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DEFINING FACTORS AND CHALLENGE POINTS OF UNIVERSITY-BASED COMMUNITY INITIATIVES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF ONE HEALTHY MARRIAGE PROJECT

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

DEFINING FACTORS AND CHALLENGE POINTS OF UNIVERSITY-BASED COMMUNITY INITIATIVES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF ONE HEALTHY MARRIAGE PROJECT

This thesis presents information on community healthy marriage initiatives and university-community collaborations. Specifically, it examined the workings of one of those healthy marriage initiatives in the university-community collaborative context. The project explored the current process of this initiative, identifying specific challenge points and defining factors and characteristics associated with the success thereof. Rather than working in discrete categories, these challenge points exist on a success continuum. How each challenge is managed determines whether it is a success factor or a stumbling block. The project is grounded in published learning from other university-community initiatives and employs an ethnographic qualitative research strategy. Data consist of interviews with several key collaborators (n = 9) who were involved with this initiative. The findings from this ethnography support and enhance previous literature on university-community collaborations and outreach scholarship and provide useful examples and lessons that can be used by other university-community collaborations, especially those involving marriage education initiatives in a community setting.

KEYWORDS: Collaboration, Outreach Scholarship, University-Community Relations, Defining Factors, Challenge Points

Erik L. Carlton

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THESIS

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THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in the
College of Agriculture
at the University of Kentucky

By

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2007

For my wife, Tamara, my most precious collaborator
and our children, Rebekah and Andrew, our greatest initiatives.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Background	
Healthy Marriage and Community Healthy Marriage Initiatives (CHMIs)	1
Community Marriage Initiatives	3
Community saturation and integrated marriage education ...	4
Challenges in reaching participants	5
The Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative (BHMI)	6
University-Community Collaborations	6
University-Community Collaborations: Lessons from Outreach Projects	10
Process Evaluation	14
Purpose and Significance of the Study	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	17
Overview of the Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative (BHMI)	17
Goals, purpose, & objectives	17
Target	18
Process	19
Challenges and Opportunities of Outreach Scholarship	20
University-Community Collaborations: Lessons from Outreach Projects ..	22
Key success factors	23
Other success factors	24
Challenge points	25
Chapter 3: Methodology	28
Qualitative Methodology	28
Strategies of Inquiry: Ethnography and Autoethnography	29
Procedure	31
Participants	34
Data Recording and Transcription	35
Data Analysis and Interpretation	36
Qualitative Rigor	37
Truth value (credibility)	37
Applicability (transferability)	38
Consistency (reliability)	38
Neutrality (confirmability)	39
Role of the Researcher	40

What is my role/position in the Initiative?	40
How does that influence how I conduct this research?	41
What are my motivations for this project?	41
What do I hope to accomplish with this study?	42
What are my perspectives on the questions being asked?	42
Connection to study participants	43
Ethical Issues	43
Chapter 4: Results	46
Success Factors v. Challenge Points: A Revised Model	46
Defining Factors: What are the Key Challenge Points?	47
People	48
Relationships.....	50
Vision & values.....	50
Foundation.....	53
Defining Characteristics: What Determines the Outcome of the Key Challenge Points?	54
Communication.....	55
Clarity	55
Conflict resolution	56
Resilience.....	58
Flexibility & change	59
Power & control	60
Balance	61
Commitment & teamwork	62
Expectations & optimism	63
Action & momentum	64
Chapter 5: Discussion	67
Implications	71
University faculty & staff	71
Community leaders & participants.....	73
Project sponsors	74
Limitations	75
Suggestions for Follow-Up and/or Future Studies	76
Concluding Thoughts: Reflections of a Researcher	77
Appendix	
Appendix A: Verbal Assent Script & Interview Guide.....	81
References	83
Vita.....	93

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Success Factors and Challenge Points of University-Community Initiatives.....	11-13
--	-------

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Factors and Characteristics of Successful Collaborations.....	47
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Social movements may be characterized by the collective, purposeful nature of their efforts in regard to specific social issues or conditions (Wilson, 1973). Wade Horn (1999), current undersecretary for the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF), identified three components of successful social initiatives: (1) a clear agenda, (2) a broad support base, and (3) an organizational structure capable of maintaining the initiative. This paper presents background information on community healthy marriage initiatives, in general, and then will examine the workings of one of those initiatives in particular as it relates to university-based community initiatives. It studies the current process of this initiative based on published learning from other university-community initiatives using an ethnographic approach. Data consist of interviews with several key collaborators involved with this initiative.

Background

Healthy Marriage and Community Healthy Marriage Initiatives (CHMIs)

The benefits of marriage is a topic that has recently been heavily debated and is currently a controversial topic. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this debate to any length. It is, however, worthwhile to note that this discussion exists and to direct the reader to sources that provide greater information on that topic. The October 2004 issue of the Family Relations journal and the November 2004 issue of the Journal of Marriage and the Family are two such resources, providing several articles related to this subject.

In response to research regarding the benefits of marriage, the government proposed the development of a healthy marriage initiative to assist those who choose marriage for themselves to be able to do so skillfully and enduringly and in a community culture that was supportive of their choice (U.S. Administration for Children & Families, 2006a). The U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF), which administers the government's healthy marriage initiatives, defines healthy marriage as mutually enriching and characterized by deep respect (ACF, 2006a). According to their definition, healthy marriages are beneficial to both husband and wife (and children if they are present), and demonstrate a commitment to on-going growth and effective use of communication and conflict management skills. Specific initiatives have been developed within ACF for African-American, Hispanic, Native American, and refugee populations. ACF's stated goals of these initiatives are to: (a) increase the percentage of children raised by two parents in a healthy marriage, (b) increase the percentage of couples in a healthy marriage, (c) increase the percentage of premarital couples equipped with skills and knowledge necessary for a healthy marriage, (d) increase the percentage of youth and young adults who have skills and knowledge about healthy relationships, (e) increase public awareness of the value of healthy marriages, (f) encourage and support research on healthy marriages, and (g) increase the percentage of homes free of domestic violence (ACF).

Community Marriage Initiatives (CMIs)

Over the past few decades, academic and social service organizations have responded to understand and support the needs of American marriages and families. Doherty and Anderson (2004) provide an overview of community marriage initiatives, including the historical development of marital therapy, marriage education programs, and community marriage policies throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The authors review several specific community marriage initiatives and state that “there is no one-size fits all approach to implementation and evaluation. Both are dependent on the needs of the targeted population, the resources available, and the expectations of important stakeholders” (p.429). Brotherson and Duncan (2004) regard the “marriage movement” as a, “growing social awareness of marriage, its role in society, and a loose knit coalition of multiple sectors that are interested in strengthening marital relationships” (p.461). According to these authors, various community initiatives targeted at marriage have arisen in academic, private, public, and faith-based sectors over the past two decades.

Community healthy marriage initiatives or CHMIs are a collective response of individuals and communities to the needs of marriages and families. As indicated by Doherty and Anderson (2004), these initiatives take many forms and exist throughout the several sectors of society (Brotherson & Duncan, 2004). Many of these initiatives have been funded by various divisions within ACF. Allowable activities for grants funded by ACF healthy marriage monies include: (a) public advertising campaigns; (b) marriage and relationship education

programs, including parenting skills, financial management, and job training in high schools and for pre-marital and marital couples and expectant parents; (c) marriage enhancement programs; (d) divorce reduction programs; (e) marriage mentoring programs; (f) reduce marriage disincentives; and (g) research (ACF, 2006a).

Community saturation and integrated marriage education. Many authors have examined how to improve the accessibility and delivery of marriage education through various community models. Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, and Willoughby (2004) recommend “embedding marriage education in diverse institutional settings with access to couples across the socioeconomic spectrum” (p.547). The power of this approach, the authors believe, is in helping marriage education efforts to expand beyond a centralized entrepreneurial effort and become a part of organizations in various sectors of the community that can themselves support and expand educational efforts. Halford (2004) suggests integrating marriage and relationship education with larger community development programs. Similarly, Ooms and Wilson (2004) suggest that financial assistance programs could be a means of accessing low-income populations for the purpose of promoting relationship education to these groups. Hawkins et al. (2004) discuss “citizen marriage initiatives,” or marriage initiatives that involve citizens at a grass-roots level, which creates a base of citizen support for these efforts. They also encourage the use of “cultural seeding” approaches, such as public awareness and health education campaigns to change the overall culture surrounding marriage and marriage education.

Challenges in reaching participants. Regardless of approach, there exist challenges to delivering marriage education and services to potential participants. Halford (2004) states, “relationship education needs to be more accessible if it is to be effective” (p.564). Ooms and Wilson (2004) call attention to the potential challenges programs may have in reaching certain populations of potential participants. Specifically, they identify the general negative attitude toward seeking help evidenced by low-income and male populations. Where established relationships are not present, these authors state, programs must work to prove their genuine interest in supporting the given population(s). Among other lessons, they suggest, “forging meaningful collaborative relationships” (p. 445) with organizations that already have established trust with the target population(s). Halford contends that strong government support is an additional factor in creating greater accessibility and community acceptance. One of the strengths, then, of community-saturation, coalition-based models thus becomes their partnership with organizations throughout various sectors of the community who already have “buy-in” with given populations, rather than a more centralized organization that is perhaps removed from the community it is looking to service. Not only do such collaborative relationships allow for the establishment of trust as various organizations become intimately involved with the given project, but they also likely prove more efficient in reaching and recruiting participants. Thus the program does not have to reach out to each participant individually, per se; they need only reach out to the organizations with which many of the target population(s) are affiliated. These organizations can then facilitate aspects of the

project with their respective populations. Collaboration, then, becomes a meaningful goal for overcoming barriers to effecting change with regards to social issues.

The Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative (BHMI)

The Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative, the CHMI targeted for this study, is a collaborative effort between the University of Kentucky Department of Family Studies and Bluegrass Healthy Marriages Partnership, a non-profit community organization, to affirm and enable healthy marriages and healthy co-parenting relationships in Central Kentucky for the purpose of increasing child well-being. This project seeks to create a community coalition by bringing together several organizations to facilitate scholarly research and provide a variety of educational events, programs and activities intended to help those who choose marriage for themselves to be successful in that pursuit. The Initiative is funded by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services through a Section 1115 waiver awarded to the state by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Region IV. More detailed information on the Initiative, as it is referred to throughout this paper, is provided later.

University-Community Collaborations

“The complex problems faced by individuals and organizations today cannot be resolved by one person’s heroic efforts; from education to science to business, increasingly, solutions lie in collaborative efforts” (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000, p.30).

By definition, collaborations involve multiple parties. Individual persons or organizations that collaborate with each other should be able to capitalize on their shared interests and diverse strengths. On the subject of youth development programs, Perkins, Borden, Keith, Hoppe-Rooney, and Villarruel (2003) indicate that deficits can only be truly addressed and ameliorated through community efforts. Erickson and Weinberg (2000) hold that universities operating in isolation from the community can do little good; meaning that universities have the most potential for effecting social change through applied research and teaching that is cognizant of community needs. Of the need for university involvement in social issues, Schuermann (2000) says that, “we cannot afford to keep our leading thinkers in the so-called ivory tower” (p.131). Surely the same can be said of most any community development issue. If we are to effectively address and overcome social issues that press upon us daily, we must work as communities, not individuals; doing so suggests collaboration.

There are aspects of collaborations shown to contribute to team success. Bray et al. (2000) highlight three such conditions inherent in what they term a “learning group culture.” These conditions are: (1) appreciation of teamwork, including a recognition of various, diverse, and reasonable difference of opinion; (2) individual expression, which they define as the extent to which individual members feel free to contribute to the group by voicing opinions, sharing knowledge, and apply specific skills; and (3) operating principles, including common values and purpose. In their own words:

Collaborators can engage in inquiry together for divergent reasons and can hold somewhat divergent assumptions about what constitutes knowledge, as long as they agree to the essentials. These essentials are the need to engage in a process of collaborative discovery marked by democratic participation in all phases of the inquiry process, authentic reflection on the interests that motivate their participation, and the honoring of a holistic perspective on the construction of valid knowledge (Bray et al., p.6).

Further, Smith (2000) calls to our attention the importance of establishing and maintaining effective and supportive relationships with various contributors and of learning the art of negotiation. Finally, Erickson and Weinberg (2000) recommend that collaborations be grounded in reciprocity and respect and be inclusive and not exclusive, recognizing the strength of possessing multidisciplinary and intersectional expertise. The existence of these conditions seems to assist collaborative efforts in successfully achieving their desired outcomes.

