

# Risk and resilience: exploring the potential of LGBTQ third sector and academic partnership

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**Abstract** The Risk and Resilience Explored [RaRE] Project (2010–2016) was a collaborative process involving a third sector agency, university partners and volunteers to better understand the risk and resilience factors associated with specific mental health issues among lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) people. In this article, we discuss the project’s collaborative ethos, based on a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach. We explain how the CBPR approach benefitted from including academic partners from the onset of the project, as well as from the direct and indirect engagement of community volunteers. We then explore some of our experience of third sector and academic partner collaboration in more depth, highlighting topic summaries salient to this partnership: support and continuity, upskilling of staff and volunteers for mutual benefit, accessible communication across sectors, and aligning priorities. We conclude by setting out recommendations based on our experience for those interested in developing similarly collaborative projects.

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## Introduction

In recent decades, researchers within and outside the academic community have placed considerable emphasis on collaborative research processes. These highlight the relevance of including and engaging with individuals and populations who are not only the subjects of the research, but who are

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also, or should be, the main beneficiaries of that research (Rappaport, 1987; Israel et al., 1998; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006). Historically in Psychology, the ‘subjects’ of research were largely seen as the ‘objects of interest’ and as such, groups and individual research participants were not given a ‘voice’ in the production of research (Ellis et al., 2020). This can be especially problematic for LGBTQ communities where often individuals have been positioned as sick by psychological research and theory (Roughton, 2002; Drescher, 2010). However, critical, feminist and community psychology practices have resulted in changes in the culture of the production of research, including those which brought about the need for user-informed practice.

User-informed research is ubiquitous now in many contexts, for example, Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) when carrying out health service needs assessment (Jackson et al., 2020). A greater awareness of needed service offers and impact-focused research have also contributed to an increased integration and collaboration between academic institutions, community organizations, and the communities they serve (cf. Oliver et al., 2001; Hughes and Kitson, 2012; Corstens et al., 2014). However, one criticism has been that service user involvement in research is often tokenistic, a form of ‘box-ticking exercise’ (Massey, 2018, p. 179).

User engagement and collaborative processes, however, can be challenging and acknowledgement of their relevance does not translate directly into practice. This is particularly the case when different priorities, values, work cultures, and sometimes world-views do not align and may lead to tensions and misunderstandings between different stakeholders engaged in the process. For example, user group consultation may be accepted as essential in processes of organizational change within health settings; however, when the focus, priorities, and/or interests of lay advisors differ from what has been envisioned or identified by people with research expertise (McGinn et al., 2011), barriers in project development need to be managed, often while keeping within tight deadlines.

In this paper, we contribute to wider discussions of such collaborations. More specifically, we outline, discuss and reflect upon some of the relevant challenges and successes of a collaborative research experience, involving third sector, academic and community partners: LGBT Mental Health Inequalities Research, also known as The RaRE Project. Full details of the research, its rationale, research methods and key findings can be found in *The RaRE Research Report* (Nodin et al., 2015), and therefore are not covered in detail here.

We start by providing background to the project, then go on to discuss, with examples, relevant aspects of our collaborative process and project activities in the context of its conceptual approach—*Community-Based Participatory Research* or CBPR (Israel et al., 1998). We then reflect on and discuss some of the challenges and opportunities we identified in the collaborative

research process between academia and third sector. Finally, we offer recommendations based on this reflective review of the RaRE Project, to inform other research projects exploring intersections of individual and community health.

## RaRE project background and description

In many parts of the world, it is generally now recognized that same-sex attraction and gender non-conformity are psychologically healthy rather than 'abnormal' (McFarlane, 1998; King *et al.*, 2004; Sherman *et al.*, 2020). Yet even where lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) lives are accepted and celebrated, there is also strong evidence of mental health inequalities for LGBTQ people. Research conducted in several western countries over the last two decades suggests that people from sexual and gender minorities tend to fare less well in their health than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Warner *et al.*, 2004; Kaminski *et al.*, 2005; King *et al.*, 2008; Chakraborty *et al.*, 2011).

