A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF COLLABORATION IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Social Work in the Graduate School of The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2015
ABSTRACT

The multidisciplinary team response to child abuse emerged during the 1980’s in response to increasing numbers of child abuse reports and the need to coordinate existing community resources more efficiently. This study investigates how multidisciplinary team members perceived collaboration and its effects upon team functioning in child abuse investigations. Using a grounded theory approach, a diverse sample of child protective service workers, law enforcement investigators, medical and mental health professionals, and prosecuting attorneys from four states were interviewed face-to-face about their perceptions of collaborating with different agencies responsible for child abuse investigations. The study revealed that effective multidisciplinary teams rely upon collaborative relationships. The ability of team members to work together affects not only how teams function but also informs investigative outcomes and hence services to children and families. The findings indicated that study participants face challenges such as dealing with differing agency policies and procedures and how the development of collaborative relationships mitigate these circumstances. Study findings hold implications for professionals responsible for responding to reports of suspected child abuse, as well as social work educators in preparing students to practice in a multidisciplinary team environment through understanding the development of collaborative relationships.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone who supported and guided me through the journey of creating the manuscript. In particular, my family and close friends who stood by me throughout the time taken to complete my dissertation.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAC – child advocacy center
CPI – child protection investigator
CPS – child protective services
CPT – child protection team
DA – district attorney
ER - emergency response
ERU – emergency response unit
LE – law enforcement
MDIC – multidisciplinary interview center
MOU – memorandum of understanding
MDT- multidisciplinary team
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am pleased to take this opportunity to thank the colleagues and faculty members who helped me with this research project. I am most indebted to Dr. Debra Nelson-Gardell, the chair for this dissertation, for sharing her research expertise and wisdom regarding child welfare practice and social work research. I want to thank all of my committee members, Dr. Brenda Smith, Dr. Javonda Williams, and Dr. Martha Crowther from The University of Alabama and Linda Cordisco-Steele, national trainer from the National Children’s Advocacy Center for their invaluable input, inspiring questions, and support of both the dissertation and other research projects in which I participated. I would also like to thank Lynn Tobola, librarian for The School of Social Work, who frequently took time to review my writing and provide questions and comments that challenged me and ultimately improved this manuscript and other papers that I wrote over the course of the past five years.

This research would not have been possible without the participation of child protective service workers and supervisors, law enforcement investigators, district attorneys, forensic interviewers, and medical and mental health professionals who took time away from incredibly busy schedules to meet and talk with me about what it is like to be a member of a multidisciplinary team responsible for child abuse investigations.

Finally, I want to thank my son Robert Young and my niece Laura Hicks Collins for being there when I really needed someone to listen. My family and friends in Tuscaloosa and North Alabama never stopped encouraging me to move forward.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on collaboration among the professionals who are members of multidisciplinary teams that respond to reports of child abuse and how team members perceive collaboration and its effect upon team functioning. This chapter provides the background for the study and includes the historical context and the significance of multidisciplinary teams in response to child abuse. The section on theoretical framework explains the existing theories relevant to interpreting and understanding how multidisciplinary team members view collaboration. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the intent of the study and the central question.

Historical Context

In order to place the topic in context, this section provides a historical background of major events and policies that led to the use of multidisciplinary teams in response to child abuse reports. The discussion includes recognition of child abuse as a social problem, landmark child abuse cases, and the impact of federal policies on how communities respond to child abuse reports.

Historical documents indicate evidence of child abuse since the beginning of civilization. Here in the United States, child abuse is deeply rooted in our cultural and religious backgrounds. Although documentation of earlier cases of child abuse in the United States exist, the case of Mary Ellen Wilson in New York City in 1874 brought recognition that no agencies, governmental or otherwise, were responsible for the protection of abused or neglected children.
(Thomas, 1972). Even then, the charity worker who intervened in Mary Ellen’s case called upon the help of the American Humane Association because one agency alone could not protect that child. Despite this child abuse case and others, society continued to view children as property belonging to their parents who could do with them as they wanted (Montgomery, 1988).

In the 1950s, the first multidisciplinary teams to deal with child abuse emerged in hospitals in Denver, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh (Bross, Ballo, & Korfmacher, 2000; Jacobsen, 2001; Lalayants & Epstein, 2005). Through the efforts of emergency room physicians responsible for diagnosing and treating injured children, child abuse gradually became recognized as a social problem. In 1962, the American Medical Association published a landmark paper that defined the battered child syndrome as a “clinical condition in young children who suffered serious physical abuse, generally from a parent or foster parent” (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1962, p. 143). As a result, studies concerning child abuse began to appear in medical journals (Duffee & Gellert, 1992). In 1965 and then again in 1971, the California Court of Appeals recognized the battered child syndrome as a medical diagnosis (National Association of Counsel for Children, 2012).

Because of increasing concerns expressed by the medical profession, the federal government enacted The Child Abuse and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974. One of the major provisions of CAPTA involved funding for states that developed child abuse and neglect identification and prevention programs (Children’s Bureau, 2013). In response, states that previously had not required reporting of suspected child abuse implemented mandatory child abuse reporting statutes. That legislation resulted in a significant increase in child abuse reports. For example, in 1974, the State Department of Human Resources in Alabama recorded approximately 800 child abuse reports (Alabama State Department of Human Resources, 2013).
The following year that number almost doubled to approximately 1500 cases. By 1984, the number of suspected child abuse reports in Alabama involved more than 30,000 children (Alabama State Department of Human Resources, 2013).

In addition to the nationwide increase in child abuse reports, two landmark court cases caught the attention of the media and brought focus upon how child sexual abuse reports were investigated. The first less publicized case occurred in 1983 in Jordan, Minnesota where 24 adults were arrested on charges of child sexual abuse and pornography involving more than 30 children (Faller, 1996). Because of repeated child interviews conducted by untrained law enforcement officers and what the media referred to as the over-involvement of the prosecutor, the investigation and prosecution of the case was severely criticized. Then, in 1983, the McMartin pre-school investigation involving the arrest of daycare center owners charged with more than 300 counts of child abuse involving 21 children began in Los Angeles (Faller, 1996). The four-year investigation preceded court action lasting over a period of another three years that included two trials. Allegations of pornography and ritualistic child abuse fueled the initial media attention that both child abuse cases received. However, eventually the focus became the failure of the investigative systems to coordinate activities and the belief that coercive interview techniques resulted in false allegations. The adults charged in both the McMartin and Jordan, Minnesota cases were either acquitted or dismissed from all criminal charges (Faller, 1996).

From the McMartin and Jordan, Minnesota cases, concerns emerged about how the procedures used to investigate and prosecute child abuse (i.e. multiple interviews; intrusive medical procedures; separation from support systems; intimidating courtroom procedures and tactics; and lack of communication and information sharing among investigative agencies) often resulted in additional trauma to abused children and their families (Kolbo & Strong, 1997).
These growing concerns coupled with funding for child welfare programs being increasingly contingent upon “reduction of service duplication and maximization of scarce community resources” (Jacobsen, 2001, p. 231) brought recognition that one agency alone did not have the expertise or the resources to deal with child abuse. Interagency cooperation and collaboration was seen as a way to maximize limited resources by bringing together different disciplines to deal with the issues associated with child abuse. In an effort to use the available resources more effectively and reduce the trauma to children, the federal government enacted the Children’s Justice and Assistance Act of 1986 that encouraged states to establish multidisciplinary taskforces aimed at improving the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases (Jacobsen, 2001). These efforts led to increased recognition for the need to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to child abuse. Consequently, the majority of states adopted the approach, including some states that mandated the use of multidisciplinary teams (National District Attorneys Association, 2010).