While collaboration is important, some authors point to potential inefficiencies or problems in collaborations. Lerner, Ralston, Mullis, Simerly, and Murray (2000) and Smith (2000) indicate the potential downfalls which can occur when different groups compete for “turf” or leadership in certain areas or when services to clients are duplicated needlessly. They also highlight the need to identify and build on community assets and of finding ways to create sustainable initiatives and programs. These same authors present and encourage a form of

scholarship called outreach scholarship, which engages university and community organizations in shared endeavors. In these collaborative ventures, community partners provide the perspective and assets of the community, while universities offer expertise about programs and policies. Such ventures can be especially challenging for leaders tasked with representing their various organizations and who may be used to functioning according to specific bureaucratic and administrative processes and paradigms. As Smith indicates, collaborative leadership “requires respect for diversity and [a] willingness to function in unfamiliar contexts” (p.67).

Context is an important aspect of any collaboration, especially in circumstances such as university-community partnerships where contexts usually vary greatly between each organization. Lerner et al., (2000) point out that successful collaborative ventures at the university level require the marriage of three specific and differential contexts. The first is the higher education system, with its established business processes, research expertise, and educational focus. The second is the various and diverse assets of the communities in and with which the higher education institution is working. The final context is the public policy arena where, as Lerner et al. state, “Politics and the need for action are often at odds with the orientation in universities for reflection and painstaking research” (p.3). Community organizations are more accustomed to service delivery and advocacy than generation of knowledge. Conversely, political pressures often force the hand of those in the public policy arena. Successful collaborations require that these differences be both overtly recognized and

adequately reconciled. Such reconciliation is not easy. “Collaboration complicates bureaucratic processes” (Smith, 2000, p.64).

University-Community Collaborations: Lessons from Outreach Projects

Working with community organizations may allow universities to reach into the community and apply research and teaching expertise to effect positive social change. Roffman, Suarez-Orozco, and Rhodes (2003) hold that community organizations can perform what they call a “bridging function” between inner city cultures and mainstream populations. In this sense, these organizations can bridge academic learning to applied service and programming settings. An excellent volume of narratives of successful university-community partnerships edited by Thomas Chibucos and Richard Lerner (1999) provides several clues into factors contributing to the accomplishments of these collaborations. Rather than go deeply into individual projects, I have chosen to summarize the various themes they present regarding success factors and potential impediments. As each of these projects was ultimately successful, I have chosen to title these “success factors” and “challenge points” respectively. While “success factors” is a fairly clear term, I have developed the “challenge points” to describe those aspects of a given project, which did not result in its ultimate failure, but nonetheless presented a significant obstacle, or challenge, that needed to be effectively addressed if ultimate success were to be achieved. A brief review of these themes is provided here; while a more complete list of various success factors and challenge points, including associated references, is provided in Table 1 and discussed in great detail in Chapter 2.

Table 1: Success Factors and Challenge Points of University-Community

Initiatives

Success Factors	Supporting Articles
Mutual respect & trust Respecting differences Appreciation of other's meaning & intent Respect traditions & structures	Bates, Luster, Massie, & Key Chibucos, Freeman, Kilmer, Larsen, O'Donnel, & Stricker Fabes, Martin, Melmed, & Schneider Hurd, Larkin, & Ribeiro Lucy-Allen & Seydel Mullis & Ghazvini Nader, Muller, Johnson, & Blakely Rodgers & Small Spoth & Molgaard Walsh, Anderson, & Smyer
Common goals & vision Clear goals & vision Consensus Compatible missions/goals Common cause Shared passion Fundamental compatibility	Blackwell & Stanberry Cato, Wilkes, Maxwell, Kreader, Wharff, & Todd Chibucos, et al. Fabes, et al. Hurd, Larkin, & Ribeiro Martland & Rothbaum Mullis (1999) Mullis & Ghazvini Sandmann & Simon Spoth & Molgaard
Dialogue/communication Open-mindedness Voice for all partners Centralized/clear communication Negotiation Compromise	Bates, et al. Fabes, et al. Lucy-Allen & Seydel Sandmann & Simon Spoth & Molgaard
"Relationship" focus Group focus Set aside individual Nurture relationship(s) Working relationships Partnership development	Cato, et al. Chibucos, et al. Fabes, et al. Fine, Coleman, Gable, Ganong, Ispa, Morrison, & Thornburg Lucy-Allen & Seydel Mullis & Ghazvini
Involvement (of): - Students, volunteers - Front-line workers - Larger community - Administrators - Stakeholders Active & continuous	Blackwell & Stanberry Cassidy, Hall, & Hicks Fine, et al. Hurd, et al. Koblinsky & Anderson Martland & Rothbaum Mullis

involvement Inclusion & ownership	Mullis & Ghazvini Rollin, Rubin, Ward, Brown, Wright, Painter, Cameron, & Scheckner Spoth & Molgaard Walsh, Anderson, & Smyer
Client- or community-centered focus and understanding Prioritize community University responsiveness to community	Hurd, et al. Koblinsky & Anderson Martland & Rothbaum Mullis Mullis & Ghazvini Nader, et al.
Shared/blended expertise Complementary and interdependent tasks	Blackwell & Stanberry Fine, et al. Mullis Nader, et al. Sandmann & Simon Walsh, et al.
Commitment/Buy-in	Bell, Haley, Felstehausen & Adams Cassidy, et al. Lucy-Allen & Seydel Mullis
Defined roles/responsibilities	Mullis
Planning	Lucy-Allen & Seydel Mullis
Advisory committee	Mullis & Ghazvini Rodgers & Small
Funding Consistent funding Flexible management	Hurd, et al. Rollin, et al. Walsh, et al.
Evaluation, frequent/on-going	Koblinsky & Anderson Rollin, et al.
Shared resources (human, financial, etc.)	Blackwell & Stanberry Cato, et al. Hurd, et al. Sandmann & Simon
Local credibility Community support/interest External cultural milieu	Cato, et al. Fine, et al. Martland & Rothbaum Spoth & Molgaard
Administrative support Leadership & guardianship Flexible & flat leadership structure	Hurd, et al. Lucy-Allen & Seydel Martland & Rothbaum Sandmann & Simon Spoth & Molgaard

	Walsh, et al.
Sustainability	Koblinsky & Anderson
Intermediary	Sandmann & Simon
Clear priorities	Nader, et al.
Research impact Timely reporting	Bates, et al.
Balancing research and action agendas	Rodgers & Small

Challenge Point	Supporting Articles
Loss of control/expertise	Fabes, et al.
Different perspectives Unique focus/expertise Different vocabulary and concepts Cultural differences	Erickson & Weinberg Fabes, et al. Rollin, et al. Spoth & Molgaard
Different motivations Differing missions	Fabes, et al. Bates, et al.
Boundaries & Turf issues Turfdom Interdepartmental turf issues	Erickson & Weinberg Fabes, et al. Mullis & Ghazvini
Local politics/climate Local needs/issues	Mullis & Ghazvini Cato, et al.
Duplication of services	Rollin, et al.
Finding collaborators	Cato, et al.
Institutional climate & cultures, especially fiscal Institutional attitudes Organizational procedures University reward system for faculty	Cato, et al. Erickson & Weinberg Lucy-Allen & Seydel Spoth & Molgaard
Individual actions of stakeholders	Cato, et al.
Fragmentation of partners	Hurd, et al.
Absence of research or action plans	Hurd, et al.
University image Public perception of university	Cassidy, et al. Erickson & Weinberg

All references are from Chibucos, T. R., & Lerner, R. M. (Eds.). (1999). *Serving children and families through community-university partnerships: Success stories*. Boston, MA: Kluwer.

Factors found to have contributed to the success of university-community initiatives include: (1) mutual respect and trust, including respect for differences, appreciation of each other's meaning and intent, and respecting traditions; (2) clear and common goals and visions, including consensus among partners, compatible missions, a common cause, and shared passions; (3) dialogue and communication, including open-mindedness, negotiation, compromise, and all partners having a voice was also frequently indicated; (4) developing and nurturing relationships; (5) involvement; and (6) prioritizing the community and maintaining a community focus.

Points that may potentially challenge project success include: (1) differing perspectives, vocabulary and concepts, cultures, and expertise; (2) divergent missions and motivations; (3) boundaries and turf issues and duplication of services; (4) local political climates and local needs; and (5) institutional climates, cultures, policies, and procedures.

Process Evaluation

The Lewin Group (1996), a technical assistance consultancy hired to work with the government's healthy marriage initiatives, suggests a process for evaluation research that is relevant for this study. This begins with determining the overall purpose of the study, including the questions to be answered, identifying key stakeholders in the program, the development of formal interview guides, conducting interviews with the identified stakeholders, analyzing the data, and reporting findings. Additionally, they also highlight two important functions of evaluation research for such programs. First, evaluation research can provide

information to outside agencies that may be interested in understanding, further funding, or replicating the program. Second, evaluation research can be used by the program to make any expedient modifications necessary to ensure higher quality delivery of services and programming. This project involved such an evaluation – what have been the project’s successes and how have they been accomplished – as well as where are the perceived growth areas – those challenges that some may feel are blocking a greater level of successful collaboration and community outreach. This recommended process for evaluation research is followed in this study.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Scholarly focus on university-community collaborations seems to have ignored healthy marriage initiatives. This may be because the vast majority of CHMIs are not inherently linked to institutions of higher education, but rather to faith-based organizations, non-profit groups, or social service agencies. Those that are tied to universities are generally focused on program development or evaluation research, not community capacity or coalition building. BHMI is thus unique in its approach to both healthy marriage initiatives and university-community collaborations. In light of the significant funding recently appropriated by the United States government over the next five years towards healthy marriage (\$500 million) and fatherhood initiatives (\$250 million), it is important to consider the role universities play or might play in CHMIs. Of the 124 recently-announced grantees from this funding, only fifteen projects seem tied to universities (ACF, 2006b). While it is yet unclear the extent to which these

university-based grants are proposed to work in collaboration with community organizations, these projects are worth mentioning, for they represent nearly \$9 million in Federal appropriations in twelve states. As most of the HMIs are primarily community-based, and given the differing expertise and organizational cultural approaches offered by universities and community organizations, it is important to consider how these groups can work effectively together.

The purpose of this study was to use ethnographic methodology to explore one university-community healthy marriage collaboration in depth. This study identifies the specific challenges and opportunities of this initiative and the findings provide a detailed picture that can offer lessons for others who are working on similar current or potential projects.

Several defining factors and characteristics emerged from this study. To some extent, these mirrored the success factors discussed in the literature review – such as the importance of interpersonal respect and communication – only in more rich detail. In light of the significant amount of federal funding being dedicated to healthy marriage initiatives nationwide, it is important to evaluate the opportunities of universities and community organizations working together on these projects. Information on these opportunities, and of the challenges thereof, should help initiatives nationwide make more informed decisions about collaborations and hopefully encourage both universities and community groups to work together.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Overview of the Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative (BHMI)

In March of 2005, the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), Region IV funded a section 1115 waiver grant healthy marriage demonstration project supported by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS). This project involves a community-based non-profit coalition called Bluegrass Healthy Marriages Partnership (BHMP), an organization that has more than eight years of experiences in bringing together community volunteers and a coalition of partner organizations, and the University of Kentucky Department of Family Studies (FAM), located in the School of Human Environmental Sciences in the College of Agriculture, providing research expertise, fiduciary management, technical support, and project staffing. This initiative began formal operation in July of 2005 and is now formally known as the Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative (referred to herein either as BHMI or the Initiative). The project seeks to create a large coalition of like-minded organizations from throughout the community with the intent of affirming and enabling healthy marriages for those that choose marriage for themselves, and where that is not a practical possibility, to affirm and enable healthy co-parenting relationships. The overall purpose of the project is improving the quality of life of the children in Central Kentucky.

Goals, purpose, & objectives. The goal of the BHMI project was to launch and maintain an initiative that unites these like-minded organizations into a

vigorous partnership capable of achieving the purpose stated above (i.e. affirming and enabling healthy marriages and healthy co-parenting relationships). BHMI has five stated objectives: (1) to increase access to marriage education activities and relationship resources, (2) to increase quantity and quality of activities and resources, (3) to increase individual and couple predisposition to participate in and take advantage of resources, (4) to enable the advancement of a coalition of like-minded organizations in perpetuity, and (5) to amass and publicize scholarly research.

Target. The Initiative primarily targets populations prioritized by its funding agency, OCSE, as most likely to impact positive child outcomes. These populations fall around the child birth and early child-rearing phases of the life cycle: seriously dating couples, cohabiting couples, unmarried parents, engaged or pre-marital couples, newly married couples, and new parents. The initiative is, however, generally inclusive and consequently recognizes populations throughout the life cycle. BHMI welcomes teen and young adult couples, married couples (with or without children), mature married couples, distressed married couples, separated and/or divorced couples (particularly relevant to our efforts into co-parenting education), individuals who are single again, and remarried couples. To enhance efficiency and focus of effort, the Initiative has a regional service area of eight counties denoted in the name of the Initiative. Selected target counties are those in the Lexington Metropolitan Statistical Area, namely (in alphabetical order): Bourbon, Clark, Fayette, Jessamine, Madison, Scott, and Woodford. The Initiative has also chosen to include Franklin County, the seat of

which, Frankfort, is also the capital of the Commonwealth and lies in direct proximity to the other targeted counties.

