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The RAVE Project: Developing Web-Based Religious Resources for Social Action on Domestic Abuse

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Abstract

The RAVE Project (Religion and Violence e-Learning) at the University of New Brunswick is an initiative that seeks to understand the interface between religion and domestic violence in the family context. Web-based resources equip religious leaders to respond to domestic violence in ways that are compassionate, practical, and informed by the latest research and best practices for professionals and to walk alongside victims and survivors on their journey to healing and wholeness. As members of the RAVE Project team, we strive to meet the challenges presented when working across the disciplinary boundaries of academia, churches and seminaries, and community agencies in order to provide faith-based resources for social action. Based on over twenty years of social scientific research, this paper considers both the obstacles and rewards of working with partners from criminal justice, advocacy, religious and therapeutic communities in four regional sites across North America. In trying to build bridges between the steeple and the shelter we need to develop the trust of the people from different constituencies while remaining sensitive to their unique informational and spiritual needs.

Introduction

The challenges of translating social science research outside the boundaries of our professional walls—and indeed beyond the academy itself—are many. Yet, the potential of its impact and the promise of collaboration and cooperation compel us, researcher and activist alike. While wife abuse, like other forms of domestic violence, is an age-old issue, talking about it in the public square is rather new. When you begin raising voices for change in faith communities—where family life is celebrated and the nostalgia for intact families continues to be so strong—you encounter an environment that is often resistant to both the pervasiveness of the problem and community-based resources to assist those who are suffering its impact.

In this article, we describe an emerging initiative to equip religious leaders to be part of the coordinated community response to domestic violence that is interdisciplinary in content, international in scope, sensitive to the unique needs of people of deep faith, and rooted in twenty years of research examining the breadth, depth and dynamics of domestic violence in

communities of faith that are linked to the Christian tradition. Funded by the Lilly Endowment, the RAVE {Religion and Violence e-Learning} Project is a web-based program of delivery that brings up-to-date statistics, best practices, online training, resources and interactive features for ongoing dialogue and training into the privacy of offices, churches, seminary classrooms, women's shelters and internet cafes across the globe. Its resources include case illustrations of pastors responding to abuse, sermons condemning violence in the family context, prayers for those who suffer, maps highlighting contact information for every transition house across North America, and ideas on how to build bridges between the steeple and the shelter.

The story of the development of the RAVE Project, the dilemmas of working between and beyond disciplinary (and regional) boundaries, the difficulties of understanding some of the specific needs of survivors who are people of faith, and the challenges these pose for community-based service providers are some of the things we highlight below. Discussed too is the challenge of educating religious leaders to respond to families impacted by abuse employing best practices that are sympathetic to both their religious sensibilities and growing knowledge in the advocate and research community. Sometimes our team poses these issues as two questions: (1) Is the faith community (or the minister's office) a safe place for a victim to disclose that she has experienced abuse in the family context? (2) Is the shelter (or community agency) a safe place for a victim to disclose that she is religious and that her faith is very important to her? Building bridges of collaboration involves responding to both of these questions—employing resources that can assist families of faith whether they seek help first in a community or religious context.

Understanding the Context of Abuse

Research and writing on domestic violence developed rapidly throughout the 1980s (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1998; R. P. Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Feld & Straus, 1989; Martin, 1981; Murray A. Straus & Gelles, 1986; M.A. Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Its scope expanded in the 1990s as advocates and survivors called for better funded—and community-integrated—social action (Loseke, 1992; Thorne-Finch, 1992; Timmins, 1995; Walker, 1990). Data on the prevalence and pervasiveness of woman abuse was mounting in Canada and elsewhere (C. Kroeger & Nason-Clark, 2001; Statistics Canada, 1993) and where were the churches, the clergy and religious voices advocating for change?

In the early days of the transition house movement, perspectives informed by religious language or passion were regarded as part of the problem of abuse rather than its solution (Brown & Bohn, 1989). Yet, others were arguing that a woman's personal narrative and characteristics, including the importance of her religious faith, shape her disclosure of abuse and the road she travels in her quest for wholeness (Clarke, 1986; Fortune, 1991; Halsey, 1984; Schüssler Fiorenza & Copeland, 1994). There was evidence that community-based professionals experienced difficulty in responding to the needs of highly religious women (Whipple, 1987) and that religious leaders were being confronted by the issue of abuse on a regular basis (Horton & Williamson, 1988; Weaver, 1993). Yet it appeared that few in the mainstream anti-violence movement were taking any notice.