Prior to that federal legislation, one community already recognized the need to coordinate the work of agencies responsible for child abuse cases. In 1985, former Congressman Robert E. "Bud" Cramer (AL), who was then District Attorney in Madison County, Alabama, organized an effort to create a better system to help children in suspected cases of child abuse (National Children’s Advocacy Center [NCAC], 2013). At that time, little coordination and cooperation existed between child protective services, law enforcement, and prosecution agencies. The processes and procedures associated with child abuse investigations often resulted in fragmented, repetitive, and sometimes frightening experiences for children that caused additional emotional stress for child abuse victims and their families. Through former Congressman Cramer's efforts to pull together law enforcement, criminal justice, child protective services, medical and mental
health workers into one coordinated team, the child advocacy center (CAC) model was
developed (NCAC, 2013). With the success of this model on the local level, the National
Children’s Advocacy Center earned a national reputation and began training other communities
interested in implementing the CAC model. Subsequently, The National Children’s Program
Advocacy Center Act of 1992 provided funding for child advocacy centers that resulted in the
number of child advocacy centers growing from approximately 50 in 1994 to more than 800
Although different models for child abuse investigations exist, the child advocacy center model
serves as the basis for much of the existing research involving child abuse investigations.

Significance

The historical context provides a background for understanding how the professionals
responsible for child protection began to recognize one agency alone did not have all the
expertise necessary to deal with the complex issues often associated with child abuse and how
the methods used to investigate allegations of suspected child abuse could cause additional
trauma to child abuse victims. In an effort to use the available resources more effectively and
protect children during the investigative process, federal legislation led to the development of
specialized organizations ranging from child abuse units in prosecutors’ offices to
multidisciplinary teams across investigative agencies to comprehensive children’s advocacy
centers (Cross, Walsh, Simone, & Jones, 2003).

Now almost thirty years since the federal government enacted that legislation, child abuse
and neglect remains a major social problem in the United States and elsewhere. In 2012,
suspected child abuse and neglect referrals to child protective service agencies involved
approximately 3.2 million children in the United States (Children’s Bureau, 2013). Of that
number, 678,810 children were found to be victims of child abuse and neglect, including 124,544 physically abused and 62,936 sexually abused children. There were 1,593 children who died as a result of child abuse and neglect (Children’s Bureau, 2013). Clearly, child abuse remains a significant social problem and how collaboration among different disciplines affects team functioning in child abuse investigations holds importance.

**Theoretical Framework**

Grounded theory is intended to “build theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). However, existing theories provide a foundation for understanding the interactions between team members as well as understanding the procedures used to conduct the study. The systems perspective orients my understanding to the complex roles, boundaries, and interactions that occur between different disciplines represented on multidisciplinary teams responsible for investigating child abuse reports. This perspective includes the idea that systems are composed of interrelated members and that each part of the system impacts the other parts and the system as a whole (Hutchinson, 2008). Therefore, the systems perspective provides an overarching view for the development of a theory related to collaboration among members of these teams.

In addition to the systems perspective, social constructionism and symbolic interactionism provide further theoretical bases for interpreting and understanding how team members view collaboration between themselves and other members of their multidisciplinary team. Fisher (1991) describes social constructionism as based on the premise that “our actions depend upon the meanings we give to ourselves, to events and to relations between the two” (p. 5). While emphasizing autonomy and personal responsibility, Fisher (1991) also points out that even though individuals construct their own views of the world based upon their experiences, the
process is not mutually exclusive and always occurs in relation to others. He also related constructivism to systems theory by describing how “each element in a system provides conditions of operation for other elements in the system” (Fisher, 1991, p. 15). In the current study, social constructivism holds particular importance for understanding collaboration among team members by explaining how individuals perceive collaboration partially through their own construction but also partially through their interactions with others.

The theory of symbolic interactionism supports the framework provided by social constructivism and the grounded theory approach to the study. Blumer (1969) explained that symbolic interactionism is based upon the premise that “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings which these things have for them” (p. 2) and that these meanings “arise in the process of interaction between people” (p. 4). The theory emphasizes the ongoing learning process of the individual who interprets and assigns meaning to an event, uses that meaning in a new experience, and subsequently revises the meaning based on the interpretation and meaning arising from the new experience. Milliken and Schreiber (2012) argued that symbolic interactionism positively contributes to grounded theory and that the methods and techniques used in that research approach are based upon symbolic interactionism.

In conclusion, systems theory, social constructionism, and symbolic interactionism provided the framework for understanding how multidisciplinary team members perceive collaboration and its effect on team functioning. The theoretical framework described here also provided the philosophical underpinning for the use of constructivist grounded theory for the study. Although these existing theories help to explain how the study participants perceived collaboration and its effect on team functioning, they did not limit the coding or impose predetermined concepts on the themes that emerged from the data in the current study.
**Intent of the Study**

The study intends to provide understanding of how front-line members of multidisciplinary teams perceive collaboration and its effects on team functioning in child abuse investigations. This section explains the intent of the study and includes definitions relevant to the major components and a discussion of the mode of inquiry procedures used to carry out the study.

I offer the following definitions of the foci of the study. The definition of multidisciplinary teams provided by Ellis (1998) where he described the roles and responsibilities of team members in response to child abuse and neglect reports provides a framework for understanding multidisciplinary teams in child abuse cases:

A group of professionals work together in a coordinated and collaborative manner to ensure an effective response to reports of child abuse and neglect. Members of the team represent the government agencies and private practitioners responsible for investigating crimes against children and protecting and treating children in a particular community. A multidisciplinary team may focus on investigations; policy issues; treatment of victims, their families, and perpetrators; or a combination of these functions. (p.5)

The literature frequently refers to the term ‘collaboration’ and often defines it as working together to achieve a common goal. The following definition expands upon that idea and appears relevant to the topic of multidisciplinary teams in child abuse investigations. Appley and Winder (1977) defined collaboration as:

A relational system in which individuals share mutual aspirations and a common conceptual framework, justice and fairness characterize interactions among individuals, and aspirations and conceptualizations are characterized by each individual’s
consciousness of his/her motives toward the other, by caring or concern for the other, and by commitment to work overtime provided that this commitment is a matter of choice.

(p. 281)

These definitions provide the basis for understanding why collaboration among team members holds importance and how team members perceive the actions, or in-actions, of other members of the multidisciplinary team.

The study intends to examine how collaboration affects team functioning in child abuse cases. It attempts to fill a small knowledge gap by obtaining the perspectives of a purposive sample of professionals whose work is critical to the safety and well being of children. Through the use of a constructivist grounded theory approach, the study aims to obtain the perspectives of multidisciplinary team members to develop a theory that explains how collaboration affects team functioning in child abuse investigations. These findings may hopefully contribute to more efficacious team functioning thus improving outcomes for children and families involved in child abuse cases.

