Reciprocity and Scholarly Connections: Faculty Perspectives About the Role of Community-Engaged Work in Their Career Vitality

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined 25 faculty members representing varying ranks, institutional types, disciplines, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and gender with current or recent participation in community-engaged research, service, and/or teaching. The study explored their perspectives on whether or not and, if applicable, in what ways their participation in community-engaged work influenced their vitality. For 23 of the 25 participants, community-engaged work positively affected their vitality. Interview analysis and document review revealed two aspects of this work as most significant: reciprocity (mutual benefits between faculty and community partners) and scholarly connections (integrating content expertise and community work). Implications for practice are discussed.

Keywords: community engagement, faculty, vitality, public good

Introduction

While I was an assistant professor, I was asked to present to the board of trustees on my community-engaged work with teacher and principal development in Haiti. As I prepared for the presentation, I recognized that my work in Haiti did more to fuel my sense of professional vitality than all of my publications and academic achievements combined. Transitioning to academia from urban, K-12 public school leadership had been challenging for me, as I felt the sense of impact of my work more readily in my K-12 role than I did in my current role as a professor of graduate education. It wasn't until my presentation on my collaborations with Haiti that I fully realized the ways in which my community-engaged work influenced my sense of vitality. This experience left me wondering if other academics felt the same way, and if they did, what was it about community-engaged work that facilitated their vitality? And with that, I embarked on a study applying the lens of vitality to better understand if and in what ways community-engaged work (teaching, research, or service) plays a role in faculty vitality.

Community-engaged work is defined as a "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" *(Driscoll, 2008, p. 39)*. Scholars have observed that, in contrast to community service or philanthropy, community-engaged work is grounded in mutuality, or in other words, a two-way street *(Weerts & Sandmann, 2010)* in which faculty and community partners work toward a common goal through the sharing of expertise, knowledge, networking, and resources *(Liang, Sandmann, & Jaeger, 2015)*. In this sense, community-engaged work resists the power structure in which faculty "give to the given" *(Liang et al., 2015, p. 241*; see also *Jaeger, Jameson, & Clayton, 2012)* and instead promotes the "civic interdependence" *(Barrera, 2015, p. 89)* of campuses and communities. For example, civic interdependence can be exemplified by a partnership between a biology professor (and her students) with expertise in tick-borne diseases and a group of medical doctors and health professionals in an underserved community. This partnership studies and promotes less expensive tick repellants in order to reduce the number of families impacted by the diseases. All members of the partnership have knowledge and skills to contribute, as well as benefits to receive.

Historically, one of the founding principles of higher education is serving the public good, often by applying scholarly expertise to society's needs *(Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005; Liang et al., 2015; Shaker, 2015)*, rather than scholars being "merely a receptacle and disseminator of expertise" *(Brint, 1996, p. 9)*. Over the last two decades, higher education stakeholders have renewed efforts to "deepen university and community relationships" *(Ivey & Teitelman, 2016, p. 1*; see also *Demb & Wade, 2012; Gonzalez & Padilla, 2008; Kezar, 2004; O'Meara, Sandmann, Saltmarsh, & Giles, 2010)*. These renewal efforts have included rewriting institutional mission statements with an emphasis on community engagement *(Aldrich & Marterella, 2014)*, promoting the legitimacy of community-engaged scholarship *(Boyer, 1990; Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997)*, forming centers for civic and community engagement and service-learning courses, creating the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification for campuses, developing professional networks and opportunities around engagement (e.g., Campus Compact), and including community engagement in accreditation indicators of institutional quality *(Weerts & Sandmann, 2010)*.

In addition to renewal efforts around community engagement at the institutional level, faculty members retain a strong com-

mitment to upholding the academy as a "public space" *(Rhoades, 2015, p. 121*; see also *Shaker, 2015; Sullivan, 2007)*. Current statistics, such as the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) survey, found that 42.5% of participating professors collaborated with local community partners in their research and/or teaching and 37.4% have focused on local community needs in their research and/or teaching *(Hurtado, Eagan, Pryor, Whang, & Tran, 2012; Rhoades, 2015)*. Further, Rhoades *(2015)* noted that one fifth of faculty in 4-year colleges and universities have taught a service-learning course, which combines a course's subject matter content with community-service experiences. A commitment to community-engaged scholarship is significantly seen in the participation rates of the following: faculty of Color and White women faculty *(Antonio, Astin, & Cress, 2000; Baez, 2000; Hurtado, Ponjuan, & Smith, 2005; Rhoades, 2015)*, faculty in the fields of education and biological sciences *(Laird, 2015)*, post-tenure faculty *(Rhoades, 2015)*, and within private, 2-year, and/or religiously affiliated schools *(Hurtado et al., 2012; Vogelgesang, Denson, & Jayakumar, 2010)*. The above statistics uphold what Shaker *(2015)* asserted: "faculty spend far more hours per week and weeks per year on their academic calling [in terms of community-engaged work] than is required by appointment or contract" *(p. 4)*.