In 1992, the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research at the University of New Brunswick was founded (Stirling, Cameron, Nason-Clark, & Miedema, 2004). Driven by both ideological commitments to the activist and community-based responses to woman abuse (and other forms of family violence), as well as university-based peer-reviewed programs of research, it began with five research teams, one of which was devoted to understanding domestic violence in Christian churches (N. Nason-Clark, 1997). Employing a variety of methodologies, and working with many faith traditions, the series of studies have included mailed questionnaires and personal in-depth interviews with clergy, focus groups of church women, telephone surveys of shelter workers and religious leaders and community consultations (Beaman-Hall & Nason-Clark, 1997a; Beaman & Nason-Clark, 1999; N. Nason-Clark, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2004, 2005). More recently, it has also involved closed case file analysis of faith-based batterer intervention programs, interviews with criminal justice and therapeutic personnel, and follow-up interviews with men who have acted abusively—many of whom have served time in prison (B Fisher-Townsend, Nason-Clark, Ruff, & Murphy, 2008; N. Nason-Clark, 2007a, 2007b; N. Nason-Clark & Fisher-Townsend, 2005, 2005a; N. Nason-Clark, Murphy, Fisher-Townsend, & Ruff, 2003).

The early days of collaboration involved writing that utilized our emerging data combined with religious voices for change (C. Kroeger & Nason-Clark, 2001; N. Nason-Clark & Kroeger, 2004). Based on the response to these books, invitations to speak to religious audiences, clergy, and seminary students began to come with increasing frequency. It was at this point that an initiative that could take seriously the data, the needs of religious leaders, and place in a position of primacy the delicate and central journey of a religious woman seeking refuge in the aftermath of violence at home was launched.

Listed below are a few of the important findings to emerge from the data, all of which we believe have social action imperatives associated with them. As others will describe in more detail in the pages to follow, the RAVE Project has been developed, in part, to address the results to emerge from 20 years of studies and public engagement on violence amongst religious families, in Canada, the US, and abroad (including Eastern Europe, the Caribbean and Asia).

- The majority of clergy are called upon several times a year to respond to a woman who is being abused by her current husband/partner, a man who has acted abusively towards his wife/partner, or an adult who is coping with issues of abuse from their past (N. Nason-Clark, 1997, 1998a; N. Nason-Clark, Mitchell, & Beaman, 2004);
- Religious women suffering abuse who look to their pastors for help are often disappointed to find that there is limited awareness and understanding of domestic violence by their leaders, modest knowledge of the resources available, and a lack of ability (or discomfort) to offer them help of an explicitly spiritual nature (e.g., prayer, Bible readings, spiritual counsel) (N. Nason-Clark, 1998b, 2001, 2003; N. Nason-Clark & Kroeger, 2004);
- Some clergy are reluctant to refer abused women and other family members who seek their assistance to professionals in the community or community-based agencies. Where referrals are needed most (amongst those religious leaders who have little or no training) they are least likely to occur (N. Nason-Clark, 1996, 2000a, 2000c, 2008a);
 - Only 8% of religious leaders feel well equipped to respond to situations involving

domestic violence. Most ministers report that they are ill prepared to assist victims and abusers in the aftermath of violence in the home (C. Kroeger & Nason-Clark, 2001; N. Nason-Clark, 1999, 2000d, 2008b);