Central Question

The central question of “how do front-line members of multidisciplinary teams perceive collaboration and its effects on team functioning in child abuse investigations?” guides this qualitative inquiry.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The concept of collaboration is frequently found in published literature related to task groups and teamwork in general (Poole & Hollingshead, 2005; Hulse-Killacky, Killacky, & Donigian, 2001; LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Fatout & Rose, 1995). What is not so easily found is how collaboration works in teams specific to child abuse investigations. Beyond government publications and program descriptions that emphasize the need for collaboration, few studies discuss collaboration or its relationship to team functioning in child abuse investigations.

Using keywords, such as collaboration, multidisciplinary teams, and child abuse investigations, an exhaustive search in the databases of The University of Alabama library system, Google Scholar, the Child Welfare Information Gateway, and government websites was conducted. More than 60 peer-reviewed articles and government publications were identified and annotated in the search of information related to multidisciplinary teams in child abuse investigations.

Much of the early research describes how communities developed different models for responding to child abuse dependent upon the needs and resources available in the community. However, the ability of communities to be flexible in responding to child abuse holds importance for studies in which comparisons between different communities measure program effectiveness. Likewise, the nature and the purpose of interagency collaboration vary widely in practice (Jones, Cross, Walsh, & Simone, 2005), thus limiting empirical research on the effectiveness of collaboration in multidisciplinary teams. The majority of the research relies primarily upon
surveys of child protective service workers and law enforcement officers related to coordinating investigative activities (Cross et al., 2005; Sheppard & Zanirillo, 1996) and secondary data (Cross, Jones, Walsh, Simone, & Kolbo, 2007; Faller & Henry, 2000; Wolfteich & Loggins, 2007). Although two studies used qualitative methods (Jacobsen, 2002; Bell, 2001), I did not find any studies that used a grounded theory approach to study collaboration from the perspective of multidisciplinary team members.

In the following sections, I use the existing research to describe the different models that communities employ in response to child abuse reports. (These models served to guide the sampling strategy described in Chapter 3 Methods.) I also discuss the studies relevant to each model that provide information related to collaboration and team functioning. The models are presented in a chronology beginning with traditional child protective services.

**Traditional Child Protective Services**

The traditional child protective services investigative model refers to child abuse reports investigated by the public child welfare agency (Jordan et al., 2011). Prior to the implementation of multidisciplinary team legislation in the 1980s, most communities relied upon traditional child protective service units within local public welfare agencies to respond to reports of child maltreatment. Generally, when the county protective services unit received a report, the supervisor assigned the case to a protective service worker to investigate. That caseworker then interviewed the child, family members, and other collaterals to make a determination as to whether the allegations were substantiated and what, if any, further interventions were needed to ensure the safety of the child. Confidentiality policies restricted information sharing among different agencies, therefore child protective services conducted investigations independently of law enforcement and prosecution.
Today child protective service agencies remain responsible for assessing the child’s safety in response to child abuse reports. While child protective services are required to notify law enforcement of child abuse reports that involve criminal offenses, co-involvement of child protective services and law enforcement in the investigation of these reports depends upon the needs and resources of the local community.

Cross, Finkelhor, and Ormrod (2005) conducted one study that examined co-involvement of child protective services and law enforcement in response to child abuse reports. The researchers considered whether law enforcement participated with child protective services in the investigations and whether their involvement influenced placement decisions or child safety plans. The researchers found child protective services concerned that law enforcement was not adequately trained to interview children while law enforcement expressed concern that child protective services was not trained to collect evidence, properly conduct crime scene searches, or inform suspected offenders of their legal rights (Cross et al., 2005).

Despite these concerns, the study results indicated that law enforcement co-involvement with child protective services was “positively associated with a range of different child protective services interventions for victims” (Cross et al., 2005, p. 17). The researchers concluded that law enforcement involvement did not hinder child protective services and may enhance services to child abuse victims and their families (i.e., increased likelihood of allegations being determined substantiated and on-going services to support child and family functioning.) More importantly, Cross et al. (2005) found ‘no empirical justification’ for concerns about negative effects of law enforcement involvement in child protective services investigations. Similar to the rural areas in the current study, the researchers also found informal agreements between child protective service workers and law enforcement investigators who
coordinate their work by conducting home visits together and unofficially sharing information in the absence of ‘formal multidisciplinary teams’ (Cross et al., 2005). Hence, the study found support for child protective services and law enforcement working together in response to child abuse reports.

Although few studies focused only on traditional child protective services investigations, implementation of federal and state policies in the 1980s resulted in new approaches to child abuse investigations and inspired a number of research studies comparing traditional child protective services to the multidisciplinary team approach. The following study compared child abuse investigations in traditional child protective services to the multidisciplinary approach in one interagency program.

Martone, Jaudes, and Cavins (1996) compared traditional child protective services to the multidisciplinary approach used by one interagency program. The researchers examined child abuse investigations, and specifically child interviews, over a two-year period. The study found that traditional child protective investigations included children interviewed by police, interviews conducted in the home, and multiple interviews of children conducted by professionals from mandated agencies (Martone et al., 1996). The comparison multidisciplinary team used an established protocol to conduct child interviews observed by law enforcement, child protective services, prosecutors, and medical personnel. When compared to traditional protective services, the results of the multidisciplinary approach showed higher numbers of cases in which alleged perpetrators were identified, child sexual abuse allegations were substantiated, and alleged offenders were arrested. However, Martone et al. (1996) found that the multidisciplinary team approach did not differ from the traditional child protective services in the likelihood of the child abuse victim having to testify in court or in criminal case outcomes (i.e., trial outcomes,
indictments, and guilty pleas). Only five percent of the children in the study appeared as a witness in court (Martone et al, 1996). The results of this study seem to indicate that ‘children testifying in court’ or ‘criminal court outcomes’ may not accurately reflect the effect of the collaboration and coordination of a multidisciplinary approach to child abuse investigations. A coordinated, thorough child abuse investigation may reveal that abuse did not occur or perhaps criminal prosecution is counter to the needs of the child and/or family.

Some communities today still rely upon traditional child protective service investigations, when formal methods of coordinating child protective services and law enforcement investigations do not exist. Many communities have developed informal working agreements between child protective services and law enforcement in response to child sexual abuse and severe physical abuse reports. Faller and Palusci (2007) found that these communities use many of the same resources available to multidisciplinary teams in child advocacy centers. The researchers found that communities relying upon the traditional child protective service investigative model can achieve comparable levels of medical examinations, satisfaction with services, and criminal prosecution as those communities that use multidisciplinary teams within child advocacy centers to investigate child abuse (Faller & Palusci, 2007).

**Child Protection Teams**

The child protection team model first developed in Florida in 1978. Services provided by child protection teams include medical examinations, child and family assessments, multidisciplinary case reviews, forensic interviews, and expert courtroom testimony (Wolfteich & Loggins, 2007). Child protection teams are the responsibility of the Children’s Medical Services Program in the Florida Department of Health with each team being led by a medical director (Florida Senate, 2012). Florida state laws emphasize the importance of medical
diagnosis and evaluative services provided by child protection teams. The child protection teams in the current study included representatives from children and family services, law enforcement, medical, and mental health providers. Child protection teams often are involved in more complex and severe abuse investigations (e.g., severe physical abuse, sexual abuse, and medical neglect).

