Conducting Ethical Cross-Cultural Research on Family Violence

Lisa Aronson Fontes

Cross-cultural research on family violence can be fraught with ethical dilemmas. Unfortunately, good intentions alone will not prevent researchers from abusing their power and inflicting harm. This chapter is meant to offer ideas and impetus for researchers to conduct their inquiries in ways that are respectful, relevant, helpful, and in synch with the people studied, as well as meaningful to the research community. With careful attention to their use of power, researchers can build sound bodies of knowledge that will contribute to the reduction of violence in families from a variety of cultures.

Ethics

Research ethics are often considered in the narrowest of frames, as referring to the prescriptions and proscriptions of professional organizations. In this chapter, I consider as "ethics" broader moral questions, such as "whose interests are served by research, and how can the subjectivity and authority of research participants be preserved" (Thompson, 1992) or enhanced? An additional question considered here is: "How can researchers best understand, interpret, and present findings about culture and violence in the family?" I believe this is an ethical question because misunderstandings and the uninformed use of research results can result in distorted theory and public policy. And, finally, "How can family violence researchers avoid abusing their power in cross-cultural studies?" Although questions of power and abuse of power are important in all research, they gain particular salience in cross-cultural and family violence research because contact between cultures and family violence—as separate phenomena—often include elements of exploitation. When family violence is considered in a cross-cultural context, the potential for abusing power increases dramatically.

Cross-Cultural Research

Most research on family violence has been monocultural, and what determines legitimate knowledge has been thought to be "plain common sense without class, gender or cultural influences" (L. T. Smith, 1992, p. 3). Cross-cultural research in family violence is rare but sorely needed if we are to understand phenomena such as battering and child abuse in all their complexity.

I am using the term cross-cultural research to refer to investigations in which the researcher is studying members of a group to which he or she does not belong (investigator-different research), and to investigations in which two or more groups are compared (comparative cross-cultural research).

Investigator-Different Research

The difference between the researchers and the participants in investigator-different cross-cultural research could be due to one or more of the following characteristics, among others: race, ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, age, nationality, educational background, sexual orientation, or profession. By providing this rather long list, I do not mean to say that racial and professional differences are of the same order of importance, for instance, but rather to assert that when a researcher studies a group of people who are part of a community and share major characteristics that the researcher does not possess, this is cross-cultural research, and should be regarded as such.

When there is an obvious difference between researchers and participants such as race, researchers are more apt to recognize the cross-cultural nature of their undertaking. However, researchers frequently conduct studies across gender or social class lines, for instance, without recognizing the background differences between themselves and the participants, or compensating for the ways these differences may affect their ability to understand, interpret, and convey that which they encounter. The lack of explicit attention to issues of crossing cultures in research may be more problematic where the researchers are "the same" as some of the participants in a given variable and different from others of the participants in the same variable and yet fail to recognize how this may distort their perspective (the most typical example may be the male ethnographers who study tribes in developing countries and document men's lives in great detail while ignoring or marginalizing women's experiences). According to this definition, then, a European American psychologist studying African American families is conducting cross-cultural research, as is an upper-middle-class Puerto Rican sociologist studying Puerto Rican ghetto children, as well as a European American gay male studying European American lesbians. Although each researcher may share certain characteristics with the participants, and the degree and kind of difference varies in each case, I believe the research will be improved by awareness of the cross-cultural nature of the research and the special attention to ethics that this requires.

Comparative Cross-Cultural Research

The second type of research included in my definition of cross-cultural involves the risky business of comparing two or more groups of people on a given variable. Comparative cross-cultural investigators often seek to determine the relative rates of prevalence or reported effects of a certain type of family violence with members of two or more groups (e.g., Russell, Schuman, & Trocki, 1983; Wyatt, 1983). Qualitative
In this analysis, each group was treated as an aggregate sample, rather than as a collection of individuals, in order to establish overall behavioral frequencies. A basic assumption here was that within-group differences would be minimal. (Cal- laghan, 1981, pp. 115-131)