- One of the best-kept secrets of church life is the amazing support network women offer each other under the umbrella of their congregation or faith network. Substantial numbers of church women have offered an abused woman they know assistance—many have provided in-kind or financial contributions to their community battered women's shelter as well (Beaman-Hall & Nason-Clark, 1997a; Beaman-Hall & Nason-Clark, 1997b; Beaman & Nason-Clark, 1999; N. Nason-Clark, 1995, 2000b; N. Nason-Clark & Fisher-Townsend, 2005b);
- When clergy preach a message condemning family violence, discuss abuse in their premarital counseling, offer support, referral suggestions and ongoing encouragement to a woman who has been battered, and hold men who act abusively accountable for their actions, the evidence reveals that its impact is profound (B Fisher-Townsend, et al., 2008; C. Kroeger & Nason-Clark, 2001; C. Kroeger & Nason-Clark, 2008; N. Nason-Clark, 1997, 2004);
- There is a tremendous need to build bridges between churches and community agencies on the issue of abuse—mistrust between churches, transition houses and other community-based resources continues, yet evidence reveals that initiatives to foster collaboration can be successful (B. Fisher-Townsend & Nason-Clark, 2008; C. Kroeger, Nason-Clark, & Fisher-Townsend, 2008; N. Nason-Clark, 2005, 2007b; N. Nason-Clark, et al., 2004).

Understanding Our Partnerships

The RAVE Project has four location sites, in addition to our home location at the University of New Brunswick in eastern Canada: Calgary (Alberta), Eugene (Oregon), Charlotte (North Carolina), and Columbia (Missouri). In each location, we have developed four interdisciplinary teams: advocacy; criminal justice; therapeutic; and religious. Each site offers a unique context to understand emerging collaborative community responses to domestic violence, and to develop, evaluate, modify and implement a web-based model for training religious leaders and providing them with best practices and resources. Deliberate choices about site selection were made to ensure that our research understandings could be tested in diverse communities. What piqued our interest as well were the opportunities for the RAVE Project to generate and enhance bridge-building between local service providers and faith communities in these dissimilar communities. Our project brought to each site particular resources that highlight the inclusion of faith or religion as important contextual factors when working to eliminate violence within the family. The RAVE project has benefitted greatly from the bidirectional nature of resource development and input around each collaborative table.

A Coordinated Community Response – the Collaborative Table

Domestic violence advocates, community workers, and agents of the criminal justice system are increasingly calling for a co-ordinated, integrated, holistic approach to ending violence against women (Shepard, Falk, & Elliott, 2002). The assumption behind a coordinated community approach is that it will produce more effective results than isolated and unsystematic

interventions (Murphy, Musser, & Maton, 1998). We found an outstanding example of a coordinated community response in HomeFront, a centrally organized collection of systems and services that together make up a research validated, internationally recognized, integrated community response to domestic violence, located in Calgary, Alberta. Calgary police received more than 12,000 domestic violence calls in 2007 (HomeFront Calgary, 2007). With a population of 1.1 million people, spread over a large metropolitan area, an extensive network of services and connections is required to deal with the enormity of the problem. Their collective response thus includes domestic violence agencies, docket and trial specialized courts, the Judiciary, the police, the Crown Prosecutor's office, probation services, the Alberta Barrister's Society, treatment providers, and government at the local, the provincial and the federal levels. The collaborative table is large and welcoming. The RAVE Project has been very successful in working within this collaborative environment to reinforce the value of these established relationships and to bring new ideas, as well as new groups and organizations, to the discussion. There is also a well-developed set of relationships between treatment providers, court personnel and community agencies in the mid-sized city of Eugene, Oregon. In this city members of the domestic violence community are well known to each other and thus able more informally to share resources and information. The Eugene Domestic Violence Council collaborates through monthly meetings to which representatives of all the constituent groups involved with domestic violence are invited. At these meetings they discuss subjects of mutual interest, brainstorm on solutions to difficult issues, listen to presentations from various groups, and spend time catching up with colleagues old and new. In Eugene, the RAVE Project has been able to build bridges through educating individuals and groups who had little prior knowledge about domestic violence and to instill energy and revitalization to the discussions by proposing new concepts that might aid in bringing about change.

Interestingly, Oregon is notable for being one of two U.S. states with the highest proportion of religiously-unaffiliated and self-identified "nonreligious" residents. About 17% of Oregonians classify themselves as "nonreligious" (while the U.S. average is only 7%) (Adherents.com, 2002). Yet the importance of recognizing the faith of both victims and perpetrators is clear. We were warmly received by the Eugene Domestic Violence Council when we recently had the opportunity to introduce The RAVE Project at their monthly meeting.

