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THE HOMELESS WOMAN WHO SPAT ON ME IS A TEACHER
The Politics of Knowledge Construction

One night in the summer of 2007, I stepped off a train into the muggy Chicago air and onto the elevated platform near my apartment. As I started forward, weary after a full day working as an AmeriCorps volunteer at a South Side school, I nearly tripped over two white garbage bags near my feet. My gaze traveled several feet forward, to an elderly woman with dark skin shuffling toward me in the yellow light, carrying two more bags. And then I looked beyond her, to a small heap of bags that rested on the concrete near the top of the stairs. Perhaps she was homeless, and moving her belongings? I smiled at her. "Want some help carrying those?"

She stopped. There was a pause. Then her eyes narrowed, and she spat on the ground next to me. She said, "I won't be your service project." And she continued moving forward. I stood silently as she dropped the bags and turned back to the pile near the stairs. I stared at the back of her loose, black shirt for several long moments before turning and leaving in the opposite direction.

This woman was one of my first community instructors. She taught me that community engagement is not always viewed the same way from different social locations. As I traveled on from that train platform to the University of Arizona to pursue the study of community engagement in rhetoric and composition, and then to University of Nebraska as a faculty member, that woman's voice has stayed with me. In the midst of coordinating engagement initiatives in two writing programs, pairing hundreds of my students with local nonprofits through the years, spending summers teaching with civic leadership programs, and training K-16 teachers on public writing pedagogy, I've found myself wondering: what is it like to be someone's community partner—or someone's "service project"? How might community engagement change if university coordinators took these community perspectives into account? What can community partners contribute to knowledge about writing, pedagogy,

and community collaborations? This book is an attempt to begin answering these questions and, particularly, to create epistemological and material space for community members themselves to offer their insights into the nature and best practices of community engagement. In this project, I synthesize a framework for knowledge construction in community engagement, critical community–based epistemologies, which can be used to inform pedagogy, program design, and research. I draw from this framework to outline a methodology for collecting community perspectives on engagement partnerships and discuss interviews with eighty-two community members involved in three common types of community-based pedagogy: classes that collaborate with underserved youth, courses that involve writing for nonprofits, and graduate education that incorporates community engagement. The book concludes with a series of program and partnership designs that highlight community perspectives.

I write with an audience in mind that includes scholars and teachers involved in community-based teaching across the disciplines, even as I write through the disciplinary frame of rhetoric and composition. Community engagement as a field—or, as some would say, as a movement—is wide reaching, with large-scale organizations such as Campus Compact, institutionalized engagement centers, thriving research journals such as the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* and the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, and even a nascent push to offer majors in service-learning (Butin 2010a).[1] As one of the top three fields involved in community-based learning, composition has a long history of investment in this larger, interdisciplinary field of community engagement (Butin 2010b). Composition and rhetoric, a field focused on studying writing and communication, has matured in what Paula Mathieu calls its "public turn," as scholars and practitioners engage with places outside of universities as sites of research, teaching, and intellectual partnership (2005). The field has continued to innovate within Tom Deans's (2000) classic model of writing *for*, *about*, and *with* communities: creating projects *for* nonprofits through local collaborations or digital partnerships (Bacon 2000; Youngblood and Mackiewicz 2013), *about* communities in reflective papers about volunteering or action research (Herzberg 1994; Juergensmeyer 2011), and *with* communities in collaborative youth writing programs and wikis (Flower, Long, and Higgins 2000; Walsh 2010). Ninety-three percent of professional and technical writing programs involve community partnerships (Allen and Benninghoff 2004), and the field of composition now hosts a regular Conference on Community Writing.

Both composition and the larger field of community engagement have invested deeply in researching community-university partnerships, offering theories, stories, and qualitative and quantitative reviews. Yet there is a curious paucity of research on how community members themselves view and experience community engagement. Randy Stoecker and Elizabeth Tryon, for example, state in their review of research, "We [the community engagement field] especially don't know how service-learning affects communities from the perspective of those who live and work there" (Stoecker and Tryon 2009, 7). While there are a few studies that seek the insight of nonprofit staff who collaborate with college students, even less has been published about those who receive the "service." Amy Martin, Kristy SeBlonka, and Elizabeth Tryon (2009) write that to their knowledge, "There are no studies of client experiences with short term service learning" (62). With some intensive searching, I have unearthed a handful of studies that focus on the perspectives of community residents rather than nonprofit staff (e.g., d'Arlach, Sánchez, and Feuer 2009; S. Davis and Roswell 2013; Jorge 2003; Grobman 2017; Skilton-Sylvester and Erwin 2000; Wetzel and "Wes" 2013), but the fact that I can nearly count these studies on one hand troubles me. Why has there been so little published on community perspectives of community-based pedagogies? Why is community member knowledge so rarely tapped to impact teaching and program design? The answer to these questions—and therefore a potential solution to this imbalance—lies in the politics of knowledge production.

TRACING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP: ACADEMICS IN THE FRONT OF THE ROOM

I was an eager first-time attendee at the 2012 International Association on Research in Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) Conference, particularly because this was the inaugural year for the "community fellows program" that sponsored the registration fees for nonprofit staff involved in service-learning partnerships. The fellows program was an effort to expand the role of community partners from recipients of university "help" to participants actively involved in collaborative knowledge production. I was looking forward to participating with community members and academics in this innovative conference structure, but I found myself troubled by one particular session. In this session, a woman in the back asked if there were any community fellows in the room, and when five people raised their hands, the woman proceeded to ask how community partners might want universities to study

community engagement. I was shocked when a white academic at the front of the room answered her question, followed closely by another white academic from the panel adding his thoughts, and then the conversation moved on. The community partners remained silent; there was no space created for them to speak. I share responsibility as an academic who did not intervene.

This moment illustrates for me the epistemological dynamics John Saltmarsh, Matthew Hartley, and Patti Clayton (2009) identify in the "Democratic Engagement White Paper," a position paper issued as a result of a summit on the future of civic engagement in higher education. The meeting sought to identify the reasons behind a perceived "sense of drift" in the movement, and a key argument of the paper is that "the dominant epistemology of the academy runs counter to the civic engagement agenda" (5). The academy's focus on expertise, specialization, and neutrality invalidates the knowledges of community members, and thus makes deep partnership and the practice of collaborative knowledge production difficult. In other words, the narrowness of the types of knowledge that are considered worthwhile in the university means that the stories, experiences, and perspectives of community members are not truly considered "knowledge." Therefore, community members often do not have opportunities to participate in research or practical problem-solving in university partnerships.

The authors call for a shift in the politics of knowledge production.[2] This "democratic epistemology" (Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton 2009, 5) has been applied in university-community partnerships to address social issues, through approaches such as participatory action research (Kinney and Boddie 2001; Reardon 1998), in which community members and academics collaboratively design and carry out research on public problems; rivaling (Flower, Long and Higgins 2000), a community literacy approach that encourages college students and community members to identify multiple interpretations of social issues; and community-based publishing (Cassell 2000; Goldblatt and Parks 2000; Parks 2009), which calls for academics to use university resources to publish community voices. Community members and university representatives have worked together to address problems such as food deserts, crime, workforce development, sexual illiteracies, and drug addiction (Flower 2008; Flower and Heath 2000; Licona and Gonzales 2013). Yet despite calls by scholars (Driscoll et al. 1996; Ferman and Hill 2004; Grobman 2015; Marullo et al. 2003; Stanlick et al. 2017) this epistemology only rarely seems to be applied to inquiry *about community engagement itself,* either in research or in practical areas such as program design.[3]

Even with firsthand experience of university-community partnerships, community members have not been viewed as knowledgeable about community engagement, which means they have not often been invited to contribute their perspectives.

Nadine Cruz and Dwight Giles (2000) identify several additional reasons for the lack of attention on communities in community engagement scholarship.[4] First, they explain that community-based learning has historically focused on validating this "experimental" pedagogy for administrators and academics, which led to an emphasis on student outcomes and faculty experiences. Randy Stoecker and Elizabeth Tryon (2009), however, challenge this idea that the university focus is merely the result of a need for validation, arguing that this emphasis stems from an outright "bias" toward postsecondary interests over community interests (4). Indeed, Paula Mathieu (2005) argues that much service-learning functions to meet university needs, especially as a source of positive publicity for institutions of higher education. She points out that a key service-learning group, Campus Compact, was founded by three ivy-league presidents, and their mission statement explicitly frames their goal as countering the perception of ivy-league college students as materialistic and self-centered (95–96). Community engagement may be especially helpful to the image of English departments who are fighting, as Thomas Miller (2011) argues, to keep their relevance amid changing conceptions of literacy and increasing calls for accountability. Community-based learning offers students résumé lines, while also offering departments an opportunity to claim a tangible contribution to local communities, providing a defense to threats of funding cuts. In this focus on university benefits, the need to listen to community members—especially about potential *problems* with community engagement that might call programs into question—can be overlooked or ignored.