Process. At the core of the Initiative is the coalition of community organizations that provide services and reach populations throughout the several sectors of society. The coalition unites into a cohesive endeavor the several efforts of business, education, non-profit, civic, industrial, government, healthcare, and faith-based organizations, which believe that strengthening and affirming healthy marriages has an impact on their constituents (employees, clientele, patients, and/or members). Such a coalition allows organizations to work together, rather than individually, towards common objectives. BHMI currently partners with two business, one healthcare, one civic, four social service, and six faith-based organizations, representing nearly 70,000 individuals in Central Kentucky; however, this number grows regularly. The Initiative then works to research each partner organizations' constituency using a research survey (called a "Constituency Questionnaire") that was constructed by faculty in the Department of Family Studies. This survey instrument, or "CQ," combines a number of empirically-validated research instruments that assess for individual and relational well-being, including communication, conflict, power and control, and marital virtues. The CQ also includes a detailed demographic piece. Using detailed selection criteria, BHMI identified a cadre of marriage education programs proven to be effective and focused on skill building in individuals and couples. A list of additional community resources and providers was also compiled. Based on the outcome of the CQ research, we provide

recommendations of programs, activities, or possible interventions that would be helpful to a particular organization's constituency. Finally, BHMI cross-promotes these activities and other resources to assure that each partner's constituency can take advantage of the greatest amount of resources throughout our service area. At the time of this writing, BHMI does not directly provide marriage education programming or services. However, the Initiative is presently evaluating direct delivery and/or educator training as models for providing marriage and relationship education services to the community of partner organizations through the efforts of BHMP directors and staff who are trained and available to provide various marriage education curricula.

Challenges and Opportunities of Outreach Scholarship

BHMI is an university-community collaboration. As such, any evaluative research must consider these contextual pieces carefully. Aside from the three contexts of successful university collaborations identified by Lerner et al. (2000) and listed earlier, universities face, and thus must address, three challenges of public perception: (1) that universities are basically ivory towers that purposefully operate in a disengaged and separatist way from the community, (2) that there is an historical and on-going failure of universities to fulfill their [explicit or implicit] mission to contribute to the social good, and (3) that universities are increasingly less accessible and affordable, and thus less accountable to the community (Lerner, et al., 2000). Aside from these problems of perceived paternalism/egocentrism and issues of access just described, Erikson and Weinberg (2000) identify poor communication of the university's goals in

research and a “lack of acknowledgement that the University and community are different cultures exploring unique missions,” as factors that contribute to public distrust of universities.

Outreach scholarship, or the “scholarship of engagement,” as Lerner et al. (2000) alternatively appellation it, allows universities to become directly involved in the communities in which they operate. Erikson and Weinberg (2000) call this making the university more “user-friendly.” Bray et al. (2000) identify this community-oriented research as “action research” because it is focused on solving real and pressing issues in the community, on purposefully applying social science research to solving social problems. As Maxwell (1984) reminds us, “The basic (humanitarian) aim of inquiry, let it be remembered, is to help promote human welfare, help people realize what is of value to them in life...But in order to realize what is of value to us in life, the primary problems we need to solve are problems of action – personal and social problems of action as encountered in life” (pp.47-48, cited in Reason, 2000). Further, former Harvard University president, Derek Bok (1990), cautions universities against, “an insistence on pure learning and research [which] drives out all concern for practical issues” (pp.7-10, as cited in Smith, 2000). Speaking from the perspective of an external funding source, Schuermann (2000) indicates that a lack of flexibility in university bureaucracy can be a significant impediment to the success of some university-based projects and thus a deterrent to those agencies and organizations providing or potentially providing project funding. While he suggests that the success of projects may require “moving around

university bureaucracies,” he also points out that this can be accomplished as organizations compromise on boundaries, and not on their specific and individual organizational values. He cautions parties against holding to vested political interests and recommends a focus on facilitating communication. As institutions of higher education focus on community-defined problems and become collaboratively involved therein, impediments to community-oriented outreach and problems public perceptions may be overcome and, as Schuermann encourages, a “community investment strategy” taken. Doing so requires that both the university and the community develop a culture of understanding, one that recognizes the individual culture and expertise of each in a co-contributive (a.k.a. “collaborative”) environment.

University-Community Collaborations: Lessons from Outreach Projects

Aspects of such an understanding have already been explored. As mentioned earlier, Chibucos and Lerner (1999) edited a volume of success stories of university-community collaborative projects. While the scope of these projects varied, each provided factors that influenced or challenged the success of their collaboration. I selected twenty-one narratives which discussed projects in family science, education, social work, or related fields. I conducted a detailed analysis of these narratives, summarizing the main points (positive or negative) presented by each. I then grouped these into thematic categories which I labeled success factors and challenge points (Table 1). Some of these factors were discussed in summary form above. I provide them here with other, additional factors all in more detail and with their associated references.

Key success factors. Of all the success factors identified in the Chibucos and Lerner (1999) volume, a few were noticeably stated by most of the authors involved. I call these, “key success factors.” Perhaps the most common is mutual respect and trust. Successful collaborations possess respect for differences, appreciation of each other’s meaning and intent, and respecting traditions (Bates, Luster, Massie, & Key, 1999; Chibucos, Freeman, Kilmer, Larsen, O’Donnel, & Stricker, 1999; Fabes, Martin, Melmed, & Schneider, 1999; Hurd, Larkin, & Ribeiro, 1999; Lucy-Allen, & Seydel, 1999; Mullis & Ghazvini, 1999; Nader, Muller, Johnson, & Blakely, 1999; Rodgers & Small, 1999; Spoth & Molgaard, 1999; Walsh, Anderson, & Smyer, 1999). Another virtually universally reported success factor reported by these projects was a clear and common goal and vision, including consensus among partners, compatible missions, a common cause, and shared passions. These shared goals and visions establish a common ground which, though differences exist, allows collaborators to keep the purpose of their work in focus (Blackwell & Stanberry, 1999; Cato, Wilkes, Maxwell, Kreader, Wharff, & Todd, 1999; Chibucos et al., 1999; Fabes et al., 1999; Hurd et al., 1999; Martland & Rothbaum, 1999; Mullis, 1999; Mullis & Ghazvini, 1999; Spoth & Molgaard, 1999; Sandmann & Simon, 1999). The importance of dialogue and communication, including open-mindedness, negotiation, compromise, and all partners having a voice was also frequently indicated. Such dialogue proved instrumental in negotiating differences and synergizing expertise. (Bates et al., 1999; Fabes et al.; Lucy-Allen & Seydel; Sandmann & Simon, 1999; Spoth & Molgaard). Developing and nurturing

relationships was identified as a primary strength to collaborations; this includes setting aside primarily individual interests and establishing highly effective work relationships. These relationships functioned, not surprisingly, because of the respect, shared vision, and communication (Cato et al., 1999; Chibucos et al.; Fine, Coleman, Gable, Ganong, Ispa, Morrison, & Thornburg, 1999; Fabes et al.; Mullis & Ghazvini; Lucy-Allen & Seydel). Many collaborative projects operate on little or no external funding, or to be effective, require levels of man-hours that exceed that afforded by those engaged in the project. As such, involvement proved to be another key factor to successful university-community initiatives – involvement of students and volunteers, of front-line workers, or the larger community, of administrators, and of course, of key stakeholders, in an active and continuous fashion that is inclusive and enables ownership (Blackwell & Stanberry, 1999; Cassidy, Hall, & Hicks, 1999; Fine et al., 1999; Hurd et al.; Martland & Rothbaum, 1999; Mullis, 1999; Mullis & Ghazvini, 1999; Rollin, Rubin, Ward, Brown, Wright, Painter, Cameron, Scheckner, 1999; Spoth & Molgaard; Koblinsky & Anderson, 1999; Walsh et al., 1999).

Other success factors. Several other factors were shown to contribute to the success of collaborative projects, including: (a) prioritizing the community and maintaining a community focus (Hurd et al., 1999; Koblinsky & Anderson, 1999; Martland & Rothbaum, 1999; Mullis, 1999; Mullis & Ghazvini, 1999; Nader et al., 1999), (b) blending the expertise of university and community representatives through complementary and interdependent tasks (Blackwell & Stanberry, 1999; Fine et al., 1999; Mullis; Nader, et al.; Sandmann & Simon, 1999; Walsh et al.,

1999), (c) commitment and buy-in of stakeholders and participants (Bell, Haley, Felstehausen, & Adams, 1999; Cassidy et al., 1999; Lucy-Allen & Seydel, 1999; Mullis), (d) clearly defined roles and responsibilities (Mullis), (e) planning (Lucy-Allen & Seydel; Mullis), (f) the existence of an advisory committee primarily made up of representatives from each partner (Mullis & Ghazvini; Rodgers & Small, 1999), (g) the presence of funding and the flexible use thereof, particularly in directing funds towards the community and community partners (Hurd et al.; Rollin et al., 1999; Walsh et al.), (h) frequent and on-going program evaluation (Koblinsky & Anderson; Rollin et al.), (i) sharing human and financial resources (Blackwell & Stanberry; Cato et al., 1999; Hurd et al.; Sandmann & Simon, 1999;), (j) credibility at the local level and a supportive community culture (Cato et al.; Fine et al.; Martland & Rothbaum, 1999; Spoth & Molgaard, 1999), (k) strong administrative support focused on stewardship and guardianship and a flexible and flat leadership structure (Hurd et al.; Lucy-Allen & Seydel; Martland & Rothbaum; Sandmann & Simon; Spoth & Molgaard; Walsh et al.), (l) sustainability (Koblinsky & Anderson), (m) having a strong intermediary partner (Sandmann & Simon), (n) possessing clear priorities (Nader et al.), (o) on-going assessment of the impact of research and providing timely reporting of findings (Bates et al., 1999), and (p) balancing research and action agendas (Rodgers & Small).

Challenge points. While many points of success were indicated, many of these same authors noted particular challenges to their projects – issues that needed to be addressed in order for their work to succeed. One of the foremost

issues is that of the different perspectives, vocabulary and concepts, cultures, and expertise, as well as the differing missions and motivations possessed by university and community collaborators alike. As much as these differences can be strengths when, as noted above, they are respected and spoken about in the context of a shared vision, they can also cause significant roadblocks to communication and implementation of project efforts (Bates, et al., 1999, Erickson & Weinberg, 1999; Fabes et al., 1999; Rollin et al., 1999; Spoth & Molgaard, 1999). Beyond these fundamental differences, there also exist organizational boundaries and turf issues (Erickson & Weinberg, 1999; Fabes et al.; Mullis & Ghazvini, 1999) and duplication of services (Rollin, Et al.), as participants in the collaboration fight for “their share” of the credit or, where applicable, project funds. Local political climates and local needs also contribute significantly to how well, or if, a particular project is able to function successfully (Cato et al., 1999; Mullis & Ghazvini). Of particular import to universities are the institutional climates and cultures, especially fiscal and other organizational procedures, such as university reward systems which effectively disincite faculty from participating in outreach and applied research activities (Cato et al.; Erickson & Weinberg; Lucy-Allen & Seydel, 1999; Spoth & Molgaard;), as well as the general public perceptions and image of the university (Cassidy et al., 1999; Erickson & Weinberg). University-community collaborations also face such issues as the fragmentation of partners (Hurd et al., 1999), counterproductive actions of individual participants or partner organizations (Cato et al.), the challenge of finding collaborators (Cato et al.), and the absence of clear and

agreed upon research or action plans (Hurd et al.). Finally, as part of collaboration, all core partners need to handle the anxieties inherent in the loss of control and positions of authority that are often a function of blended expertise and shared leadership (Fabes et al.).

