Forced Bonding or Community Collaboration?: Partnerships between science and practice in research on woman battering

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Author's Notes

About the Authors

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Abstract

This paper explores factors contributing to successful collaborations between practitioners and researchers studying the impact of adult domestic violence and the effectiveness of services aimed at stopping it. The paper identifies potential challenges to research partnerships and, through interviews with the researchers and practitioners from four successful collaborations,

highlights strategies for effectively navigating these challenges. It concludes by arguing that collaborative partnerships between science and practice communities strengthen the process of scientific inquiry and program development.

Introduction

Social scientists and practitioners alike know of the frantic search for letters of support as grant deadlines approach. From the community perspective, calls and letters from academicians seeking their agency's last-minute support for research funding in amounts that often exceed their agency budgets are met with a mixture of anger and fear. They are angry that they were not included in the design and development of the research questions or methods and fearful that these researchers will use tremendous staff resources to collect data and never be heard from again. Practitioners may also fear that the research will compromise the safety of battered women and their children with their published results. Many social scientists also resent the expectation that community organizations will be partners in a research endeavor. It is sometimes viewed as one extra hurdle required by funders with very short deadlines. Such requirements are sometimes seen as compromising the independence of scientific inquiry or researchers' academic freedoms and are not often taken seriously by the scientific community. These tensions have led one advocate to reframe collaboration as "forced bonding." [1]

The issues that arise when scientific and practice communities attempt to collaborate on research and evaluation projects have been the subject of discussion and publications for over 50 years. One of the earliest and most frequently cited is Lewin's (1946) article describing action research. Models expanding on these ideas have been proposed in a variety of disciplines over the intervening decades. Among these variations are participatory research (Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall & Jackson, 1993), participatory action research (Kondrat & Julia, 1997 ; Mies, 1996) , collaborative inquiry (Torbert, 1981) , co-operative inquiry (Reason, 1994) , feminist research (Gergen, 1988 ; Reinharz, 1992) and multicultural research (Uehara et al., 1996). These models tend to share several characteristics that make them unique in scientific inquiry. For example, they generally contain an explicit assumption that research is value-based, not value-free. They also promote research that serves social transformation and avoids harming those studied. Those being studied are believed to have extensive knowledge that requires their participation in the design, data collection and analysis, and use of research. Finally, the role of the researcher is also transformed in these models from one of detached expert to a partner, educator, and facilitator who works closely with those being studied.

In research on woman battering there have been similar calls for a movement toward a collaborative research model that serves battered women. A decade ago, Hart (1988) outlined strategies for collaboration between researchers and advocates. Eisikovits and Pele (1990) and Dobash and Dobash (1990) have called for greater use of qualitative methods which often reflect a collaborative stance. More recently, Gondolf, Yllo and Campbell (1997) described a collaborative model of advocacy research in domestic violence.

In this paper we will use the term "collaborative research" to describe investigative partnerships between advocates, practitioners, social scientists, community activists, and women who have

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1   Thanks to Sarah O'Shea, Executive Director of the Nebraska Coalition Against Domestic Violence, for her humorous contributions at many meetings, including coining the term "forced bonding."

been battered. These relationships are characterized by intensive consultation from beginning to end of the research endeavor, and include collectively identifying research questions, designing data collection methods, constructing implementation strategies, interpreting findings, and writing and disseminating the results. The collaborative researcher we describe seeks to share control of the research process with her or his collaborators.

The following sections of this paper identify potential challenges to research partnerships that partially explain the scarcity of these collaborative relationships. Following this, we explore four successful collaborations between practitioners and researchers who examine the impact of adult domestic violence and the effectiveness of services aimed at stopping it. We then highlight strategies for successfully navigating the challenges presented by collaborative partnerships and conclude by arguing that collaborative partnerships between science and practice communities strengthen rather than weaken the process of scientific inquiry and program development.

Advocates, practitioners, and researchers involved in four successful collaborative research and evaluation projects on woman battering were interviewed in preparation for writing this paper. [2] We asked participants to describe the nature of their collaborative relationship and to discuss the basic guidelines or elements that they believed made these collaborations work (i.e. partners' behaviors, the project design, program elements, etc.). We also asked participants to identify some specific benefits resulting from their collaborations, as well as the challenges they encountered in collaborating and what strategies they utilized to effectively respond to these challenges. Throughout this paper we will draw on the experiences of these four successful collaborations and from the published literature.

Challenges to Collaborative Research Partnerships

We begin by addressing the barriers that arise when attempting to conduct collaborative research and which explain why such partnerships are relatively rare. A number of authors and individuals we interviewed identified several challenges, including those related to shared control of the research process, time and trust, differences between disciplines, and skills of the researcher.

