incorporating insights and feedback from my community partner into the planning process resulted in projects that aligned with our textbook's learning objectives, but failed to meet our community beneficiary's practical needs.

As Purcell et al. (2020) argued, "The current global climate and societal context indicate a significant need for faculty who are adept at collaborative, applied research that addresses the pressing challenges of the 21st century" (p. 2). This applied research—and teaching—can be truly collaborative and applicable to all intended beneficiaries only if those beneficiaries' voices are included and centered in the "technical expert's" planning process. A boundary-spanning model that orients the technical expert—especially in the context of faculty who teach community-based learning projects—in an opposing quadrant from the "community focused" axis, may unintentionally communicate that a technical expert's goals are simply disciplinary-focused, not community focused. However, aligning the technical expert with the "community focused" axis could imply that these boundary-spanning faculty situate their curricular goals within community goals to ensure mutually beneficial and reciprocal engagements that are built upon full community partner participation (Arnstein, 2019).

Embedding Practice in Leadership

As an executive director of a Habitat for Humanity affiliate and a practitioner of asset-based community development, I, Joshua Brewer, see knowledge as emerging from community practices. Every day our build sites host community volunteers, students, and future homeowners who hope to learn how to build a home, but our organization also learns a considerable amount

in the process, as do our university partners. In 2021, while forming our Workforce Solar Housing Partnership between agencies, each educational entity came to the work site to help build a new model for housing in our region. As summer break approached, we realized that to ensure full participation from our university architecture and technical college students, we would need to build our house in 2 weeks—a feat for any professional construction firm, much less our coalition of students, professors, and nonprofit professionals. When we launched the build week, students stayed close to their classmates and teachers to their area of expertise, but soon I watched as the groups began to mix and teachers began learning from one another and from students enrolled in different programs. As the house was built, we all began to realize that each group held some of the knowledge required to build a new home, but it took collaboration for knowledge to emerge from our collective activities. This memorable experience shaped how I understand leadership, as a phenomenon that is relational, emergent, and found in everyday activities or practices that shift the expected course of action.

Contrary to my experience as a boundary spanner, the Framework for Community Boundary Spanners in Engaged Partnerships (Adams, 2014) presents a clear division between technical or practical tasks and leadership tasks. Instead, I believe that leadership is embedded in the practices that shape group activities. These activities exist in complex adaptive systems where actions shape relationships, which affect the organization in new and unexpected ways. In my work, the actions that I and my partners take together create new ways of understanding housing issues that disproportionately benefit the low-income residents of our community through our homeownership programming. These collaborations also benefit the students from skilled trades programs who have access to experiential and applied learning experiences. Centering the beneficiary group in each of these partnerships would cast light on how boundary-spanning activities or practices function as leadership themselves, thereby shifting the outcomes expected by a community.

Going forward, I welcome new frameworks for boundary-spanning practices that center the beneficiary and follow organizational studies' turn toward applying principles of practice in leadership (Carroll et al., 2008). I hope to see these frameworks attend to power in ways that reflect how change efforts emerge, adapt, and are implemented to the benefit of some beneficiary groups over others, and would expect to see some explanations of how networked relationships bridge and bond through the process of emergence. I support advancing from a competency-based model of boundary spanning to one more in line with concepts of leadership, which may be relational, collectivist, networked, and/or leadership as practice. Finally, I hope that future frameworks can move beyond the false divide between university and community actors with the centering of the beneficiary of collaborative efforts. In my university partnerships, I do not see a divide between my priorities and those of my partners. We are working together to ensure that everyone has a decent place to live.

Conclusion

Addressing the wicked problems that plague our world requires the fluid practices of boundary-spanning scholars and practitioners. A technical expert alone cannot solve these problems; instead, we need socially cultured academics *and* an intellectually curious public. Weerts and Sandmann (2010) are due acknowledgment and praise for providing a model and language to start this conversation. Additionally, Adams's (2014) community boundary-spanning model begins to address the missing perspectives of community partners in community-engaged scholarship. However, like all theoretical frameworks with social constructionist commitments, these models can evolve as HECE scholarship evolves. A framework that unites university and community partners and places the beneficiary at the center of all engagement efforts can remind each partner *why* we are doing this important work.

Organizational literature presents boundary spanning as a fluid leadership practice. It is the type of leadership best suited for the complex adaptive systems where lasting change must occur to address these wicked problems. Evolving from competency-based engagement paradigms to practice-based paradigms addresses gaps in the current literature. By focusing on collaborative practices, rather than competencies, we can remain anchored on the beneficiaries

who make our community-engaged work possible.

As seen in these reflections, we view the beneficiaries of our work as changing with each circumstance—they may be pet owners, unhoused neighbors, students, nonprofit organizations, municipal governments, or even ecosystems and the various species they support. Without an understanding of the beneficiary of each practice, our work struggles, and without placing the beneficiary at the center of our commitments, our work's impact is weakened. We offer three recommendations to expand boundary-spanning models:

- Center the concept of the beneficiary voice within boundary-spanner literature.
- Consider the impact of relational, collectivist, and practice-based forms of leadership, rather than competency-based models.
- Embrace fluidity within the model by evolving roles like the "technical expert."

Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) and Adams's (2014) boundary-spanning models provide a helpful starting point for how academic and community partners can locate their roles within axes that are institutionally or community focused, but as HECE scholarship evolves to emphasize collaborative outputs, and the boundaries between academia and the community continue to blur, academic and community partners will search for models where their unique contributions to our societal challenges are united. Once a more consolidated model is developed, scholars, students, community partners, and all beneficiaries will make the most of it to impact this complex world.

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Community-Engaged Scholars' Boundary-Spanning Roles and Intersected Identities: Korean Dual Language Bilingual Education Program in a Public Elementary School

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Abstract

Neoliberal ideology and an overemphasis on generating quick results dehumanizes higher education community engagement by overlooking the multiple roles and identities of boundary spanners, individuals engaged in community-based scholarship. If university–community partnerships are to prosper and be sustained, their human aspect deserves more attention. We contribute to the literature by framing this research project as the collective stories of our research team, nine community-engaged scholars who have established a partnership with a public elementary school's Korean–English Dual Language Bilingual Education program in the U.S. Southeast for the last 3 years. By drawing on pertinent literature about boundary spanners in higher education community engagement, we construct our narratives around how our fluid identities as females, immigrants, multilinguals, mothers, and professors have intersected with our boundary-spanning roles. Our nuanced stories provide insights and lessons to other boundary spanners in different partnership contexts.

Keywords: boundary spanning, Korean, bilingual education, elementary school, humanizing partnership

Driven by a belief in bilingual education within the public school system for students of immigrant origin, Jayoung (the first author) had attempted to be involved in the Korean Dual Language Bilingual Education (KDLBE) program at a large public elementary school in the U.S. Southeast since its inception in 2019. Initially, the school of approximately 800 students introduced two kindergarten KDLBE classes, where students were immersed in math and science classes in Korean, and other subjects were taught in English. Each school day is split between Korean and English instruction, accommodating students from both Korean heritage and nonheritage backgrounds. The program aimed to expand by adding two classes at a new grade level annually, with fourth grade marking the highest grade offered at the time of this writing. Aligned with the school district's other elementary schools that host a DLBE program in other languages, Peace Elementary School (pseudonym) also integrated a Korean specials class into its curriculum, ensuring that all students, irrespective of their enrollment in the KDLBE program, learn about Korean culture once a week.

What particularly drew Jayoung's attention was the program's inception, which stemmed from a response to the needs of the local Korean community within a wider school community. With a desire to contribute to the program's growth, Jayoung

persistently sought access to the school and ultimately gained entry when she proposed the school and its KDLBE program as the focus of a research study with college- and university-level research seed grants. Since 2021, nine of us who are faculty members across five different universities and three different regions have collectively been building a relationship with our school partners by (a) assisting in small-group instruction, (b) conducting individual interviews of multiple stakeholders (i.e., teachers, students, parents, and administrators), (c) building bilingual instructional materials for STEM in second and third grades, (d) solidifying the curricula in the KDLBE program and Korean specials class, and (e) implementing two virtual, global exchange projects with an elementary school in South Korea funded by two small external grants.

Boundary Spanners in Higher Education Community Engagement

Our essay is positioned within the large literature concerning boundary spanners in higher education community engagement. Boundary spanners, also known as boundary brokers, are individuals who traverse boundaries and facilitate connections between groups (Farrell et al., 2022; Neal et al., 2021; Wegemer & Renick, 2021). Considering boundaries as sociocultural differences between practices leading to "discontinuity in actions" or interactions (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 133), boundary spanners enter unfamiliar domains; forge relationships across communities and partners; and connect people, resources, and ideas.

In the realm of higher education community engagement, boundary spanners make institutional boundaries penetrable, bridge the gap between theory and practice, and create dialogue spaces among diverse partners (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016; Farrell et al., 2022; Green, 2023; Green et al., 2021; Janke, 2019; Jusinski, 2021; Miller, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2010; Wang & Wong, 2017, 2019). Boundary spanners, who may be (pre- and in-service) teachers, graduate students, teacher educators, university researchers, or school leaders/administrators in varied educational contexts (e.g., Ikpeze et al., 2012; Freire & Alemán, 2021; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013; Waitoller et al., 2016), cross boundaries to interact, negotiate, and collaborate with others as well as acquire new knowledge (Wang & Wong, 2017, 2019, 2023). Scholars such as Janke (2019) and Dostilio and Perry (2017) conceptualized scholar-administrators as hybrid professionals with diverse responsibilities, whereas Ravitch (2014) and Salipante and Aram (2003) emphasized practitioner-scholarship in integrating theory and practice. These insights underscore the pivotal role of scholar-administrators as critical agents of practice, adept at navigating the intersection of theory and real-world application.

Boundary spanners within universities navigate tensions, contradictions, and other issues to sustain successful school–university partnerships, particularly in contexts where competing or conflicting ideologies emerge (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Perceiving boundaries as a source of tension yet also as transformative learning opportunities, boundary spanners need to adapt their roles and practices to suit the specific context and needs of the partnership, addressing power imbalances and fostering a more democratic approach to leadership and learning opportunities (Wang & Wong, 2019).

Boundary spanning inevitably requires reflexivity (Fear et al., 2001) and continual examination of partnership dynamics to cultivate more inclusive educational experiences (Waitoller et al., 2016). Moreover, it facilitates knowledge transformation and enhances overall educational practices (Wang & Wong, 2019). For instance, Ikpeze et al. (2012) conducted a self-study to reflect on their collaborative research group, which investigated a professional development school partnership. The researchers consistently negotiated to mediate ideological and pedagogical differences between their teacher education courses and preservice teachers' field experiences. Similarly, Dallmer (2004) explored the concepts of equality and parity in school–university partnerships through a narrative inquiry approach. In her discussion, she addressed her conflicting roles as both an insider and an outsider in these collaborations, highlighting the challenges she faced as a graduate student, faculty member, and administrator. Dallmer's study raised questions about the disparities between schools and universities and the complexities of cross-institutional roles. Her collaborative relationships were demanding, difficult, and required a lot of patience. Her study highlighted that achieving equity and collaboration in all aspects of such partnerships can be challenging and may not always be realistic. The stud-

ies by Ikpeze et al. and Dallmer exemplify how acts of boundary spanning deepen our understanding of the intricate intersections of positionalities within school–university partnerships across diverse education contexts.

Despite advancements in higher education community engagement literature, a significant gap persists in understanding how individuals with multidimensional and intersected identities collaborate to transform teaching and learning in diverse school–university partnerships (Hernandez & Pasquesi, 2017). Therefore, we envision our reflective essay as providing a practical and contextual backdrop to this literature, taking a step toward humanizing community engagement activities amid the era of accountability and neoliberalism (O'Brien et al., 2022). By sharing our collective stories, which lend faces and voices to abstract concepts and illustrate real-world scenarios, we aim to encourage educators to critically engage with and explore the complexities of school–university partnerships.

Overview of Our Reflective Essay

In this reflective essay, we share the collective stories of our research team members, who serve as boundary spanners (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010), deeply engaged in this community- and school-based scholarship. We constructed our narratives around the intersection of our fluid subjectivities as females, immigrants, multilinguals, mothers, and professors with our boundary-spanning roles (Crenshaw, 1991). Centering our own identities, experiences, and reflections in this collaboration through reflexivity (Fear et al., 2001) feels appropriate for our first potential publication, as it humanizes the school–university partnerships we continue to foster (Cheuk & Morales-Doyle, 2022; Macias et al., 2021; Reyes et al., 2021). If university–community partnerships are to thrive and endure, prioritizing the human aspect is imperative, given that the complex roles of boundary spanners and their multifaceted identities are foundational to any partnership.

Our nine individual stories are woven throughout this reflective essay. Utilizing an online shared document (Google Docs), each team member responded to prompts regarding our experiences in this collaboration. These prompts covered topics such as our motivation for initiating the collaboration, what has been effective or ineffective, lessons learned, and our vision for future partnerships. Following the documentation of responses, we held several online meetings to delve into our thoughts and emotions. These meetings were enlightening, revealing the impact of our differing subjectivities on our shared professional identity and commitments as community engagement professionals (Dostilio & Perry, 2017). We have structured our composite narrative on four themes: (1) our motivations and emotions as advocates for educational justice and diversity, (2) our boundary-crossing roles as engagement facilitators, (3) our boundary-crossing roles as community-based problem solvers and technical experts, and (4) navigating conflicting roles and responsibilities. Concluding the essay, we encapsulate lessons learned for fellow boundary spanners engaged in university and school partnerships.

Our Collective Stories as Boundary Spanners

All of us as faculty in universities span boundaries by building bridges in multiple spaces, between the K-5 school community, universities, and different stakeholders in the K-5 community. Doing so, we have found ourselves facilitating engagement, crossing boundaries as community-based problem solvers and technical experts, and navigating conflicting roles and responsibilities. In performing each of these roles, which are fluid and overlapping, we have experienced various emotions, such as joy, pride, discomfort, uncertainty, and envy. Here, we bring all our lived experiences as mothers, former classroom teachers, professors, immigrants, multilinguals, and community members to this partnership and collaboration space.

Our Motives, Our Emotions, and Advocating for Educational Justice and Diversity

For too long, the language and practices in the school have not been aligned with those of our students' homes and communities, a discrepancy that has been linked to problems with educational outcomes and students' well-being (García & Li, 2014; Heath, 1983). We contributed to addressing this problem by partnering with the KDLBE program, which demanded considerable attention. Each member of our team, particularly those with Korean heritage, harbored a profound sense of pride for and commit-

ment to this important work in our local school community. Immersing ourselves in the KDLBE classroom, where the Korean language was used to learn content knowledge and conduct class routines, evoked a sense of liberation, empowerment, and surrealism. Witnessing children and educators utilizing Korean, a minoritized language distinct from English, for the instruction of mathematics and science (rather than solely language-focused lessons) within a U.S. public elementary school (rather than in a peripheral weekend community language school) was an impactful experience. Having lived in the United States for 10–20 years, many of us could never have imagined that public elementary schools would be teaching Korean to their students. The unique aspect of this program, originally established to support the educational needs of the local Korean community rather than a broader demographic, further imbued our advocacy for multilingual education with profound meaning and purpose. Beyond affirming students' linguistic identities, this program also fostered the validation of their cultural identities within the school context. While participating in cultural enhancement activities during major Korean holidays at the school, we witnessed the non-Korean administrators dressed in Hanbok (Korean traditional dress) warmly greeting students and parents in the morning carpool line. We appreciated their efforts and welcoming attitude.

As members of this collaborative partnership, we seized the opportunity to translate advocacy endeavors into tangible outcomes, transcending mere written support through publications for multilingual learners. For example, our team members shared cultural aspects of the holidays during morning announcements and activities throughout the day, strengthening our ongoing relationship and commitment. Thus, one prominent boundary-spanning role that we have played is advocating for educational justice, particularly for transnational students, and promoting linguistic and cultural diversity for all. This shared interest and passion is our foundation and a catalyst for our partnership and collaboration.

However, we often feel a pang when we think of so many other children with Korean heritage in the United States who have not had this inclusive and identity-affirming educational experience to this day—a missed opportunity for all. As parents raising bi- and multilingual children, with Korean as a heritage language, most of us also feel envious of the students in the program. Those of us with older children wished that a program like this existed when our children were younger, and some with young children even considered moving to this school district to enroll them. Such a program would support our efforts to emphasize the importance of our children's Korean heritage, and the children themselves would feel prouder of their heritage language and culture. Our feelings led some of us to proactively engage with our children's school administrators, advocating for more substantive measures to affirm the linguistic and cultural identities of students with immigrant backgrounds. Regrettably, we have yet to witness tangible changes within our children's schools, even those located a mere 10 miles from the progressive KDLBE program. Our own children's identities in public schools continue to be silenced and ignored.

