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Community Collaboration in Virginia Legal Aid Programs: A Constructivist Grounded Theory Investigation

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Community Collaboration in Virginia Legal Aid Programs: A Constructivist Grounded Theory

Investigation

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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I own my role as primary author of this document, but want to honor others without whom this product would not exist in its current form. To name is to omit, but I'll give it a try with the caveat that this enterprise is ongoing.

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List of Abbreviations

CAA – Community Action Agency

CGT – Constructivist Grounded Theory

ISSI – Intensive Semi-Structured Interview

LAP – Legal Aid Program

LSC – Legal Services Corporation

Abstract

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION IN VIRGINIA LEGAL AID PROGRAMS: A
CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY INVESTIGATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015.

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Legal aid programs comprise a robust national infrastructure attempting to alleviate and reduce

poverty. Since their proliferation as part of the War on Poverty, these organizations have

provided individual civil legal assistance and engaged in collective legal and political strategies

to advance systemic change. Starting in the 1980s, however, public policies have been enacted

to cut funding and restrict the ability of federally funded legal aid programs to engage in

collective and systemic advocacy. As a result, the ability of programs to work alongside low-

income communities has been compromised. The histories and core commitments of legal aid

and social work are linked. As a profession social work is concerned broadly with efforts to

address poverty and specifically with the self-determination and empowerment of those

experiencing poverty directly. In this study a constructivist grounded theory design was used to

examine the process of collaboration between legal aid attorneys and client community members.

The sample for the study included 28 attorneys, client community members, and other

stakeholders affiliated with three legal aid programs. Based on 28 interviews and two focus groups with these participants, a conceptual framework entitled Collaborating for Justice in a Legal Aid Context was constructed. Findings suggest that both primary stakeholder groups were motivated to act by the unequal access to advantage in the world around them. Once affiliated with legal aid, they were constrained by scarcity of resources but nonetheless acted creatively to collaborate as well as to enhance collaborative capacity. Collaboration occurred in different timeframes, and this temporal element suggested ways that individuals and organizations can extend and deepen collaboration. Collective activities, informal interaction, and boards and advisory groups all played roles in facilitating collaboration between legal aid programs and their client communities. Through these actions, participants and their affiliated organizations were able to move from circumstances of scarcity to circumstances of generativity and development. Implications for education, practice, and policy are discussed.

Keywords: legal aid, collaboration, community, constructivist grounded theory

Chapter One: Overview

Collaboration is fundamental to social work practice (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008), and it is also a key link between individual outcomes and collective or systemic strategies (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2013a; Lawson, 2013; Perelman & White, 2011a, 2011b). This study explores collaboration between legal aid programs and the communities they serve, seeking to deepen understanding of the role of legal aid in collective and systemic advocacy to alleviate poverty. The study aims to advance knowledge regarding how collaboration interacts with and promotes the goals of legal aid and other human services organizations.

Since the War on Poverty, legal aid programs have comprised a national network of publicly funded nonprofit organizations that combine civil (i.e. non-criminal) legal advocacy with organizing, legislative advocacy, and other social change strategies (Rhode, 2008). Between 1980 and 2000, however, federal policies cut funding to the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), which distributes funds to legal aid programs nationally, and restricted the ability of federally funded programs to engage in collective and systemic advocacy (Houseman & Perle, 2007). These cuts and restrictions mirrored a larger pattern of policies that constrained collective social change work in the broader human services landscape (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012).

Scholars have weighed in on the need for legal aid attorneys to take a more expansive view of their role, and more specifically on the need to engage more collaboratively with client community members (Gordon, 2007). Proponents of increased collaboration have used terms such as "community lawyer" and "collaborative lawyer" to conceptualize the ideal role for legal aid attorneys, but much of the literature in this area is conceptual rather than empirical (see Ashar, 2008; Piomelli, 2006). The dearth of empirically grounded research led Trubek (2005) to conclude that "studying how lawyers are practicing, their relationships with their clients, and their relationships with their communities…is essential" (p. 461-2). In order to devise effective strategies for working with communities to alleviate and reduce poverty, legal aid attorneys and social work practitioners as well as those affected by poverty must first understand what is currently being done.

Introduction

This dissertation examines perceptions and experiences related to collaboration between legal aid programs and the communities they serve, using the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology explicated by Kathy Charmaz (2006). Through 28 interviews and two focus groups, I examine how attorneys and client community members experience collaboration in one geographically bounded legal aid context. The findings of the study include a conceptual framework entitled, "Collaborating for Justice in a Legal Aid Context."

This study can be mapped roughly onto three categories of concepts and activities: 1) legal aid, the institutionalized provision of free legal services in civil matters to low-income residents of the United States who cannot otherwise retain formally trained counsel (NLADA, 2013); 2) community organizing, the process of a community joining together to address commonly held concerns (Mondros & Staples, 2013); and 3) social work, a profession dedicated

to improving the lives and well-being of individuals and communities and promoting change that enhances social and economic justice through various methods (NASW, 2008).

Practical Context

This section contains a discussion of how this study relates to my personal experience and perspective, followed by a brief overview of the history and purpose of legal aid.

Personal Experience

This project is to some degree a straightforward investigation of a type of human service organization (legal aid) and the relationships between its staff members (mostly attorneys) and its client communities. These relationships can be examined from numerous standpoints, however, and embedded in these standpoints are personal experiences, assumptions and views about the world in which we live and attempt to thrive, and positionality within academic and professional institutions. These considerations are relevant in that they provide readers with the researcher's rationale and purpose in conducting the study. As discussed in greater detail later in this dissertation, I follow the lead of many who call for the researcher's voice to be clearly accounted for and articulated in research projects grounded in constructivist or interpretivist assumptions (Charmaz, 2000; Guba, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Rodwell, 1998).

Experience with legal aid. I am interested in this topic first and foremost because it resonates with my personal experience as a community organizer in a legal aid setting, during which I also became aware of the cultural and social capital associated with the legal aid infrastructure (Bourdieu, 1986; Rhode, 2008; Southworth, 1996). As a non-attorney with limited experience in the role of navigating or translating between legal and non-legal contexts, I was perhaps predisposed to perceive the two contexts, or worlds, as incongruous. Lawyers and non-

lawyers[1] seemed to have not only different education and employment backgrounds but also divergent tendencies when attempting to address problems and create change. Equipped with hard-earned competencies in a technical profession that requires attention to detail, lawyers were understandably inclined to mobilize their knowledge and skills in ways that the legal system, or any system, would most likely understand. Non-lawyers, meanwhile, seemed to exist in a space of fewer bright lines and less clarity about the course of action that needed to be taken, and were perhaps more inclined to bring into play the complexities of life that may or may not be relevant or necessarily welcome in a legal context. In short, I perceived two distinct discourses at work and became fascinated with the spaces in which these discourses collide or intersect.

Another point that struck me as an organizer in that setting is the legal aid infrastructure's magnitude and impact, as well as the scale of the void it is trying to fill. Despite the substantial, though declining, public commitment to funding legal services over the last half century, the need for civil legal assistance among those who cannot afford to pay continues to vastly outstrip the capacity of programs to provide it (Shdaimah, 2009; Southworth, 1996). The dedication of personal and public resources to the goal of equality in civil legal matters is worth taking a moment to acknowledge, as is the extent to which these resources are insufficient. In terms of assets, in addition to public funds and the private funds they help to leverage, thousands of our country's best and brightest attorneys have chosen to spend much or all of their careers defending the rights of those who would be otherwise highly vulnerable if not completely without recourse in matters of the law (Rhode, 2008). These financial, institutional, and human resources, not to mention the years of formal education and training each attorney brings to their work, result in a reservoir of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that brings additional

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[1] While the terms "lawyer" and "attorney" may have different connotations for some, perhaps with the latter having an air of greater formality, in the literature they are used interchangeably and I follow that practice throughout this dissertation.

weight and consequence to the topic at hand. I discuss these forms of non-economic capital and their relevance to the study in greater detail in chapter two. The paradoxical existence of substantial yet inadequate resources is a dynamic that I was aware of going into this study.

       Social justice and identity. In 1999 I started a master's program with the intention of working in the field of international education. Having spent two years in Japan as a cultural and linguistic interpreter, my skills and passion seemed to overlap in service of helping bridge gaps of understanding. Soon after starting graduate school, however, this approach to change began to feel inadequate -- not unimportant or without merit, but simply insufficient given the depth, history, and intractable nature of the systemic failure and societal injustice against which I wanted my work to be explicitly geared. As I completed coursework in global economics and social justice, the earth under my feet was also beginning to shift. Social movements designed to disrupt or dismantle global financial institutions such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund gained momentum. Inside the classroom, I underwent a personal shift in consciousness and understanding. The evidence mounted against the efficacy of minor interventions in order to create a more just and inclusive system. Cultural bridgebuilding, though necessary, seemed insufficient. A professor at the time introduced me to the value of community organizing in mobilizing the collective will for systemic change. Power shifts were necessary, and these shifts do not come through greater understanding alone. Frederick Douglass' (2000) classic analysis, from an 1857 speech on West Indian emancipation, crystallized how I wanted my work to be oriented: "Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will." Since that time I have worked and identified as a community organizer. It is how I see myself and my role in the world.

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I am also aware of the demographically privileged part of my identity. Patricia Hill

Collins' (1990) influential work explained how intersecting aspects of personal identity,

including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality and class, create layers of oppression and

privilege that combine to shape one's experiences and views of the world. Given the

considerable privilege associated with my white, straight male "triple privilege" (Sacks &

Linholm, 2006, p. 130) identity, and generally middle class upbringing, I have reflected on the

origins of normative positions I take regarding equality and justice since they are not based on

direct personal experience of being denied opportunity on a systematic or institutionalized basis.

Despite having no outwardly apparent aspects of my identity that are current or historical targets

of marginalization, I have pursued work over the course of my adult life that challenges how as a

society we consume and distribute resources. I have gravitated toward work that extends beyond

immediate individual outcomes and into arenas of policy and system change. While personal

privilege and desire for systemic change are in some respects at odds, they also go hand in hand.

The luxury, as Shdaimah (2009) argued, to think and act in ways that may seem abstract to those

facing dire and existential struggles every day is part of what brought me to this project.

Social work and standpoint. A third aspect of my investment in this particular study, as

stated above, is the hope I hold for a vision of social work that is collaborative, catalytic, and

engaged in the biggest social questions of our time. As a system of ideas and values, social work

helped shape my approach to and development of this project. Few academic fields or disciplines

offer a practical yet theoretically based vision of how individuals, communities, and

organizations can act in concert to create positive change at multiple levels ranging from

personal to societal.

While social workers are not currently major players in the legal aid infrastructure, this project relates directly to social work goals and values, and in an aspirational sense to a vision of what social work might be in the future. Since its early connection to the settlement house movement, social work has valued multi-level change work that pays attention to individuals as well as the concentric circles of mutual influence surrounding them (Addams, 1910; Reisch & Andrews, 2001). Despite a trend over time toward more of the profession's energy and resources being funneled into individual casework, the vein of practice within, among, and alongside communities has always run through the social work landscape. Collaboration, awareness of power and oppression, and systemic change remain key reference points for social workers and the ethical standards to which they adhere (NASW, 2008, 2013; IFSW, 2012).

However, it can also be said that these are uncertain times regarding social work's emphasis on multi-faceted change and its willingness to enter the fray of contested space. Targets of concern range from eroding support for macro social work education (Gamble, 2011; Rothman, 2012) to the marginalization of organizations that engage in collective advocacy (Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012). Hasenfeld and Garrow highlight the impact of neoliberalism -- and more specifically privatization, managerialism, and devolution -- on the ability of human service organizations to mobilize and advocate for social rights. Thus they raise the specter of a dominant ideological persuasion, larger than social work or any one profession, as the primary constraint on dynamic advocacy across multiple levels and dimensions. I approach this study with doubts regarding social work's willingness and ability to embrace new venues for collaborative change work given the hostility of neoliberal institutions to collective change. Yet I also feel hopeful that a profession steeped in discourses of empowerment and change can identify a way forward that is consistent with its core values.

In order to realize this vision of social work, I argue that it is necessary to work in spaces that are contested and not clearly defined because this is by definition where hegemony has yet to fully infiltrate. Over the course of its history, social work has migrated as a profession away from complex, multi-faceted, community-based understandings of its role, and toward a deployment of services designed for short-term, measurable outcomes at the individual level (Reisch & Andrews, 2001). In order to interrogate the purpose and future of social work, one must not only consider how social work exists currently, but also investigate potential areas of growth and impact. The current study explores an aspect of civil society -- legal services -- in which social work is not directly engaged on a large scale. By considering the history and potential future of legal services, however, one can see the possibilities for social work in furthering and deepening the impact of legal services work specifically but also human services more broadly, while at the same time reigniting social work's original commitment to community-based and structural change.

Personal Theoretical Perspective

In light of the subjective and value-laden nature of constructivist grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2000; 2006), it is relevant to introduce theoretical frameworks that inform my thinking. In particular, critical theory and postmodern/poststructuralist views of power and control help explain why this topic holds my interest.

Critical theory. Critical theory is a branch of neo-Marxian theory. While not homogeneous, individual theorists identified with critical theory tend to emphasize systemic factors connected to alienation and suffering. They depart from the orthodox Marxian view of economic determinism, but maintain Marx's twin emphasis on oppressive structures and individual consciousness. Critical theory is widely used as a theoretical basis for community

organizing and other forms of collective approaches to change (Burghardt, 2011; Hardcastle, Wenocur, & Powers, 2011; Pyles, 2009; Thomas, O'Connor, & Netting, 2011).

My introduction to community organizing was an introduction to the core concepts of critical theory as well. Power, self-interest, and connections between systems and individual agency are three first-order concerns in both critical theory and the model of community organizing in Miami to which I was first exposed. In order to make change, my colleagues and I in that faith-based organizing network worked with diverse faith communities to increase their power in relation to politicians and other decision makers. This required the building and sustaining of a strong network of relationships with a common sense of purpose among its members. Though lacking the theoretical awareness to know this at the time, my first exposure to community organizing was also a primer in critical theory.

Nonprofits and postmodern perspectives. Starting with those experiences in Miami, over the last 14 years I have studied, worked professionally on, and participated voluntarily in community organizing efforts. Most of this experience has taken place within, or alongside, nonprofit organizations, with community organizing being facilitated at least in part by paid professionals. For me, the role of salaried professionals and incorporated nonprofit organizations raised questions about control, expertise, and efficacy in the process of collaboration within and alongside communities. It is a core tenet of community organizing that the community's voice must be elevated in all aspects of planning and decision making (Burghardt, 2011; Hardcastle, Wenocur, & Powers, 2011; and Pyles, 2009). Indeed the empowerment of individuals and the communities of which they are a part is often cited as a primary desired outcome of community organizing (see Bobo, Kendall, & Max, 2010). Yet, when professionals and nonprofit organizations mediate the process, additional layers of complexity are added to the calculus

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regarding how priorities are set and decisions are made. Funding pressures, as one example, may not affect political activity overall (Chaves, Stephens, & Galaskiewicz, 2004) but these pressures can and do create circumstances in which nonprofit organizations pursue strategies or outcomes that have not been vetted or endorsed by the community (Mosley, 2012). Partly as a result of these observations and experiences, this study is an investigation of not just the processes of community collaboration and organizing, but the organizational context in which these activities occur, i.e. legal aid programs.

The exploration of power and voice being mediated by nonprofits leads to the next theoretical perspective that informs the design of this study. Postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives on power and control, particularly those of Michel Foucault (1984), shed light on the tendency of certain discourses and values to be assumed as more useful than others. In the realm of nonprofit-based community organizing, for example, professional expertise and institutional authority can raise concerns relative to the goals of amplifying marginalized voices and empowering communities. Since its origins social work has wrestled with the merits and pitfalls of professionalization (Reisch & Andrews, 2001; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Wagner, 1990). The question of whether social work's ultimate allegiance is to clients and communities, or to the social welfare system and other human service institutions, is part of this conversation. Reflexivity within the social work community must include critical analysis of the structure, activity, and resource allocation associated with the nonprofits and other human service organizations by which a vast majority of social workers are employed (Furman & Gibelman, 2013).

The notion of providing legal advocacy for those who cannot afford lawyers is also fraught with questions about expertise, power, and control (Piomelli, 2006). The justice system

is difficult if not impossible to navigate without trained legal counsel (Zorza, 2012). To what extent does the training and knowledge possessed by the attorney then preclude the participation of the "untrained" client or community? Further, does legal training lead to the pursuit of certain strategies to resolve problems and the failure to consider other strategies? These questions helped draw me to better understand the process of community collaboration within a legal aid setting.

Legal Aid and the Purpose of this Study

Continuing with an introduction of what I perceive as the "problem" toward which this study is directed, in this part I present a brief overview of the historical development of legal aid, also known as legal services. I should make clear that in no way do I view legal aid as a "problem" in the common use of the term. Rather, like Rhode (2008) I see legal aid as a tremendous resource, but one that is woefully undervalued in the social work and community practice literatures and therefore in need of being interrogated. The history of legal aid, in fact, tells the story of a profession – or in the case of legal aid, a subset of the attorney profession -- with very similar interests and commitments as social work. It is exactly these interests and commitments that I seek to more thoroughly examine and understand, for in doing so I argue we can understand more about not only legal aid but social work as well. After reviewing the history of legal aid starting with its institutionalization and subsequent proliferation in the 1960s, I draw the circle more narrowly and describe the legal aid context to which I have been exposed and on which this study is focused. I conclude this part with the introduction of the questions that have guided the study's design, and a thumbnail overview of the study design itself.

Legal aid history. The origins of legal aid and legal services date back to the 19th century, but much of the federally supported legal services infrastructure developed as a direct

result of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (Houseman & Perle, 2007). This legislation led to creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), and along with the Voting Rights Act, the Food Stamp Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Social Security amendments that established Medicare and Medicaid, and bills that created the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation, marked a two year period in which specific policies were established to carry out the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty (Orleck, 2011; Rhode, 2008; Shdaimah, 2009). In a stunningly brief period of time, Johnson engineered passage of numerous major pieces of legislation that dramatically altered the American social welfare landscape (Orleck, 2011).

The development of legal services as a national system of free legal assistance under the OEO was in itself extremely controversial (Houseman & Perle, 2007). Before the 1960s, legal aid existed mainly as a loosely knit, privately funded network of offices in urban areas whose primary function was to provide legal assistance to indigent individuals who demonstrated need. Implicitly, the emphasis of these offices was on helping the "deserving poor." The funding was so inadequate that often only the most egregious cases of injustice could be addressed, and only on an individual basis (Houseman & Perle, 2007). As legal strategies proved effective in challenging and redressing civil rights violations at the systemic level, momentum built to create a national and publicly funded system of legal services that would not only address individual concerns related to poverty but also serve as a force for law reform and systemic change on issues affecting low-income communities more broadly (Houseman & Perle, 2007; Sarat & Scheingold, 2006).

Notably for social work scholars and practitioners, at the same time that legal services developed as part of the OEO, through the Community Action Program the OEO also established

community action agencies (CAAs) to shift power in local communities and create opportunities for those in poverty to participate in setting priorities and allocating funds at the local level. Language in the Economic Opportunity Act called for "maximum feasible participation" by those in poverty (Orleck, 2011), and clearly sought to build on the achievement of greater access to institutions by promoting not only access but the empowerment, leadership, and political engagement of those historically excluded from public decision making processes. Conceptually, the CAAs were intended to complement access to the justice system provided through legal services with a more holistic empowerment of those experiencing poverty. Providing attorneys was not a sufficient approach to addressing systemic causes of poverty, the logic went, but creating infrastructures for community empowerment would begin to dismantle some of these systemic barriers (Orleck, 2011). It was not quite this simple, however. As legal services infrastructure developed simultaneously with the proliferation of CAAs, questions and conflicts related to strategy and control of resources arose between advocates of CAAs and advocates of legal services, and the imagined synergy between the two never had a chance to materialize (Houseman & Perle, 2007).

Support for CAA-style grassroots empowerment manifested in the profession of social work through the proliferation of community organization as a practice method and as a distinct aspect of social work education (Wagner, 1989, 1990). Social workers who embraced radical political agendas found outlets for their social work skills and political beliefs in the National Welfare Rights Organization and other community-based efforts led by people in poverty. Within only a few years of their creation, backlash against the political activities of CAAs and legal aid programs led to legislative attempts to restrict the ability of both types of entities to challenge injustice at the systemic level. As a result, the mission of CAAs shifted away from the

political engagement of poor communities and toward a service-based model, presaging the ascendance of a conservative human services regime over the latter third of the twentieth century (Furman & Gibelman, 2013; Orleck, 2011). Similarly, as governor of California and later as president, Ronald Reagan systematically led efforts to cripple the capacity of legal aid programs to work toward structural reform (Houseman & Perle, 2007). Over the ensuing decades, the impact of this capacity erosion has been exacerbated by the negative effects of globalized capitalism, which have disproportionately left their mark on this country's poorest communities (Alperowitz, 2013; Mullaly, 2007). The design of this study bears in mind the potential for renewed collaboration among public interest lawyers, community-minded social workers, and low-income communities.

Legal aid in Virginia. In the Commonwealth of Virginia, ten organizations receive funding from the Legal Services Corporation of Virginia and thus are considered for this study to be legal aid programs. These programs vary geographically from rural to urban. All but one program have regional service areas. The only exception is the Virginia Poverty Law Center, which is based in the state capital, has a statewide presence, and focuses on coordinating policy advocacy efforts and conducting training and technical assistance for clients and other legal aid programs (VPLC, 2013).

In addition to the structural context, my experience as an organizer with a Virginia legal aid program, though admittedly subjective, nonetheless heavily informed my understanding of the geographically bounded context for the study and indeed motivated me to conduct the study in the first place. During this experience, for example, I perceived variation in the approach to and implementation of community collaboration by Virginia legal aid programs. While some organizations were organized primarily to provide legal assistance to individual clients, others

were involved in policy advocacy and community organizing in addition to taking on individual cases. As a community organizer I am aware that I have a preference for the latter, and this bias is something I will attend to later in the dissertation.

A formative experience for me occurred at the annual statewide legal aid conference. I noticed that some programs prioritize the attendance of not just staff attorneys but also client community members, and other programs seemed not to make community participation in the conference a priority. Additionally, dozens of workshops were offered at this conference to build individual and organizational capacity, but few were targeted to a non-lawyer lay audience. Occasionally, workshop titles were even unnecessarily harsh -- from my perspective -- with regard to client community members, including one session offered on an annual basis entitled, "How to Deal with Difficult Clients" (VPLC, 2010). This example of institutionalized insensitivity may not reflect the broader culture of Virginia legal aid organizations, but it contributes to my sense that the question of how legal aid stakeholders perceive community collaboration warrants further exploration.

Besides highlighting potential areas for improvement in community collaboration, my experiences impressed upon me the high level of commitment on the part of Virginia legal aid staff members. Many had devoted their entire careers to the alleviation of poverty and its many deleterious effects, and dozens of young attorneys were planning to do the same. My experience was consistent with Shdaimah's (2009) finding that legal aid attorneys have deep awareness of social injustice, and a proportionately deep commitment to redressing it regardless of the type of legal aid activities in which they were engaged. In large part thanks to Shdaimah's analysis, I am also more aware now, in retrospect, that a focus on individual casework is not tantamount to a rejection of collaboration.

Interactions with client community members also enhanced my understanding of the legal aid context in Virginia. Positive opinions and feelings about legal aid organizations on the part of client community members included praise for their skill and dedication, appreciation, and relief. Having access to legal expertise that would otherwise be too costly meant a reprieve from the incentives, restrictions, and punishments imposed on those who experience poverty (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011; Wacquant, 2009). Others expressed frustration with the process of working with legal aid organizations and conveyed the sense that the indignities of poverty were not being adequately acknowledged or addressed. In fairness, client community member frustration can be attributed to other causes, both immediate and systemic, but it manifested in response to their experience with legal aid nonetheless. In part, the goal of this study is to better understand how and why primary stakeholders feel the way they do about the collaboration process, and to inform a path forward that capitalizes on strengths and begins to address some of the stakeholders' concerns.

The Current Study

The personal, theoretical, and historical background described thus far led me to design this study in the hope of better understanding a specific context in which I spent three years as a community organizer. During my time as an organizer in the legal aid environment, I was preoccupied with the idea of community collaboration because that was my job. Admittedly I had a specific definition in mind about the ideal type and purpose of collaboration, i.e. that it should involve collective action for systemic change, and in designing this study I have attempted to be mindful of this bias and have chosen a term, collaboration, that is relatively unrestrictive in connotation. I have also chosen a methodology, constructivist grounded theory

(CGT), which is particularly well-suited to examination of a social process in a specific context (Charmaz, 2006). The two questions this study addresses are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of legal aid attorneys and client community members related to collaboration between legal aid programs and the communities they serve?

2. What are the perceived benefits, challenges, and desired outcomes of community collaboration in this context?

To address these questions, I gathered data through 28 intensive semi-structured interviews and two focus groups. Participants were drawn from two primary stakeholder groups: legal aid attorneys and client community members. A third stakeholder group, legal aid partner agency representative, was identified during the study and added into the sample. This process of extending the sample for theoretical reasons, or *theoretical sampling,* is common in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012) and will be discussed further in chapter three.

Purpose

The immediate purpose of the study is to better understand how collaboration occurs between legal aid attorneys and client community members, thus informing the work of those who would seek to build on and strengthen the collaborative practices as they currently exist. While scholars have addressed the importance of engaging client community members in the work of legal aid organizations at a political and philosophical level (Ashar, 2008, Gordon, 2007), empirical evidence to explain how this is possible and why it is necessary, particularly from both the legal aid client and attorney perspectives, is limited (Cummings, 2006; Shdaimah, 2009; Trubek, 2005).

A broader purpose of the study, related to troubling external trends and circumstances, exists as well. Specifically, with poverty rates, inequality, and measures of civic engagement holding steady or growing worse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), the need for those concerned with social justice to engage in new, democratic, and participatory approaches to poverty alleviation is acute (Alperowitz, 2013; Brady, 2012; Rusch, 2008; Williamson, 2010). Over the last three decades, the ability of legal aid programs and other human service organizations to engage and work alongside communities has been steadily eroded by policies and ideologies hostile to collective action (Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012; NLADA, 2011; Shdaimah, 2009). Despite these trends, as well as the inadequacy of non-collaborative, individual legal strategies in addressing some of the most urgent and pressing poverty-related concerns their clients face (Ashar, 2008; Lieberman, 2011), legal aid programs still represent a powerful infrastructure with the capacity to substantially alter numerous social problems associated with poverty (Ashar, 2007; Rhode, 2008).

Importance to Social Work

The social work profession is committed to self-determination and taking action to change social realities that disproportionately impact vulnerable populations (NASW, 2008). As practitioners, social workers are expected to value the engagement of clients and communities in decisions about the interventions that affect their lives (CSWE, 2013a). The prospect of deepening understanding of community collaboration in the legal aid context is therefore a worthy goal of systematic inquiry, not only for the benefit of the social work profession but for anyone committed to community-based social change and the alleviation of poverty.

Further, with its core professional commitments to interprofessional collaboration (CSWE, 2013a; Korazim-Korosy, Mizrahi, Bayne-Smith, & Garcia, 2014; NASW, 2008), social

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work has a vested interest in the effectiveness of other professional human service settings, and therefore to legal aid programs' efforts toward community collaboration in particular (Block & Soprych, 2011; Shdaimah, 2009). Scholars in both professions have commented on the benefits of collaboration between social work and the law (Block & Soprych; Cole, 2012; Galowitz, 1999), and the compatibility and common interests between legal aid and social work have deep historical roots (Batlan, 2015). Not only did the first legal aid organization coincide with the first settlement houses (Houseman & Perle, 2007; Reisch & Andrews, 2001), but social workers actually served as "lay lawyers" in these early years (Batlan, 2015).

The above commitments and interests, shared by legal aid, social work, and the communities served by both professions, have implications for social work educators and practitioners. Social work students should be aware of the important services provided by legal aid because their future clients might rely on those very same services. Similarly, social work practitioners would benefit from increased understanding of legal aid organizations and how they function. At the interpersonal practice level, clients of social workers may need legal assistance and vice versa. At the community practice level, social workers and legal aid attorneys have compatible knowledge bases that would lead to effective interprofessional collaboration in policy advocacy, community organization, and other methods of intervention.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation seeks to advance understanding of the perceptions and experiences of legal aid attorneys and client community members related to collaboration between legal aid programs and the communities they serve. This research also attempts to further knowledge regarding the benefits, challenges, and desired outcomes of community collaboration in the legal aid context. This first chapter has offered an overview of my personal experiences and

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perspectives that led me to the research questions and design of this study. I have provided a brief history of legal aid broadly and introduced the Virginia legal aid context more specifically. Finally, I have briefly discussed the study design and its importance to social work.

Chapter two provides a review of the literature related to legal aid, social work community practice, four theoretical perspectives that inform this research, and the grounded theory methodology. I introduce and develop several relevant terms related to the study and explain why I chose collaboration as the central concept of this study. I frame the study using the theoretical perspectives of Jurgen Habermas' writings on the public good, Pierre Bourdieu's work on forms of capital, John Dewey's writings on participatory democracy, and Michel Foucault's poststructuralist perspective on power. I then review the major variations of grounded theory and how they relate to philosophy of science.

Chapter three focuses on the constructivist grounded theory study design used to implement this research. I explicate and justify the strategies used in data collection, data analysis, and presentation of findings. I also examine the criteria used to evaluate constructivist grounded theory, i.e. the standards of rigor.

In chapter four I present the findings of the study. These include the conceptual framework constructed from my analysis and interpretation of the interview transcripts, a report of the major categories of findings using composite characters, and six lessons learned that connect the findings to possible next steps.

Chapter five includes a discussion of the findings, and implications for education, practice, and policy. While the findings are specific to the studied context and not intended to be generalized, I suggest areas for consideration in legal and social work education, social work and

legal aid practice, and policies related to legal aid and human services funding. Finally, I

propose directions for future research based on the findings of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to place the study in relation to existing scholarship and theoretical perspectives. In the first part of this section I clarify terms used in and relevant to the study. Of considerable interest are terms related to engaging with community and terms used to describe the activities of attorneys whose work extends beyond assisting individual clients. In the second part I address theoretical positions derived from the legal aid literature with regard to how attorneys, and the organizations by which they are employed, engage with clients and client communities to create change. This part also considers the level at which an attorney's work is focused -- individual, community, or social movement -- and the possible implications of working at different points on this continuum. The third part connects the study to both Dewey and Habermas' participatory democracy and to Bourdieu's social and cultural capital. The fourth part addresses the concept of "community practice" from a social work perspective and includes a discussion of why the current study is central to the scope and concerns of social work practice. The fifth part interrogates -- or to use a postmodern term "troubles" -- the totalizing aspects of the perspectives discussed by introducing a Foucauldian lens that emphasizes the micropolitical and intersubjective aspects of the topic at hand. The sixth and final part provides a methodological background of grounded theory research.

Relevant Terms

Transdisciplinary research seeks to combine concepts and methods from one academic field or discipline with those of another field or discipline. Interdisciplinary, meanwhile, describes research in which perspectives from multiple disciplines are used but are not combined

into a common framework (Lawrence, 2004). In this study, the social work researcher will collaborate with practitioners in another field (law), and the analytic description or grounded theory developed reflects an integration of the two disciplinary perspectives. In this sense the proposed research is transdisciplinary (Lawrence, 2004; Stokols, 2006). When research involves multiple disciplinary perspectives, it becomes especially important to discuss and define relevant terms. Terminology that is inconsistently used and understood has the potential to create unnecessary noise in the data collection, analysis, and dissemination processes. My hope in this section is to develop a taxonomy of terms that either may not be familiar to the reader or may be defined in different ways. I will define terms for the purposes of the current study and justify the terms I use and the context in which I use them. I will also mention terms that are relevant and came up in the research process, but which I do not emphasize in the design of this study.

The first set of terms needing attention are those related to the concept of working with community. The following terms will be used in this document: community collaboration, community mobilization, community organizing, community engagement, and community lawyering. These terms, each used to describe an approach that involves working with community members and taking a participatory rather than exclusionary stance in relation to community, cannot be cleanly distinguished because they overlap conceptually. These terms have nuances and connotations that must be parsed and explicated to minimize confusion.

Community collaboration suggests any activity that involves a shared process toward a common goal. It is a broad term, and in the current study it is embraced as a term that keeps the conversation open rather than forcing it in a particular direction. Social work as a profession considers collaboration a critical aspect of practice. It is consistent with social work's normative positions regarding self-determination and human relationships, as outlined in the National

Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008). One of the ten core competencies ratified by the Council on Social Work Education calls on the social worker ("worker") to "engage in policy practice" and "collaborate with colleagues and clients for effective policy action" (CSWE, 2013). Lawson (2013) characterizes collaboration as a process that "develops interdependent relationships among people," which are "cemented by norms of reciprocity and trust, enabling participants to organize for collective action in response to 'wicked' problems characterized by uncertainty, novelty, and complexity" (p. 2). While Lawson singles out "organizing for collective action" as one venue in which collaboration is critical, he goes on to point out that collaboration can be an essential component of a wide range of practice areas including mental health, substance abuse, school social work, workforce development, and research. One of the attractive aspects of the term *collaboration* for the current research is that it connotes an approach with multiple applications rather than a set of activities with prescribed outcomes. Still, it should be reiterated that collaboration connotes reciprocity and interdependence, and as such the term carries normative weight.

In the legal aid framework collaboration occupies similar conceptual space. In her landmark study on lawyer-client decisionmaking in civil rights and anti-poverty contexts, Southworth (1996) demonstrates that collaboration is a relevant point of discussion across a wide range of lawyer-client situations, not just communities, classes, and other collective clients. Shdaimah (2009) underlines this point by framing her entire study on the collaboration that takes place between legal aid lawyers and individual clients. She points out that much of the "progressive lawyering" literature is skewed toward an oversimplified dichotomy between approaches in which lawyers work toward social justice through collective and collaborative strategies and those in which lawyers work mainly to alleviate the effects of poverty for

individual clients. Shdaimah illustrates that work with individual clients can certainly have an underlying collaborative ethos and be grounded in values that emphasize social justice. These perspectives run counter to Piomelli (2006) and others who refer to *collaborative lawyering* as a process in which lawyers "act not as saviors or champions, but rather as partners in collective ventures to change the world" (Piomelli, 2006, p. 544). Piomelli's assertion notwithstanding that collaborative lawyering is synonymous with *community lawyering* (I discuss this term below)*, the stances of Southworth and Shdaimah suggest that collaboration is a broader term that encompasses individual and collective work. I embrace this less rigid view of collaboration, and use the term as the main point of departure for this study for the very reason that it gives flexibility to participants and does not foreclose on conversations that could reveal valuable insights about how legal aid lawyers and programs work with communities.

Two other terms, *community mobilization* and *community organizing,* are highly relevant to this study because they are more specific in their association with radical approaches to change and therefore help define potential fault lines in the ways in which participants might conceptualize their collaborative work. At the risk of oversimplifying, collaboration is a component (in most cases) of community mobilization and organizing, but the converse is not true. Collaboration does not necessarily include mobilization or organizing. As discussed above it can occur between one client and one lawyer.

Mobilization and organizing both push the conversation toward a normative stance regarding collective action and, particularly in the case of organizing, systemic change. While they seem to be used interchangeably in some cases, mobilization often brings emphasis to the act of bringing people together, while organizing is more expansive in scope. It is instructive that community organizing manuals and textbooks are common (see Bobo, Kendall, & Max,

2010; Kahn, 2010; Minkler, 2005; Pyles, 2013; and Staples, 2004), while those on community mobilization are rare[2]. In the legal aid literature, however, a conflation of the two terms seems to occur, with Ashar (2008) favoring mobilization, Hung (2008) and Quigley (1994) preferring organizing, and Cummings (with Eagly, 2001; and 2006) using both. Still, when one considers that mobilization, not organizing, is used by certain scholars to refer to the process of bringing the community together in a non-adversarial way to implement an (often health-related) intervention (see Allison, Edmonds, Wilson, Pope, & Farrell, 2011; Backer & Guerra, 2011; Frew, Archibald, Martinez, Rio, & Mulligan, 2007; and Gittelman & Pomerantz, 2011), the distinction again becomes more clear. While both terms suggest people working (or being brought) together toward a particular outcome or set of outcomes, *organizing* has a wider scope and a more consistent relationship with the goal of system change by contested or consensual political means.

Another relevant term, especially given this study's focus on the client communities and staff attorneys of legal aid programs, is *community lawyering*. On its webpage describing a course in community lawyering, the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law frames community lawyering as "promoting an expansive view of a legal aid lawyer's role" and "stress[ing] the importance of thinking beyond litigation (while retaining litigation as a vital tool) in addressing the kinds of structural problems low-income communities face" (Shriver Center, n.d.). This definition is notable in three ways. First, it refers to an "expansive" view of a legal aid attorney's role, and implies that the scope of the "typical" view is limited to litigation. At the same time, the definition retains litigation as a key role, i.e. it adds to a legal aid lawyer's job description rather than replacing one set of responsibilities with another. Third, the definition

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[2] In fact the only book of this description found in a library search conducted by the author is Kretzmann & McKnight (1993).

explicitly cites "structural problems" as the intended target of a community lawyer's efforts. To reinforce the course's structural emphasis, desired outcomes are described as learning "the multi-tactic tools of a successful advocacy campaign, including media and outreach skills, facilitative leadership, action research, targeted planning, and campaign feasibility" (Shriver Center, n.d.). In this definition and course description one can see similarities conceptually between community organizing and community lawyering. Indeed the only clear distinction between the two is that community lawyers are expected to contribute expertise in litigation in addition to most of the knowledge and skills associated with community organizing.

Michael Diamond (2000) provides another, more detailed articulation of the role of community lawyers. In contrast to the typical rights-based orientation of attorneys, he argues that communities need lawyers who not only assert the legal rights of clients, but also help build individual and institutional power using strategies that are more relational and political than legal at their core. A key link between Diamond's analysis and that of Southworth (1996) and Shdaimah (2009) is the emphasis on personal empowerment and the sharing of power between attorneys and client communities (or members thereof). Far from privileging the desired outcomes at institutional and structural levels, these authors center the relational and provide a reminder that opportunities for change exist and reverberate at multiple levels of engagement, from interpersonal to macro-structural.

Still, for an open and exploratory study such as this one, the challenge posed with the term community lawyering is that it sets expectations perceived as unattainable. Participants would assume that the researcher was suggesting that they should assume the burden of these expectations. For this reason the term was not emphasized formally in this study, though it came up in interviews and in the analysis. It is also an example of why intensive interviewing is the

primary method of data collection used. Unlike more structured interviews, intensive

interviewing allows for flexibility in how topics and questions are introduced (Charmaz, 2006), a

point discussed further in the methodology section.

While for the strategic reason I have just identified the starting point for conversations

with participants in this study was community *collaboration* rather than community *organizing,*

mobilization, or *lawyering,* this is not to say that the study does not have an interest in these more

specific collective or radical approaches to working with communities. In fact the opposite is

true: collective change is a first-order concern of this dissertation and I acknowledge my vested

interest in having those conversations. I argue, however, that this study more effectively

captures the experiences and perceptions of participants, which then leads to a more robust

analysis and more useful outcomes, by using inclusive language to start and allowing participants

to frame their own perspectives with greater specificity. It also bears mentioning that while the

researcher in constructivist grounded theory is not expected to take a value-neutral position, the

methodology recommends deep reflexivity on the researcher's part in order to avoid unconscious

biases that can skew analysis and theory development (Charmaz, 2006). I elaborate on this point

in the methodology section as well.

Continuing the above discussion, the next set of terms relates to attorneys whose work is

oriented to a social justice agenda. The five terms used with some frequency are *community*

lawyer, *cause lawyer*, *collaborative lawyer*, *progressive lawyer*, and *social justice lawyer*. These

terms are also used as gerunds, i.e. community lawyer*ing*, cause lawyer*ing*, and so on. The term

community lawyer has already been discussed. It is primarily used to suggest that in addition to

advocating for clients' legal rights, lawyers should (and yes, the normative "should" is critical)

actively assume roles in the empowerment of clients and communities, either through their legal

advocacy or through community organizing and social movement activities (Diamond, 2000; Shriver Center, n.d.). The next term, *cause lawyer*, refers to an attorney who connects her work to one or more sets of social change goals or outcomes. Cause lawyers in the second half of the twentieth century, for example, supported movements related to African Americans' civil rights, women's rights, and equal protection regardless of sexual orientation (Sarat & Scheingold, 2006). Lawyers do not, however, necessarily need a movement to have a cause. Sarat and Scheingold explain that "if causes are abstract and disembodied, movements tend to be more concrete and embodied in the people who work in and for them, the organizations that represent them, and in the actions taken to advance the movement's goals" (p. 2). In relation to legal aid organizations, attorneys might consider themselves working on behalf of the *cause* of poverty reduction or alleviation, and thus consider themselves cause lawyers. They may or may not consider themselves to be part of any coherent anti-poverty movement, however, in which decisions and activities are coordinated by movement participants. It is possible that some view legal aid itself as a movement, and therefore by virtue of their employment they are part of that movement. In that scenario, the question for this study would be the extent to which client communities feel or are perceived as participants in the legal aid movement as well.

The next term, *collaborative lawyer*, is used inconsistently in the literature, and most frequently it is used to describe those who practice law in a non-adversarial manner (see Lande & Herman, 2004, and Tesler, 2011). Despite Piomelli's (2006) counterexample, which falls more in line with the topic at hand, the predominant usage occurs in the context of family law practice. In light of the potential for confusion regarding the term *collaborative lawyer*, the usage of that term *per se* will be avoided in this document. Usage of the noun *collaboration*, meanwhile, as well as the verb *collaborate* and its other grammatical forms, will reflect

Lawson's (2013) definition, which emanates from the profession of social work and emphasizes activities taken on jointly and in the spirit of reciprocity and interdependence.

The last two terms, *progressive lawyer* and *social justice lawyer*, are used in similar ways to describe a broader category of attorneys who work at various levels toward the goal of progressive social change. The Center for Constitutional Rights, a nonprofit legal and educational organization, conducts an internship program in which they train the "next generation of social justice lawyers" to "work alongside social movements, community organizations, and impacted individuals" (Center for Constitutional Rights [CCR], 2013, para. 2). As this statement suggests, the scope of these terms extends beyond individual advocacy. For this study, a relevant facet of the discourse surrounding these terms is the contested status of individual versus collective advocacy. Shdaimah (2009) argues that the progressive lawyering literature undervalues the practice of poverty law at the individual level, and that individual lawyers and clients pursue their immediate goals while retaining a more comprehensive worldview that can be described as progressive or social justice-oriented. Sharpless (2012) adds a feminist critique of the hierarchy, arguing that individual advocacy is marginalized as "women's work" in the progressive lawyering discourse. She also contends that systemic advocacy depends on individual advocacy for its legitimacy and empirical foundation, and that the progressive movement is undermined by placing unequal value on different work foci. Sharpless' perspective stands as a reminder that the author's community organizing bias toward collective and systemic advocacy should be examined in the course of implementing this research.

To conclude, the variety of terms related to community and collaboration is an indication of both the interest in this area of practice and its complexity. The choice of community

collaboration as the primary focus of this study is made in acknowledgment of its open-ended

scope of interpretation. Collaborating as an activity and intervention sits at a higher level of

abstraction than organizing, mobilizing, and engaging, and therefore lends itself to a more

inclusive process of knowledge creation that is consistent with the guidelines that have been

developed for CGT research (Charmaz, 2000; 2006).