Sharing Control of the Research Process

Perhaps the most prevalent framework supporting interventions to reduce or end woman battering is one that places power and control as the central driving force behind violent behavior (see Pence & Paymar, 1993) . It is not surprising, therefore, that when researchers approach these programs with requests to engage in research, there is an expectation that control over the research process--from conceptualization to interpretation and dissemination--will be shared equally between researchers, practitioners, and in some cases, the research subjects themselves.

Researchers may be concerned that this degree of collaboration will compromise the integrity of research designs if advocates and others do not understand the need for the experimental controls necessary to maintain scientific standards (Galinsky, Turnbull, Meglin & Wilner, 1993 ; Gondolf et al., 1997) . Similarly, some funding agencies have traditionally viewed close

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2   The authors would like to thank the following individuals for their willingness to be interviewed for this paper: Carol Arthur, Ellen Fisher, Bob Foster, Gail Garfield, Edward Gondolf, Beth Richie, Abby Schwartz, and Cris Sullivan.

collaborative relationships unfavorably, and question researchers' independence when they are actively and closely involved with the program being evaluated. There is a perception among some funders and researchers that such a close relationship will compromise the detached objectivity of the scientist by putting pressure on her or him to alter or hide results, especially when the results show unintended negative outcomes. At the same time, some practitioners hesitate to collaborate on research projects out of fear that potentially negative evaluation results will harm their program's funding or reputation (Ford, 1995 ; Gondolf et al., 1997 ; Myers & Daly, 1997 ; Riger, 1997) .

The situation at funding agencies has begun to change in recent years as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Justice, among others, have encouraged collaborative research projects. For example, in a recent National Institute of Justice research solicitation, practitioner-researcher collaborations were actively encouraged (NIJ, 1998) .

Time and Trust

One of the most commonly cited challenges of collaborative research is the intensive time commitment required by all involved (E. Fisher & E.W. Gondolf, personal communication, 6/17/98; Myers & Daly, 1997 ; Riger, 1997 ; C. Sullivan, personal communication, 6/17/98; Uehara et al., 1996) . Negotiating the research design, implementation procedures, interpretation, and publication of results is extremely time-consuming in general, and is even more so when the process is shared among collaborators from different disciplines who often have different values. Further, differences in race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and professional experience require more time for building trust in relationships (Hart, 1988 ; Renzetti, 1997) .

Time is a tension-filled issue, both for researchers employed in an academic setting and for program staff. Researchers generally have more time than practitioners to devote to a research project because it is a recognized and rewarded as part of their jobs. Despite this added time, many researchers are evaluated on their ability to produce multiple products from their studies and to publish them as sole or first authors in academically respected journals. Practitioners, on the other hand, are seldom offered rewards for participating in research or publishing manuscripts and usually fit work on a research project into their already full days (E. Fisher, personal communication, 6/17/98; Miedema, 1996 ; Riger, 1997) .

Beyond these time pressures, both practitioners and researchers may be distrustful of each other's motives. Many domestic violence program staff have experienced or heard stories of researchers who came to programs to collect data and then never contacted the program again once the data were in hand (A. Schwartz, personal communication, 6/26/98). This results in program staff feeling they have been exploited (Riger, 1997) . Practitioners' concerns about exploitation may also extend to the women or other family members studied. Advocates may worry that interview questions will unnecessarily reactivate emotional trauma about battering, blame victims by focusing on women's behavior, or compromise women's safety (Gondolf et al., 1997 ; Riger, 1997 ; A. Schwartz, personal communication, 6/26/98). Practitioners may also fear that research protocol will substantially alter services, to the detriment of clients (Galinsky, et al., 1993 ; C. Arthur, personal communication, 7/2/98). As stated earlier, researchers may not trust the ability of practitioners to understand or be helpful in designing a sufficiently rigorous study.

Differences Between Disciplines

Practitioners and researchers bring different skills, training, and experience to the collaboration. This is both a source of strength and a potential point of conflict. Researchers, advocates, and battered women may have different views on the relative value of empirical and experiential knowledge (Hart, 1988) . Different perspectives, terminology, methods, interpretations, and concerns may lead to misunderstanding and perpetuate feelings of fear and mistrust among collaborative partners if they remain unexplored (Gondolf et al., 1997 ; Hart, 1988) .

Further, the differences in race, class, gender, and sexual orientation mentioned earlier may add to differences in professional credentials between researchers, practitioners, and battered women and reinforce power in traditional ways (Hart, 1988) . These differences may fuel mistrust and miscommunication between collaborative partners if unacknowledged.

Skills of the Researcher

The challenges identified above may well destroy attempts at collaborative research if left unresolved or unanswered. Elden (1981) , Riger (1997) , Short, Hennessy and Campbell (1998) , Uehara et al. (1996) and others have all argued that truly collaborative research places many new demands on the role of researcher. The collaborative researcher's role is much different than that of the detached expert who designs a project and supervises its implementation by other research or agency personnel. The interpersonal skills required to negotiate and maintain collaborative relationships are not commonly taught in graduate research programs. Many researchers have excellent command of scientific methods but fail miserably in their ability to be an effective part of an interpersonal and interagency network of relationships.