To review, Horn (1999) listed three components of successful social initiative: (1) a clear agenda, (2) a broad support base, and (3) an organizational structure capable of maintaining the initiative. Additionally, Bray et al. (2000) offered three conditions inherent to successful “learning group cultures”: (1) appreciation of teamwork, (2) individual expression, and (3) operating principles. Lerner et al. (2000) indicated three contexts which need to be addressed for successful university-community collaborative ventures: (1) the higher education system and processes, (2) the assets and needs of the community, and (3) the public policy climate in which the collaboration finds itself. Finally, the anthology edited by Chibucos and Lerner (1999) listed several success factors for these initiatives such as common goals and visions, open dialogue and communication, mutual respect, and the importance of relationships. The findings from this study support and enrich these models. Specifically, this study shows how many of these principles operate in concert. The people involved, their relationships with each other, and their visions and goals are more foundational aspects of each project. The way they communicate, how change or power are managed, and how their different expectations and objectives for the project are handled are all filters through which these foundational elements pass, ultimately determining whether the project is or is not successful.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research is characterized by its occurrence in a natural (or relatively natural) setting, use of interactive and humanistic methods, its emergent and interpretive natures, a holistic view of social phenomena, and the systematic recognition and overt inclusion of researcher reflections and perspectives (Creswell, 2003). As Krefting (1991) points out, qualitative research seeks to expand upon that which is observed by explicitly including the “subjective meanings and perceptions of the subject” (p. 214). Additionally, qualitative researchers employ one or more general strategies of inquiry, or procedural guides for research. These are generally identified by Creswell as: narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory. Janesick (2000) compares qualitative research design to choreography, as the research works to select strategies of inquiry and participants in that inquiry that enable the emergent potential of qualitative research. Such a comparison highlights the importance of the selected strategy to answering the research question(s) posed. It also highlights the need to fluidly improvise as necessary to fully capture the meaningful experience offered through qualitative work. To capture and evaluate the process of this Initiative and the experiences with those involved therewith, ethnography was the strategy chosen for this study.

Strategies of Inquiry: Ethnography and Autoethnography

Ethnography can be a powerful tool in researching attitudes, perspectives, and experiences. Creswell (2003) suggests the use of ethnography to, “learn about broad, culture-sharing behavior of individuals or groups” (p.183). According to Tedlock (2000), ethnography seeks to place the examined phenomenon into a more meaningful context, what she calls “situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives” (p.455). The assumption is that first-hand contact with individuals in context allows for a better understanding of their fundamental values and the behaviors associated with these values.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) assert that the first-person voice with which ethnography is generally written provides an element of accountability that often disappears under layers of quantitative formulas and statistical charts. Such accountability may be a crucial component to process evaluations, as discussed above, as it works to keep collaborators aware of the issues that benefit or detract from the initiative’s goals. As Ellis and Bochner state, “We need a form [of writing] that will allow readers to feel the moral dilemmas, think with our story instead of about it, [and] join actively in the decision points” (p.735). Reed-Danahay (1997) believes that exploring one life deeply can help us understand an entire way of life. Such is the hoped outcome of this study – to deeply examine one university-based community marriage initiative to more fully comprehend how such initiatives can be useful and effective and thus help guide similar projects, both present and future.

Autoethnography is a form of ethnography that is autobiographical in style, examining multiple contextual layers of experience that are often inherently reflexive and self-questioning. It causes the writer and participants to reflect inward about their values, beliefs, and perspectives and how these influence their actions. Doing so affords the opportunity for self-examination and potentially uncomfortable self-confrontation (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Self-confrontation can be difficult, especially if less than flattering aspects of self are revealed.

In this study, autoethnography of the project takes the form of ethnographic reflections of primary participants in the study, including this author. Harrington (1997) says that ethnography is about writing from inside the heads of the participants and getting at the phenomenological sense of their lives. While the project itself cannot be interviewed or be caused to reflect upon itself, one can conceptualize that key stakeholders, who have been involved at several levels within the project, might allow the ethnographer into the “mind” of the project. The primary benefit of this approach is to provide a rich narrative understanding of how this initiative has worked, calling attention to specifics that have contributed to the success of the project or which have challenged its potential to thrive or even exist. How have we answered those challenges? How do we address collaboration? What have we done well? What could we do better? What opportunities have and do we see in establishing this collaboration? Perhaps if we can develop a compelling narrative we have the potential to fulfill Ellis and Bochner’s (2000) vision for ethnographic studies:

Evocative stories activate subjectivity and compel emotional response. They long to be used rather than analyzed; to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts (p.744).

For these authors, ethnography constitutes a transformation. It is about “unmasking” of both participant(s) and researcher while coming to know the face beneath the mask (Rosen, 1988). It’s not just about qualitatively describing a process or quantitatively reporting on a phenomenon, but also about creating space for ongoing dialogue. In the spirit of collaborations, which may also be seen as working conversations, this dialectical process is why ethnography is so well suited for this study.

Procedure

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured, open-ended interviews with participants who had a role in the BHMI project. These interviews followed a general outline of questions and varied in length from fifteen minutes to over one hour, based on participant responses and the depth achieved in the interview. As led by participants, the researcher more deeply explored aspects of their experience not otherwise captured by a previously scripted question. According to Creswell (2003), interviews have the advantage of allowing the researcher to gain historical information and to control the line of questioning. Conversely, interviews are more intimate. The amount of information the participant feels able or willing to share may be limited by the level of trust and/or

credibility the researcher has established with the participant(s). This is an aspect of this research design where the researcher's role is vividly impactful.

Researchers who have a more trusting and respectful relationship with the participants will also likely enjoy greater access to personal information. As such, and given my role in the Initiative (to be described in more detail below), I conducted the interviews.

Effective, rich interviews consist of more than merely asking questions and having them answered. Holstein and Gubrium (1993) describe a form of interviewing they call active interviewing, which involves engaging a conversation with another. It is a process of meaning-making. Active interviewing probes deeply and creatively to “transform the...respondent from a repository of opinions and reasons or a wellspring of emotions into a productive source of knowledge” (p. 121). To be active, the process of meaning-making is on-going throughout the interview, described by Holstein and Gubrium as a developing dramatic plot. Using this method, I interviewed participants using a predetermined interview guide (see Appendix A) that asked respondents to describe their perceptions of and experiences with BHMI, especially what they perceive to have contributed to any successes they see with the project or ways in which the project has been or continues to be challenged. As the participant responded to each question, I, as appropriate, asked additional and related questions to help clarify their responses.

Patton (1987) describes a similarly emergent interview process called depth interviewing that involves open-ended questions and additional follow-up

questions. He suggests several types of questions that can be used to enhance the productivity of interviewing by increasing the perspectives from which one experience can be understood. These questions include experience or behavior questions, opinion or belief questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions, and background or demographic questions. Each different type of question seeks a particular sort of answer that can be combined with answers to other questions into the same experience, creating a more deep and pictorial representation of the phenomena being studied. Again, using the interview guide as the foundation, I asked additional questions of participants that explored aspects of their own experiences – their emotions and reactions, their values and perspectives, or their personal expertise and knowledge.

The interview guide is attached (see Appendix A). This guide included general questions to provide a basic structure and flow for each interview. However, active, depth interviews explore aspects of experience that cannot be scripted. Thus, this guide served as just that, a rough outline. It was neither a rigid structure nor an exhaustive list of questions. Rather, it was structured to allow for richer, more open-response answers, which in the spirit of depth interviewing, could engender further questions on the subject. It was not my purpose to develop a deep retrospective of what did or did not go well with the project, but rather to explore what went well and what could have been done better. As such, questions were generatively focused, designed to let participants provide open, subjective, evaluative responses on the project.

Participants

This study consisted of interviews with nine participants representing the various organizations involved as core partners in the collaboration, namely the University of Kentucky Department of Family Studies (faculty and administrators), Bluegrass Healthy Marriages Partnership (members of the board of directors), the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (the state funding agency), and the U.S. Administration for Children and Families Region IV (the Federal funding agency), as well as community partner representatives and past project staff. When determining who might participate and how that might effect the outcome of this study, I wanted to be sure that enough voice was given from each of the major entities involved in the study – government funders and university and community collaborators. I also wanted to involve individuals who were either no longer involved with the project or who might offer a perspective from the Initiative's past. Five individuals were selected to represent the university's perspective, four to represent the community, and two to represent the government funding agencies. This balance should have allowed adequate voice to each of the varying perspectives and include a valuable blend past and present experiences. Of these, only one of the individuals representing a government funding agency and one representing the university perspective were unable to complete the interview. Each representative was solicited via email or phone to volunteer for ethnographic interviews using the proposed interview guide. Participants were free to accept or refuse this opportunity to provide input into this ethnographic evaluation. To protect their confidentiality,

participants were assigned a participant number that represents only the date they were interviewed.

Data Recording and Transcription

As stated above, the researcher developed an interview protocol that structured the interview data gathered in the study. This protocol contained the list of questions to be asked, as well as information regarding the processes and procedures of the interview (Creswell, 2003). Interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder while the researcher simultaneously made hand-written notes. Krefting (1991) suggests these notes will help the researcher recall specific themes from the interview, to guide follow-up questions during the interview, and to aid in processing his/her experience of the interview(s). As envisioned, some potential participants were not available for in-person interviews. As such, some interviews were conducted on the phone. These were recorded and annotated in a similar fashion.

To ensure the accuracy and timeliness of data analysis (to be discussed below), the interviews were professionally transcribed. As the data needed to be provided to the transcriptionist who lived in another state, the digital audio files were electronically submitted using secure protocols similar to those used by this transcriptionist for other professional medical records transcribing. To add additional layers of confidential security, the digital files were devoid of audio or electronic identifiers that might be linked to the participant(s).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the emergent nature of qualitative research, data analysis is a highly reflective process for the researcher (Creswell, 2003). Given my personal involvement with this project, I had to be careful that my personal experiences did not discolor the experiences of the research participants, thus the importance in stating from the outset my background and interest in the topic (see below). Additionally, I kept a reflexive field journal (Krefting, 1991) wherein I recorded my reactions to each interview, the themes I saw developing, and my own personal thoughts. These processes allowed me to remember where I was coming from and see more clearly from where the participants might have been coming themselves.

While I already possessed hand-written notes from the interview process, analysis of the data involved reading through all of the transcribed materials multiple times. Each of the nine interviews was read and noted at least three separate times. As I read, I highlighted themes and personal meaning as presented by each of the participants. I identified clusters of themes across the several participants, which formed the categories of experiences I will address in the research write-up. To ensure the reliability of the data, I used a code-recode procedure wherein I initially coded a portion of the interview data then returned to the data one week later and recoded it, comparing the results when finished to be sure I was coding consistently. The member-checking procedure (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Krefting, 1991) proposed to help ground the analysis in the experiences of both participant(s) and researcher(s) whereby participants are

able to review and comment on the initial analysis did not occur. While intended, there was not enough time to allow this once all of the interviews were completed, transcribed, and analyzed. The project thus loses an element of validation (to be discussed below). However, as themes from previous interviews were woven into future ones (e.g., “One participant mentioned this. What do you think?”), I was effectively testing validity on participants throughout the interview process.

Qualitative Rigor

Acock, van Dulmen, Allen, and Piercy (2005) list several guidelines for evaluating qualitative research. These include (a) the researcher’s owning of his/her own perspective, (b) comprehensive description of the sample studied, (c) providing credibility checks, (d) grounding the research in examples, and (e) creating themes and findings that resonate with readers. Krefting (1991) presents a model developed by Guba (1981) to assess the rigor of qualitative research. This model seeks to assure qualitative studies meet four domains of research rigor – (1) truth value, (2) applicability, (3) consistency, and (4) neutrality – without compromising the naturalistic context inherent to qualitative research. Each of these is discussed below including relevant steps taken in this study to assure the rigor of the findings.

Truth value (credibility). Krefting (1991) describes truth value as the confidence the researcher has in his/her findings given the research design. This may also be known as the credibility or (in quantitative terms) internal validity of the study. Krefting indicates this truth value is ‘subject-oriented’ meaning that the

subject determines the truthfulness of the findings. This can be accomplished, she suggests, through such processes as member checking, reflexive field journals, lengthy and varied field experience, triangulation, or peer review.

To capture reflexivity and adequately assess the role of the researcher, a field journal was used throughout the research process. As described by Krefting (1991), this journal included reflections on my own background, perceptions, and interests, especially in relation to the emerging data from the study participants. This was a chance for self-analysis and reflection upon what I was hearing in the interviews. As mentioned above and while proposed, member-checks were not used given the eventual timeline of the project.

Applicability (transferability). Krefting (1991) holds that applicability is the ability of findings to be applied or transferred to other situations or groups. In quantitative terms, does it generalize? Krefting suggests that transferability can be achieved by providing dense descriptions of the participants such as demographics and/or lived experiences. In this study, this density of data was obtained through active, depth interviewing (described above; Holstein & Gubrium, 1993; Patton, 1987) that sought vivid and telling data rich with various experiential components. In this case, the true subject at hand was the project itself, not those participants offering qualitative data to the study. Thus the detailed background section above offers the “demographic data” Krefting suggests, while additional dense descriptions came from the interview data.

Consistency (reliability). Krefting (1991) defines consistency in terms of dependability. As she indicates, qualitative research seeks variation in

experience, rather than repetition; it is interested in individual experiences. “The key to qualitative work,” she says, “is to learn from the informants rather than control for them” (Krefting, p. 216). Dependability speaks to whether or not the data would be the same if the study were replicated with the same subjects or context. Krefting suggests a code-recode procedure in which the researcher initially codes a portion of the data, waits for a period of time, then returns and recodes the same data and compares the results. As mentioned above, this process was used in this study.