How can researchers avoid ethnic lumping? Only rarely will researchers be able to use a sample that is truly representative of the ethnic composition of the group being studied (e.g., Hispanics) would have a certain mix of Puerto Ricans, Cubans, etc., from certain social classes and with representative degrees of acculturation. Even in this design, the differences among the subcategories of Hispanics would need to be explored. A more common solution would be for researchers to limit their claims to the reality studied and provide ample information about the sample so readers can draw their own conclusions about the transferability of the findings. In other words, if the sample consisted of Mexican Americans from Texas, the study would be described as relevant to his group, not "Latinos." The "myth of sameness" can pose problems in studies of family violence among Whites as well. For example, Babu, Glenn, Stegell, and Adamson (1993) describe the sample in their study on victims of physical and sexual abuse as 95% White, composed of people who sought therapy at a center at Brigham Young University. The authors fail to mention the religious background of the participants. Given that the study takes place at a Mormon university in Utah, it would be important to know if most of the participants were Mormons, and how this might influence the results. Without this important piece of contextual information, the readers are led to assume the results would apply to all Whites. Because they are the racially dominant group, Whites are often seen as culture free or without ethnicity. When studied in greater depth, specific groups of White people are found to be highly influenced by cultural and systemic factors (e.g., for discussions of sexual abuse and Anglo-Americans and Jews, respectively, see Schmidt, 1995, and Featherman, 1995). I have developed personal guidelines for resolving some of ethical dilemmas that emerge in selecting and recruiting participants for cross-cultural research. I ask myself, "Whose voice do I hope to amplify through my research?" and "Whose predication needs to be more widely known?" I try to give voice to those who have a unique perspective, are currently ignored in the literature, and may have limited access to resources. In many cases this means those who are disenfranchised due to their gender, national origin, economic status, race, or other characteristics. Even so, my research is constrained by the limits of cross-cultural research outlined in this chapter.

Using an entirely different line of thinking, Galliber (1983) and others suggest that we study superordinates, so readers can learn more about the government, courts, large corporations, police, and other major institutions that affect their lives. What would this look like in cross-cultural family violence research? It would lead to studies of the ways courts, police, media, and social service agencies handle family violence depending on the ethnicity of the alleged perpetrator; it would lead to studies of why men from different cultures choose to hurt the women they love, in addition to studying why women stay in abusive relationships; it would lead to studies of how the ethnic, economic, and gender backgrounds of the powerful affect their decision; and so on. Researching those who are powerful in terms of family violence would require an investigation of those who are violent as well as the judges, policymakers, producers of violent media, and others who may have a role in the maintenance of a social order in which poor women and children are most often victimized. We have studied the psychology of victims at infinity, but we know little about the psychology of politicians who cut the funds provided under the Aid to Families With Dependent Children Act with apparent disregard for the women and children who may be forced to remain in violent homes because of such cuts. We know little about the culture of the judicial system wherein children are repeatedly returned to the homes of parents who have abused them. And we know little about the political incentives for politicians to support legislation like "Megan's Law," designed to make convicted sex offenders publicly identifiable on release, while supporting legislation that puts children at greater risk for abuse and neglect, in the package of "parental rights."

Choosing the Instrument

Once researchers have defined the question and group(s) they wish to study, they must choose an instrument that will be able to address the questions with this particular group. The better the method fits the group under study, the more accurate the findings are apt to be. Frequently, researchers take instruments and procedures that have been developed with White populations in North America and use these inappropriately in other contexts. People are asked to use instruments or engage in procedures that are alien and may be alienating to them.

If the researcher has chosen an instrument that does not fit naturally, try or be should consider choosing another instrument. Where this is not possible, researchers must compensate in every way possible to make sure the instrument or procedures do not offend people, and are valid. To determine whether the instrument or procedures fit with the culture(s) studied, researchers will need to include members of the target culture(s) in the design, implementation, and analysis of the research, as will be discussed below.

In a monograph on research on the Maori (Hohepa & Smith, 1992, New Zealand re-searchers from European (Pakeha) and Maori backgrounds repeatedly decry that they Pakeha researchers believe they have a "divine right" to investigate the topic of their choice with the Maori. They describe Maori research participants who "provide answers (if they cooperate at all), which they think the researcher want out of politeness and hospitality; or may or may occasionally deliberately distort responses according to a Maori logic not perceived or understood by the researcher" (Stokes, 1992, p. 6). They describe a spiritual dimension toward knowledge that is different from the knowledge western researchers. The Maori assume that knowledge should be imparted to selected individuals only after an apprenticeship that includes being able to prove oneself word
of receiving such knowledge. It should be clear from this example that the answers given in an anonymous survey on the Maori are not apt to portray Maori lifestyle accurately.