Despite the historical and renewed interest in the community-engaged mission of higher education, a number of factors present challenges to the realization of this mission: increasing faculty workloads *(Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006)*, which could hinder faculty time to engage with communities; the continued devaluing of community-engaged work in tenure and promotion rewards systems *(O'Meara, 2002, 2006, 2011)*; inadequate organizational structures to support faculty in their community-engaged work (e.g., course releases, professional development; *Amey, Brown, & Sandmann, 2002; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010)*; and cultural shifts that promote academic capitalism and the corporatization of higher education *(Rhoades, 2015; Shaker, 2015; Sullivan, 2007; Turner, 2015)*. Moreover, the literature on community-engaged work highlights a need for continued exploration from the perspectives of participating faculty members, as well as from the perspectives of community partners, although this study does not focus on the latter.

With this in mind, I apply the lens of faculty vitality as it relates to individual faculty members' community-engaged work. Past research indicates that involvement in community-engaged work might be one promising avenue to increasing faculty satisfaction *(Jaeger et al., 2012*; see also *Curry-Stevens, 2011; Williams & Sparks,*

2011); promoting the integration of teaching, research, and service *(Ivey & Teitelman, 2016)*; and expanding innovations in scholarship and teaching *(Curry-Stevens, 2011; Williams & Sparks, 2011)*. These aforementioned benefits are significant, as the extant literature notes that faculty satisfaction and retention rates are decreasing *(Huston, Norman, & Ambrose, 2007; O'Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Trower, 2012)*, especially among faculty of Color, White women faculty *(Terosky, O'Meara, & Campbell, 2014)*, and midcareer/associate level professors *(Trower, 2012)*. This is particularly relevant, as scholars have noted that faculty of Color, White women faculty, and early-career faculty are interested in conducting community-based research and professional outreach *(Antonio, 2002; Zambrana, Espino, Castro, Cohen, & Eliason, 2015)*. In turn, I ask the following research questions:

- From the perspectives of participating faculty members, does their involvement in community-engaged work (i.e., teaching, research, and/or service) play a role in their vitality?
- If community-engaged work (i.e., teaching, research, and/or service) plays a role in participating faculty members' vitality, in what ways does their community-engaged work influence their vitality?

Conceptual Framework

I am studying community-engaged work through the conceptual lens of faculty vitality. As vitality is viewed "as an important factor for employees' functioning and . . . their sustainable employability," the concept has become an important focus of study in the organizational, business, developmental psychology, and social science literatures *(van Scheppingen et al., 2015, p. 45)*. A common definition of vitality applied to organizational settings is "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties" *(Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, in van Scheppingen et al., 2015, p. 46)*. Vitality is linked to individuals' increased well-being, resiliency, productivity, creativity, innovative behaviors, and effective functioning *(van Scheppingen et al., 2015)*. A theory often linked to vitality is the theory of self-determination, which examines individuals' intrinsic tendencies to act in healthy and effective ways *(van Scheppingen et al., 2015)*. Self-determination theorists argue that three basic psychological needs need to be met in order to enhance individuals' vitality, including a sense of autonomy,

competence, and relatedness (i.e., collaborative workstyle, social capital), with vitality at work most positively associated with the need for autonomy and competence *(van Scheppingen et al., 2015)*.

In the context of higher education, the literature on faculty vitality was largely initiated by Kanter's *(1979)* work on "stuck professors" *(p. 3)* and has continued to grow over the past three to four decades *(Baldwin, 1990; Bland, Seaquist, Pacala, Center, & Finstad, 2002; Clark, Corcoran, & Lewis, 1986; Huston et al., 2007)*. Drawing on organizational behavior, business, developmental psychology, and social science literature, faculty vitality has been defined as a "continuing process of revitalization" and self renewal that, in turn, fosters the attainment of personal and institutional goals *(Bland & Bergquist,1997, p. 2*; see also *Baldwin, 1990)*. Scholars have noted qualities such as autonomy, intellectual engagement, collaboration, and purposeful work as significant to enhancing vitality *(Baldwin, 1990; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002)*. In a study contrasting vital and nonvital faculty, Baldwin *(1990)* found that vital faculty pursued short-term goals, specific projects, and challenges for growth more than their nonvital counterparts; vital faculty also took more risks, collaborated at greater levels, and reassessed their careers when they hit milestones or plateaus in their work.