Legal Aid and Community

As one might glean from the previous discussion about terminology, the views about and

evidence related to how legal aid programs interact with communities is similarly varied. This

part focuses on three angles from which to get perspective on this topic. One is the question of a

lawyer's role, i.e. how attorneys conceptualize and carry out their work, how narrowly or broadly

they define their work, and to what extent they see their work constrained by the legal system as

opposed to subverting or finding alternatives to existing institutions. A second is the level at

which change is sought -- individual, community, or societal. A third is the nature of the

relationship between attorneys and the individuals, entities, or communities with whom they are

working, and the implications of different approaches to that relationship. By exploring from

these angles, a picture comes into focus of a legal aid landscape that is decidedly fluid, multi-

faceted, and emergent.

An attorney's role. In their study of lawyer activists working throughout Africa, White

and Perelman (2011) argue that attorneys concerned with social change must view themselves as

more than experts on legal procedures and strategies. Such attorney-activists' work is decidedly

political, and they must treat it as such in order to be effective. Rather than a resigned stance

regarding the constraints of legal strategies, that is, they need to adopt a posture of willingness

and cultivate an adeptness in situations that require "breaking rules, improvisation, and

(re)claiming of political power" (p.8). White and Perelman's stance regarding the flexible and even transgressive role of social change lawyers is not universal but serves as a helpful guidepost nonetheless. If a lawyer is trained to exercise certain skills and apply certain knowledge, what does it mean when the boundaries of the legal system must be crossed? In his conceptual analysis of social justice lawyering, Piomelli (2006) agrees that the work extends far beyond what is strictly considered the practice of law. Specifically, lawyers working with low-income clients should "encourage collective action in which lawyers, clients, community groups, and other allies work together, in legal, political, social, and other spheres, to change social conditions" (pp. 547-548). In Piomelli's view this brand of lawyering at its core is about nothing less than strengthening and deepening democracy because it leads to the full participation in society of those previously confined to the margins. Trubek (2005) offers a variation on this analysis that locates social justice attorneys as key players in responding to a new, increasingly privatized and post-regulatory reality. In essence, she argues that the roles of attorneys are potentially redemptive in their capacity to restore the principle of participatory democracy, but the key question is how to bridge the gulf between the previous (and to some degree current), outdated mode of action with what is needed from today forward in order to create more just and functional public systems. Unlike police departments, public schools, departments of social services, and other frontline public agencies that comprise the public welfare system (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003), the existence of legal aid programs to some degree reflects the inadequacy and even failure of public bureaucracies (Trubek, 2005).

Whether in response to an intrinsic moral imperative, strategic exigencies, or external social and political developments, a consensus begins to take shape to some degree that progressive attorneys' work does not and should not neatly fit previously cast molds. The

demands are too great and the systemic challenges too severe to focus exclusively on individual

advocacy (Ashar, 2008; Piomelli, 2006). Traditional legal skills and knowledge are no longer as

valued or as effective as they once were (Trubek, 2005). Conservative courts, devolution, and

federal restrictions on systemic advocacy have rendered impact litigation a less potent tool

(Cummings, 2006; Trubek, 2005). Taken together, these findings underscore the value of

empirical evidence that lays the groundwork for new directions in legal and political advocacy

grounded in social justice. Trubek summarizes this point:

> [C]an new institutions and styles of dialogue assist in figuring out how to solve these
>
> policy issues? A further challenge is to identify, analyze, and theorize about how the
>
> actual practices of lawyers are changing to reflect their search to create a more equal,
>
> sustainable, and participatory society. This requires studying how lawyers are practicing,
>
> their relationships with their clients, and their relationships with their communities. As
>
> part of this reassessment, access to empirical information about what is happening at the
>
> ground level, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of existing institutions and processes,
>
> is essential. (pp. 461-462)

The current study heeds this call to "identify, analyze, and theorize" the collaborative practices

of attorneys and client communities. Two relevant aspects of these practices are the level at

which action takes place and the nature of the attorney-client relationship.

Level of action. In the 1960s and 1970s, during the initial and rapid expansion of social

justice-oriented law practices, the external political environment was conducive to the attainment

of social justice goals through litigation and other advocacy at the federal bureaucratic level

(Trubek, 2005). By necessity, as the external environment has shifted to become more hostile to

certain legal and collective strategies designed to create positive social change (Hasenfeld &

Garrow, 2012), social justice attorneys have redirected their energies toward individual client advocacy (Ashar, 2008). While increased emphasis on individual work is a common response to more conservative courts, devolution, and privatization, it is not the only possible response. Progressively minded attorneys have also begun to identify multi-disciplinary and collaborative strategies, especially ones that lead to local and state-level solutions (Cummings, 2006; Trubek, 2005).

Among those who write about social justice lawyering (Ashar, 2007; 2008; Cummings, 2006; Piomelli, 2006), a bias can be detected in favor of collectively enacted systemic change work. While perhaps this should come as no surprise given the inherently systemic nature of social justice, a critique of the *de facto* level of action hierarchy bears mentioning as well because it raises issues of micropolitics and self-determination that are relevant to the current study and to the author's own theoretical perspective. Sharpless (2012), for example, asserts that individual and collective strategies are mutually beneficial, and indeed that systemic advocacy is dependent on the lessons gained and relationships developed through work with individuals. Shdaimah's (2009) findings also align with the view that individual, not just systemic, advocacy goes hand in hand with an analysis grounded in social justice. Further, participants in her study on legal aid attorneys and their individual clients explain that the daily struggles of individuals living in poverty do not afford them the time or energy to consider, plan, and implement systemic change strategies whose chances of success are uncertain. The interplay between individual and systemic advocacy, as discussed in chapters four and five, was indeed a theme that emerged in this study.

The attorney-client relationship. Piomelli (2006) argues that in addition to encouraging collective action, the second aim of a social justice lawyer's work is to "avoid re-

enacting the very sort of subordinating relations clients seek help in combating" (p. 547). With this assertion a link is drawn between the present discussion and the micropolitical implications of attorney-client relations with which Foucault and other postmodern thinkers are concerned. A more in-depth treatment of Foucault's relevance to the current study is included as a separate part of this section below, but Piomelli also points toward the need to unpack the attorney-client relationship in more detail.

In her landmark study of Chicago-based social justice attorneys, Southworth (1996) finds that lawyer-client decisionmaking is considerably more nuanced than the binary of deference and paternalism that permeates the social justice lawyering literature. She demonstrates that context is crucial, and identifies five factors that can impact decisionmaking dynamics between lawyer and client. These factors serve as points of theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2006) as I prepare to conduct this study.

The first factor, funding sources and constraints of a lawyer's work, is exemplified by a situation in which a lawyer is deferential to a client who is paying for services, or conversely a situation in which an overworked attorney with scarce resources at his disposal does not perceive empowerment of clients as time well spent. The second factor is client sophistication and expectations, which refers to a client's level of understanding and worldliness or to a group client's level of organizational cohesion and power. The duration of the lawyer-client relationship is the third factor, which suggests that clients who work with attorneys over a longer timeframe gain greater control of decisionmaking as a result of improved rapport and trust. The type of work and activities performed by the lawyer can be another factor in that technical processes such as litigation lend themselves to greater control by attorneys, while collaborative advocacy and organizing leave room for various expertise. The fifth factor identified by

Southworth is the lawyer's political orientation and values. Since social change attorneys often have their own personal stake in how they want a situation to unfold, there is potentially a conflict with a client's interests or goals.

In another respect, relationship building with clients can be perceived as a goal that, in circumstances of scarce resources, competes with systemic social justice goals. Cummings (2004) argues that a tension exists between a lawyer's ethical obligations to advocate for his client and to promote the common good. In part this tension results from a lawyer not having the luxury to choose her clients, but there is also an opportunity cost in helping individuals, i.e. other activities that might have a systemic impact must fall by the wayside. In this sense the lawyer-client relationship cannot be removed from the previous conversation about the level at which change is sought. Nurturing relationships at the individual level at some point takes time away from strategizing for structural change.

Whereas Southworth (1996) finds that client input is stronger in collective versus individual advocacy, other studies demonstrate variance among different types of collective advocacy as well. When compared to adversarial organizing approaches, for example, collaborative community development tends to be more expert-driven and less participatory (Cummings, 2006). It is a greater challenge to incorporate grassroots voices in a meaningful way when the principal form of collaboration is at the expert level (DeSena, 2004: Stoecker, 2004). Again the concept of opportunity cost has relevance since the time and energy put toward collaboration across fields of expertise can displace resources potentially expended to engage those directly impacted by a social problem.

Conclusion. In this part I have provided some basis for the argument that the relationship between legal aid and community is an area worthy of further inquiry. The role of

the attorney, the level at which change is sought, and the attorney-client relationship are three

overlapping factors in play within this broader relationship. As I embark on the implementation

of this study, the previous work done in this area will inform my actions in the same way that my

personal theoretical perspective will result is certain urges and tendencies. As a constructivist

grounded theory researcher, I do not claim to start with a blank theoretical slate, but I also do not

relieve myself of responsibility to acknowledge and take into account prior knowledge and

predisposition (Thornberg, 2012; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). I turn next to three theoretical

perspectives that both resonate with my own critical lens and strike chords within the set of

phenomena at the heart of this study and study design.

Three Theoretical Perspectives

Aside from redressing social injustice, community organizing is considered a means by

which to create a more robust and engaged democracy (Rusch, 2008). Concerns about declining

levels of civic engagement and participation have been registered across numerous fields and

with various points of emphasis. The profession of social work has a stated interest in

contributing to the political discourse, specifically with regard to the involvement of oppressed

and vulnerable populations (CSWE, 2013a; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

Williamson's (2010) empirical and philosophical study from a political science

perspective takes suburban sprawl as its pivot point and demonstrates how automobile-based

metropolitan growth in the United States effectively degrades the social contract. A number of

studies have assessed the role of faith communities in galvanizing civic participation through

networks of congregations who work together on social justice issues (see Christens, 2010;

Rusch, 2008; Warren, 2009). Rather than consider a particular aspect of democratic participation,

Dodge's (2010) focus is on the process of deliberation itself by which civil society organizations

gain access to the democratic process. Her work provides a conceptual bridge from specific

examples or aspects of democratic participation to the idea itself, the space and process through

which it is fostered, and the theoretical justification for working to enhance its practice.

I select three major conceptualizations of public relationships -- Jurgen Habermas' *The*

Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989), Pierre Bourdieu's *Forms of Capital*

(1986), and John Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* (1927/2012) -- to help frame this study.

I choose these three perspectives in part because of their conceptual connections to the content

and methodology of this study, and also in part because they resonate within my personal

worldview, grounded in themes of struggle and injustice. I start with Habermas because he

presents a coherent view on a grand narrative scale of the history and purpose of public opinion

formation, a topic with which community organizing is directly concerned. I consider Habermas'

main argument as well as a critique that is germane to this project. Second I take up Bourdieu

and his critical view of how social and cultural capital flow in the modern world. Scholars of

community organizing invoke Bourdieu with some regularity since he offers a theoretical

explanation for the need to bring communities together to counteract if-left-unchecked societal

flows of economic and non-economic capital. I argue that his relevance is amplified here in that

his critique can also be applied to the Habermasian view of the public sphere. Third I bring

Dewey's perspective to the fore. As a major voice in the pragmatist school, Dewey has

connections to the social work profession's own pragmatist roots through his collaboration with

Jane Addams and the settlement house movement (Nackenoff, 2009; Seigfried, 2009).

Methodologically Dewey's work overlaps with the interpretive design and underlying

assumptions of this study as well. He assumes participatory democracy is a worthy goal, indeed

the highest goal (Rogers, 2012), but in the methods by which that goal is attained he is much less

prescriptive, suggesting that these processes must be determined, implemented, and evaluated by local contexts and local stakeholders (Dewey, 2012). In his introduction to Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems,* Melvin Rogers (2012) writes, "Forming the will of the democratic community, for Dewey, is a process of thoughtful interaction in which the preferences of citizens are both informed and transformed by public deliberation as citizens struggle to decide which policies will best satisfy and address the commitments and needs of the community" (p. 4). In total, these three theorists span the conceptual distance from my own critical orientation to the methodological interpretivism that informs the design of this study.

Following in the theoretical footsteps of earlier critical theorists Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas is identified with the post-Holocaust iteration of the Frankfurt School, which was faced with the challenge of reconciling the potential common good served by modern rationality with the worldwide calamity of fascism (Farmer, 2010). Habermas' work on spaces that enrich democratic participation is an attempt to refute the view that modern rationalism must lead to unadulterated horrors. His work, as it happens, also has direct bearing on the need for processes like those at the center of this study (Habermas,1989; Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974). In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* Habermas traces the history of public discourse and the formation of public opinion in the West from Ancient Greece to the present. Mainly, Habermas is concerned with how the process by which public opinion is articulated has changed as public and private institutions develop, grow, and transform. With the advent of the exchange economy, for example, the concept of public opinion became more diffuse, and as societies became more industrialized and complex, public opinion formation became a more complicated process still. Competition among a vast array of conflicting interests, along with the phenomenon of class

struggle, meant that the public sphere could no longer be conceptualized as a single space of public opinion formation. The media has also become more fractured while at the same time taking on a critical role in the public sphere. It is not clear what the shifting nature of the public sphere has meant for communities and civil society organizations. Habermas seems to suggest that while it has become *possible* for more people and more types of people to participate in forming public opinion, it has also become prohibitively too complicated to have an impact without the resources and organization to amplify one's perspective.

Along with Fraser (2010), I argue that Habermas never provides an answer to the question of how public opinion should be fully attended to in late modern welfare state democracies. In particular, one problem with Habermas' conception of the public sphere that he never resolves is its tendency to replicate patterns of exclusion. Building on the work of Geoff Eley, Fraser (2010) states,

> In all these countries [where public spheres were taking hold]...the soil that nourished the liberal sphere was 'civil society,' the emerging new congeries of voluntary associations that sprung up in what came to be known as 'the age of societies.' But this network of clubs and associations -- philanthropic, civic, professional, and cultural -- was anything but accessible to everyone. On the contrary, it was the arena, the training ground, and eventually the power base of a stratum of bourgeois men who were coming to see themselves as a 'universal class' and preparing to assert their fitness to govern. (p. 131)

Fraser goes on to challenge the following four assumptions that are embedded in Habermas' conception of the public sphere: 1) the public sphere can overcome social inequality by effectively bracketing social status; 2) the public sphere is singular, and the idea of multiple publics is counter to the goal of robust and open public discourse; 3) private matters and interests

have no place in the public sphere; and 4) the realms of the state and civil society should be considered clearly and wholly separate. Fraser's critique of Habermas rests on the following four counterpoints to the assumptions above: the public sphere has the potential to replicate (rather than overcome) patterns of social inequality; the public sphere is varied and inclusive of multiple publics, and the idea of one public can lead to the silencing of alternative perspectives; the term "private" is subjectively defined, and in many cases matters some consider relevant to the common good might be dismissed by others as domestic or workplace-oriented and therefore not relevant to the public sphere; and requiring a clear demarcation between the state and the public sphere forecloses on the possibility of productive interaction between "strong" (decision-making) publics and "weak" (deliberative) publics. The tensions that emerge between Habermas' ideal vision of a public sphere and Fraser's critique thereof foreshadow the postmodern perspective discussed later in this part. Despite the critiques of Fraser and others (see also Dahlberg, 2005) regarding Habermas' vision of a singular public sphere untainted by inequality, state intrusion, or private agendas, Habermas nonetheless provides a detailed point of reference for discussion of participatory democracy at a high level of abstraction. The next perspective introduced, Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) delineation of different types of capital, brings theoretical attention to entrenched inequality and its ramifications in the promotion of democratic participation.

The concept of non-economic forms of capital has gained prominence over the last 15 years, largely as a result of Robert Putnam's (2000) treatise on social capital in the influential book *Bowling Alone.* Cited in more than 26,000 journal articles and books (Google Scholar, 2013) and widely hailed as a groundbreaking work, Putnam's analysis has nonetheless been criticized for being more descriptive than critical and for failing to fully examine the role of

privilege and oppression in determining how social capital is distributed and accrued (DeFilippis, 2001; Siisiainen, 2003). Bourdieu's analysis of social (and other forms of) capital, by contrast, is consistent with his critical theoretical perspective and the emphasis on struggle and structural injustice throughout his body of work (Wacquant, 1992). In this representative quote Bourdieu contrasts the historical and "accumulated" nature of capital with the ahistorical fantasy of equal opportunity:

> Roulette, which holds out the opportunity of winning a lot of money in a short space of
>
> time, and therefore of changing one's social status quasi-instantaneously, and in which
>
> the winning of the previous spin of the wheel can be staked and lost at every new spin,
>
> gives a fairly accurate image of this imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect
>
> equality of opportunity, a world without inertia, without accumulation, without heredity
>
> or acquired properties, in which every moment is perfectly independent of the previous
>
> one, every soldier has a martial's baton in his knapsack, and every prize can be attained,
>
> instantaneously, by everyone, so that at each moment anyone can become anything.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241)

Bourdieu's consideration of power, inequality, and other aspects of social and historical context render his perspective a relevant point of theoretical sensitivity for this study.

Bourdieu's perspective is compatible with the process of community organizing in particular insofar as he establishes the need to challenge patterns of capital distribution that would otherwise continue to be reproduced (DeFillipis, 2001; Rusch, 2008). Like Loury (1981), one of the first to use the term, Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital lies at the intersection of human capital and social position, i.e. it reflects the manner and degree to which one's social circumstances affect one's ability to garner skills and resources. While I would

argue that the alignment between the system change goals of community organizing and

Bourdieu's critical perspective makes Bourdieu a better fit, Putnam's work has also had a major

influence on community organizing practice. For instance, powerful funders have embraced

Putnam's call for greater emphasis on social connections, and have also invoked Putnam's non-

confrontational view of social capital to encourage a more consensus-based model of community

organizing (DeFilippis, 2001). Here one can see the potential consequences, and perhaps the

potential danger depending on one's perspective, of applying social capital to community

organizing without attention to power and conflict.

A second link from Bourdieu to the current study is through the concepts of cultural

capital and the legal profession. Cultural capital is the product of educational opportunities,

formal and informal. It can be exchanged for other types of capital, e.g. social or economic,

through different transactions. On the job market, for example, cultural capital can be exchanged

for a salary that depends on the extent and specific nature of one's education. In other settings

one might gain entry into a particular social circle, i.e. accrue social capital, on the basis of one's

knowledge about art or music. Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital "defies the

old...distinction...between inherited properties and acquired properties. It thus manages to

combine the prestige of innate property with the merits of acquisition" (p. 245). The blending of

innate exclusivity and egalitarian merit makes cultural capital a nuanced phenomenon that cannot

be simplistically dismissed as an artifact of elitism. In the legal aid context, attorneys are

equipped with specialized knowledge that could, potentially, be exchanged on the job market for

a comfortable salary. Legal aid attorneys are not particularly well paid (Rhode, 2007), but

cultural capital can be measured not only by how much one receives in compensation for

knowledge and skills but also one's potential for compensation. "The ability to convert an

academic degree (cultural capital) into salary at a particular level (economic capital) means that holders of certain degrees are assumed to have the potential to possess a certain amount of economic capital regardless of whether they possess it in point of fact" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). In a society whose governance depends heavily on the creation and enforcement of laws (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2010), and whose members are granted certain "inalienable rights" enshrined in the nation's founding documents, it stands to reason that the legal profession evolved in this country as a high-status occupation. What Bourdieu highlights is the extent to which legal training, like other forms of cultural capital, is a resource that persists over time, remains connected to the individual, and can be used or exchanged in ways similar to economic capital.

Membership in a certain profession also raises the issue of social capital. The bonds between members of the same profession or organization constitute social capital that can also be used and exchanged as needs arise. Sandefur and colleagues (1999) examine the nature of social capital in the legal profession, and how attorneys serve as gatekeepers for their clients in accessing opportunities and expertise.

While social capital can be used by members of a group in solidarity with non-members, e.g. attorneys and their client communities, Bourdieu issues a reminder that social capital can reinforce difference and separation as well: "Each member of the group is thus instituted as a custodian of the limits of the group: because the definition of the criteria of entry is at stake in each new entry, he can modify the group by modifying the limits of legitimate exchange through some form of misalliance" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 250). In other words, the social capital that helps groups cohere around common attributes can also act as a deterring agent to the inclusion of those who do not share those attributes. Rusch's (2010) study of community organizing in faith communities helps crystallize the inherent tension between "bonding" social capital that

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reinforces in-group bonds and the "bridging" social capital needed to forge and nurture

intergroup relationships. Not only can bonds within a group prevent outsiders from gaining

entry, but individuals who extend themselves to create intergroup connections can suffer

diminished status within their group. This view is articulated by congregational leaders in

Rusch's study who express reluctance to collaborate with other faith groups.

Having introduced Habermas' ideal vision of the public sphere, and Bourdieu's

cautionary analysis of how context, power, and privilege can derail idealistic visions, I next raise

the possibility of Dewey as a theoretical and methodological antidote to some of the challenges

raised above.

Along with Charles Peirce, William James, and George Herbert Mead, John Dewey is

among those most clearly identified with the pragmatist school of philosophy (Scheffler, 2013).

Dewey is also associated with the early settlement house movement, which applied and extended

aspects of pragmatism into the field by emphasizing contextualized and participatory approaches

to community practice and systemic change (Nackenoff, 2009; Seigfried, 2009). Specifically,

Dewey collaborated with Jane Addams in her groundbreaking community-based work at Hull

House, one of the first and most well-known settlement houses (Addams, 1910; Harkavy &

Puckett, 1994; Nackenoff, 2009).

Dewey connects local community processes with the theory of democracy in *The Public*

and Its Problems (1927/2012), explicating the need for ongoing revitalization of the democratic

system of government through robust civic discourse. Dewey also presages the current urgency

of grassroots participation in the formation of social and political reality; in particular Dewey's

prescription for healthy democracy contrasts starkly with the current mode of monetized and

privatized influence over democratic processes, which has been ratified by the U.S. Supreme

Court (Citizens United, 2010). While Dewey's image of democracy largely implies a symbiotic and nurturing relationship between the state and the public, he reserves the possibility of a radical turn whereby factions of the public have no choice but to build power outside the system when the state cannot accommodate its needs (Rogers, 2012).

Dewey's emphasis on the role of ongoing deliberation as a mechanism to promote buy-in and unity helps resolve the conceptual chasm between "not getting one's way" and "social harmony." A critique of Dewey (and pragmatism more broadly) is that *a la* Habermas he overlooks the persistent reverberations of social stratification that render deliberative processes unfair and exclusive (Rogers, 2012; Thalin, 1986). Still, Dewey's contribution is profound in that he underscores the *process* of democracy and rejects flatly the possibility that structures are permanent, immutable, or ends in themselves (Dewey, 1927/2012). For the current study this point is especially revelatory because one can imagine commitments to collaboration that take the form of organizational structures and systems but do not result in collaborative processes. It is therefore necessary to examine the social process as it is experienced as opposed to more objective manifestations or outcomes of collaboration.

In addition to providing a source of analytic richness for this study, pragmatism and its symbolic interactionism also serve as theoretical points of reference for grounded theory scholars in general (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I discuss connections between CGT and the theoretical perspectives with which it is associated in greater depth in the methodology section. Briefly, pragmatism supports the CGT's ontological assumption that human beings are socially constituted; its epistemological underpinning that knowledge is locally created; and its emphasis on usefulness rather than universality with regard to assertions of truth (Charmaz, 2005). I turn now to a fourth theoretical perspective – Foucault's analysis of power and micro

politics – that informs my point of entry to this study and provides ballast for the first three perspectives discussed above.

A fourth perspective: Postmodern unsettling. Postmodern perspectives question totalizing narratives that purport to explain the social world in its entirety (Best & Kellner, 1991). Social theorists associated with modernism – take, for example, Marx, Weber, and Parsons – propose sweeping grand narratives by which social relations and phenomena can be explained. By contrast, postmodernists emphasize context, subjectivity, and complexity in ways that defy one-size-fits-all theoretical approaches. Despite this general distinction, however, great variation exists among postmodern thinkers just as Marx, Weber, and Parsons see and explain the world through very different lenses. Still, it is possible to identify several common themes in the work of several major theorists grouped under the banner of postmodernism. First, a concern with the micropolitical is consistently apparent in the work of Michel Foucault (1972, 1980, 1984), Jean-Francois Lyotard, and the collaborators Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Rather than assert how power and political systems work at the macro level or propose alternative structures, they examine the individual experience and how one's interests might manifest or be thwarted in interactions with others. Second, they are intensely subjective in their orientation. They do not seek to establish the existence of an objective truth, instead mining the internal realm and how one might experience the world given, or perhaps in spite of, external realities such as capitalism and industrialization. Third, they present a fragmented view of reality and social behavior that is in contrast with modernism's emphasis on coherence and rationality (Best & Kellner, 1991). Foucault, for example, uses discourse analysis to demonstrate the existence of countless socially constructed discourses as well as the phenomenon of dominant discourses that can restrict patterns of behavior and promote conformity to privileged ways of thinking (Clarke, 2009).

While other theorists are relevant in a general sense, Foucault's emphasis on knowledge, power, and discourse is especially useful in heightening theoretical sensitivity for the current study. Interaction and collaboration among attorneys, client community members, and other stakeholders can potentially be shaped substantially by multiple ways of knowing and seeing the world, asymmetrical power relations, and distinct and unequally privileged modes of communication. As such, Foucault may bring added richness to the analytical process and development of concepts, categories, and theory. Further, Foucault has received relatively more attention than other postmodern theorists in the world of social work scholarship. Leslie Margolin (1997) uses Foucauldian analysis to substantiate his argument that the profession of social work, at its core, is complicit in reinforcing oppressive regimes of control over the less powerful. Loretta Pyles (2014) includes Foucault in her discussion of theoretical perspectives relevant to progressive community organizing, specifically arguing that Foucault sheds light on how the process of narrative creation in community organizing can help subvert and replace hegemonic narratives and thus empower communities. The most thorough explication of Foucault's conceptual overlap with social work practice is provided by Adrienne Chambon and colleagues (1999). In her chapter *Foucault's Approach: Making the Familiar Visible*, Chambon (1999) asserts the need to question taken-for-granted discourses in social work that establish points of reference without acknowledging bias. Stress, for example, is one "logic" of discussing the unpleasant juggling of responsibilities and burdens, while exploitation is an alternative logic by which to engage with a similar state of affairs yet with very different points of emphasis (p. 57). Chambon also cites the fusing of self and structure in Foucault's work as a way to challenge, or "unsettle," the distinction between micro and macro levels of social work practice. Essentially,

Chambon argues, Foucault renders the self-structure binary moot by instead emphasizing institutional practices and social identities that mutually influence one another (p. 56).

In broader theoretical terms, Foucault becomes a foil to the modern perspectives discussed above, which all present a rather clear and rational, albeit critical, view of the social world. By instead highlighting the fluidity and uncertainty that characterizes social processes, Foucault challenges any *a priori* assumptions and supports the emergent nature of this project (Charmaz, 2008; Deetz, 1996). While Habermas provides an architecture for the development and enactment of the public sphere, a Foucauldian perspective might, along with Fraser (2010), suggest the existence of many publics and counter-publics that develop according to the needs and concerns of different populations. Bourdieu's analysis of social and cultural capital contains some of the characteristic elements of postmodernism. It considers social context and subjectivity, and suggests a social world that is fragmented according to experience and subjective taste. Still, the lens Bourdieu applies to this fragmented world is decidedly an economic one, and his assertions about capital (1986) and also taste (1984) take on a universal tone that is at odds with the postmodern embrace of complexity and nuance (Best & Kellner, 1991). In this respect, a Foucauldian point of view might question the certainty and determinism inherent in these assertions, and place greater emphasis on the experiences, processes, and practices associated with gaining or losing stature in the social world. Finally, with regard to Dewey's (2012) process-oriented approach to enriching democracy, Foucault's body of work casts doubt on the assumed-to-be unimpeachable goal of participatory democracy. From this standpoint, the existence of a presumed goal restricts the space needed for subjectively determined liberation.

Perspectives on Social Work and Collaboration

Given that social work is the host discipline of this dissertation and collaboration is the central concept under study, I now explore several aspects of the intersection between the two. First, I consider social work's investment in the idea and practice of collaboration. Second, I explore interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration with particular attention to the relationship between law and social work. Third, I briefly summarize and explore the rich history and tradition of collaborating with communities within social work.

Collaboration and social work. As discussed in the section on "Relevant Terms," the social work profession values collaboration and expects students to graduate with the skills necessary to collaborate effectively (CSWE, 2013a). Despite the attention to collaboration in core value statements, arriving at a consensus regarding how collaboration should be enacted or achieved is a challenge. Two aspects of collaboration rarely addressed in the literature are the role of power and how power differences can be addressed; and the specific considerations in play in collaboration between human service organizations and the communities they serve.

Ostrander and Chapin-Hogue's (2011) case study of a failed university-community organization collaboration retrospectively identified ways the university could have incentivized greater levels of interest on the part of students. These strategies included restriction of service learning options and increased accountability among students. In the end the recommendations that result from this study are more in line with the goal of increasing participation than effective collaboration. It is unclear how the authors would have defined "success" in this collaboration except that more students would have participated.

In other studies, the characteristics of effective collaboration are identified, but these characteristics can often be seen as outcomes and do not offer guidance regarding how to achieve

those characteristics. For example, Rogers (2009) found that signs of effective collaboration among faith-based social service agencies include effective communication, shared resources, and common goals and values. Without knowing how to work toward these outcomes, however, one is left with little guidance if poor communication or divergent values are in place from the start. Other studies found that organizations must consider the expenditure of resources in building relationships with other organizations (Parrish, Harris, & Pritzker, 2013). It is relevant that the unit of analysis for these studies is the organization. The assumption might be that organizations are more static in their values and capacity to communicate. The organizational focus of these studies also relates to the role of power in collaboration in that it is difficult to tease out power differentials and levels of privilege at the organizational level, especially if the types and sizes of the organizations are similar.

As with characteristics of effective collaboration, extolling the outcomes or benefits of effective collaboration might offer encouragement to those considering whether to embark on collaboration, but outcomes offer little guidance regarding how to enact the process. Wong and colleagues (2013) identified four important benefits of interorganizational collaboration between a Department of Veterans' Affairs rehabilitation center and a legal center. By contrast, Perrault and colleagues (2011) found that attention to formal and informal communication helps increase collaborative capacity and effectiveness. Still, the sample for this study consisted of members of a regional research consortium and therefore did not consider the specific challenges or opportunities of collaborating across lines of community and professional expertise.

Social work and the law. Scholars have examined the relationship between social work and the law by drawing on the historical, interprofessional, and practical elements of that relationship. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars began theorizing on the interaction between social

workers and lawyers. It was found that social workers help attorneys, but attorneys sometimes

see social workers as inferior (Scherrer, 1976). In legal aid settings, power dynamics were found

to affect interactions between the two professions (Smith, 1970), a finding reinforced by

Korozim-Korosy et al (2014) in a study of interdisciplinary community collaboration.

Galowitz (1999) studied collaboration between poverty lawyers and social workers, and

found that their skill sets were distinct yet highly compatible. In legal aid environments, social

workers can contribute an "ethic of care" – generally understood as an ontological framework

that emphasizes the relational dimensions of social problem solving (Meagher & Parton, 2004) --

for clients and ease the burden on legal aid attorneys by providing expertise that is not central to

attorneys' scope of practice (Galowitz, 1999; Retkin, Stein, & Draimin, 1994). The ethic of care

is particularly relevant in this study insofar as it is linked to the social work profession's

historical struggle to balance care with legitimacy (Freedberg, 1993) as well as the tension

perceived between individual care and systemic change efforts grounded in critical theory

(Meagher & Parton). Craige and Saur (1981) found that additional useful skills provided by

social workers include clinical evaluation, advocacy, community analysis, collaboration with

partners, and community development.

In her study of the compatibility of the two professions, Galowitz (1999) pointed out that

"the relationship between law and social work is certainly not new. As early as 1917, Mary

Richmond, a key architect of modern social work, acknowledged the role of legal authorities in

assisting her in formulating parts of her conceptual framework of casework" (p. 2130). Others

have argued that while the relationship may not be a recent development, it is nonetheless

misunderstood in fundamental ways. Felice Batlan's (2015) historical analysis of legal aid wove

together the histories of social work and legal aid, and she argued that the prevailing historical

narrative of how legal aid developed is incomplete. She found evidence that early social workers were heavily involved in legal reform and as "lay lawyers" for the poor in ways that were forgotten during the era of professionalization.

While their histories and areas of expertise suggest room for effective collaboration, the two professions adhere to distinct codes of ethics that may at times be in conflict (Cole, 2012). Some have argued that close collaboration is not practicable due to these basic differences (Galowitz, 1999). The mandates of social workers and lawyers can be at odds in that lawyers traditionally are more beholden to the instructions of their clients, while social workers' preoccupation is to consider all aspects of a situation and take whatever action will lead to the best outcome. Paradoxically, social workers are bound to support the client's self-determination, which may require letting the client take ownership and struggle in the short term. For lawyers, the primary focus is on winning the case (Galowitz, 1999). Another area of divergence is the two professions' distinct commitments to confidentiality. While social workers are mandated reporters in cases of child abuse, for example, attorneys are bound by their ethical code to maintain attorney-client confidentiality and are not required to report instances of child abuse (Cole, 2012; Galowitz, 1999).

The literature suggests that while certain challenges may arise, potential exists for valuable collaboration between social workers and attorneys in advancing client and community well-being. In the next and last part of this section, I argue that above and beyond the areas of compatibility between social work and legal aid discussed above, the social work profession is well suited to the role of broker in sites of collaboration between professionals and grassroots communities.

Social work and community practice. In this part, I first assert that several historical and conceptual attributes of social work are uniquely compatible with the interstitial nature of community-based social change practice. For example, the values and ethical commitments of social work align with the goal of bridging gaps, both between theory and practice and between professionals and community (CSWE, 2013a; NASW, 2008). Second, I make a claim that social work as a profession should concern itself with research that not only examines what social workers already do and think about, but extends the reach of social work care and influence to any site of community-based struggle for positive social change. Regardless of the current depth of involvement in legal aid-based community collaboration, the potential for positive impact is enough to warrant consideration and further study.

Social work has a long history of work alongside marginalized communities (Reisch & Andrews, 2001; Specht & Courtney, 1994). Starting with the settlement house movement in the Progressive Era, collaborative community practice has been part of social work's identity for over a century (Addams, 1910; Reisch & Andrews, 2001). Drawing heavily from, and contributing to, the budding pragmatist movement, settlement house workers emphasized social reform alongside poor communities of recent immigrants (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Nackenoff, 2009; Seigfried, 2009). Between world wars in the 1920s, the rank and file movement embraced trade unionism and radical structural change, and in so doing rejected the movement of mainstream social work toward professionalization and individual casework (Hunter, 1999; Spano, 1982).

These movements embraced a more fluid version of social work than what has been practiced over the last three decades in an increasingly fractured and specialized human services environment (Furman & Gibelman, 2013). Indeed, despite pockets of community-based

activism within social work, more often than not grassroots systemic change has not been the profession's main preoccupation (Brady, 2012; Reisch & Andrews, 2001). Since its move toward professionalization in the 1920s, the profession has sought to steadily broaden its presence in the growing American enterprise of individual mental health treatment (Specht & Courtney, 1994). In the 1960s community organizing enjoyed a period of relative emphasis in social work education, but since then the overall trend toward individual-level practice has resumed (Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Specht & Courtney, 1994). Between 5 and 10% of master's level social work students choose a "macro" concentration in their advanced year, while those who pursue "micro" or clinical concentrations make up more than 60% of the same population and the remainder pursue "advanced generalist" or other concentrations (CSWE, 2013b; Rothman, 2012).   The term "macro," it should be noted, includes administrative practice, policy practice, and other areas of practice in addition to community practice. Still, with more than 130 concentrations in areas of macro social work practice (CSWE, 2013b), and continued ratification of its commitment to systemic change in core professional standards (CSWE, 2013a), the social work profession's interest in changing contexts, not just individuals, remains.

Social work's relationship to community practice exists alongside many other academic fields and disciplines invested in this type of work, including social and community psychology, public health, political science, urban studies, law, theology, and labor relations (Mondros & Staples, 2008). It is clear that community organizing does not belong to any academic perspective in particular. A rich history also exists of the development and effective implementation of community organizing approaches by practitioners outside the academy altogether. The varied landscape of community organizing with no ties to any academic perspective is exemplified by Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation, Paulo Freire's

Creative Community Movement, the Highlander Institute, and Cesar Chavez' United Farm Workers (Brady, 2012). One challenge for scholars, therefore, is how to contribute to the effective practice of community organizing without assuming that the mode of practice itself falls under the purview of the academy as a whole, let alone any particular field or discipline.

Social work ethics highlight the importance of balancing community-based and locally driven change on the one hand, and systematic inquiry and academically trained professionals on the other. Self-determination and social justice are core principles of social work practice (NASW, 2008). Power and oppression are also lenses through which social workers are expected to analyze social problems and develop appropriate interventions (CSWE, 2013a). Social work scholars and practitioners, in other words, are expected to skillfully tread the fine line between providing support for communities and imposing professional expertise.

The current study benefits from social work's emphasis on interprofessional collaboration and the concept of praxis. Starting with the settlement houses in the late 19th century, social work has made important contributions navigating across different types of expertise and through the integration of theory and practice. Contemporaneously with the progressive era and in the same methodological tradition as Dewey's pragmatism, settlement house social workers engaged with communities on a contextualized basis rather than applying *a priori* theoretical concepts and relationships (Fischer, Nackenoff, & Chmielewski, 2009; Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). This approach to knowledge creation and social problem analysis is compatible with interprofessional collaboration and with an inclusive approach to intervention and inquiry.

As discussed above, however, movements toward professionalization, evidence-based practice, and individual casework have complicated social work's relationship with its pragmatist roots (Reisch & Andrews, 2001). Individual-level interventions based on experimental or quasi-

experimental research occupy a greater proportion of social work's time and energy (Drake & Jonson-Reid, 2008; Gambrill, 2012). Still, the value of collaboration with other disciplines and theory-practice integration is codified and endorsed by major social work institutions, and as such provides the basis on which I assert the value of this study to the profession. Working with communities and other professions to theorize and enact approaches to positive structural change is, in summary, part of what defines social work.

The relevance of this project to social work is, finally, aspirational as well. Besides the values and history that connect the profession to collaborative community practice conceptually, social work's involvement in these collaborative efforts has the potential to add concrete value and increase effectiveness in new areas of practice. Different professions enter community practice environments with different approaches to change. Urban planners, for example, carry an awareness of built and natural environments, as well as the problems and phenomena associated with urban spaces (Weber & Crane, 2012); community psychologists focus on the relationships between individual's health and well-being and his social context beyond immediate networks (Orford, 2008, p. xii); and lawyers are trained in laws and policies, legal rights, and how to redress violations of those rights. Social workers, meanwhile, bring an appreciation for context, environment, and empowerment; an awareness of power dynamics and the relationship between individual empowerment and macro system change; and a commitment to the integration of theory and practice in order to achieve social and economic justice. The current research rests on the historical, ethical, and practical commitments of the social work profession to expand the contemporary view of how and in what contexts social work can be practiced.

Methodological Context

In this section I provide background and explanation for the decisions I have made in designing this study. I introduce the concept of research paradigms and discuss the history and placement of different grounded theory variations along a continuum from the post-positivist paradigm to the constructivist paradigm. I then discuss research in the constructivist paradigm, including constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006) as well as naturalistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and constructivist (Rodwell, 1998) inquiry, and provide justification for using a CGT design for the current study.

Research Paradigms and Grounded Theory

In this part I offer a definition of paradigms, discuss their relevance to grounded theory as a methodology, and briefly cover points of confusion and controversy related to their use. Paradigms, as the term is used in the context of research, are sets of philosophical assumptions that connect a researcher's views about human nature, knowledge, and truth in ways that provide a kind of "intellectual map" through which to understand a researcher's approach to knowledge creation (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Both Guba (1990) and Burrell and Morgan (1979) propose multi-paradigmatic frameworks that have been used across numerous disciplines as a vocabulary with which the assumptions of research can be identified, discussed, and compared. These frameworks are similar in that they suggest sets of assumptions that coalesce in certain predictable and definable ways to form paradigms of inquiry. Both frameworks also situate the paradigms on two Cartesian axes, one that is vertical and represents the continuum from order and regulation to change and reform, and the other, horizontal, that represents the subjective-objective polarity. The key difference is that while Guba organizes the sets of assumptions into three paradigms – post-positivist, constructivist, and critical – Burrell and Morgan essentially

dissect the change-oriented critical paradigm into two – one that focuses on individual liberation while the second emphasizes structural transformation.

In addition to situating specific research studies, paradigms also offer heuristic devices by which to categorize and compare methodologies. Grounded theory, for example, is typically placed along a continuum from the post-positivist paradigm, which is associated with assumptions of objective reality, to the constructivist paradigm, which tends toward the assumption that reality is socially constructed (Charmaz, 2000; Guba, 1990). Grounded theory is not typically associated with the critical paradigm since it does not prioritize the goal of radical change.

Since paradigms are, at bottom, inventions of the mind (Guba & Lincoln, 1998), they can also be grist for controversy. Deetz (1996), for example, takes issue with the attempt to clearly delineate between subjective and objective research orientations given that the two concepts themselves are social constructions. Since grounded theory variations are said to differ primarily along the subjective-objective continuum (Charmaz, 2000; Hallberg, 2006), Deetz's critique resonates: "What warrants exploration is the subjectivity and implicit desire to dominate others and nature, rather than the objectivity, of the 'objective' research programs. Probabilistic and law-like claims are artifacts of a particular peer group shared language game or set of constitutive activities" (Deetz, 1996, p. 194). That is, claims of objectivity are, in point of fact, subjective.

In place of the subjective-objective continuum, Deetz (1996) proposes a continuum from local/emergent at one extreme to *a priori*/elite at the other. In describing research that is local/emergent, Deetz argues that the researcher's "theoretical vocabulary...is often considered...a first cut or guide to getting started constantly open to new meanings, translations,

and redifferentiation based on interactions in the research process" (p. 196). Deetz' conception of this continuum differs from Burrell and Morgan's subjective-objective contrast in that the former allows for the creation of "objective" knowledge within a very specific, local context without running afoul of the framework's terminology. Similarly, Deetz' framework acknowledges the deeply subjective and historical roots of research programs described as "functionalist" or "post-positivist."

Deetz' rethinking of the subjective-objective continuum underscores some of the challenges of placing grounded theory approaches in paradigmatic boxes. This study is primarily concerned with understanding what exists in a particular geographic, organizational, and temporal context. However, Charmaz (2006) allows that the development of theory, even using CGT, is not an entirely subjective endeavor. Still, the goal is not to generalize findings but to understand more deeply the community collaboration experiences of those directly involved in Virginia legal aid programs. Similarly, the goal of this study is not to create change within the context of the research study itself, but over time constructivist research can, and some argue should, lead to change (Charmaz, 2005; Rodwell, 1998).

Deetz (1996) argues that the interpretive discourse is "premodern" in nature, which "is not to suggest a focus on the past as much as a concern with those aspects of life which have not yet been systematized, instrumentalized and brought under the control of modernist logics and sciences" (p. 202). While along with Charmaz I do not reject the concept of objective truth altogether, I do avoid rationality and universality as guiding principles. I emphasize the unpredictability of knowledge co-creation with other human beings, and though I embrace change as a goal, I do not plan or promise to achieve it within the temporal bounds of this study. In summary, I claim this study as consistent with the assumptions of the constructivist paradigm

because it embraces emergence, tends toward subjectivity, and leans more toward the goal of understanding what exists as opposed to inciting change.

Grounded Theory: Historical Developments and Philosophical Differences

Grounded theory is "an inductive, iterative, interactive, and comparative method geared toward theory construction" (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012, p. 41). Grounded theory, and in particular CGT, is considered an "emergent" research design because, as Charmaz (2008) notes, "Grounded theorists choose or create specific methodological strategies to handle puzzles and problems that arise as inquiry proceeds" (p. 156). While this study uses a CGT design specifically, a brief review of the evolution of grounded theory in general is helpful in seeing why the choice of CGT in particular matters.