The research concerning collaboration and child protection teams is limited but Hochstadt and Harwicke (1985) conducted a study of one hospital-based child protection team responsible for diagnosing, evaluating, and treating child abuse. Hochstadt and Harwicke (1985) noted how a “surprisingly high percentage of the recommendations” (p. 368) made by the child protection team were followed by the other agencies represented on the team and ultimately attained by children and families. These recommendations included child placement (returning children home or placing children in foster care) and additional medical and/or mental health services. The fact that the team followed through on child placement recommendations seems to indicate a significant connection with child protective services as placement decisions are the responsibility of that agency. The researchers concluded that the multidisciplinary approach played an important role in securing services for abused children by providing accountability to ensure children and families received recommended services. Hochstadt and Harwicke (1985) also found that the child protection team reduced fragmentation and duplication of efforts through case coordination.

In a more recent study, Wolfteich and Loggins (2007) conducted a secondary data analysis of child abuse investigations in which they compared investigations conducted by one child protection team, one child advocacy center, and one child protective services agency. The child protection team described in this study attempted to target younger children under the age
of five years and placed equal emphasis on physical and sexual abuse, differing from the child advocacy center that focused on children through age twelve with priority given to sexual abuse cases. The results showed similar outcomes for child advocacy center and child protection team models (Wolfteich & Loggins, 2007). Both approaches reported higher frequencies of substantiated abuse and neglect than the traditional child protective services model, and similar outcomes for arrests and prosecution of perpetrators. Wolfteich and Loggins (2007) found law enforcement and the state’s attorney least represented on the multidisciplinary team, unlike other studies where law enforcement and prosecution agencies were dominant forces on multidisciplinary teams and in case review meetings (Bell. 2001; Bell & Feldman, 1999). This may have been influenced by the fact that law enforcement was not co-located with other child protection team members in the same facility. Co-location of team members was also perceived as a means of increasing collaboration and coordination of services in the establishment and growth of the child advocacy center model.

**Child Advocacy Centers**

The literature describes the child advocacy center (CAC) model as having an increasingly significant role in the investigation of child sexual abuse and other maltreatment in the United States (Cross et al., 2008). The multidisciplinary team represents a key component of the CAC model (Walsh, Jones, & Cross, 2003) required by the accreditation standards for child advocacy centers established by the National Children’s Alliance [NCA] (2011). These accreditation standards provide the only known national standards that guide the functioning of multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations. The purpose of the multidisciplinary team in the child advocacy center is “to coordinate intervention so as to reduce potential trauma to children and families and improve services, while preserving and respecting
the rights and obligations of each agency to pursue their respective mandates.” (NCA, 2011, p. 3) Multidisciplinary teams in child advocacy centers include representatives from local child protective services, law enforcement, prosecution, mental health, medical professionals, and advocates.

The CAC model evolved from a multidisciplinary approach first used in Huntsville, Alabama when District Attorney Robert Cramer organized a community-wide effort to create a better system for child abuse investigations (Newman & Dannefelser, 2005). The CAC model originated with the idea of co-locating law enforcement and child protective services in a facility of their own (Newman & Dannefelser, 2005). However, the literature does not indicate the number of child advocacy centers where child protective services, law enforcement, prosecution, and other agencies are co-located. Child advocacy centers may be administered by one agency represented on the multidisciplinary team and located within a larger organization, or it may be free standing and operated by private, non-profit agencies (Sheppard & Zangrillo, 1996). In 2014, more than 770 child advocacy centers provided services to 294,000 children in the United States (NCA, 2014).

The multidisciplinary team within child advocacy centers focuses on coordination of child interviews that take place in a neutral and child-friendly environment. Other team members observe the interview through either a one-way mirror or closed-circuit television system. Interviews are frequently recorded so team members may review them later. Many teams conduct case reviews during the course of the child abuse investigation when “team members meet to review evidence, discuss prosecution and child protection decisions, plan referrals to services, and coordinate communications with families” (Cross et al., 2005 p. 5).
The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency funded a major project to study the effectiveness of child advocacy centers (Crimes Against Children Research Center, 2014). The Multi-Site Evaluation of Children’s Advocacy Centers aimed to evaluate the impact of child advocacy centers on children, families, and communities. Prior to the project, Faller and Palusci (2007) described the research concerning the effectiveness of child advocacy centers as scant. The project provided the data for significant research related to key components of child advocacy centers including the activities of multidisciplinary teams.

One of the studies resulting from the multi-site evaluation was an analysis by Walsh, Simone, and Kolbo (2007) in which they addressed the question of whether child advocacy centers promoted interagency coordination. The researchers compared coordination of child interviews, joint investigations by child protective services and law enforcement, and interagency case review meetings in four communities with ‘well-established’ child communities to four non-CAC communities.

The results of that analysis indicated that traditional child protective services did not differ significantly from multidisciplinary teams in child advocacy centers in the number of child interviews (Cross et al., 2007). However, the researchers noted better coordination among the agencies and increased law enforcement involvement when child interviews were conducted in child advocacy centers. The use of joint investigations and case reviews varied among the communities in the study. Cross et al. (2007) offered the following explanation, “communities adapt to their particular structure, history, context, and goals” (p. 1050) and communities without child advocacy centers sometimes used joint investigations and case review meetings at levels that rivaled or exceeded that of the child advocacy centers with which they were paired for the
study. This holds importance for understanding the influence of environment on collaboration, such as urban versus rural areas where access to child advocacy centers may be limited.

In a commentary summarizing the research from the multi-site evaluation, Faller and Palusci (2007) noted that comparison communities without child advocacy centers performed as well as child advocacy centers on some outcomes. The researchers cited effective service coordination on the part of non-child advocacy center communities because they used many of the same resources to meet the service needs of children and families as CAC communities (Faller & Palusci, 2007). (This reflects similarities to the current study where some communities relied upon child advocacy centers in adjacent communities for forensic interviews and medical evaluations). Faller and Palusci (2007) also found that parents’ satisfaction with the investigation was based upon their child’s emotional state regardless of whether the child received services through a child advocacy center or not.

Faller and Henry (2007) also noted one particular finding involving the interaction between law enforcement and child protective service workers relevant to the current study. The researchers concluded that when multidisciplinary teams focus on criminal prosecution, child protective services workers may acquiesce to law enforcement investigators when they do not have sufficient evidence to charge sexual abuse. Thus, the researchers noted that child protective service workers may be influenced to determine abuse allegations unsubstantiated resulting in no additional follow-up or service provision to children and families (Faller & Henry, 2007). At least one study participant in the current study expressed concern about the need to remain objective and how the potential to be influenced by the opinions of other team members may be one negative aspect of collaboration.
Child Abuse Assessment Centers

Child abuse assessment centers, also known as multidisciplinary interview centers, developed in the 1990s following similar guidelines of child advocacy centers. Sheppard and Zangrillo (1996) referred to child assessment centers as alternatives to child advocacy centers when communities do not have adequate funding or sponsorship for the more comprehensive program. Child abuse assessment centers are designed to enhance joint investigations of child sexual and severe physical abuse and to reduce the trauma of repeated victim interviews. The primary role of child abuse assessment centers is to evaluate the child to determine whether abuse or neglect has occurred and does not include support and advocacy for the child and family (Joa & Edelson, 2004). An online search revealed that a number of child abuse assessment centers currently exist with the majority located in the state of California and the western United States.