Through extensive community involvement and ongoing service provision, the leadership team at PACE, a London-based mental health charity providing front-line delivery of mental health and well-being services to the LGBTQ community in London, UK and beyond<sup>1</sup>, recognized a gap in the evidence. As a consequence, the RaRE Project was developed to address that gap through collaboration with academic partners who were involved with the project from its outset, and community volunteers who engaged with the project at regular intervals throughout its development.

The project was funded by the Big Lottery Community Fund between 2010 and 2016 and focused on three mental health issues identified as prevalent among differentiated groups within the LGBTQ population: suicidality for young LGBTQ people; alcohol misuse for lesbian and bisexual women and body image issues for gay and bisexual men (Nodin *et al.*, 2015). The RaRE Project was the first British study to explore LGBTQ mental health-related risk concomitantly with resilience by including a large comparative heterosexual and cisgender sample.

In addition to exploring risk and resilience factors in respect of those mental health issues, an objective of the RaRE Project was to explore and understand how collaborative processes and experience sharing between academic and community partners could be achieved effectively and efficiently. Hence, the project was designed and delivered using the CBPR approach (Israel *et al.*, 1998; Rhodes *et al.*, 2010; Speer and Christens, 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> PACE, founded in 1985, offered a range of free and low-cost services such as counselling and advocacy, targeted at the London and England LGBT+ community. During a period of government funding cuts, PACE declared insolvency. It ceased operations one month after the official ending of the RaRE Project.

CBPR is based on the principle that academic research should involve community agents at all levels of the scientific process (Israel *et al.*, 1998). More traditionally structured forms of research tend to employ a top-down approach, where academics are privileged as holding all expertise whilst their findings are used to influence the community. This approach has identifiable problems, sometimes including resistance from a community to implementation of change, which is felt as foreign to lived experience and unnecessary. Another problem is the time for findings to be translated into policies and recognizable practice, if this happens at all. These are also identified challenges when research is carried out at the community (e.g. hospitals or community centres) but not with the community (Blumenthal, 2011).

By contrast, a CBPR approach places ‘emphasis on the participation of non-academic researchers in the process of creating knowledge’ (Israel *et al.*, 1998, p. 177), often incorporating local and community-specific theories, and reflexively considering the strengths and weaknesses of all those involved. It draws from critical and constructivist theories and uses qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand the phenomenon under study.

Academia benefits from engagement in this participatory approach as it encourages a more grounded and problem-solving focus on real-world issues, as opposed to seeking knowledge specifically for purposes of ontological enquiry or production of knowledge. Community partner organizations, such as PACE, benefit by developing research skills; being more able to deliver evidence-based services, and arguably being better able to use evidence to advocate for equality. Lay community advisory members and other volunteers may develop better insight into research processes, develop their workplace experience and acquire transferable skills. Some want to give back to the community, as in cases where they were previous service users who benefited from community-based support.

Such partnerships can facilitate researchers to use methods that are more culturally sensitive and appropriate for participants because members of that participant pool have been involved in their development (Papadopoulos and Lees, 2002). We argue that this approach to research might also be perceived by its consumers, and particularly by LGBTQ+ communities, as more relevant than that undertaken by academics alone. Importantly, this approach increases chances of translating research into change, embedded as it is in practice and in community priorities.

### **The RaRE project: CBPR in action**

The combined efforts of several different groups of people made the RaRE Project a success. To describe and explain the wide-ranging activities and the

inter- and intra-actions of a large number of contributors, we have defined and described contributors in groups according to roles that were outlined in the study protocol. In each section, we add comment on timeline and interactions, noting contributions and some of the challenges.

#### *The charity and the academic advisors*

PACE recruited a panel of three academics (EP, IR, AT) who were, at the time, all working in English universities. As experienced researchers, academic panel members were recruited to advise on the conception and design stages of the project and support the funding application. PACE managed the project, employed a small research team (NN + 2), and recruited, trained, and supported volunteers (CP + 13). By managing the project 'in-house' at PACE, the study benefited from community-specific resources, for example knowledge capital and established community contacts and networks. By collaborating with academic advisors, PACE brought in complementary knowledge and skill sets to successfully elaborate and win the large funding bid.