Faith-Based Organizations, Colleges and Churches

We have also successfully collaborated with faith-based intervention service providers, service coordinators, Christian colleges, and churches in our various locations. Importantly for the work of the RAVE Project, the City of Eugene is the site of one of the few faith-permeated intervention programs in North America—Christians as Family Advocates. The Executive Director of CAFA has played a key role in facilitating the work of RAVE – identifying relevant community and clergy members, initiating introductions, organizing presentation opportunities, and supporting our solicitations for input from staff members. Additionally, Eugene is home to two Christian colleges. As an important part of the RAVE initiative involves educating seminary students about the issues around domestic violence, these two institutions offer fertile grounds for our work. While these two colleges have not yet addressed issues of domestic violence within their curricula the RAVE project has opened that door by meeting with representatives from each

college and presenting our research that reinforces the need for clergy education and involvement.

While there are no faith-based intervention programs in Calgary, each of the city's two large secular batterers' intervention programs has faith-enriched therapeutic staff available for both victim/survivors and perpetrators of abuse who wish to address religious issues. As well, Calgary's intervention programs have responded to faith as a cultural issue in another way. Any responsive community-based approach requires recognition of the need for culturally and regionally appropriate services for both victims and perpetrators, as highlighted by many researchers (e.g., Brownridge, 2003; R. E. Dobash & Dobash, 2000; Murdaugh, Hunt, Sowell, & Santana, 2004; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). An important example of incorporating culturally relevant materials and services in the intervention process is provided by a Calgary based treatment agency. Their specialized program was formed in recognition of the fact that the cultural differences of Aboriginal abusive men require culturally appropriate and responsive services (Zellerer, 2003). The 18-week domestic violence group counseling program is grounded in the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and is informed by Aboriginal culture, identity, traditions and values.

FaithLink, a unique faith-based organization promoting sacred/secular collaborations on issues related to domestic violence is also based in Calgary. FaithLink, a partner in the Calgary-based Alliance to End Violence, began with the realization that religious/spiritual leaders needed to be engaged with the broader community as an integral part of any coordinated response. The ongoing work of FaithLink is an important part of the Calgary community initiative, blending a spiritual perspective with the secular, criminal justice oriented, response to domestic violence. Charlotte, North Carolina, known locally as the "City of Churches," was also chosen as a site because we were keen to explore the role and influence of the many African American churches which dot the city's landscape. Unlike churches across the continent which have been hesitant to address domestic violence, many of the African American churches in the south have been at the forefront of condemning all forms of violence within the walls of the family home. We were eager to work with the leaders of these congregations, expanding on what we have learned from years of research in the field and offering a plethora of new resources to those who would benefit from them. One result of the RAVE Project team's involvement in helping churches to build bridges with secular domestic violence workers on the ground in Charlotte has been a meeting with staff at the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Staff there realize the importance of using faith resources in the work of a coordinated response to abuse and were able to make a presentation of the RAVE Project web site to other state coalition representatives at recent national roundtable meetings.

Additionally, our religious leader team in Columbia, Missouri composed of members from large mainline and conservative Protestant denominations, has shared personal stories of counseling young girls who have been victimized by boys in their local youth groups, boys who were presumed to be suitable partners because of their church affiliation. Our work with the mega-church pastors has also highlighted the need for specific online tools available through our project's website, including a comprehensive shelter map—a tool that facilitates finding emergency shelter in neighboring communities when needed.

Victim/Survivor Advocacy Organizations

Womenspace, an organization offering drop-in facilities for victim/survivors, a women's shelter, legal aid and advocacy services, and numerous support groups and educational opportunities, serves the women of Eugene, Oregon. Our work in Eugene has been enhanced by the assistance of Womenspace. Here again, the Executive Director has greatly assisted us with our RAVE work in Eugene through introductions to the community, as well as offering opportunities for us to introduce staff members to our work and to solicit their feedback. The RAVE project has had several opportunities to present our work and research to the large staff at Womenspace. Their response to the resources provided on our website has been tremendous. Several of the staff told us that they were extremely worried when a woman of faith came into one of their facilities as they did not have the language or the knowledge necessary to assist these women in a meaningful way that incorporated their belief system. The RAVE project provides them with resources and information they can access on-line whenever it is required.