Comparative cross-cultural studies of family violence using standard quantitative instruments may suffer from these methodological problems. At the fourth International Family Violence Research Conference in 1995, prominent and groundbreaking leaders in the field of family violence from the Family Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire advocated the implementation of a multinational survey of family violence to enable cross-national comparisons of prevalence. Although the 60 or so researchers from all over the world who were present were generally intrigued by the idea of gathering such data, serious concerns were raised about the legitimacy of using the same methodology from country to country. Surely, the meaning of completing a survey would vary from rural Indonesia to urban Kenya to suburban Ohio, and using the same instrument would in no way guarantee the validity of the results. (Additional concerns expressed about the possible political implications of the use of findings from such a study will not be discussed here.)

Traditional empirical approaches using standardized quantitative methods may not be sufficient for some cross-cultural research on family violence. Research methods are sorely needed that take the cultural contexts of all participants and researchers into account. Written and telephone surveys are not likely to be the instrument of choice for assessing violence among members of low-income, immigrant, or oppressed groups, who feel alienated from professionals and authorities. It is ironic that these same anonymous surveys may be the method most likely to gain approval from human subjects review boards (Berg, 1995).

The importance of methodological variety can be seen in Johnson's (1995) refutation of the family violence versus feminist theory debate on couple violence. He suggests that family violence theorists rely on data gathered in large samples, whereas feminists tend to rely on qualitative and quantitative data gathered from women's shelters. He suggests that neither perspective is incorrect; rather, each has studied and described a population with a different kind of couple violence, which he calls community violence and patriarchal terrorism, respectively. If each side can recognize that it is measuring a different aspect of the problem, rather than arguing that the other is wrong, then the two perspectives can enhance each other. Without this methodological variety, only one type of battering would be known to researchers.

With the directness typical of so much of her writing, Audre Lorde (1993) asks, "What does it mean when the tools of a racial patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?" Although such language is not common in discussions of scholarly inquiry, cross-cultural researchers are advised to examine the assumptions behind the instruments and procedures they use, and create new ones, where indicated.

Simply translating instruments is not enough. Even when instruments are well translated, back-translated for accuracy, and pre-tested, undoubtedly the meaning of answering the questions, the definitions of the violent acts, and the meaning of responding to researchers vary with the cultural context of the participants. Simple information on the cultural contexts of the study and of the participants' lives will help render the research meaningful. Some of the potential dangers of poor cross-cultural research in family violence will be discussed later in this chapter.

Gathering Data
Understanding Benefit and Harm

How can data be gathered in a way that benefits and does not harm participants?

Research is based on human interaction and always includes a human relationship. Although this relationship is most obvious in the intimate setting of an in-depth interview, even anonymous telephone or written surveys create and emerge from a relationship. Researchers need to ask themselves, "What kind of relationship do I have with the participants? What kind of relationship do I want to construct with them through the research?"

Conducting Ethical Cross-Cultural Research

Graham Hingararoa Smith (1992) suggests four models for culturally appropriate research on the Maori that can be used to increase the cultural appropriateness of research on with members of other groups as well: (a) the mentor model, where authoritative Maori people guide and mediate the research; (b) the adoption model, "where researchers become adopted by the community . . . to the extent that they are considered as one of the [community] who happen[s] to be doing research and therefore can be trusted to do it right"; (c) the power sharing model, where researchers seek meaningful community assistance in supporting the development of the research; and (d) the empowering outcomes model, where the research benefits the Maori and the findings "relate to the original research questions and provide information that Maori themselves want to know" (pp. 8-9).

Feminists frequently discuss the power dynamics of gathering data. For example, Baber (1994) wonders how much she should guide the discussion of focus groups on sexuality and whether she should introduce information about AIDS.

In this project we want women to determine the topics important to them and the direction in which the discussion moves. However, we believe that some critical issues need to be addressed in the groups. At what point do we exert our "expertness" regarding factual information or move the discussion toward a subject not yet considered? (p. 69)

Concerns over the use and abuse of power in data gathering become highlighted in cross-cultural research. Researchers must ask themselves how their knowledge or lack of knowledge of members of the group(s) in the study influences the research process. For cross-cultural researchers to understand the people they are studying and empower them in the process of the research and in handling the results, they must work to become more familiar with the participants' culture(s) (Fontes, in press). Reading about history and culture, enjoying the arts, and making friends with people from the group(s) are effective means of beginning to have insight into the lives and meaning systems of the people who are being studied. Familiarity with the culture can help researchers guard against mistakes of misunderstanding in all phases of the research, from using alienating or offensive instruments to misinterpreting the results to disseminating results in a way that may be harmful to the participants' group. Familiarity with the culture can also help researchers guard against mistakes of power, such as using authority in a way that hampers the participants. Although researchers will not be able to become members of cultural groups that are not their own, all efforts toward greater cultural understanding strengthen the foundation on which they can subsequently build the cross-cultural research.