NN became the Research Manager (RM) while also an academic outside the project, finishing his doctoral research in another aspect of LGBTQ Psychology alongside running the RaRE Project. All the members of the academic panel belong to the LGBT community and, in addition to their academic expertise brought experiential perspectives to the project in terms of working with and for third sector agencies, and of delivering community-facing initiatives (cf. [Formby, 2017](#)). For example, prior to becoming an academic EP was an LGB diversity trainer and had used this activist experience as the basis for her doctoral study. IR has experience of working with third-sector organizations as well as working with local and national government agencies. AT has experience of organizing volunteer-led community groups and as a HIV-treatment and mental health service-user. This context makes the project an informative case in light of its CBPR approach, effectively blurring boundaries between academia and community-based research.

Specialized academic support covered statistical techniques, thematic analysis of interviews, in-depth knowledge of the relevant literature, and general understanding of scientific and institutional processes. This included the preparation and submission of the project to universities' ethics committees, recommending relevant literature, the selection, adaptation and creation of measures used during data collection, supporting data collection and analysis, and reviewing report drafts. Tasks were performed dialogically with defining contributions of the community volunteers, described more fully below.

The academic advisors also contributed to project administration by sitting in panels for staff recruitment and contributing to the organization

of the RaRE Research Conference in 2015 where key findings from the research were presented. Academic advisory members fulfilled additional roles when unanticipated changes in the charity's organization disrupted the project's progress. We outline some of the challenges and successes further down.

#### *Lay panel advisors*

Independent volunteers from the wider LGBTQ community and beyond came to play an important variety of roles at different stages of the project. The volunteers were key to keeping the project truthful to its collaborative and community-based design while also adding capacity, to deliver the project with finite resources.

Some of the community volunteers were engaged in RaRE via an advisory lay panel, ensuring that research methods and materials, such as survey questions and dissemination materials, were appropriate to the needs and interests of their target populations. One example of this was ensuring that language and terminology used was adjusted to what was being used in the community and thereby easily understood by lay people. For example, CP who was a member of the panel, is bisexual and has lived experience of mental health issues, bringing that insight into the project.

Lay panel members were selected across all diversities and did not know each other prior to participation. PACE staff and volunteers worked to create a sense of belonging and trusting relationships where members felt able to share their opinions. This included icebreakers, group activities, discussing upcoming stages of the project and providing community and lay perspectives to the project.

Regular contact for email consultation was assessed to be not as effective as in-person group interactions. On average, two lay panel meetings were convened each year. Although some disengagement from the project by lay panel members occurred due to life circumstances (e.g. taking up new jobs), the longer intervals between meetings may have contributed to lower attendance as the project progressed. Follow-up was often required to entice feedback from the group. Eventually, some members were also involved in other aspects of the project such as helping recruit survey participants, supporting the RaRE Research Conference (London, March 2015), and more traditionally academic tasks (e.g. data analysis).

Overall, it was agreed that lay panel members' involvement was an asset to the project as, regardless of engagement level, they became informal ambassadors of RaRE in their own various professional and social realms.

#### *Volunteers and interns*

The project actively recruited research volunteers and interns who assisted with operational and analytical aspects of the research, including writing

academic articles like this one. As mentioned, some volunteers were lay panel members who took on greater involvement in the project, developing their skills, and providing more engaged contributions to the project, the host organization and to the LGBTQ community. Several of these volunteers and interns were pursuing academic careers, keen to put into practice skills and learning from undergraduate or master's degrees. Partially inspired by their involvement with the project, (CP) resumed graduate study to finish a doctorate.

As with the identities of the professional academic advisors, these narratives disrupt the presumed distinctions between the different group identities and roles within the project.

### **Third sector and academic collaboration: challenges and opportunities**

With many successes, the RaRE project also faced challenges in its collaborative approach. Here, we discuss some of the challenges of a third sector and academic partnership in four summary themes: support and continuity, upskilling of staff and volunteers for mutual benefit, accessible communication across sectors, and aligning priorities.