With their seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* in 1967 sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss coined the term *grounded theory* and established guidelines for data collection and data analysis in greater detail than had been done previously for any qualitative research method. By doing so, Glaser and Strauss (1967) challenged the dominant notion of the time that qualitative methods are less systematic or rigorous than quantitative approaches to inquiry. More generally the original articulation of the grounded theory methodology challenged the prevailing discourse about knowledge creation related to human behavior. "[D]uring the 1960s sophisticated quantitative methods acquired an advantage over qualitative research methods and became dominant with a focus on the logic of verification. Human qualitative experiences were then reduced into delimited and measurable variables and the researchers thus relied on what they assumed to be scientific logic, neutrality, and truth" (Hallberg, 2006, p. 142). Glaser and Strauss' approach was comprehensive in that it not only addressed concerns about research design and data collection, but also encompassed the introduction of a rigorous process

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related to data analysis and inductive theory development. Whereas "theory" at the time mostly referred to grand theories that were not empirically based, Glaser and Strauss made the case that mid-level theory can be developed inductively, and that qualitative research is well-suited to building theory analytically based on empirical data (Charmaz, 2008).

In addition to helping legitimize systematic qualitative inquiry in the academy, Glaser and Strauss (1967) set the stage for a more thorough examination of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of qualitative research. Numerous scholars have traced the development of grounded theory over the last 45 years and the relationships that exist between different versions of grounded theory and the underlying assumptions on which they are based (Charmaz, 2000; Clarke, 2003; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006; and O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008), and in some ways grounded theory's development into a constellation of methods mirrors the broader discourse around epistemology and qualitative inquiry in general.

The general consensus that has emerged is that Glaser and Strauss (1967), and later Glaser (1978, 1998, 2006) alone, propose an approach to grounded theory research that is most in line with positivist assumptions related to objective reality and the researcher's role in "discovering" that reality. Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), meanwhile, have been associated with post-positivism because of the acknowledgment of the imperfections of the human instrument that is embedded in their approach. As a way to rein in these imperfections and subjective tendencies, Strauss and Corbin propose a variety of analytic frameworks and matrices to be used in the data analysis process. Charmaz (2000) and others consider these techniques to be overly prescriptive, and obstacles in the development of theory that is both coherent and truly grounded in the empirical reality of participants. Charmaz places herself clearly in the interpretive research paradigm, along with naturalistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and constructivist

(Rodwell, 1998) inquiry, largely owing to her view of reality as socially constructed and her position that in order to theorize about a specific context a researcher must commit to co-constructing knowledge along with participants. The associations and distinctions between CGT and naturalistic/constructivist inquiry are discussed later.

Three dimensions around which different approaches to grounded theory turn are the question of bias resulting from prior exposure to the literature (Dunne, 2011; Thornberg, 2012); the researcher's stance regarding generalizability and the nature of reality (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a; Charmaz, 2000; O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008); and the emergent or prescriptive nature of the research, including the researcher's role vis-à-vis research participants (Charmaz, 2008; O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008). One can, through analysis along these dimensions, arrive at a clearer understanding of the methodological differences between CGT and other approaches to grounded theory. The question of when literature should be reviewed was discussed earlier. The critical point there is that Glaser (1978) and other "classic" grounded theorists hold that a researcher can approach a study with a blank slate, i.e. with no preconceptions or biases regarding the studied phenomenon. Charmaz (2006) and other grounded theory scholars (Dunne, 2011; Thornberg, 2012) consider the ideal of a blank slate to be misguided, not to mention impossible and impractical, given that researchers will always have at least some prior knowledge; bias acknowledgment is a critical aspect of reflexivity; and professing the need for ignorance about the studied phenomenon or process requires never conducting more than one study in the same area of interest.

Regarding the relationship between research and reality, Charmaz (2000) provides a clear articulation of the CGT position in her statement that "the grounded theorist constructs an image of *a* reality, not *the* reality--that is, objective, true, and external" (p. 523). Despite this sharp

distinction between reality as objectively discernible versus socially constructed, however, one is still left with the challenge of determining how these two views of reality manifest themselves in grounded theory methods. In some cases, it is not a question of *whether* a particular aspect of grounded theory is employed, but *why* it is employed. For example, the data analysis strategy of constant comparison can assure comprehensive and objective consideration of all data, or it can serve the goal of thick and context-specific description (O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008). It then becomes the researcher's duty to clearly explicate the ends to which grounded theory strategies are being used and the criteria for rigor that should be applied.

Regarding the level of emergence and prescription, and the roles of researchers and participants in creating knowledge, the clearest contrast among grounded theory approaches is between CGT and Glaser and Strauss' original formulation. Charmaz (2006) explicates as follows:

In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging from data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvement and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices. (p. 10)

It follows, then, that CGT is emergent in nature while Glaser and Strauss' formulation is prescriptive. CGT is designed in order for the researcher to co-construct reality through interactions with participants, whereas Glaser and Strauss' version suggests a more removed and calculated approach. Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998), meanwhile, "explicitly argue that reality cannot be fully known but can always be interpreted" (Hallberg, p. 145), but go on to prescribe the use of complicated analytic techniques designed to minimize the error associated with the

human instrument (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). Charmaz takes issue with Strauss and Corbin's contention that through the use of prescriptive techniques, the findings of a grounded theory study become verifiable (Charmaz, 2000; Hallberg, 2006). Achieving a product that is verifiable or objectively "true" is not the goal of CGT. Rather, CGT researchers attempt to create a product that is context-specific, credible, original, resonant, and useful (Charmaz, 2005; O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008).

By embracing emergence and rejecting prescribed techniques, CGT effectively does away with any commitment to replicability, a position consistent with naturalistic and constructivist research scholars (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rodwell, 1998). I now focus on a comparison between CGT and these other methodologies associated with the constructivist paradigm.

Constructivist paradigm research. It is important to clarify the similarities and distinctions between studies associated with CGT and those identified with naturalistic or constructivist inquiry. Before CGT was developed, Lincoln and Guba (1985) originally explicated what they termed "naturalistic inquiry" in part by contrasting it with post-positivist research. Rather than assuming one external, fixed reality, like CGT naturalistic inquiry assumes the existence of multiple socially constructed realities. The goal of research, then, is not to discover an aspect of reality that can then be generalized to other circumstances, but to understand more deeply a locally constructed reality. Here again CGT and naturalistic inquiry are aligned.

A point of divergence between these two methodologies is related to the concept of rigor. Lincoln and Guba (1985) establish criteria, which are consistent with the assumptions of the constructivist paradigm but also evoke post-positivism, by which to evaluate the rigor of a

naturalistic investigation. These criteria are credibility, or the level of confidence in the 'truth' (as assessed by participants) of research findings; transferability, which speaks to the ability to determine whether the findings are applicable to another setting; dependability, whereby the process of conducting a study can be traced and examined; and confirmability, which refers to whether the quality of the study is demonstrated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Finlay, 2006). Lincoln and Guba (1994) later added a fifth element of rigor, authenticity, which has multiple dimensions and relates to the ethical and social justice orientation of research. Rodwell (1998) builds on Lincoln and Guba and further explicates the importance of these five criteria of rigor and the means by which they are assessed. Rodwell also uses the descriptor "constructivist" rather than "naturalistic," and highlights the compatibility of this approach to research with the problem-solving orientation of social work practice.

In outlining the criteria by which CGT should be evaluated, Charmaz (2000) identifies four criteria – credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness – that are similar but not identical to those established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). As a whole, these criteria place more emphasis on the richness and expressiveness of a study's findings, while maintaining an emphasis on analytic rigor and thoroughness. While Lincoln and Guba's criteria approximate post-positivist notions of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, Charmaz' criteria do not evoke standards associated with objectivity. Instead, her standards relate to the depth and complexity of analysis and the extent to which they resonate with the experiences of participants. Lincoln and Guba strike a balance between speaking the language of post-positivism and embracing the assumption of socially constructed reality. In her explication of CGT Charmaz seems intent to establish standards of quality in systematic inquiry that are distinctly constructivist in nature.

Another distinction between CGT and naturalistic or constructivist inquiry is the emphasis in CGT on studying a social *process*. While Rodwell (1998) places greater emphasis on the *meaning* of the studied phenomena for participants, Charmaz (2006) ties her approach to CGT to the goal of understanding how social processes unfold in specific contexts. It is in large part this emphasis that drew me to use a CGT design for this study because the phenomenon at the heart of the study, collaboration, is a process. In the remainder of this section, I discuss the importance of distinguishing between theory testing and theory building as the goal of research; the diverse theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory; and the connections between grounded theory and social work.

Theory Testing or Theory Building

In selecting a methodology for a study, it is often recommended to choose based on the question or questions one is seeking to answer (Alexander, 2006). Some questions call on the researcher to apply, or test, an existing theory in a specific context or with a certain population. These studies can be described as *deductive* since they attempt to deduce from a general theory, or extend an existing theory, to a specific context. Other terms associated with these studies are *hypothesis testing* and *falsification* because they involve developing hypotheses about how a theory can be applied to a specific context and then trying to disprove or falsify those same hypotheses (Fawcett, 1999). Methodologies conducive to theory testing are often experimental or quasi-experimental in nature because they seek to isolate variables of interest and identify causal links (Drake & Jonson-Reid, 2008).

Other questions call upon researchers to develop rather than test theory. Grounded theory, as the term suggests, is a methodology designed for developing theories that are grounded in empirical data. Research questions for which theory building is appropriate often relate to an

attempt to understand phenomena or lived experiences in a specific context. In studies of this kind, existing theories may help frame or provide general guidance to the researcher, but there is no specific relationship between variables that the researcher is trying to test. Instead, data is analyzed and coded in an attempt to develop or build theory related to the specific studied context. These studies can be termed *inductive* because the process is one of inducing knowledge about how concepts are related to each other based on empirical data.

The theory development in grounded theory studies can serve different purposes depending on the type of grounded theory methodology used (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory is designed to create theories that reflect the complexities of a specific context, whereas in objectivist or post-positivist grounded theory studies the intention is to develop more elegant, parsimonious theories that help predict how variables relate in other contexts (Charmaz, 2000; 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This study can be characterized as CGT in part because its main purpose is to help *understand* the context of Virginia legal aid programs, not to *predict* how community collaboration works in other legal aid contexts.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Grounded Theory

Anselm Strauss, co-author of the original explication of grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), was a devotee of the Chicago School of sociology in general and the influential pragmatist and symbolic interactionist George Herbert Mead in particular. The other co-author, Barney Glaser, was trained at Columbia University and embraced the positivist, experimental approaches to science that were dominant at the time. These two scholars had vastly different perspectives on knowledge creation, and their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* represented a fusing of their divergent views of science and the world.

Pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. Grounded theory's contextualized and iterative approach to inquiry is consistent with the epistemological orientation of pragmatism. Pragmatism developed in the late 19th and 20th centuries and is mainly associated with philosophers Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead (Peirce, 1958; Rogers, 2009, 2010; Strübing, 2007). A central tenet of pragmatism is that external reality exists, but that it derives its meaning in the human experience primarily when people engage and grapple with it through processes of inquiry and problem solving (Nackenoff, 2009). Strübing writes that this view of reality means that "not only [does] pragmatism arrive at a notion of data as a potential representation of parts of reality *at a certain point in time*…but it also defines reality as being made by and experienced only through human activity" (p. 583). Grounded theory is a process, like Dewey's conception of inquiry, that begins with a problem defined by or in contrast to one's personal experience, and proceeds in an iterative fashion such that those involved generate abstracted concepts and relationships (theory) based on empirical information (data) (Strübing, 2007).

Theoretical sampling is one element of grounded theory that reinforces this larger iterative pattern of inquiry. In the process of data analysis, if the researcher forms a hypothesis or arrives at a proposed relationship, he then returns to the data collection process in order to find further support for (or against) the tentative assertion (Strübing, 2007). Thus grounded theory mirrors pragmatism's iterative relationship between truth and how we experience that truth.

Positivism. Positivism refers to an approach to science that rests on the assumptions that reality is objectively knowable and that knowledge creation is a value-neutral and objective process without room for interpretation (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Deetz, 1995; Guba, 1990). Grounded theory in its original form was an attempt to marry inductive, contextualized inquiry

with objectivist standards of rigor, while at the same time closing the "embarrassing gap" between empirical data and theory at the same time (Charmaz, 2000). It constituted a middle ground between traditional ethnographic research, participant observation, and few standardized features on the one hand, and quantitative research with the goal of discovering objective truth conducted by a neutral observer scientist using a relatively prescribed approach on the other. While much has been made about the differences between CGT and its objectivist and post-positivist predecessors (Charmaz, 2000; Hallberg, 2006), it would be an overstatement to say that CGT makes no room for objectivity (Charmaz, 2009). The development of theory in and of itself is an act of objectively representing the subjective experiences of research participants. The contribution of CGT is to loosen the prescriptive elements of grounded theory, thus infusing the methodology with an emergent quality that in turn affords the researcher and participants the opportunity to join together in a collaborative act of knowledge creation.

Social Work and Grounded Theory

Since Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduced grounded theory nearly half a century ago, it has become one of the most widely employed qualitative research methodologies (Padgett, 2008). It is used across numerous disciplines, including education, nursing, and social work (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In their study of doctoral social work dissertations that use qualitative methods, Gringeri, Barusch, and Cambron (2013) find that 43% used grounded theory. Social work researchers have recently completed grounded theory investigations of coping with Alzheimer's disease in the workplace (Cox & Pardasani, 2013); experiences transitioning from doctoral education to teaching (Oktay, Jacobson, & Fisher, 2013); sexual minority experiences of culture and identity (Russell & Diaz, 2013); and hospice caregivers' experiences as symptom managers (Washington, 2013). Despite findings that not all researchers who assert use of

grounded theory actually implement grounded theory studies (O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008), the affinity of social work scholars for the idea of grounded theory suggests at least a conceptual compatibility between the two.

The link between social work and grounded theory, and in particular CGT, can be traced in part to social constructionist theory (Padgett, 2008). This theory informs both the profession of social work's commitment to context and environment as well as CGT's emphasis on emergence and socially constructed truth (Padgett, 2008; Payne, 2005). Another point of alignment between social work and CGT is the advancement of social justice. Charmaz (2005) explicates the compatibility of CGT with social justice goals. Specifically, CGT's standards of rigor include the development of theory that is useful and credible from the standpoint of participants, especially those who represent vulnerable or oppressed populations. While the explicit use of CGT in the social work literature is limited, other forms of constructivist inquiry have been used to some degree by social work researchers (Crowley, 2005; Rodwell, 1998). This study builds on their work, and on the common theoretical and social justice commitments between CGT and social work.

Conclusion

In this section I have attempted to contextualize CGT within social work, within constructivist paradigm research, and within the larger landscape of grounded theory. Grounded theory is not a static, ossified methodology (Dey, 2004), but rather an evolving constellation of approaches (Charmaz, 2000, 2009). Grounded theorists from different traditions have different approaches, but they also have much in common (Charmaz, 2009). As such, there is no "off-the-shelf" model to choose from or a flowchart that can guide researchers to a particular set of methodological choices. There are, however, sub-categories of grounded theory with more or

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less coherent methodological underpinnings. I chose CGT because it aligned with my own perspective on ethical, socially just research that involves the co-creation of knowledge along with participants as opposed to the objective, value-free, privileged position of the expert researcher. CGT also aligned with the purpose and the phenomenon at the heart of this study. Despite CGT's emergent qualities, choosing this methodology did not obviate the need to make more detailed decisions about study design. In the next chapter I provide an overview of the study design for this dissertation and justify the choices embedded within it.

Chapter Three: Research Design

This section begins with an overview of the study, and continues with detailed descriptions of the components of the study. The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of how this study was conducted and to connect design choices to the research methods literature.

Research Design Overview

This study used constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology as conceptualized by sociologist Kathy Charmaz (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b; Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2009; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). Having formed a foundation in qualitative research and constructivist research during my doctoral coursework, in order to prepare for this project I also attended an intensive two-day CGT workshop with Kathy Charmaz in July 2013, and another two-day workshop in analysis and writing with Dr. Charmaz in July 2014.

The primary means of data collection for this study was 28 intensive semi-structured interviews. Of these interviews, 26 were conducted with participants from the two primary stakeholder groups of this study: 13 with legal aid attorneys and 13 with legal aid client community members. The last two interviews were with representatives of legal aid partner agencies. This third stakeholder group was identified during data collection as part of the theoretical sampling process. Interviews were recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after each interview and, to the extent feasible, before the next interview was conducted. The intensive semi-structured interview is well-suited to CGT and an effective way in which to uncover a person's perspective because the researcher has flexibility to establish rapport and

follow leads intuitively based on the participant's responses (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz &

Belgrave, 2012).

Given the power differential between clients and attorneys, interviews with client

community members were conducted first (Charmaz, personal communication, July 23, 2013;

Rodwell, 1998). Initial and focused coding of transcripts led to development of concepts and

categories. Theoretical coding and "sensitizing concepts" were used to build toward a coherent

and integrated conceptual framework. Based on analysis of the interview transcripts, theoretical

sampling informed initiation of contact with additional participants. Among attorney

participants, it became clear that managerial perspectives would be helpful to compare with staff

attorney and client community board member perspectives regarding issues of organizational

administration. In addition, partner agency representatives were added as a third stakeholder

group after participants associated with the statewide organization indicated that they have little

direct contact with client community members but work with other organizations that serve

clients directly. Following completion of the interviews, two focus groups were held, one with

client community members and another with attorneys. The purpose of the focus groups was to

establish that the criteria for rigor in a CGT study – credibility, originality, resonance, and

usefulness – had been satisfied.

Sample and Sample Selection

This study used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling (Drake & Jonson-

Reid, 2008) and included 26 participants comprised of two primary stakeholder groups, Virginia

legal aid attorneys and client community members as well as two additional participants from a

third stakeholder group added during the theoretical sampling process. Shdaimah (2009) found

that few studies of legal aid have included the perspective of client community members, and

given that the social process under study involves both attorneys and client community members directly, it was critical to have both perspectives represented.

The sample frame for the study was the three legal aid programs that operate in a mid-size metropolitan area in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Two of these programs – referred to in the dissertation as "Regional Emergency Legal Aid" and "Regional Comprehensive Legal Aid" – are regional programs with overlapping though not identical service areas. They each serve urban, suburban, and rural communities, but differ importantly in the fact that Regional Emergency receives federal funding while Regional Comprehensive does not. Relatedly, Regional Emergency's work is primarily at the individual case level, while Regional Comprehensive's activities include community organizing and policy advocacy in addition to individual case handling. The third program, referred to as "Statewide Legal Aid," is a program with a statewide service area. Its headquarters is located in the same metropolitan area as the other two organizations. Its organizational focus is to coordinate policy advocacy, training, and technical assistance for all legal aid programs in the state. Statewide Legal Aid attorneys interact with relatively few individual clients.

I recruited participants in each of these three sites, with the goal of having three to five attorneys and three to five client community members participate in the study from each site. Sampling was restricted to these three organizations for the purpose of convenience, feasibility, and allowing sufficient variation within each site. Attorneys who were currently employed by one of the three program sites were eligible to participate. For this study, "attorney" refers to anyone with a Juris Doctor (JD) degree whose primary function in the organization is to provide legal assistance, legal representation, or a legal perspective to clients or groups, or to directly supervise, manage, or coordinate those who perform these functions.

Client community members who were 18 years of age or older were eligible to participate in the study. Prisoners of any kind and those under 18 in age were excluded from the study. For the purposes of this study, "client community member" is defined as a person who is both client-eligible (i.e. meets the income criteria to be a legal aid client) and is connected to legal aid through an individual or group legal matter or through other collaborative activities. "Other collaborative activities" include participation in a coalition, community group, or advocacy effort in which the legal aid program is also involved.

Within the two primary stakeholder groups, a participant information form (see Appendix E) was used to help achieve maximum variation with regard to demographic profiles and the type of collaborative experience between legal aid programs and client communities. For client community members, this meant that some participants had only received individual legal assistance, while others had participated in coalitions, community organizing, and policy advocacy.   For attorneys, the range included those who primarily handle individual cases, and others who handle individual cases in addition to facilitating community education, organizing, policy advocacy, or coalition activities. Three attorney participants also served in supervisory or management roles in their respective organizations.

The third stakeholder group, partner agency representatives, was identified during data collection. It became apparent during recruitment of Statewide Legal Aid client community participants that the organization had little direct contact with client community members. Hence, two of the three client community participants affiliated with Statewide were members of the organization's board of directors. Subsequently, during interviews with Statewide attorneys, participants noted that a common approach employed to engage client community members in the organization's advocacy efforts was to collaborate with other agencies that work directly

with a similar client population. In order to engage this third stakeholder group in the study, an

amendment to the study protocol was submitted to the institutional review board. This

amendment was approved with no concerns raised.

The sample for this study provided data that was responsive to the research questions

because, as noted, the two primary stakeholder groups involved in attorney-community

collaboration were represented. Further, participants with a range of collaboration experience

allowed for a richness of variation in the sample. Demographic variation was a consideration in

sampling as well. In the theoretical sampling process, the researcher included participants who

represent specific perspectives that become relevant as analysis was undertaken.

Recruitment. For attorneys, recruitment scripts for interview participants were created

(see Appendix H). The recruitment script was sent via email to legal aid attorneys from the three

organizations in the study using publicly available email addresses on program websites.

Attorneys were also contacted by phone using a phone recruitment script. An attempt was made

to achieve variation regarding the attorney participants' roles vis-à-vis client community

members. This information is partially available on program websites. The researcher's tacit

knowledge of legal aid programs also was useful in identifying participants with different job

descriptions and roles. For each of the three research sites, before initiating contact with

attorneys I listed the attorney employees and devised a plan and sequence in which to contact

them. If necessary, two attempts were made to contact attorneys. If they did not respond after

two attempts then a third attempt was not made. The primary goal in recruiting attorney

participants was to achieve variation in the types of experience represented as well as

demographic variation. I also sought specific types of experience based on the data collection

and analysis conducted to that point. This process of "theoretical sampling" is discussed further later in this chapter.

For client community members, a flyer was created (see Appendix F) and sent by email to the three legal aid programs along with requests to distribute the flyers to client community members. An additional mechanism for recruitment was through use of a permission-to-contact form (see Appendix G). These forms allowed prospective participants to declare their interest in participating in the study and provide their contact information. A representative of each legal aid organization kept any completed forms in a sealed envelope to protect confidentiality. The recruitment materials also were sent to client community board members and client community coalition members. As with attorneys, repeated communication attempts were necessary in order to achieve the number of participants and the variation in participants desired for the study. For focus groups, recruitment occurred by asking interview participants if they were interested in participating in the focus group portion of the study.

Description of the sample. The sample for this study consisted of 28 individuals: 13 attorneys, 13 client community members, and two partner agency representatives.

Attorneys. Among attorneys, four participants were affiliated with a regional legal aid organization that receives federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funding. This organization is referred to with the pseudonym "Regional Emergency Legal Aid" for the remainder of the dissertation in order to protect participant confidentiality. The term "emergency" is used to indicate that this organization primarily assists individual clients whose circumstances fulfill this organization's definition of emergency. Five attorney participants reported affiliation with a regional organization ("Regional Comprehensive") that does not accept LSC funding. The term "comprehensive" is used because in addition to emergency legal assistance they offer assistance

in non-emergency individual cases as well as programming in the areas of policy advocacy, community organizing, and collective legal strategies. Finally, four attorney participants were affiliated with "Statewide Legal Aid," which coordinates technical assistance and policy advocacy efforts for the legal aid programs throughout Virginia and accepts only a small number of individual clients. This organization's geographic scope is entirely at the state level, and it is unique in that regard among legal aid organizations in Virginia.

Attorneys who participated in this study were spread across those with fewer than five years of experience working at legal aid, those with six to ten years of experience, and those with over 20 years of experience. Almost half the attorney participants (six out of 13) reported working at legal aid for more than 20 years. Variation in age was similar. The majority of the sample of attorneys identified as white (9 of 13), but participants also identified as African American, Latina, and Asian American. Eight of 13 participants identified as female. The sample was primarily composed of staff attorneys (nine of 13) as opposed to those in management roles. Of those who reported serving in managerial roles, two identified as executives and two identified as directors of certain areas of the legal aid organization's programming. Because of the small sample size this information is not reported at the individual level in the demographic table. It should be noted that all of those who identified as managers also assisted individual clients. That is, they served management functions as well as providing direct services. A summary of demographic information related to attorney participants is found in Table 1. Attorneys reported working in a wide range of substantive areas of the law. These substantive areas included child welfare, consumer, domestic and sexual violence, education, elder, employment, family, health, homeless rights, housing, juvenile justice, and public benefits.

Client community members. Client community participants were divided across the same

three organizations but with a slightly different distribution. Five were affiliated with each of the

two regional organizations, and three were affiliated with Statewide Legal Aid. Recruitment

challenges associated with Statewide largely stemmed from limited direct contact between that

organization and client community members and led to identification of the third stakeholder

group, partner agency representatives (see the previous section on "Sample and Sample Selection"

for further detail regarding identification of the third stakeholder group).

Among client community participants the range of roles and functions within legal aid

was quite broad. Board members, advisory group members, group/coalition members, clients,

and former clients were the categories represented. Eight of the 13 participants identified with

more than one role. It should be noted that "board member" refers to membership on a legal aid

organization's board of directors; "advisory group member" refers to membership on a group

comprised of client community members only and serves an advisory capacity while also

facilitating connections between the organization and the client community as a whole; and

"group/coalition member" refers to membership in a group or coalition that is affiliated with

legal aid and works to address community concerns in a particular substantive area, e.g. public

housing, education, or homelessness. Client community members in the sample identified

predominantly as African American and female. Two participants identified as White, one as

Latina, and one as male. The disproportionate number of African American participants is

Table 1

Demographic Data – Attorneys

Organization	Role	Length of affiliation	Age	Race or ethnicity	Gender identity
Regional Emergency	Management	20+	60-69	White	Male
Regional Emergency	Management	6-10	40-49	Latina	Female
Regional Emergency	Management	20+	40-49	White	Male
Regional Emergency	Staff attorney	6-10	30-39	White	Female
Regional Comprehensive	Staff attorney	0-5	20-29	White	Female
Regional Comprehensive	Staff attorney	6-10	30-39	White; Latina	Female
Regional Comprehensive	Staff attorney	0-5	20-29	African American	Female
Regional Comprehensive	Staff attorney	20+	60-69	Did not respond	Male
Regional Comprehensive	Staff attorney	6-10	30-39	White	Male
Statewide	Staff attorney	6-10	50-59	Asian American	Female
Statewide	Staff attorney	20+	60-69	White	Female
Statewide	Management	20+	50-59	White	Male
Statewide	Staff attorney	20+	40-49	White	Female

discussed in the "Limitations" section of chapter five. Participants identified across a wide range of ages and lengths of affiliation with legal aid.

Data Collection

Interview recordings and focus group recordings are the two types of data that were collected, transcribed, and analyzed in this study. The goal in CGT data collection is to gather "rich" data. Charmaz (2006) describes rich data as "detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives" (p. 14). While differing views exist regarding the amount of data needed in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; 2006; Glaser, 1978), Charmaz encourages CGT researchers to follow Dey's (1999) lead in striving systematically to build rapport with participants and avoid "smash and grab" data collection strategies. The range in number of interviews conducted for CGT studies varies widely, but between 20 and 30 participants is considered an acceptable range in social work research (Padgett, 2008).

Intensive semi-structured interviews. Intensive, semi-structured interviews (ISSIs) are directed conversations that allow for in-depth exploration of topics and experiences (Charmaz, 1991; 2006; Galletta, 2013). Like CGT, ISSIs are emergent by design and geared toward understanding context. Critics of interviews as a data collection strategy in general emphasize the unreliable nature of personal accounts (Silverman, 2000; 2010). Since CGT researchers are specifically interested in socially constructed realities as opposed to objective truth, however, those critiques are not relevant in this case.

Table 2

Demographic Data – Client Community Members

Organization	Role	Length of affiliation	Age	Race or ethnicity	Gender identity
Regional Emergency	Board member; advisory group member; former client	20+	60-69	African American	Female
Regional Emergency	Advisory group member; former client	6-10	60-69	African American	Female
Regional Emergency	Board member; advisory group member; current client; former client	11-15	60-69	African American	Female
Regional Emergency	Former client	0-5	20-29	African American; Latina	Female
Regional Emergency	Former client	0-5	30-39	African American	Female
Regional Comprehensive	Former client; group/coalition member	6-10	30-39	African American	Female
Regional Comprehensive	Group/coalition member	0-5	20-29	African American	Female
Regional Comprehensive	Former client; group/coalition member	0-5	60-69	African American	Female
Regional Comprehensive	Current client; former client	0-5	30-39	White	Female
Regional Comprehensive	Current client	0-5	50-59	White	Male
Statewide	Board member; former client	6-10	50-59	African American	Female
Statewide	Current client	0-5	30-39	African American	Female
Statewide	Board member; former client	11-15	50-59	African American	Female

Galletta (2013) offers guidelines for the opening, middle, and concluding segments of the interview. In the opening, the emphasis is on building rapport and allowing participants room to give rich descriptions by asking open-ended, broad questions. Hearing the participant's story is critical (Charmaz, 2006). In the middle segment, the researcher might ask more detailed questions seeking nuance, clarity, and specificity, or request that the participant provide more detail on an aspect of their narrative. These probes serve also to build rapport by showing interest in understanding the participant's reality more deeply (Charmaz, 2006; Galletta, 2013). As the interview enters the concluding segment, the focus shifts to a theoretical tone whereby the researcher and participant together consider how the participant's narrative might fit into the larger context. Here the researcher might also explore contradictions both within the participant's narrative and between one narrative and another.

The goal of ISSIs, and interviews in constructivist paradigm research more broadly, is not only to collect data but to engage participants in the process of meaning making (Charmaz, 2006; King & Horrocks, 2010; Rodwell, 1998). It is a process of reciprocity and critical reflection for both parties. Galletta (2013) argues that an apt analogy can be drawn from the communicative space between researcher and participant and the conceptual space between data and theory. A dialectical give and take must occur during the interview in order to connect the participant's narrative with the emerging theory as well as to enter into a process of collaborative meaning making and knowledge creation.

Interviews for this study were conducted in locations that were both relatively quiet and in which the participant was comfortable. Participants chose a preferred location for the interviews. All attorneys and partner agency representatives elected to be interviewed in their offices. Seven of the 13 client community participants chose to be interviewed in their homes.

One chose her workplace, another chose a room at the legal aid organization to which she was affiliated, and the other four selected a private meeting room in a library or university setting. Interviews were digitally recorded to allow the researcher to be present and engaged with the participant (Charmaz, 2006).

The main questions remained consistent for all interviews within each stakeholder group. In accordance with the iterative process of CGT, however, probes were changed or added based on analysis of prior interview transcripts (Charmaz, 2006). Transcription and initial coding occurred as soon as possible after each interview and, when feasible, before the next interview took place. For each organization, interviews with client community members were scheduled before interviews with attorneys. In three individual cases, interviews with attorneys occurred before interviews with client community members as a result of cancellations and postponements. As incentives, supermarket gift cards worth $50 were provided to all participants (Padgett, 2008).

Interviews were planned for one hour, but it was explained to participants that the exact length depends on how the interview unfolds. Ultimately participants guided the length of the interviews, and if it exceeded the scheduled length the researcher provided opportunities to conclude so that the participant did not feel obligated to carry on indefinitely (Rodwell, 1998).

All interviews were recorded digitally. The researcher took limited notes during interviews as reminders to ask follow-up questions and to document nonverbal communication and contextual details. See Appendix A, B, and C for interview guides for client community members, attorneys, and partner agency representatives, respectively.

The interview transcripts seemed to provide data that illuminated participants' individual perceptions and lived experiences associated with community collaboration. Participants had the opportunity to describe the benefits and challenges of the collaboration process from their

individual perspectives. Several participants became emotional during the interviews. Others commented on the thoughtfulness of the questions, or mentioned that they had not thought about their work in the particular way they did during the interview. The researcher attempted to build trust and rapport with participants to the best of his ability. His experience as a community practitioner and his first-hand knowledge of legal aid settings may have been of service in doing so.

Focus groups. Focus groups have been used for nearly a century in scientific research (King & Horrocks, 2010). They are associated with the work of sociologist Robert Merton. In 1956, Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990) asserted that interviews with multiple participants with a shared experience can help create a more comfortable atmosphere in which to discuss difficult or charged topics. Corporations and political groups later adopted focus groups as a way of testing marketing and campaign strategies (King & Horrocks, 2010). Focus groups remained a common data collection strategy in the social sciences, and have been used in a variety of contexts and paradigms, including interpretive paradigm research and research with an explicit goal of social change (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013; King & Horrocks, 2010).

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) argued that "[w]hat happens in focus groups can help researchers work against premature consolidation of their understandings and explanations thus signaling the limits of reflexivity and the importance of intellectual/empirical modesty as forms of ethics and praxis" (p. 35). Rather than seeking truths that reside in the minds of individuals, focus groups explicitly make space for the social construction of reality. Focus groups thus provide an additional layer of consonance with the constructivist approach to this project, as well as moving it toward the establishment of rigor and the contemplation of next steps and implications.

Compared to individual interviews, in focus groups the numbers and power are shifted toward the participants, emphasizing their roles as co-creators of knowledge (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Scholars have questioned the goodness of fit between focus groups and constructivist research if the focus groups are intended to gather data efficiently (Charmaz, 2008; Rodwell, 1998). For this study, however, their primary purpose is to engage participants in the research process and allow for synergy among participants, not to gather data efficiently. The focus groups also supported compliance with the four criteria of rigor associated with CGT: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness (Charmaz, 2005). They provided an opportunity to ask participants if the preliminary analysis made sense and sounded accurate and useful.

Two focus groups were conducted, one with legal aid attorneys and another with client community members. The desired number of participants was 5 to 8 per focus group (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013), and participation in both focus groups was within that range. The attorney focus group consisted of five participants, and the client community member focus group had six. Participants were selected from among interview participants. An effort was made to achieve breadth of perspective in each focus group, but participant availability drove the composition of each focus group more than the goal of variation. Still, for both focus groups participants included those associated with each of the three legal aid organizations in the study.

Each focus group lasted approximately one hour. The focus groups were held in a private room at the 2014 statewide legal aid conference in September 2014. A guide was created (See Appendix D) along with eight composite character vignettes to use as prompts. Participants were introduced to the eight vignettes, each of which was from the perspective of a client community or attorney composite character. Participants were then asked questions to help

determine whether the vignettes aligned with their first-hand experience. The vignettes were written based on initial coding and analysis of the interview transcripts. Before using the vignettes in the focus groups, the researcher piloted them and received feedback regarding their tone and content from three social work doctoral candidates.

Data Analysis

In all major traditions of grounded theory -- objectivist, post-positivist, and constructivist (Charmaz, 2000) -- data collection and analysis occur simultaneously (Charmaz, 2001; Hallberg, 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). The theory or framework that develops is therefore linked closely to the data. In keeping with this methodological convention, to the extent possible after each interview I transcribed and performed initial (or open) coding on the transcript before conducting the next interview. This sequencing allowed for adjustments in interview probes based on analysis of the previous interviews. The following description of data analysis procedures below relates only to analysis of the interviews. The focus group transcripts were transcribed and used to support and triangulate the interview data.

Initial coding. Initial coding was conducted after each interview and before the next interview took place. This strategy allows initial codes to inform probes in subsequent interviews (Charmaz, 2006). In cases when transcription and coding was not possible because of limited time between interviews, the researcher reviewed his notes from the previous interview and listened to the interview recording to determine whether probes should be added or changed for the next interview.

Coding is the process of "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). Thornberg and Charmaz (2012) describe initial coding as the process of interpreting 1)

participants' main concerns, 2) participants' tacit assumptions, 3) explicit processes and actions related to participants, and 4) latent processes and patterns. In order to achieve these analytical goals, Charmaz (2006, pp. 47, 51) recommends posing the following questions of the data:

What do these data suggest? Pronounce?

From whose point of view?

What do actions and statements in the data take for granted?

What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it?

How does this process develop?

Under which conditions does this process develop?

How does the research participant(s) think, feel, and act when involved in this process?

When, why, and how does the process change?

What are the consequences of the process?

Mechanically, when doing initial coding I used the commenting function in the "track changes" feature of Microsoft Word to connect raw data to initial codes. Coding can be done by word, line, paragraph, or incident (Charmaz, 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). I used a combination of line-by-line and paragraph-by-paragraph coding depending on the density and thickness of the data. I attempted to keep initial codes "short, simple, precise, and active" (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012, p. 46), and used gerund forms of verbs to contribute to a sense of movement and process as the focus of analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

After completing initial coding of an interview transcript, I copied the initial codes into a Microsoft Excel file, using one worksheet for each interview. In the first column I copied all the initial codes. In the second column to the right of the initial codes I typed the page number of the transcript from which the initial code was connected to the data. This allowed the initial

codes to be easily traced back to the raw data. In the third column I typed the focused code that corresponded to that particular initial code, and in the fourth column I typed the participant "case" number.

Charmaz (2006) described CGT as an abductive process that starts inductively and later becomes more deductive. Initial coding is part of the inductive process, and Charmaz is not prescriptive about the proportion of data on which initial coding should be performed before switching to a deductive process by which data are connected to initial codes that have already been established. I chose a conservative approach and completed initial coding on approximately 80% of the raw data before applying codes deductively to remaining interviews. In all, this process yielded over 3,200 initial codes.

Focused coding. Focused codes are more conceptual and directed than initial codes (Charmaz, 2006). The purpose is to raise the analysis to a higher level of abstraction by identifying codes that seem most significant or frequent. Focused codes can either be drawn from the earlier initial codes or newly created based on comparison and analysis of initial codes (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). During focused coding, codes are raised to the level of tentative conceptual categories if, based on analysis of the data to that point, they appear to exert disproportionate influence on the studied phenomenon. Categories are then refined and defined, and connections between categories are elucidated in the process of developing theory (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012).

Focused coding is an iterative and active process, not a linear or passive one (Charmaz, 2006). Researchers might have a revelation that sends them back to data previously coded to gauge the relevance of a new code. Or, a previous code might be altered or refined based on a new insight. Making focused coding dynamic and interactive is part of ensuring fidelity to the

emergence and interpretivism of CGT (Charmaz, 2000; 2008). At the same time, the researcher must attend to personal biases, and acknowledge the extent to which preconceived ideas factor into the coding process. These are opportunities for reflexive journaling, consultation with peer reviewer, and memo writing, which are discussed below.

I conducted focused coding simultaneously with the data collection phase, but focused coding for each interview did not take place before the next interview. It occurred as time allowed during the interview phase of data collection. Focused coding for this study was, as Charmaz (2008) described, a dynamic and iterative process. Focused codes were developed, revised, compared, and recoded. Memos defining the focused codes were drafted and revised numerous times. In total, the number of focused codes totaled 72.

Categories. During focused coding, I raised codes that seemed most frequent and/or significant to the status of conceptual categories (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). I gave these categories conceptual definitions, and drafted memos that connected them to initial codes, specific data, and other categories (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). While Glaser (1978, 1998) argues that coding should lead to the identification of one "core category" in the data that "accounts for most of the variation in the pattern of behavior," (Glaser, 1978, p. 93, as cited in Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012), in CGT the researcher remains open and does not work toward the goal of discovering a lone category at the center of the studied process. As categories emerged, I grouped codes under categories by comparing codes with the category definitions. Definitions did not remain static; they changed as new data and new codes required extension or modification of how existing categories were conceptualized and explained (Charmaz, 2006).

Constant comparison. Constant comparison is one of the hallmarks of grounded theory that transcends paradigmatic differences (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967;

Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It refers to the act of comparing data with data, data with codes, and

codes with codes in order to develop a more robust and rigorous analysis (Charmaz, 2006;

Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). By comparing data gathered from different participants, and even

from different encounters with the same participant, it is possible to see the range of perspectives

on the same topic. Similarly, the researcher's own perspective should be included as a point of

comparison. In CGT, the researcher's views should be acknowledged and included transparently

in the analysis because there is no assumption of neutrality (Charmaz, 2006).

I utilized constant comparison throughout data collection and analysis as a step in

assuring compliance with the credibility criterion of CGT rigor (Charmaz, 2005). Constant

comparison is demonstrated in the coding and memo-writing processes. Data were connected to

initial codes, which were then "raised" to focused codes. As discussed in the next section,

memos documented these connections as well as the connections between focused codes and

categories.

Memo writing. Memos were used extensively during initial coding, focused coding, and

category refinement processes. Memos are "the narrated records of a theorist's analytical

conversations with him/herself about the research data" (Lembert, 2007, p. 247, as quoted in

Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012, p. 54). They are used in CGT in three ways. First, "early memos"

are used to pose analytic questions and "formulate hunches and strategies for further data

gathering and coding" (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012, p. 56). Later, "advanced memos" are

written during focused coding and serve to raise focused codes to conceptual categories and

begin to define those categories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 91). Finally, "theoretical memos" further

refine categories and define theoretical relationships between these categories (Thornberg &

Charmaz, 2012, p. 59). I used memo writing in all three of these ways. Memos include a title

and a working definition of the code or category about which the memo is written. I also used

constant comparison when writing memos, making explicit connections between the code or

category and data, other codes or categories, and/or other memos (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012).

Literature review. Literature was reviewed throughout the research process to inform

data collection, analysis, and writing. Since CGT is an abductive process (Reichertz, 2007), with

elements of both induction and deduction, the literature may be used to corroborate or disconfirm

views expressed by participants or to provide sensitizing concepts – defined as "general concepts

that do not claim to be the truth but merely suggest a direction in which to look and to make

possible interpretations" (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012, p. 53) – for data analysis (Dunne, 2011;

Thornberg, 2012). Review of literature is also helpful in establishing the originality of the

findings of this study (Charmaz, 2005) by indicating the extent to which they are redundant with

existing theory.

Reflexive and methodological journaling. Moments of uncertainty regarding

methodology were documented in the journal kept by the researcher throughout this project, as

were reflections on the researcher's biases as they arose. Rodwell (1998) recommends reflexive

journaling as a way to document the process of "making tacit knowledge propositional" (p. 134),

while methodological journaling is used to record "methodological decisions and their

justifications" (p. 136). For this study, instead of keeping two separate journals I kept one,

making sure to note whether entries were methodological in nature. One entry during the early

stages of data collection was as follows:

> Conducted interview #3 tonight. An issue that has cropped up is how to get people to
> talk about the process of collaboration itself. Participants seem to get confused when I
> ask about what makes collaboration successful or unsuccessful, and in general when the
> focus is explicitly on the concept of collaboration. I am still getting a lot of good data
> about collaboration (I think), but the word itself seems not to be readily understood. An
> alternative would be to focus on participants' dealings with [legal aid programs] and thus

get a sense of the collaborative process indirectly. But I also see the process of wrestling with the terminology as a positive in terms of consciousness raising and co-creation, as I enter into a dialogue with participants and we move together toward an analytic position. I added probes in the interview tonight based on initial coding of the first two interviews. These probes had to do with the need to build trust as a prerequisite for collaboration; the possibility of stereotyping of client community members by LA attorneys; and the extent to which participants were engaged with the community and whether that predated their involvement with LA. I need to clarify with [dissertation committee members] how to add probes in a way that the interview guide doesn't become too unwieldy.

Through journaling and subsequent conversations with dissertation committee members, I came to realize that having the word itself in my interview questions was of little consequence. I came to the decision to reduce emphasis on the word "collaboration" and instead describe what I was talking about, e.g. "Can you describe the different ways that you work with legal aid attorneys/client community members?" Another entry related to possible interpretations of a participant's statement about the "authentic voice" of client community members, eventually leading to another entry entitled "finding an authentic voice," in which I proposed (to myself) a starting definition for that phrase:

> "Finding an authentic voice" has to do with the search for a lived experience that is unmediated by institutions, dominant cultural norms, and professional or financial incentives such that the views and experiences expressed carry weight that is perceived as "real." This voice is considered helpful in influencing discourses around policy, and also may be considered by some to have inherent value in terms of what it represents, i.e. the voicing of the voiceless, empowerment, and advancing a more robust and open democratic process.