Another contributing factor to the relative absence of research on community perspectives is the problem defining "community," as Cruz and Giles recognize. Does the term refer to the nonprofit staff and professionals who plan the partnership—the director of the LGBTQA+ center, the volunteer manager of the nursing home, and the instructor of the adult literacy class? Or does the term refer to the community members themselves—the youth at the LGBTQA+ center, the residents of the nursing home, the participants in the adult literacy class? Community engagement scholarship often seems to assume that staff members can speak for "the community," as many studies use the term "community" when referring only to nonprofit staff participation (e.g.,

Vernon and Ward 1999). Yet community resident perspectives are often significantly different from the viewpoints of nonprofit staff (Kissane and Gingerich 2004), especially as the vast majority of nonprofit staff is white, middle-class, and college educated, and many clients do not share this background (Toupin and Plewes 1997). While both staff and resident perspectives are important, and this book engages both, the specific insights that community *residents* can make have been especially neglected.

Given these dynamics, the number of studies on community-based learning from community perspectives is limited. Perhaps the most substantial book-length study to date is Randy Stoecker and Elizabeth Tryon's (2009) *Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service-Learning.* Stoecker and Tryon interviewed sixty-seven nonprofit agency staff who had participated in service-learning, and their book tackles several key themes, such as staff motivations for participating, the challenge of short-term service-learning, and dynamics of training and evaluating students. Articles on nonprofit staff perspectives report the need for communication and relationships with faculty (Bacon 2000; Creighton 2008; Leiderman et al. Gross 2013; Sandy and Holland 2006; Vernon and Ward 1999; Worrall 2007), the significance of service-learning's drain on staff time (Bushouse 2005), the emphasis nonprofit partners place on educating students (Sandy and Holland 2006; Worrall 2007), the need for distribution of power (Creighton 2008; Leiderman et al. 2013; Miron and Moely 2006), and the importance of student motivation (Schmidt and Robby, 2002). A handful of resources have also been developed with nonprofit staff in mind as the audience, to orient staff to university culture and support them in evaluating potential partnerships (Cress, Stokamer, and Kaufman 2015; New England Resource Center 2000; Scheibel, Bowley, and Jones 2005).

The available literature narrows considerably as we move from non-profit staff to focus on community residents. Scholars Dick Cone and Paul Payne (2002) offer a fictionalized story about a neighborhood deliberating about whether or not they should partner with a university in the development of an empowerment zone. The article touches on gentrification, situations in which the university did not follow through on grant money or sharing research, and the pattern of the university placing its own interests first. While this piece presents a fictional account, readers are asked to judge the story's validity by the extent to which it resonates with their experience, and many readers may find themselves wincing in recognition as they read. In fact, many of these problematic themes are echoed in Harley Etienne's (2012) study of

community perceptions of the widely celebrated partnerships between the University of Pennsylvania and West Philadelphia for neighborhood revitalization. The collection *Community Literacies as Shared Resources for Transformation* (Larson and Moses 2018) seeks to prevent some of these problematic themes by involving community residents in analyzing a research partnership with a food market, emphasizing the importance of building relationships and recognizing the interconnected nature of development projects.

Regarding community engagement pedagogies in particular, I was able to locate only a handful of studies focused primarily on perspectives of community residents,[5] including Latinx community members who interacted with Spanish-language students (d'Arlach, Sánchez, and Feuer 2009; Jorge 2003); African American adults in a literacy program staffed by university students (Skilton-Sylvester and Erwin 2000); and incarcerated participants in prison education programs (S. Davis and Roswell 2013; Wetzel and "Wes" 2013). These studies reveal several aspects of community engagement troubling to community members, such as culturally insensitive students, as well as benefits, such as the opportunity to exchange knowledge and overcome community members' own stereotypes through exposure to a greater diversity of people. Strikingly, all of the studies emphasize the importance of personal relationships with students in maximizing benefits and minimizing harms.[6]

Here, then, is the bulk of what is known about how community partners experience community engagement pedagogies. While a few more studies certainly exist, the tiny percentage in light of the total volume of community engagement research is astounding. I anticipate that there is a similar lack of community resident voices in program decision making, given that I do not often see publications describing community leadership of programs. There is something more at play than a mere oversight of community partners, who comprise half of the engagement equation. This is not simply a problem of neglect, but an epistemological problem: the knowledge of community members is not viewed as valuable; academics have remained in the front of the knowledge production process. In order to address this knowledge gap, therefore, this book seeks to develop a theoretical framework that supports community-held knowledges in community engagement scholarship and practice. This framework not only provides a rationale for incorporating community knowledge, but also offers implications for how to facilitate—on the ground—the coproduction of knowledge. Whether the purpose is writing a book chapter or determining the next steps of a local engagement program, inquiry can be done in collaboration with community partners.

THE CENTER, THE MARGINS, AND OFF THE PAGE: CRITICAL COMMUNITY-BASED EPISTEMOLOGIES

The critical community-based epistemologies framework I propose here interweaves three sets of insights: concepts from what is often considered the center of the field, or foundational scholars in community engagement and composition; knowledge from the margins, or nondominant theories and theorists; and expertise from sources that are off the printed page entirely, or verbal insights from community members themselves. In this chapter, I offer a rationale for drawing from these three locations of knowledge and detail components of critical community-based epistemologies that stem from the first two locations: theorists from the center and the margins. The contributions of community members to this framework will be developed in the chapters that follow.

First, I suggest that theorists who have been central to the development of community engagement pedagogies, upon a closer read, offer implications for radically reorienting engaged pedagogies to consider community voices. Service-learning scholars in composition and beyond frequently identify John Dewey, Paulo Freire, John Kretzmann, and John McKnight as foundational theorists who have shaped how community-based pedagogies are understood (Deans 2000; Giles and Eyler 1994; Flower, Long, and Higgins 2000; Saltmarsh 1996; Saltmarsh and Morton 1997). While these theorists are often invoked to discuss interactions with students, a deeper reading of their work offers insight into how community engagement practitioners can more meaningfully relate to communities. I intentionally draw on theorists seen by many of my anticipated readers as foundational in order to argue that involving community members in inquiry about engaged pedagogies should be foundational. I also connect these central theories to nondominant theories and theorists because the effort to democratize the knowledge production process in community engagement needs to extend to theory building.[7] Community engagement scholarship is dominated by white, male, and privileged voices (Bocci 2015; Cushman, Guerra, and Parks 2010), and diversifying theory building is a vital project for the field of community writing. As Gloria Anzaldúa argues (1991), theories often serve those who create them (165). Nondominant theorists and theories are especially valuable for the insight they contribute that can highlight inequalities between the university and community.

I also make the choice to intentionally engage nondominant theories and theorists because of my own positionality as a white, educated, heterosexual woman from a relatively privileged class background. My mother is

a college professor; I learned to swim in a college pool, served as a subject in child psychology research, and spent elementary snow days sitting in the back of college Shakespeare classes, drawing pictures of my mom's students. University ways of being have shaped me, and I want to make meaning by disrupting the normative frameworks that are common in my lived experience and in academia. Conceptual moves like this feel urgent to me on many levels, given that I now navigate an interracial marriage, and as I submit final revisions on this manuscript, I find myself pregnant with a biracial child. As someone who lives in the tension between a decade-long engagement with community-based work inspired by a spiritual commitment to social justice and the haunting suspicion that I am just another white do-gooder carrying the scent of imperialism, I turn to nondominant literatures to wrestle with this tension. I have often asked myself whether I have a right to write this book, coming from the background I do—and my answer is always conflicted. I am aware of the problematic pattern of members of dominant cultures conducting research within marginalized groups (Patel 2016). Acknowledging my whiteness and wanting to work in an antiracist white frame therefore draws me to work with literatures that emerge not just from the ivory-white tower, but from nondominant locations. One of the key skills for community engagement work with marginalized groups is the ability to act in light of multiple nondominant frameworks, especially as university-community partnerships have a history of imposing the dominant university ways of thinking and being on community members (Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton 2009). It is critical to immerse myself in theories that were not written for me and to consider the ways that others have had to operate with frameworks that were not written by or for people like them. I value the practice of engaging nondominant theories not only for the potential of the theories themselves—which is significant, as these theories make important contributions to forwarding knowledge—but also the process of working with them as diverse forms of knowledge.

A natural extension of the movement from central theorists to theorists who speak from the margins is to continue off the page entirely, to incorporate the verbal insights of community members themselves as a component in critical community-based epistemologies. In other words, the framework seeks to enact what it is arguing, by creating space for community member knowledge to be incorporated into the ideas and best practices that guide community engagement work. Insights from over eighty interviews with community members who have participated in a range of community engagement partnerships thus comprise a significant component of critical community-based epistemologies.

This combination of central, nondominant, and off-the-page insights offers a multivocal theory for approaching knowledge construction in community engagement pedagogies. The epistemological framework I build here disrupts traditional conceptions of who is a knower in community engagement and also suggests how we might go about centering the perspectives of community partners in research and practice. In figure 1.1, I present the general structure for the theory. I will fill in this structure with specific scholars and concepts as I unpack critical community-based epistemologies throughout this chapter, culminating in another figure to be presented later that will include the ideas of the theory. For now, just consider the general structure of critical community-based epistemologies, becoming familiar with how the theory introduces three main strands (*experience, participation, assets*) that begin in the middle and move outward to include layers in each strand from different positionalities: foundational scholars, scholars from the margins, and community interviewees. This structure provides the architecture of critical community-based epistemologies.