Neutrality (confirmability). Neutrality is the degree to which the findings emerge from the context of the research and the participants therein rather than from other biases (Krefting, 1991). Krefting holds that qualitative researchers seek to, “increase the worth of the [research] findings by decreasing the distance between the researcher and the informants” (p. 217). Because qualitative research involves the researcher so heavily, emphasis is placed on assuring the data are neutral, rather than the researcher who is recognized as fundamentally biased. Recognition of research biases and roles in the study are thus key to a good qualitative study. Similar to measuring truth value (credibility), Krefting suggests the use of reflexive journaling to measure the neutrality of research data by assessing the influence of the researcher. This technique was used in this study.

Role of the Researcher

As has been mentioned, one of the hallmarks of qualitative methodologies is the inclusion of research reflexivity (Creswell, 2003). Reflexivity may take the form of overt recognition of personal values, biases, and interests in the topic matter. A personal involvement with the subject(s) under study, such as the my dual role as project director for BHMI and lead researcher on this project, provides excellent example of the need for and purpose of such reflexivity. Allen (2000) holds that scientific approaches require awareness by researchers of the role of their values, experiences, and contexts influence the research. Additionally, according to Creswell, it is paramount that the researcher identify his or her connection with the participant(s) in the study.

What is my role/position in the Initiative? I have been employed full-time on this university-based, community healthy marriage initiative since it was funded in 2005 and began operation in July of that year. My primary function has been external relations, having at the time of this writing taken on the role of project director. Among other things, I have been tasked with developing formal partnerships with organizations in various sectors of the community – social service, business and industry, education, faith-based, healthcare, etc. To formalize these relationships, it has been not only necessary to understand both how the initiative exists and functions at the university level, but also how the initiative translates into workable and acceptable activities for each of these organizations. Indeed, much of my time has been spent negotiating the cultures, expectations, and requirements of these organizations in order to adequately and

effectively serve the needs of the university, the community-coalition partner, and the other partnering organizations.

How does that influence how I conduct this research? While entirely employed by and thus ultimately responsible to the university, I have developed trusting relationships with many individuals throughout the community. In qualitatively evaluating the challenges and opportunities presented in university-community collaborations as evidenced by this initiative, I feel a responsibility to appropriately represent the interests of all parties involved in the initiative. My own personal observations of the challenges and success factors of the collaboration are just that – observations from my point of view only. In fact, I have carefully chosen the term “challenges” to adequately represent my perspective on those areas of potential and actual conflict that needed to be addressed in order to create a successful and workable collaboration.

What are my motivations for this project? My motivations to conduct this project flourished as the primary leadership on the grant project shifted. I was able to become more involved in decision making for the project and assumed a more significant leadership role. Our first year in operation, in my estimation, had been relatively successful, but had been hampered by several factors not unlike those challenges to university-community initiatives listed above. I had long considered how the project might work more effectively and more collaboratively and wondered what might be done to better understand our experience so as to help others who might undertake a similar project do so in an informed and more efficient manner. This project seemed an opportunity to achieve both of those

ends. These thoughts and motivations regarding this project were bolstered by input from faculty investigators on the grant, as well as leaders of the non-profit group with which the university collaborates. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to see this project be successful and was dedicated to seeing it through.

What do I hope to accomplish with this study? My goal in pursuing this project was not only to continue to improve the quality and effectiveness of our initiative, but also to provide an experiential guidebook to other initiatives that are now or may soon develop. I firmly believe that community initiatives can work at the university-level. I believe that the strengths of universities can enhance community initiatives and thus should be considered a viable component of community projects. I also believe that, ironically, many of the same principles that apply to healthy relationships – such as communication, conflict resolution, and respect – also apply to university-community collaborations. It was my hope and intent to demonstrate that such collaborations are worthwhile and attainable while being transparent about the challenges and success factors thereof. I believe I have done so and have provided a template for university-community collaborative efforts that is useful for other current or future projects.

What are my perspectives on the questions being asked? I certainly recognize my own biased assessment of the success factors and challenge points of this Initiative. To be explicit about my own position regarding each of the proposed questions, and to the general topic of this study, I was the first interview participant, taking more of an autoethnographic approach at first as I reflected upon my own experiences and thoughts related to the Initiative. My own

thoughts were continuously recorded throughout the data gathering phase through the use of reflexive field notes journaled as I interviewed each study participant.

Connection to study participants. Each of the individual participants interviewed for this study has had a significant role in the vision, foundation, and on-going implementation of this grant project. These individuals each play a unique role in the functioning of the grant. As a key player in the grant myself, my perspectives are colored by my interactions and relationships with proposed study participants. However, given the ethnographic model of this study, this seems to be a strength, as the trust and respect necessary for qualitative depth have been established.

Ethical Issues

Mowery and Walters (2005) call our attention to the idea that ethical research goes beyond general ethical guidelines and considers the potential impact of the research on the population being studied. As ethnography deals with the deep and rich environment of people's lives, ethical concerns are paramount. Speaking of ethnography, Ellis and Bochner (2000) remind us that, "we're not just talking about faceless, nameless, unidentifiable subjects – if we ever were. [Our] intimates are identifiable individuals with names" (p.759). One of the challenges raised in reviews of university-community initiatives (above) is that of public perception. Results of this study have the potential to reflect both good and bad light on the participants and the organizations they represent. Identification of key players may be relatively facile given the particular role each

has had or continues to play. All of these factors potentially threaten the freedom to identify and publish findings, especially as any of the results may be damaging to the image and reputation of other participants or the entities that they represent.

In addition to these concerns, it is relevant to point out that the three faculty providing oversight to this study have had at some time or continue to have oversight and influence with regards to BHMI. Two of the faculty are listed as co-investigators on the grant and have significant continued input into the project. The third faculty committee member stepped in to provide administrative oversight of the grant while serving as interim chair of the Department of Family Studies, but no longer has any responsibility with regard to the department or the Initiative, her appointment being elsewhere in the university. One of these individuals served as an interview participant.

One potential solution to this quandary was not to overtly identify or directly report any data provided by individual study participants. During analysis, however, it became evident that including direct quotes, if slightly edited to remove potential identifying information, would profoundly enrich the narrative write-up. Rather than compare what various participants say about the initiative against other participants' responses, I examined the collective sum of qualitative data for general themes of success factors and challenge points. As I mentioned earlier, it is impossible to conduct an autoethnography of an entity such as a project that is not able to respond for itself. Rather, this study looked to get inside the "mind" of the project by stepping inside the minds of its several collaborators.

Thus, pooling the collective thoughts of the participants may well resemble what it might have been like to deeply examine the project's stream(s) of thought and certainly should provide a very rich pool of insight and experiential knowledge.

Another important ethical consideration relates to the above discussion of the role of the researcher in the study. Given my position as project director of the Initiative, power and influence related to the study participants had to be taken into account. The information shared with me during the course of this study had the potential to affect our relationship and, given my role in grant-related decisions, could potentially influence their participation in the collaboration. This was especially important for community partners, upon whose efforts the grant relies so deeply, but who may not have the influence at the administrative level that might otherwise insulate them from adverse decisions related to their input. This concern is addressed through the use of researcher field notes and journaling, which allow the research not only to note important aspects of each interview, but also to record his/her experiences therewith, and through already established administrative procedures and hierarchy, including a strong and involved principal investigator and a faculty leadership team which guide and structure the activities of the Initiative.

CHAPTER 4

Results

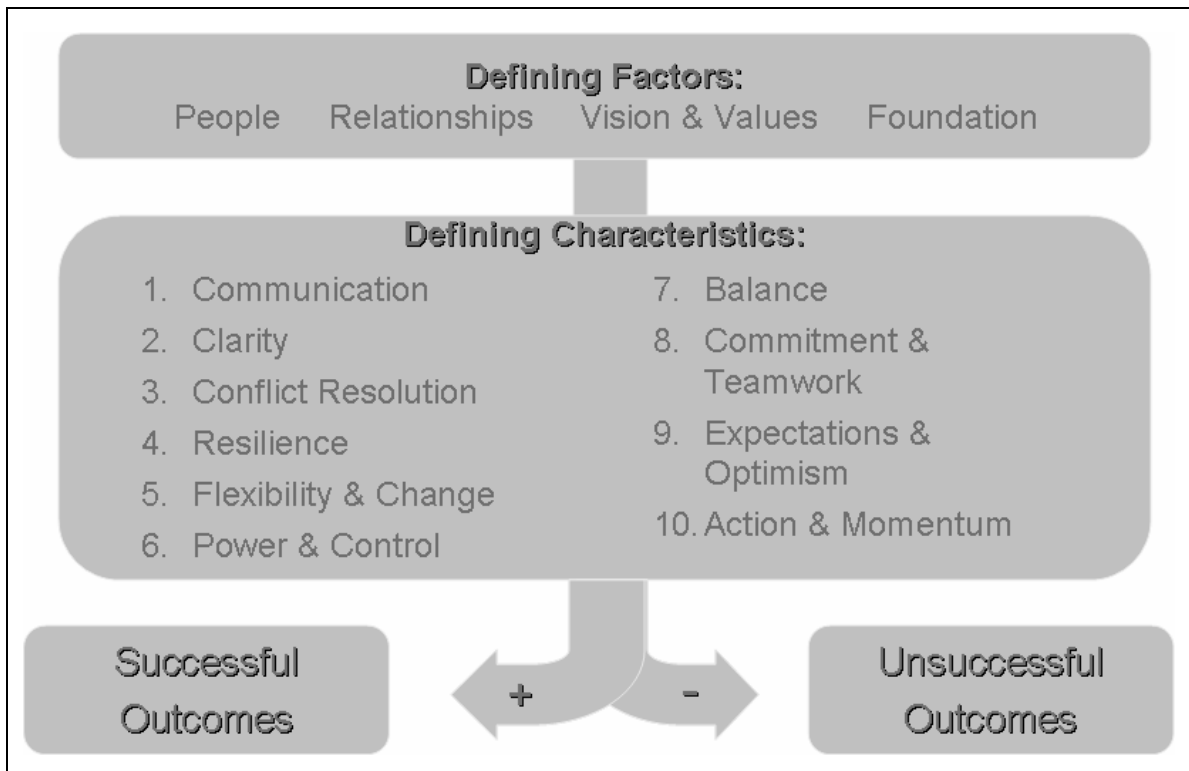
Not surprisingly, the findings of the study support those themes relevant to successful group processes and outreach scholarship efforts presented earlier (Bray, et al., 2000; Lerner, et al., 2000; Chibucos & Lerner, 1999). However, the interviews in this study offered rich insight into some of the most important factors that enable such projects to work effectively. Additionally, the data offer some alternative perspectives on success factors and challenge points. While individual experiences varied along with participants' varying roles in the project, several key themes emerged from the interviews.

Success Factors v. Challenge Points: A Revised Model

The initial study proposal categorized success factors and challenge points separately as elements that either contribute to successful project outcomes or potentially limit a project's ability to function effectively. These data suggest that these factors or points actually exist and operate on a continuum rather than in discrete categories. Also, there were certain defining factors – elements that must be addressed in any collaborative project – each of which was moderated by other influencing characteristics. For example, relationships between people proved to be a defining factor in most participants' estimation of the project's success to date. Establishing and nurturing relationships is a primary factor in any such project being successful. Building those relationships becomes the challenge point. Whether or not the individuals concerned are able to do so determines if the challenge is successfully met or unsuccessfully

missed, whether that point is a success or a failure. A model depicting this process is shown in Figure 1. Each of the key factors listed below is ultimately a challenge point. How the challenge is managed – the characteristics of success or failure – determines whether it is a success factor or a stumbling block.

Figure 1. Factors and Characteristics of Successful Collaborations



Defining Factors: What are the Key Challenge Points?

Individual participants each offered a unique perspective in describing the collaborative process(es) involved with the project. Several themes were addressed, some of which were only mentioned by one or two of the participants. However, four themes rose to the top as those key challenge points which

ultimately define a collaborative project. They are the defining factors of the project.

People. The factor participants most consistently indicated was the role of the people involved in the collaboration. Regardless if the participant was representing the university, the community, or another entity involved in the project, each pointed to the critical role of the people involved.

The number one factor that's caused us to be successful is personnel...[Having] the right people to do the job is critical to anyone's success and I think it's been critical here...They had the passion. They had the vision. They had the savvy-ness of how to navigate a difficult situation and to maintain good relationships with people that needed to be maintained. (Participant 123071)

"The people that are involved are inherently important; their skills, their passions, their desires, their experiences, their contacts, all of that are integrally a part of the success of the project" (Participant 110071). Participants often mentioned that during the collaborative dialogue and the resulting action, the ideas and talents brought to the table by each individual involved were all inescapably linked to the outcome of the project.