Researcher biases in favor of systemic change were another topic for reflexive journaling. In addition to providing a space to work through ideas and "hunches" (Charmaz, 2006), notes in the reflexive and methodological journaling informed peer reviewer consultation. Reflexive journaling supports compliance with the credibility criterion of rigor since it highlights the researcher's awareness and acknowledgment of his biases (Charmaz, 2005).

Peer review. Peer review in qualitative research refers to the practice by which another researcher serves as an outside consultant and sounding board regarding methodological questions or concerns throughout the course of the study (Padget, 2008; Rodwell, 1998). The researcher's peer reviewer for this study was Jennifer Shadik, PhD, a recent graduate of the VCU School of Social Work. Dr. Shadik completed her dissertation using a grounded theory design, and brought experience with the concept and purpose of the peer reviewer role to this project. Consultations with Dr. Shadik occurred on a monthly basis. She provided input on the progress of the study overall and regarding key methodological decisions over the course of data collection and analysis. For example, Dr. Shadik reviewed and provided feedback regarding the formatting used for coding, the composite vignettes used in the focus groups, and the development of the conceptual framework. Peer review supports the rigor of this study by providing an outside perspective on the credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness of the research process and findings.

Focus group analysis and member checking. Member checking involves returning to interview participants to gain clarification on their responses based on data analysis or further data collection (Charmaz, 2006). In this study, member checking occurred collectively during the focus groups. Participants informed the researcher whether the analysis – in the form of the composite character vignettes – made sense to them. Participants reported that the vignettes "resonated" with them and, in one case, that "this one hits me right here" because it was consistent with her experience. Member checking supported the credibility, resonance, and usefulness criteria of rigor for this project by gathering feedback from participants regarding whether the emerging theory reflected their experience; had meaning and made sense for them; and seemed practically relevant to their life and work (Charmaz, 2000).

Examples help illustrate how the focus groups advanced formulation of categories and themes. In the attorney focus group, participants affirmed the challenge of providing competent legal assistance while at the same time recognizing the deeper struggles that clients face. In one composite character vignette, a client community member described her deep appreciation for the work her legal aid attorney did on her behalf, but went on to acknowledge that aspects of her daily life are still unstable because her fundamental economic circumstances were unchanged. In another vignette, an attorney explained that while he sympathizes with client community members' struggles, at a certain point he must hone in on the legal matter at hand because resolving that issue is his primary responsibility. Attorney focus group participants responded to these vignettes by lamenting the systemic failures that lead to individual client concerns, and also discussing the importance of delineating between a legal aid organization's mission and the broader goal of social and economic justice. These discussions enriched my understanding of how participants exist in relation to opportunity and advantage, as well as the dilemma facing attorneys and organizations seeking to satisfy their primary mission while responding effectively to the broader context. The categories of "Living With (Dis)Advantage," "Coming Together for Justice," and "Navigating Context" all relate back to and were analytically enriched by these discussions. In the client community member focus group, participants engaged in a discussion about these same vignettes. While the client community focus group discussion was more of a generalized nature and less specifically responsive to each vignette, nonetheless specific points of discussion advanced the conceptualization of categories and themes. Some participants lamented that legal aid's resources were limited and that they could not offer assistance in a broader range of substantive areas. This discussion added clarity to the category that was eventually named "Accessing Regulated Involvement." Another discussion among client

community focus group participants related to the importance of developing an inclusive process for identifying the community's priorities. This discussion helped advance the theme of "Sharing a Common Vision" in the category of "Nourishing Collaborative Capacity."

Theoretical sampling and saturation. Theoretical sampling is an emergent element of grounded theory design whereby new participants are engaged or original participants are re-engaged for the purpose of enhancing theoretical complexity and precision (Charmaz, 2006; Thornberg, 2012). For this study, theoretical sampling led to a new stakeholder group, legal aid partner agency representatives, being identified and engaged. A new interview guide for that stakeholder group was created and an amendment was submitted to the IRB and subsequently approved. In addition to a third stakeholder group, specific participants within the two initial stakeholder groups were targeted for participation because they possessed attributes that became relevant in the course of data collection. For example, attorneys who serve in managerial roles in two of the research sites were approached after other participants reported that governance and administration are critical aspects of an organization's commitment to collaboration.

Theoretical sampling is connected to the concept of saturation in that both relate to an assessment of the completeness of the analysis and theory being developed. Saturation is a commonly used term in qualitative research used to describe the point at which sufficient data have been collected and the researcher halts data collection (Padgett, 2008). Theoretical saturation is used specifically in grounded theory to mean saturation with regard to the developing theory, i.e. a judgment is made by the researcher that additional data will not contribute appreciably to the richness or usefulness of the theory (Charmaz, 2006). In this study, saturation aligned with the goal of maximum variation. That is, the sampling strategy of engaging participants with diverse levels and types of experience, a range of demographic

profiles, and affiliations with two primary stakeholder groups and three different research sites ensured that saturation to a large degree was built into the sample.

Theoretical coding and sensitizing concepts. Theoretical coding takes place after initial and focused coding, and involves the application of preexisting "coding families" to the data as a means of ensuring theoretical sophistication (Glaser, 1978; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). Charmaz (2006) argues that this practice can effectively close off analytic options by forcing data into predetermined schema, but allows that they can be useful in some circumstances (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012). In this study theoretical sampling was not used in order to allow the analytic process to unfold without being forced into pre-established directions. Instead, sensitizing concepts (defined in chapter two) were used in order to provide greater flexibility and responsiveness to the data during analysis. Examples of sensitizing concepts used include foundational social work concepts such as change across individual, organization, and community systems; reflexivity; and the interrelated concepts of power, privilege, and oppression. The use of these sensitizing concepts, as opposed to predetermined theoretical coding frameworks, is consistent with the originality standard of rigor (Charmaz, 2005; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012).

Writing and visual representation. Writing in constructivist grounded theory research is part of analysis (Charmaz, 2006). In this study, writing was an iterative process with multiple drafts. Initial, advanced, and theoretical memos were the first steps in building a written product related to this research. Through memos codes and categories were defined and connected. In the initial stages of conceptual framework development, composite characters were created that reflected the stories told by participants. Versions of these characters were introduced through the focus group vignettes. Once the conceptual framework was developed, memos and analytic

descriptions were folded into initial drafts of the dissertation findings. Committee members reviewed these drafts and I made necessary revisions. Like the CGT knowledge creation process itself, CGT writing is both analytical and creative (Charmaz, 2006). Through focus groups, peer review, and committee member review of drafts, the researcher sought a balance in his writing between originality, resonance, and credibility (Charmaz, 2005; Rodwell, 1998). Evocative yet analytically sound writing was the goal for this research. Final products include both a richly detailed case report and a conceptual framework that represents the overarching narrative constructed from the data (Charmaz, 2006). In order to achieve readability and retain relevance to the questions driving this study, material from interviews that was tangential to the conceptual framework that emerged was not included in the final presentation of findings in chapter four.

Incorporating the literature. The use of literature in grounded theory is a contested topic (Charmaz, 2006; Dunne, 2011; Glaser, 1978; 1998). As discussed previously, proponents of traditional grounded theory argue that the researcher should avoid reviewing literature that may introduce bias prior to conducting a study. In constructivist grounded theory, and particularly in dissertation research (Dunne, 2011), review of the literature is part of acknowledging that the researcher is not a blank slate (Charmaz, 2006).

Issues pertaining to use of the extant literature return in the process of presenting and discussing research findings. The expectations regarding extensive use of the literature in dissertation research are clear (Dunne, 2011). However, in light of the paradigmatic assumptions of context-bound research (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Guba, 1990), tying findings to existing literature may confuse readers regarding the goals and intentions of the research. In this dissertation the findings are presented as a co-construction between the participants and the researcher, and therefore connections between findings and previous research are absent. In the

discussion of findings and the implications of this research presented in chapter five, the

literature is used sparingly to support assertions made by the researcher and to situate proposed

directions for future research.

   Composite characters. Composite characters, drawn from the stories of participants,

were used in the focus group phase of data collection and in the presentation of findings in

chapter four. Composite characters were used in this study with three goals in mind: to assist the

researcher in creating a visceral experience for participants and readers; to reduce the number of

characters and allow participants and readers to more easily grasp the main findings of the

research; and to protect participants' confidentiality.

   Charmaz (2000) explains that CGT research does not aim to present findings in a cool or

objective manor. She argues that researchers should strive for a presentation of findings that

resonates and evokes affective response, especially from those familiar with the social process

under study. To this end, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) used composite characters in a study

informed by critical race theory to convey "counter-stories" that challenge dominant narratives

of people of color. Unlike Solorzano and Yosso, who relied on archival material and

autobiographical content, each of the composite characters developed in this study was created

based only on experiences shared by participants in this study. However, the goal of presenting

findings in a manner that transcends intellectual understanding and creates a "vicarious"

(Rodwell, 1998, p. 181) experience for readers is similar.

   As in this study, Sandelowski and colleagues (2006) created composite characters as a

way to represent large quantities of data in a compelling, digestible form. These researchers

used actors to bring their characters literally to life in presenting the findings of a systematic

review that synthesized 93 qualitative studies on stigma related to HIV. In the current study, the

data collected and the characters created all derive from one study and far fewer participants in total. Still, the concept of channeling major findings and themes through characters, as opposed to a descriptive cataloguing or "reportage" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 20) of participant stories, is comparable to what I attempt in the current study.

Given the relatively small number of participants and geographically bound population under study, the use of composite characters also relates to the researcher's responsibilities for human subject protection. Confidentiality is a first-order concern for research involving human participants, in particular when views and opinions on delicate topics are being elicited (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 1979). Composite characters create another level of protection by combining several similar participant narratives into one, making it very difficult to determine which organization, let alone which individual, was the source of a particular idea or opinion.

The process of creating the composite characters began during preparation for the focus groups and continued while writing up the findings. I formed the composite characters used in the focus groups based on the analysis conducted to that point. I reviewed initial and focused codes, as well as entries in the methodological and reflexive journal kept for this project. I then created eight distinct composite characters, and one quote for each character about collaboration between legal aid attorneys and client community members. Each of the two primary stakeholder groups was represented with four composite characters, and each quote represented a different composite character. In developing the composite characters, I considered participants' length of affiliation with legal aid, their role, and their perceptions and experiences regarding collaboration. For example, one composite character was a long-time legal aid attorney whose primary focus was individual case handling. He supported collaboration with client community

members saw the primary role of attorneys being to help people achieve positive legal outcomes. Another attorney composite character was newer to the profession and saw value in working with community groups and working outside the legal system in order to empower client community members. Among client community composite characters, one was primarily affiliated with legal aid as an individual client, another was a board member and advisory group member, and a third was involved in community organizing.

In preparation for presenting the findings in this final document, I revisited the composite characters created for the focus groups. These composite characters were expanded in number from eight to 11 to account for greater nuance that emerged in the analysis. For example, to the four attorney composite characters created for the focus groups I added a fifth whose primary work focus was individual case handling but who was also highly invested in collaboration as a distinct first-order goal at legal aid. I also added a fifth client community composite character to illustrate the extended timeframe and layered nature that can sometimes characterize individual case handling, which emerged in the analysis as a theme in the temporal element of "Nourishing Collaborative Capacity."

Researcher voice. In addition to composite characters, the researcher's perspective is woven into the presentation of findings through synthesizing composite character perspectives and introductory and summary comments at the beginning and end of each section. The transparent integration of researcher voice is consistent with constructivist grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2000) and with interpretive paradigm research more broadly (Guba, 1990; Rodwell, 1998).

Rigor

Charmaz (2006) defines the criteria for rigor in a CGT study as credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness (see also O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008). The credibility criterion relates to the thoroughness and richness of the findings, and the level of familiarity with the studied phenomenon demonstrated by the researcher. Practices that support compliance with this criterion include constant comparison, theoretical sampling, reflexive journaling, and peer review. These practices give readers some level of assurance that the findings, though subjectively co-created and not intended as objective, nonetheless have been arrived at through a systematic and thorough process. Biases are explored and countered, and clear links are made from the empirical data to codes, categories, memos, and ultimately to the theory that is developed.

The criterion of originality refers to the "freshness" of the findings, and whether they offer a new "conceptual rendering" of the data (Charmaz, 2005, p. 528). Compliance with this criterion has been established through review of the literature and through focus groups with representatives of the primary stakeholder groups.

The criterion of resonance questions whether the findings penetrate beyond the obvious and address tacit and taken-for-granted meanings and understandings of the social process (Charmaz, 2005). The primary stakeholder group representatives who participated in the focus groups assessed compliance with this aspect of rigor by indicating whether the findings "make sense" given their own experience (Charmaz, p. 528). In addition, the researcher documented focus group participants' affective responses to the findings to demonstrate whether this standard of rigor has been met (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012).

Lastly, the usefulness criterion relates to whether the findings support the work and lives of participants in ways that are practical and consistent with advancement of social justice. Focus group participants helped assess compliance with this standard by giving examples of how they will be able to use the findings.

Timing and Phasing

The data collection for this study was divided into three phases: 1) interviews with primary stakeholder groups, 2) focus groups, and 3) interviews with additional stakeholder group. *Phase I* took place from March to September of 2014. Writing began with *Phase I* along with data analysis. Memos helped define codes and served as the basis for deeper analytic descriptions. Coding and memo writing continued from June to September 2014, in between *Phases I* and *II*. In September 2014, *Phase II* of data collection took place at the statewide legal aid conference. Writing continued after *Phase II.* After the third stakeholder group was identified during *Phase I,* an IRB amendment was submitted. Once this amendment was approved, *Phase III* was initiated in October 2014. After *Phase III* completed in November 2014, analysis and writing resumed. Drafts were circulated from February through April 2015.

Ethics and Politics

The guidelines for protection of human subjects of research established by the Belmont Report in 1979 and later ratified by the Common Rule in 1991 are intended to protect the well-being of vulnerable populations, e.g. children and prisoners, as well as to ensure that values of respect, beneficence, and justice are upheld to the maximum extent possible in the enactment of research (HHS, 1979). After addressing the main ethical questions raised in the Belmont Report, I discuss how this study fits into the ongoing issue of representation in qualitative research.

This study does not involve the participation of vulnerable populations as defined by the Belmont Report. That is, participants did not include prisoners, children, pregnant women, or persons with mental illness. This study upheld the values of respect, beneficence, and justice in the following ways. Informed consent is the primary component required to fulfill the respect requirement. Informed consent includes the elements of information, comprehension, and voluntariness. In the consent form that participants signed before being interviewed or being part of a focus group (see Appendix I), I provided prospective participants with a description of procedures, purpose and goals of the study; anticipated risks and benefits; and instructions for withdrawing from the study. They had an opportunity to contact the researcher, the principal investigator, or the VCU Institutional Review Board with any questions or concerns. Participation was completely voluntary, i.e. free of coercion by the researcher or any other parties.

An assessment of risks and benefits is necessary to ensure the beneficence of the study. The only risks associated with participating in the study were related to the potentially psychological and emotional content of interview and focus group conversations. In several interviews, participants cried or expressed emotion when discussing challenging circumstances. Still, the level of risk remained minimal, and the possibility of risk was deemed by the researcher to be appropriate given the potential benefits of the study. Possible benefits of this study include enhanced capacity of participants, legal aid organizations, and client communities as a result of deeper understanding of the process of community collaboration in the legal aid context. Participants also were provided with a $50 gift card to compensate them for their time. This amount is not high enough to be considered coercive.

According to the Belmont Report, the primary criterion for upholding justice is a sampling strategy that does not place undue burden or risk on a vulnerable population. This study posed only minimal risk for participants, and the sampling strategy did not place that risk disproportionately on a vulnerable population. Legal aid attorneys and client community members had equal opportunity to participate. Since client community members collectively have more limited access to privilege socioeconomically than legal aid attorneys, they were interviewed first and attorneys second. This sequencing helped correct for systemic bias in favor of the more privileged perspective (Charmaz, personal communication, July 23, 2013; Rodwell, 1998).

Representation. In addition to ethical standards established in the Belmont Report, the researcher sought to uphold a more subjective standard regarding the concept of representation. The "crisis of representation" (Clarke, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Geertz, 1988) refers to a set of concerns about how research participants' ideas, lives, actions, and words are depicted in the analyses, findings, and disseminated works of researchers (Schostak, 2006). Representation relates to the impact of research on human subjects and as such to the ethical basis of the research itself. At the same time it is an inherently subjective concept that defies prescriptive plans of action.

A critical aspect of representation relates to power. Power differentials between researcher and participants, and among participants, are inevitably part of the research process (Denzin, 2007; Drake & Jonson-Reid, 2008; Rodwell; 1998). Critics of the Belmont Report standards have pointed out that matters of research ethics extend beyond these basic protections and should attend to the idea that researchers are not in a position, and do not have the right, to represent the "truth" of the participants in their studies (Christians, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln,

2005). For these critics, representation must take on a collaborative dynamic whereby scholars

do not decide unilaterally how participants' realities are represented. Constructivist and CGT

research practices inherently acknowledge these concerns by making space for participants to

assess the credibility and authenticity of the study's findings through the process of member

checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rodwell, 1998), and CGT scholars in particular place the

researcher in a position of co-creator of knowledge alongside participants, starting with intensive,

collaborative interviews and continuing through iterative analysis, theoretical sampling, and

member checking activities (Charmaz, 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012).

Questions about representation also relate to a critique of positivism and post-positivism

insofar as the goal of objectively portraying the realities of participants is problematized. Since

this study is located in a constructivist paradigm, objective representation is not a goal. The

question remains, however, of what *is* the goal in representing the lived experiences and

perceptions of participants. Once the goal of "accuracy" is removed from the equation (Schostak,

2006), the responsibility on the shoulders of the researcher is to conceptualize how best to honor

the realities of participants through the processes of depiction and dissemination. Again, this

responsibility starts early in the research process with the development of research and interview

questions. Schostak writes, "[H]ow we ask questions and how we reflect upon the answers

provided will determine what we say we 'know' and 'believe', will influence our relations with

others, the world and our actions and thus determine the possibility for emancipatory writing and

action" (p. 8). While emancipation is not an explicit goal of this study, the larger arc of this

inquiry is informed by the goal of greater collective liberation. In this study, therefore,

participants were engaged in a manner that allowed for the possibility of future activities that *are*

emancipatory in nature. In the focus groups, participants' stories were reflected back to them

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through composite vignettes, and they had the opportunity to accept, reject, and comment on the narratives as presented. Through this brief exercise in knowledge co-creation, the hope was to take a small and modest step in a much larger process of participatory and collective narration. In summary, in this study the question of representation has been addressed by enacting a collaborative, iterative, and reflexive research process that is also consistent with the recommendations of constructivist and CGT methodologies (Charmaz, 2006; Rodwell, 1998).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described how this study was implemented, including the data collection, data analysis, and writing processes. In the next chapter I present the findings of the study, which include a conceptual framework, a detailed report of the main categories and themes of the findings, and my lessons learned based on the findings.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

What follows are the findings of this study based on my analysis and interpretation of transcripts of the 28 interviews conducted. The chapter begins with an explanation of the conceptual framework that visually represents the major categories of findings and how they relate (Charmaz, 2006). The term "framework" as opposed to "model" is in keeping with the contextualized nature of these findings. Frameworks provide guidance for practice (see Fraser, Galinsky, & Richman, 1999; Payne, 2014; Wakefield, 1988), whereas models are more prescriptive (see Aarons, Hurlburt, & Horwitz, 2011; Wright, 2001). Following the conceptual framework explanation, and comprising the bulk of this chapter, is a synthesis of participants' stories. As discussed in chapter three, I use composite characters and their stories to illustrate the major findings of the study. This presentation of findings follows the same sequencing as the conceptual framework explanation. In the last part of this chapter, I present six of the most salient lessons that I draw from the participants' individual and collective narratives. I reiterate that the findings and lessons learned are grounded in the social and geographic context of this study (Charmaz, 2006). Readers may find that this context has relevance in other settings, but that is not the primary intent of this research (Rodwell, 1998).

Explanation of Conceptual Framework

Through interviews with twenty-eight legal aid attorneys, client community members, and partner agency representatives in Virginia, I have come to a tentative understanding of how

collaboration between legal aid attorneys and client community members manifests as both a reflection of structure and an outcome of human consciousness and action. Organizational, social, and political context sets in motion configurations and interactive patterns of legal aid personnel, job descriptions, legal problems, and people and communities affected by poverty. Simultaneously, attorneys and client community members are propelled by their own agency into engagement with each other and the legal aid environment. The resulting process – "Collaborating for Justice in a Legal Aid Context" – is visually represented in Figure 1.

Starting from the left side of Figure 1, attorneys and client community members in the studied context live in a world characterized, in their experience, by unequal access to advantage. Based on their experiences living with (dis)advantage, they move toward and into a legal aid environment, seeking to resolve both material injustices and the dissonance between their own value commitments and the dominant social and political environment. Before they can become affiliated with a legal aid organization, however, attorneys and client community members must gain access to regulated involvement. This element of the process is represented in Figure 1 by a lens shape because it refracts individuals' paths between living with (dis)advantage and coming together for justice. The shape is shaded in order to suggest a filtering function as well. The organizations toward which attorneys and client community members gravitate must limit their operations and target their resources. That is, the process of becoming involved is not open to all regardless of circumstance but rather subject to regulation by organizational resource distribution and priority setting. In addition, individual actors in this setting seek or do not seek access to legal aid based on their own interests. Once attorneys and client community members make their way into the legal aid environment, depending on their specific interests and goals they come together seeking justice in one of five principle ways. First and perhaps most commonly, they

come together to address individual legal matters through the courts and other legal institutions. Second, they address legal matters collectively through class action, representation of a corporate entity, or representation of similarly situated individuals. Third, they attempt to achieve systemic change through legislative or policy advocacy. Fourth, they engage and organize at the community level to address commonly held concerns through the mobilization of political will. Finally, they work together on boards and advisory groups that fulfill governance roles within legal aid organizations.

Figure 1

Collaborating for Justice in a Legal Aid Context
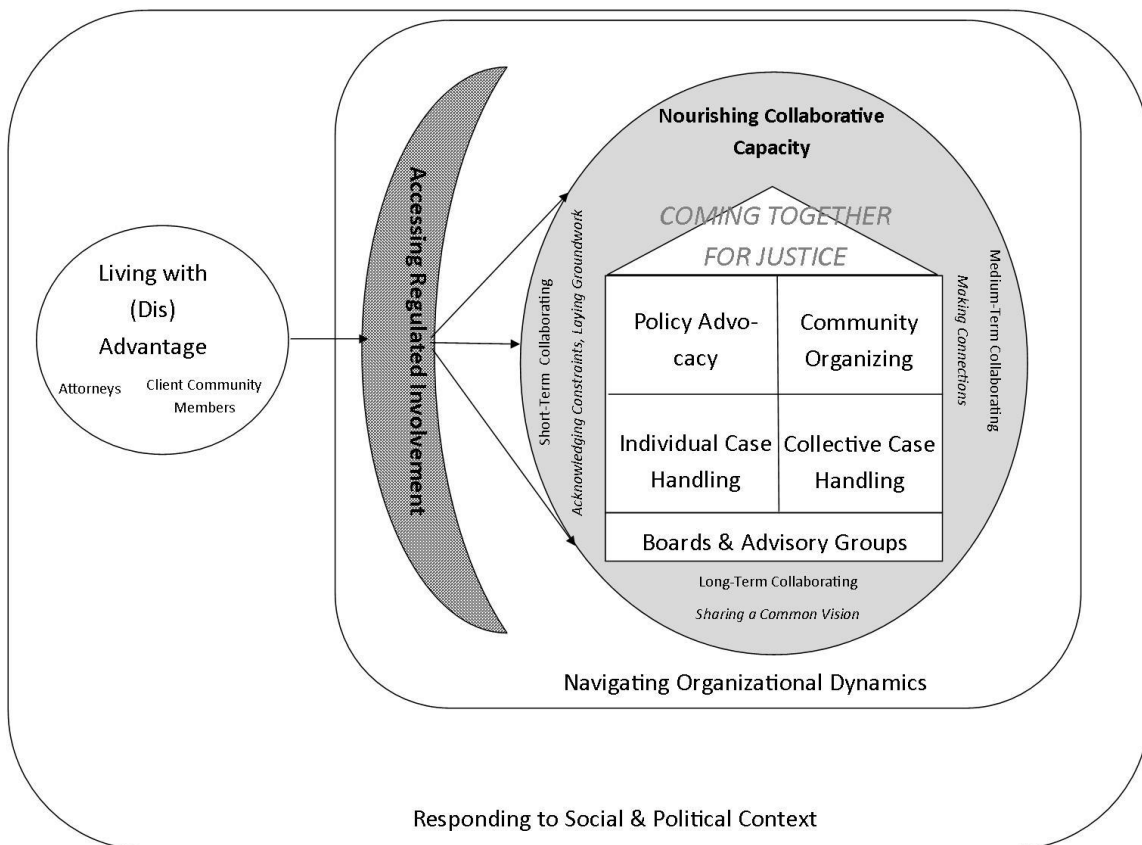
The area immediately surrounding the house shape labeled "Coming Together for Justice" depicts the space in which collaboration in the context studied is attended to and nurtured in each of the five modes of joint action. In each of the five modes, those involved work together in ways that, to varying degrees, make that work interdependent and reciprocal. This collaborative work can be short-, medium-, or long-term. Short-term collaboration offers an opportunity to acknowledge constraints of the limited timeframe but also to lay groundwork for deeper collaboration. Medium-term collaboration allows the participants to make connections between people but also between individual, organizational, and community levels of intervention. Long-term collaboration affords the opportunity to bridge differences and identify and mobilize around a common vision. In addition to working within the bounds of these timeframes, however, attorneys and client community members build bridges and work reflexively to *sustain* and *extend* collaborative capacity in ways that challenge or build on what previously seemed possible. They question presumed roles, move outside of mediated or prescriptive spaces, and work toward making connections and uniting around common visions.

Lastly, the two rounded boxes in Figure 1 represent the context in which all of these activities take place. In order to collaborate and create positive change attorneys and client community members must navigate and respond to the organizational and broader social and political contexts. Organizational characteristics shape the types of change that are possible and the degree to which the change that occurs is considered positive. The change created must also be considered in the context of the social and political environment insofar as certain types of change might be more urgently needed or more possible depending on where and when the change is set to take place. The goals and activities of the participants in this study, for instance, are driven by their location in the Commonwealth of Virginia during the time period of the 2010s.

This context allows for a different set of goals and activities than their counterparts during the 1970s or those in Massachusetts or California might undertake. In the next section, I proceed with a more detailed discussion of how legal aid attorneys and client community members in the three organizations studied come together in the process of "Collaborating for Justice in a Legal Aid Context."

Collaborating for Justice in a Legal Aid Context

In this section, I present my synthesis and interpretation of the participants' stories, on which the conceptual framework in the preceding section was based. I construct and use composite characters as a vehicle for bringing the participants' stories to life. These twelve composite characters are introduced in this opening discussion of living with (dis)advantage. Each composite character represents several participants in the study and was created using the process described in chapter three. Names are fictitious and individual attributes and affiliations are combined in ways that render the characters unidentifiable and protect participant confidentiality. Each character will "speak" using the first-person voice, and in between their comments I interpret those comments and place them in the context of the larger process of collaborating for justice. As discussed in chapter three, the names of the three organizations to which characters are affiliated have been changed as well. The names used to refer to the organizations are Regional Emergency Legal Aid, which refers to a Legal Services Corporation (LSC)-funded organization with a regional service area that primarily handles individual cases that are deemed emergencies; Regional Comprehensive Legal Aid, a non-LSC funded organization whose profile of activities includes more collective and systemic change work than Regional Emergency Legal Aid; and Statewide Legal Aid, which is also not subject to LSC restrictions but primarily serves a training and technical support function for all of the regional

legal aid programs in the state while at the same time carrying out its own legal and political advocacy efforts with and on behalf of low-income residents of Virginia.

The discussion of living with (dis)advantage consists of self-introductions of the twelve composite characters tied together with analysis and framing of their stories. After I introduce them and place them in relation to unequal access to advantage, I trace the characters' experiences and perspectives through the remaining portions of the larger narrative, which are "accessing regulated involvement," "coming together for justice," "nourishing collaborative capacity," and "navigating context." Each portion of the narrative is labeled accordingly.

~Living With (Dis)Advantage~

The individual stories of the composite characters, and their roles in Collaborating for Justice in a Legal Aid Context, begin with their relationship to (dis)advantage. In our conversations, attorneys and client community members each told stories about their daily lives as well as the events leading up to their association with legal aid. A common thread that can be traced through these stories is the effects of living in a world with unequal access to advantage. I am defining advantage here as access to opportunities and resources, and I use the term living with (dis)advantage to represent how the formative and ongoing experiences of attorneys and client community members are shaped by the unequal distribution of advantage. My use of (dis)advantage points to the extent to which one's actions, activities, and decisions are monitored, restricted, or subject to punishment (see Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011) by social institutions that govern housing, employment, safety, and other basic needs. The term also prefaces the purpose for which these characters eventually come together to create change. It is both a description of their, and our, environment and the driver of their participation in the meaningful social, legal, and political acts that are at the center of this study.

These relationships between individuals and their social worlds vary between attorneys

and client community members, and also within those two groups. For client community

members, themes of living with (dis)advantage include *existing in the margins*, *avoiding scrutiny*,

feeling less than, and *navigating bureaucratic systems*. These four main attributes appear in

italics for emphasis and ease of identification. For attorneys, a major preoccupation in their

stories is how to use their time and energy to address the inequality and hardship they see in the

world around them. The themes of their experiences of living with (dis)advantage are *aligning*

their values and interests, *addressing root causes*, and *fighting for the underdog*. These terms

also appear in italics. Comments by the twelve composite characters are set apart with single

line spacing and italics. The first character I introduce is Beatrice, who exemplifies several

aspects of the client community experience of living with (dis)advantage, including being

affected by poverty over an extended period of her life. Beatrice is an African American female

in her sixties. She is connected to Regional Comprehensive Legal Aid through a grassroots

organizing group but she has been an individual client in the past as well.

Beatrice: I am a public housing resident and for a number of years I have been involved with a
group of people that works on making the situation in public housing better for the residents. I
came to legal aid because of some personal issues with the housing authority and my grandson's
school, but now I'm mainly involved with the public housing group. The reason why I had to
contact legal aid is because of the poor bookkeeping of the housing authority. It's always
because of something at the housing authority. Poor bookkeeping, being given eviction notices
when the rent was already paid, things on that order, which causes a lot of stress, being
threatened to be evicted, you don't have a place to go at that point, then it just brings about a lot
of negative feelings, which if the bookkeeping and all had been kept correctly it would have
avoided me having to go through that. Fortunately I had all my pay stubs so I was able to deal
with it. But it could have been a lot worse. It is important for us as residents of public housing
to keep pristine records because it is very very difficult if you can't prove what you're saying.
It's important to be able to substantiate what your complaint is against the housing authority.

In introducing her path to legal aid, Beatrice recounted the experience of being incorrectly

accused of paying rent late. This accusation could not be addressed quickly or easily. First, it

required her to bear additional emotional and psychological weight. She had to consider the possibility of losing her subsidized housing and being unable to afford another place to live. Then she had to produce all of her payment stubs, which she fortunately keeps track of meticulously. Over time, through relationships with members of a community coalition seeking to address affordable housing issues systemically, Beatrice became a member of that group. She recommends in this passage that residents take preventative measures such as record-keeping to avoid similar problems. *Avoiding scrutiny* is a theme for client community members that I define as the need to protect one's tenuous social position by preventing unwanted negative attention. Beatrice's story also exemplifies the theme of *existing in the margins,* which I define as experiencing a life that proceeds largely outside the scope of the mainstream social world and therefore leaves them subject to greater vulnerability, risk, and isolation. Client community members must contend with institutions under circumstances in which there is social, physical, and/or emotional risk and no immediate prospect of support or guidance. The scarcity of the social welfare system creates instability and lack of choice. The passage above hints at some of this vulnerability and isolation. Beatrice goes on to describe a situation in which the housing authority told her she would have to move from a "scattered" mixed-income community to a large public housing "court" community:

Beatrice: I don't like the surroundings in the courts, and then why would I want to be put into a violent neighborhood and leave my neighborhood here, and it's safe [here]. In all these scattered houses it's either seniors or they have some type of disability. So I was furious because they treated us like this just point blank. You got to move, you don't have no money, so you need to go.

As a result of her lack of economic means and the corresponding inability to exert influence, Beatrice experienced hearing of an imminent and major change in her life that would put her personal safety in jeopardy and being told she had no choice in the matter. This experience

reflects the marginalized existence described by several participants. They described being ignored and neglected and not knowing where to turn for help, or not being aware of the resources that were available, including legal aid. Beatrice went on to explain that as a result of this communication and support vacuum, dozens of her neighbors fled their homes for less favorable housing options because of vaguely described redevelopment plans by the local housing authority. These plans never materialized, in part due to organized resistance to the displacement of residents. Beatrice and her neighbors did, therefore, exert influence to some degree through concerted action. Nonetheless, the residents who left never came back, and now many of those homes remain vacant.

Another composite character, Maria, provided another example of *existing in the margins.* Maria is an African American woman in her late twenties and connected to Regional Emergency Legal Aid. She began her story with an experience she had with a public defender after committing a minor alcohol-related offense:

Maria: I came to legal aid originally for a situation with my employer. It was soon after I graduated from college and I was terminated from a full-time job in a childcare center. But several years before that I took a charge for underage drinking and disorderly conduct. The public defender assigned to me never returned my calls and did not meet with me before the trial date. At the trial, I looked all over for him, and finally saw him in an office but he didn't even come talk to me. Eventually another attorney came up to me right before the trial was about to start to say he would be my attorney. When that happened I was just, I was running out of my mind. I felt completely deserted by the public defender who was supposed to represent me. After that and talking to other people who had something like that happen, any time I have to go to court I'm nervous, I'm biting my nails, I'm just like oh my god this could go one way or the other. Even if it's just for a traffic violation. The legal system is scary. I mean sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

Maria's story demonstrated how the legal system and other large systems can come to represent fear and uncertainty for people who exist on the margins. Going to court for the first time and facing the possibility of jail time, the one person she counted on to help her navigate the process, the public defender, did not appear and did not communicate to tell her he would no longer

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represent her. She described a bodily reaction she now has anytime she deals with the legal system. Later in her story, Maria described the reduction in stress that came with skilled legal aid representation when dealing with her employment termination. After having her point of view dismissed in a preliminary hearing, her confidence grew dramatically because she was accompanied by a legal aid attorney who made sure that her perspective was honored.

For Maria, her story of *existing in the margins* also included a domino effect of stressful events set in motion by getting terminated from her job. Getting fired initiated the loss of a stable living situation and a "downhill spiral" that led to doubts about her ability to survive. For others, they express hope that the marginal existence is temporary because it was brought on by a discrete incident. In Walter's story below, existing in the margins starts with a denial of due process. Like Maria, he was terminated from his job without an opportunity to express his point of view or advocate for his innocence. Walter, a White male in his fifties who sought assistance from Regional Comprehensive Legal Aid, seemed to have a foothold in the middle class before this incident, and has hope that he can return to that position:

Walter: I couldn't understand why I didn't have a chance to plead my case. They just took my supervisor's word for it and I was terminated. I was devastated by losing this job and no longer being able to provide for my family. I felt like people looked at me like I needed other people's help. But on the other hand it gives me great satisfaction to pursue...trying to get another job cuz I'm not trying to exploit or take advantage of unemployment. But I feel that I'm entitled to [unemployment insurance], and I'm gonna pursue that. I just hope that my years of experience will count in my next job, and that I'm not basically starting over.

Walter refers in his comments to losing his independence and not being able to provide for his family. Compared to other client community members, Walter's experience with (dis)advantage was more isolated and perhaps less permanent. He saw himself as different from people who "take advantage" of the system. Nonetheless, he experienced *feeling less than* as a result of being terminated from his job and losing a degree of his social status. The loss of employment

threatened not only his career identity but his sense of self-sufficiency. He felt helpless and worried that others would see him that way, yet he retained hope that he would return to his previous station in life as opposed to "starting over."

For others, however, *feeling less than* was the norm rather than an aberration. It related to a more permanent set of circumstances, such as being poor, not being White, or living in a low-income neighborhood. Here Beatrice describes the stigma of living in low-income communities:

Beatrice: Someone in a low-income community is often not considered as a viable Richmond resident as everyone else even though they have the same desires and needs and wants like anyone else. That can affect a person's self-esteem, and it's just because you don't live where other people live and you don't have maybe what other people have.

Beatrice and Walter highlight the texture and gradation among client community members. While generally limited in their access to advantage, they are nonetheless a heterogeneous group characterized by diverse lived experiences.

The stories of client community members continue momentarily, but for a moment we consider the attorney experience. In contrast to the isolation and feelings of diminished value described by client community members, for attorneys the experience of living in a world characterized by (dis)advantage seems to result primarily in an active commitment to *aligning values and actions, addressing root causes,* and *fighting for the underdog*. They reject the status quo as unfair and unsatisfactory and embrace a commitment to using their time and talents to make society, or at least individual lives, better. Carrie is a White woman in her thirties who has worked at Regional Comprehensive Legal Aid for about five years. Carrie describes the trajectory that led to employment at legal aid:

Carrie: I guess I started identifying with progressive politics pretty early in life. I grew up in a violent household but it was mainly the bigger structural issues that motivated me. The global justice movement against the IMF and WTO and all that stuff was going on. Through all of that

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I was exposed to community organizing and other participatory social change work at a pretty early point in my life. I saw a lot of value in those methods but it didn't seem like a good fit with being an introvert. I did some hourly wage work out of some political concerns about professionalization, but eventually kind of gravitated to the law after recognizing that all career choices are imperfect and public interest law is quite appealing compared to a lot of other options. Plus I guess I have an affinity for technical work so being a lawyer made sense in that way. I never considered working for a law firm for a minute. It was more a question of what kind of public interest law to pursue, and I wanted a position with an organization that had strong ties to community organizing efforts. There were no positions available locally when I graduated, and when I didn't get a fellowship I wanted I decided to volunteer at legal aid and make due on my partner's income until I could get hired, which happened after about a year.

For Carrie as well as other attorneys, their interest in the law was as a vehicle through which to marry values and worldviews on the one hand with personal strengths and attributes on the other. Carrie is invested in *addressing root causes* by working toward systemic change and grassroots empowerment. Notably, Carrie sees great value in community organizing and other grassroots strategies but does not see that kind of work as well-suited to her strengths. She reconciled this inconsistency by seeking a position that supports participatory strategies but does not require her to take direct responsibility for those efforts. Another character, Suzie, provides a contrast to Carrie's story. Suzie is an Asian American attorney in her late thirties with experience at both Statewide Legal Aid and a regional legal aid program. She describes a different and more personal motivation for becoming a legal aid attorney:

Suzie: *I have always had an affinity for public sector work and only considered public sector and public interest employment after law school. Growing up I definitely experienced racism, but it was seeing my grandmother get mistreated in a nursing home when I began to see that I had some skills that would serve me pretty well as an advocate. One summer in law school I took an unpaid internship at legal aid, just doing whatever they needed. I guess I proved my dedication to the work because they hired me as a full-time attorney after law school. It sounds simplistic, but helping people is what drew me to legal aid and what continues to motivate me. This makes it especially difficult to decline requests for legal representation. I struggle sometimes with the work-life balance for similar reasons. I'll try to do anything I possibly can for my clients, including coordinating with other agencies, which I do a lot. What I try to tell the law students I work with is that we rise and fall together as a community and that's what motivates me. The hardest thing for people to understand is the difference between "unfair" and "illegal," and sometimes it's frustrating trying to explain that difference to clients. Community*

organizing and other bottom-up change strategies definitely have merit, but I see a clear line between an attorney's work and an organizer's work and I am definitely on the attorney side.

Unlike Carrie's early interest in systemic change, Suzie's original motivation to explore legal aid came through a personal experience at the individual level. She is interested in *fighting for the underdog* like she did for her grandmother. She sees a clear distinction between a lawyer's work and an organizer's work, and has little interest in bridging that distinction in her work. She coordinates services with other agencies for particular clients, however, and wants to do everything she can for each client. Later in her story she explained that her supervisor was surprised that she does so much to connect her clients to other services. Like Carrie, she sought value-action alignment in her career and pursued employment at legal aid in part by forgoing financial compensation on a temporary basis. Carrie and Suzie both had a degree of control and flexibility with regard to their financial situation that allowed them to seek gratifying work even if it meant working as a volunteer for a period of time.

This level of agency and autonomy did not typically characterize the experiences of client community members in this context as they move toward interaction with legal aid. For example, as Beatrice mentioned in describing her frustration about getting displaced to a neighborhood perceived as more violent, physical danger is a concern that further limits the choices of client community members. I return to another client community character, Sandra, who is an immigrant from Central America in her forties and came to the United States twelve years ago. She described her experience with a violent home life, the challenges of which were compounded by isolation and lack of support:

Sandra: Soon after I came here I got married and had my son. I contacted legal aid when I was trying to find a way to leave my husband, who was physically and mentally abusive. I didn't know what else to do. One of the only places I went to feel safe was the public library, where I could use a computer to search for help without anybody knowing. I never contacted anyone but

for some reason I just wanted to search. Then one day I saw the brochure in Spanish for legal aid, which was like a miracle.

For Sandra the fear and isolation of a highly marginalized existence was compounded by the threat of physical violence. She went on to describe the shame and anger she felt toward the world after finally escaping a violent home life. In addition to her own shame, she did not want to burden others. She perceived America as a place where people are preoccupied with improving their own lives and would not care about her situation. Maria also recounted a story of physical danger in which she came close to death while living with violent roommates. She connected her physical vulnerability to financial instability insofar as she accepted a dangerous housing situation only because she lacked better options in her price range.

Thus far, we have seen that client community members' experiences of poverty and marginalization drew them to legal aid, while attorneys were motivated by their values and desire to align their work with those values. Another aspect of living with (dis)advantage described by client community members is the enormous additional stress caused by *navigating bureaucratic systems*. Those in this study dealt on a regular basis with complexities and barriers of bureaucratic systems that are distinct from the substantive reason for engaging with those systems. The act of navigating these systems was time-consuming and inconvenient for participants, yet necessary in order to achieve their immediate desired outcomes. Often the assistance provided by legal aid attorneys and organizations was crucial to successfully wading through a complicated web of institutional procedures. The lives of client community members are often controlled, or "steamrolled" as Regional Comprehensive attorney Carrie put it, by bureaucracies much more than people of greater economic means. Sandra described the experience of leaving her abusive relationship while also addressing her lack of documentation and uncertain immigration status:

Sandra: I didn't have a driver's license before, but to get one I have to go to the police to get fingerprinting done. I only have a passport, but they need two documentations to do the fingerprinting. You need two IDs to get stuff sometimes. So it's just very complicated. Going through all the process it sometimes felt like would it be better if I stay in my situation? You know at least I could be a little bit safer, um, at home with my abusive husband than to be out here by myself trying to figure out how to survive.

This situation is real but sounds almost parodic. To acquire official identification she must get fingerprinted at the police department, and in order get fingerprinted she needs the proper forms of identification. Under the best of circumstances this particular situation might cause frustration. For Sandra, though, the stakes were much higher. The experience of navigating layers of impersonal bureaucracy led her to consider returning to a husband who had essentially enslaved her, only allowing her to leave their apartment to go to work. She explained that her legal aid attorney was her "savior" and that she "would not have done anything without her helping me." Her reliance on someone with advanced technical knowledge and experience dealing with these bureaucracies highlights the power large systems wield over client community members. Without the support and guidance of a professional expert, the choice between returning to an abusive home and figuring out "how to survive" might have been made differently.