In Charlotte, North Carolina we have an active advocacy team. Working with the support of a nationally known advocate, our site coordinator has introduced us to the response of the anti-violence community in Charlotte. We have listened to the challenges faced by advocates in the local area, including the problems associated with very limited shelter beds in a large urban area. We have been active participants in local activities that highlight the reality of domestic violence, such as speaking at annual domestic violence vigils held in collaboration with local churches. And, we have witnessed various local responses to violence, including marches held in the city-circle to mark the death of each woman killed by an intimate partner.

In contrast to our other sites, we were initially drawn to the university town of Columbia, Missouri because it was in the heartland of America. In this location, our project has been enriched through working with a local noted scholar of religion, faculty in the university's department of women's studies, and our local coordinator, a graduate student with many years of experience in the shelter movement. We have profited from the opportunity to explore how the relationship between academic experts and community advocates unfolds in a small mid-western city, and its impact on the lives of religious survivors of domestic violence. The RAVE project has had the opportunity on several occasions to both introduce new connections and reinforce previous connections between the community shelter organization and local church leaders in order to foster collaboration in addressing the specific needs of abused women. In fact, local seminars and workshops have been utilized to emphasize the value of the religious community's response to family violence.

The Impact of Collaboration

Constituents from a variety of perspectives have been invaluable in assisting us to broaden our ties, to provide information about our initiative to the wider community, and to build bridges between sacred and secular service providers—all of these offering RAVE great networking possibilities and broadening the scope of our website. In each of our sites we have organized “lunch and learn” sessions and workshops; presented to therapists, community advocates and clergy; hosted members of various constituent groups for mealtime meetings; and met individually with numerous domestic violence community members. These contacts and events

have yielded a wonderful selection of poetry, sermons, clergy advice, answers to FAQs, and words of hope and awakening, all available on our website located at theraveproject.org. The unique mix of clergy members, faith-based service providers and feminist advocates demonstrates how religious and secular workers can come together to achieve a common goal—the condemnation of family violence. Our teams around North America provide evidence of how our project is served from our valuable connections with the various carefully selected partner locations. Religious and secular workers in each location are finding unique opportunities to partner together to address issues in their locality. Through our work with our partner locations, we are uncovering triumphs to be shared—and challenges to be overcome—across the continent.

The Specific Challenge of Incorporating Religious Leaders and Bringing Seminaries on Board

When we seek to collaborate with religious leaders and seminaries in responding to family violence in faith communities, we are dealing with many concerns that go beyond academic issues. In both cases, and in different ways, we are dealing with people who have a sense of spiritual responsibility and calling. For pastors and denominational leaders, there is a concern for the spiritual welfare of their congregations and of their denomination, and there is a concern for the spiritual traditions represented by those faith communities. For seminaries, there is a negotiation between their academic purpose and their sense of responsibility to provide qualified church leaders who will not only know and understand but also live their beliefs and traditions. We know from our research and from feedback to our presentations that many pastors are concerned about family violence and how to respond to it, and that they are also concerned that they have not been adequately prepared to respond to the spiritual and practical needs of victims. Our meetings with administration and faculty of theological seminaries have confirmed that among seminary leadership there is a realization of the importance of the issue and even a sense of urgency about training ministerial students to respond to family violence. In other words, we have not experienced problems convincing religious leaders and seminary officials that family violence is a major problem that needs to be addressed by pastors, churches, denominations, and theological seminaries.

However, we have experienced some roadblocks when we have tried to involve religious leaders in providing material for the website, and when we have invited clergy to attend information sessions. These are important challenges related to the task of partnering with religious leaders and seminaries, especially when they represent a variety of faith traditions. We have grouped those challenges into four areas:

First there is the “trust” issue—from a spiritual point of view. Religious leaders are not prepared to collaborate with just anyone. When seeking to partner in ways that guide the spiritual relationships between clergy and the members of their congregations, academics and activists need to realize that churches are not just interested in what we have to say or the information we have gathered. They are interested in who is saying it and how it is being said. Can they trust us to understand and to value and respect their spiritual beliefs and traditions? Will we show that respect not only when we are talking to them, but also when we are talking about them? Will we approach them as academic experts seeking to enlighten them, or will we approach them as partners who will walk with them as they grapple with the situations they encounter in their

everyday ministries? Can they trust that we will not cause them to be embarrassed by their partnership with us (in a day and age when religious leaders may feel vulnerable to such embarrassments)? Religious leaders have responded to our research by expressing their desire to be better trained; can they trust us to respond by providing that training while affirming their candid admission of unpreparedness? To build the necessary trust, we must come as partners with resources to help, not as critics seeking to correct.