It was meant to be a very totally collaborative project because there were key people who were in kind of a cinch-pin position who had feet in both camps and so it was all supposed to work together. (Participant 312071)

People are so important that one participant (315071) suggested that universities employ "community grant navigators," individuals experienced with

the process of university community collaborations who are able to help harness the desire of universities and community groups to work together, facilitating a “path of least resistance” between the very differing original positions of both parties and that which they share in common – their desire to do something to benefit the community. In a sense, these navigators could help make these projects more “user friendly” to all involved, bridging gaps, synergizing effort, and assuring on-going collaborative work.

Because of the critical role each collaborator plays, changes in those involved may have profound effects on the project, especially if changes occur within the group that originally came together and began the collaborative work.

[They] were the visionaries and then when we didn't have them, we didn't have as clear a vision...because the people are different from those who designed it...it's like everybody is playing catch-up. (Participant 312071)

Some people bring special transformative qualities to projects. These individuals lead out of vision and sheer passion. Referring to the leader of another marriage initiative project, one participant highlighted that quintessential “it” quality that passionate individuals can bring:

This is his thing. This is his ministry. This is his passion. Very few communities have someone like [him], but every community that does, wherever there is at least one person like that, there are strong healthy marriage initiatives...When you have a leader, a person that is an evangelist, so to speak, for a point of view, things happen. (Participant 312071)

Relationships. “All of this is hand in hand...we’re all here to serve the same people” (Participant 126071). Any interaction between two or more individuals inherently assumes some form of a relationship. The strength and duration of the relationship depend not only on the purpose thereof, but what each invests into and receives from it. The same is true of university-community collaborations. If the people involved are the most elemental challenge point, how the people come to interact with each other – what they give to and get from each other – have a significant bearing on the quality and strength of their relationship. “Respect exists between people, but I’m not sure there’s a lot of respect for the institutions” (Participant 123071). There is a difference between inter-institutional and inter-personal respect. While institutional differences may create seemingly insurmountable gaps between the parties involved, the people at the heart of the project perform the critical bridging function, allowing differing cultures to share a horizon on a particular issue. Interpersonal respect, which is at the heart of relationships, may well be the most important element in keeping collaborative work collaborative. Rather than working in silent silos, collaborators need to work openly with each other, involving each other in decisions, sharing each other’s vision.

Vision & values. Vision is the seed that becomes the project. It serves as the guidepost to nearly all future actions and developments of the project. “More than anything [what has contributed to the success of the project is] a vision of what could be...Despite our differences, we are linked by a common cause” (Participant 129071).

Participants implied that a shared vision allowed them to blend their multidisciplinary expertise into something beneficial. By their very nature, collaborative visions are larger than any one individual. What seemed important in these findings was the force of a unifying vision:

It wasn't a vision I had in mind. It was the vision [of] a group of people. It was a vision of constantly expanding circles of people who got more and more involved and who, in a sense, fed off or nurtured each other.

(Participant 312071)

To be successful, the vision must be broad enough to learn from the past, function in the present, and be mindful of the future. "I think sometimes any group can be guilty of getting myopic and just taking care of the tasks that are right in front of you instead of having a larger vision" (Participant 125071). Myopic tending to day-to-day tasks sometimes resulted in frustration and disenfranchisement of key stakeholders and, in the eyes of some, kept the project from going anywhere.

Collaborators' visions do not always perfectly align. However, when the visions that people have for the project differ greatly, it became difficult for any work to be done, at least together. Lack of a unifying vision allowed for separatism among those involved.

There have been times...where the major stake holders have been at odds. They've had different perceptions of the project, had different desires, and were going to get different things out of it...The stakes they held were very different. (Participant 110071)

Generally speaking, universities and community groups have fundamentally different, culturally-ensconced perspectives and processes. Such differences had important implications for the way the project functioned, what its objectives were seen to be, and how participants felt about the work being done.

Seeing [marriage initiative] grants written and implemented by community groups as opposed to grants written and implemented by universities and agencies, there seems to me to be a huge difference. And the huge difference is that the community initiatives are mostly about changing the culture in our community to be more pro marriage – a grant is a way to get the culture in our community to support marriage. The grants that are implemented by different agencies it seems come about as to use marriage as a way to support the mission and the goals of the agency.

And that's not a bad thing, but it's different. (Participant 312071)

Because of these differences, collaborators or partners needed to know that what makes them unique, what they value as individuals and institutions would not be legitimately threatened by their participation with other individuals and organizations who may not have shared their identical values or perspectives.

[One of our] initial questions and concerns [was], 'Are there going to be any difficulties in maintaining our uniqueness...' We've felt like a respected organization and that concern and sensitivity was displayed toward our particular viewpoints. (Participant 125071)

Foundation. The final defining factor indicated by participants was the importance of starting on a solid foundation, a strong base upon which to build their work. The foundation identified by the data analysis included the three key factors listed above – people, relationships, and vision/values.

Any project like this takes an enormous amount of foundation laying...Pragmatically, we got together and I think we did a good job of just identifying what our vision was, what we needed to do to achieve it, and in subsequent conference calls we have really operationalized those things. (Participant 129071)

It was emphasized that all collaborators should be fully aware of and in agreement to the unifying vision, assigned tasks, and processes of the group. Otherwise, stress fractures in the foundation may occur as undue weight is placed on one portion. Collaborators who felt their position or perspective was not being taken into account or those who were assigned tasks not of their choosing sometimes felt unconstructive pressure that threatened their involvement in the project.

I believe the initial authors of the grant proposal wanted to create a collaboration, but created a structure that in many ways I believe they genuinely thought would facilitate collaboration and instead what it did was create competition and create ill will. (Participant 123071)

As participants in this study pointed out, there is a large difference between collaboration and cooperation or partnership.

If you look at the definitions of a collaboration versus a partnership, your goals don't have to be the same. With partnerships, your goals are usually the same, but [in a] collaboration your goals can be different; it's just that you need each other to accomplish your goals. (Participant 123071)

Cooperation is where people of goodwill work together to achieve a goal.

Collaboration extends cooperation to the point of design and innovation that comes about from a dialogue process of people talking and getting excited and getting creative about what can happen. (Participant 312071)

A true collaboration could be defined as a conjoint effort of two or more individuals and/or institutions with a unified vision characterized by a high degree of dialogue, creativity, evolving process, and excitement. Whereas a cooperation or partnership, is a conjoint effort of individuals/institutions characterized more by structure and usually involving generally different visions or desired outcomes, possessing enough shared interest to necessitate working together, but no further.

Defining Characteristics: What Determines the Outcome of the Key Challenge Points?

Each of the above mentioned defining factors – People, Relationships, Vision & Values, and Foundation – was affected by a number of smaller factors or characteristics of success or failure. Each of these defining characteristics helped determine the trajectory of each challenge point, and thus, whether or not each was ultimately successful.

Communication. Successful relationships are based in such principles as communication, respect, and conflict resolution. The same seemed to hold for this university-community project. “Communication expresses respect. Communication expresses interest. Communication expresses collaboration and without communication there is the feeling that one group is off on their own thing” (Participant 111071). The level of open, respectful communication and commitment to resolving differences determined just how much relationships in the project could be characterized as trusting and/or durable. The unknown that resulted from silence bred doubt and distrust. As individuals trusted each other they came to rely on each other’s strengths and work toward their shared goals. They were able to voice their opinions openly, knowing they would be considered by the group. Communication kept people involved and aware of the group’s actions. Most importantly, communication involved participants actively listening to each other and being mindful of differences or questions as they arise

Clarity. While the importance of having a broad vision is noted above, the need for clarity in the structure – a clear and focused approach – was also quite evident. “The project was not written tightly enough to foresee the loopholes that caused it to drag” (Participant 111071). More than one participant reflected thoughts similar to this one. Clarity allowed people to know what they were to be working on. Because they represented and fostered further ambiguity, these so-called loopholes in design contributed to confusion and inaction. Clarity was also necessary when major staffing changes and turn-over in collaborators occurred.

Conflict resolution. One of the greatest potential stresses on any collaborative project is conflict between collaborators. Conflict often becomes a wedge driven between two (or more) parties if not dealt with swiftly and appropriately. Because perspectives are often quite different, some degree of conflict was an inevitable part of this project. How such conflict was handled (e.g., whether difference of opinion escalates into conflict) became the key characteristic here.

[What would contribute to the success of the project?] I think that our ability to work through differences, address common goals, keep our eyes on what the Initiative can be rather than those differences...The project will fail if people refuse to work together, if they fail to try and understand each other and fail to find solutions. (Participant 110071)

To be resolved, conflicts needed not only be identified, but also needed to be generatively addressed. Several participants cited the impact that one particular collaborative planning meeting had. This meeting was held one year after the project had been funded and begun operation.

We got together and worked out the pragmatics and we also talked about the process...We were talking on a relational level...We were working out our dynamics successfully...Now we're to the point where we'll all engaged. We can move beyond our problems. There will still be work to be done, but we're going to be okay. (Participant 129071)

“All of the entities involved...we all sat down at the table to iron things out. [That] was when I just saw that beacon of light, that this is going to happen and this is going to be fantastic” (Participant 126071).

Disconnect in understanding values or selecting objectives and processes resulted in conflict. There may be a significant potential for such disconnect in university-community collaborations because they often value things quite differently.

When you start thinking about community, [it] probably does not mesh well with the mission or some of the services of involvement or whatever with [the university]...There is a little bit of a disconnect...that has nothing to do with anybody personally, just the way the institution(s) are. (Participant 118071)

Much of conflict resolution had to do with communication and understanding – helping both parties see things from the others’ perspective(s).

I think that it’s hard for the university to put on the glasses of a small community coalition member and to see it from their eyes. I think they’re more quick to say, ‘Well, they just don’t understand ...this is just how university is.’ Okay. That’s true. But how could we make it easier for a community member to see [the university] as a friendly institution as opposed to a bear? I think from a community standpoint, they probably look at the university and say, ‘Is it really worth it to partner with them because I’ve got to do so much stuff to just get the workshop I want funded, is it worth it?’ (Participant 315071)

In this case, conflict resolution was about getting these parties to step back from their usual stances and understand what the other was going through, helping them respect what the other might have been feeling or thinking.

Resilience. Resilience is generally understood to be the degree to which a person or group of people is able to withstand the effect of a given stress or set of stressors. Each of the challenge points mentioned, and to a good degree each of the characteristics of success or failure spoken about here, can be a stressor. But what's the potential effect of stress on a project? What should collaborators be worried about when stress exists?

The effect of cumulative stress...that no one thing would cause the end of it, but the effect of stress pile-up and people giving up...that's what I'm afraid of genuinely at this point. I'm afraid of people giving up and the project ending... (Participant 312071)

Normal pressures from the demands of the tasks at hand can combine with additional stressors such as staff changes, delays in funding, conflict of interest and other phenomenon to create a pile-up of stressors. The potential effect is referenced above and may include an inability to adapt to the circumstances at hand or getting stuck and refusing to try something else.

...The full answer would be people giving up and saying, 'This has been too hard for too long. I'm going to do other things.' Along the way, I guess, is people not working from their vision, but from their frustrations or from their seat of responsibility or whatever. (Participant 312071)

When people begin to act out of frustration, rather than vision, the cause may well be a failure to adapt. The effect may be significant conflict or failure for the project to progress.

Resilience also allowed participants to keep going in the face of opposition, frustration, or other negative influences on their work, to learn from the past and plan better for the future, especially when the destination can be so worthwhile.

As many struggles as we had in those first several months of the project, I really hope that these kind of partnerships do continue and that there are people willing, like we were, to stick it out and say, "There are good things that can come from this. Yes, it might not look like what we thought it was going to look like, but now we know what to ask for in the future...I hope that the nonprofit and the university partnerships continue, even though they are hard, because they won't get any better unless we keep trying.

(Participant 315071)

Flexibility & change. No project vision, no matter how detailed or insightful is able to predict the eventual path the project will follow or the obstacles (stressors) it may encounter along the way. A thousand decisions influence what happens and why. "If as a team we hadn't been able to modify the structure of the grant...I think that would have diminished its success or eventually contributed to its entire failure" (Participant 129071). "...To rethink what are some more realistic goals and really aim to those instead of trying to cram our original goals in this structure...Let's let that be okay and really do it well" (Participant

315071). Expecting the original vision to hold throughout the time of the group's work may have been unreasonable. Not that the basic ideas or goals changed, but rather how they were to be achieved became an evolving process. Change in this sense was a natural response to environmental pressures motivated by our desire to survive and keep living and thriving.