In another example of navigating bureaucracy, Beatrice described her frustration as her grandson with special needs struggled for years without the support he needed from the school system. She suffered effects on her livelihood as meetings and other communication with school officials took up more and more of her time. In her view, the system simply wanted to punish, and ultimately banish, her son from school so that he would no longer be their problem. At the same time she was trying to address her son's needs, she was dealing with a local housing authority through her participation in a grassroots advocacy group. In this context, she described the bureaucracy changing its policies without input from community stakeholders, then responding to the group's overtures and communication with silence.

Public social welfare bureaucracies in particular were a source of participant frustrations. Employees at these agencies were described as unsupportive, unsympathetic, and worn down by heavy caseloads. Maria described the employees she interacted with as accusatory by default or simply "going through the motions." She speculated that some case managers are jaded by seeing too much of the "handout scenario." Sandra described social services workers as losing their desire to help and effectively adding insult to injury.

Regardless of their cause, these attitudes and behaviors seemed to exacerbate feelings of stress and isolation for client community participants. The ongoing frustrations with bureaucracy resulted in a mindset of short-term coping and periods of hopelessness for Sandra and Maria, who described their physical and emotional responses to the daily stress:

Sandra: It's like I have a long rope of problems to deal with. If one thing goes wrong then all the others just go along with it. Sometimes I lie in bed at night, and it's just so much to deal with. I keep [my attorney] on speed-dial in case anything happens. I don't know what to do without her.

Maria: I used to have a dream job in mind to shoot for but I've given up on that. It's just survival. Living day to day, paycheck to paycheck. Usually I sleep too late because I've been up late working the night before. I regret letting the hours go by in the morning. Then I go back to work [as a server] and try to make those dollars off the tables.

From these quotes it is apparent that living with (dis)advantage affected Sandra and Maria's daily lives both physically and emotionally. They sought legal aid's help in buffering them from these daily stressors. Attorneys in this context, meanwhile, seemed interested in both mitigating the concerns of individuals like Sandra and also finding ways to address root causes of those concerns. Alicia, an African American woman in her forties, came to legal aid seeking meaningful work and coworkers with similar commitments. Alicia was affiliated with Regional Emergency Legal Aid and had a prior interest in human rights and community engagement. She spent the first half of her career working with grassroots coalitions and doing policy advocacy

work at an organization similar to Regional Comprehensive. She discussed her values and how they translated to her work at legal aid:

Alicia: I grew up in a very socially conscious family, going to protests and things like that. Earlier in my career I struggled to find human rights work. I learned about the first legal aid program I worked at through a community event, and I was immediately drawn to this organization for the vision that I saw. It was a lot of community engagement and a mix of client cases and policy work. After relocating to the area with my partner I immediately contacted the executive director about job opportunities at the local legal aid. It took some time to pass the bar and things like that, but eventually I got the position I wanted. The position I have now is a really a good fit with my interests and wanting to be out in the community a lot. It's a great place to work.

Alicia came into legal aid with a passion for community engagement. She talked about gravitating toward professors in college and law school who pushed her to think about civic responsibility and community self-determination. She even designed and implemented a community-based education program during college. Over her career she has worked with two highly isolated and marginalized populations, migrant farmworkers and incarcerated youth, and personally identifies as LGBTQ. Service and empowerment are two core values that motivate her in this work. She is passionate about these values and believes strongly that any policy change efforts should be tied strongly to community input and the experiences of those directly affected by the policies in question. Like Carrie she sees *addressing root causes* as consisting of both empowerment and changing policies.

Some attorneys expressed displeasure with the amount of injustice in the world, but like Suzie's experience with her grandmother they see their role as *fighting for the underdog* more than changing systems. Miles, a White male in his fifties, has worked as a legal aid attorney for 25 years. He is affiliated with Regional Emergency Legal Aid, and his path to legal aid exemplified the desire to assist the downtrodden:

Miles: I came out of law school with the idea of wearing the white hat rather than, you know, oppressing people in tall buildings. I valued having an impact in people's lives much more than

monetary compensation. I also liked writing and solving problems, so that seemed like a good fit with the law. I considered other professions, but was drawn to legal aid after a very positive internship experience with a legal aid attorney during college. I ended up relocating to this area for law school and after graduating and passing the bar I got a job with legal aid. I took on management responsibilities fairly early in my career, but always had a caseload as well. I wish I could say that things have gotten better for poor people since I started working at legal aid, but unfortunately I believe they've gotten worse.

Miles' journey suggests that his primary interest from a young age was helping people and not necessarily creating broader change. Regardless of whether he saw the potential for systemic change at one time, his current view is that positive change of this kind has not occurred. Later in his story, he went on to describe what he sees as lack of interest in society to reduce inequality. He does not see collaboration with his clients as a major strength. Rather, he does what he can through the legal system, mainly through individual representation, to protect poor people from exploitation and even harsher outcomes than they already endure. Miles is an attorney who also has served in management roles at different points in his career. In this management capacity Miles worked with client community members who serve as board of directors or advisory group members.

Composite characters Lenora and Carmen represent this category of client community members who also serve as organizational leaders. Lenora and Carmen differ in that their primary interests are community activism and legal aid governance, respectively. While Lenora is a long-time activist and that is primarily what drives her, she also serves as a member of the Statewide Legal Aid board of directors. In her story she connected Beatrice's concept of *avoiding scrutiny* to the existence of entrenched mindsets and a reluctance to break free of those thought patterns:

Lenora: *I came to legal aid through prior work in the community on housing and poverty issues. Living in public housing I see a lot of turmoil and things that keep people in a negative mindset. As an example, I know of a situation where one of the service providers is buying food stamps from her client. Now if I go and try to deal with that problem by talking to the person's*

supervisor, then I would become the problem and that could be counterproductive to my physical health (laughs). So there are some real blockages in dealing with things at the higher levels. You also have a situation where academic training is valued a lot more than what I call mother wit. So organizations come in with agendas and get the community's input when it's convenient. That just causes more dependency and separation anxiety instead of fixing the deeper issues. It's a two-way street with both sides operating on a hand-out model.

Lenora, who is African American and in her fifties, perceives that unhealthy relationships between service providers and low-income community members need to be disrupted, but doing so will not necessarily be appreciated by either party. She sees challenges that need to be overcome in poor communities as well as among those trying to "help." In her view, underlying the practices that perpetuate unhealthy patterns are differential attitudes toward professional knowledge versus community expertise. This is another cause and manifestation of *feeling less than.* Feelings of inadequacy are embedded in, and exacerbated by, complicated dynamics between professional helpers and members of low-income communities. Making the situation more challenging, in her experience those who might want to change those dynamics face the prospect of personal harm.

Carmen described a different role for client community members as well as different challenges associated with attempting to bridge client and professional perspectives. She too identifies as a leader in her community, but her primary identity in the legal aid context is that of board and client advisory group member with Regional Emergency Legal Aid. She described her efforts in the community and the challenges of working across lines of economic difference on the board itself:

Carmen: I spend a lot of my time out in the communities making sure people are aware of legal aid. We hand out fliers, and if people have questions then we try to answer them or make sure they know how to get in touch with the legal aid office. We also have an annual breakfast for the homeless that is very well attended. But sometimes we don't feel appreciated by the other board members. They don't communicate with us and let us know what's going on. We'll get to a meeting and find out about something that all the other board members knew about weeks ago. That didn't use to happen but now it does.

Carmen has seen a shift in the relationship between client community board members and the rest of the organization. Elsewhere in her story she attributed that shift to a change in organizational leadership. The previous leadership made sure that she and the other client community board members felt included and knew everything that was happening, but that was no longer the case. From Carmen's perspective, *feeling less than* therefore extended into her relationships with the staff and other board members of legal aid itself. While Beatrice and others described experiences of feeling less than based on their race, their accent (Sandra talked about "not sounding White"), or their material wealth that framed these feelings in a broader social context, Lenora and Carmen's experiences drew connections to their experiences with service providers and with legal aid specifically.

As Lenora and Carmen pointed out, broader social dynamics found their way into legal aid and other human services contexts. In a similar vein, Ron, an attorney affiliated with Statewide Legal Aid, discussed the importance of addressing the lack of demographic diversity he sees among legal aid managers, as well as aspects of law firm culture that seep into how legal aid programs operate:

Ron: *I was the first lawyer in my family, and I didn't find out about legal aid until law school when I had a clinic professor who was a legal aid attorney. I started working for a more traditional legal aid office that mostly handled individual cases, and I used to love doing that and making a difference everyday in the lives of regular people. Then over time I just started getting worn down by the daily urgency and seeing hundreds of people in the same situation. I kind of burned out, and when a position opened up with another organization where I could try to address some of those issues at the policy level, I made that transition. What I've found since being in this position and seeing from afar how local programs operate is that there is a huge emphasis on closing cases in those local programs, and I think that is connected to funding but also the legal culture of counting cases and counting billable hours. There are also too many people who look like me, white men, running programs. I think if we had more diversity in leadership that would change the way programs operate in terms of collaboration and other things too.*

Ron's story goes back to the theme of *aligning values and actions.* He is not content to work in an organization with goals that align with his own if its internal culture fails to live up to his values. His career path, from individual case handling to policy work, also illustrates that legal aid tries to not only protect individuals from legal harm but also address the root causes of that harm. He has experienced the challenges and limitations associated with alleviating poverty on an individual case-by-case basis. Ron's story, along with those of Lenora and Carmen, points to areas in which they perceived that differences could be bridged more effectively, as well as the need to critically reflect on how individuals, groups, and organizations function within the legal aid context.

Summary

As illustrated above, client community member stories are varied but nonetheless saturated with examples of the direct and immediate impact of living with (dis)advantage. By comparison, attorneys are spared having to navigate bureaucracies, exist on the margins, or endure the other experiences that constitute lives of disadvantage, but many still have seen and experienced disadvantage and it has greatly affected how they want to live in the world. They have personally experienced (dis)advantage as well—victimized by racism, exposed to violent households, and marginalized as members of certain communities of identity. Yet for the most part attorneys' value commitments have come to them through their families of origin and their personal sense of justice, and not primarily through their direct experience. Through legal aid, attorneys became involved in seeking justice alongside and on behalf of client community members, whose stories also lack homogeneity. Some, like Lenora, came to legal aid through their pre-established commitments to social justice and involvement in community activism.

Others have experienced a run of bad luck with cumulative and devastating impact, and still others have lived in poverty for most or all of their lives. Through their values, experiences, and interests, attorneys and client community members came to the door of legal aid. Whether and how they eventually became involved was dependent on the resources available and organizational priorities in place. Access for both attorneys and client community members is therefore regulated by both individuals and organizations, and I turn to that part of the process next.

~Accessing Regulated Involvement~

Attorney participants recounted how, in response to overwhelming demand for services, legal aid programs make decisions about the clients they serve and activities they undertake. They conducte outreach in order to educate and raise awareness regarding the rights and responsibilities of client community members under the law. They encourage client community members to seek assistance before problems became emergencies. In other ways, legal aid organizations limit the services they provided. They select substantive areas of poverty law in which to devote their limited resources. They define which circumstances constitute an "emergency" and which others can be handled through a more deliberate process.

Attorneys and client community members such as the composite characters presented here use their personal agency to seek involvement in legal aid. But this involvement is constrained and regulated by legal aid organizations that have limited resources at their disposal. In turn, when accessing regulated involvement, client community members and attorneys have to navigate these organizational filters, restrictions, and priorities. Thus the process of accessing regulated involvement is a dialectical exchange in which individual agency and organizational structures and priorities combine to result in certain patterns of interaction. The parameters of

this exchange are set, in the experiences of study participants, by five themes: *becoming engaged*, *managing unmanageable caseloads*, *engaging in outreach*, *assessing community needs and priorities*, and *regulating broader impact advocacy*.

Client community members described two primary ways of *becoming engaged* with legal aid. One of these ways is targeted written communication tied to specific areas of legal assistance. Maria and Walter learned about legal aid through documents obtained from the Virginia Department of Social Services while they navigated the process of applying for unemployment insurance. Sandra was experiencing domestic violence and immigration issues when she saw a flier at the public library--the "miracle brochure" as she called it--offering free legal assistance for undocumented immigrants. These materials provided links to services for individuals, and the key moment of engagement was receiving or coming across a document that directly related to her circumstances.

The other way client community members described becoming engaged is through interpersonal networks and tends to involve oral communication rather than written materials. Beatrice heard from an acquaintance in the community about a child advocacy program, and later helped others get connected to a public housing organizing effort. These personalized experiences of becoming engaged were predicated on word-of-mouth networks and face-to-face interaction rather than static documents:

Beatrice: *After they told us we had to move, then we got invited to a meeting of the housing coalition, the one that I was telling you about. They elected me to speak about this issue, and after hearing what was happening the coalition helped us get meetings set up with the housing authority CEO and eventually we were successful in stopping the sale of the houses. We did a lot of research and got people together and found out the housing authority really wasn't following the procedures they were supposed to. And so they stopped. So that's how I became involved.*

These networks and interactions that led to engagement seem particularly important for grassroots organizing efforts. In Beatrice's case, without a personal connection and invitation from someone already involved, the initial engagement would have been less likely to occur.

In addition to hearing about specific programs or forms of assistance, participants described the importance of hearing success stories. Success stories gave participants hope that getting involved with legal aid would lead to positive outcomes. It increased their level of trust in the organization and provided inspiration during challenging times. After becoming involved, Beatrice and Carmen described taking on the role of legal aid booster, telling others in their communities that they should consider reaching out to legal aid and becoming involved.

A shared element of these two modes of engagement -- written and word-of-mouth -- is the participant's self-interest. When Beatrice learned about the child advocacy program she was struggling to navigate conflict with her son's school. She then went on to be part of a leadership development initiative and grassroots community-based advocacy efforts connected to legal aid after hearing about those opportunities from others in her neighborhood who were involved. Other client community member participants initially responded positively to brochures and other materials that spoke to their direct and immediate needs.

For attorney participants, *becoming engaged* required the pairing of an open position and a qualified applicant. Miles from Regional Emergency described applying for jobs in all parts of the country before ending up in Virginia. After relocating to Virginia, Alicia networked in the legal aid community until a position became available in her area of expertise at Regional Emergency. Carrie from Regional Comprehensive worked for one year on a volunteer basis until a full-time position became available. Underlying the limited availability of attorney positions was the scarce pool of financial resources organizations had at their disposal. Suzie

from Statewide described a scenario in which funding was available to hire an attorney in a rural office of the organization, but the funder stipulated that only graduates of certain law schools in another region of the country would be eligible. Qualified, eligible applicants never materialized, and the position remained unfilled.

Once employed at legal aid, attorneys were faced with the process of *managing high-volume caseloads.* One of the most taxing demands on legal aid organizations described by participants was the steady stream of individual clients who come seeking legal assistance. This demand, which was far more than the supply of resources could accommodate, can be both a source of collaborative potential and a constraint. Miles described triaging cases at Regional Emergency in the same way a hospital operates. They look for emergency situations that will have serious negative outcomes without immediate intervention. They have very specific definitions of what constitutes an emergency, and if the criteria are not met the client is referred elsewhere, perhaps to Regional Comprehensive. The overwhelming demand puts pressure on legal aid intake systems. Erica, a partner agency participant representing a statewide nonprofit called Affordable Housing Now, expressed disappointment that nearly half the people she referred to legal aid have a negative initial experience as a result of the intake process:

Erica: No one returns their calls or some other basic customer service expectation is not met. It's frustrating because I know they do great work and I want to refer people there, but I hesitate because it feels like I'm sending people to a brick wall.

Carmen the client community board member shared this concern. She tries to shield prospective clients from excessive disappointment by explaining that the organizations simply cannot meet the demand for services. Miles described the level of need for legal aid's services as essentially infinite, and he explained why the actual met need is much less than people think:

Miles: Legal aid serves at most 20% of the client community members who need free civil legal assistance, but in reality it's much less. First of all we only serve people within our narrow band

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of priorities. Then we only have the capacity to provide "advice and counsel" to most of the clients we serve. So if someone comes here saying their landlord won't give their security deposit back, we can't take that case. We can tell them how to file a warrant in debt, and we count that as providing services, but have we really given that person what they need? I'm not sure.

Miles went on to connect the pressure to meet demand to the organizational need to satisfy funders. Funders, including the state and federal governments, want legal aid programs to serve the most clients they could as efficiently as possible. He explained that programs therefore look for ways to promote efficiency. For example, his organization found value in developing and providing stock answers to common problems. To further increase efficiency, his employer incorporated technology in its approach to helping clients through the legal requirements of completing a divorce. This strategy allowed them to help 15 clients complete petitions for divorce during a 1-hour period using a room with ten computer work stations and one printer.

On the one hand, heavy caseloads and overwhelming demand suggested the need for more lawyers and more resources to help more people. On the other hand, Carrie from Regional Comprehensive expressed doubt that hiring more lawyers would result in meaningful change: "I actually don't think that what is wrong with the world is that poor people don't have enough lawyers." Even with more lawyers, she added, those who are motivated to come to legal aid might receive services, but the large number that do not seek assistance will be left to defend themselves. Suzie added that legal aid "inflicts" its priorities and case acceptance criteria on people even though it feels very arbitrary in individual cases: "It's at odds with wanting to help people to tell someone, 'I can't help you because you have a private landlord and we don't take clients with private landlords.' It just doesn't make sense, but we have to do it."

Several attorney participants also recognized that many problems do not come with legal solutions, and two consequences derived from this reality. One is that attorneys and legal aid

organizations tend to overemphasize the promise of legal strategies because that is their field of expertise. The second challenge, according to these participants, is that this way of thinking extends to client community members. Suzie and Carrie both lamented being asked by clients wanting and expecting help addressing a problem for which a legal strategy was not appropriate or useful. This dynamic led to disappointment and mistrust when the client felt unheard or dismissed by the attorney.

Carrie: Sometimes I feel like people think we're holding out on them or not doing everything we can, but in reality sometimes it's just that the problem doesn't lend itself to a lawsuit. But to them, it's another situation of people with privilege controlling access to resources. It's just unfortunate.

Carrie expressed regret that a consequence of these situations is to reinforce existing power dynamics. She went on to emphasize the importance of having relationships that can withstand these challenging circumstances that would otherwise derail the partnership.

In addition to experiences of high-volume caseloads, participants described how organizations make decisions about taking clients who are more isolated and/or have complicated sets of legal problems. Juvenile justice and special education cases, for example, cannot be handled in the same quantity as housing or public benefits cases. Alicia explained that her cases in these lower caseload areas often contain several elements that need to be addressed in succession over a period of years:

Alicia: A lot of times it's not like clients come to us, they have a hearing, and in a day or two it's resolved. I mean I had one client at the organization I used to work at. I worked with him over a period of two years, had multiple hearings, and then he re-entered the community and there were a lot of new issues that I helped him with in relation to that. So it's a long-term process.

These longer-term, complicated cases affect the overall caseloads of legal aid attorneys and organizations. In addition to their own caseloads, several attorneys mentioned being responsible for managing volunteer "pro bono" attorneys and supervising law school students who take on

legal aid clients as part of their practical training. Involving volunteers and students helps

increase the number of individual clients served by legal aid. It also serves a function of raising

awareness of legal aid's work in the broader legal community and helping prepare the next

generation of legal aid attorneys.

Several attorneys and client community members described the process of *engaging in*

outreach, which includes activities undertaken to educate and build relationships between legal

aid organizations and prospective clients. Outreach activities typically entail introducing legal

aid and providing information about the services they provide. Often the goal in these activities

is to encourage client community members to come forward and seek help from legal aid when

problems occur. Attorneys described conducting outreach through traditional, structured

community education sessions. As Alicia described, however, outreach also can occur through

unstructured, informal meetings at flea markets, in churches, and wherever else client

community members gathered. Part of an attorney's work in doing unstructured outreach is to

identify appropriate opportunities and locations. They seek guidance from other attorneys and

conducted background research that informs their outreach practices. In addition to attorneys

conducting outreach, client community members described disseminating information in their

neighborhoods and in other neighborhoods with high concentrations of client-eligible residents.

Beatrice from Regional Comprehensive described becoming a neighborhood resource as she

learned more about legal aid and the cases they handle.

Alicia connected the heavy emphasis on outreach in her work to the degree of isolation

experienced by certain client populations. If not for her outreach, these culturally, institutionally,

and/or geographically isolated populations' access to legal aid services would be minimal.

Therefore, unlike many attorneys for whom client demand exceeds attorney capacity even

without conducting outreach, for Alicia her effectiveness in serving isolated populations depends on successful outreach. She spends much of the year connecting with prospective clients and building trust so that when problems occur they will contact her, and she spends entire days in her car driving to meet with clients or potential clients. She finds creative means by which to build relationships with client community members. To build trust she sends letters and connects client community members with non-legal resources that they needed. She has encountered institutional barriers and in some cases specific individuals in positions of authority who perceived a vested interest in preventing access to legal aid.

At the organizational level, Miles described sponsoring events in the community to raise awareness of legal aid. Since in his experience attorneys are extremely busy and often do not have time to initiate these activities, he expressed his preference for client community board and advisory group members to take more initiative in setting up community education events in the future. He emphasized that community members need to understand the importance of coming to legal aid as soon as possible. Unfortunately, he added, people often come for help after it is too late. Suzie of Statewide Legal Aid described two factors that affect whether clients seek legal aid's assistance:

Suzie: Part of the problem is that if you're really struggling and juggling all these things with your job and your kids and trying to keep everything together it's hard to find time or energy to come to legal aid even if it would mean getting the SNAP benefits that you're qualified for. But the other thing is what we call the Zen of legal aid, and that is that you get more of the cases you do. So we get a ton of divorce intakes and a ton of housing intakes because people say 'oh go to legal aid for that because they helped so and so.'

As Suzie explained, one consequence of focusing on certain types of cases is that the organization tends to get more of those cases. She went on to talk about working with other agencies to lay groundwork for referrals, e.g. hospital patients who are low-income and need legal assistance. Similarly, Miles described community education with partner organizations that

might refer clients to legal aid rather than with client community members directly. He does not

proactively seek community engagement opportunities because he does not have the time.

Suzie's explanation reflects the view that even if attorneys had time to go out into the community

for the purpose of encouraging prospective clients to come to legal aid, it may not be the best

way to facilitate client access to legal aid. These are the kinds of challenging dilemmas attorneys

discussed in relation to how time and energy should be allocated.

Another theme that emerged within accessing regulated involvement is *assessing*

community needs and priorities in order to set organizational priorities that are more in line with

and more effectively address those needs. Miles described the challenges of assessing

community needs effectively as well as the importance of distinguishing between legal needs and

broader social problems:

Miles: There's no doubt we have serious flaws with how we engage the client community in priority setting. We need to do more. Part of it is just that it's really hard when you're tied to your desk for most of the work day. So in reality I experience the community largely through those who come to legal aid. Now as an organization we do study the community's needs every three to five years. We gather individual and community data. But a lot of times the main problems identified through this process are non-legal and legal aid can do little to address them. For example racial tensions in the community, or transportation. So we end up saying well, these are the two biggest problems in the community and we can't do anything about either of them. So it's not ideal by a long shot. To kind of supplement what we do with the community, we work with partner agencies and funders to identify problems and try to come up with creative solutions.

Through this indirect approach described by Miles, Regional Emergency worked with a partner

organization and started offering services related to the Affordable Care Act. These services

were technically non-legal in nature but they improved the overall well-being of clients and

expanded awareness of legal aid at the same time. Similarly, interprofessional collaboration with

medical doctors has proven an effective means of addressing legal concerns that coincide with

medical problems. In other instances, attorneys became invested in an aspect of poverty law and

poverty alleviation, and their interest and passion helped drive organizational priorities. Suzie

described how she started doing more work on nutrition:

Suzie: I became passionate about food security issues after a professional development event, and then I just made a point of convincing my colleagues that the organization should handle more public benefits cases. I mean I can literally change someone's life by spending twenty minutes writing a letter to get their food stamps reinstated. It's that simple, so I'm like why aren't we doing more of these?

Miles and Suzie's comments underscore that the needs can be so vast and numerous that in some

cases it comes down to an individual attorney's analysis or interest related to a particular

problem, or an organizational partnership that expands the reach of legal aid's work in a way that

improves the well-being of clients.

In addition to regulating the ambit of individual cases a program undertakes by managing

caseloads and assessing priorities, scarce and restricted resources require that legal aid programs

create ways of *regulating broader impact advocacy.* Of the five modes of coming together for

justice that I discuss in the next part of this section, I use the term broader impact advocacy to

describe three: cases that have an impact beyond relief for individual clients, policy advocacy,

and community organizing. Organizations that receive federal Legal Services Corporation

funding are prohibited from taking part in class action litigation, lobbying, and political

organizing. While the definition of class action is fairly well agreed upon, the same seems to be

less true of lobbying and political organizing. Participants offered different interpretations of

what these terms mean in practice, but several participants agreed that uncertainty leads many

LSC-funded organizations to avoid any activity that carries risk of non-compliance with LSC

restrictions. For organizations that do not receive LSC funding, they must decide how to allocate

resources across the three modes of collective advocacy.

Collective case handling includes class action litigation as well as representation of corporate entities such as grassroots community groups. It is important to note that class action is but one legal avenue that attorneys and clients can take in achieving systemic change. Other than class action, collective and systemic legal advocacy is not generally prohibited by LSC. It should also be noted that "collective" and "systemic" are not synonymous. Collective advocacy can address a very specific complaint and have a limited impact, and conversely an individual claim can ultimately lead to systemic change through, for example, the setting of precedent. Nonetheless, participants explained that as a general rule these collective and systemic cases are more time consuming, which means there are organizational considerations as to whether the opportunity cost is too great. Suzie explained how the opportunity to engage in collective or systemic advocacy is more available to her when student supervision needs receded:

Suzie: Part of the calculus of whether to engage in impact litigation is whether attorneys can spare the time to identify promising opportunities and build cases involving numerous plaintiffs. It takes a ton of time and with caseloads and students to supervise it can end up on the back burner. When students are on vacation is when I can usually devote time to systemic cases.

Policy advocacy is similarly dependent on the time and ability of attorneys to connect client concerns with systemic policy-based solutions, as well as whether the substantive area of law lends itself to intervention at the policy level. Carrie explained why certain attorneys in Regional Comprehensive spend more time doing policy advocacy while she works more with individual clients and community groups:

Carrie: Certain areas like education and immigration reform are more conducive to legislative work. For housing attorneys it's mostly individual cases, but we also do work with a local group of public housing residents to address problems related to local housing authority policies.

One question related to policy advocacy is whether or not to spend time doing it. Another question is whether and how to engage client community members in that work. Ron from

Statewide Legal Aid explained some of the concerns and barriers associated with engaging

grassroots constituents in the legislative process:

Ron: There are major barriers to involving clients in policy advocacy. First, the legislative process in Virginia is just awful when it comes to grassroots participation. You go down there, you wait around all day, then you find out the committee meeting you came for is postponed. It's really not set up for regular people to participate. It's set up for lobbyists who are down there everyday talking one-on-one to legislators. The other thing is that it's really hard to ask clients to re-live a traumatic event that's just happened and then go to the general assembly and get the run-around and not even be able to participate.

The process of *regulating collective advocacy* seems to highlight issues related to resource

scarcity and allocation. Participants suggested that while the impact of collective advocacy may

be greater than individual case handling, so too is the time and energy required to pursue

collective strategies.

Summary

According to study participants, accessing regulated involvement is a dialectical and

highly non-linear process. Because the level of need far outstrips legal aid organizations' ability

to provide service, difficult decisions must be made. Informing these decisions are individual

and institutional views about whether individual or systemic change is needed; views of funders

and partner agencies about what kinds of issues are most pressing; the availability of funding and

restrictions on that funding as well as the correlated issue of staffing and human capacity; client

community priorities and demand for certain types of intervention; and individual attorneys'

interests and passions. Despite this complicated web of considerations, client community

members and attorneys eventually come together in pursuit of justice. When they do, their

activities fall within five major categories or modes. These five modes are discussed next.

~Coming Together for Justice~

Once both attorneys and client community members are mutually engaged within a legal aid organization, they come together in five major ways for the purpose of advancing justice. These modes of action are *individual case handling*; *collective and broader impact case handling*; *policy advocacy*; *community organizing*; and *boards and advisory groups*. The particpants in this study explained how each of these five modes of interaction unfolds, as well as the key considerations, benefits, and drawbacks for attorneys and clients community members involved.

Several attorneys described individual case handling as the "bread and butter" work of legal aid. These cases are typically matters of great urgency. Whether cases related to housing, employment, domestic violence, or another area of the law, the stakes are high. Despite the "bread and butter" characterization, attorneys recognized that for clients these cases are anything but mundane. As Miles from Regional Emergency explained, he always reminds himself that for his clients these cases are not "cases" at all, but lives. Despite and perhaps in part because of the level of urgency, these cases can take on a pragmatic, outcome-oriented quality in which each party completes the tasks required to achieve a positive legal resolution. Several attorneys described working collaboratively with clients as much as possible within the context of individual cases, but also acknowledged the constraints placed on collaboration in individual cases. Miles explained that he uses his technical knowledge and skills to achieve a desirable outcome:

Miles: The first thing I have to do is determine the merits of the case and the best course of action. A big reason I have to exercise control over the process is to maintain legal aid's credibility with judges and courts. Bringing cases that are frivolous or without merit damages that credibility and, in turn, legal aid's ability to help others. If a trial is needed, I prepare the client by helping get their story straight. Clients tend to have the facts of a situation all jumbled up and the attorney needs to help them get the facts in the right order so the judge will

understand. Attorneys are trained to do this and frankly there's no reason clients or any non-attorney needs to think this way. I see it as the client provides the raw material and the attorney crafts the case.

Miles' description helps define a tension in individual case handling between achieving desired outcomes and collaboration. Attorneys need to take a certain amount of control, in Miles' view, in order to maintain the organization's reputation and achieve what the client wants to achieve. Suzie explained that attorneys are trained to help in specific ways and, in her view, they should stay focused on those professional priorities:

Suzie: Telling clients what to focus on is part of being a lawyer, and this is especially true with individual cases. To me, collaboration is only beneficial if it results in more effective case handling. I don't see other inherent benefits to collaboration. Lawyers have skills and resources to see the bigger picture, and sometimes it is necessary to explain to a client and even convince them that no legal claim exists. Attorneys are professionally bound to give their opinion; they are not trained to just do what people want. We hear passionate complaints all the time about indignities that are not illegal and therefore not suited to legal action. In those cases we have to tell clients there's nothing we can do as attorneys.

Suzie further explained that attorneys serve as cultural liaisons of sorts. They introduce clients to new modes of communication, and prepare them to present information in a compelling and accurate narrative. She explained that the natural tendency for clients is to not want to repeat themselves, for example. Attorneys therefore rehearse with clients so that they understand the way stories are explored in the courtroom. Based on her experience, Suzie believes that most client community members are grateful to have the stress of all the technical aspects of the case lifted from their shoulders. Miles added that there is a social value for attorneys of being exposed to poverty through individual cases. He explained that both attorneys and clients have opportunities to see another perspective through their interactions:

Miles: For attorneys, their sensitivity about what it means to be poor is increased. The insights that come from this exposure and contact can change attorneys' behavior and motivate them. People can develop appreciation for other people's way of life. This is especially true for the pro bono attorneys and law students. And I think clients can learn too about society and

themselves from that. They can see how systems work and maybe a little bit how they can take greater control over their lives.

Miles' comments suggest that while individual case handling may skew toward outcome-driven forms of interaction, there are nonetheless social aspects and consequences of these interactions that should be considered.

Client community participants agreed with attorneys' assessments to a degree. Maria described the reduced stress and increased confidence in her life as a result of legal aid's assistance:

Maria: I know my situation would be much more stressful without legal aid in my corner. [My attorney's] thoroughness really set my mind at ease. I knew he was on top of things. And it was great to know that I could stand up to my employer and win. That felt great, let me tell you. My life is still kind of a mess financially, but at least that was a victory and I got that little bit of money. At least I won that one.

Maria experienced greater confidence as well as a sense of agency from successfully challenging her former employer. She recognized that the case did not solve her deeper financial problems, but she took solace in the limited but important victory. Sandra, the Statewide Legal Aid client with a complicated set of housing, immigration, and domestic violence concerns, described a shift in her ability to discuss traumatic events after a positive collaborative experience with her attorney.

Other participants' experiences supported Miles' idea that cases provide those involved with new perspectives. Beatrice worked with an attorney to win concessions at her son's school and described developing a sharpened analysis of systems as a result. The school situation improved temporarily, but after she stopped applying pressure the school reverted to its previous ways of treating her son. She learned from this experience that change only comes with action, and you cannot let up. Maria connected her own experience with pro-employer state

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employment law to greater appreciation for how laws, in her view, are set up to hurt the have-nots.

Client community members did not always express appreciation for the division of labor in individual cases, however. Walter, the Regional Comprehensive client community member in his 50s, emphasized feeling dismissed and disappointed not having a chance to determine the legal strategy for his case:

Walter: From my previous work I have a fairly good understanding of the law, probably more than most typical legal aid clients. There was one situation where I just didn't understand [the attorney's] approach. You know he's the attorney so I wasn't gonna make a big deal of it, but I just didn't understand it. And it was a little frustrating because I just didn't see why he would view it that way.

Walter went on to describe feeling underappreciated by the legal process in general. Others had similar experiences. Sandra felt left out of a strategic decision and confused and isolated as a result. Maria worked with a law student who did not have the same attention to detail and thorough communication style as the experienced attorney with whom she worked. He came up with a plan without consulting her, and it made her nervous when he made irrelevant arguments in the hearing.

As mentioned by Alicia, the timeframes of individual cases vary. Partly as a function of the type of case, Suzie and Alicia both used approaches in working with clients that involved relatively extended time commitments. Suzie of Statewide Legal Aid used means other than litigation to help resolve individual legal claims:

Suzie: It's not always necessary to be adversarial. If you can get what you need by taking a gentler approach then why not? I guess I practice what I call the 'gentler side of law' rather than going to court for every issue. I know I have the fierce litigator instinct if needed, but in most cases, especially with public benefits cases, I'll magically get an immediate response from social services or medical assistance services because I have that little "Esq." after my name. I just do whatever I can that will make the situation better. I spend a lot of time building relationships with other service providers that can sometimes help my clients. I see that as the 'counselor' part of 'attorney and counselor at law.' I like to say I'm not jealous of my clients. If

they can get help from someone else, that's great. I see collaboration with other agencies as more efficient because people are staying within their expertise. It's just about helping the client in any way that makes sense. It also makes the community stronger when organizations have those relationships.

Suzie's story suggests that attorneys are often first and foremost problem solvers. If a situation calls for interaction with other service providers and a longer overall timeframe, then that is what should happen provided it can be justified with regard to opportunity cost. Her comment about building relationships and making the community stronger reflects the potential of collaboration when it becomes medium-term. Even though she referred here to collaboration with partner agencies as opposed to client community members, the value of these extended relationships is relevant in that it demonstrates that the impact of these relationships extends beyond the specific time-limited context in which they are initially formed. Suzie later added that her longer-term clients seem to grow more empowered over the course of her representation. Even if Suzie does most of the communicating and coordinating, clients start to carry themselves differently and open up to her about their lives. Suzie added that for better or worse she takes her clients' decisions personally:

Suzie: I really take it to heart when they make bad decisions. It's almost like being a parent, you know, I've spent all that time teaching you the, you know, whatever, I've given you all the tools you need. At some point you have to let it go, but it's hard. I get really invested.

Suzie's use of the parent-child analogy points to questions about power and self-determination that several other participants raised. While Suzie's extended approach to individual case handling revolves around coordination of services, in other cases working with geographically and socially isolated clients also requires a longer timeframe. Alicia, the Regional Emergency attorney, described migrant farmworkers being intimidated by employers and reluctant to have contact with an attorney, and incarcerated clients having their mail illegally withheld, preventing contact with an attorney. In these circumstances she takes a more intentional and creative

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approach to interactions with clients. As time passes she finds that relationships with clients

grow deeper, and those relationships are, for her, an important part of her work:

Alicia: A lot of juvenile justice clients I used to work with felt judged, especially by adults. So I tried to understand what's going on for them without judgment, and also to think about how to build and foster a positive relationship with them since a lot of the relationships they've had with adults haven't been so positive.

Alicia, who has a background in community engagement, seems to approach longer-term

relationships with an intentional emphasis on providing an alternative model to previous negative

relationships. She is aware of how power differentials can interfere with effective problem

solving, and she described tools she uses to avoid that trajectory.

Attorneys whose individual case handling takes place in a shorter timeframe described

greater challenges in taking a collaborative approach. Regional Comprehensive attorney Carrie

finds that individual cases, for her, tend to lack a relational component and be less collaborative

than collective aspects of her work. She explained how individual cases can leave less room for

relationship and collaboration, even for attorneys predisposed toward collaboration:

Carrie: There are regularly times when, in the heat of the moment, I'll say to myself 'OK that person's just being crazy right now, like I have no idea what they're saying, it's totally off topic,' and I'll try to steer them back to what I think is important. But then if I have the chance to spend more time with them, I'll start to see the connections and realize that they were totally right. It's important I think to remember that interpersonal work with clients can move toward collective liberation or it can move in an oppressive direction.

Carrie's comments, as well as Suzie and Alicia's, suggest that while individual cases are limited

and constrained in one sense they are opportunities to build and develop collaborative capacity as

well. Carrie connected work with individual clients to larger themes of oppression and liberation.

Alicia linked her work with clients to the goal of un-doing unhealthy patterns formed in past

relationships. Suzie discussed forging relationships with partner agencies that may have value as

precedents for similar collaboration between attorneys and client community members.

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Summary

The typical individual case is limited in timeframe but can vary depending on the client's circumstances, the nature of the problem, and the attorney's approach. Urgency is the norm, and the attorney's need to accomplish procedural tasks in a timely manner often aligns with the client's desire to offload stress. Nonetheless, the varied experiences of individual case handling shed light on how collaboration is perceived and valued. For example, it seems that regardless of the urgency and relatively short timeframe, some clients still value process and reciprocity. Among attorneys, the goal of empowerment in individual cases seems ancillary for some and essential for others. This variation is understandable given the urgent and challenging circumstances facing their clients.

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The second mode of Coming Together for Justice is *collective and broader impact case handling*. Participants described three types of cases that involve representation of more than one individual. In the first type, the attorney is representing several similarly situated individuals with similar claims. For example, three individuals might come to legal aid for help recouping unpaid wages from an employer. In the second type, the attorney represents an incorporated group or association, e.g. a homeless advocacy group that files a grievance against the city regarding the operation of a municipal homeless shelter. In the third type, the attorney represents a "class" of similarly situated individuals such that everyone who is similarly situated would potentially benefit from a positive outcome even if they are not directly involved as plaintiffs in the case proceedings.

For participants, these collective legal approaches brought with them a distinct set of issues related to attorney-client interaction. Suzie spoke about the particular dynamics involved in these cases:

Suzie: In class actions, attorneys first must identify a pattern of complaints that lends itself to a class action suit. They then determine the best clients to represent the class as plaintiffs. A plaintiff must be willing to tolerate a pretty arduous process and jump through administrative hoops. The opposition might attempt to break up a class by offering individual settlements, meaning that cohesion within the group of plaintiffs is critical and clients have to be willing to say no because it's important that we deal with this on a systemic basis. So clients must therefore understand the importance of the class as an entity.

In this comment Suzie suggested that group cohesion is an important element of successful collective advocacy. In a different type of collective legal action, Suzie described helping a community group file a grievance with the housing authority, and having to manage group dynamics during that process. Instead of addressing the issues with greatest material impact, one client community member wanted to address paternalistic language about community service. In that case Suzie had to negotiate with clients about realistic legal remedies versus issues of dignity that may not have a legal basis for action. In another group case, Miles described trying to keep the group together by explaining that getting something as part of the group is better than getting nothing individually. Miles explained that, in his experience, group cases are a mix of representing clients' interests and attorney judgment about the goals of group members:

Miles: The attorney's job is to provide guidance to the group, especially when opinions within the group differ. After I advise the group on its goals and which options are better than others, I then let the group decide. Group clients are also a reflection of the legal aid program's interests. Attorneys choose group cases in part based on the organization's values. I reject the idea that the client is always the ultimate decision maker. In one example, I had a group case where certain members of the group had been coopted by the housing authority. I could not ethically continue to represent that group on behalf of the organization.

Miles pointed out that in collective cases the stakes are often higher for the organization, both in terms of values and resources. Suzie explained that these cases required the use of substantial time. The legwork required before even filing an "impact" lawsuit is extensive. Attorneys must navigate bureaucracy in order to identify and work with prospective clients. Suzie and Ron both reported engaging other organizations as partners in collective case handling in order to maximize legal resources. Even so, Suzie added that scaling back on individual cases is necessary in order to make time for class actions and impact work. As an organization, her employer tries to find the right balance between "smaller cases" and impact litigation in order to achieve maximum impact with limited staff resources. It comes down to a process of calculating whether time is better spent helping an individual by resolving their legal crisis or helping a lot of people by addressing a systemic problem. Ron described working with attorney members of the board of directors who have expertise in class action. He explained that this has resulted in doing more class action as an organization because the additional resources are available.

Summary

Compared to individual cases, collective and broader impact legal action seems to foster greater attention to group dynamics and collective decision making. Given that the process must adhere to rules and protocols of the legal system, the attorney's expertise on the manner in which the group or entity ultimately proceeds still takes precedence. Because group cohesion and community engagement can enhance effectiveness of collective legal action and may be required by decision-making rules, there may be more collaborative process undertaken to arrive at a desired legal outcome than in the instance of individual case handling.

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A third mode of Coming Together for Justice described by attorneys and client community members is working to achieve change through *policy advocacy*. For example, legal aid organizations in Virginia came together to change state policy regarding the use of isolation for incarcerated youth with special education needs, and to increase efficiency and decrease cost associated with no-fault divorce. In the context studied, these policy advocacy efforts do not always involve client community members directly, but they typically originate with individual client concerns at the local level before spurring policy action. Lenora from Statewide Legal Aid was the only client community member who discussed being involved in policy advocacy. Organizations that receive federal LSC funds face strict limitations in the manner in which they can engage in legislative advocacy, though interpretations of what exactly is prohibited seems to vary. Nonetheless, participants affiliated with Regional Emergency Legal Aid, which is LSC-funded, did not mention policy advocacy except when Carmen the client community member made a blanket statement about not being allowed to lobby.

Attorney participants described their involvement in policy advocacy occurring primarily in collaboration with other legal aid organizations and partner agencies, but indicated that community-based engagement takes place as well. Carrie from Regional Comprehensive Legal Aid explained that she participates in policy advocacy coalitions that included client community voices, but this grassroots involvement is coordinated by other organizations, not legal aid. She typically supports the policy advocacy coalition to which she is connected by doing legal research on housing policies. Lenora, the only client community participant who discussed her involvement in policy advocacy, explained that her involvement in these activities comes through a separate nonprofit that has a community organizing focus.

Alicia and Suzie described different ways of incorporating community perspectives in

policy advocacy work:

Alicia: On a basic level, even if client community members are not directly involved it is critical to have direct practice knowledge of clients' problems going into the process. Otherwise you just don't know what will make a difference in people's lives. So it's both a moral issue and an effectiveness issue. In the past I've worked with community engagement specialists to facilitate grassroots participation in policy advocacy, and that to me is the ideal situation. Policy ideas should not be formulated without the directly affected stakeholders at the table. That said, it can be a challenge working with diverse coalitions on policy advocacy because you're managing different styles and approaches to change. In one case we had a policy advocacy coalition had formed around a particular topic related to education. Most of the members of the coalition favored a bill that had a realistic chance of becoming law, but a faction within the coalition wanted to push the envelope and introduce a bill that would be closer to the ideal. So the coalition split and two different versions of the bill were introduced, which caused confusion among allies at the state legislature and put both bills in jeopardy. So there are times when policy advocates' needs and passionate communities' needs don't align, but that's just how it goes sometimes.