Studies in Research on Woman Battering

Challenges do exist in collaborative partnerships, but many advocates, practitioners, battered women, and researchers have been involved in highly successful research relationships. As stated earlier, we interviewed the researchers and practitioners associated with four successful collaborative research projects. To introduce them, we present brief summaries of each collaborative partnership immediately below. We will continue to draw from their experiences and those of other researchers to identify the underlying assumptions and research strategies that appear to promote successful research collaborations.

The Community Advocacy Project: A Michigan Battered Women's Shelter and Cris Sullivan

The Community Advocacy Project was a multi-year study that examined the effectiveness of alternative interventions with women leaving abusive partners (Sullivan, 1991 ; Sullivan & Bybee, in press) . The Project's co-principal investigator was Dr. Cris Sullivan, an Associate Professor of Ecological Psychology at Michigan State University. Abby Schwartz was the administrative coordinator at the women's shelter with which Sullivan collaborated. The study not only involved a close partnership with the shelter, but also actively engaged shelter residents as collaborating partners in the research design.

Sullivan initiated the collaborative relationship with the women's shelter as a volunteer with the shelter, where she facilitated support groups and came to know agency staff and other volunteers.

She also later joined the Board of Directors and served as its Chair. Sullivan informed the staff and volunteers that she was a researcher who was interested in designing and evaluating an intervention project that would examine what women needed after leaving the shelter in order to increase their safety. She received permission from the shelter administration to talk with shelter residents regarding her research plan.

Sullivan's discussions with battered women themselves led to the development of a ten-week advocacy program designed to aid women leaving the shelter access resources to help increase their safety. The subsequent study randomly assigned battered women to experimental and control groups, with members of the experimental group working with trained paraprofessionals for 10 weeks to access the resources participants identified they needed after leaving the shelter (see Sullivan, 1991) .

The Domestic Abuse Project: A Minnesota Multi-Service Agency on Domestic Violence and Jeffrey Edleson

The Domestic Abuse Project (DAP) was four years old when Dr. Jeffrey Edleson moved to Minnesota in 1983. Edleson, a Professor of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, first volunteered at the agency, co-leading groups for men who batter and helping to organize collected data for reporting to funding agencies. These data were then analyzed by several staff at the agency and used as research projects to fulfill requirements of graduate degrees (Grusznski & Carrillo, 1988) . At the same time, Edleson assisted the agency in documenting its work and analyzing other sets of data (Brygger & Edleson, 1987 ; Edleson & Brygger, 1986 ; Edleson & Grusznski, 1988 ; Grusznski, Brink & Edleson, 1988) . He has worked closely with Carol Arthur, DAP's Executive Director, in his role as a long-serving member of the agency's administrative team.

As the relationship grew, the Domestic Abuse Project's management and staff set research priorities based on their personal and clinical experiences, with Edleson's facilitation. These priorities resulted in a decade-long research program that experimentally examined group treatment programs for men who batter (Edleson & Syers, 1990 , 1991) , surveyed the impact of coordinated interventions on battered women and their perpetrators (Gamache, Edleson & Schock, 1988 ; Syers & Edleson, 1992) , and investigated services to children who have witnessed adult domestic violence (Peled & Edleson, 1992 , 1995 , 1998 , in press) . The culmination of several projects was an extensive dissemination effort through an agency newsletter, DAP Research & Training Update , sent to approximately 9,000 individuals and organizations semi-annually and the publication of several books (Peled, Jaffe & Edleson, 1995 , Peled & Davis, 1995 ; Edleson with Frick, 1997) .

The African American Task Force on Violence Against Women and Beth Richie

The collaborative work of the African American Task Force on Violence Against Women is unique among the four case studies featured here because its collaborative research project was undertaken in support of a larger community organizing initiative. The Task Force received funding from the Violence Against Women Grants Office to bring together different community stakeholders in Central Harlem, New York, for the purpose of developing strategies in response to violence against women in their community. The Task Force was comprised of community residents and representatives from organizations working on behalf of children and families,

job readiness programs, public assistance programs, Head Start, the Urban League, health care providers, religious organizations, law enforcement, and others. Gail Garfield, Director of the Institute on Violence, Inc. in New York City, managed the Task Force. Dr. Beth Richie, formerly of Hunter College of the City University of New York and now a Professor in the Departments of Criminal Justice and Women's Studies at University of Illinois at Chicago, is a Senior Research Consultant with the Institute.