Our experiences gave us greater appreciation for the imperative of upholding educational justice and recognizing and respecting the diverse linguistic backgrounds of all students within the educational landscape. Collaboratively and intentionally, we directed our efforts toward "more equitable learning environments as social justice teacher educators" (Leonard et al., 2021, p. 23). Although we welcomed the linguistic and cultural validation of Korean heritage students in the program and school, we found ourselves contemplating the situation of students who we identified as speaking other heritage languages, such as Mandarin and Arabic. We were concerned that the dominance of Korean, along with English, would further minoritize other languages that those children bring to this space. DLBE programs are intended to center multilingualism, rather than English, in the curriculum. However, we have felt that there is not much room for celebrating linguistic and cultural diversity in this KDLBE program. This worry is particularly resonant for one of our members, who strongly advocates for this issue, as her own children are heritage speakers of a language even more minoritized than Korean within their home environment (Choi, 2022a, 2022b). Additionally, two of us felt more sensitive to the way this dominance of Korean silenced linguistic identities of other non-Korean heritage students, given another research study they conducted where children from immigrant

families living in South Korea are not given the opportunity to grow as bilinguals (Lew & Choi, 2022, 2023).

As advocates for educational justice and diversity, we believe that this collaborative effort aligns seamlessly with our mission as minority university faculty to make distinctive contributions to the community, providing tangible and substantive resources and support to students, teachers, and the school at large. Engaging in this endeavor with a profound sense of fulfillment and pride, we have contributed to the maintenance of heritage languages and cultures within the United States. As female minority faculty members in a U.S. higher education system that is not inherently linguistically inclusive, we acutely understand the significance and impact of authentically representing minority languages and cultures within public sectors. With this understanding, we play a pivotal role in advancing educational justice and promoting diversity in the academic landscape.

Crossing Our Boundaries

As Engagement Facilitators

As advocates for educational justice and diversity, one of our crucial roles in traversing boundaries was that of engagement facilitators, forging connections and fostering relationships with various stakeholders. Several of us are former K-12 classroom teachers, as well as currently being Korean language instructors and teacher educators at the university level, so we deeply empathized with the Korean teachers. Spending more time with the teachers at the school and through individual interviews, we started recognizing the immense dedication, investment, and internal pressure that they faced in validating the success of the program. We also empathized with their pride and confidence that their position as regular faculty members teaching content areas in Korean is irreplaceable, that their unique contribution forms the core of the KDLBE program, and that the full repertoire of their abilities is essential. Furthermore, as Koreans, we could also understand why they work so hard and feel pressured to make this new program thrive. We not only appreciated the external pressures these educators faced for the program's survival but also acknowledged their internal identification with the program, compelling them to strive tirelessly. We took the position of *knowledge broker teachers* (Jusinski, 2021) since we engaged in relationships through open communication, negotiation, and empathy. This approach helped us see the needs and challenges through their eyes while reinforcing our approachability or reliability.

Regarding the responsibility to teach, we deeply understood the teachers' frustration with the underresourced curriculum and the lack of knowledge about the KDLBE program throughout both the school and the district. Therefore, we decided to address the systemic disparities that contributed to such challenges. We presented these issues and challenges as scholars through conferences, while simultaneously offering immediate assistance in areas of urgency, such as curriculum development or course material creation. Leveraging our scholarly and past experiences, we approached with expertise, always respecting the authority of the teachers and fostering close collaboration.

However, our concern goes beyond the technical aspects of education. We also appreciate the crucial role of representation, inclusiveness, and cultural understanding within the context of the KDLBE program. We as advocates, and also as mothers of immigrant children, formed personal connections with parents and students, particularly those from Korean heritage backgrounds. Moreover, we acknowledge that a diverse research team, including members from different cultural backgrounds like Türkiye, contributes to a more inclusive educational environment. Our Turkish team member witnessed one KDLBE student's pride and happiness when the student approached her to introduce herself, emphasizing that she was also from Europe. This small anecdote gives a rich insight, a sample of how understanding the cultural nuances within the program, as well as racial and cultural diversity in our research team, can create empowering connections and validate students' identities even in the program's Korean- and English-dominated context. These connections we have made with students serve as a foundation for our advocacy for educational justice and diversity.

As Community-Based Problem Solvers and Technical Experts

In order to break down the traditional boundaries between the university and the school, we actively engaged in bridging the gap between our university and the K-5 school. In particular, we embraced a dual role as community-based problem

solvers and technical experts, facilitating the implementation of a wide range of educational practices. According to Weerts and Sandmann (2010), these two roles are typically categorized separately. Problem solvers maintain closer social ties with community partners; technical experts are often university researchers with specialized field expertise who may lack social closeness. We challenged this distinction by assuming both roles simultaneously. We assisted our K–5 partners in solving practical problems while fostering deeper connections with them and providing technical expertise as university researchers. One primary request addressed by both school administrators and teachers at the beginning of our partnership was assistance in developing differentiated reading, math, and science teaching materials in Korean. Initially, we utilized our institutional and external grants to purchase instructional resources and Korean books to build classroom libraries. The administrative and logistical aspects of building these libraries proved to be cumbersome and time-consuming for classroom teachers. Therefore, our research team intervened to mitigate barriers in purchasing materials and enhancing the libraries within the school. Furthermore, district leaders invited us to participate in a teachers' retreat aimed at developing assessment rubrics for students' reading abilities in Korean. Leveraging our expertise in utilizing well-developed and detailed language proficiency levels from the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) field, we applied this knowledge to the Korean reading context to support the teachers effectively.

The teachers were also spending a significant amount of time developing instructional materials, especially as a new grade is added to the program every year. To alleviate this burden, we actively participated in the development of curriculum units, specifically contributing to a second-grade science unit about the moon and a third-grade habitats unit. In both units, we created assessments, bilingual vocabulary lists, and instructional materials, including read-aloud videos in Korean based on available English stories. Additionally, we introduced an instructional innovation in the third-grade unit by acting as brokers of educational experiences. As one of our global exchange projects, we facilitated the virtual exchange of completed videos and digital books about local habitats between students in our program and fifth graders in a South Korean elementary school. In this externally funded project, we guided students in brainstorming ideas about local animals and plants, empowering them to research and write bilingually for their creation of digital books. We used this experience to break down traditional educational boundaries by incorporating technology and cross-cultural exchanges.

Another need identified by the teachers was the widening gap in Korean language proficiency between Korean heritage and nonheritage students. Students who lacked exposure to Korean at home or in the community, particularly over the summer break, faced challenges due to limited language use and resources. Their low proficiency level in Korean resulted in the possibility that some students would withdraw from the KDLBE program, where half of the subjects are taught almost exclusively in Korean. We even observed some students losing motivation to learn Korean and subjects taught in Korean. Recognizing this critical issue, both the teachers and the research team felt an urgent need to address it to maintain program stability and prevent attrition.

During one academic year, several of us made weekly visits to a second-grade classroom to provide Korean language instruction to a small group of students. As former and current Korean language professors in universities, we were positioned as experts in Korean language education by the teacher. The students and parents also seemed to accept us as linguistic figures, relying on our inputs as native speakers and experts in language education. In our role as boundary spanners, we ensured transparency and care by sending bilingual letters to parents requesting consent with detailed information, emphasizing our academic specialty and the benefit for the children. Later, we learned from the teacher that our presence and assistance as university professors with language and literacy expertise, particularly with struggling students, helped change the minds of parents who were considering withdrawing their children from the program due to lower proficiency in Korean. This anecdote illustrates that our presence at the school to support the program and the teachers was impactful since it increased our credibility. We served as a bridge between the language needs of the students and parents in the program and the educational goals of the curriculum.

In addition to assisting teachers in the

KDLBE classes, we also played a crucial role in curriculum development and implementation in the Korean specials class, which aims to teach Korean culture to all students at the school. Through interviews with parents and frequent school visits, we discovered that this unique specials class, newly added by the district at the start of the KDLBE program, was largely unnoticed within the school community. To better publicize this resource, we created a website to showcase the class curriculum. Conversations with the former and current Korean specials teachers also highlighted the need to develop two units: one on the Korean alphabet, and another on critical perspectives and identities for better cultural understanding. Collaborating closely with the teachers, we codeveloped and cotaught the identities unit with the teacher. Additionally, funded by the same grant, we facilitated a virtual exchange where students shared stories about who they are and what their school is like with peers who also created vlogs about their identities as part of the global exchange project with the partner South Korean elementary school.

Despite the usual distinction between technical experts and community-based problem solvers, it was through technical expertise that we were able to address identified needs and challenges while maintaining close ties with our partner. Specifically, we acted as knowledge translators (Jusinski, 2021; Wang & Wong, 2017, 2019) to support curriculum development and to create bilingual materials that could enhance students' understanding of abstract science vocabulary and content. Similarly, our language expertise gave us credibility with parents whose students were struggling, so our support served to stabilize program participation. The exchange project with the South Korean elementary school, which offered an unparalleled form of enrichment, would have been beyond teachers building a new program or administrators who do not speak the language. Thus, by bridging fields, such as TESOL, bilingual education, and foreign language education, as well as connecting the university and K-12 schools within and beyond national boundaries, we facilitated meaningful cross-cultural exchange and learning opportunities for students. Our multifaceted roles as boundary spanners demonstrated a more integrated and collaborative model than the traditional form of collaboration in which community closeness is separate from technical expertise.

Navigating Conflicting Roles and Responsibilities

We navigated the dual roles of community problem solvers and technical experts, endeavoring to fulfill institutional duties while meeting the expectations of the community and our research goals. However, we experienced the need to balance time commitments between university responsibilities, motherhood, and community engagement, leading to feelings of exhaustion and internal conflict. Time constraints on our community-engaged scholarship posed challenges, defying our initial expectations that we would visit the classroom every week and "hang out" there. The reality of our full-time faculty positions, necessitating carved-out quiet time for research, publications, and grants, alongside our role as mothers, made spending time at the school both rewarding and draining. We always felt we should be spending more time building the relationship with the K-5 school.

We are accustomed to the discourse of enumerating and naming our "accomplishments" in a way that could easily and mistakenly place us, university faculty, as experts and service providers while situating our school partners chiefly as persons from whom we procure data (Clifford, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2022; Silbert, 2019; Trent & Lim, 2010). We have many times been asked by funders and our universities to report our outcomes this way, although this methodology goes contrary to the foundation of higher education community engagement. Our progress with our partners has enabled us to present our work at several conferences. However, we have not had a single publication nor a large-scale external grant till now, in our third year of partnerships. Because we have been taking the time to build our relationships with our school partners and among ourselves, as university researchers, we have not produced enough according to the pervasive neoliberal narratives in higher education (O'Brien et al., 2022).

Securing funds and resources for the projects was among our responsibilities to our school partners. As a result, we often felt concerned that we would be perceived as contributors only when we brought external grants. As O'Brien et al. (2022) acknowledged, tensions arise between the desire to sustain relationships and the practical need for funding, creating a complex dynamic in the partnership. The grant-funded projects,

facilitating virtual exchanges between the KDLBE program in the United States and an elementary school in South Korea, enhanced the purpose and motivation of science learning, meeting the criteria of "no harmful results" as defined by our IRB. However, we sometimes felt worried, conflicted, and uncomfortable about imposing an additional burden on students and teachers with these projects.

As university researchers, we faced pressure to fulfill our institutional duties by completing the project within expected time frames and generating results quickly. Receipt of internal and external grants was an additional source of pressure to produce outcomes for the partnership and research. Further, we felt that the funding from these grants served as our primary justification for our presence in the school. Without ongoing grant-supported projects initiated by our research team, sustaining the relationship with the school would have been challenging. However, bringing grants to the partnership also meant demanding more work from our partners, such as interviews and additional projects in their classes.

We also acknowledge that there were moments of dissonance with various stakeholders. At times, we felt frustrated as the responsibility for initiating and sustaining projects with the school and teachers typically fell on the research team. Maintaining this partnership demanded considerable time and energy, with much of the relationship-building effort resting on our shoulders. Additionally, we felt that our expertise was sometimes overlooked, particularly in providing Korean language support for struggling language learners. Admittedly, the DLBE programs in the elementary school context are a brand-new area for us, one in which we lack specific expertise. Our knowledge in TESOL, bilingual, foreign language, and literacy education needed to be more localized to this particular context to yield more fruitful results in our partnership.

Similarly, we sometimes felt that our scholarly, critical-stance-based knowledge regarding DLBE programs was not fully utilized in our partnership. We believe that DLBE programs, which have been sprouting up in the state, offer an innovative solution to address the English-only ideologies and practices that have been a disservice to immigrant students. However, we are also aware of the political nature of the term "Dual Language Immersion," which can disguise and undermine bilingual education originally intended to serve immigrant-origin students in the local community. The larger DLBE literature has made us aware of such issues as DLBE programs primarily serving White middle-class students, language policies that force the separation of languages (Delavan et al., 2021), and recruitment of non-Asian-heritage teachers as the English side of the DLBE program (Flores & García, 2017). Therefore, we grappled with the desire and need for teachers and administrators to maintain a balance of Korean and non-Korean students so the program would not skew toward more Korean heritage students as it matures. On the one hand, we struggled to raise critical awareness among multiple stakeholders and enact our critical stance toward DLBE programs in their everyday reality. On the other hand, the partnership's focus on practical aspects, such as curriculum building and language instruction, made it challenging to fully engage in critical discourse. We have navigated between moments of dissonance with stakeholders and a sense of fulfillment in collectively investing in making the program work.

Lessons Learned

Our partnerships presented both challenges and opportunities as we engaged in research and education projects. Our experiences mirrored those of boundary brokers in other partnerships, characterized by intersected identities, collaborative efforts, and the establishment of trusting relationships (Dallmer, 2004; Miller, 2008; Wang & Wong, 2019). The narratives of our partnership highlight valuable lessons and insights with recommendations for systemic, structural changes. In this discussion, we emphasize two overarching lessons that we learned, which may benefit other community-engaged scholars: (a) the importance of familiarity with higher education community engagement literature and (b) that humanizing partnerships is essential.

Familiarity With Higher Education Community Engagement Literature

We learned the importance of familiarizing our research team with higher education community engagement literature and partnership models. Although we possessed expertise in our respective disciplines, we lacked prior knowledge about engagement scholarship in higher education. For in-

stance, we were unaware of the distinction between engagement and service or outreach (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). From the start, we were certain that we were not merely service providers or data extractors from our partners (O'Brien et al., 2022). However, we did not realize that our approach aligned more with engagement, differing from service or outreach, as both our research team and our school partners aimed to address mutually identified needs by generating knowledge.

If we had entered the partnership with this foundational knowledge, we could have provided a clearer answer to a question that some teachers raised. They often inquired about our presence in their school and our purposes. We typically stated that we were there to assist; however, we struggled to articulate that, as advocates for educational justice and diversity, we shared the same goals as our partners: to enhance the KDLBE program's effectiveness and success, address the socioeducational issues associated with monolingual education in the United States, and foster program stability and student progress. Although we recognized these questions as genuine inquiries rather than doubts about our intentions and roles in the partnership, they occasionally made us feel undervalued and not appreciated. If we had embarked on this project with knowledge about this larger literature, encountering these questions from our school partners could have been a great opportunity to "demystif[y] research among community partners" (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010, p. 643) and to talk about our shared goals of promoting the program's stability, reducing dropout rates, and enabling students to progress smoothly to the next grade.

In addition, a prior understanding of higher education community engagement would have enhanced our preparation for the time, energy, and emotional commitment required in healthy, longitudinal partnerships. We did not fathom how long it takes to build a relationship and trust with school partners. Having been familiar only with short-term classroom-based research studies, we did not have a model for longitudinal engagement spanning more than 3 years involving so many researchers. We are still left with questions like how to sustain this long-term partnership and how to pace partnerships to avoid exhausting ourselves.

Furthermore, we have also learned that we should do a better job of recording the histories of our collaboration and partnership. Over the years, we have seen key personnel changing in our partnering school. For example, teachers and administrators with whom we closely worked relocated to other spaces, threatening the preservation of our partnership history. Instructional materials that we have codeveloped and purchased, as well as the class website, can easily be forgotten. As a result, we felt the burden of having to restate the purposes of our presence and reestablish our relationships. Knowing the literature and being familiar with other partnership models would help us better cement our partnership histories.

We agree with Day et al. (2021) that partnerships can lead to positive changes in the consideration of our partnership roles as educators and the overall educational environment. Knowing the larger literature about long-term partnerships would have informed us that as the partnership matures our roles evolve, and that we need to be ready to adapt and grow too. At the beginning of our partnership, we focused on building classroom libraries, codeveloping materials, and providing small-group language instruction. However, as the program has become more stabilized and established, we realize that its needs have changed. We also recognize that we have reached a critical turning point for reflecting on our directions and paths.

Humanizing Partnerships as Essential

Every higher education community engagement endeavor must be centralized around humanizing partnerships. We have invested time in building relationships with different stakeholders by frequently visiting the school and conducting individual interviews. Specifically, our team listened to and learned about the various experiences and needs of the teachers, parents, and administrators instead of assuming authority or overstepping boundaries (Wegemer & Renick, 2021). We empathize with the stakeholders' challenges, frustrations, and unique experiences. This understanding enables us to build trust and rapport within the educational community and to remain grounded when encountering challenges and conflicts. We have sought to establish relationships "built upon an infrastructure of trust, communication, listening, empathy, negotiation, diplomacy, and conflict resolution" (Williams, 2011, p. 29). Therefore, we emphasize the importance of centralizing higher education community engagement efforts around hu-

manizing partnerships. Building relationships, conducting interviews, and empathizing with the experiences and needs of stakeholders must contribute to trust and rapport within our educational communities.