The ability to respond productively to change, to be resilient in the face of stress, seems to have been a strong determinant of why the project was able to bend and adjust rather than snap and die. The loss of key people may be one of the most important changes outreach projects may face at any given time. Such a loss jeopardized relationships and trust among individuals and entities participating this project. When collaborators left the project, they took with them their skills, their knowledge, and their relationships with people. Participant 118071 identified staff turnover as the primary challenge to the project to date and Participant 123071 clearly stated the impact such a change had, especially on those who remained involved as others came and went: "How difficult it is to change in the middle of the road to a different vision." Not just a different vision, but different abilities and different relationships exist if the personnel change. Recall what Participant 312071 stated (cited earlier), "It's like everybody is playing catch-up."

Power & control. The manner in which control or authority is determined and executed in collaborative projects has a significant bearing on its outcome. According to participants, this has been one of the most challenging aspects of

the project to date. The voices of university and community participants juxtapose this issue in striking manner:

There is not enough respect for the community non-profit as an equal partner – that we who had the original vision for it seem to have a much smaller piece of the thing...The word ‘power-struggle’ is in my mind...There is that sense that we who are the grassroots, hands-on, service delivery, passionate people kind of lost control and control went to the research side...The meeting that we had just a few months ago where there seemed to be kind of an attempt to bring back parity and that sense of collaboration, [it] was very positive. (Participant 111071)

What never really worked out is the authority that the [community stakeholders] would have over the project...Some of what was written in the [project] proposal violated university policy and so that’s a really hard thing to carry out when it violates policy...And so that part of the collaborative never really worked, and still doesn’t today. (Participant 123071)

While both of these participants noted the positive position in which the project now finds itself with regards to collaborative spirit, their recognition of the dilemmas of power and control are clear.

Balance. Achieving a relative state of balance in the roles and responsibilities of collaborators and their activities was another characteristic brought out by participants. Some felt it to be a pressing issue. “There is a feeling that the emphasis went way more to research and so it’s kind of a feeling of,

'Where did our emphasis go? Where did our partnership go?' We felt that the partnership did lose some of that balance" (Participant 111071).

Where balance is lost, it can be regained: "The meeting that we had just a few months ago, there seemed to be an attempt to bring back that sense parity and that sense of collaboration was very positive" (Participant 111071). This participant identified a specific meeting convened with all core parties involved wherein many of the core factors (above) were discussed. Where balance had been lost and the voice of both participating institutions muffled by the other's feeling left out or misunderstood, dialogue allowed all involved to be reminded of why the others were a part of this project with them. University personnel were able to see a bit more clearly the specific concerns from community leaders and their motivations for collaborating. Likewise, community participants were reminded of the value university stakeholders saw in the project and their own reasons for participating therein. A relative sense of balance was restored.

Commitment & teamwork. Misunderstandings and imbalances may have been inevitable. What enabled the project to endure was a level of personal commitment to the project that allowed individuals to overcome personal hurts and strive to function in relationship (i.e. in collaboration) with others.

All of the interested parties are coming to the table and they continue to come to the table...Everybody has to work to get [things] done. And in that effort, I try to bend over if I'm needed to assist in any way I possibly can.
(Participant 126071)

This participant highlights a level of commitment to teamwork and collaboration stated by others interviewed. To them, it is about giving more than we take or are even asked to give, putting in as much as possible to assure the ends of the project are met. This individual alludes to how personal the project was to them, that level of personal passion motivates a level of involvement and dedication not possible under a quid pro quo manner of operation. As another pointed out, a commitment to the project may translate as a solution-focus, rather than an obstacle-focus:

I think a lot of it has to do with how much you let things be obstacles and if you're the kind of personality [where] the skin on the back of your neck is going to be raised every time an obstacle comes up and put yourself in a defensive posture then it's going to, it's not going to be done well. But I feel like if you're the kind of person who says, 'Okay. That's the obstacle. How do we get around it and keep everybody happy?' then you can do it.

(Participant 315071)

Expectations & optimism. It is difficult to remain committed and offer of oneself if there exists a perception that others are not or will not do the same. Thus, what one expects and/or assumes of others has a strong effect on how we interact with others. Doubtful or pessimistic views of others contributed to parochialism and team-defeating behaviors. Expecting the best from others and being optimistic had a softening and a healing effect, even when bad things happened.

I just have appreciated the spirit and the certain goodness with which everyone has come to the table...That good will and assumption of good intentions [has] provided the glue for the project. That despite our sort of institutional differences we are united by a common cause...given each other the benefit of the doubt. (Participant 129071)

When the individuals involved in the project assumed good things from each other, they were able to build off each other's strengths, trusting the others to fulfill commitments honorably and contribute a relatively equal amount to the shared endeavor. When conflicts of interest arose, the pessimistic assumption of negative intentions and/or actions may have bred a discontent and distrust that could have easily subverted the project itself. Goodwill inspired people to collectively contribute to a co-created objective or set of objectives.

It's easy to be discouraged and so you really, I found that I really needed camaraderie amongst people who were, who had an equal commitment to the cause, and who, um, just could encourage one another to keep going and to say, 'This is worth it. This is for a good cause. This isn't so we can make a million dollars. This isn't so that I can be famous. It's so that we can make a difference, a positive difference.' You really need good people in that kind of work. (Participant 315071)

Action & momentum. Seeing progress may have been one of the strongest determinants of optimism about the project's vitality. To maintain their motivation and/or to pour effort into an endeavor, people want to see thing happening.

We can't just say, 'Ten years from now we are going to build a building and it's going to provide great services to the community...' You've got to start using it fairly quickly in order for people's excitement to be up, to see results, to get the sense that it is worthwhile...What we're building in a partnership is like a building and as you build it, you've got to use it or people's excitement will dissipate. (Participant 111071)

"I think there were maybe a couple fleeting moments when I was maybe anxious for the results and they weren't coming, yet, and having to wait for that"
(Participant 125071).

It felt like we were horses in a starting gate, just waiting, you know, agitated, wanting the gates to open, getting frustrated, you know, backing out of the gate, getting back in the gate, that it just (sigh) took a lot longer than we ever imagined to get out of the gate. (Participant 315071)

Where there was a strong desire for action from the standpoint of the community and perhaps the funding agencies involved, recognizing the process inherent to larger organizations such as universities, was an important step in avoiding becoming entirely frustrated with or even paralyzed by inaction.

I don't think that [community members] nor university personnel have much respect for how tedious some of the university processes are. None of us like that. None of us like that it takes forever to get something very simple done, so I'm sure it has to be much worse for community members.
(Participant 123071)

“The work that’s been done has been really good work. It’s that it’s taken so long to do that work” (Participant 312071).

Projects with powerful momentum have developed that kinetic sort-of energy over time. Inertia is only unrealized potential. The ability of collaborators to patiently await the unfolding and achievement of the project’s vision is an additional influence here that bears mentioning.

To me this project is still in its kind of hope stage. In my mind, the vision that we started with is by no means remotely close to being realized. We got diverted. I don’t think that it’s not going to happen, but it hasn’t happened yet. (Participant 312071)

“The potential is still there...I guess a success point is just the very fact of the tremendous potential that is there. The structure is there. The potential is there” (Participant 111071).

However, as optimistic or hopeful as these participants are, the existence of potential does not equate with the actualization of success. A successful project doesn’t just happen. In the words of one participant, “You don’t order success. You develop and nurture and grow success” (Participant 123071).

Success is a result of a series of generative actions, in this case by many people, over time. Success does not happen over night or because one person dictates it to be so. Success is a process.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

University-based community initiatives can be successful ventures. This study's findings provide and operationalize a framework of foundational components and procedural elements whereby individuals and institutions involved or intending to be involved in university-community collaborations may develop and enhance their capacity for success. They suggest that such relationships should be well-grounded in a shared vision and that time and effort should be dedicated to assuring the vision of the project is to a significant extent shared among the collaborators. Project participants should consider an inclusive strategy whereby motivated individuals may be continuously engaged to offer their various expertise and skills. Finally, efforts should be made to ensure and develop the relationships between these individuals. These implications may be operationalized into a set of questions that may be asked of those individuals and institutions participating in the project: Who are the key people involved in the project? Are there any key stakeholders or interested/expert parties that we should invite to participate? What are we trying to accomplish? Are there any differences? What are they? What is shared? How will we handle disagreements? Who has ultimate responsibility for the process of the project? For its outcome? These and other questions may be asked as a template for successful collaborations.

The pre-eminent importance of the people involved was shown above. For any project, its people are its most precious resource. People's talents and ideas

are the raw materials upon and through which the collaboration builds itself. Involving and recognizing the involvement of key collaborators may well be the most fundamental factor contributing to the success of university-community projects. It thus becomes increasingly important to find those individuals in whatever sector of the community they may be in – academia, business, industry, government, etc. – and engage and involve them to the fullest extent possible. If people are so important to a project, they must be treated as such, valued for their participation, recognized for their contributions, and respected for their perspectives. Projects need passionate and talented people. Failing to find them in the first place is unfortunate. Losing them can be devastatingly costly.

While the vision of the collaboration may evolve and those that are involved may change over time, it is important that the vision be clear and overtly shared. Individuals need not have similar skill sets as much as they need a shared vision. This needs to be identified overtly through on-going dialogue or the vision may well not be unifying at all. Honoring and respecting the uniqueness that each individual and organization offers is an integral part of valuing who people are and what they have to offer. Visions and values are deep and powerful aspects that guide each of our work. They should not be taken nor treated lightly. Having a clear sense of from where each collaborator is operating can help others create a more shared vision.

Collaborative projects involve the inherent fusing of two or more cultures. Individuals participating in a project each bring their own values and vision to the group process, but when representing organizations, they also bring with them a

powerful cultural lens. One's vision for any project is intrinsically linked to the value set he or she espouses. Generally, community members from small non-profit groups or other entities bring an entirely different set of perspectives on process and expectations of outcome than do faculty and staff members from a university. Community groups are accustomed to quick decisions that involve limited red tape. These groups are often program- or action-oriented. Universities, on the other hand, function with a greater bureaucracy. Perhaps because it is a natural function of the university environment, faculty and staff at universities are often very thought- or evaluation-oriented. While this may not specifically preclude action, some felt that this was a challenge to those who were used to quicker turn-around. To the same extent, university participants had the challenge of identifying with what sometimes seemed to be action-anxious community participants who were eager to do something tangible and who were accustomed to a faster pace of programming and services. Further, community-based initiatives generally consist of groups of like-minded individuals, normally volunteers, who have a shared or unifying vision and who are working to achieve a specific end relating to a general cultural shift on a given topic in the community. University-based initiatives, on the other hand, likewise consist of relatively like-minded people, except that the given project serves to support or contributed to the larger vision and mission of the institution of the university – a means to an end rather than an end all to itself. Universities and community groups may share a general goal while having vastly different opinions of how to achieve the goal. Their goals may differ, as well. Thus, it becomes important to

understand not only the vision people have for the project, but also where that vision is coming from and how they expect it to be achieved. Whether a project's foundation is collaborative or cooperative will have profound bearing on how the project develops. Both models can and do successfully integrate university and community participants. The defining factor becomes whether those involved recognize the difference and accept one as the shared model for the given project.

Collaborative efforts are inherently shared; the objectives and activities thereof are co-created by all involved. In a group, especially one where no real authority dictates the agenda, people must come together and determine the roles and responsibilities and processes that the individuals and the project will take on. The plan, the process, and the roles in a group collaboration are co-created. Time and effort must be allotted to assure that everyone is absolutely clear and in relative agreement about the issue(s) at hand. When parties are working together, whether toward shared or separate visions, when decisions need to be made, as they often do, it is imperative that both parties have a clear understanding of how the decisions will be made and if there are larger processes or procedures at work, such as university policies, that often force the hand of collaborating leaders. Finally, rather than one individual's or one institution's goals being actively sought, a balance must be struck to assure all involved that their investment of time and energy will bear fruit, else the project risks losing some of its collaborators.

When feelings of competition and/or ill will arise, it would be wise for collaborators to examine the key factors mentioned in this study. Using this framework of defining factors and characteristics, collaborators can determine if the right people are involved to the fullest extent they are willing and able, that healthy and respectful relationships exist between them, and that care has been and is taken to assure that the vision of the project is a dialectical process, not a unilateral dictatorial mandate by any involved.

Implications

Aside from these general discussion items, specific implications for university faculty and staff, community leaders and participants, and current and potential project sponsors are indicated by these findings:

University faculty & staff. University personnel must be vividly aware of the inherent power and equity of their positions. Universities are large institutions with procedures and regulations that may well prove the rudder of any collaborative project by directing what and how faculty and staff are able to contribute. It is imperative that university collaborators be vividly mindful of the effect of these procedures, and the often protracted timeline associated with them, have on community participants and project sponsors. These collaborators may become frustrated by a perceived lack of action, when university stakeholders are actually actively working to make processes faster. To this point, university personnel should remain mindful of the tedium of process and painstaking research, which though proven need to be balanced with the desire for action and programmatic application by community project participants.

