

## COLLECTIVE OUTPUT PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

# Transformative Conversational Practice in Feminist Spaces: Early Career Network and Global South Perspectives

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With a foundation in intersectional feminist principles, the project aimed to create a transformative space within academia, emphasising the equal significance of the 'how' and 'why' of research, in relation to the 'what' is ultimately produced. This initiative unfolded over the course of a year through monthly online conversations involving early career researchers (ECRs) and practitioners within the Gender, Justice and Security Hub. Central to these conversation circles was a commitment to intentional, relational, connective and generative engagement.

The project yielded dual outcomes. Firstly, it provided a platform for participants to share experiences and reflections on the 'unhealthy' dynamics prevalent in research environments, fostering a network of peer support to combat senses of isolation and alienation. Secondly, the insights gained through these conversations contributed to knowledge production on aspects of organic and nurturing practice-based solidarity. Hence, the impact of the project extended beyond its temporal boundaries, fostering enduring connections among participants and culminating in various outputs, including a blog entry, podcast, journal article and conference participation. These outputs collectively explored conversation as a feminist method essential for transforming the rigid structures and hierarchies entrenched in academic spaces.

Among the issues addressed are the existing power dynamics between the global North and global South, ableism, gender disparities, professional hierarchies, precarious work conditions, inclusivity and accountability within feminist and/or academic spaces. Additionally, the project explored the impact of the prevalent emphasis on output over process, often sacrificing genuine positive relationships and the wellbeing of those involved and leading to mechanical productivity devoid of creativity and flexibility.

These themes highlighted the necessity for a transformative approach, specifically an organic and fluid conversational practice that facilitates an ongoing process of unlearning and relearning. By providing a space for introspection and self-reflection, free of judgement, the process has proved to deepen interest in and attachment to the project. It has become a platform for personal growth and connection with others, wherein participants confront their discomfort with silence, the urge to rush to fill it, as well as tendencies towards negation, defensiveness and avoidance of addressing expressions of unease or 'negative' feelings within the group. This journey also involved facing one's own inclinations towards self-control and policing.

The core of conversation lies in the dynamic of interaction, silence and diversity of experiences, working, thinking and relating – not only between thoughts but also in the evolution of thought itself as the conversation unfolds. There is also the creative chaos within conversation that enables connections and departures in non-hierarchical and non-prescriptive ways, with neither beginning nor end, which may be undermined by academic writing styles that can disavow anything personal or remotely emotive.

The pursuit of transformation, albeit imperfectly achieved, has diversified ways of thinking and creating outputs. Embracing imperfection liberates dialogue from the pressure of providing definitive answers. Disagreements and challenges are viewed as opportunities for growth. Importantly, by emphasising the collective nature of knowledge production and the significance of genuine engagement, the project underscored how transformative conversational practice rooted in feminist principles can challenge entrenched structures, foster meaningful inclusivity and cultivate solidarity within academic and professional spheres.



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This Collective Output Project Spotlight was first published in the Hub's final report, *Gender, Justice and Security: Structural Challenges, Feminist Innovations and Radical Futures*. Go to [www.TheGenderHub.com](http://www.TheGenderHub.com) to read the full report and to learn more about all 38 research projects in the Hub.



This research is part of the UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub. The Hub is an interdisciplinary, transnational research network working with local and global civil society, practitioners, governments and international organisations to advance the delivery of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality; SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions; and the implementation of the UN Security Council's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

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