Furthermore, we learned that recognizing the complexities of our personal and professional roles, especially when multiple identities intersect, was crucial for effectively managing our partnership and addressing issues within the community. We now understand that various emotions, challenges, and tensions are inevitable when crossing boundaries. In partnerships, power struggles manifest through diverse cultures, norms, and expectations (Dumlao & Janke, 2012). We need to develop a nuanced understanding of these complexities and distribute power equitably among partners, which involves "teachers' ability to become knowledge brokers by shapeshifting into different personas and engaging in brokering processes to build and share knowledge" (Jusinski, 2021, p. 189). Our commitment lies in advocating for a fair distribution of power among partners. By embracing the role of knowledge brokers as we engage in processes to construct knowledge, we aim to advance our understanding and application of successful and equitable partnership management.

It is imperative to address existing tensions through candid and open dialogue. In our capacity as boundary spanners, we have adeptly acknowledged and navigated the multifaceted challenges, encompassing power imbalances and the nuanced intersection of personal and professional identities. Ensuring that every team member possesses a voice and the potential to assume leadership roles, irrespective of their academic position, is a fundamental commitment. To foster a conducive environment, we advocate for the facilitation of regular meetings and constructive discussions within the research team and between researchers and practitioners. Our stance aligns with the perspective put forth by Waitoller and Kozleski (2013), wherein inclusive education necessitates sustained endeavors toward equitable opportunities, the acknowledgment of differences, and the empowerment of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.

Recognizing the power imbalances within our research team, with some members in tenure-track research positions and others in teaching roles, we advocate for a more democratic approach in which each team member is content with their roles and contributions to make this partnership sustainable and successful. Moreover, as we have many members, we were able to secure enough participants to consistently assist with the partner school's needs and requests, even when institutional duties placed time restrictions on some individuals. We believe that it is important to act with resilience and adaptability to achieve our ultimate goals in the partnership.

In conclusion, our journey in higher education community engagement has unveiled valuable lessons that resonate with the broader context of collaborative scholarship. As boundary brokers, we came to recognize the significance of familiarizing ourselves with higher education community engagement literature, shedding light on the need for a comprehensive understanding of partnership models and communication frameworks. The importance of humanizing partnerships emerged as a central theme, emphasizing the value of building relationships, conducting interviews, and empathizing with the diverse experiences and needs of stakeholders.

As we embark on future endeavors, we invite reflection on these lessons, urging stakeholders to consider the transformative potential of nuanced understandings, empathetic partnerships, and the continual pursuit of equitable collaboration in the landscape of higher education community engagement. We also recommend systemic and structural changes within higher education institutions, such as creating clear guidelines and manuals for higher education community engagement endeavors and reducing institutional workload of faculty and staff who take additional time to build scholarship with the community.

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It Takes a Village to Raise a Science Communicator

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Abstract

Using the metaphor of a medieval village, I share and reflect on my story as a PhD student, holder of an underrepresented identity in STEM, and next-generation boundary spanner in science communication. I am a science communicator to faith-based communities—a neglected and often contentious space in science communication. Through 6 years of graduate education, my metaphorical village helped me to discover and refine my "impact identity," the fusion of my outreach with my scholarship that enables me to advance into the next stage of my career with community engagement as one of my strongest assets. Beyond my personal story, I reflect on what a "village" can look like for other boundary spanners. My village concept can help students, universities, and others in higher education navigate the development of next-generation boundary spanners in science communication.

Keywords: science communication, graduate student development, faith-based communities, underrepresented students, boundary spanning

Our world is undergoing massive challenges that can bring societies together or split them apart. In the face of climate change, polarizing perspectives have emerged as some communities emphasize the urgency of collective action while others resist due to conflicting interests or skepticism (Falkenberg et al., 2022). Facing environmental injustice, marginalized communities have had to bear the disproportionate burden of ecological crises while affluent communities remain relatively less affected, exacerbating existing disparities and deepening social inequalities across various scales (Faist, 2018; Folke et al., 2021). As nations unite on sustainable development (UN General Assembly, 2015), conflicting priorities among societies reveal tensions in balancing socioeconomic progress with ecological responsibilities (Díaz et al., 2019; Menton et al., 2020). And as new technologies develop at incredible speeds, some members of the public are encouraged and empowered while others are at risk (Leach et al., 2010). While these and other such delicate tensions arise, barriers between the academy and society are becoming noticeably and intentionally thinner, reflecting efforts to assist, inform, and develop trust in finding solutions for our shared future. Specifically, sharing one's personal identity has the power to shift perceptions and ease tensions in important conflicts (Chu et al., 2021; Scheitle & Ecklund, 2017). Thus, to span new boundaries in outreach and engagement, the next generation of science communicators must dare to get personal.

I am a PhD student, an ecologist, a woman of color, and a Christian. Starting my PhD during a time of social injustice, environmental injustice, climate change, a global biodiversity crisis, and a global pandemic, I witnessed the "perfect storm" for the world to also experience a crisis of faith. In response, I emerged as a science communicator to Christian communities. However, this emergence was not easy. Faith-based communities are strongly linked to polarization on public health and environmental issues (Corcoran et al., 2021; Lowe et al., 2022; Perry, 2022; Rutjens et al., 2022). They are also among the top neglected spaces in science communication, alongside communities of color and the LGBTQ+ community (O'Malley et al., 2021; Wilkinson, 2021). Long-standing controversies and public debates over science and faith have built distrust and strong societal barriers between these two spaces (Curry, 2009; de

Felipe & Jeeves, 2017; O'Brien & Noy, 2015). Additionally, the stigmatization of religion within scientific and academic settings has led some 40% of religious graduate students in the sciences to conceal their faith as they struggle with balancing their scientific and religious identities at school (Scheitle & Dabbs, 2021). Given these tensions within both broader society and the academy, I recognize that my ability to share my faith as both a student and an emerging public figure in science is a rare privilege (Scheitle, 2023, 2024). I am also aware of the inherent challenges this endeavor holds for my career (Edwards, 2015). As I dare to harness my faith-based identity to reach out to underserved communities that are not the "norm" for others in my field, my professional development journey as a science communicator has required more than the university as my source of support. Considering my community and borrowing from a famous African proverb, I realize that "it took a village" to raise me into a science communicator.

In an era of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, universities have the potential to host a variety of boundary spanners who will become crucial for our changing world. Boundary spanners are bridge builders between institutions and external communities who engage in unique behaviors as they play important roles in translating and integrating diverse perspectives, building and maintaining trust, facilitating communication and understanding, and creating a shared vision toward mutual goals (Peterman et al., 2021; Sandmann et al., 2014; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Here, I share and reflect on my personal experience as a next-generation boundary spanner and graduate student. I use the metaphor of a village to identify the many actors and components both within and beyond the university that contributed to my development as a science communicator in an atypical space, focusing on the medieval version of a village due to its centering around an ideology instead of an academic institution. I share how this medieval village concept can apply to other boundary spanners in science communication and potentially other areas of outreach and engagement.

A Science Communicator's Village

A medieval village is a suitable metaphor for my (and hopefully others') experiences as a next-generation boundary spanner in science communication for three main reasons. First, it decentralizes my main institution (the university) and invites another group or institution to become a central place of identity, belonging, value, and understanding. In medieval times, this central place was the cathedral or church, which had an overarching, structured influence on local communities (Slater & Rosser, 1998). Second, the hierarchical structure of medieval societies allows me to summarize and characterize multiple people, groups, resources, and organizations into understandable roles. My metaphorical medieval village consists of two institutions and 10 types of actors that have been integral to my development as a next-generation boundary spanner in science communication. In this village, I position myself as a fellow villager. I am a student or apprentice, and thus of low status. Seeing myself as a fellow villager allows me to acknowledge the hierarchical structures around me (the metaphorical parents, elders, institutions, etc.) while putting myself in a position of humility and resourcefulness, since given my current career stage I do not have access to the same privileges (finances, tools, personnel) as higher level academics, established science communicators, or other professionals. Lastly, roles within medieval villages have widely recognized names and are universally relatable, as they permeate fantasy literature, movies, games, and popular culture (Cook, 2019; Tolmie, 2006; Young, 2015). It is my hope that contextualizing my story in such a way can help others to easily associate my descriptions with their own experiences or development needs. Table 1 summarizes these roles, with examples and questions for personal reflection.

The Village Cathedral

At the center of a typical medieval village square is a cathedral or a church. It is a village's most important building, representing a foundational ideology that shapes the village community (Slater & Rosser, 1998) and serves as a self-governing body that liaises between lords and other authorities to maintain harmony (Dyer, 1994). For a science communicator, the cathedral represents a central place where community members gather to affirm their shared values. It can be an organization or group with a common cause or shared identity that is part of one's platform as a science communicator. A cathedral can help develop, hold, and maintain a science communicator's foundation as they

Table 1. Medieval Village Roles That Serve as Metaphors, With Examples and Reflection Questions

Village role	Examples	Questions for personal reflection
Cathedral		
A central place where members of the boundary spanner's community gather to affirm their shared values or identity.	Church; nonprofit organization; company	What are your core values? How do your core values intersect with your scholarship? Which groups or organizations outside your institution best represent and uphold these values? Do they have a mission or core values statement that you can adopt?
School		
The institution where science communicators are trained, conduct research, teach, publish, and fulfill other scholarly activities.	University; school; educational program	What programs, workshops, or courses at your institution are accessible to you that would be helpful for your training and development as a science communicator?
Parents		
Mentors for personal growth and development who support the science communicator in areas beyond values, mission, alliances, and scholarship, since those may shift over time.	High school teacher; neighbor; family member; community elder	Who has been alongside your personal journey as you have pursued your goals and profession and redefined your values, mission, and vocation? Have you taken time to express gratitude for them? Would it be helpful for you to reconnect?
Elders		
Well-experienced, earlier generation of science communicators who hold a close overlap with the emerging science communicator's calling and mission.	YouTubers; public scientists; government officials; TV hosts	Which science communicators do you follow on social media? What kinds of posts go viral? How do they publicly handle adversity? How do they answer difficult, or even controversial questions? Have you met those closest to your own mission and values? If you could meet them, what advice would you seek?
Kin		
Peer-level sources for encouragement and vulnerability, helping to ensure the longevity and sustainability of the science communicator's mission.	Friends; lab members; fellow students; fellow researchers	Do you share your outreach and engagement endeavors with your close friends? Do you have someone with whom you can share your good, bad, or confusing experiences in confidence?
Children		
Others with less experience who are inspired by the science communicator and seek formal/informal mentorship and connection in a shared value or scholarship.	Undergraduate students; audience attendees	Have you had the opportunity to serve younger generations? In what ways? When privately mentoring, have you tried generalizing stories and experiences, as a way to practice sharing public versions of your stories with larger audiences?
Guards		
People or groups to consult when evaluating and redefining professional boundaries and the extent of one's reach as a science communicator.	Outreach and engagement office; personal counselor	When invited to participate in a new activity, how much does that activity intersect with your core values and mission as a science communicator? How much time would you need to commit to that activity? If not relevant or no time, who else's voice could you amplify by suggesting them instead?

Table continued on next page

Table 1. Continued

Village role	Examples	Questions for personal reflection
Tradespeople		
Experts who are not always present in the science communicator's journey but are available to help solve complex, topic-related problems or provide new resources (e.g., skills, technology, or materials).	Theologians; climatologists; organizational leaders; subject professors; peers; journalists; librarians	Who have you met at professional conferences or outreach events that can watch a practice talk or read a draft blog for you? Who can comment on your practice responses for an upcoming interview? What kinds of material resources can enhance your science communication skills and reach? What does your school offer? What does your village cathedral offer?
Wealthy patrons		
A means of financial support that is specifically targeted for a science communicator's outreach and engagement activities.	Scholarship programs; grants; broader impacts statement and budget; community partners	How much do your science communication activities financially cost you personally? If you are a student, is there support through your lab, department, or student government?
Town crier		
Someone who calls special attention to the science communicator's engagement activities, scholarly work, and professional achievements.	Communications director; social media influencers; email discussion lists	Who shares your news? Who helps to celebrate you in the midst of your work? Which social media groups follow you that you can privately message and ask to repost or highlight your posts?
Jester		
A person or group that holds opposing or challenging views about the science communicator's outreach endeavors; can be a "critical friend."	Skeptic; audience member; YouTuber; critical friend	How do you react to criticism about the things that matter most to you? How do you react to criticism about your central message as a science communicator? Are you familiar with the arguments? Do you have someone with whom you can safely discuss opposing perspectives?
Mayor		
An overseer of the science communicator's activities, who makes sure that scholarly guidelines, principles, expectations, and priorities are upheld.	Advisor; boss; supervisor	What are the general conditions that cause you to fall behind in your scholarship? In what ways can you create a healthy balance between your outreach and scholarship to ensure that you achieve the primary goals of your main institution (i.e., your village school)?

Note. These roles serve as metaphors for the various types of communities, organizations, and levels of support within and beyond the university that are helpful for an emerging science communicator's development—especially one who is also a boundary spanner. Some examples and questions are added to help reflect on the relevance of these roles beyond my own personal story.

engage the public, whether in relation to the cause they endorse (e.g., climate action, social justice) or in relation to an identity they hold (e.g., Latinx in STEM). A cathedral can also become the central hub for a broader network, serving as a launching pad or broker for opportunities by facilitating connections.

As a science communicator to Christian communities, my foundation is the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA; https://network.asa3.org). Established as a professional society in 1941, the ASA is the world's longest standing international network of Christians in the sciences. ASA members range from scientists to theologians and philosophers, and they hold a broad spectrum of views on science and Christian faith. They hold annual meetings, online and in-person meet-ups, and host the peer-reviewed journal *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*.

Bringing a cathedral to the center of one's development helps science communicators to join a continuum of efforts as opposed to "reinventing the wheel." As I engage with Christian communities across various venues, I hold true to the ASA's mission, and this mission also helps me to establish a trust with communities that reaches beyond my own personal abilities as I enter new spaces. My cathedral serves as a meter of expectations for my personal demeanor, my core values, and my central message or approach. In my case, my meter is centered around open, humble conversation, especially over issues where there is honest disagreement within my community (American Scientific Affiliation, 2024).

By choosing to stand by the ASA's core values, I have been able to connect and engage with various other faith-based organizations and universities, both nationally and internationally. Leaders of the ASA interviewed and profiled me on their member page, and it resulted in interviews by many other organizations, podcasts, and magazines as a snowball effect. The ASA also gave me access to top experts on various science and faith perspectives, which helped me to listen, learn, and determine gaps as I discovered my own niche as a science communicator in this realm.

Boundary spanners in science communication should be encouraged to seek organizations and partners that best represent the core values from which their engagement work springs forth. As a student, I joined a professional society, but for others, their foundation can come from a special interest group or being part of an existing project.

The Village School

A school represents the institution where science communicators are trained, conduct research, teach, publish, and perform other scholarly activities. It serves as the core affiliation that gives scholarly credibility for their outreach and engagement. It is also a place where a science communicator can develop proper scholarship and training in outreach and engagement itself. Schools can be represented by research institutes, government agencies, or wherever else a science communicator holds their working affiliation. In essence, it is their home base. Unlike the cathedral, which is centered on the science communicator's values and mission, the school intersects with mission but is also centered on training and academic rigor. Academic rigor also relates to the scholarly boundaries under which a science communicator engages (i.e., the scientific dimension of what is covered as a public speaker would typically relate to their field of expertise or the research they pursue). Schools also serve as "neutral ground" for science communicators as they reevaluate their outreach activities and develop and refine their personal and academic identities.

For me, my school is where I get my PhD training: Michigan State University (MSU). My coursework, research, and participation in multiple ecology labs and working groups help me to innovate within my field and stay up to date on current issues, which prepares me as I engage with the public. My academic scholarship is also directly related to the topics I discuss as a science communicator (i.e., I "stay in my lane").

My school has also provided me with ample training and scholarly resources in outreach and engagement. MSU's Office of University Outreach and Engagement offers a Graduate Certification in Community Engagement that teaches 20 core competencies in community-engaged scholarship (https://gradcert.engage.msu.edu/about). Their office also hosts workshops on constructing and writing broader impacts activity plans to meet requirements for grants from the National Science Foundation.

A school helps emerging science communicators to explore the various ways that their expertise can contribute to communities and reflect on those experiences. During the first years of my PhD, I got involved in student government and coding workshops, giving me exposure to politics, fund raising, and underrepresented gender empowerment. It was when I learned about impact identities (a scholarly term for the intersection of one's discipline, scholarship and research, capacities and skills, institutional context, personal preferences, and society's needs, which together create a unique space for broader impact; Risien & Storksdieck, 2018) that I reflected and found reason to prioritize my efforts toward faith-based communities.