#### *Support and continuity*

Continued collaboration from the academics to the project was made possible with their universities' early agreement for continuous support to the project and PACE. Financial and time pressures in higher education cannot be disregarded in the conception, implementation and maintenance stages of collaborative community-based projects. At the same time, the impact agenda remains a key performance indicator for universities and academics, and such collaborations may contribute towards this agenda creating opportunities for relevant impact within civil society (Gunn and Mintrom, 2016).

Nevertheless, external projects remove academics from other costed, professional activities, which can place pressure on departments, management, and colleagues. As such, financial compensation or contribution for academic input needs to be weighted in when planning for projects of this nature, even if academics might derive benefits from such projects, e.g. by boosting their external engagement and impact profiles. In the case of RaRE, the funds provided by the Big Lottery allowed remuneration based upon daily rates that reflected status and costs, providing some financial compensation to the academics' home universities.

In turn, the relevance of continued support of academics to community projects becomes obvious in rather pragmatic aspects of the project's success.

For example, the RaRE project lost the original RM during the second year parallel to significant changes and restructuring at PACE. This led to a disruption of continuity in the PACE staff and an adjustment to milestone targets; however, having an academic advisory panel was useful, in terms of assisting with interpretation of documentation, data, and minutes of previous project meetings. Therefore, having a consistent academic panel bridged a temporary gap in third sector staffing as well as providing a source of project-specific expertise that helped carry the project forward in times of transition.

When PACE closed unexpectedly shortly after the end of the project, many of the study's non-academic outputs were lost, including hardcopies of professional recommendation sheets and research summaries, alongside channels for their distribution. Again, the academic partnership meant that at least some of these materials remained openly available via academic repositories<sup>2</sup>.

#### *Upskilling of staff and volunteers for mutual benefit*

In our project, four interviewers were recruited to interview thirty-five participants in the first and six to interview twenty-three participants in the second qualitative phase of the project. Interviewers applied to advertisements across a number of channels, and included existing PACE volunteers, former service users, and researchers interested in the topic. All successful candidates had in common an LGBTQ identity, a relevant criterion suggested to facilitate rapport with interviewees in this project, as advocated by [Edwards and Holland \(2013\)](#). EP and AT designed and delivered a training workshop and resources for those involved. Trainee interviewers received free training contributing to their professional development, while AT and EP gained additional experience training novice researchers.

Engaging multiple interviewers allowed us to collect the data quickly and to schedule. What was lost with fewer interviewers hearing from the total number of participants was an element of incremental skill development such as acquiring insights into particular avenues of enquiry to pursue with subsequent interviews. Despite the training, the interviewers' skills effectively varied, with some adhering quite rigidly to the interview guide and capitalizing on fewer opportunities to ask probing questions or pursue informative directions of enquiry. Interviewer training was reviewed and NN added debriefing sessions with each interviewer for the later phase of interviewing to manage variation in skill and develop individual and collective strengths.

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2 E.g. [https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/28072148/RARE\\_Research\\_Report\\_PACE\\_2015.pdf](https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/28072148/RARE_Research_Report_PACE_2015.pdf)

Though not ideal and presenting some of the challenges outlined, the choice of multiple interviewers proved effective and invited multiple and critical perspectives of the data, including reflexive analysis of the roles of the interviewers and how the narratives were co-produced with participants (Talmy, 2011; Tyler *et al.*, 2019).

Building on our learning from the interview stages, we placed additional emphasis and resources on the mutual benefits of enhancing training and skills for community interns and volunteers. Twelve people made use of a bespoke series of workshops to develop their skills in scientific writing for peer-reviewed journals. The workshops had complementary aims: to increase human resourcing for dissemination activities, to ensure community voices were central to dissemination, and to ensure measurable value was offered for volunteer efforts. The workshops included senior and peer reviews from NN and workshop participants with collaboration, mentoring and review from the academic panel. NN used resources and his previous experience of a similar workshop where he had benefitted as an early career writer in an academic setting<sup>3</sup>. NN ran two series of writing workshops, co-producing a number of manuscript drafts with potential for submission or further development for publication.