The term "critical" in critical community-based epistemologies signals an approach that seeks to critique and intervene in oppressive power dynamics, inspired by the rich histories of critical theory and critical pedagogy. I'm drawing here on the spirit of critical theory as developed by The Frankfurt School; as Max Horkheimer, one of the founding members of the Frankfurt School, suggests, critical theory "never aims simply at the increase of knowledge as such," but rather aims at forwarding human "emancipation" (1972, 245–246). This definition of "critical" is also present in theoretical families such as critical race theory (Bell 1992; Delgado and Stefancic 2012) and LATCrit (Delgado Bernal 2002), as well as pedagogical approaches such as critical pedagogy. As Peter McLaren writes, critical pedagogy "engages [people] in analyses of the unequal power relations that produce and are produced by cultural practices and institutions (including schools), and it aims to help [people] develop the tools that will enable them to challenge this inequality" (qtd. in George 2013, 92). I hold similar goals for the theory of community knowledge production that I am developing here. Often, deconstruction in academic contexts has become an exercise in armchair critique. However, as Leigh Patel (2016) notes, "calling attention to something does not automatically mean its transformation" (2). My conception of critical includes both raising awareness of imbalances in who is considered knowledgeable, and working toward pathways for intervening.

By "community-based," I mean that the knowledges of community partners—including nonprofit staff and especially residents who access

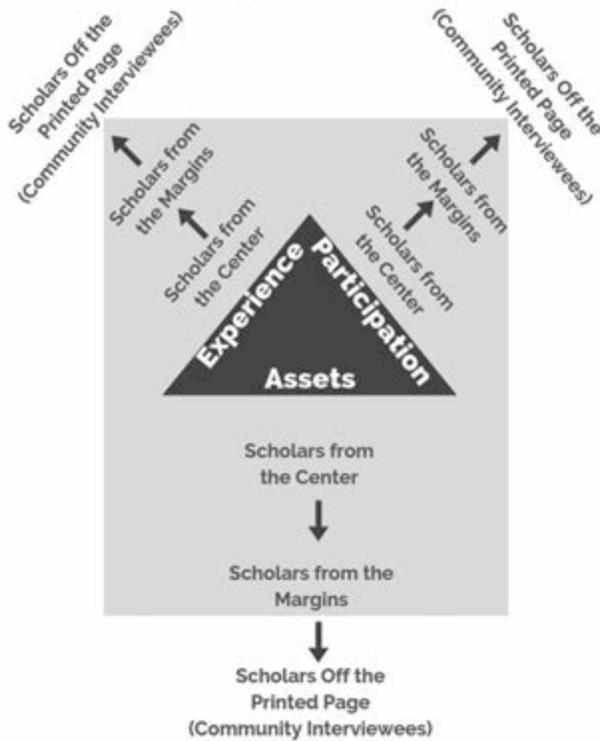**Critical Community-Based Epistemologies**
Theory Structure

Figure 1.1. Structure of critical community-based epistemologies

nonprofit services or partnership programming—are highlighted by the theory. In other words, the focus is on people who enter the partnership primarily through their connection to an organization, association, or neighborhood, rather than through their role at a university. As Paula Mathieu (2005) notes, "community" is a notoriously difficult term to work with because of its ambiguity and its warm, fuzzy connotations that cause people to overlook conflict. She outlines a few other possible terms from scholars, such as "contact zones," "sites of service," and "outreach," ultimately settling on "street" as her preferred term. However, as Mathieu recognizes, "street" implies "urban," which may not be a good fit for all partnerships, like some of the collaborations with rural schools described in this book. Other terms for "community," such as "street," have yet to be taken up widely in community literacy and the larger field of engagement. Therefore, in the interest of clarity for readers who are

familiar with terms such as "community partner," I use "community-based" to indicate that the focus is on knowledge that comes from non-profit staff and residents who collaborate on public partnerships, rather than traditional academic knowledge.

And finally, I define "epistemologies" as theories of knowledge. As feminist philosopher Sandra Harding (1987) explains, an epistemology "answers questions about who can be a 'knower' . . . what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge . . . what kinds of things can be known . . . and so forth" (2). Critical community-based epistemologies therefore seeks to build a rationale for why community partners are creators of knowledge, why their stories and analyses should be considered important forms of knowledge, and how these knowledges can be engaged. The theory has natural implications for methods and methodologies in community engagement. As Harding writes, "A research *method* is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence"; "A *methodology* is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" (2). Later in this chapter, I detail how I transposed critical community-based epistemologies into a research method and methodology for this study, explaining my rationale and process for interacting with data. While this method ultimately led to the formal publication of this book, along the way I also gathered many practical insights about specific engagement programs, leading to local implications for how these partnerships were run. A similar method to the one I use in this book could be used to gather perspectives for informal program evaluations or discussions about future directions of a partnership, even if no publication is planned. In other words, the term "epistemologies" and references to "knowledge production" are not meant to indicate that this theory applies only or even primarily to formal research—critical community-based epistemologies explores the what, why, and how of community knowledge in both practice and research. I weave this theory of critical community-based epistemologies by braiding together three strands, each one composed of concepts drawn from the center, margins, and off-the-page: *experience, participation, and assets.*

Knowledge Comes from Community Experience*: Insights from*
John Dewey, Cornel West, and High School Students

Philosopher John Dewey is part of composition's "tacit tradition" (Fishman 1993), and his work forms the "theoretical roots" of service-learning (Giles and Eyler 1994). But perhaps this bespeckled professor

holds more radical potential for the field of community engagement than his oft-cited theories of democracy and experiential education might suggest at first glance. For Dewey, knowledge is created in experience. He champions what he terms "the doctrine of the value of consequences" (Dewey 1984, 13): as a pragmatist, Dewey continued the tradition of Charles Sanders Pierce and William James to rely on results in action over abstract ideas. Abstract principles, even cherished ones, were suspect and relentlessly questioned until examined on the ground. In fact, Dewey went so far as to say knowledge is not truly knowledge until the ideas have been tested in experience and produced results (Dewey 1916, 144).

The concept of consequences looms large in Dewey's theories of education and cognition. For Dewey, learning through experience involves both a doing—action—and an undergoing—seeing the results of this action, "the return wave of consequences which flow from it" (1916, 64). In other words, we do something to a thing, and then it does something to us in return. Reflection seeks to connect the doing and the undergoing: it is only when we think critically about *why* our actions produced certain consequences that we are learning. In particular, past consequences should be examined for how they might shed light on future action (1938, 87). When people act without reflecting on the results of their action, their approach is "capricious" (1916, 36). The goal, then, is to approach experience with the scientific method, which Dewey defines as identifying a hypothesis in an uncertain situation, testing the hypothesis by observing the consequences it produces when acted upon, and then reflecting on the results to act more effectively in the future (1938, 86–87). By failing to look at consequences, we lose the opportunity to generate knowledge about our experiences.

For a field permeated by Dewey's thought, community engagement's lack of attention to its consequences for communities is striking. Dewey would challenge us to rigorously analyze community impact, rather than relying on assumptions about how community engagement is good for the community. Classic truisms such as "Service, when combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both" (Honnet and Poulsen 1989, 1) may need to be examined more deeply—especially considering the ambiguity around value *for whom*? In much service-learning scholarship, community impact is glossed over with the assumption that communities are appreciative of students' efforts, even in otherwise critically aware pieces such as Bruce Herzberg's classic "Community Service and Critical Teaching" (1994). When describing the benefits of a service-learning tutoring program, Herzberg writes, "And of course

the students provided real and needed services" (308). This "of-course" attitude toward community consequences is also visible when composition scholars Gay Brack and Leanna Hall (1997) claim, "The benefits to the children our students tutored were obvious" (151). Yet, perhaps these benefits are not so obvious to community members. In fact, several scholars have discussed the potential ways that community engagement can harm community members (Eby 1998; Stoecker and Tryon 2009). In one poignant example, Lucía d'Arlach, Bernadette Sánchez, and Rachel Feuer (2009) write about a community engagement program with Latinx adults, where one insensitive student added the word "taco" to the end of every sentence during the exchange. Two community members were so troubled by this behavior that they left the literacy program, demonstrating the human consequences of problematic engagement. To truly learn about community engagement would require that we reflect on the connections between actions and the results, and that we seek to use this knowledge to create stronger partnerships for the future.[8]

Dewey's theories have the potential not just to shift attention to community consequences, but also to reframe who can create knowledge about these consequences. Dewey locates knowledge generation in hands-on experiential inquiry, rather than mastery of abstract theories, breadth of memorized knowledge, or the number of books on community writing one might have lined up on a dusty office shelf. This means that community members, with experiential knowledge of university-community partnerships, have critical insight to offer to the conversation—and they become invaluable partners in understanding the nature of engaged pedagogies. In short, Dewey's pragmatism asks us to seek knowledge in experience, including community members' experiences, and to focus on action, reflection, and revision rather than perfection.