Sheppard and Zangrillo (1996) conducted one study that surveyed child protective service workers and law enforcement officers associated with child abuse assessment centers, child advocacy centers, and traditional child protective service models to investigate child abuse. Even though the results of the study do not differentiate between multidisciplinary teams in child abuse assessment centers, the researchers noted that coordinating investigative activities between law enforcement and child protective services reduced the overall number of child interviews compared to traditional child protective service investigations. Child protective service workers and law enforcement officers also reported the following benefits to coordination between law enforcement and child protective services:

- Minimize the number of people involved in a case
- Enhance the quality of evidence for the criminal prosecution
• Provide essential information to family service agencies
• Minimize the likelihood of conflicts among agencies with different philosophies and mandates. (Sheppard & Zangrillo, 1996, p. 4)

Sheppard and Zangrillo (1996) found that law enforcement and child protective services agreed the presence of law enforcement in child abuse investigations provided an element of authority that child protective service workers needed. Law enforcement assisted child protective service workers when parents refused access to children. In situations involving imminent danger of children, law enforcement holds the authority to enter homes forcibly, if necessary, to take children into protective custody. In these high-risk situations, frontline, uniformed patrol officers often respond to assist child protective services rather than law enforcement investigators. In terms of case outcomes, child protective services and law enforcement were also in agreement that arresting and jailing offenders can at times provide more adequate protection than foster care or on-going child protective services (Sheppard & Zangrillo, 1996).

In addition, Sheppard and Zangrillo (1996) found conflicting information related to joint child abuse investigations reported by law enforcement and child protective services. Although the majority of law enforcement agencies reported they frequently conducted joint investigations with child protective services, public child welfare agencies reported that only 20% of their child abuse cases involved joint investigations with law enforcement. Of course, law enforcement and child protective services only conduct joint investigations in more serious child abuse cases, such as sexual abuse and severe physical abuse. Less serious reports of physical abuse and neglect are typically investigated by child protective services alone. The researchers noted a trend toward
higher abuse substantiation when agencies conducted joint investigations, but here again these cases typically involved more severe forms of child abuse.

Sheppard and Zangrillo (1996) also found that larger police departments tended to conduct more independent investigations of child sexual abuse while law enforcement in smaller jurisdictions considered joint investigations more helpful (probably because larger metropolitan police departments handled more cases overall). As shown in the current study, law enforcement in larger police departments complained about the turnover in child protective services personnel and constantly dealing with new and inexperienced child protective services workers.

In a more recent study of child abuse assessment centers, Joa and Edelson (2004) concluded that prosecutors were more likely to file charges on behalf of children interviewed at the child abuse assessment center versus children interviewed at other locations. The results concerning prosecution indicated the majority of the offenders from the child abuse assessment center cases pled guilty prior to trial compared to non-child abuse assessment center cases. Joa and Edelson (2004) also found more criminal charges filed for four to six-year-old children when the child abuse assessment center evaluated the children than when they were assessed elsewhere. The researchers credited child assessment centers with trained interviewers who limited leading questions, so that prosecutors perceived the children’s statements as more accurate and credible. The researchers also believed that having interviewers and medical examiners from the assessment center available to offer supporting testimony was helpful to prosecutors. The results from this study support the findings of the current study to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.
Justice Model of Child Abuse Investigations

The justice model of child abuse investigations refers to law enforcement being solely responsible for child abuse investigations. While seven states mandate the justice model for specific types of child abuse cases, the State of Florida transferred child abuse investigative responsibilities for child abuse cases in general to law enforcement in seven jurisdictions across the state (Jordan, Yampolskaya, Gustafson, Armstrong, McNeish, & Vargo, 2011). Beginning in 1997, the State of Florida began contracting with seven county sheriff’s offices that initially volunteered to accept responsibility for these investigations. At the time of the study conducted by Jordan et al. (2011), these protective service units inside the county sheriff’s offices were staffed by civilian child protective service investigators and led by either a member of law enforcement or a civilian director. Child abuse reports were received through a statewide child abuse hotline and then routed to the investigative unit in each jurisdiction. Jordan et al. (2011) conducted a comparison of the investigations conducted by law enforcement investigators to those conducted by child protective service workers within the public child welfare agency.

Jordan et al. (2011) found modestly higher rates of substantiated reports in instances of repeat maltreatment when law enforcement investigated. The researchers also found child protective services investigations more cost effective than law enforcement investigations and that the child protective service workers each completed an annual average of 30 more cases than the law enforcement investigators. Both models achieved almost 100% performance on starting investigations within 24 hours and completing investigations within 60 days. However, the researchers found younger children and non-minorities more likely to experience a recurrence of abuse and substantiated abuse following an initial unsubstantiated report. Jordan et al. (2011) recommended that policymakers examine the outcomes of law enforcement jurisdictions.
carefully before transitioning child protective services responsibilities from public child welfare agencies. Team members from one Florida county that relied upon the justice model participated in the current study.

**Gaps in Knowledge**

This section provides a summary of the areas that the researchers in the previous studies and others identified as ‘needing further study’ that relate to collaboration and multidisciplinary teams. Faller and Henry (2000) noted how much of the existing research focused on policies and practice related to children testifying in court. Given that the majority of child abuse cases never reach the prosecution phase (Martone et al.,1996), Faller and Henry (2000) indicated the need to focus future research elsewhere on the investigative system and recommended additional research concerning coordination of multidisciplinary teams. Cross et al. (2007) commented on the need for research to expand knowledge in general about best practices of multidisciplinary teams, while Sloper (2004) identified the need for research that focused not just on describing multidisciplinary team processes, but the factors underlying team processes and how they affect team functioning. The researchers also indicated the need for more studies concerning co-involvement of law enforcement and child protective services.

As previously mentioned, the quantitative study of multidisciplinary teams provides a particular challenge as teams tend to be individualized and based upon the unique needs of the particular communities where they are located. One particular comment in the literature by Faller & Palusci (2007) described the difficulty in comparing multidisciplinary teams from different communities as “comparisons of new Cadillacs to old Fords” (p. 1024). The literature also reflects the diversity of the methods used by different researchers to measure different aspects of multidisciplinary team involvement in child abuse investigations.
The research does not identify an instrument, or specific variables, that used to successfully measure collaboration and/or the effectiveness of multidisciplinary teams who respond to child abuse reports. For these reasons, no attempt was made to conduct a systematic review of the literature on the topic of collaboration in multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations.

Given the discourses on multidisciplinary teams provided in the prior research, it appears that a multidisciplinary team approach extends beyond joint investigations and coordination of child interviews. Collaboration holds importance for a community response to child abuse reports that can reduce trauma to children and families, while respecting the responsibilities and legal mandates of the disciplines represented on the team (Ells, 1998; National Children’s Alliance, 2011). The questions of how multidisciplinary team members perceive and experience collaboration and how collaboration affects team functioning remains unanswered in the current literature. Hence, the central question to be addressed in this study is “how do front-line members of multidisciplinary teams perceive collaboration and its effects on team functioning in child abuse investigations?”
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

In this chapter, the rationales for using qualitative inquiry and a grounded theory approach to conduct the study and the role of the researcher and reflexive comments are discussed followed by a description of the data collection procedures for sampling and analysis. Prior to initiating the study, the Institutional Review Board at The University of Alabama approved the study. (Refer to Appendix A for IRB protocol.) The Alabama State Department of Human Resources also provided an agreement of participation for the Alabama counties identified for the study. (Refer to Appendix B for SDHR agreement.) The study relied upon the support and cooperation of the National Children’s Advocacy Center, regional child advocacy centers, state and local government agencies, and the various team leaders, coordinators, and members representing child protective services, law enforcement, medicine, mental health, prosecution, and other professionals who serve on multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations.