While boundary spanners in science communication fulfill their main scholarly duties, they should be encouraged to take classes, join workshops, or participate in groups that allow them to develop their scholarship and fine-tune their outreach methods.

The Parents

Although classic medieval history often emphasizes hierarchical structures, family was also important during this period, as parents, children, siblings, and other kin held a close sense of attachment and worked together to maintain the household and proprietary land (Dyer, 1994, 2022; Razi, 1993). Parents in a science communicator's village serve as personal mentors for development. They can be a person or persons who walk alongside the science communicator as they discover themselves and how their societal impact relates to their identities, personal interests, and goals. Parents may or may not be individuals from the village's cathedral or school; they can originate from other important spaces or communities in a science communicator's life. The difference between parents and cathedrals or schools is that parents support the science communicator in a way that transcends values, mission, alliances, and scholarship. The transcendent nature of the parental relationship gives emerging science communicators the ability to shift focus, mission, identity, or community while having consistent, independent support along the way. In a sense, parents are present in the village to "watch them grow up."

I have two parents: my undergraduate advisor who has become my mentor and "papa," and my spiritual "mama" from my church. These parents have raised me in ways that intersect with both my professional identity and my personal identity. My "papa" has been present over my entire professional development journey. I have known him ever since I entered higher education. My "mama" entered my life many years later, right as my science communication work began to accelerate and I was recentering my personal faith. I consistently speak with my "papa" and "mama." They lament with me about my disappointments, deliberate with me about important choices, and celebrate my successes.

Parents are reliable sources of encouragement. As emerging science communicators are straddled between their communities' needs and the needs of their institutions or organizations, parents are purposely biased toward the science communicator's ultimate well-being. Boundary spanners in science communication should reflect on the person(s) in their lives or along their journeys with such characteristics and (re) connect.

The Elders

In medieval times, "the younger generation was clearly expected to be respectful of their elders, and there is evidence of regard for the wisdom of seniors when they were asked to use their memories to resolve disputes and matters of custom" (Dyer, 2022, p. 134). For an emerging science communicator, village elders are those who are well-experienced in science communication, representing an earlier generation. Unlike parents, who may have different backgrounds, elders most closely overlap with the emerging science communicator's calling and mission. They can be podcasters, vloggers, TV program hosts, professors, organizational leaders, magazine or news article columnists, or social media influencers, among others. Emerging science communicators watch, listen, and learn from their elders, heeding their advice to avoid mistakes, and carrying their elders' legacies with them as they innovate new approaches. It is not necessary to meet or have a strong relationship with an elder. Instead, lessons are often learned at a distance by reading their materials, watching their presentations, listening to their interviews, or through informal mentoring from brief engagements with an elder. When a stronger relationship with an elder does exist, emerging science communicators can also contribute to their elders by offering fresh perspectives.

My elders are science communicators who speak on the topics of "creation care" (also known as conservation or environmental stewardship in secular terms). I have met or listened to many of my elders through in-person or online events from the ASA, BioLogos (https://biologos.org), the Evangelical Environmental Network (https://creationcare.org), and the American Academy for the Advancement of Science Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion (AAAS-DOSER; https://sciencereligiondialogue.org/). My elders are keynote speakers, career panel guests, and news/podcast interviewees, with roles as scientists, theologians, and organizational directors. I watch my elders' presentations and style, take note of how they answer difficult questions from audiences, and observe their character off-stage. I listen to the criticism my elders receive, both from the public and their peers, and strategize better ways to be a bridge builder as part of the next generation.

Elders serve as a means to watch and learn as an emerging science communicator scopes the field. Gauging the boundaries and settings where elders occupy space can help boundary spanners in science communication determine whether they can best serve communities as a reverberating echo of a central message or present something new. Emerging science communicators should be encouraged to identify their elders, make themselves known to them, and seek their advice.

Kin

Beyond the nuclear family, medieval households had networks of kin relationships that helped to fill gaps when families faced demographic failures or crises such as limiting gender roles or plagues (Wheaton, 1975). In this way, medieval kinship was a mechanism to sustain families when vulnerable to ensure the longevity of the family name. Similarly, kin in a science communicator's village are peer-level sources for encouragement and vulnerability. Whereas parents offer encouragement and support as mentors or counselors, kin emphasize an excess, superfluous engagement that can organically stimulate growth. Because they are not necessarily linked to the science communicator's scholarship or public platform, kin may offer lenses of differing experiences and values, leading to broader perspectives for the emerging science communicator. Similarly, the reciprocal nature of kinship allows the science communicator to broaden their kin's perspectives in return. As peers, kin can also offer an environment where the science communicator can be "raw" and authentic as they share and reflect on new experiences and challenges.

My kin include fellow lab members, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, friends, and many others who have been a part of both my academic and personal life over the years. They are Christians, agnostics, atheists, or hold other kinds of spiritual beliefs, and have various professional backgrounds, from retail to government to academia. Not all my kin understand my faith or profession, but I can maximize on those gaps to consult with them about my slides, illustrations, interview responses, or ability to describe difficult concepts to broad audiences. I also can confide in my kin, and even complain, as I reflect on some of my experiences. While I have developed as a science communicator, my kin have also gained an insider's view that has caused them to engage in new ideas.

Having a space for raw authenticity and vulnerability will be important for emerging science communicators as they juggle tensions both within society and within themselves during their development. As they process experiences, boundary spanners in science communication should feel welcome to share their work with whoever they consider kin.

The Village Children

Being young in medieval times was challenging, as child mortality rates were incredibly high (Griego, 2018; Lewis & Gowland, 2007). Hence, village children symbolize those who need special attention and care to succeed beyond the norm. Village children are others with less experience who are exploring and defining their own journeys and are inspired by the science communicator. Unlike kin, children will overlap in the science communicator's values, profession, and/or scholarship. They can identify with the science communicator at some level that drives them to be formally or informally mentored. Village children serve as prompts for science communicators to evaluate their outreach and engagement experiences in a way that transforms into valuable lessons and applications for future scholarship on their activities. Motivating the next generation, children also represent a valuable connection that can directly influence their trajectories.

Through the ASA and Emerging Scholars Network, I have participated in multiple early career panels and speed mentoring sessions. The Emerging Scholars Network is a national network and ministry that

> supports those on the academic pathway as they work out how their academic vocation serves God and others. [They] encourage and equip undergraduates, graduate students, postdocs, and early career faculty as they navigate each stage of their academic vocation and transition to the next step in or beyond the academy. (Emerging Scholars Network, 2020, para. 1)

On these mentoring panels, I have sat alongside graduate students, early career and retired professors, and popular scientists from various fields. In front of large audiences of students and early career scientists, I answered questions on both my spiritual and professional journeys, and reflected on other parts of my identity, such as being a woman of color in science. Sitting in smaller focus groups, I asked questions to encourage students to self-reflect. After talks or panels, I make myself available for one-on-one, private discussions held in an informal, personal mentoring style.

Village children have the power to keep an emerging science communicator reflective, grounded, humble, and grateful as they recognize the rareness of their successes and opportunities. For boundary spanners working in sensitive, unconventional, or controversial topics, village children serve as reminders of personal compromise or sacrifice that others may not be able to make at a similar level. The intangible recognition as an overcomer can also motivate a boundary spanner to keep moving for the sake of those who come after them.

Boundary spanners in science communication should make themselves available for such humble moments. Participating in speed mentoring or career panels during the nascent stage of a science communicator's career will also help them to practice establishing the private and public boundaries of their personal stories—especially before they become well-known. Early career panel hosts should consider emerging science communicators as guests in addition to those who are already popular and established.

The Village Guards

Like walls or gates surrounding a medieval village, village guards are people or groups whom emerging science communicators can consult when they need to redefine their boundaries and reach in order to stay professionally safe. Whereas cathedrals, schools, and parents can offer shelter for emerging science communicators through their procedures, policies, and guidance, village guards can stand at the edge of the broader village system or above it and help emerging science communicators to define appropriate lines for their work and platform. Village guards are not gatekeepers that establish boundaries on the science communicator's behalf or block community engagement activities. Instead, they are guides to help science communicators draw their own boundary lines safely.

I consider MSU's Office of University Outreach and Engagement to be my guard. They serve within the school component of my village, where they offer formal scholarship and training, but their practical experience with a multitude of engagement projects and communities helps me to seek perspective. Similar to guards who stand on high towers and look for significant and alarming movements, Office faculty can pull my field of vision away from a single situation and bring it into a larger context. As part of the Graduate Certificate in Community Engagement program, the weekly open office hours offer an availability where I can seek counsel on situations as they arise. Because the relationships I hold with my community are not facilitated or maintained by my university, my guard is not a mediator for solutions, but instead offers helpful advice.

As boundary spanners in science communication emerge, there can be much excitement about the new spaces they fill, but they need to learn to manage and adjust community expectations. Especially for a boundary spanner holding multiple underrepresented identities and an interdisciplinary scholarly background, gaps in diverse voices for other platforms or causes can open a diversity of platforms and opportunities. I have learned to be careful about stretching my abilities and to also make space for other boundary spanners to fill those roles. As boundary spanners in science communication practice such decision-making, they should seek help in learning how to say "no," and how

to do it gracefully to minimize damage to their bridge building and trust efforts with their communities.

Tradespeople

In a medieval village, tradespeople enhance the welfare of others, such as apothecaries that find cures, blacksmiths that create and dispense tools, and tailors that make clothes to craftily boost their customer's public image. In a science communicator's village, tradespeople represent professionals of differing expertise (e.g., science, theology, leadership, journalism, outreach) that help the science communicator find solutions to complex problems and expand their skill sets and equipment to enhance the delivery of their message. They are only occasionally present in the science communicator's development, and differ from village elders because they do not necessarily overlap with the science communicator's work and mission. Like an assortment of herbs in an apothecary's cabinet, or a set of tools in a blacksmith's workshop, tradespeople form a hub of targeted resources.

My tradespeople are university professors, professional society members and leaders, church pastors, missionaries, journalists, and editors. As a student, I go to my professors when I have trouble illustrating or articulating complex scientific ideas in lay terms. I show them presentation slides or article snippets for comments and critiques. Through the connections I make at professional society meetings, I pitch new ideas and seek members' knowledge and opinions. Church pastors and missionaries also serve as resources as I fuse motivational speaking with spirituality for conservation action. Journalists and editors enhance my writing abilities whenever I write news and opinion articles for them (Frans, 2022; Frans & Liu, 2022).

Although tradespeople are considered resources for help and materials, they also form a vast network of supporting community members. Throughout the course of their engagements, boundary spanners in science communication are sure to meet many experts who can become professional friends. I stay in contact with many professional friends regardless of whether they contribute to my development. Emerging science communicators should learn to regularly keep in touch with their tradespeople—even for updates on each other's progress and for moments of celebration.

Science communication requires a lot of creativity so audiences can understand and remain attentively engaged. Attending workshops on data visualization, scientific illustration, videography, photography, painting, or poetry can help science communicators develop a large breadth of new abilities. Technology such as microphones, cameras, lighting, or visualization software can also form part of their toolkit. At early stages in their careers, boundary spanners in science communication can face tensions if the tools or skills they require are outside their program or beyond what their institution normally provides. They should assess their needs and determine whether they can compromise by borrowing materials from libraries or other departments, joining multiple short-term workshops that accumulate into a comprehensive skill set training over time, relying on materials from organizations or venues that host them as invited guests, or explicitly seeking funding and support for their outreach activities.

Wealthy Patrons

In medieval times, wealthy patrons were nobles, lords, or other wealthy people who financially supported artists as they created pieces reflecting the patrons' values. Similarly, a wealthy patron in a science communicator's village represents a means of financial support that specifically targets their outreach and engagement activities. Wealthy patrons help science communicators flourish in their creativity and reach.

For a student, volunteering resources for outreach and engagement can get both temporally and financially expensive. When I first started, most of my science communication was achieved online, which helped me to build enough credibility at smaller scales to later seek support for larger scaled opportunities. Eventually, when I was invited to speak at events that I really wanted to attend but could not afford, I sought financial support. From my own personal judgment or from seeking counsel from my village elders or parents, I evaluated when it was appropriate to request that venues or community members help financially support my participation at in-person events. I also applied for awards and fellowships that honored my science communication activities and used that financial support to travel to conferences and speaking events or purchase books and software for topics outside my PhD dissertation.

Boundary spanners in science communication should of course be excited for each new area that they are able to reach, but they also need to take a realistic approach, recognizing that at an early stage of their careers, not all sacrifices for a cause need to be personal. The work of boundary spanners should be valued and recognized, and it is a good exercise for them to seek support for the niches they are able to fill. Emerging science communicators should apply for outreach and engagement awards and supplemental project awards. Where possible, writing proposals for funding outreach activities can also train them in writing and preparing broader impacts activity plans for grant proposals such as the National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Research Fellowships. On some occasions, organizations may offer speaking honoraria, which science communicators should not feel uncomfortable about receiving (sometimes such funding is a normal part of their programming); however, they should learn about any terms and limitations of their home institutions prior to accepting them.

The Town Crier

Town criers in medieval times were the best way to hear and spread important news. For science communicators, the town crier is a person or persons who calls special attention to the science communicator's engagement activities, scholarly work, and professional achievements. Similar to the role of a school, the town crier's role of promoting a science communicator's scholarly and professional achievements can enhance their public recognition and credibility within their field. When promoting engagement activities, the town crier can also call attention to upcoming activities that lead to increased following and attendance. Announcing successfully completed activities helps village cathedrals and schools stay apprised of science communicators that are affiliated with them and can also inspire invitations from other groups.

I have a network of town criers. Some town criers oversee media and communications for my department, my lab, the university, or for some Christian organizations with which I engage. They are also popular online influencers with many followers. For me personally, my town criers are more like advocates and supporters of my mission, as opposed to just workers forwarding my news. They openly celebrate me as they amplify my work on my behalf, and even take the time to read (or watch) and summarize my work in their own words. The work that my town criers celebrate is not only what I do in relation to outreach, but also my original research. For example, when my research on New Zealand sea lions went viral and was picked up by the press (Frans et al., 2022; Graham-McLay, 2021), pastors and missionaries shared it. I am fortunate that my town criers do not discriminate between subjects, but instead recognize and celebrate all aspects of my identity and career as a scientist.

It is important for boundary spanners to notify their institutions when they make headlines. Coming from a large university, I realized that if I do not directly notify town criers myself, my news risks going unnoticed. I also have learned to not take offense if town criers cannot share some of my news on my behalf. News moves quickly, and there are other members of my community and within my institution who should be equally celebrated.

If an emerging science communicator does not have a town crier, a good start would be to personally broadcast their work and outreach activities via email or discussion lists, make their own social media posts, or use relevant hashtags or bots. It is also important to note that spreading news is a multidirectional social activity. Science communicators should practice being town criers themselves by engaging and promoting the works of others. Gratitude for such efforts can lead to reciprocation.

The Jester

Although mostly serving in the courts of a lord, a jester in medieval times was a professional entertainer who would mock others, tell jokes, and perform tricks (Doran, 1858). The jester was well aware of political and social matters, speaking truths through satire. For a science communicator, the village jester symbolizes a person who holds opposing or challenging views about the science communicator's outreach endeavors. Put simply, the jester is a skeptic or a critic. A jester's words play key roles in shaping the science communicator's character, and can positively contribute to their growth. Of note, engagements between science communicators and jesters should not result in enmity, even if some misunderstandings and challenges get intense. No matter the jester's behavior or demeanor, the science communicator focuses on what

is within their own abilities and responsibilities, which is to consistently recenter themselves on the foundations of their village cathedral when necessary.

Listening to jesters helps me to think outside the box and sharpen my reasoning. Jesters are found in all parts of my village. They are other science communicators with different missions, values, and beliefs who try to steer my own mission and values into another direction; they are audience members or social media followers who present information that challenges the integrity of my message; or they are people who disagree with me in science, theology, or policy because of deeper issues that I am incapable of addressing. They are professors, fellow students, friends, or strangers. I never sense malice or ill intentions from my jesters, but instead, genuine concerns that stem from their own experiences, philosophies, and reasonings. As an early career professional, I am also humbled by jesters as I realize the breadth of their knowledge on some topics compared to my own.

Boundary spanners in science communication should become accustomed to having jesters. Critiques and skepticism are not synonymous with conflict. A jester can be a critical friend who "asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work" (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50; MacPhail et al., 2021). They stand along a continuum of levels of experience, critique, and support and can serve catalytic roles, stimulating innovative ideas, social energy, and new courses of action (Goodyear & Casey, 2015; MacPhail et al., 2021). Overall, jesters are advantageous for development despite some initial challenges.

The Mayor

Some medieval villages had a mayor (also known as a lord mayor) that served as their head council. In a science communicator's village, ultimate governance stems from the mayor. Although the mayor may not be involved in the establishment, guidance, or coordination of a science communicator's activities, the mayor still stands as the overseer. Like a government official who is unable to monitor all constituents, the mayor uses general guidelines and principles and expects all village residents to uphold them. From the mayor's perspective, residents have various professions and interests, and the science communicator is just one individual whose interest happens to be in outreach and engagement. Science communicators must thus uphold the mayor's overarching expectations, being sure to profile themselves as upstanding citizens if they want to keep practicing their freedoms and privileges.