While imperfect itself, especially in its unwavering faith in the scientific method and lack of emphasis on difference,[9] Dewey's is a hopeful approach to me. As Linda Flower (1997) and others have identified, Dewey's perspectives can be usefully expanded when put in conversation with philosopher and African American public intellectual Cornel West—a scholar who actively invokes perspectives from the margins, offering the next layer of the *experience* strand of critical community-based epistemologies.

Cornel West (2005) has infused Dewey's thinking with critical theories of race, the spirit of blues music, and Jewish traditions to craft a version of pragmatism West calls "prophetic pragmatism." West admired Dewey but critiqued him for his lack of attention to real suffering and injustice

(Gilyard 2008). Dewey's son died while a baby, and West reflects, "Now I would say to Dewey—and I love John Dewey—'You know, let's start your project with the death of your child'" (Gilyard 2008, 109). It's this attention to the pain involved in injustice that leads West to argue that pragmatism needs to "shatter deliberate ignorance and willful blindness to the suffering of others" (West 2005, 114) and take as its *starting point* the painful experiences of those most vulnerable in a society. West writes of Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old who was murdered in 1955 after reportedly flirting with a white woman, and the family's choice to leave the casket open at the funeral to show the brutality of the act. Prophetic pragmatism asks us to "stare painful truths in the face" (21), just as the nation was asked to gaze at Emmet Till's face. Learning from experience, for West, begins by centering the experiences of those who are most vulnerable.

In community engagement pedagogies, those who are most vulnerable to multiple forms of oppression are often, but not always, the community members. A stance of prophetic pragmatism would intentionally seek out and act in response to the failures and painful moments of community engagement, such as students' racist comments to adult literacy learners or projects promised to community partners but never finished. Community members' experiences, especially difficult experiences, become critical sites of knowledge. As West (2005) argues, however, we cannot stop with tragedy. Inspired by the tradition of blues music, West writes that blues is a "hard-fought way of life" that involves recognizing deep injustice, but still moving forward in belief of the possibility of change (20). This blues spirit can inspire concrete action and hope in community-based learning.

West's deep and soulful stance against injustice adds a necessary analysis of power to Dewey's emphasis on experiential knowledge, antifoundational questioning, and feet-on-the-ground commitment to action. Dewey lays the groundwork for why community members, with experience of the consequences of community engagement pedagogy, are considered knowledgeable, and West adds an ethical imperative to consider the consequences and experiences of those who are most marginalized. As I will detail in chapter 3, high school students who participated in a writing collaboration program with college students offer further contributions to this line of thinking, illustrating how a key part of marginalization is epistemological marginalization, as voices from the margins are devalued. This marginalization creates emotional barriers to sharing knowledge and necessitates relational strategies in order to tap into the rich experiential knowledge of community members. The *experience*

strand of critical community-based epistemologies, stemming from Dewey, West, and the high school youth, foreground the consequence-knowledge of community members and seek to create relational spaces for that knowledge to be shared.

Understanding the experiences of community members as a source of knowledge is a starting point for the second strand of the theory: *participation.*

Knowledge Comes from Community Participation*: Insights from Paulo Freire, Laura Rendón, and Nonprofit Staff*

Valuing the experience-knowledge of community members provides the groundwork for recognizing community members as active participants in the knowledge-making process: as Subjects and not just objects. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970a, 1970b, 1995, 1998a, 1998b) has theorized the importance of understanding people as Subjects. Freire's works have often been mined for his ideas on meaningful learning for students, shared authority between teachers and students, and critical consciousness that comes through reflection and action. Yet Freire, speaking from a context of adult literacy initiatives and research programs with peasants in the clash of power dynamics of Brazil and Chile, makes several powerful statements about the process of collaboration with marginalized people.[10] Stretching across his oeuvre is an impassioned call for respecting the voices of community members as active participants. He writes that attempting to help marginalized people without their reflective participation is akin to objectifying them, treating them as objects to be saved from a burning building (1970b, 65).

Rather, those involved in community engagement must actively dialogue with community members. For Freire, effective thinking occurs collaboratively (1970a, 124), and dialogue is an "epistemological require-ment" (1998b, 92). Dialogue stems from mutual respect, a sense of adventure, confidence in co-questioning, critical thinking, and hope (1970b, 1998b). It requires listening, which goes beyond hearing, as the listener must be "open to the word of the other, to the gesture of the other, to the differences of the other" (1998a, 107). While dialogue does not free people from power differences (1998a), pursuing dialogue is central to community work, and it is dialogue that differentiates liberatory from oppressive collaborations with community members.

Dialogue between university and community representatives is only possible when community knowledge is understood as valid. For Freire,

untrained teachers in rural Brazil are just as curious as the professor of philosophy (1998a). In one of his vibrant stories in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1995), he illustrates this concept to peasants who insist that they should be quiet, and learn from him, the professor. He tells them they will play a game in which they take turns asking each other questions, and points will be awarded for correct answers. He begins by asking them a question about a social theorist, which they cannot answer. One point for him. But then they ask him a question about erosion in farming, and he doesn't know. They continue on in this way and end up with a tied game. Freire explicitly calls for community workers to consider the lived knowledges of the people they work with, writing that "on no account may I make little of or ignore in my contact with such groups the knowledge they acquire from direct experience and out of which they live" (1998a, 76).

Freire seeks and asks others to search for a profound respect for community knowledge. However, this call is not unequivocal: he warns that we must not overtrust the people's knowledge, as the oppressed "house" the oppressor (1970b, 169). In other words, community members can sometimes reflect harmful dominant ideologies—such as racism, sexism, and classism—so community knowledge as well as academic knowledge must be considered with critical reflection. In community engagement pedagogies, community insights must be held up to the light for close examination in the same way that academic knowledges are: community members do not have a de facto innocence or corner on "truth."

However—and this point deserves much more emphasis—neither do academics. Freire describes how dominant groups are characterized by the "illness" of believing their thought to be infallible (1970a, 8), and he works to criticize "an undisguisable air of messianism, at bottom naive, on the part of intellectuals who, in the name of the liberation of the working classes, impose or seek to impose the 'superiority' of their academic knowledge on the 'rude masses'" (1995, 67). All too often, community engagement researchers may be ill with the belief that their ways of knowing are superior to community knowledges.

What do these ideas mean for community engagement pedagogies? An obvious implication is that Freire would call academics to dialogue with community members about community engagement programs. He would challenge academics to value the knowledge of community members, to rein in epistemological pride, to be mindful of the ways intellectuals are socialized to distrust nonacademic ways of knowing, and to collaborate with community members in action. An example of this approach is Lucía d'Arlach, Bernadette Sánchez, and Rachel Feuer's

(2009) program that involved students and community members in dialogue about social issues. In this course, Spanish-language students and Latinx community members spent the first half of the program working on Spanish- and English-language exercises and the second half discussing current political issues. Inspired by Freire, these authors also interviewed the community members about their experiences in the program, and the authors thoughtfully engaged community members' words in the published article. Some community members did express problematic perspectives that reflected distrust of queer and African American students, and the authors reference and critically examine these perspectives while still speaking out of respect for community participants, modeling Freire's simultaneous trust in people and awareness of how marginalized people can house oppressive ideologies. These authors also recognize community members as active participants, discussing the political actions of community members that resulted from the project and incorporating the voices of community members prominently into a published article that seeks to impact the field of community engagement. As another example, Grobman (2017) reports on interviews with African American community partners about some of the tensions that arose in her oral history classes. I was particularly intrigued by how she navigated the ethical question of whether students should edit the African American Vernacular English present in oral history transcripts. Ultimately, she honored community members' wishes for Standard Written English editing, and she shared their nuanced thoughts on the issue through block quotes. Yet she also dialogued with partners about the politics of language and referenced African American scholars' perspectives, including scholarship that questions the idea that Standard Written English should be the norm. One of the community interviewees suggested, and Grobman agreed, that these conversations would make a powerful launching point for a future joint pedagogical project that engages local African American residents on the issue of language diversity. Grobman, along with d'Arlach, Sánchez, and Feuer, offer models for how community engagement teaching and scholarship can engage insight from community members, and I work to adopt their critical trust of community member insights in this project. Their work begins to gesture toward a Freirean respect for community knowledges. It is easy to forget, at times, that Freire's theories were originally considered so dangerous to the established order that he was exiled and imprisoned. Freire's ideas, if applied fully to the field of community engagement, could radically shift knowledge production and pedagogy.

I would like to reclaim Freire's community focus for community engagement, and also extend his approach through the "sentipensante" (sensing/thinking) pedagogy of Laura I. Rendón, who provides the second layer of the *participation* strand. Rendón is a professor at University of Texas–San Antonio, and she writes out of the wisdom of navigating higher education as the first in her family to attend college, which she describes in "From the Barrio to the Academy: Revelations of the Mexican American 'Scholarship Girl'" (1992). She positions her work on sentipensante pedagogy as building from the foundation Freire laid for holistic education. Rendón (2009) argues for a vision of education that takes into account emotional, spiritual, and transdisciplinary intellectual development, and she highlights the work of faculty members across the disciplines who include contemplative practices and community engagement in their pedagogy. While her work touches on many powerful ideas, I would like to take up one concept in particular that I see as a useful expansion of Freire's focus on participation for community engagement: *difrasismo*, which allows for thinking beyond dualities.