The process of conducting research tends to reinforce the power imbalances of society. Researchers usually study down the societal power hierarchy, studying people who are poorer, less educated, more discriminated against, and in a variety of ways less socially powerful than themselves (Keith-Spiegel & Klocher, 1985). This may be seen as a glaring problem in family violence research because power and abuses of power are key to the violent behavior. If family violence researchers favor the reduction of violence, it behooves us to adopt nonviolent (nonexploitative) methods of research.

In the research setting, the researcher is always more powerful than the participant. Although this is most obviously true for experimental research conducted in a laboratory, where the participants are manipulated in some way, even the most collaborative methods—such as participant observation—do not erase this imbalance. Researchers always have the option of leaving the setting; they know they have a life and identity other than the one that they are trying on (like a coat) for the duration of the study. It has been argued that one cannot really know what it is like to be a crack addict or mental hospital resident or homeless person, for instance, by doing fieldwork in this area, no matter how long the researcher stays in the field and no matter how thoroughly he or she adopts local customs. A key part of being in any of these positions is the knowledge that one may not be able to get out (Wieder, 1983). If a researcher promises not to interrupt violent episodes for the sake of...
of observation or recording, this poses a new ethical dilemma.

Potential Benefits of Participation

To what extent will the research participants benefit directly from the research? Human subjects review boards usually concern themselves with issues of benefit to the field. Here I am not referring to some theoretical benefit down the road, but rather to the extent to which the participants will be changed (beneficially) by their participation. If the research has low direct benefit, the participants and their circumstances will be much the same after participating. For instance, archival research offers no direct benefit to those who provided the original data. Depending on the content and processes of data collection, both qualitative and quantitative methods can provide high or low benefit to participants. In survey research, for example, a question can be phrased in a way that gives participants insight into their lives. Interviewing people allows groups to break isolation and offer avenues to recover from family violence, or can retraumatize, depending on the participants, the methods, and the intentions and ability of the interviewer. Research can help participants recognize resources within themselves and within their communities and can teach participants new skills. These may be primary goals of the research (as in action research) or planned in as "side benefits.

Research is always an intervention of some kind. Especially when investigating a dangerous phenomenon like family violence, one might ask, "Is it ethical to leave participants as vulnerable when they complete the study as before they participated?"

Risk of Harm to Participants

Collecting cross-cultural data on family violence, whether through interviews, questionnaires, experiments, observations, or other means, has a high potential for inflicting harm on participants. Events from traumatic historic events may influence the context of the research and the relationship between the researcher and the participants (e.g., a Cambodian being interviewed about family violence may remember the interrogations she faced in resettlement camps). Considering risk is particularly important when conducting cross-cultural inquiry because researchers and human subjects review boards may not be aware of all the potential harm that might befall participants in their specific contexts. The potential harm to participants may be of a psychological, physical, social, or political nature.

Psychological Harm. Research on sensitive topics can provoke a powerful emotional response in participants. Lee and Renzetti (1993) describe a sensitive research topic as "one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the research the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data." (p. 5). Lee and Renzetti assert that research is more likely to be threatening when it involves private or deeply personal material, concerns deviance and social control, "exploits the vested interests of powerful persons for the exercise of coercion or domination," and where it touches on material that is considered sacred (p. 6). Family violence research would seem to meet all these criteria for being sensitive and threatening.

Given that family violence is a sensitive topic, researchers must become highly familiar with the phenomena they are studying and the people who have been affected by it. All the personnel who have contact with the participants must be well versed in the topic under study and well trained in the social skills necessary to conduct quality research, not just research methods. Featherman (1989) describes her decision to conduct all the interviews and administer all the tests in her study of survivors of sexual abuse herself:

This decision was made in order to avoid the kind of interviewer bias resulting from only a cursory knowledge of sexual abuse. Victims of sexual abuse have by definition been invaded upon and have already had their privacy violated in a damaging and insensitive manner. A well-meaning yet naive interviewer, due either to ignorance or to widespread misconceptions about sexual abuse (i.e., that sadistic children invite abuse, that memories of sexual abuse are likely to be simply Oedipal fantasies, etc.), may unintentionally discourage full disclosures and leave the subject feeling further victimized. (pp. 29-30)