My mayor is my PhD advisor—the one who allows me to do outreach but keeps me on track for what matters most: graduation. I am fortunate to have an advisor who celebrates my work in science communication, since only *one* community outreach or engagement activity is actually required by my PhD program and I have done significantly more. I recognize that all I have been able to accomplish as a science communicator is thus thanks to the good graces of my advisor. However, my advisor still holds me to a set of expectations: I need to do my research, fulfill my PhD requirements, and publish. I find these guidelines fair because he equally expects them for all his students. It is also in my best interest to fulfill these expectations because they train me for my career. Conducting research is still my primary interest, so being able to juggle my research responsibilities with my science communication activities prepares me for a postdoctoral or tenure-track position that has research, teaching, and service expectations.

Unless science communication is the only work that they do, science communicators will ultimately be under the governance of someone. Boundary spanners in science communication should not perceive this as a problem, but instead a reality. Especially if a boundary spanner may have a deeper sense of mission with their science communication activities that stems from their personal identities or a critical gap that they are filling, it is important for mayors to make space for open conversation about the science communicator's activities as they work to find a sustainable balance.

To find balance, science communicators should plan their timelines and workloads in ways that are mutually beneficial for their mayor. For example, figures or slides prepared for an outreach activity could be "recycled" for a conference presentation and vice versa. Or, science communicators can focus on publishing first (especially if there is a research embargo), use the peer review process to learn how to manage and correct misunderstandings, and then present their work publicly.

Building Your Own Village

To build new bridges across new boundaries, villages must be built to sustain the bridge builders. Here, I showed that such a village begins with the recognition that the core values and foundational messages for outreach and engagement may need to stem from beyond the university in order to enter new, often delicate, spaces in science communication. Resources and training may also come from outside the university to meet a boundary spanner's needs. Further, spanning boundaries during an early career stage increases the number of metaphorical village roles required to succeed in unique, underserved spaces. It also necessitates time and space for reflection, as well as a diversity of people of different ages, backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences with whom to seek counsel and solace as the science communicator navigates new territories and grows. I encourage others who self-identify as boundary spanners and science communicators to examine their village, discover their needs, and seek ample support.

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Nurturing Community and Resilience: Four Years of Reflection on Virtual Coworking Among Boundary-Spanning Community-Engaged Scholar–Practitioners

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the practice of community-engaged scholarship and challenged internal and external boundary spanners to maintain and grow authentic and meaningful relationships. Female-identifying scholars and practitioners faced, and continue to face, extra personal and professional demands in the postpandemic era (Purcell et al., 2022). In this reflective essay, four female community-engaged scholar–practitioners reflect on the importance and value of cocreating a weekly, virtual coworking space to support professional and personal resilience. Over 4 years, this coworking space shifted in focus from solely a cowriting accountability time during the COVID-19 virtual work era to more of a "relational pause" (Barton et al., 2022) focused on encouraging, caring for, and uplifting one another. We offer readers practical ideas to organize and lead their own virtual coworking spaces or, for institutional leadership roles, strategies to support others in developing communities of care that sustain boundary spanners.

Keywords: community of care, whole person development, authenticity, institutional transitions

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated political, social, and environmental upheavals of 2020 challenged higher education's community-engaged scholars and practitioners in multiple ways. Those with community engagement values and commitments found their work, framed in deeply relational ways, difficult to enact. During this time, our communities changed, our work changed, we changed. Female-identifying scholars and practitioners were especially affected by these multidimensional changes (Purcell et al., 2022). Understanding the personal and professional meaning and impacts of these ongoing changes requires time and space for vulnerability, reflection, and compassion.

In this reflective essay, four community-engaged scholar–practitioners share their experiences cofounding and participating in a weekly virtual coworking space for the past 4 years. We began in June 2020, shortly after mandated state and campus shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our 2-hour coworking sessions initially provided a sense of community, protected time, and accountability for individual writing projects. Over time, the focus organically shifted to include more emphasis on supporting one another through various personal and professional transitions—some hoped-for and some imposed. We sold first homes; moved to new communities; merged households; had babies; lost beloved pets; adopted new ones; took on caregiving roles for aging family members; got sick and healed; changed roles at the institution; coped with national and institutional scandals; weathered leadership changes in departments, colleges, and

central administration; considered leaving academia; and experienced the trauma (and response) of a campus mass shooting in February 2023.

Today, our virtual collaborative has grown from a space focused primarily on productivity to one grounded in collective care for each other. In this essay, we discuss the factors contributing to this deepening sense of community, belonging, trust, encouragement, respect, and mutual support, and how they informed our evolving identities, supported our well-being during times of joy, challenge, and trauma, and created a deep and sustained community of care.

As a fully women-identifying collaborative, we face societal and organizational cultures of gendered and emotional labor. We begin with our personal standpoints as women in higher education (Hill Collins, 2009; Smith, 1992), our community engagement professional roles and status (Dostilio, 2017), and our institutional contexts. We discuss the genesis of the virtual coworking space (Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006; Grant, 2006; Grant & Knowles, 2000; Smith, 2019; Sword, 2017) and the importance of having a supportive space during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (El-Alayli et al., 2018; Squazzoni et al., 2020). Then, we speak to the changing phases of our coworking space, our evolving personal and professional boundary-spanning roles, and the attributes that made this experience so significant for the four of us as whole people.

Throughout this essay, all four of our voices appear autoethnographically as we share insights, reflections, and experiences from our unique personal and institutional perspectives. Representing multidisciplinary fields and departmental experiences, we are threaded together by training and commitment to embracing community-engaged principles and methodologies in teaching and learning, service, and scholarship. These diverse fields of work, orientations to practice, and commitments are woven together as we reflect on our boundary-spanning identities and intersectionality as well as our individual and collective wellness, well-being, and career sustainability. We conclude with lessons learned, especially emphasizing how virtual coworking collaboratives can be adopted as innovative approaches to supporting the personal and professional success of community-engaged boundary spanners (Purcell et al., 2020; Van Schyndel et al., 2019; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

Katie's Story

Katie: When my postdoctoral research position ended at the end of 2019, I transitioned into a teaching faculty position in 2020. I loved teaching and was ready to go! Less than 3 months later, we shifted to a fully remote model in response to state pandemic lockdown, and I was the most isolated I had ever been in my personal or professional life. Prior to this shift, I made a pedagogical decision to talk to my students about the importance of acknowledging our "whole personness" in efforts to be more explicit about how I integrate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) into the classroom. Suddenly, instructors, supervisors, chairs, and administrators were all being reminded to consider the competing attentional demands of their students, colleagues, faculty, and staff—*their* whole personness. As an instructor, that meant spending more time acknowledging and supporting individual students' stressors and needs, as well as adjusting class expectations, redesigning curriculum and assessment. This left me with no time for the other parts of *my* personhood. My spouse was a first responder throughout the pandemic, and that lived as a low-frequency, constant stressor in the background of my life. It was toward the end of spring 2020 that our virtual coworking session came together, as a way to designate work and colleague "face" time.

These virtual coworking sessions were the first time I had dedicated discussion time with women who were definitively colleagues—we didn't have overlap in our social lives—about the multiple roles we were juggling and the pressure to continue giving more of ourselves, which disproportionately affected women in higher education even before COVID-19 (El-Alayli et al., 2018; Flaherty, 2017; Guarino & Borden, 2017). We started with a 2-hour time block that included about 10–15 minutes of greetings before we committed to our independent writing task. We did not all know each other at the start of cowriting, so we drew on the community engagement training and skills we used as boundary spanners, like empathy, openness, and trustworthiness (Williams, 2002).

We began building trust in each other, then gradually expanded into sharing professional and personal challenges and losses that were making it difficult to bring our best selves to our professional work. I shared our family losses and had space to

share that grief. This small virtual collaboration became a space to share my fears about health and job security. That greeting time grew to 20–30 minutes, and often longer. For me, one of the reasons this collaborative felt like a safe and welcome space to disclose these concerns was because we came from different institutional backgrounds and units, and spanning that internal boundary seemed *more* welcoming than trying to achieve such sharing with colleagues within my unit. This diversity helped me feel more like my whole self. Perhaps this could be a metaphor, but it's the first professional space I showed up in without a full face of makeup!

One of the most draining aspects of teaching remotely, asynchronously, during that time was that I identify as a community-engaged scholar, and I felt so limited in my ability to engage students in that way. When we returned fully in person in 2021, I committed to integrating a community-engaged component into my most relevant course. I was, and still am currently, the lone instructor integrating a semester-long nontraditional community engagement component into a large lecture course. There were no spare departmental resources to help me span the boundary between this community engagement and teaching. Our coworking group was made of community-engaged scholars in four different professional roles, so I was able to draw from lots of examples of how to perform this type of work in ways that could work for my class and felt true to myself. I was teaching about participatory research methods, and I decided to implement a boundary-spanning role for students. The course community engagement component was designed, and advised, by a student advisory board from within the class. They applied course concepts to the structure of community engagement and made recommendations for how to improve the student and community partner experience.

As a very early career scholar in immensely unusual times, I found that this group also served as career mentorship. It was a time where we agreed to meet and work on community-engaged scholarship (and write!). We came from different units and were at different points in our careers. I learned about how my coworking group handled competing demands in their personal and professional lives and how they discussed boundary spanning (or decided not to) with their colleagues. The pandemic was a time for lots of career changes across academia (Flaherty, 2022). Almost all of us experienced intraunit administrative shifts, which gave me a unique opportunity to learn about different ways to approach that process and how to continue to advocate for myself in a way that helps me build and sustain a career.

Makena's Story

Makena: At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had just had my first baby, moved to a new city, and was writing the final components of my dissertation . . . all with a partner who had recently completed chemotherapy (making him immunocompromised and at high risk for COVID). I know *isolation* was the name of the game for most folx, but I can honestly say I'd never felt more alone. When our virtual coworking began, we met with the aim of protecting time and space for mutual commitments, for work relating to community engagement. As time in the pandemic passed, the nature of our time together shifted. What started out as a collegially supportive group for professional productivity morphed into a community of practice, "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). We were a group of women in academia, engaging in conversation about *both* the practice of being community engaged *and* how to navigate and negotiate the context of life in the academy.

It was the first space where I felt truly seen, heard, and valued for the experiences I'd had (and was having). In all my time, across all my roles, this collaborative became the place I knew I could bring everything—my whole, authentic self, without question or judgment. As administrative shifts at the university level sent my unit cascading into a state of almost constant transition, I found myself depending on my time with women in our virtual coworking collaborative to share stories, seek assurances and validation, and solicit advice on tackling tough situations in my work.

With my "educator developer" hat on, I was filling gaps, being proactive on behalf of my unit, and taking on additional leadership roles and responsibilities. With my "university employee" hat on, I found myself working harder to demonstrate the value of my work to supervisors who were in regular turnover, while advocating for equitable pay and role designation, and ensuring

my previously agreed-upon remote work arrangement would be honored. With my "partner and parent" hats on, I was setting, maintaining, resetting boundaries in a way I had never practiced before while keeping my household running smoothly and often providing child care to my kids. Who I was as a professional—who I was striving to be as a person—was constantly being challenged as I navigated major identity transitions and, let's face it, wore all these hats simultaneously.

hooks (2009) said it best in *Belonging: A Culture of Place:* "Communities of care are sustained by rituals of regard" (p. 229), centered in friendliness and gratitude. Each week, it was the time spent with my virtual coworking colleagues that reminded me to [re]center equity and empathy across all aspects of my life. Despite multiple, ongoing experiences of situational and global trauma, their whole human care and consideration was integral to my personal well-being as well as my professional poise and passion.

Michele's Story

Michele: The COVID-19 pandemic shutdown occurred on March 16, 2020, just 3 months after I started a new position. I was transitioning from a research assistant position in which my primary responsibilities were project management and implementation to a faculty/academic specialist position of curriculum development and consulting. Not only had my work responsibilities and university position changed, but my primary work culture and environment was drastically different; I moved from a midsized academic department that fostered academic growth and welcomed contribution across diverse roles and professional backgrounds (tenured faculty, junior faculty, interns/fellows, visiting faculty, graduate students, staff, etc.) to a much larger, clinically focused college with a profession-driven hierarchical culture of power, authority, and autonomy. Due to unmet workplace expectations, I earnestly reflected on my career aspirations and transitioned to another faculty/academic specialist position in 2023 that also proved to propagate an unhealthy work environment, compounding disappointment, burnout, and loss of confidence in finding my career fit.

Parallel to my career changes, I was also experiencing transition within my academic journey. I had finished my epidemiology master's thesis in 2019 while in a full-time career job but was still in the process of completing my Graduate Certificate of Community Engaged Scholarship (CES) portfolio project. Since my graduate-school writing accountability partnership naturally dissolved after graduation, I joined this coworking group with the intent of completing my CES portfolio by committing to regular writing time, gaining support from community-engaged mentor and peer scholars, and creating healthy writing accountability. Our weekly focused sessions were critical for me in accomplishing my academic writing goals.

Organically, our collaborative became a trusted space to share professional experiences as women in higher education dedicated to continuous quality improvement in our work, institution, and communities. As an emerging community-engaged scholar within the veterinary and human medical fields, promoting the core engagement principles of colearning, capacity building, and collaborative decision-making, especially within higher academic communities, has been extremely difficult. In my experience, these fields are grounded in a culture that often, counterintuitively, fails to practice community engagement principles. Our coworking collaborative has provided important growth and support opportunities integrating interdisciplinary relationship building, leadership discussions, and CES support from a female perspective that does not exist within my current professional networks, in which leadership roles are persistently male dominated (Mousa et al., 2021; Tindell et al., 2020). Perhaps most importantly, we supported one another in our encounters with unprofessional workplace behaviors, unmet expectations, disappointments, systemic organizational failures, and "small wins," processing these experiences from a holistic, value-guided perspective. In conjunction with navigating the inherent losses and opportunities in my academic and career transitions, I was experiencing many personal changes within family relationships, new financial and property investments, social activity loss due to the pandemic, a new romantic relationship, the loss of my beloved pets, training to enhance my well-being, and navigating serious family health events. To say the past few years were a roller coaster ride might be an understatement—especially in the face of our domestic and global social, medical, and political contexts.

I have deep gratitude that our collaborative offered relief from day-to-day challenges where my authentic self was frequently unwelcomed and disrespected in the workplace. In contrast, I was welcomed, respected, and, in the true spirit of collaboration, have both contributed and received support and encouragement from other cowriters. The impact of our "writing" time became an invaluable haven of authenticity and care that I looked forward to each week. I strongly believe our cowriting collaborative has mitigated loneliness, defeat, despair, and has helped me cope with burnout.

Diane's Story

Diane: In spring 2020, I was teaching in the Graduate Certification in Community Engagement (Grad Cert), a program that supports master's and PhD students' learning about community engagement. In addition to in-person Friday afternoon workshops, Grad Cert learners are required to complete mentored community engagement projects with off-campus community partners. In mid-March, I traveled home to walk my dog at lunchtime and received a text message not to return to campus that afternoon. The next day, the official university announcement was made—we would be remote for the rest of the semester. Abrupt does not even capture that moment. I didn't even have my laptop with me (after all, I was heading back to campus right after lunch).

In the days and weeks that followed, I had to learn so many things. Up until that time, I had never taught online and rarely had online meetings via Zoom or Teams (many of my community partners were still meeting in person or on telephone conference calls). The camaraderie I felt in my community partner meetings, classes, and workshops dissipated. Our institution's work-from-home orders, and eventually our state's stay-at-home orders, meant my days were isolated and isolating. As an introvert who craves quiet downtime, I found this situation not so bad at first. After a time, however, the lack of structure made it easy to drift through the days. As a countermeasure, Katie and I started meeting, mostly as a writing accountability space. Through my other institutional responsibilities, I knew the value of write-ins (monthly, 3-hour collective writing spaces) and initially thought of our time together that way (Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006; Grant, 2006; Grant & Knowles, 2000). At the start, we'd say hi and then get down to the business of writing. Then Michele and Makena joined us. It was great to have "work buddies" during a time when there was so little company of any kind. I found myself looking forward to these standing weekly meetings and started prioritizing certain tasks for those 2 hours of shared work time. During those early 18 months of our coworking time together, my coworking partners helped me focus on the many new tasks at hand. From them, I learned different tricks for our online teaching platform and community-building activities for the virtual world. We compared notes and shared ideas about community engagement, especially how to navigate respectful and ethical community engagement with our partners, who themselves were experiencing great turmoil, stress, and losses. We asked questions: What was appropriate to expect from our community partners and from our students? What does authentic and meaningful community engagement look like during these challenging times? How are our boundary-spanning roles shifting as we navigate the loss of in-person connecting time with our community partners? My coworking colleagues' wisdom improved my practice more than any university-sponsored workshop I attended or had organized for others.