Whilst the original bid had not specified the writing workshop as an outcome, we were able to draw on existing initiative, experience, and resources for the benefit of the project. Likewise, we were able to draw on the resources of our volunteers, acknowledging and operationalizing their intersecting roles as community members-researchers-volunteers. Enhancing this skill base in the voluntary organization and wider LGBTQ community was an unintended, positive outcome of the project, acknowledging an ethos of empowered engagement (Freire, 1972; hooks, 2014). We elaborate on benefits to the community below when we discuss the impact issues in the context of challenges and opportunities experienced in the third sector and academic collaboration process.

#### *Accessible communication across sectors*

The issues that we noted in communication for our project collaborating across sectors are accessible timing and accessible voice. First, communication needs to be relatively open between the RM doing the frontline work and academic partners working offsite. In practical terms, this means relatively frequent and timely communication. In this project, effort was made to manage this with good effect.

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3 The HIV Center Manuscript Workshop, at the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at Columbia University and New York State Psychiatric Institute. The authors would like to thank Susie Hoffman, DrPH, for kindly sharing materials for use in PACE's Manuscript Workshop.

When multiple contributors from different organizations and sectors come together with a shared aim, teams must work to develop awareness of leadership, management and inter-organizational behaviour. For instance, senior academics will be used to leading research projects within a department or working within familiar patterns of collaboration and line-management. Whilst not revelatory, we observe that collaboration and autonomy are culturally defined within our sectors and organizations. Inter-sector and community-based projects can disrupt established expectations of hierarchy, reporting, and what counts as ‘expertise’.

Good feedback and open dialogue are useful to continuously confirm and affirm what is helpful as ‘advisory’ alongside lay advisors, service users, and other stakeholders. Teams must be mindful of third sector actors feeling unable to ask or not wanting to ‘inconvenience’ academic partners with (what may be perceived by either party as) trivial matters of specific, day-to-day elements of research processes. Conversely, people dedicated to a single research project may be unaware that academic work largely consists of managing multiple research projects at different stages as well as teaching, administrative, and leadership roles. We noted times when our academic members struggled to respond in due time to the queries of the ground research team. This sometimes meant delays and anxieties to manage in the process. Funders and managers of collaborative teams may find it beneficial to consider opportunities and limitations for how ‘time’ is understood, managed, and costed.

The second point pertaining to communication is the significance of a shared or diverging language. In our case, the second RM (NN) had academic and research experience. Communication about various aspects of the research process, such as data collection instruments and strategies for recruitment and analyses, was therefore facilitated and there was less effort to negotiate a common vocabulary that was accessible to all involved. As a contrast, the community advisory panel included many members who were non-specialists and/or research-naïve. The issue of accessible vocabulary is an ongoing endeavour for all academics, and there are benefit from exercising and rehearsing these skills with stakeholders who are willing and empowered to express gaps in messages that would lead to misunderstanding, misinformation, or missed opportunities.

*Aligning objectives: priorities across the two sectors*

The priorities within the two sectors (academic and third) are the drivers behind each actor’s engagement in collaborative research projects. We suggest that agreeing on objectives and priorities contributes to success. In this case, we agreed to focus on the impact and dissemination of the findings, as common drivers of our collaboration.

The British government and its funding bodies such as Research Councils UK have increased emphasis on the ‘impact agenda’ in the past decade (Hughes and Kitson, 2012; UK Research and Innovation, 2021). Research must have social and/or economic impact and develop strategies to ensure that the research is meaningful outside the academy (cf. National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, 2021). This dovetails with the aims of third sector organizations when research supports evidence led design and delivery of service provision to ultimately have a positive impact for service users.

Even—or especially—noting the fuzzy or fluid categories of ‘academic’, ‘community’, and ‘third sector’ in our larger research team, from the perspective of our third sector contributors, having partners working within academic institutions lends a ‘gravitas’ to the outputs within the sector, and increases recognition of scholarly rigour to the research. Similarly, academics are urged to produce high impact, excellent quality research outputs for academic audiences, produce accessible lay summaries of research findings, and engage service users in all aspects of the research process.