What kind of obligation for participants' psychological well-being do researchers have to the participants once a study has been completed? Gerrard (1995) coined the term research about to describe the practice of researchers parachuting into people's lives, interfering, raising painful old feelings, and then vanishing—leaving the participants to deal with unresolved feelings alone and isolated. There is often a sense of "us" and "them" perpetuated by researchers so that the subjects feel "examined" sometimes exposed and judged. (p. 59)

There are two elements here: not only the reawakening of old feelings but also the sense gained by participants that they have been used by the researchers for their own purposes and then abandoned, which in some cases may replicate the original abusive relationship. Researchers have handled this dilemma by achieving different degrees of postresearch proximity with participants, including staying in touch (Matocha, 1992); holding a party for participants and their families in which the research results are presented (Julia Pacy, personal communication, September 1996); facilitating access to health, legal, and social services for participants in need (Richie, 1996); and more typically, mailing a copy of the research reports to those participants who have requested it.

Family violence researchers can reduce the likelihood of psychological harm through careful choice of their research sample and questions. In one study (Fontes, 1993b), for example, I decided to interview only those victims of sexual abuse who had been in therapy. That, of course, limited the findings to a clinical sample and therefore partially shaped the research questions. Like many researchers before me, I made this decision so the participants would have had some initial processing of the abuse and would be less likely to be thrown into a crisis by the research process (Castañ-Lewis, 1988). This choice enabled me to focus on issues in therapy for Puerto Ricans who had been abused sexually, but limited my ability to study people who had not sought therapy.

Retraumatization and misunderstanding are more apt to occur in cross-cultural contexts, where researchers are not fully aware of the cultural meanings around asking certain questions, or asking them in certain ways. Questions may be biased by the researchers' assumptions that all respondents will be similarly motivated (e.g., to provide the maximum number of answers possible, to guess when uncertain, and to provide the truth rather than save face). Research questions are often phrased in ways that are syntactically complex, and language is used that may not be comfortable for some participants, introducing bias against less educated and non-native speakers (see Canio & Spurlock, 1994, p. 97).

In their applications to human subjects committees, researchers routinely say they will offer to stop the interview or refer participants to therapists if the participants become emotionally upset, but these measures are not always adequate. Researchers may not be able to recognize when they are retraumatizing research participants who are from other cultures, because cultural norms around expression of distress vary widely. Investigators should offer a variety of alternatives for participants who may be upset by the research including consultations with trained clergy, self-help materials, support groups, and referrals to anonymous telephone hotlines. Offering mental health referrals as the only option to people from groups who are less likely to use mental health services may constitute unequal protection of the participants from these groups.

The potential for research to be emotionally upsetting is not limited to interviews, and errors of omission can feel as upsetting as errors of commission. For example, victims of rape and sexual abuse have described to me being upset by survey instruments on sexuality that do not give them an opportunity to tell that their first sexual experience was an assault. People of mixed racial or ethnic background are sometimes offended by having to choose only one...
category in the demographic sections of research instruments.

Physical, Social, and Political Harm. Physical harm to participants can result from attacks by offenders who are angry about having their secrets told, and by others who feel threatened by the research. It may be difficult for researchers unfamiliar with the participants' social context to assess this threat accurately. For instance, a researcher from India described the difficulty in conducting research with women who had been attacked by their husbands or husbands' families for the perceived lack of an adequate dowry (Shobha Pais, personal communication, October 1994). She feared that merely approaching these women about the possibility of participating would put them in increased physical danger.

Crossing cultures in research on sensitive topics increases the potential for unrecognized social harm to individual participants and their communities. Darro et al. (1993) describe ignoring local systems of authority as the most egregious error in conducting research with Native Canadian populations. They provide the following example:

A research assistant arrived in a remote Cree village. On the first day, he asked the chief for access to subjects. He was refused. He then asked the local school principal. He was again refused. He next approached the minister. The minister agreed. The next day, the principal, chief, and minister met for their regular weekly lunch to discuss community issues. They felt that the research assistant's actions had caused the potential for conflict among them. The research assistant was then told to "take the next airplane out of the village or sleep in a snow bank" . . . From the chief's point of view, an unsupervised and arrogant stranger had come to his village and endangered the social peace. (p. 327)

Cross-cultural researchers need to be acutely aware of their personal and institutional power. Although they themselves may feel and try to present themselves as "regular people," their (usually) high levels of education, university or government affiliations, access to media and to powerful people, and relationship to the research setting often distinguish them from the researched. In another role—as friends or teachers, neighbors or co-workers—perhaps the investigators would not have increased power over the participants. But in the relationship of researcher to researched—regardless of the degree of disclosure that has been used—researchers must be acutely aware of their heightened power, and use it wisely.