The goal of the Task Force was to develop a community-defined plan of action to address the complex issues of violence against women in the Central Harlem community of New York City. To accomplish this aim, a Community Involvement Model (CIM) developed by the Institute on Violence was implemented. As part of this model, a multi-phased needs assessment was conducted that included a systematic survey of organizations in the community; the gathering of descriptive information and data from community organizations and governmental agencies; and a series of focus group interviews with community residents and clients of services. To guide the implementation of the needs assessment, the Task Force established subcommittees composed of community members.

Beth Richie worked closely with the Focus Group subcommittee, who designed the focus group discussions. This included identifying the appropriate questions to be asked and identifying what different community populations would participate, as well as assisting Richie in facilitating the interviews. The subcommittee also helped analyze the findings and reported the results to the community in various forums. Overall, 11 focus group interviews were conducted during a three month period in 1997. The data from the needs assessment helped to inform the decision-making process by community members in the actual development of a plan of action to respond to violence against women.

Battered Women as Survivors: Texas Battered Women's Shelters and Ed Gondolf

The collaboration regarding battered women in Texas shelters between Dr. Edward Gondolf, a Professor of Sociology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Ellen Fisher, then-director of a Texas battered women's shelter, began when the two met in Portugal at the Third International Institute on Victimology in 1985. Fisher approached Gondolf at the conference regarding data that the Texas Council on Family Violence and the Texas Department of Human Services had collected from battered women residing in shelters during the women's intake and exit interviews. Fisher invited Gondolf to analyze the interviews of over 6,000 women who entered fifty shelters in Texas during an eighteen-month period in 1984-1985. Gondolf and Fisher's (1988) analysis of these data was eventually presented in their book entitled Battered Women as Survivors: An Alternative to Treating Learned Helplessness .

Best Practices in Successful Collaborations

A review of the strategies that researchers and practitioners have outlined as keys to the success of their collaborative ventures points to a set of underlying assumptions and best practices. Individually, the strategies identified below may look rather ordinary. Uehara et al. (1996) suggest that research projects become truly collaborative when strategies such as these become organic to the entire research endeavor. When taken together, these assumptions and strategies create a very different experience for both the social scientist as well as the practitioner. They

are likely to significantly affect every aspect of scientific inquiry, from initial problem and question formulation to the way in which the results are presented and disseminated.

In the sections below we will first outline three basic underlying assumptions that commonly appear in published accounts of collaborative research and were voiced by the individuals we interviewed for this paper. These include using woman-centered advocacy as a metaphor for the research process, viewing both researchers and those studied as equal partners in the research enterprise, and the assumption that research is value-based. After reviewing these underlying assumptions we will then identify concrete actions that bring life to these assumptions in the research process.

Assumptions in Collaborative Research

Advocacy as a Metaphor for the Research Process

In their recent book, Davies, Lyon and Monti-Catania (1998) define women-centered advocacy as giving women "the opportunity to make decisions...to guide the direction and define the advocacy...that she is the decision maker, the one who knows best, the one with power" (pp. 3-4). In the literature on collaborative research and in our interviews with collaborators, a similar theme appeared. The successful collaborative researcher appears to be one who spends a great deal of time being involved with a program or community, who shares decision-making power with others in the collaborative partnership, and who helps shape battered women's and/ or practitioners questions into research projects.

For example, a key element that contributed to the success of the Community Advocacy Project collaboration, according to Sullivan and Schwartz in Michigan, was that Sullivan became actively involved in the life of the shelter and its residents by volunteering as a support group facilitator and serving on the Board of Directors. According to Schwartz, the fact that Sullivan became an active member of the shelter community helped build trust because she was considered one of them. She spent a great deal of time listening to battered women, shaping a service response with them and then evaluating it.

The skills of the collaborative researcher involve many of those commonly outlined in the program evaluation literature (see, for example, Posavac & Carey, 1997) and include listening to the needs of practitioners and battered women, providing adequate information about the research project so that collaborative partners can make informed decisions about their involvement, and going forward with what the community partners want. The collaborative researcher also enters into the partnerships with an expectation that he or she is there to learn from women who have been battered, and views them, program staff and volunteers, and community members as equal partners in the collaboration (Hall, 1981 ; Kondrat & Julia, 1997) .

Blurring the Line Between Researcher and Those Studied

If researchers adopt a woman-centered or practitioner-centered approach to research, the traditional line between who is the researcher and who is the client, advocate, or practitioner is often blurred. As Elden (1981) suggests:

> *In participatory research compared to other types of research the researcher is more dependent on those from whom data come, has less unilateral control over the research*

process, and has more pressure to work from other people's definitions of the situation. (p. 261)

The collaborative researchers interviewed for this paper and many others in this area of study have, to varying degrees, practiced in a form close to what Elden describes. They have given up unilateral control over the research process (Torbert, 1981) and might be characterized as "advocate-researchers," as described by Gondolf, et al. (1997) . They take the questions, ideas, and strategies of advocates, battered women, and community members and make them central to the research study. Further, such researchers are immersed in the advocacy community and function as advocates in addition to researchers, serving in volunteer or administrative positions, on boards of directors, or as activists within the larger community.