During our coworking time, we extended grace to one another. We had glimpses of each other's lives. Dogs, plants, partners, and children were welcome; they grew and changed in the backgrounds of our Zoom meetings, and then in the foregrounds of our conversations over the 4 years. Questions about how we were doing COVID-19-wise shifted to how we were doing in general. Conversations grew deeper, more vulnerable, more real. When one of us was struggling, the others listened, shared similar experiences, and offered advice gently.

As I had to think through Grad Cert teaching online and community engagement projects for my students during a lockdown, it was my coworking colleagues who had innovative and thoughtful ideas for "pivoting" (our institution's favorite word at the time) the curriculum and community experiences. We talked through shifting expectations and needs from the perspectives of community partners, our students, our families, and ourselves. We critiqued what was respectful, meaningful, and impactful in light of what was possible during these times. We

discussed what it meant to span boundaries when we knew our institution's more transactional productivity expectations seemed inappropriate to our community partners whose bandwidth to do more *for us* was diminished by their own leadership challenges and personal losses. We worked to forefront relationships, care, and a slower pace with our partners in spite of pressures to carry on with business as usual.

As the immediate tasks of pivoting diminished, our coworking group kept meeting. Even after the work-from-home orders were lifted, we continued to meet virtually because it better accommodated our work–life balance needs. I noticed that our conversations shifted. We were all trying to sort out the collateral damage and emerging opportunities (we hoped) related to the ripple effects of the pandemic and the environmental, social, and political unrest. In my work life, multiple layers of leadership above me changed and then changed again—often causing uncertainty and anxiety. My coworking colleagues reminded me to advocate for myself and stay true to my values during this institutional turbulence. In my home life, my caregiving responsibilities increased significantly with the move of out-of-state aging parents to my town. My coworking colleagues reminded me that "you can't pour from an empty cup" and to take care of myself even more. When burnout from the constant juggling of so many responsibilities loomed (my work life never returned to prepandemic levels—I now have both in-person and virtual activities), my coworking colleagues provided a "relational pause," a break from the constant push of work to step back from, reflect on, and "discuss the emotional and relational realities of work" (Barton et al., 2022).

Although I was initially more emotionally reserved, over time I grew to feel more and more comfortable sharing the messy parts of my life with them. Every time I shared difficulties, my coworking colleagues responded with kindness, care, and encouragement—even when we might not have completely agreed. Our virtual coworking time evolved into a community focused on sense-making, reflection, and care. This community of caring allowed us to navigate the emotional dynamics of institutional and life disappointments, misalignments, and ambiguities—as well as celebrate accomplishments big and small with our community partners, our students, our families, and ourselves. Counterintuitively (for me at least), the more I shared the "hard stuff" with the group, the easier both work and life became. In a season of my life when juggling personal and professional responsibilities during unceasingly uncertain and challenging times had become the norm, my coworking colleagues and our two weekly hours of compassion, care, and, when needed, challenge, gave me the gifts of perspective, perseverance, and self-compassion. This entire experience, in turn, has strengthened my capacity to collaborate with community partners and students with compassion, grace, and authenticity at the center.

Conclusions

Our four perspectives shed light on the significant impact of virtual coworking collaboratives in supporting the personal and professional well-being of community-engaged scholars and practitioners. These impacts span encouraging and supporting productivity; navigating change; sustaining whole-person development; reimagining internal and external community partnerships; and mitigating the effects of burnout through care, authenticity, and compassion. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was the primary impetus of coming together, we moved well beyond the unique individual needs created by COVID-19, bringing what we've learned personally and professionally to other boundary-spanning contexts.

This coworking collaborative has further highlighted the importance of equity and empathy spanning our personal and professional lives and created a space made possible by the authentic, whole human care and consideration to [re]center these priorities in our lives and careers. The authors are early and midcareer professionals with backgrounds in health sciences, higher education, Extension, teaching and learning, research, community engagement, and community psychology. Fine and Torre (2021) affirmed the value of participatory spaces where "differently positioned people come together, with distinct relationships to power and vulnerability, where our differences are cultivated as resources" (p. 8). As a result, lessons learned from our experiences may be translated more broadly into other informal, interdisciplinary communities of care for those in boundary-spanning roles. For example, this support helped strengthen Michele's confidence to continue engaging internal and external partnerships despite ongoing barriers and, perhaps most

importantly, to advocate for her own needs within these partnerships. It has also contributed to making value-guided career decisions, igniting hope for discovering roles with boundary-spanning opportunities. The reliable and consistent time established and protected by this space allowed for ongoing exploration, reflection, and vulnerability with one another, ultimately resulting in important self-discovery and growth that have influenced how we advocate for ourselves, our institution, and our partners. By drawing on the important characteristics of boundary spanners (Williams, 2002) within ourselves, we strengthened our individual and community-engaged identities.

The virtual cowork time created social connections of being seen and heard, resulting in energy necessary to thrive, thus mitigating burnout (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019, pp. 152–153). Sources of such support may be especially helpful as the complexity of boundary spanning increases (Purcell et al., 2020). The sessions also contributed to sharing institutional knowledge sometimes held by gatekeepers that helped us think about career sustainability in new ways. Over time our collaborative focus shifted from progressing writing products to navigating workplace stressors, to coping with institutional hardships, and then naturally evolved to sharing the bidirectional, holistic impact and intersectionality of our personal and professional lives, including the joys and challenges of our boundary-spanning roles. As we gained trust through vulnerably sharing our professional goals and experiences, we began to share more deeply personal experiences of our community partners, relationships, finances, physical and mental health, and future aspirations.

Women in academia face additional demands and expectations in the workplace, especially in service roles (El-Alayli et al., 2018; Flaherty, 2017; Guarino & Borden, 2017). Through our virtual coworking, we talked through the signs of burnout we experienced and helped "fill our cups" together. Celebrating with a group of women whose interest is primarily in one another's well-being has profound positive impact. It provides encouragement for facing challenges, practicing self-compassion, developing resilience, and building professional identities that reflect personal values—all important aspects of mitigating burnout.

The relational pause Barton et al. (2022) described contributes to sustained well-being because this type of emotionally focused conversation acknowledges the collective institutional experiences of work and reframes adversity as belonging to the collective (not the individual). Instead of framing well-being as something achieved through individual efforts alone, this perspective frames it as a collective responsibility for caring for one another. These relational pause spaces encourage authenticity, support complex identities, and are grounded in the lived experiences of those who participate. Fine and Torre (2021) also spoke of the importance of similarly relationship-focused environments where participants can "speak and listen, argue differences and disagreements, develop trust together, stumble and say I am sorry, learn from mistakes, challenge each other, grow new analyses, and build a more critical and imaginative knowledge base" (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019, p. 9). Our coworking space engendered the "holding space" attributes of Fine and Torre's critical participatory practices, a natural practice for community-engaged scholars and practitioners since we often hold space for our community partners.

Virtual Coworking Communities of Care at Your Campus

Our interdisciplinary, virtual coworking space has been an important and meaningful way for us to sustain our individual and collective well-being and to inform respectful and ethical ways of collaborating with our internal and external partners. For others interested in convening similarly supportive communities of care for boundary-spanners, we would like to note that there is no standard recipe for developing these spaces because they are deeply rooted in the lived experiences of the individuals involved (Neal, 2020). As a result, we do not have exact, easy-to-replicate recommendations; instead we offer these suggestions as starting points for fostering an emergent, organic experience that honors the collective wisdom of potential participants.

For Individual Community-Engaged Scholars and Practitioners

Seek out (or cocreate for yourself) spaces that are supportive and nurturing. Remember that these spaces are not a luxury, saved for that mythical moment when you have extra time or when things get back to normal (Chabon,

2009); they are essential to your personal and professional well-being (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019, p. 135). Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2008) affirmed that building supportive on- and off-campus networks is a key practice in successful academic careers, especially for junior faculty of Color. Prioritize and value this kind of community and space for yourself. Seek out others who are like-minded, share a common commitment or identity—ultimately, people who value authentic time together, friendship, trust, community, vulnerability, empathy, diversity, respect, and learning—to form a group (Babcock et al., 2022; Neal, 2020). Colleagues (internal and external) who share a scholarship or practice orientation, such as solidarity or feminist theory and literature, may find that such networks are an important asset in other virtual coworking spaces, and we encourage like minds to integrate this advice as it speaks to them.

If you are unsure whom to connect with, ask around about who is doing interesting community work and then reach out for an initial coffee (virtual or otherwise). Do not be shy about asking who else your initial contact might recommend you connect with. Consider a consultation with your faculty development office, writing center, outreach and engagement office, or teaching and learning center with the goal of identifying potential community of care coparticipants. As your group forms, build trust early on, which will naturally and organically shift through different phases (Fine & Torre, 2021; Wenger et al., 2022). Communities of practice are inherently engaged in a constantly iterative process of evolution as the groups' activities, members, sociocultural contexts, and meaning-making are in constant flux (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Remember that having collective times and places to navigate through challenges together builds resilience in more sustained ways than individual mindfulness practices (though they are also beneficial—just different in impact; Babcock et al., 2022; Barton et al., 2022).

For Institutional Leaders Supporting Individual Boundary Spanners (e.g., Unit Directors, Department Chairs, College Deans)

Consider the identities of such individuals as "long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice," which means "identity, knowing, and social membership" are explicitly interlinked (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Make it a point during your informal conversations, annual reviews, and mentoring meetings to ask whether your community-engaged scholars and practitioners are participating in supportive spaces that sustain their well-being. If they do acknowledge being a part of such communities, vehemently acknowledge the value of their participation for their own personal and professional growth and wellness. If they do not have supportive networks, make some introductions, then encourage them to form and participate in nurturing communities of care. Boundary-spanning community-engaged faculty report that institutional support is needed for promotion of competencies related to boundary spanning (Purcell et al., 2020).

It is important for practitioners to give themselves permission to prioritize these activities, which is easier when supported and encouraged by leadership since these activities are often countercultural (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019, pp. 196–212). Remind your boundary-spanning colleagues that tending to their own well-being, their own selves as whole people, has been shown to be a key practice for nurturing and sustaining careers over time (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2008; Wenger et al., 2022). Tending to those more relational and community aspects also translates into strengthening relationships with community partners.

For Institutional Leaders Who Develop and Lead Programs (e.g., Faculty Development, Teaching and Learning Centers, Community Engagement Offices)

Organize small groups "to celebrate and respect the spaces that foster friendship, trust, community, vulnerability, empathy, respect and learning across diverse individuals through time in informal groups" (Neal, 2020, p. 111). Promote access to resources, training, and support for these coworking communities to increase awareness, develop skills, and encourage a culture of resiliency. The beauty and benefits of these caring communities are bounded by their organic and evolving nature (Neal, 2020). Unlike diamonds, they cannot be synthetically produced by pressure. Instead, these groups are more like a freshwater pearl . . . under supportive conditions, with specific inputs and time, something truly unique is formed.

Emphasize the value of diverse job positions, roles, and stages as well as disciplinary expertise in forming the groups and attend to power differences in the trust-building process (Fine & Torre, 2021). Encourage conversations about the joys, challenges, and strategies of boundary spanning during ever-changing times by modeling in team and group spaces, and publicly sharing gratitude to others who bravely share with candor and vulnerability. Realize that individual mindfulness practices and resilience efforts fall short when workplace burnout, the toll of continuing turnover of colleagues and leaders, and isolating and dehumanizing institutional cultures are collective experiences (Aronsson et al., 2017).

Remember that communities of practice, learning communities, and writing groups focused solely on academic productivity may reinforce the values that lead to burnout. Instead, Lave and Wenger (1991) advocated for increasing participation in communities of practice that explore "the whole person acting in the world" (p. 49). Developing spaces that support a more relational (versus productivity) focus enables vulnerability, authenticity, and resilience to flourish, and is especially fitting for boundary spanners who foster relationships and connections as part of their core work. These group qualities can result in "deep and meaningful wisdom being constructed" among group members (Neal, 2020, p. 111) and are often values community-engaged boundary spanners advocate for and practice with their community partners. Turning those well-honed community engagement practices inward nurtures our own sense of community and our resilience to maintaining community-engaged boundary-spanning commitments.

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(Re)Building Trust With Indigenous Communities: Reflections From Cultural Brokers

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Abstract

Indigenous people are often hesitant to participate in research projects because they lack trust in researcher intentions. In this article, we explore the critical role that Indigenous boundary spanners play in research conducted with Indigenous communities through our research on oceans and human health. Our analysis centers around five principles where Indigenous boundary spanners significantly influence the research process. Centering work around 'ohana (family), being intentional around where to collect data, approaching the work with humility knowing that the community are the experts, cultivating team members' knowledge of community through conversations, and challenging assumptions within the institution are all aspects of research that must be considered when working with Indigenous communities. Including Indigenous community members and Indigenous scholars as part of teams can improve these aspects of research and begin the process of (re)building trust with Indigenous communities.

Keywords: Indigenous, relationship building, trust, community-engaged research

Indigenous communities have endured numerous waves of researchers entering uninvited into their communities, extracting information, and leaving without providing sufficient benefits to the community. These ethical issues came to a head in the infamous Havasupai case where, unbeknownst to the Havasupai participants, researchers at Arizona State University used blood drawn to study diabetes for a variety of mental and physical disorders beyond the scope of the original study. The Havasupai community not only did not know about these additional studies, but received neither compensation nor any benefits from these studies. "Helicopter researchers" like these perpetuate the historical power imbalances that persist in the Indigenous–settler relationship ("Tackling Helicopter Research," 2022).

Native Hawaiians have a growing reluctance to participate in research due to prior negative experiences. Some have said they felt like "guinea pigs"; others have shared that their views were misinterpreted or they sensed they were exploited to advance the researcher's career (Braun & Tsark, 2008; Fong et al., 2003; Matsunaga et al., 1996; Santos et al., 2001). These feelings are often steeped in a recognition that they were not consulted in the research process, from study design to the implementation of findings (Fong et al., 2003). The differences in perspectives, approaches, and priorities can lead to conflicts between researchers and the Native Hawaiian community members unless the research team addresses these issues through trust-building activities (Matsunaga et al., 1996).

One elegant solution is to engage more Indigenous researchers. As more Indigenous people receive graduate and even doctoral degrees, this option has allowed communities to engage institutions of higher education from a place of deepened equity. Moreover, as more Indigenous researchers enter academia, the potential to expand research opportunities in different disciplines increases. These opportunities are facilitated by Indigenous boundary spanners who are often coupled, with one centered in the community and the other in academia. Both,

however, are fluid actors who support the broader goal of the community.

Background

Rise of the Indigenous Researcher

From the early years of the United States when researchers attempted to justify discriminatory policies based on phrenology to deficit-based research that focused on the ways Indigenous communities are not living up to the standards of settlers (Guilliford, 1996; Hyett et al., 2019; Poskett, 2021), research on Indigenous people has always captured the settlers' imagination. Today, there has been a concerted effort to focus on strengths-based research that explores areas of improvement in ways that contextualize problems and articulate solutions in terms of Indigenous resilience. Boundary spanners play a critical role in ensuring equitable engagement between Indigenous communities and institutions of higher education (Hatch et al., 2023). Many successful collaborations have had one or more knowledgeable individuals who make themselves available to the project. Indigenous boundary spanners often have a braided identity that enables them to understand both the Indigenous community and the academic desires of researchers. The boundary spanners have developed these identities through prolonged interaction during their educational journey or through bridgers who link the individual to other projects or activities (Long et al., 2013).

Indigenous voices have largely been absent in the research literature, in part due to the dearth of Indigenous PhDs (Bastien et al., 2023; Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Minthorn, 2022; Shay et al., 2023). In 2004, only 6.6% of the faculty at the University of Hawai'i were Native Hawaiian (University of Hawaii, 2004); today, the number of Native Hawaiian faculty has nearly doubled to 12.0% across all University of Hawai'i campuses (University of Hawaii, 2023). Indigenous faculty and PhD students often engage in the boundary-spanning activities that support the (re)building of trust. The rise of Indigenous researchers has not only resulted in challenging the deficit-based research frame, but also pushes forward decolonial and Indigenized research methods (Bishop, 2005; Lowman & Barker, 2010; Smith, 2012).

As Indigenous wahine (women) scholars, the authors have taken on the role of advocate. We consider ourselves part of the Native Hawaiian community, individually and through our 'ohana (family), but acknowledge that our experiences differ from those of many community members, as both authors spent part of their childhood on the U.S. continent or internationally. Despite having spent years away from the Hawai'i, we have rediscovered our place on this 'āina (land). We are dedicated to working with the Hawaiian community and are open to being guided toward topics that the community values. One of the authors primarily sits in an institution of higher education as a faculty member while the other primarily sits within the community as an advocate, though we move interchangeably when needed. This mutual trust and understanding at an individual level enables project development that centers balanced power and reciprocity, which then embeds respect within the form of the project itself. Designing projects in this context facilitates the cultivation of these values among the project stakeholders and hopefully beyond the project.