In sum, the literature on faculty vitality generally falls within three strands of study: (a) differentiating between vital faculty and stagnant and/or disengaged faculty *(Baldwin, 1990; Huston et al., 2007)*, (b) detailing strategies for promoting renewal across career stages *(Bland & Bergquist, 1997)*, and (c) highlighting institutional and individual factors that help or hinder vitality *(Bland, Risbey, Berberet, & Brown, 2004; Bland et al., 2002; O'Meara, 2006, 2011)*. This line of research has typically studied faculty vitality through performance and productivity outcomes, for example by examining publication rates, teaching performance, achievement of tenure or promotion, or involvement in shared governance *(Baldwin, 1990; Clark et al., 1986; Huston et al., 2007)*, or by relying on national datasets. Consequently, the extant literature might be overlooking local contexts and the individual's experience. Although a focus on performance, productivity, and national datasets is a valid measure of individuals' achievements and institutional reputation, higher education scholars have called for broader studies on faculty vitality that take into account individuals' experiences and their "subtler forms of engagement and disengagement" *(Huston et al., 2007, p 518)*. I have therefore chosen to build on the literature by concentrating on individual faculty members' experiences in community-engaged work through the lens of their vitality.

Methods

As I am interested in better understanding the perspectives of faculty members participating in community-engaged work, this qualitative study is grounded in interpretive traditions *(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Erickson, 1985)*, in which researchers seek to examine individuals' experiences and sense-making of their experiences rather than uncovering given facts or universal truths.

Following Institutional Review Board approval for the study, I obtained participants by applying purposeful sampling, a qualitative research technique that intentionally identifies and recruits "information rich" participants who have experience with the phenomenon under study, as well as demonstrate their availability and willingness to articulately communicate their experiences *(Palinkas et al., 2016, p. 534*; see also *Denzin & Lincoln, 2000)*. I contacted 30 members of my personal and professional networks via e-mail, asking for nominations of faculty members who were currently participating in community-engaged teaching, research, and/or service or who had done so within the past 5 years. In my nomination e-mail, I asked my networks to suggest faculty members from a variety of ranks, races/ethnicities, institutional types, geographical locations, discipline sectors, and categories of community-engaged work. I received 57 nominations, and I developed a demographics matrix that I used to select a diverse participant pool. I invited 28 potential participants via e-mail, and 25 agreed to participate in the study. Demographic information is included in Table 1.

I conducted 60–90-minute interviews with the 25 participants. The interviews were either face-to-face, over the telephone, or through a virtual meeting platform. The semistructured interview focused on three key areas: (a) background information about pathway to academic career and discipline area, (b) discussion of participants' community-engaged work, and (c) discussion of participants' views on vitality and, if applicable, in what ways their community-engaged work had influenced their vitality. Each interview question either directly connected to one of this study's two research questions (e.g., "Does your community-engaged work influence your professional vitality?"; "Please describe an example of when your community-engaged work helped or hindered your vitality.") or inquired about pertinent background or contextual information on professional trajectories and the nature of the community-engaged work (e.g., "Please describe your community-engaged work."; "How did you enter into the academic profession?"). Following the tradition of member checking, all of the

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Gender	• 13 men • 12 women
Institutional type	• 14 research universities • 4 comprehensives • 5 liberal arts • 2 community colleges
United States geographical region	• 10 northeast • 2 southeast • 5 midwest • 3 southwest • 5 west
Discipline	• 9 applied/professional • 4 arts or humanities • 9 social science • 3 science
Rank	• 6 assistant professors • 9 associate professors • 10 full professors
Type of community-engaged work	• 10 in teaching, research, and service • 7 in service and teaching • 3 in research and teaching • 2 in teaching only • 3 in service only
Race	• 13 White faculty • 12 faculty of Color

interviews were transcribed and sent to each participant to review and/or clarify; I revised transcripts based on participant feedback when applicable. Beyond interview data, I also collected documents (e.g., participants' scholarship or publicly available reports related to their community-engaged work) or reviewed electronic sources (e.g., college/university websites, community organizations' websites) related to items discussed in the interviews. These documents provided valuable background information on participants' community-engaged work, the institutional contexts in which that work was situated, and, at times, individuals' personal reflections and commentary on their communities and their role in their communities.

For analysis, I followed a three-phase strategy, guided by the work of Saldaña *(2012)*. In the first phase, I conducted first-cycle coding by posing three analytic questions: (a) Do participants discuss their community-engaged work in relation to their vitality? If

yes, in what ways? (b) What aspects of participants' community-engaged work influenced their vitality, if at all? (c) How might participants describe the role of community-engaged work in faculty vitality? I highlighted sections of transcripts with responses to the analytic questions, as well as developed codes that captured key ideas represented in the highlighted sections. In all, I developed 18 codes that addressed the analytic questions. Throughout the coding process, I created code memos, which included the names and definitions of the different codes and reflective notes about the codes and their meaning.

The code memos assisted me with second-cycle pattern coding *(Saldaña, 2012)* in which I consolidated similar codes, which resulted in the two robust themes of reciprocity and scholarly connections. For example, for the theme of reciprocity, I combined the codes "partnerships," "team," "mutually beneficial," "give and receive," and "interdependent." After determining the two robust themes of reciprocity and scholarly connections, I reanalyzed each transcript, specifically coding for the two themes, as well as any outliers. Further, I created a chart detailing when participants' responses demonstrated reciprocity and/or scholarly connections.