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

Cresswell (2013) explains that qualitative research is used to ‘explore’ a complex problem or issue that requires detailed understanding. In studying the topic of multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations, the search of the literature prompted me to consider the question of ‘what makes a good team?’ Although the use of quantitative research methods was contemplated, I somehow always returned to research questions that began with ‘what’ or ‘how’ and the types of open-ended questions that qualitative inquiry is intended to
explore (Creswell, 2013). Different agencies being responsible for child abuse investigations led to the idea of collaboration, which for me means working together toward a common goal with persons holding a perspective different from your own. Although the term collaboration is mentioned throughout the literature concerning multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations, little is known about how team members perceive collaboration or how collaboration affects multidisciplinary team functioning. Researchers ascribe various meanings of collaboration in these studies, but none rely upon the study participants to define what collaboration means to them, how they experience it as members of multidisciplinary teams, or how team members think collaboration affects overall team functioning.

Creswell (2013) describes using qualitative inquiry to develop theories when existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem being examined by the researcher. As evidenced by the review of the literature, a definitive theory related to collaboration and its effect upon multidisciplinary team functioning in child abuse cases does not presently exist.

Another reason for choosing qualitative inquiry for this particular study is the complexity of responding to child abuse reports and how multiple systems interact on multiple levels. Team members are expected to work together to investigate child abuse, yet they have different roles and responsibilities to their respective agencies as well as the children and families they serve. Each team member is affected by interactions with systems outside the ones directly involved in the child abuse investigation (e.g., community resources, federal and state mandates). Collaboration among team members involves a complex interaction of people, policies, and procedures involved in child abuse investigations.
Rationale for Grounded Theory Approach

Upon evaluating the various approaches used in qualitative inquiry, grounded theory provided the best approach for studying the effect of collaboration on team functioning from the perspective of frontline team members. A grounded theory approach (Straus & Corbin, 1998) offered the opportunity to address the lack of knowledge regarding collaboration among team members representing different agencies and models of multidisciplinary teams. The use of grounded theory also offered the potential of constructing a theory that explained how collaboration affects the overall functioning of multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations from the perspectives of professionals involved directly with these cases. The grounded theory approach provided structure to guide me as a beginning researcher without limiting my ability to explore issues emerging during the data collection. The approach relies upon interviews with a carefully selected sample of persons (Padgett, 2008). Because the current study sought to obtain the perspectives of multidisciplinary team members, the techniques used in grounded theory provided the best way to obtain ‘insider information’ about collaboration.

The primary rationale for choosing this approach rather than other methods of qualitative inquiry related to the research question and the idea of proposing one theory for effective collaboration among multidisciplinary team members. In reviewing the literature and talking with other professionals in the field of child abuse investigations, there does not appear to be a prevailing theory that explains why some particular teams function more effectively than others. The literature and professionals frequently refer to the need for collaboration among team members (Axelsson & Axelsson, 2009; Bertram, 2008; Gardner & Cary, 1999; Darlington et al., 2005) leading to the central question of how front-line team members perceive collaboration and its effects of collaboration on team functioning.
A grounded theory approach using an constructivist framework enabled me to use the data gathered through the research study to develop a general explanation of collaboration among members of multidisciplinary teams. The views of a diverse group of team members representing different disciplines and different models of multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations shaped the theory presented in the following chapter.

**Epistemological Framework**

Constructivism provided the epistemological framework for the methods used to conduct the current study. Charmaz (2006) advances the grounded theory approach described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) through the use of a constructivist framework. Charmaz (2006) describes how “we construct our grounded theories though our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (p. 10). Relying upon a constructivist framework, my previous experiences as a practitioner provided a basis for connecting with the study participants and interpreting the meanings of their responses related to collaboration and team functioning.

Creswell describes using constructivism “to move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory” (p. 85). The study used the grounded theory approach to move beyond describing the process of how teams investigate cases to analyzing the perspectives of team members to understand what collaboration means and how it affects multidisciplinary team functioning. In conducting the study, I relied primarily upon the grounded theory method described by Strauss & Corbin (2009) and the constructivist perspective of grounded theory provided by Charmaz (2006, 2014).

Scholars more familiar with an epistemological framework from the objectivist end of the continuum may take issue with the bias introduced by the researcher’s previous experiences
However, the constructivist approach calls for the interpretation of meanings relying upon both the participant and the researcher. Although I perceived my practice experience as a strength, I made efforts to be aware of the implications of bias while conducting the research. The following section describes the role of the researcher and reflexivity and provides further discussion related to bias.

**Role of Researcher**

Padgett (2008) refers to the researcher in qualitative inquiry as the “instrument of data collection” (p. 2). Overall, my role in the study was to collect, synthesize, and interpret a substantive amount of data from members of multidisciplinary teams to develop a theory. It is important to note that although an interview protocol guided the line of questioning; it was merely a guide. Depending upon the response of the study participant, I relied upon my own knowledge and skills to follow-up on points that were consistent, or inconsistent, with the literature, previous interviews, and/or my own practice experience. In this section and the following one, I discuss my background in multidisciplinary teams, acknowledge my existing values and biases, and comment on the concept of reflexivity related to this study.

Early in my career as a supervisor of child protective services, I became a member of the first multidisciplinary child protection team established by the district attorney in a rural county of northern Alabama. The district attorney held case review meetings on a monthly basis where he met with local law enforcement and child protective service workers to review child abuse investigations involving child sexual abuse and severe physical abuse and neglect. As the protective service supervisor, I was responsible for knowing the status of the investigation for each child abuse case assigned to the protective service workers in my unit. My involvement included formal and informal case conferences and going into the field with my workers and
other members of the multidisciplinary team. I remained actively involved with the multidisciplinary team until transferring to another agency in 2003.

Upon retirement from state employment in 2006, I became the founding director of the Morgan County Child Advocacy Center where I wrote the multidisciplinary team protocol, trained team members, tracked child abuse cases referred to the team, and coordinated case review meetings held at the child advocacy center. Throughout my career as a social work practitioner, I experienced different degrees of collaboration among team members leading me to the initial question of what makes a good multidisciplinary team. When considering a topic for the dissertation, my thinking led to my role as a member of the multidisciplinary team and how working together with other members of the multidisciplinary team provided my most fulfilling and challenging moments as a child protection supervisor and child advocacy center director.

In terms of the relationship between conducting this study and my own values and biases, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that rather than attempt to bracket beliefs and perspectives it is more helpful for the researcher to acknowledge his/her biases and experiences and use what he/she learned through these experiences in the analytic process. Because of my prior work experiences, I identify closely with the roles, responsibilities, and challenges faced by child protective service workers in conducting child abuse investigations. However, I also relate to law enforcement officers because of friendships that I developed with various members of police and sheriff’s departments during the course of my career. I recognize that these prior experiences and relationships may bias my perceptions of particular disciplines represented on multidisciplinary teams.