Community-Engaged Research

Community engagement often helps improve research through "partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices" (CDC, 1997, quoted in Clinical and Translational Science Awards Consortium, 2011, p. 7). Using this approach provides greater opportunities to build trust and respect between communities and academic researchers. Engaged approaches incorporate methods to collapse divides between communities and institutions, specifically by including people with a multiplicity of types of economic and political power (Hardy et al., 2020). Indigenous leaders and communities have called for research designs that are developed "with" instead of "on" people in ways that provide opportunities for "counter-storytelling" (Mitchell, 2018). This fundamental shift in conceptualizing research design with Indigenous communities has had a transformative impact on how research is and can be done.

Under the larger umbrella of community-engaged research sits community-based participatory research (CBPR; Holkup et al., 2004), which is particularly suited for research with Indigenous communities. CBPR is a flexible approach that treats the

community as the unit of engagement and seeks to elevate community partners to the status of coresearchers (Israel et al., 2012). Trust can be rebuilt by incorporating action-based advocacy, engaging the community in topic identification, collaborating on the research design, and increasing capacity within the community (Blumenthal, 2011). Although CBPR is often the goal of community-engaged research, it is difficult to implement without preexisting community relationships that often take years to develop (Wilson et al., 2018). Thus, our project incorporated community-engaged research methods with the eventual goal of developing strong relationships with the community that would enable us to move toward a CBPR model.

Overlaid upon the community-engaged method was our commitment to Indigenous and decolonial research methods. Decolonial research methods incorporate the active removal of colonial structures within research, whereas Indigenized research methods integrate Indigenous concepts and methods into the research design (Evans et al., 2020). Critically decolonized research methods consist of transforming colonized views while holding alternative knowledge in pursuit of inquiry (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Thus, removing traditionally strict structural processes represents a decolonial approach to conducting research. Moreover, incorporating a fluid storytelling approach allowed us to Indigenize the research process and honor the experiences of participants. These approaches were used regardless of the ethnicity of participants, which further decolonized the research design and situated the work squarely within the Indigenous community.

Remaining Challenges

Despite these efforts and improvements, challenges remain. Research involving Indigenous peoples has historically suffered from unequal power relations, wherein Indigenous communities are treated as passive subjects rather than active, self-determining storytellers and collaborators. Because the general narrative frames Indigenous communities as suffering from disparities, many researchers seek out Indigenous communities to conduct disparities research. However, they are often ill-prepared to enter into this endeavor with the cultural humility required to conduct meaningful and respectful research that supports the community (Worthington & Worthington, 2019). Moreover, Indigenous communities desire reciprocity from their contribution and respect for the self-determination that their communities embody (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Building mutual trust and respect is thus fundamental to the work of an Indigenous boundary spanner.

As Indigenous researchers and boundary spanners, we were committed to performing research through open dialogue and critical inquiry. "Open dialogue" refers to our efforts to create spaces that are safe for mutual exchange and honest discussion, and "critical inquiry" points to our conscious awareness of navigating complex issues of power and knowledge. This reciprocal inclusivity was also carried over into the research team. As a research team that included Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, we made sure open dialogue and critical inquiry played a pivotal role not only in the relationship between researcher and participant but among the research team members. Beyond trust and mutual respect, both the research participants and the Indigenous researchers observe an anticolonial understanding and accountability. This approach often presents itself through seeking guidance and reiterative feedback loops (Taha, 2018), as was the case in our work.

In the face of a growing number of Indigenous researchers and advocates, we share our experience working on a large systems mapping project exploring the community's relationship with the ocean. This article, grounded in our position as Indigenous researchers and advocates, will explore how Indigenous boundary spanners emphasize relationality when working within Indigenous communities. We will first detail the design, implementation, and initial findings of our Oceans and Human Health Systems Mapping project, before reflecting on themes that emerged throughout the project related to conducting community-engaged research. Finally, we share lessons learned that can be transferred to other projects with Indigenous communities.

Summary of Oceans and Human Health Systems Mapping

Research on oceans and their connection to human health has seen increased interest in recent years, aligning with the United Nations' declaration in 2017 of the Decade of

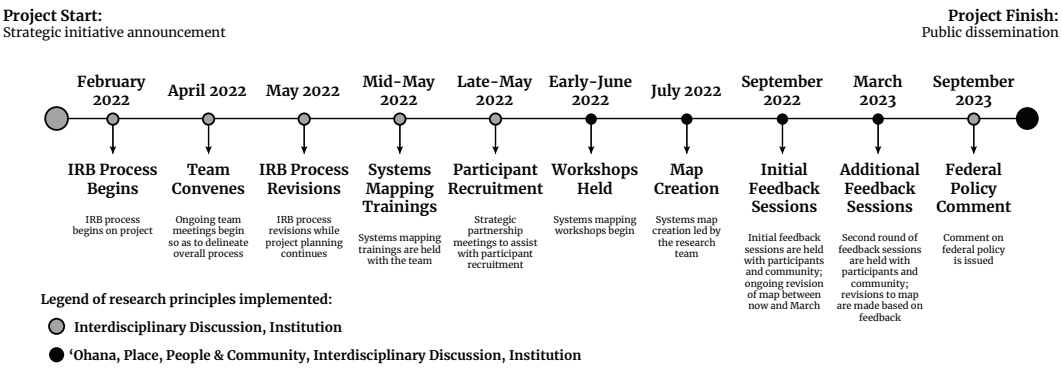
Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. Scientists across the globe heeded this call by tackling critical issues related to climate change, habitat destruction, food systems decline, and recreational impacts. Although great diversity of topics exists, a significant amount of the literature is deficit-based and fails to incorporate Indigenous communities, many of whom are disproportionately impacted by changes to oceans. In order to develop a line of research that takes into account the needs and desires of our host Indigenous community, our research team developed a systems mapping research project designed to engage the Native Hawaiian and other Indigenous Pacific Islander communities that reside in the Hawaiian archipelago as a step toward the construction of a unified research agenda on oceans and human health.

Guided by the vision that "people and oceans thrive together through their shared kuleana (responsibility/privilege) to promote collective well-being," we crafted our framing question. The term "kuleana" was intentionally used because it embodies the Hawaiian belief that it is a privilege to undertake one's responsibility. The framing question, "What helps or hinders island inhabitants' relationships with the ocean?" was posed to participants at the initial systems mapping workshops as well as in the follow-up sessions. To honor the host culture, we translated our framing question in ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi, "Pea ka pilina o ke kai?" to ground our sessions in place.

Our study used systems thinking to explore the causal factors affecting Hawaiʻi Island inhabitants' relationship with the ocean and, in turn, the ocean's effects on human health. Systems mapping is a qualitative systems thinking research approach that collects stakeholder community members' experiences to visually depict a system (Reid et al., 2020; Sterman, 2002). Causal loop diagramming was utilized to visualize the complex interactions that underlie human health related to the ocean (Nash et al., 2022; The Omidyar Group, n.d.). Participants identified factors that impacted their relationship to the ocean, dynamics that perpetuate or change behavior, and key points within the system that can inform collective decision-making through a leverage analysis (Purtle, 2018).

Our adapted systems mapping process involved three phases: (1) systems mapping workshops, (2) map creation, and (3) feedback sessions where the first phase (systems mapping workshop) could be broken down into four steps: (1) identifying forces, (2) articulating causes and effects, (3) creating causal loops, and (4) sharing results with the group. A total of eight sessions with 136 participants and seven feedback sessions with 32 participants were held. In alignment with traditional Hawaiian ʻike (knowledge), the oceans were considered part of the land. This definition broadened our systems map, creating a holistic and inclusive map that covered many things that may, at first glance, appear to be beyond the scope of the research question. Our overarching findings indicate that when the ʻāina is healthy, the

Figure 1. Timeline of Project Activities



health and well-being of humans follows. Figure 1 shows our Timeline of Project Activities.

Systems maps tend to have a core story or story that underlies the map. Our core story consists of three interlocking loops: (1) ʻohana, (2) privatization, and (3) ea (self-determination). The ʻohana was the basic unit that transmitted knowledge of oceans for subsistence, spirituality, and recreation down through the generations. Although the privatization of land through colonization and capitalism has severed some of that strong pilina (relationship; connection) between people and place, some Native Hawaiians have maintained that connection. Historical trauma or the cumulative psychological and emotional wounding over one's lifespan and across generations stemming from the remnants of colonization have accumulated among Native Hawaiians. These remnants include unsustainable tourism and militarism, which have indelibly altered the ecosystems and disrupted the socioeconomic landscape. Despite the deeply disturbing historical events that ultimately dispossessed the Indigenous community, Native Hawaiians have continued to pass down ʻike kupuna (traditional knowledge) and mālama ʻāina (care of the land), which highlights the resilience of this community. Refocusing policy efforts on mālama ʻāina, culturally informed resource management, and sustainability may increase ʻāina momona (abundance), which lies at the center of our system map and represents a shared vision of the past and of future goals.

Considerations for Indigenous Research

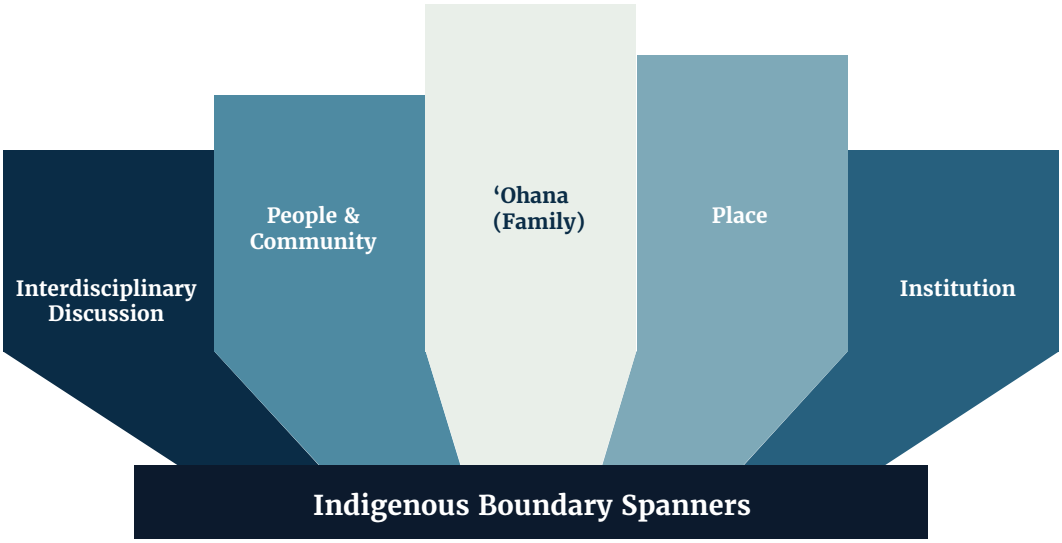
The Oceans and Human Health Systems Mapping project consisted of an interdisciplinary team of researchers in fields ranging from public health to marine biology to psychology. Despite the diversity of disciplines represented, the ethnic communities that the researcher team represented were more homogeneous. The inclusion of the two Indigenous author boundary spanners and one graduate assistant greatly facilitated participant recruitment and overall community engagement. Systems mapping sessions that included the Indigenous boundary spanners received more positive feedback from community members compared to the other sessions. In other words, the Indigenous boundary spanners lent their legitimacy to the project and influenced the use of five separate but overlapping principles that should be considered in future research efforts. See Figure 2 for the five dimensions of Indigenous boundary spanning.

Principle 1: ʻOhana

For us and our children.

ʻOhana was a guiding principle throughout this project. Not only did it appear in numer-

Figure 2. Dimensions of Indigenous Boundary Spanning



ous causal loops in the systems map, it was an element that we discussed as part of the design process. Because Native Hawaiians are ʻohana-centered, incorporating ʻohana in the recruitment of participants and other aspects of a research project was beneficial. For example, health interventions that focus on the ʻohana rather than the individual have been successful in Hawaiʻi (Mau et al., 2010; Miyamoto et al., 2019). In our project, we utilized ʻohana to help spread the recruitment call and accepted ʻohana into our sessions. One valuable aspect of allowing ʻohana to join our sessions was that we naturally obtained an understanding of how oceans and human health impacted participants in a variety of generations. These discussions also facilitated cross-generational dialogue that allowed participants to gain new perspectives simultaneously with the research team.

Within the workshop sessions many participating families described their experiences with historical and cultural trauma. Stories connected back to the overthrow of the Native Hawaiian government by agents of the U.S. government and were brought into the present through discussions of the sustained colonization of Hawaiians. Participants connected colonization to the school system, increased participation in the military, and, in some cases, the adoption of Christianity. This insight explained that the ongoing colonization of Hawaiʻi stemming from the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy indelibly changed the value system and dislocated the ʻohana from its centered place. Given this context, the Indigenous boundary spanners brought forth a trauma-informed approach to ensure that participant stories were honored and respected. Seeing the salience of the lived trauma that was expressed, the research team readily agreed to the adoption of this approach, which allowed for safety and connection to be established within the storytelling space and across participant storytellers.

The quote "for us and our children" speaks to a Hawaiian participant's shared hopes of seeing water treatment processes and subsequent water quality on their island improving over time so that their children and grandchildren may thrive. In the context of Hawaiian perspectives on caring for water, this quote reflects the ancestral and intergenerational connection to protecting and preserving natural resources, especially water, for present and future generations. It also signifies a need and commitment to safeguarding access, quality, and sustainability of water and underscores the urgency of protecting water resources from exploitation, contamination, and overuse. For the participant and others, access to clean water requires pono (good and righteous) stewardship and consideration of the environmental, cultural, and social impacts of water management decisions on ʻohana and ʻohana to come.

Principle 2: Place

> *He ʻāina ke aliʻi, he kanaka ke kamaʻāina*. #531 (Pukui, 1983)
>
> The land is a chief; man is its servant. (Interpretation: Land has no need for man, but man needs the land and works it for a livelihood.)

As an archipelago with expansive ocean space between islands where the majority of Hawaiʻi's total population is located on Oʻahu, it was important to the team to ensure equitable representation of place in this project. To avoid contributing to power inequities by focusing only on densely populated locations, our team traveled to various locations on Oʻahu and Hawaiʻi Island, in addition to offering virtual sessions. The diversity of location also served as a means to contextualize stories heard in the sessions.

Hawaiʻinuiākea School for Hawaiian Knowledge

On Oʻahu, sessions were held on two University of Hawaiʻi (UH) campus locations, including Hawaiʻinuiākea School for Hawaiian Knowledge at the University of Hawaiʻi Mānoa. Although UH as a whole is not synonymous with research ethics, Hawaiʻinuiākea, a beloved center of Hawaiian Knowledge, was an endeavor endorsed by the Hawaiian community. Established as a separate college in 2007, its historical roots trace back to 1921 when ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian language) was first offered. In 1970 Hawaiian Studies was established under Liberal Studies; however, it wasn't until the 1980s, when a group of students uncovered an ancient ʻauwai (open channel irrigation) alongside Mānoa stream near the edge of campus, that collective efforts began to restore this ʻāina for the study of Hawaiian language and culture.

Hawaiʻinuiākea, located in the ahupuaʻa (land division) of Waikikī, was known to

be a productive farming area, especially for kalo (taro). The traditional name of the ʻauwai was Kānewai or waters of the god Kāne. Today, the Hawaiʻinuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge comprises Kawaihuelani (Hawaiian Language), Kamakūokalani (Hawaiian Studies), and Ka Papa Loʻi ʻo Kāneawai (Wetland taro farming program). The building itself incorporates Hawaiian design elements, including a covered open-air space that is used as a hālau (technically school, but often used in reference to hula) and overlooks a traditional hale (house), the loʻi (terraced irrigation system used to grow kalo) and ʻauwai making it an appropriate, calming, and trusted space for community members.

University of Hawaiʻi West Oʻahu

Similarly, the second site on Oʻahu, University of Hawaiʻi West Oʻahu (UHWO), was located on a UH System campus. UHWO is the newest campus in the University of Hawaiʻi System and is located in a part of the island that has a high Native Hawaiian population. UHWO is Indigenous-led, with one of the first Native Hawaiian chancellors and nearly 30% of the student body identifying as Native Hawaiian. Moreover, UHWO prides itself on embodying UH's call to be a Hawaiian place of learning.

The UHWO campus is located in the ahupuaʻa of Honouliuli, the largest ahupuaʻa on Oʻahu. This area was once known for its productive coastline and home to numerous fishponds. Honouliuli borders Puʻuloa (Pearl Harbor), which is prized by the U.S. military for its strategic location and over the years has brought significant development throughout this area. This development brought both water diversions and pollutants to this area. In alignment, UHWO is the fastest growing campus in the UH system and serves high numbers of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students, making it a trusted space for the Native Hawaiian community.

Liliʻuokalani Trust's Kīpuka Kona, Kailua-Kona

Place was also intentional for the sessions held on Hawaiʻi Island. Liliʻuokalani Trust's Kīpuka Kona site in the ahupuaʻa of Keahuolū in Kailua-Kona (also called Kona) was identified as a location that the community trusted. Liliʻuokalani Trust was established by Queen Liliʻuokalani, who saw her people decimated by death and disease. Upon her death a trust was established for the betterment of orphaned and destitute Hawaiian children. Since 1909, Liliʻuokalani Trust has provided supportive services to Hawaiian ʻohana across the islands.