Rendón (2009) describes the Aztec concept of difrasismo as a "literary device in which a pair of seemingly opposite terms was used to refer to a third concept or phrase" (67). She offers the example of how fire and water could be used to allude to war, or you and I could combine to capture the idea of belonging. The first two terms establish a polarity, and it is the third term that transcends the linked dualities to challenge them and offer a richer meaning. While the difrasismo is traditionally used in poetry, Rendón reimagines this ancient form for use in pedagogical scholarship. She offers several difrasismos for sentipensante pedagogy, such as Intellectuality.Intuition.Wholeness, and Content.Contemplation. Knowledge/Wisdom (67–90). As a form, difrasismo rejects binaries while still holding the tension between terms. Freire, while he often referenced the need to move beyond dichotomy in his later work (1998a), also often slipped into dualities such as "oppressed" and "oppressors." Community engagement is full of dichotomies, and Rendón's application of difrasismo to pedagogical theory may foster more complex ways of thinking about participation in university-community partnerships.

As one possibility, I propose the following concept through Rendón's difrasismo form: UniversityMember.CommunityMember. LocalParticipant. Civic engagement literature frequently discusses university and community members as separate categories, not recognizing the ways that the lines between the two may blur. For example, students or teachers may be from the neighborhoods where they do community engagement, community members may have university ties, college

representatives may be clients of the nonprofit organizations they are serving, and students of color or of low-SES background may feel more at home at the community site than at the university. The university-community dichotomy becomes especially problematic when scholars and teachers overlook the particular experiences of students who do not encounter "the other" at a community site, but rather encounter some form of themselves (Hickmon 2015), or when scholars and teachers miss how a community member's affiliation with the university might be shaping partnership dynamics. Holding a dichotomy between university and community can also hide the very real justice issues happening on campus and paint the campus community as a homogenized group (Kannan, Keubrich, and Rodriguez 2016).

Similarly, talking about the dichotomy of oppressor and oppressed from the lens of settler colonialism, Leigh Patel (2016) points out that "even though it is undeniable that some people enjoy and wield settler status more pervasively, coloniality does not statically reside in some and not others. The structure is far too pervasive" (8). More helpful than creating clear lines between groups, she suggests, is to look at how power and coloniality are always shaping our relationships with one another in different ways. I do not wish to overlook the power dynamics that can come by approaching a partnership primarily through the university or the community organization, but at the same time it is important to move beyond this simple dichotomy. A third term, Local Participants, allows engagement practitioners to see community members and students as collaborating together on action. This difrasismo highlights the tensions between university and community positions, while also blurring the lines between categories, reminding us that identities are intersectional and shaped by a variety of factors beyond just primary university or community affiliation. As a whole, the UniversityMember.CommunityMember.LocalParticipant difrasismo challenges community engagement practitioners and researchers to stay cognizant of the plurality of positionalities from which people are approaching the university-community partnership—an awareness that is especially important when attempting to conduct research into community perspectives of university-community partnerships, to collaboratively design engagement partnerships, or to pursue joint knowledge production at community sites.

Rendón's ideas, combined with those of Freire, offer a view of community knowledge production grounded in a commitment to participating *with* community members and resistant to the binaries that have calcified throughout the development of service-learning, such as the duality between the university and community. In other words,

Rendón and Freire together facilitate dialogue without dichotomy. As I will discuss in chapter 4, nonprofit staff interviewees extend this notion by moving beyond participation among individual university and community representatives toward participation in an integrated knowledge network. These nonprofit staff illustrate that dialogue isn't a knowledge exchange between two separate people; rather, it is co-construction of knowledge within a network, as knowledge is distributed across people, genres, objects, and technologies. As a whole, then, epistemologies of participation suggest that knowledge production in community engagement involves participation *with* community members, while avoiding overtrust of community or university knowledge, and dialogues extend beyond the binary of a single university and community representative to interaction within a knowledge network of variously positioned local participants.

Next, I turn to the *assets* strand of critical community-based epistemologies, which highlights one particular component of local knowledge networks: stories.

Knowledge Comes from Community Assets: Insights from John Kretzmann and John McKnight, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Dolores Delgado Bernal, and Community Members in Graduate Engagement

In their widely cited toolkit, *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, John Kretzmann and John McKnight (1993) outline two approaches to engaging communities: asset-based, "which insists on beginning with a clear commitment to discovering a community's capacities and assets" (1) and deficit-based, which is focused on a community's needs. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) has been embraced by the community engagement field, standing as a touchstone for respectful and effective ways of framing communities. Kretzmann and McKnight argue that the needs of a community are part of the truth, but only part, and that making community needs the entire representation promotes the idea that only outside experts can help—in addition to overlooking important strengths of a community and thus ultimately misrepresenting it. In other words, communities are never one-dimensional, and they cannot be built from the top down or outside in.

Therefore, ABCD calls for the creation of a "Community Assets Map," tracking the resources in local institutions, such as business and libraries; associations, such as church choirs and cultural groups; and the gifts of individuals, including especially populations traditionally framed in terms of their deficits, such as youth and the elderly. In addition to

being "asset-based," ABCD is "internally-focused," which means it highlights local definitions, creativity, and control. A third characteristic is "relationship-driven," suggesting an emphasis on building relationships among residents, associations, and institutions (9). In sum, strong communities identify, value, and connect the capacities of local residents, and outsiders can offer respectful support to reinforce bottom-up initiatives directed by the community itself. While some scholars have raised concerns about how a focus on local strengths can detract from the need for structural change (Stoecker 2016), the Asset-Based Community Development Institute continues to publish resources and train leaders in the ABCD approach, and their networks and partners extend around the globe.

Asset-Based Community Development came alive for me when I had the opportunity to hear John "Jody" Kretzmann speak to a group of civic leadership students in Chicago in 2012. An older man now, he still lights up when discussing the potentials of communities. In response to the question "What does ABCD *look like?*" he shared the story of a soup kitchen near Cincinnati that began asking guests, "What are you passionate about?," "What are you good at?," and "What are your dreams?" They discovered that one skill was reported more than any other: over half of the people named cooking as a talent. The leadership of the soup kitchen realized that this was about more than cooking—people were saying they wanted to cross over the receiving line and participate. So guests began participating as chefs. The leadership also found that many guests had musical talents, and the kitchen started offering live jazz from these musicians during meals. Several of the people experiencing homelessness were skilled as carpenters, and the carpenters initiated a remodel of the facility and began working on burned-out buildings in the neighborhood. Now, if you visit the kitchen, it is difficult to tell who the "clients" are, as both guests and outside volunteers are involved in leading, cooking, serving, *and* eating. One project of guests was to take pictures of those involved in the kitchen and impose these images on ceramic tiles to be displayed in the dining area in a "Wall of Fame." The conversations that began over meals between guests, volunteers, and neighbors developed into an organized community development group that is working to shape the future of the neighborhood's transportation options, economic landscape, and vacant lot development in response to the plans being forwarded by upscale housing developers. In this soup kitchen, assets are connected on both an individual and institutional level.

While engagement scholars often reference ABCD to remind practitioners to frame the community in positive ways for students, truly

applying the three tenants of ABCD to the field of community engagement would require a much more radical shift. Being "internally focused" might mean valuing *community* definitions, ownership, and gifts in the development of knowledge on engagement partnerships, and "relationship-driven" research might involve building connections among community organizations and individuals during the inquiry process. Perhaps most salient for this project, what would it mean to take an "asset-based" approach to research on community engagement pedagogy? What are the implications for epistemology? When listing the assets of individuals, Kretzmann and McKnight mention "stories" as an asset. Although they do not unpack this idea, I would like to explore the implications of viewing and incorporating community members' stories as an asset for community engagement.

African American education and methodology scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) and Chicana education scholar Dolores Delgado Bernal (2002) provide the groundwork for an argument that marginalized community members have an advantaged position in the community engagement knowledge-making process—that marginalization can be an epistemological asset. In other words, while West (2005) and Freire (1970a, 1970b, 1995, 1998a, 1998b) make an ethical case for considering community knowledges, Ladson-Billings and Delgado Bernal make a philosophical case based on the nature of knowledge.

First, Ladson-Billings explains that ways of knowing and understanding the world are influenced by the conditions of living. In other words, people know differently based on their identities and environments. Ladson-Billings and Delgado Bernal analyze the dominant epistemology in the academy, which grows from the cultures and experiences of Europeans, and pinpoint the need to include additional worldviews in the knowledge-making process: critical raced-gendered epistemologies.