The active involvement of battered women, advocates, and community members greatly enhances the research project by bringing knowledge based in practical and lived experiences, as well as critical analyses that are crucial to the project. Their contributions to research design, implementation, and analysis are vital. When a project is fully collaborative, all involved function as "co-researchers" in a project (Kondrat & Julia, 1997 ; Reason, 1994) . Underlying the sense of participants as "co-researchers" is the notion of reciprocal learning. The researchers, advocates, and battered women involved in they study both teach and learn from each other, with each partner bringing complementary and necessary skills to the project (Maguire, 1987 ; Renzetti, 1997) . When a truly collaborative relationship is established, everyone's expertise and contributions are valued equally.

Fisher and Gondolf report that while Gondolf was responsible for analyzing the data, they interpreted analyses together. Fisher would provide feedback on the written response, suggesting additions of summary charts or other tools to make the text more accessible to practitioners. Working in separate states, the two visited each other as often as limited funds allowed in order to devote uninterrupted time to the analysis. Their mutual commitment of time and energy to the process suggests that Fisher clearly functioned as a "co-researcher" on the project.

A Value-Based Science in Service to Social Change

Many authors promoting models of collaborative research reject the traditional notion that research is value-free. Rather, they argue that all researchers bring a specific set of values to the enterprise (Kondrat & Julia, 1997 ; Mies, 1996) . These values are viewed as playing a major role in every stage of the research process, affecting the selection of a problem and research question, design of the study, definition and measurement of variables, and interpretation and dissemination of the results (Dobash & Dobash, 1990 ; Eisikovits & Peled, 1990) . Collaborative research models call on researchers to make explicit their value orientation rather than assert they are value-free (Small, 1995) .

Uehara et al. (1996) argue that research "objectives should be linked to community empowerment, social justice, and social transformation goals" (p. 614). Advocacy research is intended to support the development of programs and public policies that improve the lives of battered women and their children (Gondolf et al., 1997) . As Small (1995) states, "If our research is to be more than an intellectual exercise, we need to seriously consider who we hope will benefit as well as who may be harmed by our work" (p. 952).

The collaborative research partners we interviewed spoke to these values. Carol Arthur of DAP described one of the benefits of doing collaborative research as "creating a culture where we're constantly asking if what we're doing is effective" (C. Arthur, personal communication, 7/2/98). In response to needs expressed by former clients in follow-up interviews, the agency developed an after-care program for women and men who had completed its groups. In addition to improving agency services, DAP's research supports the organization's efforts for social change by providing it with data on the effectiveness of the criminal justice system's response to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Strategies for Successful Collaboration

The three key assumptions we have outlined above support several concrete strategies for collaboration. These strategies include providing equal access to funding, involving survivors of woman battering and their advocates in research projects from the beginning, identifying incentives for all parties involved, and establishing communication between research partners that includes understanding roles of partners, being flexible regarding problem solving, and spending time in each others' domains and in neutral settings.

Provide Equal Access to Funding

Community agencies must be recognized as equal partners in collaborative research projects by both researchers and funders. The organization that controls the budget often also wields the greatest power in the relationship. Practitioners and their agencies should be fairly compensated for their contributions to research (E. Fisher & E.W. Gondolf, personal communication, 6/17/98; Miedema, 1996) . Collaborating partners should develop agreements in advance regarding funding allocations for operations and indirect costs, as well as strategies for fundraising (Gondolf et al., 1997) .

Involve Survivors and Practitioners from the Beginning

Research that actively involves women who have been battered in the conceptualization process will likely be enriched (Short et al., 1998) . Collaborations that involve battered women and their advocates in the research process will increase the likelihood that the research questions asked are relevant to the lives of battered women and the interventions designed to help them. Survivors and practitioners can help identify potential safety risks in the research design and implementation, create effective strategies for improving response rates and minimizing attrition, identify outcome variables, and validate the interpretation of results (Gondolf et al., 1997 ; Short et al., 1998) . Battered women and their advocates can also help identify issues that are salient to survivors, but which may not be initially viewed as scientifically relevant to researchers (Renzetti, 1997) .

In the Texas collaboration, Gondolf and his colleagues would run initial statistical analyses of the data and reach tentative conclusions, which shelter staff would then test with women in the shelter. In one case, this led the collaborators to modify the severity ranking of different kinds of threats. The researchers initially ranked threats to children as a moderately low-level threat, while shelter residents asserted that threats to children were the number one threat to women.