Trust is developed over time—it cannot be developed with a first contact or in a single meeting. Our experience both with religious leaders and with seminary faculty has shown that several face-to-face contacts are necessary before a partnership can begin to develop. Our personal credibility is central as is the disclosure of something of our own personal stories with regard to faith communities. There must be some common ground.

Secondly, there is the challenge of remembering that religious leaders and seminary faculty members are real people dealing with real people. Church congregations, denominations, and seminaries are not just institutions or organizations. As academics with a sociological perspective, members of our team may be tempted to look primarily at power relations between leaders and followers or the structural realities of religious organizations. But to be successful in involving clergy and seminaries in our work, we must understand their work as people relating to people. Some ministers and seminary professors have spent much time and sleepless nights as they have been called upon to respond to domestic violence; others may be quite worried that they will be called upon to respond when they feel unprepared. Those are not just institutional issues; they are deeply personal.

Around the collaborative community table, we need to understand that churches are places to which people in spiritual need turn—that is especially true of congregations where women may first go to their pastor or to other women in the church for help and guidance in the aftermath of violence in the home. Some victims may be seeking spiritual strength in the teaching of the church or in the worship experience; this is precisely what our fieldwork with religious survivors has revealed.

Third, there is the challenge of stereotypes. For example, studies have shown that women in conservative Protestant congregations are no more likely to have been abused than is the case in other religious groups, or among the non-religious (Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002; Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999; Gengler & Lee, 2001; Levitt & Ware, 2006; Wolff, Burleigh, Tripp, & Gadomski, 2001). Moreover, Ellison et al (1999) and Cunradi et al (2002) conclude that religiously heterogeneous couples, or couples in which the husband and wife had different religious affiliations, were no more at risk for domestic violence than were religiously homogenous couples, or couples in which the husband and wife shared the same religious affiliation. Yet conservative Protestant pastors are sensitive to community-driven exaggerated claims of abuse in families of deep faith—unfounded, and based on stereotypical views, of highly religious families. This may explain, in part, why we have found it difficult to get evangelical Protestant pastors to attend information sessions when those include a wide variety of clergy and community activists. Working alongside evangelical Protestants in religiously homogenous groups has not proven to be as difficult.

In training venues—sponsored by RAVE—involving clergy from a variety of backgrounds, we have heard comments that family violence in the faith community is exacerbated by conservative interpretations of the Christian scriptures—particularly concepts such as submission and male headship. While it is certainly the case that there are men who abuse their wives and use those very scriptures to justify their actions, this does not mean that abusive religious men who use such scriptures do so with the support of their denomination or individual pastor. This is precisely why the RAVE initiative attempts to ensure that there are spiritual resources available to counteract erroneous religious ideation concerning abuse in the family context. Religious leaders—conservative and mainstream alike—have an important role in holding accountable those who act abusively, especially those who may believe that there is religious justification for their actions. As advocates, we need to ensure that we do not accept stereotypical ideas about religious groups—for family violence has no religious boundaries.

Our RAVE team is now taking steps to respond to these challenges. For example, we have initiated partnerships with theological seminaries in Canada and the United States to determine how best to prepare ministerial students to address and respond to domestic violence in communities of faith. By researching a coordinated seminary response to domestic violence and by providing online resources to support the initiative, our goal is to assist seminaries in identifying and providing the most effective ways to equip seminary students to respond to the needs within their congregations. This initiative illustrates the bidirectional nature of our partnerships: the data from our research sites identifies challenges, which we then seek to address by providing resources, which we can then test at our research sites.