From our experience on this project, dissemination of research findings and the impact programme PACE developed with support from all partners, met the goals of the charity, the community stakeholders, and of the academic partners in two ways. First, by increasing awareness of the mental health needs and priorities of LGBTQ people and of the services provided by the charity to support these needs. Second, by establishing strategic partnership between a community organization and universities, thereby accessing relevant skills, knowledge, and impact channels.

As another example, PACE organized a two-part webinar building on findings that many participants had experienced discrimination and violence in public, social contexts such as at school and while accessing health care (Nodin *et al.*, 2015; Rivers *et al.*, 2018). The webinar expanded the impact of the research by presenting research findings, providing practical recommendations, and sharing experiences on how discrimination might be addressed and prevented within these environments. Both parts of the webinar were streamed live, recorded, and made available as an online resource.<sup>4</sup>

The funder required a formal assessment of impact, including a follow up questionnaire to key stakeholders who had participated in RaRE dissemination activities. This process identified a number of positive outcomes for the project, some of which as a consequence of key stakeholders participating in the RaRE conference in 2015. For example, the research report informed

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4 See <https://youtu.be/uFB4qvsmp2c>; <https://youtu.be/pk2b0tsO3tw>

a local council's strategy on suicide prevention and was used as evidence to UK parliament discussion on trans mental health issues.

Third sector organizations and academics continue to use the RaRE findings as evidence and to support further research about LGBTQ mental health (Stonewall, 2017; Rimes *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, the project has seen some of its findings featured or cited in news articles in mainstream British news outlets (Strudwick, 2014; Derbyshire, 2015). The project may have exceeded the initially stated outcomes and reached wider, relevant audiences. This highlights the dual responsibility and relevance of being very clear in managing how research findings are communicated more widely on one hand, and on the other hand of monitoring and addressing how some of these outcomes are used and sometimes misinterpreted or distorted by third parties.

Impact can, and should, be about addressing the needs of communities, and translating research into societal change at various levels. Therefore, rather than direct emphasis on economic recovery of costs as might be measured in science and technology projects, we invite governments and funding organizations to consider how indirect and longer-term effects of education and dissemination activities—and the interrelated savings in healthcare and workplace productivity—might be accounted as return on investment. Such collaborations between academia and the third sector can deliver individual, organizational, and social benefits.

## Final reflections and recommendations

The impact potential of research led by the LGBTQ third sector is particularly significant as it can contribute to a number of positive outcomes to the community, such as increased skills, the empowerment of young activists and impact on policy and practice with positive implications for the lives and well-being of sexual minority populations (Wagaman, 2015). This need not be at the expense of or in contrast to academic agendas; rather, collaborations between both sectors can complement and build on each sector's strengths, as the RaRE project exemplifies. It is possible that some of the experiences illustrated from this project can be applied to similar collaborations and contexts, namely to research carried out collaboratively with other oppressed and minority groups.

It is worth noticing that the limited range of identities in the core team of the project, predominantly white, LG and cisgender, may present as a limitation to the ability that RaRE had in truly representing the wider LGBTQ+ community. One way by which we diversified representation was via the advisory panel where attention led to the inclusion of more diverse ethnic and other backgrounds. Although for most of the project trans voices

were absent, in later stages a trans member of staff at PACE took on the role of administrative support, adding the benefit of some informal input into strategic activities (e.g. dissemination).

We have aimed to disrupt the dichotomy of conceptualizing ‘us’ and ‘them’ in-group and out-group identities in research partnerships. The boundaries can be, and often are, very blurred and we emphasize these collaborations as reciprocal. Importantly, such partnerships may open possibilities and generate hope at a time of increased tensions.