The dominant European epistemology, Ladson-Billings explains, stems from the eighteenth century, when religious belief in transcendent and absolute truth traveled to science, rendering knowledge pure, elegant, simple, summarized in laws, and neutral. While forwarding inquiry in many ways, this epistemology has also been problematic, because it encourages people to present scientific findings as objective, observed truth, rather than recognizing the ways that knowledge making can be flawed and shaped by cultural power dynamics. In particular, the dominant European epistemology has often been used to justify racism through appeals to objectivity and science. For example, Thomas Jefferson argued black and white people could not live together because "nature" had made distinctions, and many studies have been done that

"prove" the inferior intelligence of people of color based on skull size or IQ, legitimizing oppression (Herrnstein and Murray 1994; Morton and Combe 1839).[11] In fact, the idea of race itself has been forwarded from the European epistemology, though there is no substantial biological basis for race: differences in skin pigmentation and other features are minor, and there are more differences within races than between them (American Anthropological Association 1998). Under the guise of objectivity, harmful ideas can thrive, such as the concept of biologically distinct races with differences in behavior and aptitude. Because the idea of race was invented by people operating with a dominant European epistemology, epistemological challenges by people of color are often both about racism and the nature of truth.

Critical raced-gendered epistemologies are one such challenge to the idea that the dominant paradigm is the only legitimate way of perceiving the world. Delgado Bernal explains that critical raced-gendered epistemologies come from a cultural history different from the dominant one—they're based on experiences of people of color—and they challenge common research paradigms (from positivism to liberal feminism to postmodernism) that draw on the experiences of dominant Europeans. In particular, critical raced-gendered epistemologies turn the knowledge-making gaze on oppression itself; these epistemologies are a collection of theories and standpoints that "examin[e] how oppression is caught up in multiply raced, gendered, classed, and sexed relations" (107). Critical raced-gendered epistemologies arise from lived experiences that are often marked with pain.

Just as there is not just one form of oppression or one experience of a minoritized group, there is not just one critical raced-gendered epistemology. Ladson-Billings outlines several examples, with three in particular that are especially relevant for my project because of how they demonstrate the epistemological assets of otherized people. She starts with W.E.B. Du Bois's conception of "double-consciousness," which holds that people of color can—and have to, for survival—see situations from two perspectives at once. They see both the dominant worldview, as this perspective is so pervasive in our society, and the perspective of a person of color: thus offering an epistemological advantage. Similarly, Ladson-Billings describes Sylvia Wynter's concept of "alterity," which holds that people who have been constructed as other have an advantaged perspective, a "wide-angle view" from the margins of society, as distance may allow these people to see the cracks in dominant worldviews. Wynter writes, "The position of alterity—the liminal—is not a privileged position, but it is an advantaged one" (qtd. in Ladson-Billings

2000, 271). In other words, alterity often comes from the experience of painful oppressions, so it does not involve a boost in power, but it does frequently offer an edge in understanding how power relations function. When I am explaining alterity to people, I like to move to the middle of a room and describe how my view from this position is limited in some ways—I can only see one part of the room. Then I move to the corner and explain how I am now able to see more of the room from this new perspective on the margins. So it is with being in the center or the margins of power in a society—sometimes privilege can make it difficult for people to understand how power is functioning. Indeed, part of the nature of privilege is that those who are privileged do not have to be aware of their own privilege. While everyone's vision is partial and biased, alterity suggests that nondominant people may have particularly significant insights into the nature of social relations.

A third stance, critical race theory, adds a complement to alterity by providing a way for people to share their knowledge from the margins. Critical race theory seeks to identify racism through experiential knowledge and "counterstorytelling," the sharing of narratives that challenge dominant assumptions about a situation. Initially part of a response to racism in the field of law, critical race theory is now used in many fields. Critical race theorists have published a variety of stories, such as Tara Yosso's (2006) narrative about a concerned group of Latinx parents who meet to discuss how to improve their local elementary school, countering the dominant perspective that Latinx people do not care about education. Dolores Delgado Bernal has been instrumental in bringing these stories to educational scholarship, arguing that expanding epistemologies to include these stories can help resist epistemological racism and create better approaches to educating students.[12] While critical-raced gendered epistemologies have been used to understand the experiences of minoritized students, parents, and teachers, when applied to community engagement,[13] these epistemologies may highlight the stories of community members who speak from marginalized social locations.

Synthesizing ABCD with critical raced-gendered epistemologies, then, creates the *assets* strand of critical community-based epistemologies, which we might call "epistemologies of assets." A linchpin in critical community-based epistemologies, epistemologies of assets can be defined as systems of knowing and worldviews that acknowledge the advantages marginalized communities bring to the knowledge production process in community engagement, with particular attention to the implications of race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status. Kretzmann and McKnight identify stories as an asset of community

members, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies explain that stories by community members may contain special insight because of the positionality of the storyteller. While some in the fields of community engagement and composition have built frameworks that give community members a seat at the table in discussing engagement (Dostilio 2012; Flower, Long, and Higgins 2000; Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton 2009), epistemologies of assets takes this viewpoint a step further to argue that community members may have a particularly *advantaged* perspective on the partnership, and their insights should be given special attention. Under epistemologies of assets, community members would be considered holders and producers of knowledge, and traits too often framed as deficits—such as bilingualism, family commitment, and culture—would be recognized as epistemological strengths that help them understand the world. On the ground, this means that community members, from their range of social locations, may be able to pick up on class dynamics at play at a community engagement site, see the cultural implications of practices a dominant faculty member might consider "neutral," recognize the flaws in volunteer policies that are taken for granted, or offer insight on ways to better prepare students for engagement that others may not have considered.

In interviews, community members who were involved in graduate-level community engagement partnerships offered an important addition to epistemologies of assets. As they articulated, it is not enough to simply assert, in an intellectual way, that the stories of community members are valued; this idea must be *enacted* through a multifaceted disposition of openness. In chapter 4, I detail the components of an open disposition as sketched by community members, to explore how epistemologies of assets can be brought to life in community settings. Together, insights from Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), Ladson-Billings (2000), Delgado Bernal (2002), and community members who worked with graduate students can be stitched together to form a theory that enacts the idea that the stories of community members are an epistemological asset for community development.

Epistemologies that locate knowledge in community *experience*, *participation*, and *assets* interweave to form critical community-based epistemologies—and this book is ultimately an argument for greater incorporation of critical community-based epistemologies in community engagement research and practice, along with a demonstration of the potentials of this framework. The full theory is visualized in figure 1.2, with each strand of *experience*, *participation*, and *assets* beginning in the middle and moving outward with the three layers of contributors.

Figure 1.2. critical community-based epistemologies

Written in prose, critical community-based epistemologies holds the following assertions:

- Knowledge comes from community members' *experience*: this means knowledge about engagement is generated by experiencing the consequences of community partnerships (Dewey), with particular attention to consequences on those disadvantaged by inequality (West), and accessing this knowledge requires creating relational experiences (Community Interviewees).

- Knowledge comes from community *participation*: this means knowledge is generated by participating in dialogue with communities (Freire), with particular attention to thinking beyond dualities such as "university and community" or "oppressor and oppressed" (Rendón), and accessing this knowledge requires participating in networks (Community Interviewees).

- Knowledge comes from community *assets*: this means knowledge is generated by engaging community strengths such as stories (Kretzmann and McKnight), with particular attention to how people from the margins often have an advantage in telling and interpreting stories about power (Ladson-Billings and Delgado Bernal), and accessing this knowledge requires dispositions of openness (Community Interviewees).

These multilayered conceptual strands work together to position community partners as holders and producers of knowledge, offering insights about why community members should be considered knowledge makers, why their knowledge is critically important for the community engagement field to consider, and how to engage this knowledge.

While critical community-based epistemologies is no silver bullet for the potential hurts in community engagement—no one framework can speak to the kind of complexity of what community engagement is—this theory does provide a starting point for listening to community partners, allowing for a deeper understanding of the messiness of engagement even if the messiness cannot be resolved. Critical community-based epistemologies is not meant to be a neat and all-encompassing picture of knowledge production, but instead one window through which to view the plural, fluid, and always-moving dimensions of community knowledges. The framework leans into the messiness and multiplicity rather than trying to solve it: there are many kinds of community knowledges—different ways of knowing, different types of communities, and different approaches to expressing knowledge—and the *s* occasionally used in "knowledges" is meant to highlight this plurality. My hope is for critical community-based epistemologies to be useful in supporting a variety of messy knowledge-production practices in community engagement, from pedagogy (explored in chapters 2–4), to program design (discussed in chapter 5), to research methodologies—which is where I turn next.

CRITICAL COMMUNITY-BASED EPISTEMOLOGIES AS METHOD/OLOGY: REFLECTIVE STORYTELLING

Critical community-based epistemologies begins, for me, with the idea that community knowledges—and particularly community stories—can be assets. Through dialogue about these stories, university listeners can catch a glimpse of how community engagement looks from the wide-angle view, the vantage point community members have on university-community relationships. These stories are valid because they stem from experience of the consequences of community engagement. There is

an ethical imperative to center stories of those who are most vulnerable in the partnership and in society, even as engaging community stories involves recognizing the plurality of positionalities that shape how people view community partnerships. These concepts from critical community-based epistemologies challenged me to move in particular directions as I worked to craft a methodology for the interviews in this book.