The Opportunity to Interweave Spirituality and Social Action

Central to our work has been the opportunity to interweave social science data on abuse collected by our team, religious resources informed by the expressed needs of victims and survivors, and selected aspects of the religious journey towards healing and wholeness. The RAVE initiative attempts to use web-based technology to bring hope and assistance to people of faith who suffer abuse and to equip both religious leaders and secular workers to respond to them with compassion. This is no small task because it involves the work of using a vocabulary about abuse that can be understood and respected by both groups.

Below we offer an example of this interweaving process as it manifests itself on the RAVE web site—the use of stained glass as a visual reminder of beauty but also brokenness. Jagged pieces of glass, rough to the touch and piercing to the skin can be reshaped, refigured, reset. The stained glass portrait is what a survivor of abuse becomes—moving from the chaos of brokenness to new beginnings. In essence, we retell the story of violence for women of faith through our stained glass story of abuse as it has been told to us, by countless numbers of women.

A familiar aspect of Christian churches is stained glass windows, visual depictions of key stories for the Christian faithful, often dedicated in memory of loved ones who have journeyed with a community. Like the pieces of colored glass that make up a stained glass window, families bring together individuals with unique and varied hopes and dreams for the future. At first glance, the family seems to be at peace. However, for many families, the reality of violence shatters the dream of a healthy family life. Like a window that breaks, domestic violence brings chaos and

brokenness to the lives of all family members. Over time and with tremendous patience and support, the broken shards of glass can be refigured into a new window, carefully reset within bonds of safety, honesty, trust, accountability and faith. So too can the pieces of a family member's life be reclaimed through the process of naming and healing from abuse. The journey to wholeness will be unique for each person and the memory of violence will never be erased, just as the pieces of glass that are used to construct a new window are borne of the old.

A religious victim can meditate on the stained glass story of domestic violence provided on our website and she can also listen to the talking circles of women whose lives, like her own, have been broken apart. This serves as a reminder that part of the work of the RAVE Project is to help victims recognize abuse in their lives and reach out for help, moving on with the guidance of the spirit to a new day of hope. Visual depictions, like the stained glass story, audio-recordings of speaking circles, and podcasts for ongoing training, all developed out of our expansive research program, can be downloaded for use as illustrations in sermons, adult classes and pre-marital workshops in churches or for spiritual sharing in survivor support groups.

We have also developed a section on our website entitled "Stained Glass Advice," an idea suggested by a member of our Charlotte team—an ex-police officer now working for a faith-based organization. Victims of abuse visiting the RAVE site can go to "Stained Glass Advice" under the resources section and click on the face of a minister, many of whom are female, who will encourage them to seek help. In time, as this section expands, it will represent diversity across our location sites—in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and race. Like our work, other researchers have found that women in ministry tend to be the most well-informed about issues pertaining to domestic violence (Gengler & Lee, 2001); in their California study, Gengler and Lee conclude that female clergy were more understanding of the issue than males since they have had their own experiences of struggle against discrimination in the patriarchal institution of the Christian church. We too have reported that female ministers are more likely than Protestant males or Catholic priests to ask a woman if she was experiencing abuse (N. Nason-Clark, 1997; Stirling, et al., 2004). Through our research, we have also learned that some women clergy are reluctant to accept referrals of battered women from their male colleagues in neighboring parishes since they have experienced both the large number of such requests and the corresponding unwillingness of those male colleagues to avail themselves of training opportunities—metaphorically washing their hands of the problem (N. Nason-Clark, Mitchell, & Beaman, 2001).

Our research shows us that while many religious families experience domestic violence, it is not the religious teachings themselves that are the principal cause of violence but, like in non-religious families, it is rooted in an imbalance of power. The RAVE Project equips those who believe that it is time to lay aside theological and ideological differences and proceed with the work of providing Christian churches and their members with the resources they need to move towards safety, healing and wholeness. In one project, we learned that while 31% of clergy reported that they have preached a sermon on domestic violence, 95% of women interviewed said that they have never heard such a specific message, though church women long for condemnation of abuse from the pulpit (Nason-Clark, 1997). We attempt to provide both awareness training and ideas for action.