Suzie: I sort through hundreds of bills each year leading up to the general assembly. I identify the most important ones, and then reach out to other attorneys to find relevant first-hand experiences and expertise. If I find a story that relates to a particular bill, I weave it into my conversations with legislators.

Alicia and Suzie's stories provide a sense of the limitations and opportunities of collaboration

with client community members in a policy advocacy context. Erica, a partner agency

participant, described a similar process of using "victim stories" to indirectly involve client

community members in policy advocacy. For Erica, this way of using client stories is far from

ideal, but she applauds legal aid for doing more than most nonprofit lobbying organizations to at

least base their advocacy on constituent experiences. Several attorneys explained that client

community members do not want to relive their trauma by engaging in policy advocacy. They

might want to testify at the state legislature when the situation is in the past, but for the most part

they want to move on. Erica suggested that there may be truth to this but that it is also an excuse,

not just on the part of legal aid attorneys but most policy advocates with whom she works. She

asserted that the lack of grassroots participation might be related to discomfort in working across

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lines of economic and cultural difference. In lieu of involving client community members directly, Statewide Legal Aid attorney Suzie synthesizes their stories and makes them compelling for legislators. By handling individual cases she becomes a more effective advocate, but she is not a conduit for their participation in making policy change. She explained that she is one step removed from collaborating with client community members in that way.

Ron reiterated that clients do not want to get involved following a traumatic event. He added that the state legislature is not friendly to grassroots participation and he would not want people to come to testify only to be abused in the process. He described a hotline that is useful in informing the organization's policy advocacy work, however. They know more as an organization because they talk to directly affected people every day about predatory lending; this contact allows them to stay more current than their lobbyist adversaries. Still, he lamented that at the end of the day the legislative process is set up for lobbyists, and a lot of barriers prevent the participation of directly affected client community members.

Summary

Policy advocacy seems to be an avenue by which some legal aid attorneys who are not prohibited by regulation from engaging in it make use of their extensive familiarity with client community concerns in order to create systemic change. By their accounts, some of these legal aid attorneys are one step removed from direct contact with client community members in their policy advocacy work. Real and/or perceived barriers prevent concerted effort toward collaboration between attorneys and client community members in this area. Still, some of the skills and considerations involved in policy advocacy -- e.g. coalition building -- may be analogous and transferable to the process of collaboration with client community members. That

is, skills used in mobilizing interests toward specific policy goals, even if client community members are not directly involved, can be applied to working with and mobilizing client community members directly. It also seems that in some contexts if the will and the staff support are available then grassroots voices can effectively be infused into policy advocacy efforts.

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The fourth mode of interaction between client community members and attorneys is *community organizing*. The Legal Services Corporation funding restrictions prohibit political and grassroots organizing activities.   Attorneys and client community members associated with non-LSC organizations are permitted to participate in these activities, however, and as with policy advocacy, interpretations of the term "organizing activities" differ. Regional Emergency attorney Alicia, for example, was uncertain whether organizing a conference related to a particular area of advocacy, with both legal aid attorneys and client community members in attendance, would be classified as organizing for political purposes and therefore outside the scope of allowable activities for LSC-funded programs.

Regional Comprehensive attorney Carrie described how her non-LSC funded organization helped a community group plan and coordinate a community forum on public housing issues. She also performs "rudimentary" organizing functions for a community group focused on homelessness issues. She does what she can to help these groups, and this includes helping groups formulate goals and strategies, but she does not consider herself a community organizer by training or in practice. She participates in other community coalitions, but again not in an organizing capacity. Her view is that adequate and appropriate skills are needed in order to take on the role of community organizer, and she does not want to veer too far outside her primary skill set as an attorney.

Carrie nonetheless described what she considers to be the value of community organizing efforts, as well as the challenges that arise when grassroots voices are mobilized in ways that may alienate other valued stakeholders:

Carrie: In one instance, a community coalition connected to legal aid mobilized the community and packed the room for a housing authority meeting. After this direct action tactic was implemented, I was in a few meetings with officials of the housing authority where they said very clearly that they never wanted that to happen again. I think the group had successfully conveyed the latent possibility for action and I saw the housing authority leadership change its behavior in a positive direction as a result. So there's the moving the substantive needle aspect that I think is important. But it interjects an authentic voice into public conversations, as opposed to professional advocates doing all the talking. So aside from the substantive outcomes that can be achieved through grassroots-led efforts, there's kind of a procedural value of having client community members in the driver's seat. You know I've seen in those contexts clients standing taller after taking a meaningful role in a public setting. And I see that having a lot of value aside from any policy change that may be achieved. And as far as a downside if there's a downside I've seen in certain situations potential allies who were alienated by one member of a group repeating the same inaccurate claims and unrealistic demands in meeting after meeting. In that kind of situation I do struggle with how to strike a balance between having the authentic voice at the table and taking a reasonable or appropriate approach so people don't get alienated.

Carrie described both the process and outcome value that she associates with community organizing, as well as the potential challenges of engaging marginalized voices in advocacy efforts. Later in Carrie's story, she wondered how the decision makers in that situation interpreted the grassroots voice at the table, and grappled with how to handle such a situation in the future. In terms of the collaborative value of these experiences, Carrie's reflexivity and internal dialogue raises important questions. Perspectives might reasonably differ about the calculus of having grassroots voices interacting with, and even causing frustration among, mid-level bureaucrats and policy makers. Some might view the net balance as positive, for example, as long as client community members are exercising their right of self-expression. It seems likely, however, that regardless of that calculus the process of reflecting on these difficult questions alone is useful.

From a client community perspective, Beatrice from Regional Comprehensive explained

that her experience in community organizing was developmentally important in that her

confidence and ability to analyze and serve as a resource for her community increased:

Beatrice: Since joining the group I got a lot more comfortable with public speaking, and people come to me now when they're having a problem. A lady just came to me the other day about cars with busted tires parked near her house and she's gonna get that on her record. So I gave her some information about how to deal with that and she got it taken off her record. You know I used to see people refuse to get involved and get really frustrated by some of the negativity in the neighborhood. But now I see we can't let it get to us. We just have to keep going. So that's been a change for me.

Like Carrie, Beatrice struggled with situations in which people were not all like-minded with

regard to regarding collaboration. She referred to the difficulty of working with people who

seem to take a more apathetic or disinterested view. Over time, however, she felt better

equipped to persist despite encounters with naysayers and detractors.

While Carrie and Beatrice seem to see value added to legal aid by community organizing,

Statewide Legal Aid attorney Suzie differentiated between what she sees as the core purpose of

legal aid organizations versus community organizing organizations that focus more on "rabble

rousing." She similarly distinguished between organizing work and attorney work. She values

both, but as an attorney, not an organizer, she sees the need for clarity about which is the main

focus:

Suzie: In some ways it's a difference in philosophy. Some attorneys believe more in the goals of organizing, while others believe in using the legal system to create change. But there is also the issue of the core mission of the organization, and if we're a legal aid organization, then we have certain responsibilities to that mission and I'm not sure it's the best fit to have client board members who take a community organizing approach.

In these comments Suzie drew the distinction between organizational mission and individual

philosophy or theory of change. She seemed to say that it is fine to embrace different ways of

creating change at the individual level, but it is also useful at the organizational level to have

clarity of purpose.

Regional Comprehensive attorney Carrie, who favors community-based strategies,

acknowledged that sometimes it is still hard to resist sending a demand letter, or taking a

similarly unilateral legal action, in order to solve a client's problem quickly and efficiently. It is

easy, in other words, for legal solutions to become the default, and therefore self-reflection is

important in order to prioritize the inclusion of client voice. She went on to describe how, in her

view, commitment to community-based collaboration then helped build greater capacity for

collaboration:

Carrie: If you believe that building capacity in the community to mobilize for change is the most
important thing, then making change through litigation is not necessarily going to advance the
main goal. Once the commitment is there, then as an organization you start developing the
relationships because that's how you measure effectiveness. On the other hand, if you value
legal outcomes or policy change, then the relationships will be secondary and may start to seem
like an afterthought.

Like Suzie, Carrie pointed out that clarity of purpose is helpful in aligning values and action. It

should be a process in which strategy and capacity are linked. That is, organizations decide on

goals and objectives and commit resources to activities that support those desired ends. Later in

her comments, Carrie added that in her estimation the legal system creates barriers to grassroots

community participation by requiring specific professional credentials and expertise, meaning

that legal aid organizations must be even more thoughtful and intentional about how client

participation is prioritized.

Summary

Community organizing, for some, seems to represent the ideal form of collaboration

between client community members and attorneys. It creates opportunities for client community

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participants and attorneys to redistribute power both in their relationships and in the public realm more broadly. It thus helps challenge the status quo in ways that other forms of collaboration do not. Questions arise about the time commitment required for community organizing, and whether attorneys are best suited or qualified to engage in this type of collaborative work. The importance of clarity regarding an organization's mission and purpose is highlighted insofar as community organizing requires specific types of organizational capacity and resources. Suzie and Carrie suggest that organizational clarity in this area may also facilitate development of different criteria by which to measure organizational effectiveness.

~

The fifth mode in which client community members and attorneys interact is through *boards and advisory groups* that serve governance and guidance functions for legal aid organizations. In addition to complying with requirements for client community representation on boards of directors for LSC-funded programs, some legal aid organizations also choose to create client advisory councils composed entirely of client community members.

Ron from Statewide Legal Aid described engaging the activist community voice through client community board members. They help keep the organization accountable to its mission and engaged with the communities whose interests they are supposed to serve. At the same time, he acknowledged that in his experience for some organizations having client community board members is a metaphorical box to check:

Ron: *Organizations keep the same people on the board for years and years because they see it as too much trouble to replace them. Or they may have been burned by bad experiences or difficult board members. Then once you have client board members that's not enough. You have to be creative about engaging them and making sure their voice is heard by other board members.*

Ron identified the tension that arises for some organizations and individuals who see forming

productive relationships with client board members as more work than they are prepared or able

to do.

The experiences of Miles and Suzie led them to conclude that client participation in these

groups is not as useful or effective as it can be. Miles provided an example of a client

community group that does not serve a collaborative function:

*Miles: From what I've seen the client advisory group is much more of an inward-focused group
that tries to help the friends and family members of its members than a truly engagement-
oriented group that goes out and tries to bring together the different parts of the client
community. I see them as fairly insular and having little capacity or willingness to engage the
larger community in its activities. Instead of organizing opportunities for community education,
they bicker among themselves. They rarely conduct outreach with people they do not already
know. They do an annual community breakfast for the homeless and it's a nice enough event,
but that's really more social work than legal aid work.*

Miles registered his view that the client advisory group can and should do much more in the way

of engaging the client community as a whole in legal aid's work. Later in Miles' story he

articulated his vision of a well-functioning client group, which would spend a lot of time setting

up community education opportunities and talking to the community about issues such as end of

life documents and predatory lending. In Miles' view, legal aid should operate as a law firm for

the poor, and client board members and advisory group members should facilitate the community

having a sense of ownership over the organization. Instead, he lamented, they view legal aid as

"another arm of the government or another entitlement service."

Suzie from Statewide sees client community members who serve on the organization's

board as tokenized. She described clients on the board talking about issues "in a community

organizing way" that is markedly different than how other board members see the organization.

In her view, their perspective would be better suited to a community organizing effort, which is

different from what legal aid is trying to do. She experiences discomfort with the dissonance

between the client community board members' interests and the organization's overall mission. She perceives that they are included on the board partly "for show." She expressed her view that client community board members should be former clients of legal aid who can explain how legal aid helps people in similar situations.

For client community members involved in boards and groups, the perspectives were quite different. Carmen, from Regional Emergency Legal Aid, who served on the board of directors and a client advisory group, described being systematically left out of important decisions by the staff leadership and the attorney board members, or having client views and suggestions dismissed without consideration. She noted a lack of effort to communicate on their part as well. Lenora, a client community participant affiliated with Statewide, also described attorney board members being non-collaborative, yet acknowledged that some client community board members and advisory group members fail to bridge the organization and the community as well. They receive important and potentially useful knowledge but do not manage to share that knowledge in ways that empower the broader community.

Client community board member participants described the opportunities and challenges associated with their role as bridges between legal aid and the community. Carmen expressed empathy for attorneys who have to interact with disrespectful clients who try to tell them how to do their jobs. At the same time she feels a responsibility to protect clients from disappointment by letting them know that in her experience the intake process at legal aid can be frustrating.

Summary

Collaboration through boards and advisory groups seems to highlight several challenges and opportunities. These are potentially long-term relationships, and as such they represent

opportunities to build longstanding collaborative partnerships between attorneys and client community members. Views of those interviewed differ on the purpose and efficacy of client community participation in these groups. While in some cases a program's current model may function effectively, in other cases, the organizations seem to lack meaningful client participation through these boards and groups. The extent to which client community board members realize their potential to serve a bridging function between legal aid organizations and client communities seems to vary as well.

~ Nourishing Collaborative Capacity ~

In addition to the five modes of interaction discussed in the previous section, study participants' experiences and perceptions suggest that the timeframe of collaboration is an important consideration. Moreover, the forms, goals, and processes associated with collaboration seem to vary in part depending on the timeframe of the interaction. In relatively short-term interactions between individual attorneys and client community members, for example, the emphasis might be on determining roles and responsibilities and deciding goals and expectations related to an individual case, whereas in more prolonged individual cases, relationships have more time to grow and develop. In cases involving multiple or collective parties, in some participants' experiences the focus can shift toward skills or attitudes related to group dynamics, including awareness of others' perspectives, facilitation and consensus-building, and forging a group identity. In order to achieve systemic change goals, groups also might need to collaborate for the purpose of strategic planning or engagement of new participants. Boards of directors and other governance groups have yet a different set of considerations. In addition to attending to group cohesion, they are charged with shaping and advancing the organization's mission and goals. Those organizational responsibilities and aspirations, like the governance

structure itself, have an indefinite temporal quality. There is no set endpoint. Similarly in

community organizing, the purpose of working together is ongoing and long-term. This section

presents findings related to the idea that when client community members and attorneys are

joined in pursuit of a common goal, their work together can be collaborative in different ways

depending in part on the timeframe of their interaction. Through awareness of this temporal

aspect of collaboration, these findings also suggest ways in which collaboration can be extended

or sustained across timeframes.

Short-term collaboration: Acknowledging constraints, laying groundwork. When

attorneys and client community members come together on a short-term basis, it is often for the

purpose of addressing a discrete individual legal matter. In many cases, as discussed previously,

the matter at hand is one of urgency, and long-term relationship building seems not to be at the

forefront of either party's mind. Nonetheless, in order to work together effectively and lay

groundwork for further collaboration, some negotiations about power and mutual respect must

occur.

Sandra, a client community participant associated with Statewide, related a story from a

previous experience with a local legal aid program. Her story illustrates the complicated short-

term power dynamic between attorneys and clients:

*Sandra: I worked with two different attorneys to deal with an issue with my landlord. With the
first attorney, she was generally good but there was a time when I just didn't know what she was
doing. She went and talked to the landlord and his attorney in the courtroom. I didn't know she
was gonna do that. It kinda bothered me because she was talking to his attorney for a few
minutes, like five minutes, and they were smiling back and forth. Later I found out she was
trying to make it so the case would be dismissed on both sides, but at the time I just wasn't sure.
I had a lot of things going through my head but I kept it to myself.*

Even though Sandra's attorney was attempting to negotiate a resolution to the case that would

have been very favorable, in the absence of that information Sandra was left to assume that her

attorney was prioritizing a personal relationship over the case at hand. The attorney explained what she was doing after the fact, and over time Sandra came to appreciate the attorney's actions on her behalf. In the moment, however, she felt frustrated and left out of the process by the attorney. By contrast, when Sandra worked with a second attorney, she never doubted his allegiance. He explained his thinking about her case and why he would be taking certain actions. Sandra trusted this attorney, but their relationship was still characterized by a power differential. She viewed him as a father figure. To her this description held positive connotations. The attorney's patience and trustworthiness resembled the best attributes of a father. It also meant that he was an authority figure, and that he had the authority to make final decisions about the case. With both attorneys, Sandra was ultimately content to relinquish control. Before doing so, however, she described wanting some assurance and trust that the process was in capable hands. The insecurity associated with being in a legally tenuous position is highlighted in this story. The first attorney left her feeling insecure by not communicating about what she was trying to do with the other attorney. The second attorney was more authoritative but made the client feel secure at the same time.

Maria expressed her perspective on the client's role in creating a clear albeit unequal distribution of power between attorney and client. In her view, clients need to convey clearly that they take legal aid seriously. She described the importance of letting attorneys know their work is important and their help is needed:

Maria: You can't be like look this is what's going on, you need to help me now. You know it needs to be more of a you know like you really need that helping hand—[affecting a desperate tone of voice] I don't know what else to do, I don't want to lose my kid, but this is going on can you help me? It really needs to be that worry I guess. And the client--you really need to be serious about it, because these things are serious. You really shouldn't take legal aid as a joke because these are people that really want to help people that can't really hire all these top notch lawyers and stuff. So you know don't take it as a game because they don't take their job as a joke.

In this passage Maria explained the importance of creating a dynamic in which it is clear that the attorney's skills are required to achieve a positive outcome. There is an element of affected and even performed helplessness that she describes. Later in her story Maria indicated that she felt very secure once she recognized her attorney's level of knowledge and experience and realized how helpful he would be. She also pointed out that some of what he did was common sense and she might be able to figure it out herself, but since he was more experienced he could accomplish research and other tasks more efficiently. "Because I mean you can google everything, but sometimes they know how to google better (laughs)."

While some client community members seemed content and pleased to relinquish much of the technical responsibility for their cases, they also want their voice to be valued. Statewide client community member Lenora recounted an experience in which she was reprimanded by an attorney for looking at her phone while he was talking:

Lenora: I had a pay or quit [housing eviction] situation that I went to legal aid to get addressed. And you know like I'm sitting here talking to you now, I'm checking my phone, I got papers over here, and I'm talking to you too. And the lawyer had the nerve, the unmitigated gall and audacity to say to me, you need to stop doing what you're doing and look at me. You know and I had an out of body experience (laughs). I'm like who the fuck do you think you're talking to? You know how dare you try to assess my mental capacity?

Lenora went on to explain that she views lack of sensitivity during these attorney-client interactions as a major barrier in effective collaboration, and explained that people have to have the right mindset to collaborate. Sandra echoed this perspective and suggested that certain jobs, including legal aid attorney, require heart as well as skills and experience. The job is a combination of attorney and social worker, she explained. In her view, the ability to connect is innate, not learned; either people have it or they do not. Other study participants expressed their appreciation for attorneys who paid close attention to their story--listening, taking notes, and

asking questions. Maria said her attorney had "an ear to hear" and that made her difficult situation bearable.

Attorneys are then faced with the challenge of balancing attention to interpersonal dynamics and empowerment with effective legal representation. Several attorneys discussed strategies for making sure clients are invested in the process without losing sight of what needs to be done. Miles explained that he makes sure to be nonjudgmental, and provides options for his client and lets them decide. He avoids negative outcomes simply by not giving clients bad options. Miles and Suzie expressed the importance of letting clients help themselves whenever possible. They try to educate clients so that they might not need legal aid's help as much in the future. Miles explained that clients live up or down to your expectations. In working with clients, he sees a choice between empowering and enabling clients. In this context, he used the term empowerment to mean having clients complete tasks instead of doing everything for them. He summed up this approach by saying that "no legal aid lawyer can care, should care, more than the client." Suzie and several other attorneys emphasized the importance of a client's trustworthiness in a successful collaboration. Lawyers universally need to be able to trust their clients, and clients must also trust attorneys with sensitive information. Suzie described having to end representation of clients who lie or withhold information.

While Miles attempts to be as patient as possible, he acknowledged that he sets somewhat strict limits on clients venting and veering off topic. He gives them a few minutes in the initial interview to "let the steam out of the pressure cooker," but after that he stops them so that he can determine the merits of a case. He sees trust and empathy as important, but secondary to solving problems. In most cases, he experiences sharing the same goals and perspective with his client, and this is the most important thing.

In addition to the interpersonal dynamics involved, attorneys and client community members must contend with systemic barriers in short-term collaboration. At the organizational level, Miles cited an efficiency-based mode of service borne of overwhelming demand for services as a challenge in building rapport. Like doctors, some legal aid attorneys and organizations take the position that they should help as many people as they can in a given time period, which creates an incentive for faster treatment options.

Summary

In short-term collaboration, there seems to be a desirable balance struck between a utilitarian goal of having to resolve what is often an immediate, serious problem and an acknowledgment of the complexity underlying relatively brief interactions. Client community member participants recognize that they are in the role of being "helped" and that attorneys bring technical expertise that is necessary for them to achieve their desired outcome. Attorneys, meanwhile, similarly take into account client voice within the scope of effective representation and achievement of the client's immediate goals. Legal strategies to achieve the client's desired outcomes often must take precedence, however, and therefore for some participants attorney knowledge is more relevant in certain legal situations than client experience. At the same time, some participants reported that organizations are under pressure to handle cases as quickly and efficiently as possible. Despite these challenges, the experiences of participants in this study suggest that the foundation for collaborative capacity can be and often is formed through individual case handling, including in these short-term contexts. Through mutual respect and recognition of the constraints of collaboration in a short-term timeframe, attorneys and client community members can lay the groundwork for further and deeper collaboration.

Medium-term collaboration: Making connections. Certain conditions for attorney-client community interaction are conducive to, or require, moderately longer timeframes than those involved in a large number of individual cases. In some cases this slightly longer time period relates to the level of isolation of a client population and the barriers that prevent easy access to legal aid attorneys. In other cases the legal matter itself is layered and takes more time to resolve. In addition to individual cases that are more complicated, policy advocacy and collective legal action typically occur in a medium-term timeframe. Regardless of why the timeframe is slightly extended, it seems that the relationships between those involved can grow deeper and the strategic and analytical connections between individual, organization, and community concerns have the opportunity to grow stronger.

When establishing rapport with individual clients who are highly marginalized and dealing with complicated sets of legal problems, Alicia from Regional Emergency Legal Aid discussed the importance of first attempting to truly understand what they go through. This effort goes beyond a factual accounting of the events that led the person to legal aid, and extends into sincere consideration of their life circumstances. The relationship itself grows in importance in relation to the technical pursuit of a positive legal outcome. Listening attentively, while taking note of gestures and other nonverbal cues, is part of building this kind of rapport. When developing initial rapport with migrant farmworkers, she avoids identifying herself as an attorney at first for fear that clients will lump her into the overall package of oppressive institutions. Alicia discussed the paradox of avoiding judgmental conclusions as a lawyer:

Alicia: It's difficult to set aside our judgmental nature, but we have to try. As attorneys we're not trained to be humble. We're trained to know the truth, to own the truth, and to defend the truth (laughs). And the desire to win, so the story has to be right. But legal aid attorneys are the best that there are. We're not the sharks, we're the dolphins (laughs).

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Alicia identifies the possible challenge posed for attorneys in blending their professional mandate to advocate tirelessly for their client with the need to build a relationship. She went on to discuss the importance of overcoming social distance and power differential when working with highly marginalized clients. She described the moment when she first felt a sense of connection with a formerly incarcerated client. She mentioned that she had relatives in the same town where her client grew up, and she saw his eyes lit up. Other interactions are more challenging. Deeply isolated client community members see legal aid attorneys as threats to their anonymity and safety. Some harbor a firmly entrenched distrust of professionals and in particular attorneys. To overcome this distrust, she takes a low-key approach. She tries to behave as a "regular person." She dresses and speaks casually, and attempts to connect as human being to human being rather than as lawyer to prospective client.

For client community members, when activities extend beyond the short-term, opportunities arise to connect their individual experiences with systems and structures. As Beatrice, a client community member from Regional Comprehensive, pursued the purchase of her home from the housing authority, she also became more involved in a collective advocacy effort. She discussed the value of home ownership in stabilizing a neighborhood:

Beatrice: All [the people] around here want to be homeowners so they can raise their kids up and be here for the long haul. But now for the last 15, 20 years the neighborhood had went down because nobody had any interest, and the housing authority had no interest in the appearance of the houses.

Beatrice made this comment after spending approximately two years working with legal aid and neighbors to protect their homes from being sold on the open real estate market at a price she and her neighbors could not afford. She went on to describe her affection for the people at legal aid and the coalition to which she is connected. Sandra made similar connections, both with her attorney and between herself and the community. She described her attorney as extending her

hand like a friend, and she appreciated not having to explain every detail of a painful situation in order for the attorney to understand. The intimacy and trust of this relationship allowed her to take as a given that the attorney was trying to protect her even if she did not quite understand the attorney's actions. She explained, however, that she could never quite express herself to the attorney until the equality of their relationship was established. As time passed, she let her guard down and allowed the attorney into her way of seeing the world. It also became clear that her multi-year collaboration with legal aid helped both her and her attorney understand a different perspective. She came to realize that her voice was important in the process of making change:

Sandra: I know what is what. I know sometimes why people do the things they do. Like the anger, they are angry because of the things they've been through. And just like if you can try to understand it first before—before judging.

She explained that she now knows first-hand the depths of challenges faced in the community, and she understands how hard and tough people's lives are. She sees the legitimacy of people's anger, and she helped her attorney see that legitimacy as well. In both Sandra and Beatrice's stories, deeper interpersonal connection accompanied stronger analytical connections between individual and community concerns.

Suzie described partnering strategically with other human service organizations to help highly vulnerable clients. She explained that she and her coworkers collaborate with staff members of those organizations to identify and resolve flaws in their coordinated efforts. Suzie sees differences between establishing rapport with professional community partners versus client community members, however. With the latter, she takes into account their different backgrounds and experiences. She sees community partners as being on equal footing and tends to share more details about her personal life. She wants to be sensitive to clients' circumstances, and for example might choose to discuss recent vacations with a community partner but not with

a client. Similarly she avoids wearing jewelry to the office except a simple wedding band. In the end, with clients she strives for a balance between down-to-earth and overly personal.

By contrast, in order to sustain the health of partnerships with other organizations Suzie views them more as friendships than transactional business relationships. She participates in taskforces not in pursuit of a specific outcome but to show support and nurture relationships. She finds common ground with her counterparts in other organizations, and through those relationships new ideas for partnerships emerge:

Suzie: One of the best partnerships I ever had was with a girl who was wearing a coat that was similar to my coat. And we bonded over that. We were sisters with the same peacoat (laughs). And really it's funny what worked if you just notice what you have in common with people.

These relationships serve a clear purpose in Suzie's professional life. Through them she makes sure partner agencies have realistic expectations of what attorneys can achieve before they refer clients to legal aid. If she detects misinterpretation about legal aid's role or why a case was rejected, she attempts to clarify with the partner organization as quickly as possible. Yet clearly she is strategic and mindful in how she approaches these relationships differently than her relationships with clients. She literally alters her appearance and keeps out of view parts of her life that she considers irrelevant for clients or too far outside their experience, whereas with other professionals clothing choices, vacations, and other aspects of life are grist for developing stronger bonds.

Another mode of medium-term collaboration is case handling for multiple clients, frequently for broader-based outcomes. Suzie explained that working with group clients requires attention to group dynamics. She has experienced tension with a particular group over the years. She attributes this tension in part to the differences between legal strategies and organizing as ways to create change. In her view, an attorney's work is different than an organizer's work, and

some complaints lend themselves to the legal system while others are better suited to organizing. When working on a group case, she explained that a tension exists between keeping the group and broader community abreast of the case and meeting deadlines. It takes time to keep people informed. Group cases also add layers of interpersonal complexity. She wants to keep the group and community informed, and she also needs to build consensus at certain critical junctures in a case before moving forward. This requires both communication skills and patience, which she tries to practice herself as well as model for the group or community with whom she is working. She makes sure that space is available for client group members to bring their ideas to the table and determine certain aspects of a strategy.

Summary

In the medium term, it seems that client community members and attorneys in this study have opportunities to more fully explore the contours of collaboration and attend to each other's perspectives in ways that are difficult in a shorter timeframe. The importance of relationships increases while the relative legal urgency recedes. The calculus shifts. Analytical connections between individuals, organizations, and communities become clearer. In some cases relationships seem to grow more nuanced and less uneven with regard to power, while in Suzie's case the relationships with clients are more thoroughly examined but the social distance is strategically and intentionally retained. It is no longer an entirely rational process. In these prolonged contexts client community members seem freer to engage in their own analysis and contribute that analysis to the process at hand.

Long-term collaboration: Sharing a common vision. Long-term collaboration between legal aid attorneys and client community members seems to exist most commonly in

community organizing contexts as well as through boards of directors or advisory groups. For

participants in this study, the effectiveness of these long-term collaborative relationships is

connected to bridging perspectives and uniting around a shared vision.

For Beatrice and Lenora, a common vision is elusive but worth working for. The distinct

areas of expertise that client community members and attorneys bring to the collaboration

process must be mutually acknowledged and honored. Lenora, a Statewide Legal Aid board

member, expressed her view that client community leaders and attorneys must both take on that

bridging responsibility. She pointed out that when people see legal aid, "they naturally see that

credibility piece." Therefore it is essential, she added, that the community and the legal aid

program negotiate a tradeoff between reaping the credibility associated with legal expertise and

maintaining emphasis on the empowerment of communities.

Beatrice also described a vision for a healthy community in which diverse perspectives

are engaged in a process of mutual care and problem solving.

*Beatrice: The relationship between low-income communities and the police department, the fire
department, city council, NAACP, legal aid, the housing authority, everybody needs to come
together to solve these problems, but they don't. You see a police officer just drive by but never
engage with any of the neighbors.*

By contrast, she highlighted the coalition she belonged to as an example of people having open

and honest dialogue, sharing ideas, disagreeing respectfully, and making decisions as a group:

*Beatrice: At the meetings, you get a sense that I can get up and say what I want to say, and I'm
gonna get feedback, whether it's good feedback or bad feedback. And if it's bad feedback I'm
gonna come out of that meeting and understand why I thought it was bad. So I like that.*

She added that the coalition grows through informal public gatherings, which gives others in the

community confidence to get involved. This point underscores the importance of getting outside

the role of attorney and having "unmediated contact" with the community. For Beatrice, having

legal aid's "muscle" behind the coalition's efforts makes them even more effective. Not only are

observers heartened by seeing the group in action, but legal aid's involvement adds institutional credibility and perhaps in some ways legitimizes that action. Legal aid also serves as a physical hub, making it easier for people to get connected.

Regarding barriers to realizing these visions, Lenora acknowledged that it is hard convincing members of a fractured, disengaged community that their voices matter. She sees both sides of the coin, i.e. that it is understandable and also frustrating when members of the community fail to take ownership of making the situation better for all. Her comments indicate an awareness that low-income community members should not be absolved of responsibility, but at the same time a long-term strategy is needed to overcome the overwhelming current, not to mention historical, injustices perpetrated on low-income communities. For Lenora it is also important to recognize the dynamic in which people in power, including nonprofits, intentionally or unintentionally use poor communities for their own benefit. Changing behavior patterns that have been developing for generations is not easy. She highlighted the importance of self-sufficiency, and evolving slowly and deliberately from a personal empowerment focus to the political goal of community empowerment. Similarly, Carmen described time as a key factor in overcoming the challenges she experienced in building rapport with more well-to-do board members at Regional Emergency. Having time to talk freely and gradually reduce the level of intimidation made a big difference for her. The situation on the board was also a point of great frustration for Carmen, but her experience suggests that if the will exists then deeply felt differences can be overcome.

For Regional Comprehensive attorney Carrie, a degree of political analysis and reflexivity is essential in avoiding the view that clients are defective and in need of help. The view that one is helping people with problems may serve to simplify an otherwise overwhelming

set of circumstances, but this view hinders rapport building over the longer term. For her, offering empathy is a problematic goal with someone in an entirely different position socially. She questioned the honesty and usefulness of attempting to emotionally care for someone experiencing social violence and poverty. She believes that this "elephant in the room" of demographic difference is often omitted, or oversimplified, in conversations about client-attorney interaction. Gaps in trust can be traced to deeper gaps in demographics, identity, and social experience that must be acknowledged. In light of these considerations, Carrie perceives that bringing intention and focus to the attorney's relationships with community groups is a precondition for effective long-term collaboration. A vetting process must occur, whereby trust is established and the community sees that the attorney has the community's best interests in mind. There is not a shortcut available for a long-term relationship, and no substitute for building trust through prolonged engagement and time in "the trenches." Similarly, Alicia discussed the need for attorneys to listen more than talk. She has experienced events during which community voices, and in particular the passion and expressive quality of those voices, have been dismissed. She underscored that professionals need to recognize that participation is not "just a job" for client community members. On a practical level, Alicia voiced the need for an increase in staff devoted to engagement with community groups.

Miles reflected on his experiences and ultimately his lack of success in building a public housing resident group affiliated with legal aid. The common interest did not take hold and the residents never seemed to see potential benefits, or perhaps the immediate and critical needs affecting their lives occupied their time and made the opportunity cost of time-consuming, long-term problem solving too high. That said, conditions that improve chances of effective collaboration include the existence of a clear-cut issue to rally around and create focus; a pre-

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established structure to increase the efficiency of the group process; and strong leadership to keep the process moving and connect participants to specific roles. Miles described these inputs as essential preconditions for success, but did not discuss how to build up those structures or develop strong leadership.

Miles went on to articulate his perspective on greater long-term attorney engagement with the community. He envisions legal aid organizations engaging not with specific community-based groups but in having a more consistent presence in the community. In doing so, attorneys can intervene closer to the root or origin of problems rather than after a problem has morphed into an emergency. Client community members can also then "learn to fish" by having a more integrated role in the identification of problems as well as the formulation of solutions. Lawyers and client community members can then engage on a regular basis in the process of prioritizing the organization's use of resources.

Summary

While perspectives differ, for a number of participants effective long-term collaboration seems to hinge on reflexivity and bridge-building. Whether in organizations or in the community, some participants associate long-term collaboration with more fully formed and reciprocal relationships in which voices are heard and perspectives are mutually understood. A number of the client community member and attorney participants conveyed hope that by taking these steps opportunities will emerge to unite around a common vision. Conversely, if efforts to bridge differences in perspective and achieve a common vision are not made or are not successful, long-term collaboration will stall.

Sustaining and extending collaboration. In addition to interacting collaboratively in a variety of ways depending on the timeframe, participants' stories suggest that certain actions and conditions help to propel collaborative capacity across timeframes. In addition, participants described situations in which the path to more prolonged collaborative capacity was obstructed.

Relationship development. Attorneys discussed conditions that can nurture or hinder relationship development. Suzie and Carrie described the personal and external challenges associated with building rapport. Suzie used the term "action-oriented" to describe herself, and said that this makes it hard to sit through meetings with client groups that she views as tangential to her work. Compounding the difficulty of this experience is the fact that she is under time pressure to complete other tasks. She added that she has to keep her empathy for clients in check. In order to function effectively, in her experience she needs to be able to "turn off" empathy. Otherwise it becomes too taxing emotionally to make the hard choices made necessary by organizational priorities and clients with dire situations showing up at the door. Carrie mentioned an instance when she grew frustrated with a client who continued to veer off topic. After initially (and internally) dismissing the client's perspective, she later saw its value on further reflection. In her view, differences in attorney and client community experiences and presentation styles, left unexamined, help create this kind of initial negative response. Alicia suggested that ideally attorneys would live and socialize with client community members in their communities. In her experience a sharp distinction is made by clients between "them" (attorneys) and "us" (clients). This divide cuts across race, ethnicity, and gender so that the operative difference in that relationship is between the ones who are attorneys and the ones who are not. She recommended creating opportunities for nurturing relationships that are not predicated on this dichotomy, and expressed confidence that this would lead to more effective

legal strategies and increased capacity among attorneys. Alicia also discussed helping law

students who work as interns at legal aid move from a simplistic savior mentality to something

closer to solidarity. Sometimes students come into legal aid with presumptions about how the

experience will unfold. These students tend to draw generalized conclusions based on specific

situations, which causes them to give up on collaboration more easily. As a preventative

measure, Alicia tries to expand students' horizons and the breadth of their experiences at legal

aid. She views this as getting students out of their "bubble" while at the same time helping them

manage their expectations. If students are sufficiently prepared, these experiences can help

shape the course of their lives.

     Connecting individual and broader concerns. Several client community member

participants in this study made connections between their individual situations and larger

concerns or values. These analytic connections provide evidence that the capacity to move

toward involvement in structural change is present even if the opportunity lags behind. Some

participants who received assistance related to an employment termination expressed concerns

about state employment policies that favor employers' needs over the needs of people losing

their jobs. Under these pro-employer laws, these participants perceived the needs of families

with children as being completely dismissed. The legal system itself came under their scrutiny.

In particular, Maria cited the disproportionate resources required to pursue justice and obtain a

relatively small financial award in the form of unemployment benefits. Maria, Walter, and

Sandra all expressed interest in being part of collective change efforts but had not been made

aware of these opportunities. Beatrice represents a success story in this progression from

individual to community consciousness. She recounted her own story of going from legal aid

client to community group member, and eventually taking on a leadership position in the local

political system. The collaboration she experienced working with an attorney on an individual case led to an opportunity to be part of a community organizing effort, which in turn led to the role she now has on a public agency board.

Maria and Walter framed their experience with employers and other corporate entities in language of struggle and resistance. They distinguished between moral and financial outcomes. They used language of fairness and justice to articulate their legal goals; they wanted a fair hearing to set the record straight and clear their names. A higher purpose existed for their action beyond exoneration or personal benefits; they did not want others to endure similar hardships or suffer the same fates. Maria refused to disrobe for an "observed" drug test that she viewed as retaliation for expressing her opinion about food safety, and was terminated as a result. Walter refused to resign for insubordination when, in his view, he had done nothing wrong and in fact took pride in and defined his identity through his level of professionalism.

Based on her experience with the local housing authority, Beatrice described the futility of arguing with lower level managers. She found that they will either fail to respond or fail to follow through on their commitments. The housing authority's written claims of action often, in her experience, do not correspond with lived reality. In such cases, there is strength in numbers and in a response to the systemic nature of the gap. Whereas individual complaints can be easily dismissed, she explained, the complaints of dozens of a similar nature are harder to ignore.

Participants also offered an analysis of the social and political dynamics that underlie legal aid organizations. Maria pointed out that clients' legal problems are ultimately what keep legal aid attorneys busy, but also acknowledged the need for attorneys to be intrinsically motivated since they do not benefit financially from the outcomes of the cases they handle. All

of these comments by Maria and others reflect deeper values and broader concerns that extend beyond participants' individual responses to the material challenges they face.

Strengthening policy advocacy and broader impact case handling. Attorneys described ways that community engagement can strengthen policy advocacy and handling impact or multi-party cases in ways that are both gratifying and effective. Alicia described having a great affinity for community-based work. She enjoys it. At the same time she lamented policy advocacy initiatives she had been a part of in which those directly affected were not at the table. She then recounted her experience working on a systemic racism task force that explicitly sought client community participation from the early planning stages forward. In that case, Regional Comprehensive provided both technical legal support and community organizing expertise to the task force. A community engagement specialist helped coordinate grassroots involvement, which included knocking on doors in low-income neighborhoods in order to generate interest. Alicia saw how community members then became invested and effective as recruiters themselves, getting their neighbors to come to an event and become more engaged. She described using language of shared interest that allowed directly affected individuals to feel less alone in their struggles and see that the broader community needed to work together toward a common goal. Alicia sees her own self-interest served through these activities. She has opportunities to meet and raise her own level of awareness of problems affecting the community. For her, having unmediated contact serves as a complement to an attorney's role as provider of legal expertise. Staff members dedicated to community engagement can broker these opportunities for unmediated contact, which she finds inspiring but often beyond her ability to initiate.

In another instance, Suzie described how community engagement can catalyze and increase the effectiveness of class action lawsuits. She related a situation in which prior relationships and trust with community members facilitated the identification of appropriate plaintiffs and the development of group cohesion once the class was formed. By the same token, she has seen how grassroots activism can catalyze legal claims of which attorneys otherwise would have been unaware. Even though Suzie was clear that her role is that of an attorney, not a community organizer, she allowed that being enmeshed in communities and connected to community groups helps her stay attuned to problems and potential legal solutions. Conversely, class action can be used to activate organizing efforts in a community. A potentially positive material outcome win can pique the client community members' interest. Finally, after resolution of a class action settlement, community relationships facilitate effective distribution of settlement funds. Ultimately, both Alicia and Suzie described the value of relating and engaging with the community, but they measure that value in different ways. For Alicia working with the community is both intrinsically gratifying and associated with successful outcomes, and for Suzie the clearest benefit is to facilitate and expand on legal outcomes.

Demonstrating unwavering support and commitment. Participants expressed the importance of demonstrating unwavering support for and commitment to the cause in question. Maria expressed deep appreciation for people like her attorney, who make it known that they are not going to "leave you on your back." She described the value of simply being tuned in and present. Beatrice expressed gratitude that an attorney knew her situation so well and was so committed to her cause that she was comfortable letting the attorney "be my voice" in meetings with her son's school. Her attorney was there to "wipe her tears away" when her son's situation became particularly difficult. In a community organizing context, Beatrice took comfort in

knowing that the community group of which she was a member had "somebody to back us up" in their dealings with a public agency. One way participants measured the commitment and solidarity of attorneys was how hard they worked. Beatrice noted that certain attorneys instilled confidence in client community members by "working their butts off." Carmen highlighted examples of attorneys who worked nights and weekends, and saw this as an indication of their commitment to a common cause.

Client community members discussed the importance of knowing someone is on their side. In individual cases or collective advocacy, participants remarked on the impressive level of commitment demonstrated by legal aid attorneys. They took notice of the quality of legal aid attorneys' work, their technical abilities, and the steadfastness of their commitment to the community. Maria registered amazement at this commitment level especially in comparison to public agencies such as the Department of Social Services and the Virginia Employment Commission. On the other hand, at the organizational level attorneys and client community members explained that legal aid programs need to overcome the perception that they are "unsafe" or part of the system of oppressive institutions. Carrie, Alicia, and Beatrice each separately described experiences of people in the community thinking that legal aid is connected to a state welfare or law enforcement bureaucracy.

Bridging organization and community. Client community members described their own experiences as bridges between legal aid and their communities. For Beatrice, seeing neighbors throw away fliers from a grassroots public housing group makes her upset and frustrated. She assumes that pride makes people not want to receive help or become involved, and she understands this but it is still hard to watch. In contrast to these challenges, Beatrice described having and resolving disagreements in community group meetings alongside legal aid attorneys.

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She added that debate is normal and occurs amicably. She expressed the emotional connection she has with this community group. Despite disagreements, they always come to a shared understanding before making decisions. They make decisions together. They also gather for informal gatherings and neighborhood barbecues to create casual opportunities for others who might be interested to gain access.

At the board or advisory group level, some of the interviews reflected that client community members play roles in managing relationships between clients and attorneys. Carmen described having to help clients understand how to approach their legal aid experience. As client community members with leadership roles, they understand the process and can help clients seeking services to avoid disappointment. They help clients understand the importance of telling the truth about their situation and treating attorneys with respect, but also not being afraid of attorneys and expressing dissatisfaction when necessary. As client community members become more embedded in and committed to a legal aid organization's vision, they seem to have more of these opportunities to bridge community and organizational perspectives.

Summary

Participants' experiences suggest that while in some cases collaboration remains tethered to a specific timeframe, in other cases opportunities exist for individuals and organizations to strategically build the capacity needed to sustain or extend collaboration across timeframes. Many of these strategic opportunities seem to involve moving outside pre-established categories, structures, or roles. Attorneys move from mediated contact with client community members to less formal interaction in neighborhoods and communities. Individual clients become aware of the connection between their experiences and systemic concerns. Board members and

community organizing participants become brokers of engagement for others in the community. By changing existing patterns of interaction, these participants deepened and extended collaboration between attorneys and client community members.