Given the concept that the ideas and stories of community members are an epistemological asset, transposing critical community-based epistemologies to a research methodology and method led me to seek opportunities for community members involved in university-community partnerships to tell and interpret their stories. To do so, I combined the method of the personal interview with practices from indigenous methodologies and structures from the service-learning tradition of reflection. Indigenous methodologies strive to make research ethical for a community population historically exploited in research[14]—indigenous peoples—and researchers working in a range of community contexts may be able to foster more responsible research through ideas and practices from this conceptual heritage. In this project, I drew from the indigenous traditions of reciprocity, relationality, orientation toward action, and "conversational storytelling" interviews, all features that resonate with critical community-based epistemologies (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010; Kovach 2010; Smith 1999; Thomas 2005). To provide a structure for turning the stories gathered in these conversational interviews into concepts that can guide future action for teachers, students, practitioners, and community members, I adapted service-learning's theories of reflection. Blending indigenous methodologies with theories of reflection, I fashioned a reflective storytelling methodology.

The reflective storytelling methodology rests on personal interviews because they allow the most space for community storytelling and freedom for community partners to shape discussions. Margaret Kovach (2010) explains that indigenous methodologies "assum[e] that knowledge is transferred through oral history and story . . . and that knowledge is co-created within the relational dynamic of self-in-relation" (42). She describes a "Conversational Method" of storytelling in interviews that is informal, conversational, collaborative, reflexive, and linked to non-Western, tribal epistemologies (43). Following Kovach, I used a semistructured interview approach, meaning I planned questions but also allowed the flow of the conversation to be guided by the stories the community partners identified as important. Almost all questions were open-ended, asking interviewees to offer a response in their own words rather than to choose among a closed set of options.

Instead of collecting the stories and then conducting the analysis myself as the academic, I found that critical community-based epistemologies challenged me to recognize the epistemological potential of community members, and therefore involve community members in *interpreting* their experiences. To do so, I borrowed from service-learning's tradition of reflection as a process of making meaning out of experience. As Janet Eyler, Dwight Giles, and Angela Schmiede (1996) write, reflection is the "glue" that binds experience and learning, and reflection is considered one of the central components to service-learning practice for students (16). As community members are also active knowledge-producers who learn from their experiences, interviews became a space for the research participants and me to collaboratively reflect and learn from the experiences of community engagement.

David Kolb's "Experiential Learning Cycle" is widely used to structure reflection in service-learning (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters 1997; Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede 1996). Based on Dewey's vision of education as arising from experience, Kolb's cycle outlines four recursive stages that people work through as they produce knowledge (see figure 1.3). During the stage of "Concrete Experience," the learner interacts with the environment, both acting and undergoing the consequences of these actions. Next, "Reflective Observation" calls for the learner to step back, recount the experience, and begin to analyze it. In "Abstract Conceptualization," the learner identifies generalized theories, concepts, or hypotheses to frame the experience. These theories are then translated into action steps in "Active Experimentation," which leads once again to "Concrete Experience," and the cycle continues.

The early service-learning group Campus Opportunity for Outreach League (COOL) condensed Kolb's cycle into an easy-to-remember set of questions to guide reflection: "What? So What? Now What?" (Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede 1996), and I borrow this same structure for the core of my interview process, which is outlined in figure 1.4 with sample questions for each category. Before the core questions, I worked to establish rapport and discuss the research goals and processes, given the importance of relationality and open communication in community engagement. After these introductory moves, I transitioned into the "What, So What, Now What" interview structure. Community partners were asked to identify stories from their engagement experience and to describe the story in detail (the "What"). Sometimes the community partner brought objects or texts from the partnership into the discussion, pulling up emails shared with a college student or showing me projects students had completed. I encouraged this use
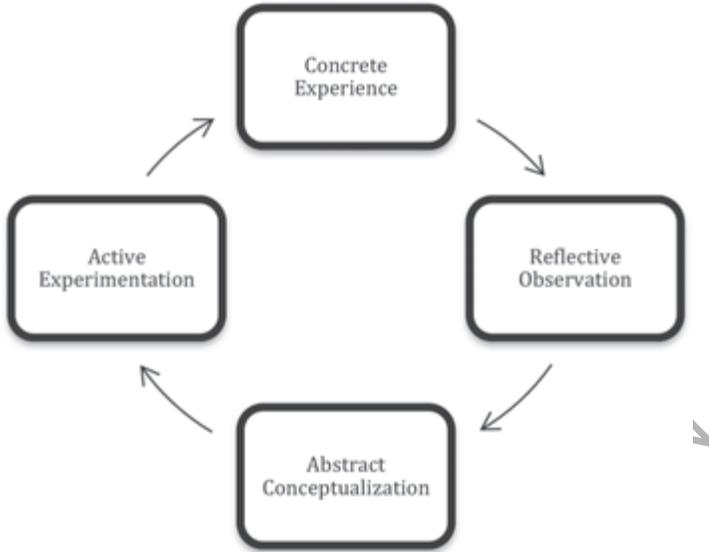
Figure 1.3. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

of artifacts; as nonprofit staff interviewees demonstrate in chapter 3, knowledge is distributed across people and objects. After the "What," together we reflected on the "So What," analyzing emotional, political, and cultural dynamics behind the stories through questions such as "Why did that happen?", "How do you think the student was feeling then?", and "Would you have reacted differently if your college partner were female?" Finally, I invited the interviewee to identify implications for future community engagement practice, in the "Now What" stage. In other words, while the stories usually provide an entry point into the discussion, this methodology is not about simply "collecting" stories, but rather about engaging community partners in collaborative knowledge production. After transcribing the audiotaped interviews and coding,[15] using Dedoose software, I invited interview participants to check the transcript and a two-page highlight sheet that summarized significant insights from each interview. I also emailed the manuscript draft itself, offering participants the opportunity to offer approval on how they were portrayed.

In addition, given the ethical considerations about consequences for marginalized people in critical community-based epistemologies, I sought to incorporate aspects of reciprocity with the participants in my research study. Service-learning scholar Jane Kendall (1990) defines

Opening Establish rapport, negotiate the research process, determine context.	Are you from Tucson originally?
	Would you like to be identified by your real name in any publications, or would you like to select a pseudonym?
	What's your role at the Community Food Bank?
	What do you love most about your high school?
	How often did you meet with the students?
What Identify and describe stories from the experience.	What experience stands out in your partnership with the students?
	What happened when you first met the students?
	What was the best/most challenging moment for you in the partnership?
	What happened after the students gave you the final deliverable?
	(Follow up/Probe) What did the student say in response?
	(Follow up/Probe) Did the students speak Spanish?
So What Analyze emotional, political, and cultural dynamics.	How were you feeling at that point?
	Why do you think the student did that?
	What do you think caused this?
	What role do you think culture played in this interaction?
	Why did you decide to say that?
	How would you describe the power dynamics of this situation?
Now What Determine implications for future practice.	What do you think the instructor could do differently next time?
	What can we do to replicate this result in future partnerships?
	What do you think is the "moral of the story" here?
	Based on this experience, what advice would you give future community partners?
	What do you wish the students had known before they started?
	What kinds of activities could prepare community members for this?
Closing Renegotiate interview process, discuss next steps, pursue reciprocity.	Would you like to see the final chapter or an email summary of the main points?
	Now that the interview is over, are you still feeling good about using your real name?
	Is there anything I can do to support you in return, such as offering feedback on your college application essay?

Figure 1.4. Reflective Storytelling Interview

reciprocity as "the exchange of both giving and receiving" (21–22), and indigenous research scholars emphasize the importance of pursuing reciprocity through opportunities for research participants to benefit from the experience (Chilisa 2012; Kovach 2010; National Health and

Medical Research Council 2003). All community partners had the opportunity to reflect on their interactions with the university as well as receive the findings and resources from my study, but I felt reciprocity required something more. Rhetoric and composition scholar Ellen Cushman (1996) explores reciprocity through research, describing how she wrote letters of recommendation, provided access to university computers, offered tutoring on college application essays, and completed letters to landlords for the participants in her research study. Rather than "helping," the activist research stance requires an approach that honors participants' agency. Cushman describes this approach as "(a) to enable someone to achieve a goal by providing resources for them; (b) to facilitate actions—particularly those associated with language and literacy; (c) to lend our power or status to forward people's achievement" (14). These concepts dovetail with the acknowledgment of community members as active Subjects rather than objects in critical community-based epistemologies. I therefore invited research participants to identify reciprocity moves I could make to support them in achieving their goals, if they were interested. Reciprocity looked different for each participant, and I engaged in activities from volunteering at an AIDS walk to offering feedback on scholarship application materials.