In the Community Advocacy Project, Sullivan spent a considerable amount of time talking with shelter residents informally to gather information to aid in the development of an experimental advocacy program and evaluation project, with significant benefits to the project. As Sullivan

recounts, "I think I would never have designed an effective intervention if I hadn't listened to the women themselves, because everything I was reading at that point, the literature in the journals, would have led me in a completely different direction." Sullivan's experience demonstrates the value of involving women who have been battered as equal partners in research on domestic violence. This example also illustrates the benefits resulting from investing significantly more time in consultation with battered women, advocates, and community members.

Offer Incentives for All Parties

Collaborative research on domestic violence should offer tangible benefits to all participants of collaborative research projects ([McGee, 1997](#)) . This helps to ensure the commitment of community programs and dispel feelings of mistrust or fear of exploitation. Examples of benefits to domestic violence programs are scientifically sound data to use in grant applications, evaluation of programs to help improve services, the sharing and interpretation of new research information from published journals and conference papers, donated services and materials to the program, and a greater understanding of the experiences of battered women and their children.

Both Fisher in Texas and Arthur in Minnesota described having a vested interest in having program data analyzed so that their programs could demonstrate to funders the need for additional financial support. Gondolf and Edleson each had a professional interest in publishing quality research. Further, all of the collaborators were motivated by the desire to learn more about the needs of battered women. According to Fisher, these incentives ensured that she remained responsive to requests from Gondolf.

The Community Advocacy Project collaboration in Michigan provided incentives to the shelter in several ways. First, residents assigned to the experimental group were provided advocacy services upon leaving the shelter that the program was otherwise unable to provide. In addition, advocates solicited donations for the shelter as part of their training in order to become familiar with community resources. Research participants were also well paid for their time and their expertise. Finally, Sullivan was able to use the positive research findings to help the shelter write a grant for funding of an Advocacy Coordinator position. This position has received on-going funding and is now viewed as an integral part of the shelter program.

Make Research Products Useful

Small ([1995](#)) argues that research products must be made available to and useful for research partners if we are to truly fulfill the mission of collaborative research. The African American Task Force on Violence Against Women in New York used their research to support the development of community-generated strategies for responding to violence against women in Central Harlem. According to Gail Garfield, the Task Force collaboration also began to "lay a foundation for the community--however defined--to begin to take ownership of the issue" (G. Garfield, personal communication, 7/6/98).

Disseminating research results in multiple formats was a strategy used by the Domestic Abuse Project in Minnesota when seeking to make information more useful. Study results were used to shape the redesign of agency programs and are integrated into training manuals that assist other programs in implementing and refining services. Results were also distributed widely in brief newsletter stories and press releases, through community presentations, and in a variety of longer publications and books. While the results were not always to DAP's liking, funders, policy makers and other practitioners have tended to appreciate its willingness to expose itself

to evaluation and then widely disseminate the findings, even when the study results point in a different direction than the agency's current program.

Establish On-Going Communication

Effective and culturally relevant communication is possibly the most essential and complex element of successful collaborations. Effective communication begins with all parties exploring their objectives, assumptions, roles, limits, and concerns. The participants of the 1996 conference on Creating Collaborations, held in Detroit, Michigan, have created a helpful list of questions to guide dialogue between those considering collaboration (Creating Collaborations, 1996). Honest dialogue from the onset lays the foundation for establishing trust and alleviating fears cited earlier.

As the research process begins and evolves, collaborators must continue to build in regular opportunities to discuss the research process and express concerns. Turnover in personnel at non-profit agencies is often frequent enough that even the clearest communication must be repeated many times with the aim of ensuring that all collaborators continue to be adequately informed. Regular and repeated communication will also help ensure that interventions or data collection methods are implemented as intended (Galinsky et al., 1993) . Schwartz, a staff member of the shelter in Michigan which collaborated with Sullivan, cited such ongoing communication as one essential element that contributed to the success of the collaboration, as did Arthur, in Minnesota, who collaborated with Edleson.

The content of on-going communication will depend on the particular setting in which a research project is conducted. The collaborators interviewed raised a number of communication issues including role responsibilities, approaches to problem solving, and spending time together in each others' domains and in neutral settings.

Be purposeful about roles in the research process

Several of the successful collaborators cited the benefit of clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each partner before engaging in research, including Gondolf and Fisher as well as Arthur and Edleson. These collaborators identified the need to resolve decision-making strategies, lines of authority, authorship and publication, and timelines for completion of tasks (Galinksy et al., 1993 ; Gondolf et al., 1997 ; Riger, 1997) . Collaborators also must decide whose interpretation of the data will be upheld when researchers, advocates, or battered women disagree (E. Gondolf, personal communication, 6/17/98; Riger, 1997) . Gondolf and Fisher explained that in their collaborative project, agreeing upon an efficient division of labor, establishing practical steps and check-in points, clearly identifying goals, and setting a timeline were all factors that assisted them in completing the tasks associated with their collaboration.