Before concluding, we lay out some recommendations for those seeking to engage in similar collaborative processes, based on our experience:

1. Ensure funding bids adequately support requirements for academics’ time and expenses to enable buy-in from home universities and allow for a sustainable partnership. Other than fees, the project contemplated items such as travel and catering for the recurrent day-long meetings with the core research team on site.
2. Involve all main stakeholders in early dialogue together to co-produce shared understanding of values, goals and expectations around frequency and modes of communication, and aligned commitment to project outcomes. Despite our best efforts, there were moments in our project when we had to manage tensions related to timescales and availability. Having clear time plans that are generated and agreed collectively might be a way to minimize these.
3. Ensure academic and other partners include members who share the researched communities’ characteristics; here LGBTQ academics were also ‘insiders’ to the researched target communities, which facilitated deeper understanding of priorities and methodologies. Projects where this is not possible might require an investment in training and in knowledge sharing activities to facilitate an understanding of needs and priorities.
4. Arrange regular opportunities for all stakeholder groups to interact so group cohesion and sense of purpose are maintained, especially where there are fewer commonalities and to allow for development of a common lexicon that facilitates communication. We tried to keep meetings frequent enough to address the needs of the project but avoiding excessive demands on stakeholders’ time. This balance needs to be found for each project according to specific requirements and context.
5. Actively seek ways to add value to each stakeholder group, such as skills workshops. The upskilling of those involved has multiple advantages, in that it can benefit the individuals and the communities that they belong to, but it may also contribute towards meeting the aims of the project. For example, developing the skills of volunteers might allow them to engage in more specialized activities than those they were initially recruited to partake.

6. Anticipate unforeseen disruptions to naturally occur in the project's life cycle, particularly in the case of community-based organizations. Our experience suggests that some outputs such as collaborative networks are harder to maintain in the event of a more substantial event such as the closure of a partner organization; therefore, those developing collaborative projects should place thought towards how to prevent such losses should something of that nature occur.
7. Explore possibilities for research and dissemination offered by the partnerships, particularly to sustain and expand impact of the project beyond its lifetime and cost. In our case, not only the research report has continued to be widely accessible via academic depositories, but also academics, third sector elements and volunteers have continued to work collaboratively in outputs such as research papers, and have used the project findings and learnings in their academic work (e.g. teaching, supervision).
8. Accept that blurring of lines and roles can be a positive, empowering developmental factor in this kind of research programme, allowing for the reframing of what can be standard assumptions about the right way to be professional in such contexts.

Ultimately, all collaborative research processes involve both risk and resilience. The unexpected closure of PACE shortly after the official conclusion of the RaRE project is a stark reminder of this, as are the increased financial pressures and cuts to funding for community-based organizations. Despite many financial challenges particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, the well-established higher education institutions are less likely to experience disruption to the same extent.

Much has happened in the UK since the project took place, affecting the LGBTQ+ community in many ways, sometimes disproportionately. Concerns have been raised that the exit from the European Union and calls for abandoning scrutiny from the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice might negatively impact on LGBTQ+ rights in the UK (Channing and Ward, 2017), in a context of growing antagonism and violence towards minorities (Eminson, 2021). In turn COVID-19 compounded this already challenging context. There is evidence of homophobic attacks having increased during the pandemic in the UK (Chao-Fong, 2021), and as a large proportion LGBTQ+ people work in the services industry, many lost their jobs during the several lockdowns leading some to poverty, particularly those with intersectional minority status (Martino *et al.*, 2021). Some had to return to their families' homes where they had to hide their identities or where these were not accepted or welcomed, contributing towards an increase of mental health problems (Gonzales *et al.*, 2020; Bavinton *et al.*, 2022).

This complex set of factors makes an ongoing investment in collaborative research, particularly that focused on LGBTQ+ populations, ever more relevant. Research led by third sector organizations may signal a shift from symbolic public participation in academically led projects to fully collaborative research efforts. The research thus can be inherently embedded in community concerns, with the third sector offering a wide range of existing networks and mechanisms, which have great potential for impact generation, both at a broader policy level and more specifically within the practices of grassroots organizations (Hardwick *et al.*, 2015).

To conclude, while research tends to emphasize ‘findings’ rather than ‘process’—the messy and much more ephemeral aspects of the business of doing research—this brief flavour of some of the less tangible aspects of the RaRE project might stimulate dialogue within other teams planning or dealing with similar collaborative endeavours.

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