In the third phase of analysis, I asked how the literature on vitality discussed earlier might help me clarify, elaborate, or strengthen my analysis, as well as how my findings might contribute to the extant literature. This analysis is detailed in the findings and discussion sections.

In terms of trustworthiness of the study, I sent all interviewees a copy of their transcript and incorporated any feedback I received. Additionally, I asked several colleagues with expertise in community-engaged work and/or faculty careers, as well as my graduate assistant, to serve as critical peer reviewers of my code memos, analysis, thematic coding, and paper drafts. Third, I maintained a codebook to retrace my thinking and analytical decision points. Fourth, I included a statement of positionality in the introduction of this article. Lastly, the full article contains thick description so that the reader has participants' voices to represent the themes I present.

Findings

This article addresses two research questions. In regard to the first research question, which asked if involvement in community-engaged work played a role in their vitality, all 25 participants agreed that community-engaged work played a role in their vitality.

Twenty-three of the 25 noted that their community-engaged work positively enhanced their vitality, with 18 noting that community-engaged work is the most significant factor in their vitality. In contrast, two of the participants shared that their community-engaged work negatively impacted their vitality, even though they value the ideals of community-engaged work.

In regard to the second research question, in what ways does community-engaged work influence vitality, there were two categories of responses. The first category consists of two outlier participants who noted that their community-engaged work negatively impacted their vitality. In these cases, the participants had experienced episodes that were described as "volatile" or "disheartening." One case involved a situation with a partner community organization that resulted in legal ramifications, and the other case involved a failed promotion case. Both of these cases highlight challenges encountered in community-engaged work, including the complications that can arise from working with community organizations and the ongoing debates about the legitimacy of community-engaged work in academic reward structures. For both participants, their involvement in community-engaged scholarship decreased their vitality and, for the "unforeseeable future," ended their involvement in this type of community work.

Members of the second category, consisting of the remaining 23 participants, noted that community-engaged work positively, and significantly, heightened their vitality. Although acknowledging challenges to conducting community-engaged work, including lack of resources and recognition, scarcity of time, and risks to tenure and promotion associated with this type of work, these 23 participants (the "positive participants") commonly discussed how the benefits significantly outweighed the challenges. For these participants, two aspects of their community-engaged work most significantly enhanced their vitality: *reciprocity* and *scholarly connections*. I will discuss each theme next.

Reciprocity

The value of reciprocity, defined as a mutually beneficial relationship in which individuals serve others while also receiving benefits, was discussed as one of the key factors to enhanced vitality through community-engaged work by 21 of the 23 positive participants. Borrowing the language of a social scientist participant, reciprocity is viewed as a "two-way street" that breaks down the hierarchical power structure purporting that "the professor or uni-

versity is in the role of the giver and the community is solely a receiver." Participants disrupted the notion that their community-engaged work was to "save people" or "sweep in with a superhero cape to save the day." Instead, participants readily shared that they "receive as much, if not more, than [they] give" through their community-engaged work. And, according to participants, it is this value of reciprocity—embedded in their community-engaged work—that added vitality to their personal and professional lives. In the following sections, I will share the ways in which participants experienced reciprocity in community-engaged work. Participants' self-reported contributions to community-engaged work included (a) *scholarly and research expertise*; (b) *resources*, including those of a physical, personnel, and/or networking nature; and (c) *legitimacy*. Their self-reported benefits included (a) *purpose*, (b) *sense of community*, and (c) *opportunity to honor their own history and communities*. Although I divide their contributions and benefits for ease of discussion below, I do note that participants discussed both seamlessly.

When viewing community-engaged work through the lens of reciprocity, the contribution of their scholarly and research expertise was the most common response among participants. Acknowledging the "privilege" of graduate training and a profession that expects and supports ongoing scholarly learning, participants discussed how their knowledge of "the literature," as well as their "experience with designing and conducting research studies," represented one of their key contributions to their community-engaged work. The case of Kevin, a full professor of science at a liberal arts college, serves as an example. With a long history of designing research studies and collecting data "out in the field," Kevin established a partnership with an environmental advocacy organization. The partnership consisted of all parties determining the needed data to apply for grants, followed by Kevin and his students designing the study and collecting and analyzing the data, and concluding with the advocacy organization applying for grants to rectify the environmental damage. As a reciprocal arrangement, Kevin acknowledged that the organization "needed my time, my students' time, and my skill in designing and collecting data in the field," while he and his students "needed [the advocacy organization's] know-how in grant writing and political connections to win grants and follow-through on clean-up efforts." Kevin is extremely proud of his contribution because of the number of people who "use this data and benefit from this data."