~Navigating Context~

Through all of the activities described thus far, the client community members, attorneys, and other staff and stakeholders operate within organizational, as well as broader social and political, contexts. At the organizational level, they are constrained and enabled by funding streams, as well as organizational structures and the views of staff and other stakeholders. Organizational structures seem to facilitate some activities while hindering others, and diminished resources overall mean that decisions are made in circumstances of scarcity. The staff and other stakeholders who comprise legal aid organizations in the studied context espouse varied political views and theories of change that shape strategic planning processes and organizational priority setting. Beyond the organizational level, federal and state policies regulate legal aid activities. These policies determine the level of funding available for legal aid and allow certain activities while prohibiting others.

An organizational typology. Carrie from Regional Comprehensive proposed a typology of three organizational approaches, grounded in different theories of change, that result in divergent ways of involving client community members in a legal aid organization's activities. The first approach is to engage client community members in setting priorities for the organization's case handling. This approach reflects the legal aid tradition of being a "law firm for the poor" and mobilizing legal expertise on behalf of low-income clients in a way that is analogous to the operation of a law-firm for people of greater economic means. In this approach client community input is built into the organization's decisions about what types of cases to

handle, but the primary function of the organization is still to provide legal expertise to poor

people who need help. Outside the process of determining which substantive areas of law to

focus on, collaboration is limited. The second approach is to engage client community members

to serve as "directly affected spokespeople" for specific, discrete low-income concerns, e.g. to

speak in favor of a particular bill being considered by the state legislature. This approach

requires building and maintaining relationships to a sufficient degree that client community

members respond favorably to these targeted requests for participation. While client community

members participate in advocacy efforts under this approach, the overall process of determining

priorities and strategies is still the domain of attorneys. The third approach is grounded in a

community lawyering perspective, whereby emphasis is placed not only on achieving change on

a range issues affecting the broader low-income community, but also on shifting the power

dynamic in favor of client community members who are typically "steamrolled" by

bureaucracies and other institutions. In this approach, relationships are long-term and ongoing

because the process of building those relationships, working together, and shifting the balance of

power is central to the larger purpose of the organization.

The above typology reflects Carrie's predisposition to the third "community lawyering"

approach, but it serves as a helpful framework for understanding the continuum of organizational

contexts nonetheless. Several participants pointed out that the "ideal" vision for legal aid also

must be tempered by on-the-ground realities such as shrinking funding and staff capacity

combined with pressure to handle more cases. Navigating context entails balancing these and

other elements of the surroundings in which legal aid attorneys and client community members

operate.

The legal profession. In addition to informing specific decisions and actions through codes of ethics and professional standards, the legal profession and legal education have an imprint on how collaboration occurs in the legal aid context. Alicia recalled her experience as a student. Her undergraduate education was explicitly organized around the concept of community engagement. By comparison, in law school she experienced little in the way of community orientation except for the clinic experiences. She sought out one elective class in law school with a particular emphasis on community interaction. Other than this class, her coursework in law school did not include content related to working with or alongside communities. Carrie referred to law schools as "prestige and credentialing machines" that provide little in the way of practical training that is relevant to the work that attorneys actually do with clients. In her experience, attorneys are left to their own devices when it comes to determining why and how they should collaborate.

Ron described lawyers in general as creatures of habit, trained to handle facts and evidence in specific ways, and not inclined to venture into unchartered territory. Erica, the partner organization representative who is also an attorney, agreed and added that attorneys (and most professionals for that matter) are also uncomfortable crossing lines of demographic difference. Carrie described a colleague's fellowship in which her main responsibilities related to campaign work with a local community group that was affiliated with a legal aid organization as a potential remedy for this discomfort. She participated in the rhythms of the group and built relationships with its members. In the realm of staff professional development, Alicia suggested training in anti-oppressive practices and proposed encouraging self-reflection among attorneys and incentivizing time devoted to quiet meditation. Through conscious reflection and training individuals can identify their biases, limitations, and patterns of behavior that create frustration

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or stigmatize client community members. She added that this research project is a possible jumping-off point for a consciousness shifting process for all legal aid programs in the state.

Different views of collaboration. Regarding how to balance scarce resources and the importance of collaboration, positions among participants varied substantially. Carrie expressed her view that attorneys benefit from working with community groups by being kept accountable to their political compass. She described spending most of her days "being reasonable" while interacting with public bureaucracies and needing community groups to remind her to stay firm to their immediate concerns and positions. A legal aid attorney's job requires her to work with powerful people while being accountable to the perspectives of the powerless. She must embody the good cop while carrying with her a commitment to the value of the bad cop. A focus of professional development, then, should be the ability to navigate the psychological twists and turns of being an advocate with grassroots allegiance. She acknowledged the challenge of bringing clients' needs and perspectives – both tangible and those involving less tangible concerns such as the need for respect -- into a bureaucratic dialogue. In one experience involving the Department of Social Services, she perceived that grassroots participants in this dialogue were alienating allies with repetitive digressions and making it harder to build consensus.

Despite such challenges, she posited that collaboration makes attorneys more holistic advocates. They develop an understanding that litigation is but one tool in effecting change, and that it can be a dead end strategy in certain situations. The appropriate tool should be used for the task at hand. By taking a broader view of social problems attorneys would begin to see the value of this pragmatic "tool in the toolbox" approach. She stated that lawyers are educated to see legal action – litigation and policy change -- as the "ultimate weapon" to create change, but

in reality change occurs through a confluence of social and political developments. In addition to lawyers having biases toward legal solutions, she acknowledged the challenge of community members seeing legal aid as a lawsuit machine and becoming disappointed when attorneys express reluctance to litigate. She has experienced members of the community interpreting the decision not to sue as an indication that legal aid is not prioritizing the community's concerns. Ironically, Carrie pointed out, a more varied strategic toolkit would allow organizations to enhance their responsiveness to low-income concerns. From Carrie's perspective, the range of a legal services program's impact may be limited if attorneys view litigation as the only option.

Miles saw things differently. From his perspective, working with client community members around common concerns has clear ethical and moral value, but in practice it can lead to frustration. Strong personalities hijack agendas, and the collaboration can lose its focus. In weighing whether to embark on a joint project with client community members, programs must consider the inefficiency and delays in achieving outcomes. Processes are undertaken that seem not to align with the advocacy goals at hand. Meanwhile, he noted, when the phone rings all day with people in dire need, attorneys have good reason to withdraw from the goal of community-wide engagement and collaboration. His organization has decided that it does not have the resources to devote to long-term relationships in the community or building the skills needed for extensive community engagement in its workforce.

Notably, Miles contrasted concerns about the efficiency of community collaboration with the net benefits of organizational coalitions composed of professionals, in which a diversity of goals and agendas elongates the process but also brings richness and adds value to the final product. In another contrast, he cited the success of middle class organizing around a discrete social problem requiring time-limited action. Carrie alluded similarly to communities with

short-lived, delimited objects of dissatisfaction such as the proposed opening of a group home in the neighborhood.

Carrie also recognized pitfalls associated with collaboration, but her concerns were different. She explained that she would like to have more capacity personally as a community organizer and builder of relationships, but she also would rather see that capacity in the community itself, or in conjunction with an established community group, than within legal aid. She suggested that there may be value in having more legal skills locally available within community groups themselves as opposed to forcing communities to rely on a separate legal aid organization. In lieu of that approach, which might present logistical and financial challenges, she suggested prioritizing a higher degree of enmeshment between legal aid attorneys and the grassroots structures and groups that exist. She noted, however, that while more community-based collaboration would be a positive step, in the final analysis she doubted the long-term strategic value in emphasizing legal solutions. Given the choice, she would prefer non-legal client-centered strategies to addressing client concerns. She acknowledged the benefits of having a lawyer "in the room" at times, but also recognized the potential downside of an attorney's presence. Collaboration, she added, is one way of mitigating the possible negative consequences of a lawyer's involvement because it leads to more equitable distribution of power, but whether or not it is worth it to have a lawyer involved is a subjective question.

Carrie spoke about managing an organizational bias in favor of outcomes over process, and how that relates to the tension between scarce resources and organizational priorities. She described spending time attending community group meetings and doing other things that people do not consider productive. Attorneys experience time pressure and competing demands, and must consider the expectations of their employer in fulfilling their duties. At the same time,

Carrie expressed appreciation to her organization for keeping attorneys accountable to their time and multiple responsibilities. She described being in meetings with community groups while her phone is "blowing up" because she is needed by colleagues in another meeting. This dynamic can result in relationship building getting tabled in order to deal with crises. While her ideal scenario would be serving as an in-house attorney for a community-led organization, this participant acknowledged the feasibility concerns associated with this approach. Alternatively, she commented that legal aid programs could focus energy on having more complex and "enmeshed" relationships with community groups, but recognized that most staff members do not have the time.

Suzie summarized the dilemma facing organizations seeking to collaborate: scarce organizational resources and high levels of community need mean that the legal aid organization can only do a limited amount of work in each area. The organization is inundated with demand for service and cannot respond to all of the community's needs or interests. Even organizations that want to use the community lawyering approach described Carrie's typology, in other words, face constraints in carrying out that approach.

Intervening within organizations. Several interventions were proposed to address some of the intractable constraints facing legal aid organizations. Statewide Legal Aid attorney Suzie sees the time spent engaging in debate and dialogue about how to interact with the community as critical. Organizers and lawyers might disagree about how much their work should overlap, but often she finds that perspectives track philosophical differences more than professional ones. This observation gives her hope because it suggests that views cut across profession and background, meaning that various permutations of collaboration are possible. She also sees potential for greater dialogue about problem identification between attorneys and communities.

While lawyers in some cases can detect a policy issue before it is felt directly by the community, attorneys must be open to concerns that they are unable to detect. She added that prerequisites for this process of mutual consciousness raising are showing concern, care, and empathy, and in turn building trust. In her experience supervising students she sees the importance of overcoming differences in identity and experience in order to collaborate effectively. At bottom this bridging of difference is about tapping into a common human condition. Lenora recommended that a starting point would be to have greater emphasis at the state legal aid conference on client-friendly workshops and workshops that appeal to both client community members and attorneys.

Alicia echoed the idea of professional development to support dialogue, suggesting that if logistical challenges can be overcome attorneys would benefit from sessions on mindfulness, reflexivity, and meditation. Client community members Carmen and Lenora added that attending to listening skills would improve the potential for collaboration in boards of directors and throughout organizations.

Miles offered another perspective, however. He explained that Regional Emergency Legal Aid has made a choice to limit its resources to handling individual emergencies. As an indication of time constraints, Miles explained that he resigns himself to never completing his managerial to-do list, but he also acknowledged that he chooses to handle cases rather than devote himself to administrative and other non-case related activities. In part he makes this choice because it helps him stay connected to the community, but he allowed that "managing a bureaucracy" holds little interest for him. Miles expressed his desire for client community board and advisory group members to invest more heavily in improving community relationships, but

added that the effectiveness of client community leadership is "politically sensitive" and therefore hard to address as an organization.

Regardless of the challenges, Statewide attorney Ron's experience has led him to the view that organizational leaders need to make collaboration a priority. The mindset needs to change so that it is not considered a failure to do fewer cases. There needs to be a positive discourse around collaboration, and formalized expectations and criteria for evaluating community engagement. It needs to be formalized, in his view, if it is to happen. Unfortunately, he explained, many people think of seeing desperate clients and community engagement as a zero sum situation. If you do more of one, it means you do less of the other. Since some major funders want to know the number of cases and the outcomes of those cases, some legal aid organizations use numbers as a single or predominant measure of effectiveness. In Ron's experience, organizations feel pressure to have impressive statistics. They must contend with the short-term lens imposed by funders in light of the extended timeframe associated with community collaboration.

Alicia proposed creating an organization that provides technical assistance to legal aid programs in the Commonwealth in the practice of community engagement and collaboration. She expressed hope that Virginia would become a leader and innovator in the field of legal aid practice and community collaboration specifically. This would be unexpected and meaningful in light of Virginia's political and historical context. While the variety of views held and solutions proposed is somewhat overwhelming and hard to put into perspective, a number of participants indicated that it was nonetheless useful to begin this discussion. They expressed appreciation for the opportunity the interviews provided to step back and think about the big picture. This time to

consider creative solutions to organizational challenges is hard to come by in the course of a typical work day.

Societal views of poverty. In the broader social and political context, participants described legal aid as a voice for positive change. Client community member and activist Lenora explained the need to distinguish between personal blame and structural barriers. People need to think critically about and identify the structural barriers that exist, which she likened to a race in which one contestant has his legs tied together and gets poked in the eye as the starting whistle blows. Miles explained that compared to attorneys who work for private for-profit firms, legal aid attorneys do define the range of activities they undertake in a way that private firms may not. Their choices about the scope of their practice are shaped by the legal aid organization's mission and values. Miles attempts to remedy what he sees as a prevailing lack of consciousness about poverty in the legal system by exposing pro bono attorneys and judges to legal aid's organizational values. Unfortunately, he added, he has little hope that people in power will change their views about the poor. Over the decades, if anything, it has gotten worse in terms of material conditions and societal harshness toward the poor. He expressed doubt that policies would systematically move in a positive direction.

In contrast to Miles' posture about the larger state of affairs, Carrie described her trajectory as transitioning from a law student "anonymously railing" against the system to a public interest lawyer who now pragmatically engages with bureaucratic systems and tries to make everyday life better for communities. For those communities, there is no choice in whether to deal with bureaucracies, and so trying to make those systems "less of a huge jerk" is now a big part of her job. For example, when a local housing authority misrepresented discretionary federal guidelines as required mandates, she worked with client community members to

challenge proposed local policy changes that would have hurt local residents. She attributed these and similar actions by welfare agencies to the underlying view that low-income people are unwilling to take responsibility and therefore deserving of punitive policies even if they are not necessary to achieve the intended outcome.

Responding to LSC restrictions. Programs that receive federal funding entirely or in part through the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) address poverty and engage in collaboration in ways that are different than programs funded by other sources. In addition to the specific restrictions imposed by the LSC, Ron explained that, in his view, the most damaging consequence of the restrictions is the fear and confusion they cause. His impression is that many in legal services programs are both worried and misinformed, which makes them think twice about everything they do.

Miles recounted the steps taken by several legal aid organizations to restructure their operations in response to additional LSC restrictions put in place in the 1990s. Some programs were absorbed by other programs, resulting in the consolidating of several local programs into two regional programs, only one of which accepted LSC funds. The two organizations agreed to cover the same geographic territory and work together in strategically addressing the needs of the client community, but had to maintain separate organizational structures. Staff members were redistributed into the two resulting organizations in part based on personal preference but also according to the congruence between their substantive practice areas and the LSC restrictions. For example, one attorney who practiced consumer law joined the non-LSC funded organization because consumer cases can result in attorney's fees being awarded and one of the new LSC restrictions forbade the collection of attorney's fees (a restriction that has since been removed by Congress).

A critical element of this two-organization arrangement is that the LSC-funded organization deals primarily with individual cases and emergencies, while the non-LSC organization handles systemic advocacy, including the class actions, policy advocacy, and community organizing that is prohibited under LSC restrictions. Miles explained that this division of labor informs how his organization collaborates and engages with client community members:

Miles: You know, eighty per cent of our practice is advice and counsel and brief service. So people are coming away with a letter, a pamphlet, some questions answered, and maybe they can handle it themselves. Maybe we could handle more of the critical cases and try to move those issues forward, but that's the role that [Regional Comprehensive] is supposed to have, and so we rely on the two sides of that coin to get the best things for our clients. What we don't want is to spend a lot of time trying to collaborate, ignoring housing, food, jobs, and the other critical needs, and then have the collaboration be ineffective and not make the change.

Since his organization's focus is on individual emergencies, its need and capacity for collaboration is lower. He and his colleagues leave the more complicated cases and systemic work to their sister organization, and trust that this arrangement will serve the community well.

Other participants confirmed Ron's assertion about the fear and confusion caused by the LSC restrictions. Alicia recounted stories told by a past supervisor about programs being defunded for the slightest lack of compliance. Participants also expressed uncertainty about the prohibition on community organizing. Alicia wondered whether a conference held for attorneys and clients on a specific topic would be considered community organizing. Miles classified the type of activity that is prohibited as "political organizing and lobbying." As Alicia explained, because the LSC language is vague she and her colleagues must remain vigilant in order to maintain compliance. Similarly, board member Carmen conveyed her understanding that Regional Emergency is prohibited from lobbying under any circumstances, but others explained

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that the restriction on legislative advocacy is not so absolute. As Ron suggested, LSC-funded organizations may take a "better safe than sorry" approach to avoid the possibility of sanctions.

It was also Miles' perception that, in addition to curtailing systemic and political activities, the LSC's support for community input on organizational priorities has decreased dramatically as well. That is, even in the "law firm for the poor" category of Carrie's typology, the LSC pushes organizations to serve clients who walk through the door rather than going out and finding out what issues are most pressing. Compared to previous points in legal aid history, he concluded that the trend in community collaboration in priority setting is downward sloping. In the early years of the LSC in the 1970s, he estimated that the expectation was for legal aid programs to spend 50% of their resources engaging with the community to identify and address their concerns. Now he estimates that the preferred outreach time has been reduced by funding cuts and LSC restrictions to 20%. On the other hand, he reiterated, non-LSC programs are well-positioned to collaborate.

Summary

The process of Navigating Context involves consideration of individual theories of change, organizational structures and funding streams, as well as social and political realities. None of this is clear-cut. Attorneys and client community members are faced with a disorienting array of forces and conditions to consider. One silver lining seems to be that they find hope in discussing and having an exchange of ideas. Even articulating their own ideas proved useful for some in the context of these interviews. The process of Collaborating for Justice in a Legal Aid Setting ends, then, with a complicated set of daunting circumstances as well as a sense of possibility and hope associated with the value of further dialogue.

Conclusion

The findings of this study, as discussed above, explain how attorneys and client community members in this context overcome a number of challenges in order to come together to advance justice through legal aid. They are motivated to come to legal aid by their experiences in a world defined by unequal access to advantage. Their values and their personal circumstances differ, and once they are associated with legal aid they negotiate their interaction in ways that honor and reflect those differences to varying degrees. As time passes, they have opportunities to make connections, both interpersonally between and among individuals as well as analytically across individual, organizational, and community levels of intervention. They can build deeper relationships as the timeframe of their interaction is extended, and potentially work toward a common vision as a community or as an organization. All the while, they operate in a challenging mix of organizational and sociopolitical contexts that enable and constrain their interactions. Because the process of collaborating for change reflects the complexity of the individual lives, organizations, and social forces by which it is animated, it is difficult to distill these findings into a neat set of final thoughts. Nonetheless, I attempt in closing to present several summary learnings that serve as both an imperfect drawing together of the study's findings and a conceptual bridge to its implications.

Lessons Learned Regarding the Context Studied

Lessons learned are used as a "sensemaking" strategy in constructivist research to allow the researcher, and reader, to transition from thickly written case report to ideas that can be carried forward (Rodwell, 1998). These lessons learned are another step in providing what John Ashworth (2008) calls a "record of a process by which a researcher interprets the research participants' constructions of their world" (p. 19). Toward the goal of further sensemaking and

interpreting, if what has come before is an accurate depiction of participants' lived experience of collaboration between legal aid attorneys and client community members in this particular setting, then it seems that the following assertions about the context studied are plausible:

1. Given that legal aid attorneys are faced with enormous demand for their expertise, "saying no" to prospective clients becomes a precondition for creating the deeper relationships on which collaboration depends.

2. Since the education and professional culture of attorneys is aligned with the process of resolving problems rationally through the system of laws and lawmaking, the expressive and affective elements of collaboration require conscious attention if they are to be emphasized at the individual or organizational level.

3. Even if certain activities may not necessarily require heavy emphasis on collaboration, there are ways to build collaborative capacity and prefigure enhanced collaboration through attention to interpersonal or group dynamics, systemic analysis, and creating a shared vision.

4. For client community members and attorneys alike, as individual power and capacity increases within the legal aid system, so do opportunities to facilitate collaboration and bridge differences between client communities and legal aid organizations.

5. Boards and other advisory groups represent opportunities to anchor organizational commitment to long-term collaboration with client communities, but they can also be sites for experiences that reinforce status quo power differences and inequality.

6. In the current funding and political environment, strategies of change that are long-term, collective, or political require greater creativity, reflexivity, and political analysis within and across organizations.

The above lessons learned reflect the author's interpretation of experiences and perceptions of collaboration in a geographically bounded legal aid context in the Commonwealth of Virginia, as told by the participants in this study. In the next and final chapter, I discuss how participants in this study seem to suggest moving from a place of scarcity to a hopeful process of generativity and development. The implications of these findings for education, practice, and policy are then discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The lessons learned listed at the end of the previous chapter, along with the conceptual framework presented earlier in the same chapter, provide a starting point for a discussion here of how this dissertation is relevant for education, practice, and policy. Before discussing specific implications in these areas, I trace the potential path from the condition of scarcity, on several fronts, to a generative process of building collaborative capacity. In the current discussion, I use the terms generative and generativity to refer to the idea that potential outcomes are not limited in scope by the immediate inputs. The concept of generativity is used in psychology (Erikson, 1950/1963) and linguistics (Chomsky, 1966, as cited in Studdert-Kennedy, 1998) to suggest that the meaning created by individual parts, actions, or people can extend beyond the immediate context or what might be imaginable when considering only the constituent parts in isolation. What is occurring in the studied legal aid context may reflect this idea. That is, collaboration is possible in ways that might not be expected in light of the constraints and scarcity of resources faced by those interviewed. By thinking in terms of nourishing, sustaining, and extending, it is possible that individuals and organizations can become more collaborative and more effective in their collaboration if they determine that it is useful to do so.

A theme that reverberates in participants' stories -- and thus in the lessons learned -- is a reconciliation of scarce resources with ambitious goals. For attorneys, having to "say no" when they are driven by deep values to do the opposite is a gut-wrenching proposition. Even for the

cases they accept, time is scarce and making space for collaboration is a struggle. Professionally, they are trained and ethically required to collect facts and shape them into compelling, logical narratives in service of winning positive legal outcomes for their clients. That process does not always require a reciprocal or collaborative approach. As several participants pointed out, technical expertise is essential, whereas the expressive and affective elements of case handling are important but supplemental. Limited organizational resources also mean that, as one attorney pointed out, the relationship between collaboration and legal outcomes is viewed as zero sum. As a consequence of this work environment, another participant described with regret that she had learned over time to "turn empathy off" in order to function effectively as a legal aid attorney and still have energy left for her personal life.

For client community members, another brand of scarcity -- "doing without" -- is part of daily life. Their choices are limited and often made for them by bureaucratic agencies. They come to legal aid having been devalued, yet they too seek ambitious change. They want to challenge systems, not only to have their names cleared or their rights protected on an individual basis but to help others in similar situations by altering policies and other systems. They value the credibility and expertise of legal aid in achieving these goals. Having legal aid's "muscle" in their corner lowers stress, lends legitimacy to their claims, and amplifies their capacity for change. Interactions with legal aid can be limited in scope, and even reinforce broader power differences and inequalities, but they can also become opportunities for empowerment, skill development, and greater influence in the community. Attorneys become more versatile advocates with increased awareness of client community perspectives, and client community members overcome personal and systemic barriers to their engagement in legal and political

processes. Under the right circumstances, that is, these experiences of scarcity can transform into sources of generativity and development.

Despite important concerns about opportunity cost -- more collaboration means helping fewer people -- attorneys and client community members recognized the political, moral, and practical value of effective collaboration. It leads to more lasting and meaningful change; it is consistent with the unassailable moral position that we all have equal value as humans; and it allows organizations, groups, and individuals to operate more smoothly and effectively. But how can it be facilitated and achieved while also "managing unmanageable caseloads"? How can it be prioritized when funders prefer individual and short-term outcomes? How can it be given attention when class action, policy advocacy, and political organizing are restricted or prohibited? In response to environmental constraints, participants move across borders and outside more typical lawyer-client spaces. They wipe tears away, extend hands, gather for barbecues, and listen intently to neighbors. They "unsettle" their roles, Foucault might say (see Chambon, 1999), to overcome scarcity and redefine relationships to organizational and external contexts.

Through specific generative and developmental actions, it seems that collaboration, as well as the capacity to collaborate, can be nourished and strengthened over time. Individual cases lead to heightened awareness of systemic concerns. Participation in a coalition provides opportunities to unite behind a common vision. Board members build bridges between organizations and client communities across which important knowledge and information can be carried. These enhancing actions can occur in isolation, but underlying commitments by individuals and organizations make them more possible and more likely by granting license for the expansion of collaborative capacity. Participants described not only the personal satisfaction

they draw from forging bonds between groups, and but also how their job descriptions and other organizational rhetoric enabled and legitimized those efforts.

How, then, can we move forward? This chapter attempts to link the current study to considerations for education, practice, and policy. Implications for education cover both social work and law. I attend to usage of the term *collaboration* and the role of power and expertise in collaboration. In light of findings that are relevant to interpersonal, organizational, and community practice, the delineation of *micro* and *macro* social work education versus a more graduated or integrated approach is discussed. Among practitioners, the study suggests implications for social workers across a range of human service environments as well as for legal aid attorneys and other legal aid stakeholders. Policy implications relate to federal Legal Services Corporation funding levels and the restrictions associated with LSC funding. The larger universe of legal aid funding options is relevant as well, including state-level public funding and support from bar associations, law firms, and private foundations. Another area discussed is the litigation of poverty. Attention is warranted to the housing, consumer, employment, and other policies that lead to the high relative frequency at which the poor are subject to legal action and therefore must seek legal aid assistance or be exposed to legal risk without appropriate technical assistance and/or support. Finally, I discuss directions for future research and how subsequent inquiry can build on the conceptual framework, lessons learned, and other findings.

Implications

In this section I present implications for education, practice, and policy. The implications for education encompass both social work and legal education. Similarly, implications for practice extend to social work practitioners as well as legal aid practitioners. Policy implications are primarily in the area of funding.

Implications for Social Work Education

   This study may help social work educators to effectively deepen understanding of

collaboration, increase capacity for interprofessional work with legal aid, and bring greater

awareness of individualized funding priorities and their consequences for human services

administration and practice.

   Collaboration. This study suggests that collaboration is a concept compatible with some

of the most basic of social work values. While these connections can be inferred in the arena of

social work education, this study makes those links more explicit. In recent years, the use of

standardized competencies to design, implement, and assess social work curricula has become

prevalent, as many accrediting bodies have instituted stricter guidelines for grounding education

in the development of specific areas of knowledge, behavior, and attitude. In particular, the

Council on Social Work Education requires that social work students at the baccalaureate and

master's level complete their education having developed the ability to collaborate with clients,

communities, and other professionals (CSWE, 2013a). Social workers are expected to

"collaborate with colleagues and clients for effective policy action" (CSWE, 2013a, p. 6). They

are also expected to arrive at mutually agreed-on goals and strategies; take into account

underlying dynamics of oppression and power difference; and see themselves as learners and

those with whom they work as informants. These other competencies, also ratified by CSWE,

are not explicitly connected to the concept of collaboration. It is therefore not always clear how

or why social workers should prioritize collaboration.

   One step toward a more cohesive and precise understanding of collaboration is to

highlight the value as well as the potential pitfalls of collaboration in assorted contexts. From

this study, for example, we see that collaboration in a legal aid context entails more than simply

working together toward common goals. It involves acknowledgement of different perspectives, awareness of power differentials, and the use of affective and expressive behaviors. Further, a temporal element of collaboration means that the development of skills and behaviors associated with collaboration can occur incrementally, starting in short timeframes and continuing in more extended ones. This study also suggests that collaboration can be impacted by policies and other contextual circumstances. In the case of legal aid, organizations are pressured by external stakeholders to emphasize short-term, individual interventions in ways that deter agencies from prioritizing collaboration.

Of specific interest is the need to consider both professional and community expertise in collaboration. As social work students grapple with the paradox of professionalization and shared power (Weinberg, 2015), they can consider similar dynamics experienced in other professions. Attorneys, as one participant stated, are taught to convincingly advocate for a particular version of the truth, which makes embracing community-based expertise that is grounded in first-hand experience a challenge. Social workers are similarly charged with identifying as professional social workers while viewing clients and community members as experts in their own right. This study provides an example of professional and lay experts using a scaffolded capacity development process to support negotiation of power and expertise.

This study also provides a case example of how, in order to actualize core ideas of social work -- in this case collaboration -- human services practitioners must incorporate interpersonal, group, community, and policy levels of analysis and intervention. Conversely, the argument can be made that the concept, collaboration, helps facilitate an integrated, multi-system approach. From either vantage point, distinctions between individual, organization, and policy levels of practice are blurred. Educators can emphasize that these distinctions serve analytic purposes in

the abstract but then must be transcended in practice on the ground. Through collaboration, for example, individual clients can be connected to groups and systemic change efforts. Connections are made and common visions develop.

Legal aid. Legal aid attorneys and social workers have compatible goals and interact with overlapping populations. Content related to the history of social welfare as well as the contemporary social welfare landscape is commonly included in social work curricula, and on both fronts increased attention to legal aid is warranted. The histories of social work and legal aid are intertwined in ways that stimulate classroom discussions about gender roles and professionalization. Early social workers have even been referred to as "lay lawyers" and written into historical accounts of legal aid by virtue of their instrumental roles in legal advocacy and social reform on behalf of women, children, immigrants, and other politically marginalized groups (Batlan, 2015). In the contemporary landscape, future social workers would benefit from knowledge about an important infrastructure that serves low-income residents of all regions of the country.

In addition to courses devoted to social welfare, electives and field placements are opportunities to raise awareness regarding legal aid. Content about the existence and functioning of legal aid organizations would add to elective courses in social work and the law. These courses often emphasize how social workers and social work clients interact with the legal system and how the law affects clients and communities with whom social workers are engaged (Braye, Preston-Shoot, Cull, Johns, & Roche, 2005; Colarossi & Forgey, 2006). Adding content about legal aid organizations would enhance students' understanding of an important resource in addressing the legal concerns of low-income individuals and communities. Field placements at legal aid organizations would have the additional benefit of allowing social work students to gain

practical experience in client legal matters and to serve as interprofessional liaisons. Increased

mutual awareness between legal aid organizations and social work education programs might

lead to more effective interagency partnerships and perhaps to an increase in legal aid programs

employing social workers directly.

Legal aid field placements would help expand awareness and interpretation of

interprofessional practice. Increased emphasis on interprofessional practice in recent years has

largely focused on social workers' roles alongside health and medical professionals (Bonifas &

Gray, 2013; Ko, Bailey-Kloch, & Kim, 2014). Like other social problems, concerns of legal aid

organizations and client community members do not conform to one profession's scope of

practice. As participants in this study reported, legal aid clients regularly raise concerns for

which legal solutions are unavailable or suboptimal. Social work students placed in legal aid

organizations could increase their own capacity to work interprofessionally while at the same

time adding to the capacity of those organizations.

Administrative practice. Social work educators may also find relevance in this study's

findings with regard to the pressure some legal aid organizations in the studied context feel from

funders who prefer individualized outcomes consistent with traditional legal services.

Participants reported that their programs and administrators appear to be under pressure to

maintain high caseloads in order to sustain funding and maintain organizational viability. Those

committed to collaboration with client communities and systemic change expressed concern

about these funding priorities. Social work educators likely would have similar concerns given

their profession's vested interest in self-determination, social and economic justice, policy

advocacy, and community practice. Instructors of courses in administration and management of

human services organizations can use legal aid to demonstrate how federal policies have shifted

away from support for systemic change and to show how organizations have acted creatively to mitigate the impact of that shift. Finally, educators and students can analyze whether and how the restrictions imposed on LSC-funded programs may create apprehension, as participants in this study described, and if the prospect of sanctions leads federally funded legal aid organizations to adopt a more conservative approach to services than adherence to the restrictions requires. Questions for students to consider might include: How would you respond to this funding environment as a legal aid administrator? To what extent should organizations acquiesce to funders' priorities and how much should they push back? The predicament for legal aid organizations reflects broader funding challenges faced in the nonprofit world (Eikenberry, 2009), and future human services leaders would benefit from reflecting on how they would respond.

Implications for Legal Education

Study participants described the lack of emphasis in their law schools on interactions with clients, let alone collaboration with low-income communities. Clinical education is an area of legal education that holds promise for enhancing students' understanding of collaboration and discussing the role of the Legal Services Corporation in shaping the strategies used by legal aid organizations. Law students could also be engaged in creative problem solving regarding how to bridge individual interventions with action at the community and policy levels. In addition to clinical education, in which law students see clients under supervision, traditional lecture-based courses in poverty law, community lawyering, or law and organizing represent opportunities for discussion of collaboration with client communities and other strategies for the alleviation and reduction of poverty.

Clinical education. Attorney participants reported that clinics were the primary if not the only opportunities they had during law school to experience and learn about how to work with clients. Clinics are often held in legal aid offices or other programs serving low-income clients. Clinics then become opportunities for future attorneys to develop and shape their understanding of how to interact with low-income individuals and communities. Within the interpersonal sphere, clinical professors and attorneys who supervise students in clinics could emphasize the importance of collaborative interactions with clients. In addition to seeking positive legal outcomes on behalf of clients, students could be engaged in discussions about connecting clients to collective and political efforts to create change. Clinic programs have begun to incorporate collective mobilization as a tool for change, and commentators have recommended more widespread emphasis on community-based engagement through clinical education (Ashar, 2008; Barry, Karn, Johnson, Klein, & Martin, 2012).

Two attorney participants reported that one part of working with students is disabusing them of a savior mentality. This mentality should be familiar territory both to legal aid attorneys (White, 2005) and to social workers familiar with their profession's history (Margolin, 1997). To stem these inclinations, participants recommended workshops and ongoing instruction on how to work with low-income clients from an anti-oppressive perspective. Specific topics might include effectively combining legal and community expertise; the concept of privilege; negotiating power when working with legal aid clients; and working toward sustained collaboration. Whether through workshops or other means, clinic students as well as legal aid organizations and client communities would benefit from seeing individual cases as opportunities to lay groundwork for longer and deeper collaboration in addition to the need to fulfill the immediate task of resolving the client's often urgent concerns. The Shriver Center

(n.d.) and the Center for Constitutional Rights (2013) are two national organizations that provide professional development opportunities in this area and could serve as resources for law school clinics and legal aid organizations.

Clinic students also would benefit from exposure to policies that limit legal aid activities. Educating future attorneys regarding the LSC restrictions and other salient political issues can only help in raising overall societal awareness. Additionally, for those students who will go on to work at a legal aid office, this knowledge will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in legal aid programs regarding the challenges and opportunities associated with the LSC restrictions.

Classroom courses. Like other graduate professional education programs, law schools offer electives that cover specialty content areas, methods, or populations. Electives on poverty law or community lawyering are likely to cover material that relates to this dissertation. Courses in poverty law provide an overview of the law-related tools and strategies used to address poverty, as well as the historical development of those tools and strategies and the extent to which their use is feasible in contemporary contexts (Edelman, 2014). Community lawyering courses emphasize how attorneys work with communities to address their concerns using legal and non-legal strategies. Scholars and practitioners have explored the benefits and challenges of integrating legal strategies with participatory social change efforts that may or may not depend directly on the legal system as a vehicle for change (Cummings & Eagly, 2001; Sarat & Scheingold, 2006). In both types of courses, legal aid organizations have a substantial presence, as would the challenges facing federally funded legal aid organizations in light of restrictions. This study provides an example of how some organizations have responded to those restrictions and the consequences of those responses. For example, students could assess and analyze the

impact of having both an LSC-funded and non-LSC legal aid organization in the same region. More broadly, the classes could examine strategic organizational partnerships -- both between legal aid organizations and with organizations whose primary focus is community engagement -- as viable responses to LSC funding restrictions. Students in law and organizing classes in particular could consider the implications of some participants' comments that an attorney's work is fundamentally different from an organizer's work, and that as attorneys they do not have the appropriate skills needed to meet the community's need for organizing capacity. The courses could review options for expanding legal aid capacity to collaborate with client communities, including strategic partnerships, hiring practices, and professional development.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Social workers are occasionally employed by legal aid organizations in order to expand the impact of their services or provide additional services for their clients (Block & Soprych, 2011; The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, n.d.). The implications of this study for social workers employed directly by legal aid organizations is discussed first, followed by the implications for social work practitioners more broadly.

Social work practice in legal aid. Social workers are trained and educated to serve as connectors, brokers, and facilitators (CSWE, 2013a; Oliver, 2013). The skills, attitudes, and behaviors required to effectively serve in these roles are relevant and potentially useful for legal aid organizations seeking to enhance collaboration with client communities. These contributions can roughly be categorized as organizational culture considerations, making connections with attorneys, and making connections with client community members.

In the arena of organizational culture, the biopsychosocial lens used by social workers would potentially help facilitate processes by which to align the organization's mission, goals,

and activities and move toward an understanding of collaboration as a reinforcement of the organization's purpose rather than a distraction from it. Addressing the tension between time scarcity and collaboration may not be as simple as deciding as an organization that it is acceptable to close fewer cases, as one participant suggested, though that may be a productive start. Other attorney participants' comments suggest that a focus on legal outcomes is part of their professional identity and ethical mandate. In that case, explicitly acknowledging the value of collaborative activities as an important tool for achieving client and client community goals would not diminish the impact of the legal assistance programs provide but give programs and their clients more options and greater power to achieve goals that have a broader dimension. It may also help, as one participants noted, to combine new performance evaluation language as well as professional development regarding the relationship between collaboration and the ethical requirements of the legal profession. Social workers with administrative and interpersonal practice skills can help identify deeper questions regarding professional identity and responsibility at the individual and organizational level.

Social work practitioners could also contribute to forging and deepening the interpersonal connections on which collaboration is predicated. Among the client community participants interviewed for this study, individual clients had limited knowledge regarding legal aid's systemic change efforts, its funding, or other aspects of how it operates. Social workers could work with new individual clients to provide an overview of how the process of working with a legal aid attorney will unfold, with attention as well to how legal aid functions as an organization more broadly. This orientation might serve to increase clients' level of comfort in advance of initial appointments with attorneys. To the extent that clients are interested, social workers could also connect them to opportunities beyond their immediate legal concerns to participate in

creating change. These opportunities might exist for participation within the organization in the form of community groups, advocacy coalitions, and even advisory groups and the organization's board of directors. Relevant opportunities might exist outside the organization as well.

Social workers could perform similar functions with attorneys, connecting them to opportunities and activities in the community. As several participants reported, attorney presence and participation in community activities outside the physical confines of legal aid offices conveys a deeper commitment and sense of solidarity to the communities with whom they work. Client community members see very clearly that for a legal aid attorney who is out in the community on an unstructured or voluntary basis, it is more than "just a job." By meeting the community on its own terms, attorneys help redistribute power away from professionals and toward the community. They must adapt to the community's norms and priorities. While it is possible for attorneys to make these connections on their own, participants reported that community engagement specialists can foster effective collaboration and help attorneys who have less experience get out from behind their desks and into the community.

Working across different systems. For social work practitioners more broadly, this dissertation affirms the value and the real challenges associated with intervening across individual, organization, community, and policy systems. Individual attorneys reported that it is emotionally taxing and stressful to meet the needs of individual clients who have complicated, layered, and urgent concerns. Burnout and compassion fatigue were mentioned as professional challenges with which legal aid attorneys contend. For social workers, like legal aid attorneys, facing overwhelming individual need on a daily basis can make collaboration with groups and communities seem unrealistic.

For organizations, as with individual practitioners, this study suggests that primary emphasis on individual interventions has similar effects. High caseload practices can crowd out forms of community engagement and advocacy if a program does not take steps to identify its goals and methods, and to make careful decisions about the ways in which it will deploy its resources. Care must be taken at the organizational level, therefore, to allocate resources and develop programs in ways that address social problems individually, structurally, and at points in between. Given the prevailing individual focus of current human services funding, multi-level change is easier to recommend than to implement. Still, this study provides some ideas for how to expand the impact of an organization beyond the individual level. Social workers can work with individual clients to create groups, coalitions, and other vehicles for collective problem solving. Or they can partner strategically with organizations that take a more explicitly grassroots approach.

In addition to these adaptive strategies, social workers can consider directly challenging funders' disproportionate support for individualized change. The inherent risk of "biting the hand that feeds you" is clear, but the risk of deferred action for communities directly affected by systemic injustice is equally clear. By virtue of their on-the-ground experience and long history seeking to address social problems, social workers are well positioned to advance a discussion in the fields of civil society and philanthropy that critically reflects on the prevailing distribution of funding for human services. The profession of social work is committed to creating change across systems. This study contributes evidence to the argument that public and private funders constrain organizations in seeking broader change. It would be appropriate for social workers to consider how to influence funding policies and practices that currently inhibit long-term, systemic strategies for change.

Implications for Legal Aid Practice

Just as teachers and social workers often serve on the "front lines" of state bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003), legal aid organizations operate at a critical intersection of poverty and access to justice. In the current study, participants reported that legal aid organizations face overwhelming demand for their services and have scarce resources at their disposal to meet that demand. Despite this daunting reality, participants suggested that in their quest for increased effectiveness in collaborating with client community members legal aid attorneys have plausible options to consider in several areas of the theoretical framework presented in Figure 4.1. First, as attorneys seek careers in legal aid in what is depicted as "Accessing Regulated Involvement" in the theoretical framework, organizations can tailor hiring practices and job descriptions to the goal of increased collaboration. Second, they can take steps to support the goal of "Nourishing Collaborative Capacity" within, and with, boards of directors and advisory groups. As the only example of long-term collaboration across all three organizations in the study, boards and advisory groups represent an opportunity to demonstrate clear commitment at the organizational level to working collaboratively with client community members. Third, in the process of "Coming Together for Justice," some participants suggested that legal aid organizations may benefit from increased management and administrative capacity. Participants reported that management duties are not the primary interest or focus of those who fill management positions. Greater emphasis here may facilitate organizational cohesion in the area of collaboration. Fourth, they can strategically respond to the federal Legal Services Corporation funding directives, and fifth, legal aid organizations can take advantage of opportunities for state-level intervention alongside other legal aid programs. The organizations represented in this study illustrate that legal aid organizations coordinate their responses to LSC

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restrictions and divide substantive legal areas and strategies to address poverty regionally and at the state level. These actions are part of "Navigating Context" and in particular the social and political context in which legal aid organizations operate.

Hiring practices. Among participants in this study, attorneys described a range of experiences that lead them to legal aid. One area of variation was the degree to which they came into legal aid with experience and vested interest in community engagement and participatory change strategies. For these participants, client community voice and participation seemed to be a first-order concern. For organizations seeking to increase their capacity for collaboration, when hiring attorneys it may be worth probing the degree to which applicants are comfortable with and committed to building power and voice within client communities. This evaluative lens would be especially useful for applicants seeking positions with heavy emphasis on client community groups and coalitions, but it might be relevant for positions primarily responsible for individual cases as well. The findings of this study suggest that organizational, and perhaps even interorganizational, efforts to collaborate with client communities are most successful when approached with a holistic vision that transcends timeframes. It follows that in short-term individual case handling contexts it is beneficial to have an eye toward laying groundwork for and making connections with longer-term opportunities for collaboration. Hiring attorneys who are committed to that longer-term trajectory would therefore serve organizations well.

In addition to considering applicants' attitudes and experiences related to community engagement, this study suggests that organizations might also want to gauge applicants' willingness to reflect on their personal identity as professional and expert, interact with client community members in informal settings, and engage in a political analysis that contemplates strategies for both individual and systemic change. Rather than prescriptive requirements or

exclusion criteria, these implications might serve as areas to consider for hiring committees when crafting job descriptions or interview questions.

Administration and management. Participants in the study who have managerial responsibilities reported lack of time to attend to administrative duties and in some cases lack of interest in those activities as well. These same participants expressed their commitment to remaining connected to the mission of the organization by maintaining a small caseload or otherwise engaging directly with individuals seeking legal assistance. These experiences practicing law with actual clients no doubt inform decisions about resource allocation and planning in useful ways. A hands-off managerial style can also help create a "flat" organizational culture in which employees are more self-directed and accountability is horizontal rather than vertical. The decision to create an organizational culture in which employees are empowered to execute the organization's mission and take personal accountability for their performance should be a conscious choice, however, and not a byproduct of disinterest in management or lack of time. Again, the implication is not that organizations need top-down management in order to effectively collaborate. Rather, it seems that putting intention into an administrative framework that includes attention to collaboration would be useful.