To monitor the effect of my values and biases, I gave particular attention to my emotional reactions to comments concerning the work of child protective service workers and supervisors.
Comments made by child protective workers and supervisors generally evoked a positive emotional response for me. I identified with these individuals and perceived what they say as truth because of the lived experiences I share with them. Similarly, criticisms of child protective service workers and supervisors coming from individuals outside the field of child welfare evoked my feelings of defensiveness. However, I received these comments differently when initiated by law enforcement or other disciplines represented on the multidisciplinary team. Because of their involvement in child abuse investigations, I perceived these professionals as more understanding of the challenges faced by child protective service workers. Even though I may become defensive when I perceived criticisms of their work, my expectations of child protective service workers’ knowledge and behaviors remained higher than for other members of the multidisciplinary team. Being aware of my values and biases and efforts to address the effect of these issues on the interpretation of the data are discussed in greater detail in the section on strategies to ensure trustworthiness on p. 50.

**Reflexive Comments**

Creswell (2013) explains reflexivity as the researcher’s awareness of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study. The first step, which to some extent I accomplished in the prior section, was to describe my previous involvement in a county multidisciplinary team. However, my own experiences related to collaboration go much deeper than just a description of my roles and responsibilities. Through collaboration, I established meaningful relationships that lasted for years and extended well beyond the eight-to-five hour working day. These relationships included professionals from other disciplines, including mental health and criminal prosecution, but in particular the law enforcement investigators and uniformed police officers responsible for child abuse reports.
As the researcher in this study, my position was to ensure that the voices of the team members were heard and accurately reflected in the study. In using a constructivist framework, attention was given to how my own experiences shaped the interpretation of the responses from the study participants. My perceptions of collaboration tend to be positive based upon my own experiences with the multidisciplinary team. However, multidisciplinary team members experience collaboration differently and sometimes perceive working with other agencies as burdensome. Using the semi-structured interview protocol described in the following sections helped prevent my own values and biases from influencing study participants through keeping the interview focused on their perceptions. I also monitored what my tone of voice and body language conveyed to the study participant to establish an environment where the study participant felt safe to discuss their positive and/or negative experiences of collaboration with other team members. As anticipated, certain comments triggered an emotional reaction for me. During several interviews, I found myself having to reframe from verbally agreeing or making ‘helpful’ comments in response to remarks made by child protective service supervisors. Similarly, I reminded myself to remain neutral when skeptical of study participants’ responses.

A reflexive journal was initiated and maintained to document my experiences, thoughts, and feelings surrounding events and decisions made during the research process. The journal served to document my journey through the research process and kept me aware of the potential influence of my values and biases. Ortlipp (2008) describes how keeping a reflexive journal is an accepted practice in qualitative research and that journaling gives clarity to the research process. Initially, the journal served to document the steps taken in the dissertation process and dates certain events occurred. However, the journal evolved into a record of the decisions made during the course of the study and a means of checking my decision-making. The journal
provided a central location to document reflexivity and my reactions to specific interviews. Recording in the journal provided an opportunity to discuss the interviews where I practiced remaining neutral and bracketing my feelings about the study participants’ responses. The journal served as a data source for decision making related to coding during the data analysis.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The study examined how the members of multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations perceived the effect of collaboration on team functioning. The following sections include a discussion of the sampling strategy, study sites, and theoretical sampling. The following section entitled ‘Gathering Data’ provides the rationale for the data collection procedures used in the study followed by a discussion of the interview protocol and the preliminary pilot findings used to refine the questions. This section concludes with a discussion of strategies to ensure trustworthiness and ethical concerns as well as how the study procedures addressed these issues.

**Sampling Strategy**

Padgett (2008) suggests 20-30 study participants in a grounded theory approach but the number may vary depending upon the topic and information provided by study participants. The overall sample in the current study was comprised of 43 participants involved in piloting the interview protocol, study interviews, and/or theoretical sampling.

**Inclusion Criteria.** Professionals currently serving on multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations were asked to participate in the study. Study participants included front-line team members who work as case managers, child protective service workers, forensic interviewers, law enforcement detectives, medical and mental health professionals, and prosecutors with direct responsibilities related to child abuse investigations.
Only front-line team members were included because these professionals work directly with the child, family, and representatives from other agencies to investigate child abuse. Front-line supervisors from child protective services and law enforcement were included in the study sample because often they represent their agency at case review meetings and have regular contact with team members from other disciplines.

**Exclusion Criteria.** Professionals holding administrative positions in agencies represented on multidisciplinary teams were excluded from participating in the study. Although agency administrators and program supervisors may attend team meetings, they do not work directly with children, families, or the other agencies responsible for child abuse investigations. While their support to front-line team members is important, their work does not focus on child abuse investigations nor routinely require time to coordinate their daily work activities with representatives from other agencies responsible for investigating child abuse reports.

With these criteria in mind, I relied upon both personal and professional contacts to develop a purposive sample of team members representing different disciplines and models of multidisciplinary teams in order to obtain a number of diverse perspectives. In the next section, I described the process used to identify and recruit study participants from local jurisdictions in each of the study sites.

**Study Sites**

I sought to interview team members from communities relying upon different models of multidisciplinary team response as described in the previous chapter to obtain diverse perspectives that could provide “rich text” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 18) and “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) in keeping with the tradition of qualitative inquiry. States using the different
models described in Chapter 2 to respond to child abuse reports were selected for the study. The sites were counties located in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and California.

**Alabama.** To identify potential study participants using a traditional child protective services model, the Alabama Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers provided a list of counties not currently covered under the auspices of a child advocacy center. In Alabama, nine rural counties currently rely upon a traditional child protective services model to coordinate child abuse investigations with local law enforcement and district attorneys’ offices. I then applied for and received an agreement of participation from the Alabama State Department of Human Resources that ensured the cooperation of the county director in each of these counties. Once that agreement was obtained, I contacted the county director in three of these counties to elicit their support and to obtain contact information for the child protective service supervisor. Each county director provided contact information for the child protective services supervisor who was then contacted by phone and provided the study invitation and informed consent form via email. The child protective services supervisors who agreed to participate also identified and provided contact information for other team members representing different agencies to contact as potential study participants. Each potential study participant received an email invitation that included the informed consent. I interviewed twelve team members (including five pilot interviews) representing child protective services, forensic interviewers, law enforcement, mental health, and prosecution from five counties in Alabama.

**Florida.** In the state of Florida, the child protection team model is used in response to child abuse reports in the majority of counties while seven jurisdictions respond with the judicial model (Jordan et al, 2011). In seeking potential study participants here, I relied upon my faculty advisor to connect me with the program directors associated with two child protection teams.
These program directors were contacted to explain the purpose of the study and asked to share information about the study with members of the team. The study information included the informed consent form and contact information so that individual team members willing and available to participate in the study could contact me directly. The program directors subsequently forwarded the information on to members of their respective teams who agreed to participate in the study. In addition to the study participants recruited through the child advocacy center directors and/or team coordinators, I contacted a sergeant within the sheriff’s department in one of these counties and through him was able to interview an investigator from the child abuse unit. While I on-site at one of the agencies, I also was able to arrange a brief interview with the physician from the local child protection team. Thirteen study participants representing case management, child protective services, law enforcement, forensic interviewing, and medical and mental professionals from two jurisdictions were interviewed in Florida.