The second most common contribution noted by participants was their ability to acquire needed resources for the community-engaged work. These resources typically took one of three forms: (a) physical resources, such as meeting rooms or office supplies; (b) personnel resources, such as the services of an administrative assistant, graduate assistants, marketing staff members, and/or students enrolled in service-learning or research courses; and (c) networking resources, such as access to experts, policymakers, and other scholars. For example, the case of Will, an associate professor of social science at a regional research university, demonstrated the ways in which he could utilize the physical, personnel, and networking resources available to him, via his academic career and his position as a locally elected government official, to facilitate his community-engaged work that focuses on a transient population of adults. Will explained how he views his role as a resource provider:

> I'm not trying to solve anything for anybody. I'm working with communities who want to solve their own issues in their own ways. And my job is to facilitate information, to provide resources, to help be a critical friend, to help keep dialogue afloat, to engage other stakeholders that maybe didn't feel they had the political capital to engage. So, I see myself as more of a conduit to resources that maybe to certain community members are out of reach.

As a "conduit to resources," Will focuses his and his students' research agendas (personnel resources) on a transient adult population in order to provide valuable information to community leaders so that they can make informed infrastructure decisions. Moreover, Will provides "a voice" to transient adults by insisting that the town's decision-makers know about and "connect to their stories, their lives" (i.e., networking resources) in ways that Will believes results in more ethical decisions.

The third contribution commonly described by participants is the "legitimacy" they bring to community-engaged work "simply because of [their] reputation as a scholar or because of [their] institution's name." Participants highlighted cases in which their community partners, despite their own expertise and experience, "could not get a seat at the table" until they, as academics, joined in the effort. Most of the participants, when discussing legitimacy, demonstrated resigned acceptance of this phenomenon, jointly expressing frustration with the power embedded within norms

of legitimacy while also determined to "take advantage of it" for projects fostering the public good. Leo, an associate professor of an applied field, serves as a case of legitimacy. As an advocate for revising how colleges and universities prepare K-12 teachers, Leo found teacher representatives "stalled" in advocating for needed changes, largely because of a "disconnect" with state-level policymakers. With his appointment at a prestigious research institute focused on higher education initiatives, Leo had the necessary access to state-level policymakers; because of past interactions, he also had their trust. Through these networks, Leo was able to bring together policymakers and teacher representatives to start "conversations . . . and public discourse" about the future of teacher preparation programs. Consequently, Leo and this newly formed network went on to prepare a "set of recommendations around how to transform . . . the way we prepare the teachers of tomorrow." Leo acknowledges that it took his reputation with the research institution to "get the policymakers on board" with collaborating with the teacher representatives. Additionally, Leo explained that he also had to establish trust with the teachers because they were "increasingly skeptical of researchers coming in the door . . . and disappearing without telling them the results." Recognizing that teachers "distrust the academy," Leo insisted that teacher representatives had "a true seat at the table" and received "recognition for their voices and input" in the final recommendation report.

With participants' contributions of scholarly and research expertise, resources, and legitimacy in mind, I next turn to the benefits associated with the reciprocal nature of community-engaged work and discuss how these benefits enhanced participants' vitality. As a reminder, benefits included (a) *purpose*, (b) *sense of community* and (c) *opportunity to honor their own history and communities*.

Purpose, and its connection to participants' vitality, was frequently cited as the "greatest benefit" of community-engaged work by all 23 positive participants. Repeatedly, participants expressed that they "felt vital" because community-engaged work provided "a sense of purpose" that "gave [them] hope" that they could be a part of "meaningful work" and "make a difference" for communities. For some participants, community-engaged work was "always a part of who [they] are," and they knew "from the beginning of the academic career" that they would pursue this line of scholarship. For others, community-engaged work came later, usually after tenure or following a transformational event that "sprung [them] into action." Despite the timing of their entrée into community-engaged work, all 23 noted that they "could not imagine

[their lives] without [community-engaged work]" or would not be interested in "working in a silo separated from the community or practical applications." The story of Henry, an assistant professor of an applied field at a major research university, symbolizes the theme of purpose. Following graduate school specializing in a traditional humanities discipline, Henry worked in the field of finance and accumulated significant wealth and success through this work. However, Henry could not "dodge" feelings of "lacking a purpose" in his work. Unable to "let go" of these doubtful feelings, Henry returned to graduate school, this time in an applied field, and pursued first a career in a nonprofit organization and later a career in academia focused on studying and advocating for a vulnerable population. Soon after assuming his new roles in the nonprofit and later in his university, Henry realized that he "just stopped being miserable" and no longer asked himself, "What am I doing?" Additionally, people around Henry started to notice his new outlook, as he recalled a story in which a former colleague saw him working with his nonprofit's clients at a park and commented on how he "look[ed] so comfortable and involved." As he begins to reflect on what his posttenure career might look like, Henry knows that his career trajectory will "certainly include [community-engaged work]" because he "thrives" when his work offers a sense of purpose:

> What do I get out of doing community-engaged stuff, I guess is the question? I think it's, if I don't do it, then I'm back to where I started, doing stuff that's not really meaningful . . . and that's the whole point . . . to lead a meaningful life, and that's why I didn't stay in [finance career]. If I end up in some way, in that same position, it's such a waste. So, I think there's this element that I recognize it is absolutely essential that I figure out how to make [community-engaged work and academia] work, otherwise, the whole project has failed.