Boards and governance. Another aspect of organizational leadership that may benefit from further consideration is boards of directors and advisory groups. Participants described situations in which trust between client community board members and attorney board members is low; client community board members see attorneys (both legal aid staff as well as board members from law firms and other outside entities) as condescending and exclusive; and attorneys perceive client community board and advisory group members as either out of step with the organizational mission or unwilling to take responsibility or ownership for the

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organization. Just as hiring practices help shape organizational capacity for collaboration, board and advisory group recruitment practices are relevant here. Participant comments that organizations often approach filling client community board slots with the same attitude as "checking a box" are cause for concern. Combining client community members and professional attorneys on boards of directors is a well-intentioned potentially beneficial practice. To help ensure success, organizations should consider providing training in group facilitation, conflict resolution, anti-oppressive communication, and other relevant skills for all incoming board members. In the continuum of short- to long-term collaboration, boards and advisory groups are long-term. They can play pivotal roles in anchoring organizational efforts toward community engagement and collaboration, but intention and concerted effort are needed for them to realize this potential.

Legal Services Corporation restrictions. As reported in chapter four, the restrictions imposed by federal policies can result in uncertainty among some practitioners in their programs who must abide by those restrictions. These responses seem to stem from not only the restrictions themselves but also a lack of clarity surrounding the meaning and intent of those restrictions. A first step toward clearer and more consistent interpretation of these policies in these programs would be an infusion of technical assistance and professional development with the goal of resolving inconsistencies and eliminating gaps in understanding. The impact of this strategy might reverberate at the organizational level as well. It is plausible that with lack of clarity comes a more conservative posture regarding the restrictions such that organizations fail to reach the full scope of permitted activities. Attorney and client community board member participants reported being told cautionary tales by supervisors about entire programs being sanctioned as a result of minor violations of federal restrictions. This climate of fear, as

described by one participant, suggests that organizations stop short of doing all that is permitted by federal policy. In other words, by maximizing understanding of the restrictions, organizations might also effectively expand their menu of programming. It is possible, for example, that community engagement activities can be quite robust without violating the LSC prohibition on "organizing activities, including training for, or encouraging of, political activities" (Legal Services Corporation, 2015, para. 2).

Another outcome of the LSC restrictions described by the attorney participants in this study was that several organizations came together and agreed on a coordinated regional course of action. Under this agreement, one organization in the region receives federal funding and focuses on individual emergencies, while the other organization in the same region receives non-federal funding and is therefore freer to deliver a wider range of programming. Several benefits are, in theory, associated with such arrangements. First, the organizations take a broader view of what is needed in the region beyond what each organization can provide. For instance, when setting organizational priorities Organization A considers what Organization B is doing, and vice versa, which leads to a more holistic approach to legal aid programming in that region. A second benefit is that funding sources can be more efficiently and thoroughly engaged. By dividing up the sources of funding to which they will appeal, e.g. one organization appeals to law firms while the other appeals to private individual donors, the two organizations can use their fund development resources more efficiently and extract more aggregate funding for legal aid from the individual donors, law firms and bar associations, private foundations, and federal, state and local governments than might otherwise be available for that region. Third, the organization that does not receive federal funds is free to engage in the types of "grassroots" activities prohibited

by LSC restrictions, class actions, lobbying within the restrictions applicable to all 501(c)3 organizations, and other activities that cannot be undertaken by an LSC-funded entity.

A potential disadvantage of this kind of arrangement emerges from this study, however. Just as lack of clarity regarding LSC restrictions can lead to a cautious posture, having a non-LSC organization in the same region might have the unintended consequence of making the LSC-funded organization more individualized than necessary in its approach. This is well demonstrated by one participant, who noted that his organization focuses on emergencies and leaves the more complicated and "critical" cases to the non-LSC organization. Of course while the non-LSC organization is not constrained by federal policy or law regarding the collective and political work it does, there may be other equally challenging constraints. Elected officials at the state level, for example, would not necessarily condone spending state funds on specific types of activities. Nor necessarily would the non-LSC organization reach a consensus among its employees to move further away from handling individual cases. In addition to wanting to create systemic change, legal aid attorneys are committed professionally to the goal of helping protect poor people from harm and to ensure that they have as level a playing field as possible and obtain results that are fair for the clients in courts and other forums that determine their rights, opportunities, and responsibilities. If they do not already do so, programs that share the same service area may benefit from dialogue and discussion regarding how best to advance their complicated set of interests while also maintaining compliance with LSC restrictions.

Legal aid as a state-level intervention. Legal aid programs are heterogeneous in their organizational profiles. They employ different combinations of programming depending on whether they are prohibited by LSC from engaging in certain activities, but also depending on the demographic makeup of the region they serve; whether they are regional or statewide in

scope; and whether they serve an urban, suburban, or rural area. In Virginia, these organizational dimensions lead to different forms of collaboration with client community members. An organization that is LSC-funded is precluded from collaborating with client community members through overtly political organizing. As one participant reported, programs that serve urban areas might work with local housing authority residents, while rural populations tend to need assistance with employment and disability concerns more frequently. The statewide organization, by contrast, rarely works with individual clients but coordinates policy advocacy efforts on behalf of all legal aid programs in Virginia and initiated a hotline for individuals seeking advice about predatory lending.

Legal aid programs already take advantage of this heterogeneity to coordinate efforts to create positive change. Participants reported that the statewide program works with regional programs to identify policy priorities, for example, and that "creative advocacy" teams have also been formed that cut across programs to deal with larger systemic issues. Participants did not report specific ways in which collaboration with client community members is coordinated, however. It seems that, in light of the study's findings related to short-, medium-, and long-term collaboration, opportunities may exist to "scaffold" collaboration across programs and across timeframes. This could entail individual clients getting referred to statewide policy advocacy projects, or an LSC-funded program's individual client getting connected to a non-LSC program's community organizing initiative.

One participant suggested a novel approach to this kind of coordination. Rather than piecemeal coordination on an ad hoc basis, she raised the possibility of forming a separate organization with a statewide scope for the express purpose of coordinating community engagement efforts for all legal aid programs in Virginia. She pointed out that LSC-funded

organizations are forbidden from certain types of collaboration, and attorneys often do not have the time or requisite skill sets to effectively collaborate. It seems logical, therefore, to consolidate this aspect of legal aid operations under the management of a specialized organization. A benefit of this approach is that one organization would have as its primary focus the engagement, inclusion, and amplification of client community voices. The staff of this organization could work with client community members to develop a holistic vision for collaboration across the state, and design an implementation plan for how each legal aid organization could contribute to that vision. Assuming financial viability could be achieved, the organization would be free of LSC restrictions as well. The potential downside of this arrangement that would require vigilance is that a subset of legal aid organizations or individual attorneys might perceive that by offloading primary responsibility for collaboration they no longer have to make that aspect of their work a priority.

Under the coordinating efforts of the statewide legal aid organization that already exists, a statewide legal aid conference is held annually. Another state-level nonprofit organization is responsible for distributing state funds to the individual legal aid programs. This existing state-level infrastructure is a strong foundation on which to build. Whether through the creation of a new organization or expanded efforts by existing state and regional organizations, it is worth considering additional efforts toward statewide coordination of collaboration between legal aid and client communities. Through that increased coordination, stakeholders might view themselves and their work with legal aid as part of a more coordinated movement.

Implications for Policy

The policy implications of this dissertation relate to funding for legal aid; the state legislative process in Virginia; and the frequency with which client community members (and

those experiencing poverty more broadly) are involved in civil legal procedures as well as the costs associated with that involvement.

Funding for legal aid. It is apparent that a major force shaping the operations, goals, and priorities of legal aid organizations is the funding provided by Legal Services Corporation. The stipulations attached to LSC funding set in motion a chain of events and responses that ultimately affect how residents of Virginia who are experiencing poverty address their legal and political concerns. Organizations either accept or do not accept LSC funding, meaning they are either permitted or not permitted to engage in political organizing, class action lawsuits, or lobbying. Client community members are in turn more or less encumbered in working with legal aid organizations to gain access to the democratic process and seek systemic change.

Extrapolating from participants' comments, three courses of action seem plausible in response to these federal funding policies. One, organizations can accept the funding and accommodate the restrictions in their choices of programming. This might be called the "adaptive" approach. Two, organizations can find other sources of funding and avoid being subject to federal policies. Since it entails leaving the federal funding environment to some degree, this can be called the "exit" approach. The third approach would be to seek change in the federal policies themselves, which can be called the "contest" approach. A fourth approach, as seen in this study, is for organizations to work together to combine the adaptive and exit approaches in the same region.

Among organizations that operate under the adaptive approach, there may be some that stop well short of carrying out any restricted activities and others that push the boundaries of compliance. Returning to the example of political organizing, one LSC-funded organization might focus entirely on individual case handling while another organization also accepts federal

funding but engages the community in myriad contexts yet always makes sure to justify why those engagement efforts do not constitute political organizing. Since LSC funding represents a substantial percentage of financial support for legal aid programs nationally, it is unlikely that organizations will adopt the exit approach *en masse.* It then becomes a question of to what degree organizations will challenge the borders of the restrictions under the adaptive approach.

Organizations that opt for the exit approach must then turn to private, state, and local sources of funding. State funding is a major source of support for legal aid in Virginia, which then raises questions about state policies related to funding for legal aid as well as the political climate at the state level. While specific restrictions analogous to the LSC restrictions do not exist at the state level, state elected officials can reduce or eliminate funding for legal aid during a budget crisis or, in theory, in service of a political agenda. Even under the exit approach, therefore, legal aid organizations may need to consider the political ramifications of their activities. Still, by not accepting LSC funding organizations are exempted from the most clearly articulated set of restrictions on legal aid activities.

Participants in this study did not discuss using the contest approach in response to LSC restrictions. It may be that these strategies are part of the national legal aid advocacy discourse but do not filter down to the state or regional level. It is also possible that the restrictions are seen as a tradeoff in exchange for avoiding steep reductions in overall funding. That is, any funding, even if restricted, is better than no funding. Further research is needed to understand how legal aid stakeholders view this tradeoff.

From a social justice perspective, policies that fund legal aid organizations help to provide necessary support for a population pressed to engage with the legal system on a more frequent basis than the general population. According to participants in this study, however, the

support needed far exceeds the support provided, which then leads to the overwhelming and unmanageable caseloads described by participants. Yet, while funding is inadequate for individual cases, as a result of the LSC restrictions the scarcity of resources supporting collective and political action is even more severe. Existing policies are therefore particularly hostile to efforts by legal aid organizations to address root causes of social and economic injustice.

Litigating poverty. The degree to which poor Virginians are subjected to onerous and expensive legal proceedings should be of concern to social work practitioners, educators, researchers. Much has been written about the perceived need for punitive and disciplinary components of welfare policy, and the growing popularity of these components in recent decades. That larger discourse aside, the experiences of the participants in this study can be seen as an outcome of these policies to a certain degree. Client community members and attorneys alike spend time, energy, and institutional resources in front of judges and hearing officers, and countless additional hours preparing for those proceedings. Their purpose is not to find work or better themselves or their communities but is to maintain a tenuous grasp on affordable housing, or to prove that they were terminated without just cause in order to receive unemployment insurance. This study has highlighted ways that collaboration between attorneys and client community members can transcend purely defensive experiences in which the goal is preventing circumstances from growing worse. It is possible, it seems, through collaboration to move from a defensive posture to a more generative and catalytic one. Yet despite these glimmers of hope, the lawsuits and hearings continue, and the policy question remains of whether, and why, it is socially useful to expend resources on such a large scale to, as one client community participant put it, "keep the have-nots in check."

Study Limitations

The limitations of this study relate to participant recruitment and the heterogeneity of the sampling frame. In addition the volume of data collected raised questions about performing data analysis by hand rather than using qualitative analysis software.

Participant recruitment proved challenging in two of the three research sites, especially with regard to client community member participants. Partly as a result of recruitment challenges, for these two sites (Regional Emergency Legal Aid and Statewide Legal Aid) the variation in demographics and role among client community participants was suboptimal. All eight client community participants associated with these two sites identified as female and African-American (one identified as both African-American and Latina), and five of these eight participants identified as legal aid board members.

Given the dimensions of variation in the sampling frame, achieving maximum variation proved a complicated and challenging task. In addition to age, race, gender, and other demographic characteristics, dimensions of variation for attorneys included organizational affiliation, number of years of experience, substantive area(s) of practice, and job description. Without expanding the sample beyond the range of feasibility all attorney perspectives could not be represented within the sample. A wide range of perspectives was included nonetheless, including diversity with regard to age, gender, race, ethnicity, years of experience, substantive area of law practiced, and job title. Among client community members, eleven out of thirteen participants (84%) were African-American, which is substantially higher than the percentages of Virginians experiencing poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014) and legal aid client community members in Virginia who are African-American (Legal Services Corporation of Virginia, 2009), but perhaps more reflective of the population in the region in which two of the research sites are

located. Client community participants who identified as female (92%) were also disproportionately represented in the sample.

Another possible limitation of this study is that all data analysis was performed without the use of qualitative data analysis software. Given the volume of data collected (35 hours of audio recordings and over 700 pages of transcripts), software may have helped organize the data into codes more easily and streamlined the analytic process. Drisko (2013) explains that software "allows virtually instant retrieval of researcher-identified text passages or segments of electronic files. Such features speed recall, which in turn can help maintain connections to the larger, shaping context" (p. 286). By streamlining and computerizing data reduction, it is possible that time spent reading and re-reading sections of transcripts could have been spent connecting specific passages to the composite characters and then incorporating these passages into the final written findings. On the other hand, scholars have distinguished between the facilitating function of software and the analysis function of the researcher, and urged caution regarding confusing these functions (Drisko, 2013). They have further argued that early career researchers can benefit from developing a solid foundation in qualitative analysis before using software (Drisko, 2013; Lewins & Silver, 2007).

Directions for Future Research

Building from this dissertation, areas for future inquiry fall into three categories: enacting similar studies in other regions and states toward the goal of understanding more broadly how collaborative capacity can be maximized in legal aid contexts; investigating alternative funding sources and other strategies used nationally to adapt to, exit from, or contest federal restrictions imposed by the Legal Services Corporation; and collaborate with legal aid stakeholders in

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Virginia to move from the findings of this study toward design and implementation of an intervention.

In the first area, it would be useful to explore whether perceptions and experiences of collaboration among attorneys and client community members are similar in other regions of the country. Building on the current study's findings as well as Sarat and Scheingold's (2006) distinction between causes and movements, questions in the interview guide would be added to address the extent to which participants see their work with legal aid as part of a larger movement building process. Also building on the current study's findings, participants would be asked to comment on collaboration across different timeframes. These studies would lead to a broader understanding of how collaboration occurs in legal aid programs nationally, with the eventual goal to develop a model for how legal aid programs can maximize their collaborative capacity. Southworth's (1996) study of lawyer-client decisionmaking in poverty law and civil rights contexts, as well as the conceptual framework developed in this study, would provide a theoretical starting point for this broader study. As discussed in the literature review of this dissertation, Southworth found five key factors that inform attorney-client decisionmaking: funding of attorneys' work; client sophistication and expectations; duration of relationship; type of work or activities; and political orientation of attorneys. These factors dovetail with the findings of this study in interesting ways that could be explored further in a broader study.

In the second area, the unit of analysis shifts from individual attorneys and client community members to the legal aid organization. Organizational representatives would be asked how they respond to LSC restrictions, which other sources of funding help sustain the organization, and the extent to which they coordinate with other organizations in making these decisions. This study would lay the foundation for an analysis of the impact of the LSC

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restrictions on organizational programming and fund development strategies. Further, this study would help establish the extent to which organizations are employing the "contest" approach. Scholars have issued calls for the end of the "draconian" and "wasteful" restrictions (Diller & Savner, 2008), and practitioners are likely familiar with how organizations across the country are acting in response to the restrictions or the degree to which they are working together to end them. Studies have not compiled and analyzed this information systematically, however. Bellow and Kettleson's (2005) analysis of scarcity and access to justice would be salient for this node of inquiry, as would law professor Gillian Hadfield's (2012) testimony regarding legal aid funding in New York. Hadfield wrote: "There is no way to generate the kind of legal help that ordinary New Yorkers need solely through the expenditure of public money on legal aid and the provision of pro bono and other charitable assistance. No way" (p. 1). Like one attorney participant in this study, these commentators argue that increased funding dedicated to individual case handling, even at the exorbitant levels needed to address all individual low-income legal needs, would do little to address access to justice and inequality systemically.

The third direction for future inquiry would involve engaging legal aid stakeholders in Virginia in a participatory action research process to increase collaborative capacity in legal aid programs throughout the commonwealth. Participatory action research is grounded in critical theory and an empowerment perspective and is used to engage participants in the process of designing and implementing the research design (Healy, 2001; Taylor, Braveman, & Hammel, 2004). Grounded theory has also been identified as a suitable methodological approach for action research (Dick, 2007). The specific steps a follow-up to the current study would be determined by the assembled research team, but a general template for this type of research is as follows: 1) form a research team of attorney and client community stakeholders; 2) establish

goals and a timeframe for the process; 3) analyze the findings of this study and gather additional data that they deem relevant; 4) collaborate in designing and implementing an appropriate intervention; and 5) evaluate the process and outcomes and determine next steps. If the current study is any indication, legal aid organizations have few available resources to devote to organizational development initiatives. Researchers in Virginia and elsewhere could serve as facilitators in assembling the research teams comprised of primary stakeholders who would then participate in developing locally appropriate interventions.

The purpose of this dissertation and future research is to contribute not only to the academic discourse regarding legal aid and collaboration, but to promote further discussion and inform action among practitioners and communities as well. It is important to note that the current dissertation attempts to attend to the complexity of a specific context, while at the same time raising as many relevant questions as possible for general audiences to consider. Given the transdisciplinary nature of this research, presentation of these and future findings necessarily will take into account the variety of audiences targeted.

<div align="center">**Researcher Reflections and Learnings**</div>

During the course of this research I have learned a great deal about the motivations and daily efforts toward collaboration (in a particular geographic context) between legal aid client community members and the attorneys with whom they work. Through the interviews participants provided and in a sense entrusted me with a tremendous volume of data. These data were their words, and their lived experiences, regarding topics about which they had strong opinions and feelings. I experienced the weight of the responsibility as trustee of their experiences, and my biggest hope for this dissertation is that I have done some modicum of justice to the passions and struggles contained within their words.

I need to question that "weight," however. As one attorney mentioned, for those in

positions of privilege it is a slippery path from responsibility to power. Social workers similarly

have been reminded of their tenuous claim to "kindness" (Margolin, 1997) and the status of

"angel" (Specht & Courtney, 1994). In similar fashion one attorney used the term "white knight,"

and several participants referred to the danger of bringing a "savior" mentality into their work.

As practitioners and researchers committed to positive change, these words are part of the

professional environment and therefore elements of the relevant context to be considered.

Weinberg (2015) writes that professional privilege complicates the iconic definition of privilege

as "unearned power." Professionals, after all, can argue that they have *earned* their degrees and

their licenses. They also do, in fact, help people, and professional credentialing itself helps

protect society from those who harm others or fail to follow established rules. As a practical

matter, attorneys in particular can utilize the legal system with an effectiveness that most non-

attorneys cannot. Nonetheless, Weinberg concludes, being a professional "serves as a barrier

that must be scaled" (p. 3). As a researcher, I must take into account this "barrier" as it relates to

myself as well as the phenomena I choose to study.

One opportunity to think about this barrier between helping professionals and the

populations with whom they work is in choosing a research design. In retrospect, the use of

constructivist grounded theory was consonant with the goals and questions driving this study.

Like the participants in this study who find creative means by which to bridge difference,

constructivist grounded theory (CGT) blurs borders between participants and researcher. With

its grounding in both symbolic interactionism and pragmatism (Charmaz, 2000), CGT

researchers move past description of social processes, attempting to uncover and explicate the

latent aspects of those processes (Charmaz, 2006). Researchers are given room to analyze and

interpret, but ultimately the findings and the research process are evaluated according to their usefulness to those who experience the social process under study. Critically, CGT also embeds the researcher as a participant, not a socially distant or objective observer, in knowledge creation, and conversely makes space for interviewees to be engaged and regarded as co-creators of knowledge and not solely as "participants" or "subjects." These elements of CGT made it a sensible choice for this study. As a former employee of a legal aid organization, my role too is blurred. As practitioner-turned-researcher, I embodied the dialectical relationship between interviewer and interviewee in intensive semi-structured interviews (Galetta, 2013) and between data and theory in CGT (Charmaz, 2006).

While CGT's advantages for this study included its inherent questioning of boundaries, this resistance to clear delineation also posed challenges. Specifically, the lack of prescriptive guidance associated with CGT (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012), combined with my relative inexperience as a researcher, led to intellectual quandaries. When should I stop the initial coding process? To what extent and how should the literature be integrated into the findings? I believe these quandaries ultimately made me a stronger researcher, but they also likely prolonged the data analysis and data reduction processes. In addition to personal challenges, theoretical sampling and other emergent aspects of a CGT design can create challenges and delays in gaining institutional review board approval (O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008). For this study I submitted an amendment to the IRB after a third stakeholder group was identified, and the subsequent delay was minimal. Nonetheless, IRB delays should be expected when implementing a CGT study design. These uncertainties and delays are acutely felt when attempting to conduct dissertation research in a limited timeframe. As Dunne (2011) notes, expectations for demonstration of rigor and clarity of process are heightened in dissertation

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contexts, and these expectations are at odds with CGT's intentional lack of clear methodological directives (Charmaz, 2006). Thus CGT forces the researcher to take a more passive role at times, waiting for the process to unfold.

The experience of conducting focus groups for this study helped tie the preceding reflections together. Focus groups were incorporated into the design of this study primarily in order to involve participants in the creation of knowledge (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). In the process, focus group participants were intended to help affirm, or call into question, the usefulness and resonance of the research. In other words, the purpose of the focus groups was twofold: to blur the boundary between researcher and participant, and to help ensure compliance with the standards of rigor of CGT, in particular usefulness and resonance (Charmaz, 2000). As in the presentation of findings in this document, I used composite characters to elicit visceral responses from focus group participants. What I found was that in both focus groups -- one with attorneys and the other with client community members -- participants responded positively in the sense that the composite characters made sense and aligned with their experiences with legal aid. The paths taken from the composite character "vignettes" to the participants' lived experiences were markedly different, however. The attorneys primarily provided analysis of the composite characters' stories and drew connections from those specific vignettes to legal aid in general. For client community members, the conversation moved more directly to their personal lived experiences.

As a researcher, I was struck by how the focus groups paralleled the study itself. I, along with the attorneys, brought the conversation to a place of abstraction. We were comfortable there, whereas the client community participants were comfortable relating specific points in the vignettes to their own experience. It became apparent that I, as a researcher, had replicated the

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dynamic that participants described in the interviews whereby a system, academic or legal, gives precedence to a technical language and logic with which client community members are less familiar. Fortunately, in this case Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) were correct in their assessment that focus groups can and do shift power. Participants in the client community focus group developed rapport amongst themselves and expanded on each others ideas conversationally and with warmth and humor. The attorney focus group participants also brought the conversation to a place of warmth and mutual support quite easily. The important question for the purposes of this study is whether the attorneys started out with less discomfort regarding the analytical tone that I had set. I suspect so.

Conclusion

In this study I conducted 28 interviews, primarily with attorneys and client community members associated with three different legal aid organizations in Virginia. The investigation focused on participants in a particular geographic context and on their perspectives and experiences with regard to collaboration. How the actors in this legal aid setting come together and how they interact was demonstrated at the individual, organizational, and broader contextual levels.

According to the study participants, some client community members come to legal aid to address their individual legal concerns, and some of them also seek to resolve their collective legal and political concerns. They have faced an array of social and economic injustices with little institutional support on their behalf. They join together with attorneys, who have come to work at legal aid to do meaningful work and to reconcile their commitment to fairness and justice with the daily experience of living in a world characterized by inequality and social injustice. Once they come together, attorney and client community interaction involves

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timeframes and other attributes that facilitate or hinder collaboration. These attributes can also serve to extend collaboration temporally and expand capacity for collaboration. Individual case handling, even in the short-term, can lay groundwork for deeper connections. Group structures, including coalitions and collective legal advocacy, provide opportunities to make connections both interpersonally and between individual and systemic concerns.

Through the incremental building or "scaffolding" of collaborative capacity among attorneys and client community members, legal aid organizations can move from scarcity to generativity. They can explore and put forth alternatives in a sociopolitical environment that prizes short-term, individual interventions and outcomes. In the face of changing federal policy guidelines, these participants and these organizations provide an example of delivering a range of programming designed to achieve change across individual, community, and policy systems. In the end, the participants in this study illustrate that there is value in the services offered by legal aid, as well as value inherent to the process of collaboration itself. In legal aid organizations, and perhaps in the broader human service landscape, a critical question raised is how to most effectively combine the benefits of substantive outcomes with an emphasis on working together to achieve them.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CLIENT COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Intro: *I'm going to ask you a number of questions. In the first part, the focus will be on your day-to-day life, your overall experience with legal aid, and how you came into contact with legal aid in the first place. In the second part I'll ask you about the process of collaboration with legal aid attorneys and your thoughts and experiences related to collaboration. And in the third part I'll ask you some review questions and see if there's anything else you want to mention.*

I. Opening Segment
    a. Can you talk about the events or experiences that led you to contact or get involved with legal aid?
    b. What does a typical day look like for you?
    c. Can you tell me about how you have been involved with legal aid?
        i.   PROBE: Changed over time?
        ii. PROBE: How long ago?

II. Middle Segment
    a. Can you talk about ways that you've collaborated with legal aid attorneys or the legal aid organization in general, i.e. worked *with* attorneys to make a decision or take an action as opposed to them working *for* you?
        i.   PROBES: Successes? Times that seemed or felt unsuccessful?
    b. What would you say are the benefits of collaboration with legal aid attorneys or the legal aid organization in general?
        i.   PROBE: Who receives the benefits? Examples?
    c. What would you say are problems or negative outcomes of collaboration with legal aid attorneys or the legal aid organization in general?
        i.   PROBE: Who is affected by these consequences? Example?
    d. What do you think helps make collaboration with legal aid attorneys or the legal aid organization in general easier or better?
        i.   PROBES: Within legal aid? Outside legal aid? Other?
    e. What keeps collaboration with legal aid attorneys or the legal aid organization in general from happening or prevents it from being successful?
        i.   PROBES: Within legal aid? Outside legal aid? Other?
    f. Are there any other examples of collaboration with legal aid attorneys or the legal aid organization in general that come to mind that relate to what we've been talking about?

III. Concluding Segment
    a. How would you describe the ideal roles for legal aid attorneys and for client community members in their work together?
        i.   PROBE: What would be needed to make those roles a reality?
    b. Is there anything else you would want to tell someone about what it's like to collaborate with legal aid attorneys or the legal aid organization in general?
    c. Is there anything you hadn't thought about before that came up during this interview?

        d. Is there anything you want to ask me?

IV.   General Probes

        a. Can you tell me what you mean by _____ (a word or phrase used by the participant)?

        b. Can you say more about the time when _____ (an incident or experience that the participant alluded to in the interview)?

Intro: *I'm going to ask you a number of questions. In the first part, the focus will be on your work in general and what led you to work here at legal aid. In the second part I'll ask you about the process of collaboration with client community members and your thoughts and experiences related to collaboration. And in the third part I'll ask you some review questions and see if there's anything else you want to mention.*

I.   Opening Segment
    a. What were the experiences or events that led you to work at legal aid?
        i. PROBE: How many years ago?
    b.   Can you tell me about a typical day doing your work at legal aid?
        i. PROBES: Changed over time? Similar or different to other attorneys?

II. Middle Segment
    a. Can you talk about your work that you would consider collaboration with client community members, i.e. working *with* as opposed to working *for* client community members?
        i. PROBES: Successes? Times that seemed or felt unsuccessful?
    b. What would you say are the benefits of collaboration with client community members?
        i. PROBE: Who receives these benefits? Example?
    c. What would you say are drawbacks or negative consequences of collaboration with client community members?
        i. PROBE: Whom do these consequences affect? Example?
    d. What do you think facilitates or enhances collaboration with client community members?
        i. PROBES: Within organization? Externally? Other?
    e. What keeps it from happening or prevents it from being successful?
        i. PROBES: Within organization? Externally? Other?
    f. Are there any other examples of collaboration with client community members that come to mind that illustrate what we've been talking about?

III. Concluding Segment
    a. How would you describe the ideal roles for legal aid attorneys and for client community members in their work together?
        i. PROBE: What would be needed to make these roles a reality?
    b. Is there anything else you would want to tell someone about what it's like to collaborate with client community members as a legal aid attorney?
    c. Is there anything you hadn't thought about before that came up during this interview?
    d. Is there anything you want to ask me?

IV. General Probes

a. Can you tell me what you mean by _____ (a word or phrase used by the participant)?
b. Can you say more about the time when _____ (an incident or experience that the participant alluded to in the interview)?

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTNER AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

Intro: *I'm going to ask you a number of questions. In the first part, the focus will be on your day-to-day work, your overall experience with legal aid, and how you and your organization started to interact with legal aid. In the second part I'll ask you about the process of collaboration with legal aid attorneys and your thoughts and experiences related to collaboration. And in the third part I'll ask you some review questions and see if there's anything else you want to mention.*

I.   Opening Segment
    a. Can you tell me about your work?
    b. Tell me about your or your organization's relationship/experience with legal aid?
        i. PROBE: Does this involve legal aid client community members? How?

II.   Middle Segment
    a. Can you talk about ways that you or your organization has collaborated with legal aid in their work with client community members?
        i. PROBES: Successes? Times that seemed or felt unsuccessful?
    b. What would you say are the benefits of you or your organization's collaboration with legal aid in their work with client community members?
        i. PROBE: Who receives the benefits? Examples?
    c. What would you say are problems or negative outcomes of collaboration with legal aid in their work with client community members?
        i. PROBE: Who is affected by these consequences? Example?
    d. What do you think helps make collaboration with legal aid in their work with client community members easier or better?
        i. PROBES: Within legal aid? Outside legal aid? Other?
    e. What keeps collaboration with legal aid attorneys in their work with client community members from happening or prevents it from being successful?
        i. PROBES: Within legal aid? Outside legal aid? Other?
    f. Are there any other examples of collaboration with legal aid in their work with client community members that come to mind that relate to what we've been talking about?

III.   Concluding Segment
    a. How would you describe the ideal roles for legal aid attorneys and for legal aid's partner agencies in their work together?
        i. PROBE: What would be needed to make those roles a reality?
    b. Is there anything else you would want to tell someone about what it's like to work/partner with legal aid?
    c. Is there anything you hadn't thought about before that came up during this interview?
    d. Is there anything you want to ask me?

APPENDIX D
Guide for Both Client Community and Attorney Focus Groups

Participants will first be shown and introduced to the theory and conceptual model that has been developed based on analysis of the interview transcripts. I will then ask them the following questions:

I.   Do these findings seem thorough to you?

II.   Does it seem from these findings that the person who did this research is familiar with the subject matter?

III.   Do these findings provide a new or fresh perspective, or are these things you already know? Can you give examples?

IV.   Would you say these findings challenge ways of thinking or ways of practicing in this area? If so, how?

V.   Do the findings make sense to you?

VI.   Is there anything that is confusing about the findings?

VII.   Does anything about the findings seem "wrong" or "off base"?

VIII. Do the findings help you see things about your work with legal aid that you were not aware of?

IX.   Can you use these findings in your everyday life/work? Can you give examples?

APPENDIX E
Participant Information Form

1. Name: _____

2. Phone and/or email: _____

3. Role in connection to legal aid (check all that apply):

    ___ current client

    ___ former client

    ___ board member of the legal aid organization

    ___ group or coalition participant

    ___ staff attorney
        Please indicate your substantive practice area(s):

    ___ managing attorney
        Please indicate your substantive practice area(s):

    ___other (specify: _____)

4. Legal aid program affiliation or association:

    ___ Central Virginia Legal Aid Society

    ___ Legal Aid Justice Center

    ___ Virginia Poverty Law Center

5. Length of affiliation or association:

    __ 0-5 years

    __ 6-10 years

    __ 11-15 years

    __ 16-20 years

    __ over 20 years

6. Age:

    __ 18-29   __ 60-69

    __ 30-39   __ 70-79

    __ 40-49   __ 80 or better

    __50-59

7. Race/Ethnicity (check all that apply):

    __ Asian or Pacific Islander

    __ Black or African-American

    __Hispanic or Latino

    __ Native American

    __ White or European-American

    __ Other (specify: _____)

8. Gender identity:

    __ Female

    __ Male

    __ Transgender

9. City or county of residence:

    _____

Are you a current or former legal aid client?

OR

Do you work with legal aid to advocate or organize with low-income communities?

If so, you may be able to participate in a research project. The purpose of the project is to learn more about how legal aid organizations work with clients and communities. If you would like to participate in this project, please contact Andrew Schoeneman* at:

(804) 874-0261

schoenemanac@vcu.edu

***Participants who complete interviews for this project will be compensated for their time with a $50 gift card.**

* - Andrew Schoeneman is doing this project for his dissertation research at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work.

APPENDIX G

**Perceptions and Experiences of Collaboration in Legal Aid Programs: A
Constructivist Grounded Theory Investigation**

Permission to Contact Form

 I am interested in participating in the research project, **Perceptions and Experiences of
Collaboration in Legal Aid Programs: A Constructivist Grounded Theory
Investigation,** and would like for the researcher to contact me. By signing and providing
my contact information, I give (Gatekeeper's Name) permission to provide my contact
information to the researcher to contact me about the research project.

_____
Signature

_____
Print Name

_____
Phone Number

_____
Email

Best day and time to contact: _____

APPENDIX H
Recruitment Script

Phone:

Hello. My name is Andrew Schoeneman and I am a doctoral student in the School of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University. I am calling to see if you might be interested in participating in a research project I am conducting on legal aid programs and how they engage with the communities they serve. The purpose of the research is to better understand how legal aid attorneys and community members work together. I'll be conducting interviews with legal aid attorneys and community members over the next few weeks. If you'd like to consider participating, I just need to get some basic information from you over the phone, and then if you are eligible I will be back in touch to set up an interview. Does that sound OK?

If "yes": Great, then if you don't mind I'll just ask you a few questions. *Proceed with the participant information form.* Thank you very much for your time, and I will be back in touch within the next week about setting up an interview. Goodbye.

If "no": OK, thank you very much for your time, and if you reconsider please feel free to give me a call or send me an email. *Give contact information.*

Email:

Hello. My name is Andrew Schoeneman and I am a doctoral student in the School of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University. I am calling to see if you might be interested in participating in a research project I am conducting on legal aid programs and how they engage with the communities they serve. The purpose of the research is to better understand how legal aid attorneys and community members work together. I'll be conducting interviews with legal aid attorneys and community members over the next few weeks. If you'd like to consider participating, I just need to get some basic information from you either over the phone or by email. Please let me know if you are interested and whether you would prefer phone or email. Or, if you would prefer, you can complete the attached "participant information form" and send it back to me by email. Thank you for your time!

Kind Regards, Andrew Schoeneman

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Perceptions and experiences of collaboration in legal aid programs: A constructivist grounded theory investigation

VCU IRB NO.: HM20000732

If any information contained in this consent form is not clear, please ask the student researcher (Andrew Schoeneman) to explain any information that you do not fully understand. This unsigned copy of the consent form is being provided to you to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your final decision about whether to participate. You will be asked to sign the consent form before your interview.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to better understand collaboration between legal aid programs and the communities they serve.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are either a legal aid program attorney or community member who is currently or formerly associated with a legal aid program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand how you will be involved.

In this study you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the student researcher (Andrew Schoeneman). The interview will last approximately one hour. In the interview, you will be asked to talk about your experiences with legal aid and your thoughts on collaboration between legal aid programs and the communities they serve. After the interview is over, you may be contacted again to clarify or give more information about some of the ideas you discussed in the interview.

After completing the one-on-one interview and follow up, you may also be asked to participate in a group interview (or "focus group") with 4 to 7 other participants. You can choose to participate in the focus group or not. It is up to you. In the focus group you will be shown some of the results of this study so far and asked to talk about what you think about those results. The interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded so we are sure to get everyone's ideas, but no names will be recorded.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Sometimes talking about personal experiences causes people to become upset. Several questions will ask about things that have happened in your life that may have been unpleasant. During an

interview you do not have to talk about any subjects you do not want to talk about, and you may take a break or end the interview at any time. During a focus group (if you participate) you do not have to talk about any subjects you do not want to talk about, and you may take a break or end your participation at any time. If you become upset, the study staff can give you names of counselors to contact so you can get help in dealing with these issues.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but, the information we learn from people in this study may help improve the work of legal aid programs, the communities they serve, and other similar programs.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend in the interview, responding to follow-up questions, and in the focus group if you participate. You will be reimbursed for any travel expenses related to the focus group if you participate.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive a $50.00 gift card for participating in and completing the interview portion of the study within one week after the interview takes place. If you are asked and you choose to participate in the focus group portion of the study, you will receive an additional $50.00 gift card within one week after the focus group takes place. If you choose to withdraw from the study before completing the entire interview (or focus group), you will not receive a gift card for that part of the study. You may receive a total of $100.00 in gift cards if you participate in and complete both the interview and focus group parts of the study.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative to participating in this study is simply not to participate, which you may choose to do at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of the participant information form, and the notes and recordings from the interview and focus group (if you participate in the focus group). Your name will be changed to an ID number on the participant information form. Paper data or files related to you will be identified by this ID number, not your name, and stored in a locked research area. Electronic files related to you will also be identified by this ID number and all other identifiable information will be removed. These files will be password protected. Interview and focus group notes will be kept indefinitely after all identifiable information is removed. All other electronic files related to you will be deleted within one year after the study is complete. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel. A data and safety monitoring plan is established.

We will not tell anyone the answers you give us; however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

The interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded, but no names will be recorded. At the beginning of the session, all members will be asked to use initials or fake names only so that no names are recorded. The recordings and the notes will be stored as password protected files. After the information from the recordings is typed up, the recordings will be deleted permanently.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study. A decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of service or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study without your consent. The reasons might include:
- the timeframe for the study has ended;
- you have not followed study instructions; or
- administrative reasons require your withdrawal.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research, contact:

Andrew Schoeneman, MIIM   **David Fauri, PhD**
Student Researcher   Principal Investigator
Phone: **(804) 874-0261**   Phone: **(804) 828-1041**
Email: **schoenemanac@vcu.edu**   Email: **dfauri@vcu.edu**

The researcher/study staff named above is the best person(s) to call for questions about your participation in this study.

If you have any general questions about your rights as a participant in this or any other research, you may contact:

Office of Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000

P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: (804) 827-2157

Contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about research. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or if you wish to talk with someone else. General information about participation in research studies can also be found at http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm.

CONSENT
I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

_____
Participant name printed   Participant signature   Date

_____
Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent
Discussion / Witness
(Printed)

_____ _____
Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent   Date
Discussion / Witness

_____ _____
Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above)   Date

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM
(Verson 2 – Revised to include Partner Agency Stakeholder Groups)

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Perceptions and experiences of collaboration in legal aid programs: A constructivist grounded theory investigation

VCU IRB NO.: HM20000732

If any information contained in this consent form is not clear, please ask the student researcher (Andrew Schoeneman) to explain any information that you do not fully understand. This unsigned copy of the consent form is being provided to you to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your final decision about whether to participate. You will be asked to sign the consent form before your interview.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to better understand collaboration between legal aid programs and the communities they serve.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are either a legal aid program attorney, a community member, or the employee of a legal aid program partner organization who is currently or formerly associated with a legal aid program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand how you will be involved.

In this study you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the student researcher (Andrew Schoeneman). The interview will last approximately one hour. In the interview, you will be asked to talk about your experiences with legal aid and your thoughts on collaboration between legal aid programs and the communities they serve. After the interview is over, you may be contacted again to clarify or give more information about some of the ideas you discussed in the interview.

After completing the one-on-one interview and follow up, you may also be asked to participate in a group interview (or "focus group") with 4 to 7 other participants. You can choose to participate in the focus group or not. It is up to you. In the focus group you will be shown some of the results of this study so far and asked to talk about what you think

about those results. The interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded so we are sure to get everyone's ideas, but no names will be recorded.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Sometimes talking about personal experiences causes people to become upset. Several questions will ask about things that have happened in your life that may have been unpleasant. During an interview you do not have to talk about any subjects you do not want to talk about, and you may take a break or end the interview at any time. During a focus group (if you participate) you do not have to talk about any subjects you do not want to talk about, and you may take a break or end your participation at any time. If you become upset, the study staff can give you names of counselors to contact so you can get help in dealing with these issues.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but, the information we learn from people in this study may help improve the work of legal aid programs, the communities they serve, and other similar programs.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend in the interview, responding to follow-up questions, and in the focus group if you participate. You will be reimbursed for any travel expenses related to the focus group if you participate.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive a $50.00 gift card for participating in and completing the interview portion of the study within one week after the interview takes place. If you are asked and you choose to participate in the focus group portion of the study, you will receive an additional $50.00 gift card within one week after the focus group takes place. If you choose to withdraw from the study before completing the entire interview (or focus group), you will not receive a gift card for that part of the study. You may receive a total of $100.00 in gift cards if you participate in and complete both the interview and focus group parts of the study.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative to participating in this study is simply not to participate, which you may choose to do at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of the participant information form, and the notes and recordings from the interview and focus group (if you participate in the focus group). Your name will be changed to an ID number on the participant information form. Paper data or files related to you will be identified by this ID number, not your name, and stored in a locked research area. Electronic files related to you will also be identified by this ID number and all other identifiable information will be removed. These files will be password protected. Interview and focus group notes will be kept indefinitely after all identifiable information is removed. All other electronic files related to you will be deleted within one year after the study is complete. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel. A data and safety monitoring plan is established.

We will not tell anyone the answers you give us; however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

The interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded, but no names will be recorded. At the beginning of the session, all members will be asked to use initials or fake names only so that no names are recorded. The recordings and the notes will be stored as password protected files. After the information from the recordings is typed up, the recordings will be deleted permanently.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study. A decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of service or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study without your consent. The reasons might include:
- the timeframe for the study has ended;
- you have not followed study instructions; or
- administrative reasons require your withdrawal.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research, contact:

Andrew Schoeneman, MIIM	**David Fauri, PhD**
Student Researcher	Principal Investigator
Phone: **(804) 874-0261**	Phone: **(804) 828-1041**
Email: **schoenemanac@vcu.edu**	Email: **dfauri@vcu.edu**

The researcher/study staff named above is the best person(s) to call for questions about your participation in this study.

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> Office of Research
> Virginia Commonwealth University
> 800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000
> P.O. Box 980568
> Richmond, VA 23298
> Telephone: (804) 827-2157

Contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about research. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or if you wish to talk with someone else. General information about participation in research studies can also be found at http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm.

CONSENT
I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

Participant name printed   Participant signature   Date

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent
Discussion / Witness
(Printed)

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent   Date
Discussion / Witness

Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above)   Date

Vita

Andrew Charles Schoeneman was born on September 26, 1973, in Washington, DC. He received his Bachelor of Arts in American Government with a Minor in Japanese Language from the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1995. He worked as a coordinator of international relations in Yukuhashi, Japan, for two years before receiving a Master of International and Intercultural Management from the School for International Training Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, in 2001. Subsequently he served in several community education, advocacy, and organizing roles, including as a community organizer on public housing and education campaigns with the Legal Aid Justice Center in Richmond, Virginia, from 2007 until 2010.