Another way of pursuing reciprocity and acknowledging the intellectual assets of community members, for me, was offering research participants an opportunity to be credited for their contributions to the work. Describing an indigenous interview methodology, Bagele Chilisa (2012) argues that participants should decide if their names can be used in the research, as using names encourages the researcher to remain accountable to the participants and highlights the role of interviewees as knowledge makers rather than objects. In my study, participants were given the option of choosing their own pseudonyms to protect their privacy or using their real names to be publicly acknowledged for their insights. Most research participants chose to be named in this work, with a small handful of participants choosing pseudonyms instead.

Using the reflective storytelling methodology described above, I conducted 82 interviews (one round of 36 interviews and one round of 46), with community partners from three different types of programs: 53 youth and 8 teachers involved in partnership programs in which secondary students collaborate with college composition students; 9 nonprofit staff who acted as clients for upper-division professional writing classes that created deliverables such as brochures, websites, and grant proposals; and 12 community members (a mix of adult literacy learners, queer youth, rural teachers, and young poets) who worked

with graduate students in a graduate community literacy practicum or research collaborative.[16] I have been involved in each of these community programs for several years: I coordinated the youth partnership programs in Arizona and Nebraska for eight years; I taught several sections of the professional writing class and served as a community partner for other instructors teaching the same class; and I participated in one of the graduate courses and worked with a community partnership that was initially connected to the graduate class for two and a half years. These three research sites reflect what I view as the three most common types of community-based learning in composition—youth programs, writing for nonprofits, and graduate internships—and analyzing all three allowed me to identify both distinctive characteristics of each program and common themes that cut across all three. Each set of community partners contributed a different idea to critical community-based epistemologies—relationality (youth), networks (nonprofit staff), and openness (community members who worked with graduate students)—and taken together, these community partners offer vibrant thinking and tangible strategies for fostering knowledge construction in community engagement.

I hope critical community-based epistemologies may be useful for a variety of engagement sites, and I know that programs similar to the ones detailed here are present in universities across the country, but I want to emphasize that this study is located in a particular place. A reflective storytelling methodology highlights the fact that knowledge is situated, not universal or immediately transferrable. Stories have specific actors, particular events, and a setting. The three main programs studied here are located in Tucson, Arizona,[17] a borderlands of intensive political battles, vibrant cultures, and a rocky history between the university and the local community. When the University of Arizona was first established in 1885, the politician who secured the funding for the university was showered with, as historian Douglas Martin reports, "ripe eggs, rotting vegetables, and, some say, a dead cat" (qtd. in Holmes 2016, 122). Community members were angry, because they had been hoping to host the state capital or an insane asylum, honors that went to Phoenix and Prescott, respectively. Thus began the complex relationship between the University of Arizona and local residents. Since then, UA has struggled to realize its land-grant mission to serve the area in the midst of pressures to perform in space and optical science research, recent severe cuts to funding, and a pressing need to support a growing student body, which now numbers over 44,000. The university has no centralized office of outreach for community work, so the

programs studied here are what Paula Mathieu (2005), borrowing from de Certeau, would term "tactical" rather than "strategic"—they exist through the efforts of graduate students, individual instructors, writing program administrators, and cobbled-together funds, rather than operating out of institutionalized, "strategic" spaces with secure resources. At the same time, all three initiatives have been in existence for over ten years, demonstrating the resilience of the faculty and community partners. I've caught high school teachers paying for buses to the university out of their own pockets, weary graduate students sending emails about community collaboration events at 4:00 AM, and local youth sponsoring breakfast for college students by filling tables with Mexican pastries and fresh fruit. Engagement efforts at the University of Arizona, like the scruffy cacti that surround the campus, survive—and sometimes thrive—in a mean environment. It's a dynamic context for this study of community perspectives on engagement partnerships.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In this project, I hope to amplify the voices of the people who offered their stories about what community engagement can look like from the "other side," people who continually surprised me with their insight over coffee, *raspados* (Mexican-style snow cones), or school lunch. I do not attempt to identify the pure essence of the experience of partnering with a university class, but rather to construct a flexible framework for knowledge construction in order to encourage space in our programs and theories for community members to participate in dialogue about partnerships. In other words, my hope is for this project not to stand as some kind of definitive statement on how community members experience engagement, but to foster more openings for community members to offer their own thoughts.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 complete the critical community-based epistemologies framework by adding community members' insights to the theory, extending the ideas outlined by scholars from the centers and the margins discussed in this introduction chapter. I begin to flesh out the framework in chapter 2 by exploring the component of relationality, a concept offered by youth involved in direct engagement with college students. The youth interviewed for this chapter, participants in a high school–college writing collaboration program, expressed an emotion that challenges many of the simple stories about community engagement told by university relations offices: fear. Chapter 2 inquires into the fear minoritized youth reported about working with college students, placing

this fear in political context through Alison Jagger's (1989) concept of "outlaw emotions." Outlaw emotions are emotions experienced by subordinated individuals that do not match dominant expectations—for example, when a woman expresses unease instead of laughing at a sexist joke, or when youth experience fear rather than gratitude at the chance to collaborate with college students. I link the interviewees' fear to the ways minoritized and low-income youth are devalued on a structural level, probe how the fear can damage community partnerships, and suggest that relational approaches to counteracting fear are therefore not just social niceties but essential political moves. The youth offered multiple relational strategies for addressing fear: *personalismo* attitudes that value interpersonal connection, *affirmation* of ideas and cultural strengths, *rigor* in responding to community writing and discussion contributions, and *fluidity* of giving and receiving roles. Chapter 2 includes concrete examples of how to implement each strategy. Most significant, the youth illuminate the role of relationality in knowledge construction: they move beyond Dewey and West's synthesized claim that special attention should be paid to the experiential knowledge of the most vulnerable to demonstrate how epistemological vulnerability can create emotional barriers to sharing knowledge—and also how relational strategies can help build vibrant spaces for co-creation.

Chapter 3 unpacks the idea of networks, which is the concept identified by nonprofit staff who worked with upper-division writing students. The chapter asks: When students create projects for local nonprofits, how many of these projects are actually usable by the nonprofit? Why do so many projects end up collecting dust? What can teachers and community partners do to prepare students to write more effectively in organizations outside the classroom? And what can we learn from professional writing partnerships about how knowledge circulates more broadly in community engagement? The chapter is grounded in a community interviewee's penetrating statement about writing for nonprofits: "Students are not the speaker. That's the hardest part" (Johnson 2013). Most of the problems with student projects, as interviewees revealed, were not related to grammar errors or failed design: the problems stemmed from an incomplete understanding of the context that made it difficult to take on the voice and perspective of the organization. A solution lies in equipping students to understand authorship as *distributed* across people, genres, and technologies, rather than residing in an individual speaker, invoking the theory of distributed cognition. Nonprofit staff recommended techniques for guiding students in this kind of authorship in community-based settings, ranging from site visits

to specific interview questions students can ask. While scholars such as Freire call for dialogue with community members, the nonprofit staff remind us that dialogue occurs not just between individuals, but in networks of objects, genres, and people.

Chapter 4 takes up the dispositions of openness needed for collaborative knowledge generation; healthy community engagement requires, in the words of one community member interviewee, particular "ways of being" (Marsh 2014). This chapter seeks to trace the contours of these ways of being and to explore how these dispositions can be fostered, drawing on interviews with community members who have worked with graduate students in community-based rhetoric and writing seminars. When describing what was most important in engagement, community members from indigenous youth to adult literacy learners repeated a particular term again and again: "openness." I unpack this term to theorize a disposition of openness for engaged work, blending insights from community members with bell hooks's (1989) work on radical openness and María Lugones's (1987) discussions of playful "world"-traveling. Several key facets of openness emerged: open minds, open construction of self and others, open hearts, open revision, open communication, and open structures. The chapter concludes by offering suggestions from community members on the training, reflection, and mentorship practices that could support dispositions of openness. Openness enriches critical community-based epistemologies by suggesting that it is not enough to simply make a theoretical argument for the validity of community stories; it takes multifaceted dispositions of openness—on the ground—to elicit and understand these stories.

With the critical community-based epistemologies overview then complete, I turn in chapter 5 to the radical potential of community voices by exploring how engagement programs could be changed at the structural level in light of this framework. I discuss three structural approaches to centering community voices: community advisory boards, in which community members serve on a committee that oversees the engagement program; participatory evaluation, in which a team of community members together with university representatives conduct program evaluations, and community-based student grading, in which community members are directly responsible for determining a small portion of students' final grades. I offer a brief theoretical discussion of each and include illustrations from my own experience and community member experiences with these strategies.

And finally, the conclusion touches on how critical community-based epistemologies can promote answerability in partnerships, offering a

heuristic for integrating this stance into research and practice. The conclusion also features a poem written by my longtime community collaborator, a community organizer of undocumented farmworkers turned high school English teacher, Maria Elena Wakamatsu. Her bilingual poem evokes several of the themes explored in this book through a different way of knowing, providing a closing reflection for readers or a text that can be used to spark discussion with community partners or students.

The woman with the white garbage bags I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was my first community teacher about engagement. This book holds the stories of eighty-two more, and I offer these stories to readers in the same spirit they were offered to me—with a touch of sadness, a genuine anticipation about new possibilities, an occasional undertone of wry humor . . . and, most of all, hope that these stories will be heard.