Although acknowledging that there are easier ways to "go about the academic career," Henry is determined to pursue "meaningful work" that "serves a purpose," because he knows firsthand how a lack of vitality feels professionally and personally.

A second benefit to their vitality, as commonly discussed by participants, is the greater sense of community they derived from their involvement in community-engaged work. Relationships with community-engaged partners were often labeled "the highlight" of

their work, thereby contributing to participants' sense of vitality, especially in the context of "feelings of isolation or incivility in the academy" that many participants shared. In addition, participants emphatically noted that their community relationships were "grounded in equality" in that participants, overall, resisted deficit models or "charitable models of community service partnership" and instead sought out "equal" or reciprocal models that recognized and valued the assets of all partners. In other words, participants acknowledged that their community partners brought "important knowledge, skills, and perspectives to the table" and "should not be discredited by anyone." Quinn, an associate professor of an applied field at a major research university, serves as a case of the subtheme of a greater sense of community. In her research and teaching, Quinn concentrates on addressing environmental issues in collaboration with her students and/or K-12 teachers. Acknowledging that empowering teachers and students to confront environmental issues is challenging, Quinn finds vitality and energy for her work through relationships with her community partners. "[Working with community partners] fuels me," shared Quinn. "I work a lot but because I am working with and in a community, it gives me the inspiration and strength." Moreover, Quinn discussed how being surrounded by a strong and supportive community of fellow activists serves as a buffer when advocacy efforts do not turn out as planned.

A final benefit for participants' vitality in the context of community-engaged work is the opportunity to honor and support their own history and communities. This benefit was particularly prevalent in the responses of participating faculty of Color and/or working-class, first-generation participants. Expressing their gratitude "for the sacrifices of the previous generations to grant [them] the opportunities of education and upward mobility," participants passionately described how their vitality is enhanced when they can "leave a legacy" for their families and "create a better future" for younger generations. For example, Penelope, a full professor of social science at a regional research university, shared that she finds her community-engaged work with immigrant students and their families "especially rewarding" because it connects to her grandfather's experience as an immigrant working in a demanding industry that resulted in his body "[taking] such a beating." She finds working with immigrant communities a "natural" extension of her background, and her work is a means of "honoring the sacrifices that my family made so that I could go to college and pursue a doctoral program." Penelope shared:

> It's really about honoring their sacrifices and everything they sacrificed, their own education, their own health, to labor in difficult positions to provide better opportunities for their families and their children . . . just paying homage to that. You know, I think it's super rewarding for that reason.

Penelope described how, if she feels overwhelmed or less motivated, her "perspective changes" when she remembers the strength of her grandfather and of the families who still confront oppressive systems. For Penelope, honoring her grandfather through her community-engaged work, and remaining mindful of his sacrifices, is a source of vitality. This finding resonates with the literature on "inherent philanthropic work" characterized by a strong sense of emotional connection and community responsibility by faculty, especially faculty of Color *(Moore & Blake, 2015, p. 97; see also Baez, 2000; Rhoades, 2015)*.

To summarize: The theme of reciprocity answered this study's second research question, which asked how community-engaged work influenced participants' vitality. In response, the subthemes of contributions (i.e., scholarly and research expertise, resources, and legitimacy) and benefits (i.e., purpose, sense of community, and opportunity to honor their own history and communities) highlighted that mutually beneficial models of community-engaged work, rather than one-directional, hierarchical models, enhanced participants' vitality. Next, I turn to the second theme, that of scholarly connections.

Scholarly Connections

In analyzing participants' responses to the question of how does community-engaged work enhance their vitality, 22 of the 23 positive participants shared that connections between their community-engaged work and their scholarly expertise were significant. Although valuing volunteerism and generalized community service, participants reported that there was little to no increase in their vitality if their community-engaged work did not connect to their own scholarly expertise and learning. In fact, several participants shared that they became "burned out" if their community-related work lacked this connection. Therefore, participants' vitality became enhanced, via community-engaged work, in three key ways: (a) by deepening their own learning and understanding of their scholarship; (b) by expanding their research trajectories,

especially in applied ways; and (c) by invoking inspiration to revise their teaching. I will describe each subtheme next.

In regard to the first subtheme of deepening their own learning and understanding of their scholarly expertise, participants noted that community-engaged work that fostered, and challenged, their own learning was viewed as a source of vitality rather than another "service requirement." The case of Linda, a professor of humanities at a liberal arts college, serves as an example. Originally "a traditionalist," Linda links a profound shift in her scholarly identity—from "pure theory to applied [name of discipline]"—to her engagement with community work. Citing happenstance, Linda "came across" the concept of restorative justice, a rehabilitation approach within prison populations, while conducting a literature review for another study. With her curiosity about restorative justice piqued, Linda sought out and joined a restorative justice project. Surprised by the connections between her pure research and the applied aspects of restorative justice, Linda realized that her previous grounding in her area of expertise was incomplete, which in turn encouraged her to pursue new avenues of learning about her expertise. This "deepened awareness" of the intersection of theory and practice spilled over into her teaching; Linda began offering service-learning courses in her traditional discipline. "I am now convinced . . . ," reflected Linda, "that student learning, when it is actually engaged with people on the ground, then they are really experiencing something that can't be replaced by just theory." Despite her long tenure as a professor, Linda noted that her continued "vitality" is linked to her engagement with a community that applies her scholarly expertise to a practical issue.