Differing definitions of family and notions of ownership of information can complicate issues of consent for researchers in cross-cultural settings. Lipson (1994) writes about being caught between her own Euro-American ethical values and the Afghan worldview:

Afghans do not think of themselves as individuals who have their own rights or autonomy, but as members of families. When considering protection of human subjects, I have to think in terms of family privacy or risks to the family. This notion is not easy for an individually oriented researcher. (p. 342)

How can the notion of harm be measured, then, when an individual consents to participate in a study but that individual may reveal sensitive information about another person who has not given consent? These resolutions can affect participants' privacy and all aspects of their future, as when participants reveal information about children who are currently at risk for abuse that requires reporting to authorities. Other than assuring confidentiality and anonymity to the extent afforded by the law, and informing participants of the exceptions to confidentiality, it is hard to know how to handle these dilemmas.

In conducting research in Third World situations of extreme poverty and few structural resources for victims of family violence, the implications of raising awareness of family violence may cause serious, indeed, if a disclosure leads to an abusive man who is the monetary provider leaving the home, for instance, his family could be pushed over the edge from the brink of hunger. I conduct myself with the general motto that "knowledge is power," but this truism does not relieve me of my sense of moral respon-

sibility to participants and their families and communities.

Participating in research may also expose participants to political risk. Simply speaking with a researcher may brand a participant as a collaborator with an enemy group (whether that group is seen as "the establishment," "the feminists," "the communists," or whomever). Participants in my focus group study on sexual abuse in Chilean shanty towns (Fontes, 1996) described how the dictatorship influenced their experiences of family violence. Some described their courageous involvement in activities intended to overthrow or resist the Pinochet dictatorship. It is clear that if a brutal dictatorship ever returns to Chile, the mere fact that they participated in the focus groups could put them at risk. They would not be identifiable through my publications, but secret police and informers were rampant under previous regimes in Chile, and could again. My presence as a facilitator of the focus groups gave the appearance of safety to them. For now there is no problem, but the political winds are fickle, and this is a real source of concern.

Other kinds of potential harm to participants in cross-cultural family violence research are harder to categorize. For instance, through their studies researchers may influence the thinking or create a category of harm that will have implications for the participants and their communities. In Chile, for example, I asked focus group participants if a sexual relationship between a 30-year-old male and his 12-year-old female neighbor would be considered sexual abuse. With some qualifications, there was general agreement that it would. I then asked if a sexual relationship between a 30-year-old female and her 12-year-old male neighbor would be considered abuse. There was considerably more debate on this point. By juxtaposing these questions, I made an intervention that could be described in two ways: I created awareness of the sexual abuse of boys by women (that is the description using my lens on the world) or I created a category of harm and victimization that did not previously exist. To date, I have no sense of the long-term implications of this intervention.

Analyzing Data

Data do not simply present themselves neutrally so that all who find them would report them similarly. Rather, researchers work like tailors, selecting, cutting, shaping, and sewing together bits of data into a piece that then bears evidence of their own design. Investigators make decisions regularly about which results to highlight and which to allow to fall into the background. We also make decisions about how to contextualize our results. Because of the potential power of research, these may be seen as ethical decisions.

How can data be analyzed in a way that is respectful of the participants and reflects both the participants' and the researchers' views of reality? And what happens when there are differences in interpretation, such as when researchers regard aspects of participants' lives as oppressive or in need of intervention, and the participants themselves interpret their experiences in a different way? Fine (1992) has eloquently described this dilemma in a number of articles collected in Disruptive Voices: The Possibilities of Feminist Research. In one, she describes efforts to motivate a rape victim she is interviewing to "take control" and report the rape to the police, when the victim would rather wash, forget, and get on with her life. In another, she describes researchers' efforts to "empower" participants, when the participants would rather be "represented" by the researchers at school meetings.

Here I will discuss two ways researchers can increase the ethicability of their data analysis and presentation procedures: by using integrated research teams and by choosing a stance that makes their biases clear in their data analysis and presentation.