Historically, in Kailua-Kona—a unique living area because of its volcanic landscape and dry, leeward weather—villages thrived along the entire coastline of Hawaiʻi Island, also called Moku ʻo Keawe. Villagers sometimes had several living areas within their ahupuaʻa, which they inhabited at varying times of the year according to seasonal farming and fishing cycles. The landscape appeared dry, but in fact many sources of water from within caves, springs, and underground streams supported the people and their crops. Keahuolū, a sacred ahupuaʻa in Kona, was a highly desired location because fish were abundant, the weather mild most of the year, and the ground fertile. Queen Liliʻuokalani later inherited the land, which is now stewarded by Liliʻuokalani Trust and served as the site of one of our sessions.

Arc of Hilo, Hilo

The Arc of Hilo, a nonprofit organization, has been providing people with disabilities support to lead productive, community-driven lives since their establishment in 1954. Hilo is located in the ahupuaʻa of Piʻihonua, known for its verdant and dense forests and freshwater springs. Native practitioners often gathered forest-plant resources here, and many would travel to the upper regions of this ahupuaʻa to Mauna Kea to worship, gather, and be in sacred and safe spaces (Maly & Maly, 2004).

The Piʻihonua region is located within the Wailuku and Alenaio watershed areas. Watershed areas capture rainfall and atmospheric moisture from the air and allow the water to drip slowly into underground aquifers or enter stream channels and eventually the ocean. The Wailuku watershed area measures 252.2 square miles and collects into several major streams and tributaries that are considered perennial streams, including Wailuku River. Wailuku River and its tributaries Kapehu, Waiau, and Pakaluahine flow through Lower Piʻihonua. Like Kapolei where UHWO sits, several stream diversions exist in the Wailuku watershed area (Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, 2017).

Kamehameha Schools' Laehala, Keaukaha

Finally, in line with the reflective nature of the project, the team held a postsession re-

flection at Laehala, located in the ahupuaʻa of Waiākea and currently being stewarded by Kamehameha Schools as part of a larger effort to preserve the significance of this wahi pana and wahi kupuna (storied and sacred place). Kamehameha Schools, established by Princess Pauahi upon her death, created educational opportunities to improve the capacity and well-being of Native Hawaiians.

Laehala is an important historical and cultural site that includes the ocean access that the team was able to utilize to connect with the spaces that we hoped to better understand. Historical cultural sites command mindful and respectful conduct, as they are the places that Native Hawaiian ancestors walked. The presence of the research team in this wahi required specific protocol, including oli (chant), pule (prayer), and centering mālama ʻāina (caring for the area). This near-ocean site provided a safe harbor for reflection and the beginning stages of postsession analysis.

For Hawaiʻi Island sessions, in particular, it was important for the team to engage places that are rural and remote, allowing for a variety of perspectives to reflect diversity in place. Place continues to be an unequivocal focal point in the identity processes for many Indigenous communities, including Native Hawaiians (Kanaʻiaupuni et al., 2021). To connect with this relationship-driven culture, the research team worked to build pilina (relations) with the places where these gatherings occurred. This reciprocal relationship can be seen in the ʻŌlelo Noʻeau (Native Hawaiian proverb) above, *He ʻāina ke aliʻi, he kanaka ke kamaʻāina* or "The land is a chief; man is its servant." This ʻŌlelo Noʻeau is a reminder of the kuleana (responsibility, privilege) we have as people to serve ʻāina, as well as the reassurance that in return, the ʻāina will care for, feed, and provide for our needs.

Principle 3: People and Community

> We is ʻāina (land). We is wai (water). We is all forms of kinolau (embodiment of the Gods). We is kānaka (human). We is pō (darkness; realm of the Gods). We is huge. We is here.
>
> —Native Hawaiian participant, systems mapping project

In adopting a strengths-based approach to oceans and human health, we understood that Native Hawaiians already both knew the challenges that exist and held the solutions to improving the relationship between oceans and human health. Based on this principle, a major goal of this project was to include the community in the development of a research agenda on oceans and human health for future collaborative work. As part of the process of (re)building trust with the Native Hawaiian community, our hope was to use the systems mapping project to begin new dialogues, expand and deepen existing relationships, and gain a shared vision for future research. Therefore, the design of this research project needed to reflect the community and meet the community where they were, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

We also understood that Native Hawaiians may be hesitant to participate not only because of a lack of trust, but also because many of our engaged community members are asked to participate in many different projects. Thus, clarity in our goals and the ability to articulate them to the community was critical. To honor participants' time, a makana (gift) or research incentive along with a meal was provided. Moreover, to ensure that our results were useful to the community, we engaged in nonacademic dissemination, including writing op-eds and commenting on federal regulations, in addition to sharing our results back to the community for their use.

Community organizing principles were utilized to ensure that reciprocal relationship-building was prioritized. Mobilization started within known networks so those networks could, in turn, cast a more expansive ʻupena (net) to others. Making connections in this way became an effective approach to seeking active participation of willing contributors. Participants were more apt to join the conversations when they knew who was on the research team and/or who was invited to join the working sessions and research process. The community recognized who needed to be present for the session to be valuable and used the recruiting process as a way to ensure the legitimacy of the design. As a result, the research team facilitated the development of pathways for participants to engage in this research project and continue to collaboratively advocate for improvements to oceans and human health.

A critical point in the research process was the dissemination of the draft maps, which

included several rounds of virtual and in-person feedback opportunities from participating storytellers. These feedback loops facilitated timely course corrections and deepened trust with the community. They also surfaced the realities of a geographically dispersed and culturally diverse community and research team. Although never fully finalized, once these maps had received the community's review, they could be leveraged with those in positions of power and influence, including government leaders, to help identify opportunities to provide ongoing support, promote joint problem-solving, and strengthen communication with these communities.

As reflected in the previous quote from a Native Hawaiian participant, Native Hawaiians have a deep and profound interconnectedness with ʻāina and wai (water), rooted in our cultural, spiritual, and traditional practices. ʻĀina and wai are considered members of the ʻohana, and people are considered land and water masses themselves (Antonio et al., 2023; Harden, 2020). Despite ongoing acts of colonialism against our people, community, and places, the participant emphasized our resilience and resistance against seizure and alteration. This was a declaration of our ongoing presence and continued connectedness to Native Hawaiian people and community to come.

Principle 4: Interdisciplinary Discussions

> *E ala! E alu! E kuilima!* #258 (Pukui, 1983)
>
> Up! Together! Join hands! (Interpretation: A call to come together to tackle a given task.)

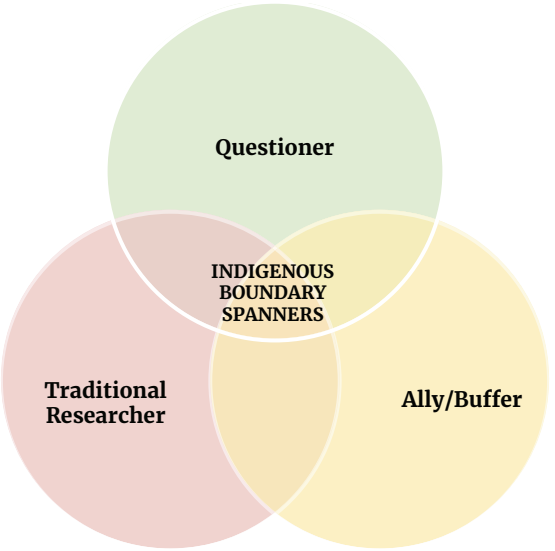
The co-PIs on this project were intentional in selecting scholars, graduate students, and community members to participate with the goal of curating an interdisciplinary team that could reach a variety of communities, including the Native Hawaiian community. This intentionality extended to the systems mapping workshops, where we grouped attendees based on any information we had on the participant, such as their industry or employer, where they lived, and whether they were Native Hawaiian. We also ensured that facilitators for these small groups were culturally and educationally aligned with the participants. For example, if a group included several scientists, we assigned a facilitator who also was a scientist. Doing so ensured that the facilitator would be equipped to understand and facilitate the discussion. Similarly, in groups that had several Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners or advocates, we assigned a Native Hawaiian facilitator who would be able to engage with that group.

Because of the general distrust that exists between the Native Hawaiian community and researchers, we found that the larger group sessions that were facilitated by Native Hawaiian members of the research team ran more smoothly. These sessions produced results that tended to move beyond superficial sharing and reflected deeply personal stories and experiences. In fact, at one session a participant shared how, after witnessing how the session unfolded, he actively decided to be vulnerable and share fully. Not only is this one of the greatest compliments any researcher can receive, but it indicates that (re)building trust in the community can occur under the right circumstances.

Additional team members also embodied boundary spanner roles. One non-Indigenous scientist ally often adopted the role of a buffer in team meetings. This individual was able to translate values expressed by Indigenous team members into terms that other Western-trained scientists understood. Moreover, her role as a faculty member who was firmly embedded in the scientific community boosted the legitimacy of concepts that arose for team members who were still struggling with the Indigenous methods. Similarly, our lead facilitator and trainer acknowledged his role as supporter and ally in the process. Rather than impose his ideas or interpretations of the sessions, he contributed to our discussions solely via questions. Through this methodology, team members were able to reach our own intrinsic conclusions and benefit from the process of working through our experiences and biases. See Figure 3 for the roles of team members.

To honor participants' willingness to share, our research design incorporated a variety of modes of dissemination. In addition to the traditional dissemination at academic conferences and through peer-reviewed publications, we intend to develop policy briefs, comment on proposed regulations, provide testimony, and share information through editorials. Moreover, because we viewed this information as coming from the community, we provided the systems map to the public

Figure 3. Roles of Team Members



for their use, enabling them to modify and update as needed. Providing data ownership back to the community is an integral element in Indigenous data sovereignty. We therefore sought a community organization that could become the caretaker of the systems map, so that ownership would be transferred to the community itself.

Principle 5: Institution

> *E lawe i ke aʻo a mālama, a e ʻoi mau ka naʻauao*. #328 (Pukui, 1983)
>
> Take what you have learned and apply it and your wisdom will increase.

One critical space that we operated within was the academic institution where we often found ourselves trying to balance the desires of the community with risk-averse institutional rules. For example, to engage with the Native Hawaiian community, our research methodology had to be flexible, allowing us to nimbly move between different communities while still maintaining legitimacy. However, institutional review boards (IRBs) have standardized rules that are guided by a positivist understanding of research. In order to meet the institutional standards such as ensuring that participants understood the purpose of our research, what they were required to do, and any potential benefits and risks, our consent forms were quite lengthy. Additionally, we were required to write at a sixth grade reading level to ensure that participants could understand the consent form, which made it difficult to define certain Hawaiian terms. The Native Hawaiian community, however, is more concerned with the intentions of the researcher, the relationship of the researchers with the community, and what will be done with the research findings, types of information that are not required on consent forms. We did our best to create consent forms that included information the community cared about, but the resulting forms were quite off-putting because of all the additional mandatory information and lack of ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi.

Other institutional rules made it difficult to host Native Hawaiian and local participants. In many Indigenous communities it is inappropriate to host someone and not feed them (Lassetter, 2011), yet institutional rules made the purchasing of food either impossible or quite arduous. Moreover, even when we were able to purchase food for participants, we were not allowed to feed our staff and volunteers, which is in contradiction to Hawaiian values. Similarly, to honor participants' time, incentives were provided; however, due to administrative challenges, we opted for an item rather than the cash or gift cards that participants prefer. The challenges associated with hosting and cultural protocols that show participants that they are valued and respected are not new. Many researchers have called for revising ethics regulations to better meet the needs of communities that they work in (Riley et al.,

2023; Steigman & Castieden, 2015). Working collaboratively with a community organization less restricted by administrative rules may be one way to help researchers fulfill such cultural expectations.

Finally, under an Indigenous research paradigm, the relationship does not end when the funding source ends, which can create challenges. Due to grantor rules and award periods, often there is little funding available for disseminating findings, especially back to the community. Because academic institutions value conference presentations, faculty can apply for a variety of funding sources supporting dissemination at academic conferences; similar sources are rarely available for community dissemination. Alternative funding sources that recognize the value of dissemination to the community are needed to support community-engaged research and (re)build trust in Indigenous communities.

Additionally, throughout our meetings we kept returning to how to define certain Hawaiian terms in English. Translations are always difficult, but because language embodies ways of knowing and Hawaiian ways of knowing are profoundly divergent from Western ways of knowing, these translations had become quite complicated. In order to ensure that our work aligned with the meanings of participant storytellers, additional follow-up conversations were needed. Again, funding timelines often do not allow for unanticipated deep exploration that may be required when translating Indigenous knowledge.

Although this project was not the first to identify and articulate these challenges, we hope that the institutions that we are part of will consider reevaluating the policies that subconsciously reinforce Western-focused approaches. Like the ʻŌlelo Noʻeau cited earlier, when applying collective knowledge, we can increase our wisdom and move forward together. See the Appendix for a checklist for collaboration with Indigenous communities.

Conclusion

As Indigenous boundary spanners, we inherently work to ensure that greater research accountability is built into the research process. However, we can perform this work only when we are included in the research process as community members or Indigenous scholars, or ideally as both. Empowering community members to harness the potential of the oceans and human health systems map stands as a cornerstone of our work, particularly as Indigenous boundary spanners. Systems maps are invaluable tools for communities seeking to understand and address complex challenges, as they provide a visual representation of interconnected elements within a system and offer a holistic view of community dynamics. Including Indigenous boundary spanners will ensure that the research process aligns with Indigenous values and ultimately will result in deeper understanding of concepts while supporting the (re) building of bridges in these communities.

Continuing our research relationship within Native Hawaiian communities, we propose an advanced phase that involves conducting a comprehensive leverage analysis embedded within the dynamic systems map, coupled with an engagement initiative specifically targeting Indigenous youth. By integrating a leverage analysis within the systems map, we aim not only to understand the intricate interconnections and leverage points within the system but also to identify strategic opportunities for impactful interventions. Simultaneously, reaching out to Indigenous youth serves a dual purpose: infusing diverse perspectives into our research while fostering an inclusive research space that empowers the next generation to meaningfully contribute to solutions of these complex societal problems. This combined approach enriches our research framework and nurtures a more comprehensive, collaborative, and Indigenous-values-centered research process.

As Indigenous boundary spanners, we maintain a commitment to disseminating research results that extends beyond scholarly circles to embrace a broader audience, including community, legislators, and policymaking bodies. Engaging the community in this way ensures ongoing transparency as the research evolves, promotes trust between the research institution and Indigenous communities, and encourages active participation in the implementation of our research findings. Simultaneously, our outreach to legislators and policymakers seeks to provide evidence-based guidance and supply decision makers with the knowledge necessary to shape impactful policies that resonate with our communities and address pressing societal challenges. This multifaceted approach is an attempt to bridge the gap between research and

actionable change within Native Hawaiian communities.

Although Indigenous boundary spanners are crucial to the success of collaborative, community-based projects, the role is not often formally recognized (Hatch et al., 2023). Working with Indigenous boundary spanners may add a layer of complexity, but this investment of time, energy, and expertise often yields results that prove more impactful and meaningful in the communities we all seek to serve. We challenge researchers to consider the impact of Indigenous boundary spanners and the critical role they play in community-engaged and community-based participatory research and to include them as resources, accordingly.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The Oceans and Human Health Strategic Initiative was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Hawai'i Mānoa (protocol number 2021-01063 originally approved on 02 February 2022). Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the underlying study.

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Appendix. Checklist for Collaboration with Indigenous Communities

For those who are considering doing research in collaboration with Indigenous communities, we suggest engaging in the five previously mentioned research principles in the following ways:

Principle 1: ‘Ohana

- □ Center work around ‘ohana (family).

Principle 2: Place

- □ Be intentional around where to collect data, as place and space is important.

Principle 3: People & Community

- □ Focus on the strengths and resilience of Indigenous communities and contextualizing community problems.
- □ Value and practice community-engaged approaches with the goal of moving towards community-based research approaches
- □ Prepare to enter into the research with the cultural humility required to conduct meaningful and respectful research that supports the community, knowing that the community are the experts.
- □ Work with communities to seek guidance and provide reiterative feedback loops throughout the process — from design to roll-out.

Principle 4: Interdisciplinary Discussions

- □ Build a research team that reflects varying perspectives, backgrounds, and expertise.
- □ Recognize the balance of power and place reciprocity at the center of evaluation design and research.
- □ Cultivate research team members' knowledge of community through open dialogue.

Principle 5: Institution

- □ Support the hiring of more Indigenous researchers. This honors practices, values, and beliefs related to Indigeneity and works to provide legitimacy to the project.
- □ Seek Indigenous boundary spanners, as they play a critical role in ensuring equitable engagement between Indigenous communities and institutions of higher education.
- □ Cultivate mutual trust and understanding between Indigenous boundary spanners and within the community.
- □ Commit to Indigenous and decolonial research methods, including fluid storytelling.
- □ Challenge administrative assumptions within the institution.