The second subtheme of scholarly connections highlights the ways in which participants' vitality was enhanced when their community-engaged work provided opportunities for an expanded research trajectory. Participants discussed new pathways of inquiry and opportunities to conduct research that was not previously "on the horizon." In this context, approximately a quarter of the participants received grants and state-level assessment projects based on their work on a community-based project. Shane, an assistant professor of an applied field at a community college, falls into that category. After attending and networking at numerous township meetings on police–town relations, simply as a "member of the community" and as an "academic from a related field," Shane was invited by high-level policymakers to join a large-scale, quantitative study surveying citizens' perceptions of the police force. Shane had been predominantly a qualitative researcher, but this project

required him to "more deeply learn" quantitative research skills and pushed him to analyze this phenomenon from the "micro, individual level" rather than from his "wheelhouse of macro, policy-level analysis." Within a collaborative setting, Shane acknowledged that his own research skills, and his approach to his area of scholarly expertise, were significantly impacted "for the better" and resulted in a "renewed sense of vitality" because of this new research agenda, which encouraged him to "be a lifelong learner."

Whereas the cases of Linda and Shane represent the connections between community-engaged work and their scholarly learning, the case of Michelle, an associate professor of the arts at a community college, illustrates the subtheme of connections between community-engaged work and teaching. Michelle credits her sense of vitality to the connections between her community-engaged work and essential concepts taught in her courses, which included design and marketing strategies and professional dispositions. Collaborating with the director of a nonprofit, Michelle's students listened to the director's needs and then developed and pitched marketing materials, such as logos, stationery, and supplies. Moreover, Michelle simulated the real world, in terms of professionalism, by "reinforcing" that students respond promptly and appropriately in e-mails, arrive on time in professional attire when meeting with the director, adhere to deadlines, and stay "on budget." By integrating a community project geared toward preparing her students for "a real business experience," Michelle derived "great satisfaction and energy" from knowing that she was helping her students develop portfolios for college transfer or employment while also serving a community organization operating on a limited budget.

To summarize: The theme of scholarly connections answered this study's second research question, which asked how community-engaged work influenced participants' vitality. Participants' responses demonstrated that their vitality was enhanced when their community-engaged work merged seamlessly with or built on their scholarly expertise and learning, especially when linked to their own learning within their expertise, to new research projects, or to meaningful learning experiences for their students. Moreover, this finding is supported by the work of O'Meara *(2008)*, which found faculty members' perceived fit between their discipline and their community engagement served as an important motivation for their participation.

Discussion and Significance

In this article, I examined 25 faculty members who are currently participating or have in the recent past participated in community-engaged research, service, and/or teaching to learn more about their perspectives on whether or not, and if applicable, in what ways their participation in community-engaged work influenced their vitality. All of the 25 participants agreed that community-engaged work influenced their vitality, with 23 of the 25 noting positive influences and the remaining two outliers describing negative influences. For the 23 participants who noted increased vitality due to their community-engaged work, two aspects of their community-engaged work most significantly enhanced their vitality: the themes of *reciprocity* (mutual benefits between faculty and community partners) and *scholarly connections* (integrating content expertise and community work).

As higher education stakeholders grapple with faculty satisfaction, productivity, and engagement, I share three key contributions on the role of community-engaged work in faculty vitality. First, policies and discourse around community-engaged work typically focus on one of the following three areas: (a) the external benefits to the public when academics engage with the community, (b) the pursuit of improved relations with the public and policymakers by fulfilling the public good mission of higher education, or (c) the status and evaluation of community-engaged work in faculty reward structures. In contrast, this study builds on previous work that focused on analysis at the micro or individual level, from the perspectives of the faculty members themselves *(see also Liang et al., 2015; O'Meara 2008)*, with a specific focus on faculty members' vitality. This study thus provides insight into the experiences of faculty members conducting community-engaged work and their perspectives on the significance of community-engaged work on their vitality, as 23 of 25 participants noted a positive connection. With deeper analysis, this study also pinpoints what it is, specifically, about participating faculty members' community-engaged work that enhances their vitality. An important takeaway from this study is that the essential elements of reciprocity and scholarly connections are key to enhancing the vitality of this study's participants, a finding that might resonate with other faculty and institutions.

A second key takeaway of this study is the concept of selflessness. In order to view community-engaged work through a lens of faculty vitality, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers need to reassess the dominant narrative of selflessness, in which the actions of faculty are viewed and evaluated based on how their work ben-

efits others, how their work produces outcomes for others. Instead, finding a more holistic approach to understanding faculty and their community-engaged work—one that integrates both the contributions of faculty and the benefits to faculty—is an important step if colleges and universities, and the communities in which they are embedded, strive to promote community-engaged work among faculty.