In other cases, however, collaborations may benefit from allowing roles and responsibilities to overlap and to develop organically. Richie identified the fact that roles remained undefined as a key element to the success of the Harlem initiative. Because Richie and Garfield were perceived as members of the community and not as outside researchers, the boundaries between researcher and community were blurred. This facilitated feelings of trust among collaborators. In either case it was helpful to be purposeful about the clarity or lack of clarity in collaborative roles.

Be Flexible in Problem Solving

Regardless of whether or not collaborators find it useful to create agreements regarding roles and responsibilities, partners must be willing to problem-solve together regarding how to address conflicts and be prepared to renegotiate agreements as necessary. Fisher, Sullivan, and Schwartz each described the tendency for outside researchers to label program staff "uncooperative," and cited this tendency as an indication that the researchers were not willing to work together with program staff to solve problems.

Schwartz recounted the Michigan shelter's experience with a research team other than Sullivan that wanted to survey shelter residents using a written survey instrument. The vocabulary of the instrument was for college graduates. When shelter staff tried to explain that the language was not appropriate for shelter residents, the researchers were not receptive to their feedback and did not change the instrument. Further, the research team did not pay women for the considerable time it would take to fill out the survey. When shelter staff warned the researchers that they were unlikely to get a good response rate, the researchers acted as if the shelter staff were not being cooperative.

As Schwartz recalls,

> *It was like they thought, `If you were really helpful, you'd talk them [shelter residents] into it.' But it wouldn't help us, it could in fact hinder us in doing our work, because women might be put off by it, and we have to spend a lot of time building trust, so there was no give and take. (A. Schwartz, personal communication, 6/26/98)*

The shelter's experience demonstrates not only the necessity of assuming an attitude of joint problem solving, but also illustrates the benefits of recognizing the expertise of program staff.

Spend Time Together in Each Others' Domain and in Neutral Ones

Advocates and researchers often work in very different environments. Some collaborators find that exposure to each others' workplace can facilitate understanding of the demands placed on collaborators' time and attention. Researchers may wish to consider attending regularly scheduled staff meetings at community agencies to give and receive reports about the research project, or to collect feedback from staff (Riger, 1997 ; A. Schwartz, personal communication, 6/26/98). Using this time may be more efficient than scheduling additional meetings to discuss the research (Riger, 1997) . Collaborators may want to schedule some meetings at the research team's offices so community partners can familiarize themselves with researchers' environments as well.

Conversely, advocates and researchers often find it helpful to schedule time away from their respective offices in order to devote their undivided attention to the research project. This could be called "the kitchen table factor," as several collaborators identified the kitchen table as the location where the best work was accomplished. Fisher, in particular, stressed the benefit for practitioners of taking time away from the office to work on the project in order to ensure that required tasks are completed without the imposition of competing demands.

How is Science Enhanced Through Collaboration with Practice?

Throughout this paper we have explicitly and implicitly argued that collaboration on research is beneficial. While there is no guarantee that collaboration will generate the benefits described below, we believe that more meaningful and useful research is generated by holding to the assumptions and strategies outlined above. A number of benefits that result from conducting research in partnership between scientists and practitioners have been identified in the literature and through our interviews. These include improvements to research questions, enhancements in research implementation, gains from complementary talents, increased legitimacy and utilization, enhanced accountability to battered women and their advocates, and a connection to a larger social movement. Each of these benefits are discussed in detail below.

Improved Research Questions

One of the most significant benefits of collaborating on domestic violence research is that the inquiry is often far more relevant to the lives of battered women. Numerous researchers have testified that working with battered women and their advocates led to the formation of research questions that researchers would not have created on their own--questions that were grounded in the experiences of battered women. Gondolf asserts that, "Without Ellen's involvement...I probably would have asked the wrong questions, because there are a lot of cases where when you have all of this information in a database, you can start asking crazy questions" (E. Gondolf, personal communication, 6/17/98).

Adopting research questions that are generated from battered women and their advocates also sets a precedent of valuing the expertise that these collaborators bring to a research project, which helps balance other possible power differentials. Further, collaboration is more likely to generate multiple outcome measures that more accurately reflect the complexity of battered women's lives (Gondolf et al., 1997) . Richie recounted how community members helped her to view violence against African American women in relation to larger issues facing the community, stating,

> It was very hard to stay on domestic violence in the narrowest sense. So while I was tempted scientifically to bring the group back, I didn't because I think it would have skewed what people were comfortable saying, and would've made them focus on something that wasn't a discrete concept to them. (B.Richie, personal communication, 7/3/98)

Enhanced Research Implementation

Research projects designed collaboratively, particularly those that include battered women in the design, often find that data collection methods are improved. Collaborative projects are more likely to collect information in ways that do not compromise the safety or confidentiality of participants by paying attention to the timing, format, and location of interviews and surveys (Gondolf et al., 1997) . Battered women, advocates, and community members can help develop survey instruments which use language that is appropriate and inclusive of its audience (Renzetti, 1997) .