Integrated Research Teams

One way to improve the likelihood that cross-cultural research will be respectful of those it studies is to include people from the culture or cultures being studied in the planning, implementation, interpretation, and dissemination of the research. The more they are present, the
more likely it is that the research will be designed, implemented, and used in an ethical way. Having people from the culture(s) being studied on the team, but only in the lowest positions without a real voice, does not help, however, and may serve to legitimize research that is exploitative. (I am reminded of an African American colleague who conducted interviews in a home-based study of abusive families, but then was excluded by the White senior researcher from the data analysis, write-up, and conference presentations and was not acknowledged when the results were published. Her work as an interviewer probably led participants to believe their viewpoints were being handled by a culturally sensitive team, but my colleague believes that—ultimately—they were not.)

Our teams must be structured in such a way that members of the culture being studied have a powerful hand in shaping the research. When we make sure our research teams include people from the culture being studied, it is important to ask ourselves what we mean by “from the culture.” What combinations of race, native language, gender, economic class, geographic origin, religion, level of education, and other variables are most important here? When I was writing my dissertation on issues of disclosure around sexual abuse for low-income Puerto Rican women in the United States (Fontes, 1993b), I was fortunate to have had colleagues from low-income Puerto Rican families as members of a collaborative dissertation research group. The fact that we were on equal footing structurally—we were all graduate students—helped them feel free to critique me and my work. They helped me check on bias, oversight, and lack of understanding due to cultural and background differences at every step of the design and conduct of the research.

The actual processes of data analysis vary, of course, with the research methods and questions. However, in all types of research, qualitative and quantitative, experimental and naturalistic, there are a variety of ways to include members of the group being studied in the interpretation of the findings. Some of these include member checking (Bloor, 1983) where researchers return to the people studied for confirmation, elaboration, or correction of the findings; integrated research teams where members of the group studied are active and empowered members of the actual research teams (Fontes, in press); and the use of consultants who are professionals from the cultural group in question who are paid for their services in helping the researchers plan effective and culturally sensitive studies and understand the results (e.g., G. H. Smith, 1992).

No results speak for themselves. Whether the data obtained are numbers or words, researchers engaging in cross-cultural inquiry who wish to analyze their data in an ethical way will break out of the Lone Ranger model of intellectual success and collaborate, collaborate, collaborate.

Disseminating Findings

The ultimate phase of research, that of disseminating the findings, is given the least attention in the methodological literature. It is almost as if researchers believe that their decisions about how and where to inform others about their results are neutral and unimportant, or are in some way beyond their control. Social scientists are often seen as taking a great deal and giving little in return. Carefully attending to the ways in which we disseminate our findings is an important final step in conducting ethical research.

The first step in disseminating findings is deciding who will be part of the conversation. In other words, who are the researchers as they present the findings (are they speaking or writing primarily as scientists, academics, activists, advocates, or members of a certain group?), and who is the intended audience for the findings? The answers to these questions will determine the voice used and the intended vehicle for dissemination, respectively.

Choosing a Voice for Presenting the Data

Fine (1992) describes three stances that researchers can adopt in analyzing and presenting their research: venteriloquy, voices, and activism. Venteriloquy, the typical, “scientific,” objective stance,

Conducting Ethical Cross-Cultural Research

describes behavior, attitudes, and preferences as if these descriptions were static and immovable, “out there,” and unconnected to political contexts. . . . Such texts render oblique the ways in which we, as researchers, construct our analyses and narratives. Indeed, these texts are written as if researchers only serve as passive vehicles for transmission, with no voices of their own. (p. 211)

This stance is easily recognizable as the most common. Family violence researchers often fail to discuss the intense emotional reactions that we may experience at various points during the research process. Researchers are also apt to hide their passionate commitment to the issues for fear this will tarnish the perceived objectivity of their findings. When writing from the venteriloquy’s position, researchers write in the third person and “treat subjects as objects while calling them subjects” (Fine, 1992, p. 214). In the “voices” position, which applies most clearly to qualitative research, quotes are selected, edited, and used to advance the researchers’ ideas, generally compartmentalizing the “delicate tailoring” (Fine, 1992, p. 218) that researchers do to transform stacks of transcripts into an article. According to Fine, “The problem is not that we are taller but that so few researchers reveal how we do this work” (p. 218).