Third, for community-engaged work to flourish, there is also a need to push back against the narrative of productivity that characterizes contemporary discourse on faculty work. Community-engaged work—especially if we consider the importance of reciprocity and scholarly connections—takes time: time to build a community's trust, time to engage all stakeholders, time to capture the true essence of an issue facing a community, time to build capacity and include all voices. Under the current metrics of accountability and productivity, community-engaged work is often viewed as a challenge or an "add-on" and will likely fall on the shoulders of faculty committed to this type of work. If colleges and universities hope to reclaim the public's perception that they are true partners to their communities *and* support faculty vitality vis-à-vis their community-engaged work, higher education leaders and policy-makers will need to adjust the perception that community-engaged work is a distraction from productivity.

How might higher education stakeholders apply this study's findings and key takeaways to practice? In response, I offer a few suggestions. First, department chairs and academic leaders should assist faculty in structuring their community-engaged work with an eye toward reciprocity and scholarly connections, among other considerations pertinent to the individual faculty member. Faculty members should also consider asking themselves these questions prior to their community-engaged work: "What might I contribute to the community—and—what benefits to my teaching, research, service, and vitality might exist due to my participation?" "What linkages are there between the community-engaged work and my scholarly expertise and learning?" "Is there a way to integrate my community-engaged work with my other responsibilities in teaching, research, and service?" Reflecting on these questions will assist faculty members and their academic leaders in determining participation and in shaping community-engaged efforts in ways that optimize the potential for enhanced vitality.

Relatedly, past research has noted that community-engaged work has great potential for integrating the signature responsibilities of the faculty career: research, teaching, and service. As

studies demonstrate that faculty workloads are increasing (Eagan & Garvey, 2015), integrating research, teaching, and service within the context of community-engaged work is a potential pathway for focusing faculty members' work. Academic leaders, as well as campus centers for community partnerships and disciplinary associations, should provide guidance, case exemplars, and consultations on how faculty members can craft their community-engaged work with an eye toward integrating the "varied hats" of teaching, research, and service that faculty members wear. As an example, Linda, a participant showcased earlier in this article, applies her restorative justice work to service projects with local prisons, to teaching via service-learning courses, and to applied research in her discipline. To Linda, her community-engaged work is seamless, with lines between the traditional faculty workload categories blurred.

A third implication—and one that is not new in higher education conversations—is that academic and faculty leaders must recognize the additional time needed to authentically develop reciprocity and scholarly connections in community-engaged work, and in turn, evaluate and reward participating faculty members accordingly. Applying traditional metrics of productivity hinders faculty members' engagement with community projects. If colleges and universities are committed to the public good—and if they want to pursue one potential avenue for increased faculty vitality—then they must recalibrate the evaluation system (see O'Meara, 2011 for discussion of rewarding community-engaged scholarship). This recommendation is especially geared toward addressing issues of equity in the recruitment, evaluation, promotion, and retention of faculty of Color and White women faculty, as statistics highlight higher participation rates in community-engaged work among these groups than among their White male counterparts *(Eagan & Garvey, 2015; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Stanley, 2006; Ward, 2008).*

Limitations and Future Research

As with all studies, there are limitations to this work, which include considerations of sample size, reliance on participants' articulated experiences with community-engaged work, the nature of collecting data at one specific time rather than longitudinally, and the lack of data from constituents influenced by participants' work (e.g., communities, students, institutional leaders). Thus, future studies would benefit from incorporating additional data sources, such as interviewing community leaders, students, and higher education leaders to serve as additional points of evidence

for examinations of faculty vitality within community-engaged work. Moreover, it would be valuable to trace participants' experiences in community-engaged work over a longer period of time and to determine if and how career or life stages influenced their perspectives.

Conclusion

The growing literature on faculty vitality—especially studies from the individual faculty members' experiences—highlight that the faculty role can be characterized by a commitment to meaningful work, serving the public good, autonomy, and collaboration, and that these characterizations move beyond the "elements of a job description" *(Turner, 2015, p. 145; see also O'Meara, 2008)*. "The nature of the academic community has changed over time," stated Burlingame *(2015)*, "and the need for today's professoriate to find meaning in their work beyond monetary gain is perhaps more critical than ever" *(p. 135)*. With this in mind, this study focused on faculty members themselves as the unit of analysis, in order to better understand if and in what ways community-engaged work can promote vitality, a goal that institutions of higher education are increasingly attuned to in light of decreasing levels of faculty satisfaction. This study's findings, of participants' perceptions of increased vitality due to community-engaged work (with two exceptions) and the values of reciprocity and scholarly connections, might resonate with the work of professional development staff, administrators, community leaders, and policymakers as they strive to better understand how to enhance faculty vitality and foster campus–community partnerships.

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