Collaborative projects may also lead to the creation of more effective retention strategies for longitudinal studies by consulting with battered women regarding what incentives and contact methods are more likely to work. The Community Advocacy Project staff interviewed women in the control and experimental groups every six months for two years. Based on conversations with and feedback from women residing at the shelter, Sullivan and others on the research team designed a three-phase retention protocol that involved paying women progressively larger amounts of money for their participation over time and utilizing women's social networks and community contacts to locate them if they relocated. This retention strategy enabled the study to maintain a 97% retention rate at the 24-month follow-up interviews (Sullivan et al., 1996) .

Benefit of Complementary Talents

When professionals with different training and experience collectively direct their energies toward the same outcome, the process is often synergetic. Battered women and advocates are experts in interpreting responses to abuse. They are therefore valuable interpreters and validators of research results. Battered women and advocates may also be more aware of the effects of culture and ethnicity on those responses, and can provide valuable insight regarding how to modify research instruments for various populations (Riger, 1997) . Researchers are trained in scientific methods and data analysis and can help link the experiences of battered women explored in a specific project to the theoretical contributions of existing research on violence against women.

When researchers, practitioners, and battered women apply their complementary talents in tandem, their collective efforts can often reach underserved populations in more effective ways than if they had worked independently. The diverse talents included in the African American Task Force on Violence Against Women initiative ensured that the data collected and the community intervention strategies developed were relevant to and inclusive of the Central Harlem community in which it was based.

Enhanced Legitimacy and Utilization

Entering into a collaborative relationship with practitioners and their associated programs often provides enhanced legitimacy for researchers. Associations with domestic violence programs often afford researchers access to data to which they would not otherwise have access. After agreeing to collaborate, Fisher and Gondolf met with the Texas Department of Human Services to secure access to the data. Gondolf recalled that the shelter's involvement in the project was a major source of legitimacy; without the shelter's involvement, Gondolf would have been less likely to have had access to the data.

Practitioners may also benefit from the credibility that researchers contribute to a project through researchers' careful attention to the scientific rigor of the research design, data collection, and interpretation. Fisher, Gondolf, Sullivan, and Arthur all identified the benefit of utilizing scientifically sound data that expresses clients' needs, demonstrates the effectiveness of an intervention, or supports the assertions of battered women and their advocates.

Enhanced Accountability to Battered Women and Their Advocates

Truly collaborative research that involves advocates and battered women in the design, implementation, and interpretation of research increases the accountability of the research to

battered women and their advocates. It is also more likely to enhance their ongoing efforts of social change to end violence against women (Hart, 1988) . When collaborators share power in the research process, it may reflect a commitment to social change. The results of research are more likely to be trusted and utilized by advocates and other practitioners to improve services focused on enhancing the safety of battered women and holding perpetrators accountable.

Researchers who are active in advocacy or the larger community find an added incentive to ensure that the research will make a difference in the lives of battered women and other community members. As Richie reports, "I was a part of the community, not an outsider. And I didn't want to feel that I couldn't go back to a community meeting and have people say, `Whatever happened to that project that you did?' I didn't want to be faced with that" (B. Richie, personal communication, 7/3/98).

Connection to Larger Social Movement

Practitioners may find that collaborating on a research project can lead to increased exposure to the national battered women's movement and can expand advocates' understanding of issues concerning battered women and their children. Fisher described working with Gondolf as a "life-transforming experience" that broadened her thinking and analysis beyond the local or state level to a national analysis of how to make a difference in the lives of battered women.

Researchers may also benefit from being connected to the larger movement to end violence against women as a result of collaborating with advocates and battered women. Gondolf asserted that his collaboration with Fisher grounded him in the political issues surrounding the field and pointed him toward research that affected public policy issues. Further, the dialogue with Fisher and others matured his understanding of the field because real-life issues were involved.

Conclusion

We have attempted to describe elements of a model of collaborative research that is grounded in the experiences of researchers, practitioners and battered women. Many research partnerships and program evaluations currently utilize elements of this model, but given the challenges outlined, it is rare that most or all of these elements are applied in a single project. Interestingly, there are few studies of collaborative research models themselves.

Taken together, the assumptions and strategies of collaborative partnerships create a research environment with a very different culture than found in more traditional research projects. Research conducted in collaboration has the potential to transform both the researcher and community partners when control of the research process is shared. Researchers may learn to shape studies around the questions of those in the field, gaining tremendously from the input of practitioners and battered women with direct experience. Practitioners may increasingly value the opportunity to have their specific questions answered, becoming more motivated to use research information to shape practice and to participate in future studies. Collaborative research partnerships offer a potential path for helping to create more useful research and improved services for battered women, their families, and their communities.

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