The voices position is commonly used in the popular literature on family violence, where testimonial accounts of “women who got away” from battering relationships (NiCarthy, 1987), survivors of incest (Bass & Davis, 1988), and victims of all kinds of abuse are quoted about their experiences, advancing the ideas and often bolstering the theories, reputations, and lecture tour fees of the book editors. Research reports from this position are not as common but do exist, including some of the most vivid and compelling snippets of testimony that I have ever read (e.g., Berliner & Conte, 1990; Conte, Wolf, & Smith, 1989).

I adopted the voices stance in my first formal report on research (Fontes, 1993b) where I reported solely on the methods and findings, neglecting my personal identity and the ethical issues that I faced as a White therapist conducting research on Puerto Rican clients who had been abused sexually. I reported the words of
all cross-cultural research in family violence should be of an activist nature (although it wouldn’t be interesting if all were, for a couple of years!), but rather that a wider space be opened in the traditional journals and conferences for research of an activist bent. This would relieve some of the historic tensions between the researchers and the activists.

Where to Publish

Investigators who are academics are pressured to publish in those journals with the greatest prestige and visibility to improve their standing in the field. Those who believe they have an urgent message may also write for popular publications to reach the largest number of people. Other options available to researchers include disseminating findings through television, radio, and the Internet; using varying levels of complexity depending on the intended audience; developing practical workshops for professional groups (e.g., therapists, shelter workers) or laypeople based on the findings; developing relevant brochures to be distributed to a variety of audiences through community organizations; making presentations to organizations of survivors or victims; writing for survivor or victim publications; and serving as consultants to public service organizations on the topic of their research. Research results can be disseminated through articles in cookbooks, soap operas, videos, songs, murals, handouts, theater, dance, and a variety of other means. The ethical issue involved here is the response to Fals-Borda’s (1996, p. 78) question, “Knowledge for what? Knowledge for whom?”

Linda Tuyihui Smith (1992), a Maori researcher, writes that although the Maori people have been studied extensively by Pakeha researchers and this research may have added to the knowledge base of the European New Zealanders, “it has done little for Maori people and in many cases simply confirmed what was obvious... Researchers appeared to be willing bedfellows of assimilationist, victim-blaming policies” (p. 7). One might similarly ask what the decades of cross-cultural research into every aspect of society have done to benefit people from disempowered groups in the United States.

Guilty Knowledge

Researchers may be tempted to hide some results so they cannot be used against the participants. Steinberg (cited in Gottfried, 1990) calls this “guilty knowledge,” that is, knowledge gained in a study that potentially compromises the interests of the individual or group under study. For example, one researcher on woman battering described her dilemma when she found small but statistically significant differences between racial groups in reported levels of battering, but was unsure as to the meaning of this finding and uncomfortable with the ways in which this result could be misinterpreted and misused:

On the one hand, if Black men are more likely to beat their wives, then the research and clinical community needs this information so that intervention programs can be developed that specifically target this “at-risk” population (Black men). That is where the money and efforts should be spent. On the other hand, when I think about how the lay community may interpret this “racial differences” information, it makes me sick and very cautious. You and I know that family violence cuts across racial and class lines (Pan Choce, personal communication, May 15, 1990).

Researchers who devise questions or uncover findings that are not politically palatable may find themselves in a worse position of having to choose between suppressing the questions or the findings, or publishing findings that may then be used to damage the community studied. Although careful social scientists include cautions in their published work (e.g., that what appears to be a racial difference may stem from a social class difference), these works are often distorted by the press or presented out of context by subsequent writers.

When researchers ponder their motives for conducting research, they may have a clearer idea of where and what to publish. Are they conducting research on family violence only, or are they conducting research for the elimination of family violence? Is the purpose to discover truth or to displace dominant knowledge and ideologies that oppress people (Gavry, 1989)? Undoubtedly, there will be much variation among researchers in relation to these questions. I believe a dynamic and vibrant field will benefit from inquiry conducted from several of these positions. The important point here is that ethical researchers must examine their options and choose their stances explicitly.

Conclusion

I hope this chapter will help investigators engage in more and better cross-cultural research on family violence. Although the potential for ethical problems in this kind of research is great, so is the potential for tremendous rewards. Qualitative cross-cultural research on family violence not only can contribute to improved theory but will also lead to changes in public policy and interventions that will make family life safer for people from a variety of groups. Through intensive reflection, analysis, evaluation of current practices, and planning for the future, the good intentions held by researchers “can be reflected in good practice and not just good rhetoric” (L. T. Smith, 1992, p. 2).

References