Another example of how the RAVE web site interweaves the sacred and secular is through ensuring the immediate safety for religious victims of domestic violence. Coming to recognize and name abuse is a process for religious victims. Once this realization is made, a person may need help in developing a plan of escape. Julie Owens, a survivor and an advocate, has developed an extensive safety plan that can be downloaded from the site. Just as a pastor can review the safety plan with a woman who seeks help, using our site, the pastor can also offer contact information for the nearest transition house with only three clicks of a mouse. Thus, even without extensive training or knowledge, religious leaders can be of immediate assistance to women and their children by having up-to-date information at their finger tips. [We are now constructing a religious resources map which will serve secular professionals as they offer assistance to religious victims in their communities.]

Both religious and community professionals can affirm and support the spiritual work necessary for the healing of a religious survivor of domestic violence. Once a victim has taken the steps to put an end to the violence and abuse, the long and complex road to healing can begin. This journey is different for everyone. Domestic violence can cause a religious woman to question her faith. These questions do not necessarily signal an end to a woman's religious faith, but can be a sign of its deepening. In providing women's spirituality circles, the RAVE web site gives examples of how feminist theologians have grappled with questions of spirituality in contexts that devalue women's gifts.

We also realize that the prevention of family violence must be a priority for all community partners. The youth resources section of the RAVE web site—currently under development—is designed to help youth ministry personnel address dating violence—a microcosm of marital domestic violence (Barnett, 2001). One of our strategies is the development of a “dating game,” using cartoon characters and simulated dating experiences, as a computer activity for church youth groups. Like others, we believe that relationship patterns experienced during the teen years may influence later domestic relationship patterns. Thus early warning signs of unhealthy relationships can be addressed by youth leaders to help teens learn skills and strategies to alter attitudes and behaviors.

Concluding Comments

Translating social science research into evidence-based passion that impacts both community agencies and communities of faith is an enormous challenge. The RAVE Project is a research-driven, online series of resources, which offers awareness training, best-practices, strategic ideas for secular-religious cooperative ventures, and hope for survivors and those who walk alongside them in the aftermath of domestic violence. Bringing religious leaders to the collaborative community table to address abuse in the family is central to offering women and men of faith assistance after violence impacts the family context.

The RAVE initiative has identified both the potential and the impact of collaboration between secular and faith partners at the community level. To be sensitive to the specific experiences of people of strong faith takes training, respect and resources. To be aware of the prevalence and severity of abuse requires training, respect and resources. Our work to assist professionals in both secular and sacred contexts to come together to address issues of faith and abuse reveals

that it is possible to build bridges of common purpose—to pave the pathway between the steeple and the shelter. Through our location sites in four diverse communities across the US and Canada, we have learned that when workers representing various perspectives (advocacy, criminal justice, therapeutic responses) are brought together in a respectful way that partnerships are formed and collaboration follows. Then religious families impacted by abuse are offered best practices whether they seek help first in the community or from their church, congregations become part of the coordinated community response to end domestic violence, and the prevention of all forms of family violence can be integrated into the mission of the faith community—for all ages and throughout all programs.

Yet, the challenges are many—to ensure that seminaries and training programs for religious leaders prepare and equip future pastors to speak out against violence and to respond compassionately to those whose lives have been touched by it; to offer strategies by which youth leaders might assist young people to choose healthy patterns of interaction in all of their interpersonal relationships; and to offer ways that the weekly routine of church life might help to reduce the prevalence, severity and consequences of violence in and beyond families of faith. The bidirectional links that RAVE has established with advocates, criminal justice workers, therapists and religious leaders across North America has enabled us to translate the peer-reviewed research of our team to a web-based system of training and resources for religious and secular professionals alike. Though our work is still developing, and our website has been “live” for only one year, the number of unique IP addresses to tour our website, the length of stay when visiting the site, the number of return visitors and the feedback reveal that social action on issues of violence and faith can no longer be denied, minimized or swept under the proverbial church carpet.

We long for the day when every house of worship is a safe place to disclose violence in the family and every secular agency is a safe place to disclose religious faith. The journey towards healing and wholeness for all requires cooperation and collaboration outside the boundaries of our professional walls—building bridges at the local level and beyond. We invite you to visit the RAVE website theraveproject.org and offer us your comments and suggestions.

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ⁱ The staff identify as Christian, the program is biblically based using a revised version of the Duluth Power and Control model, and the name and premises of the agency are specifically identifiable as Christian.