University participants should find ways to respect these proven processes while finding flexible and creative means for implementing them as efficiently as possible.

As pointed out in the Chibucos and Lerner (1999) text, university evaluation and compensation structures do not often reward the practice of collaborative, community-based work which is difficult to quantify in terms of research dollars or refereed publications. Policies that encourage publication over practice, rather than a balance thereof, may inhibit faculty and staff involvement in efforts that are not accounted for in their evaluations. Additionally, where they do become involved, there is the potential for reduced overall involvement as university personnel feel the need to balance activities for which they have a passion which may not be rewarded with those that count more overtly to their distribution of effort.

University faculty and staff possess expertise in and passions for their field(s) of study and practice. These individuals must be conscious and respectful of community leaders and volunteers who likewise possess a wealth of professional and practical expertise and work to integrate this wealth of diversity and talent for the benefit of a given project. Many in the community openly express a perceived disconnect between the university as an institution and, especially in the case of land-grant universities, their institutional mandates for community outreach. Disconnects occur between public and private spheres; between volunteer-based, non-profit institutions and the paid employee base of universities; and even between the educational levels of participants.

Recognizing and balancing the use of power and control may be one of the most critical tasks performed by university faculty and staff.

Above all, university collaborators must maintain a collaborative spirit through active inclusion of community stakeholders, sharing as much power as is procedurally appropriate, and practicing open, honest, and on-going communication, fostering an environment of creativity and innovation wherein ideas and solutions may germinate and blossom. The hiring and development of experienced community grant navigators is one method whereby universities can assure themselves that this collaborative spirit is maintained.

Community leaders & participants. For community leaders and other participants in collaborative projects, the essential nature of shared power and open communication are, as with university stakeholders, pre-eminent in importance. Other specific implications reflect those for university faculty and staff, only from a community perspective. As much as university actions often require layers of administrative approval, community players must remain patient and understanding, balancing the need or desire for tangible activities with the university's research efforts and administrative processes, the tangibility of which often is evident only over time and may not match the generally experienced programmatic applications preferred by those involved at the community level. Further, just as university personnel are challenged to be inclusive of the practical and experiential expertise of community leaders, so too are community participants challenged to respect and include university research expertise. As mentioned above, maintaining a balance of power is one of the more difficult

tasks faced by all parties involved. Whereas the university must be mindful not to wield an overdue amount of power, community collaborators may need to respectfully, yet firmly maintain their position and their voice in collaborative projects. Where fiscally or procedurally necessary, such as in university administration of sponsored projects, understood deference should be given to university stakeholders. Otherwise, community leaders should contribute as much as possible, working to advocate and assure a balanced approach to the shared project.

Project sponsors. Certainly, not all university-community collaborative efforts are sponsored. However, to a great degree, universities become involved in projects through research and programmatic funding from either private or public sector sponsors. These sponsors are in a unique position to encourage and ensure collaborative efforts. In as much as collaborative projects can combine the diverse experiences and expertise of both university and community players, tying funding to collaborative structures, where feasible and appropriate, is one method in which sponsors can encourage creative and innovative solutions to existing social problems. In doing so, these sponsors may set and maintain clear objectives that include requirements and/or provisions for collaborative work. Where this is done, they should be sure roles in the collaboration for both university and community partners are clarified and overtly specified and agreed to beforehand, being mindful to assure such roles and responsibilities adequately conform to existing procedural protocols, such as those for sponsored projects administration. Funding entities may recommend

specific guidelines or models for collaborative work and provide coaching in the development, maintenance, and enhancement of collaborations established through these projects. Finally, sponsors can and should facilitate dialogues and generatively mediate conflicts that may arise between organizations and their representative individuals participating in the collaborative effort.

Limitations

This project examined the workings of one university-community collaboration. The experiences shared during the interviews may potentially be limited to the project at hand and not generally experienced in other university-based community initiatives. The project was funded by a federal sponsor, adding a specific delimitation that may not apply to other collaborative projects. The practice area of the project – healthy marriage initiatives – is one that is fairly polarizing among the several sectors of society and which has experienced a good degree of both support and controversy nationally. As such, other projects which do not address an area that is quite so politically charged may already benefit from more general support or readiness by both university and community players to respond more creatively and openly to each other. Additionally, only a limited number of collaborators participated and interviews did not occur with all of the proposed participants and thus not all perspectives – university, community, and sponsor, past and present – were available to the researcher. This study is fairly limited in its scope and, thus, its generalizability. However, the significance of the study is not so much to discover universal principles as much as evidence occurrences that may arise under similar circumstances. Finally, the

dual role of the researcher in a position of primary influence in the project is of particular import to this discussion of limitations.

Qualitative research, especially ethnographic research, relies on the researcher's relationship with participants. To this end, as much as participants may have been more apt to disclose personal perspectives to the researcher because of their existing relationship with him, they may also have felt more limited in their disclosures, not wanting to offer information that could potentially negatively impact that relationship. This may be particularly true of community participants who may already have been sensitive with regards to their changing role within the collaboration. Given my role in the project, I also possess my own perspective to the research questions. Methods, such as participant reviews of initial analyses and a researcher field journal helped to track and, hopefully, minimize the impact of researcher bias.

Suggestions for Follow-Up and/or Future Studies

To address these limitations, future studies with varying methods would be helpful. For example, future studies could involve multiple interviewers and/or a series of interviews with the same participants by multiple, rotating interviewers who might glean or focus on specific elements differently. The potential to enrich the interviews may increase thereby. Studies might also examine multiple projects, comparing and contrasting results between the two. Research questions might be quantified for statistical analysis, avoiding the bias of researcher interpretation or the influence the researcher has on participant responses.

It would be helpful to explore each of the core factors – people, relationships, vision and values, and foundation – in more depth. For example, several participants highlighted the prominent influence the people involved in the project, including their skills and expertise, personalities and passions. One participant (123071) suggested an exploration of what each collaborator thought he or she had contributed positively to the project and how they may potentially have been a limitation. Other similar deep explorations could yield even richer narratives on the elements and workings of university-community initiatives.

Concluding Thoughts: Reflections of a Researcher

When as a researcher, a true participant-observer, I reflect back on my experience in these interviews, I am struck by the fundamental goodwill and intentions of those who have been or are now involved in the project. I expected participants to speak more about the negative aspects of the project, the conflicts and struggles that we all experienced firsthand. While participants did make mention of these conflicts, I was impressed by how little they dwelt on these, instead focusing on their appreciation for the others involved and on their vision for the project – what it could yet accomplish. I wonder if some of this reflects the relatively generative tone I wove into the project through the questions, structure, and process of the interviews. My intent was never to provide an evaluation of the BHMI project, but rather to evaluate the process thereof. Certainly my own perspective and approach has been to focus on the good and work to overcome the obstacles we have faced. This lack of balance between positive and negative responses could also be a function of hesitancy of participants to be fully honest

and open in their disclosures to me. Still, I do believe that participants were and are genuine, honest, and good-willed.

People really do make the difference. For all of this project's ups and downs, most of which I have personally lived, I see now quite vividly why it is that "people" was the single most frequently identified and important defining factor to this, and I believe any, project. The people involved helped this project find its genesis. The people involved want to see it succeed, if by different standards. The people are the project – the two are inseparable. The passion participants displayed for their work, the candor and deep emotion with which they expressed themselves to me evidence their goodness and the willing application of their talents towards a project in which they do truly believe, even as it has evolved.

My own perspective on the project has been enriched as I feel I have come to more fully understand the interests and motivations of the people with whom I have now worked for two years. I have a renewed vision of the project that is at once more broad and more clear. Maybe I am starting to understand what this collaborative project is all about, why I even have my job in the first place. Throughout the process, I felt vividly the areas where I believe I had contributed positively to progress and tasted of those bitter moments where perhaps I could have fought harder, or where I colluded in processes that were not collaborative. As one participant alluded to herself, I wonder what has been the sum of my contributions. How have I personally facilitated or limited success? Did I, with others, rise to the occasion and make good things happen or was I

reactive, allowing circumstances to guide my efforts? How much did I matter to the success of the project? Maybe only time will tell.

Finally and perhaps more importantly, I see each of these participants and our collaborative project in a different light. I am grateful to them for allowing a level of honesty and personal vulnerability with me that has served to deepen my respect and admiration for each of them and the talents they bring, as well as a renewed vigor for my own work. If we are still in the hope stage of this project, maybe that is not such an awful thing. Maybe any project and the people associated with it need a little hope, a little vision about what can yet be accomplished.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

Verbal Assent Script

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to better understand the collaborative process involved with the Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative. You will be asked several questions and will have the opportunity to respond in as much detail as you desire to each of these questions. Specifically, we are seeking to understand what have been factors contributing to any success you may perceive the Initiative has achieved to date and/or those points that have challenged the project thus far. You will have the opportunity to respond to both of these areas (successes or challenges). Your particular insight is invaluable to this project and to this research study. As mentioned in the informed consent document you signed, your identity will be protected and your answers combined with those of other respondents to develop themes in the areas (success factors and challenge points) mentioned above.

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your involvement in the Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative.
2. Please tell me your perceptions of the collaborative nature of the project.
3. How would you evaluate the success of the project to date?
 - a. What, if anything, have been factors contributing to the success of the project?

- b. What, if anything, have been areas that have challenged the project?
- 4. How well do you feel that the university and the community non-profit understand and respect each others' values and processes?
- 5. If you woke up tomorrow and the project was completed and had been widely recognized as a wild success, what would have contributed to that success?
- 6. If you woke up tomorrow and the project had failed, what do you believe would have caused its downfall?
- 7. Can you tell me about a time that you felt particularly enthusiastic about or optimistic for the project?
 - a. How about a time when you did not feel this optimism, can you tell me more about that?
- 8. What do you envision for the future of the project?
 - a. How can that be achieved?

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VITA

Erik L. Carlton was born February 14, 1978 in Castro Valley, CA.

EDUCATION

California State University – Hayward
B.A. – Human Development, Adolescence emphasis, 2003

Las Positas College
A.A. – Liberal Arts & Sciences, 2001

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative (UK Dept. of Family Studies)
Project Director, 10/2006 - present
Interim Project Director, 7/2006 - 9/2006
External Relations Coordinator, 7/2005 - 6/2006

Initiative Consulting
Founder & Consultant, 8/2004 - present

University of Kentucky Family Center
Staff Therapist Intern, 9/2005 - 12/2006

University of Kentucky Department of Family Studies
Graduate Research & Teaching Assistant, 8/2004 - 5/2005

Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream Company
Marketing Coordinator – Superpremium Brands, 8/2000 - 8/2004

IKON Office Solutions – Technology Services Division
Project Manager/Telecommunications Technician, 8/1999 - 12/1999

France, Bordeaux Mission
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
Missionary / Zone Leader, 6/1997 – 6/1999

SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES

Carlton, E., Bradford, K., & Whiting, J. (2007). Domestic Violence: Keep it Safe. Workshop presented at Smart Marriages Conference July 1, 2007 in Denver, CO. (authors contributed equally to the project)

Carlton, E., & White, C. (2007). The 7 Principles for Making Marriage Work. Workshop presented at the Kentucky Association for Community Action Annual Conference June 14, 2007 in Louisville, KY.

Carlton, E. (2007). Defining Factors & Characteristics of University-Community Collaborations. Paper presented at the University of Kentucky Graduate Student Interdisciplinary Conference April 13, 2007 in Lexington, KY

Whiting, J., Bradford, K., Roberts, M., & Carlton, E. (2006). The Importance of a Violence Protocol in Marriage Education. Poster presented at the American Association of Marriage & Family Therapists Conference October 20, 2006 in Austin, TX.

Carlton, E. (2006). Healthy Marriage through Community Partnerships – Developing a Community Healthy Marriage Initiative. Keynote Address given at Kentucky Association for Community Action Director's Conference September 26, 2006 in Jamestown, KY.

Carlton, E. (2006). Healthy Marriage through Community Partnerships – The Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative. Keynote Address given at Kentucky Association for Community Action Annual Conference June 14, 2006 in Owensboro, KY.

Carlton, E. (2006). Cognitive development in adolescence: An overview. Cooperative Extension Curriculum Project. Available online at: <http://ceonline.tamu.edu/index.cfm>

SCHOLASTIC & PROFESSIONAL HONORS

Valedictorian – Dublin High School Class of 1996

Robert C. Byrd Scholar, 1996

Oakland Coliseum Foundation George P. Scotlan Scholar, 1996

Bausch & Lomb Science Scholar, 1996

Nestlé Ice Cream Company – Partners in Excellence, 2001

California State University, Hayward – Magna Cum Laude, 2003

KAMFT Bill Greenwalt Memorial Graduate Student Award, 2006

UK School of Human Environmental Sciences – Centennial Future 100 Award, 2007