**Georgia.** The majority of communities in Georgia use the child advocacy center model in response to child abuse reports. I relied upon personal contacts made with team members during a national child abuse symposium to recruit study participants from a rural community located in central Georgia. I contacted the law enforcement investigator and forensic interviewer via phone and email to provide study information and both agreed to participate. The law enforcement investigator also provided the name of the local child protective services supervisor who also agreed to participate in the study. Thus three team members from one rural county in Georgia were interviewed.

I also attempted to arrange to interview team members from an urban area in Georgia, but unfortunately was unable to receive permission from the local law enforcement agency for the investigator to participate. Despite efforts to work with the child advocacy center in that county,
I was unable to secure the interest and thus the involvement of the local team members to participate in the study.

**California.** Four jurisdictions within the state of California served as interview sites for the study because the multidisciplinary child interview center model exists primarily in California. However, it is important to note that many multidisciplinary interview centers in that state also meet the accreditation standards for child advocacy centers. Recruitment was focused on jurisdictions with teams that identified as ‘multidisciplinary child interview centers.’ Based upon available resources and my familiarity with the region, counties in northern California were initially identified as potential study sites. Using a list from the California Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers’ website, I attempted to contact the team coordinator for a number of multidisciplinary interview centers in the northern California region. Although this resource provided one potential study participant, much of the contact information listed was obsolete.

I then contacted the executive director from the California Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers who emailed the center directors in three counties information about the study at my request. Her outreach efforts provided another team coordinator who assisted in recruitment efforts in a different county. The executive director of the National Children’s Advocacy Center facilitated my contact with the director of a multidisciplinary interview center in northern California who assisted in recruiting study participants from the local team. Because of my prior relationship with the parent of a medical professional who practices in California, I identified and secured interviews with team members from a child advocacy center in a metropolitan area. Fifteen team members from four jurisdictions in the state of California participated in the study. These team members included representatives from child protective services, forensic interviewing, law enforcement, medical and mental health, and prosecution.
Theoretical Sampling

As the study proceeded, I recognized the need for theoretical sampling to identify participants to provide information to refine the categories that emerged from the initial interviews. Charmaz (2006) suggests theoretical sampling in order to develop the properties of categories until no new properties emerge or to achieve saturation of the categories with data. Theoretical sampling may involve interviewing initial study participants more than once or recruiting additional team members.

In conducting and transcribing the Florida interviews and memo writing, common themes emerged which led to the need to sample study participants directly involved in the investigation process. I subsequently focused on recruiting study participants from child protective services, law enforcement, and forensic interviewers who were more involved in the investigative process and dependent on the outcomes. Case managers and mental health professionals stated that they were not as involved in the child abuse investigation and had difficulty responding to questions about collaboration and its effect upon team functioning. This finding was not surprising considering that multidisciplinary team protocols often distinguish these roles as separate from investigative responsibilities.

Theoretical sampling continued to focus the interviews on the professionals more directly involved in the investigation to shed light on categories that emerged during the early interviews of study participants in Georgia and California. Although I continued to use the same interview protocol, I explored more closely the meaning study participants gave to familiar categories by asking study participants to explain further about such topics as building trusting relationships and describing the qualities of effective collaboration. Time was taken to delve more deeply into the study participant’s perceptions of categories mentioned in earlier interviews.
Gathering Data

The nature of qualitative inquiry requires extensive fieldwork so gathering data took place in communities where different models of multidisciplinary teams were located. I conducted semi-structured interviews with members of multidisciplinary teams from the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and California. Previous research demonstrates that face-to-face interviews are preferred for data collection in qualitative research when social cues (i.e. tone of voice, body language) hold importance for the interpretation of the study participant’s non-verbal communication and to aid in the facilitation of the interview process (Opdenakker, 2006). In the current study, team members also appeared to be more inclined to participate because they appreciated the effort put forth in conducting the interview face-to-face and thus the importance of his/her contribution to the study findings.

Each study participant selected the location for the interview. Although most interviews occurred in his/her place of employment, the location remained flexible to provide an optimal level of comfort and confidentiality for each study participant. It was important to ensure an interview environment conducive to the study participant feeling safe to discuss their experiences openly and honestly. Each interview averaged from 30 to 60 minutes.

All of the study participants signed written permission to audio record their interviews. Study participants were offered the opportunity to review transcripts of their individual interviews to ensure accuracy and completeness of the text. Study participants were allowed to modify the text through additions or deletions. Ultimately, none of the study participants made revisions to their respective transcribed interview. In addition to the audio recording of the interviews, handwritten field notes captured the non-verbal communications of each study participant and served as reminders when follow-up questions were needed to clarify specific
comments. The field notes were written directly onto the individual interview protocol form either during or immediately following the interview. The field notes served as a source of information for the data analysis.

**Interview Protocol**

An interview protocol comprised of open-ended questions supported the central question of how multidisciplinary team members perceive collaboration and its effects on team functioning. The construction of the interview protocol relied upon a technique called “scaffolding” (Choi, Land, & Turgeon, 2005, p. 483) in which one question provides the foundation for the following question.

Upon meeting each study participant, a few minutes were dedicated to rapport building usually in the form of small talk related to the weather or current events. Each interview began by asking the study participant to talk about their background to provide an opportunity for narrative practice and establish a conversational tone for the interview. In order to place the question into a context that translates to multidisciplinary team members representing different disciplines, I then asked the study participant to discuss how he/she came to be part of a multidisciplinary team (i.e., how long they have been a member of the team, trainings they may have received, and whether they served as team member, coordinator, or leader). The logic for this line of inquiry was to understand whether the roles held by study participants offered different vantage points for the processes that shaped their views of collaboration.

The following is a list of guiding questions related to collaboration included in the protocol prior to the findings from the pilot interviews:

1. Describe your work as a member of the multidisciplinary team.

2. What do you need from other team members to do your work?
3. How effective would you say that other team members are in meeting your needs?

4. What you think the other team members need from you to do their work?

5. How effective do you believe you are in meeting the needs of other team members?

6. How does working with a team generally affect your investigation findings?

7. Can you provide an example of how working with a team affected your investigation findings?

8. What does the term collaboration mean to you?

9. In general, how have your investigations been strengthened by collaboration with team members? Can you provide examples?

10. In general, how have your investigations been harmed by collaboration with team members? Can you provide examples?

11. Overall, how well do you think your team works together? Why?

12. Is there anything else you think that I need to know to understand about your work as a member of the multidisciplinary team or collaboration with other members of the team?

In addition to the above questions, the interview protocol also included the following questions during the piloting phase only:

13. What revisions or deletions would you make to the existing questions to enhance the ability of study participants to respond to the central inquiry of the study (how collaboration affects team function)?

14. What additional questions would you suggest in order to help study participants describe their experiences with collaboration on the multidisciplinary team?
While these questions comprised the core of the interview protocol, further follow-up questions encouraged study participants to clarify or deepen the detail of their initial responses. The intention of these questions was to invite study participants to assign meaning and share more details about their perceptions and experiences (i.e., ‘Tell me more about what you mean when you say’ or ‘What is your experience with?’) Because the purpose of the interview was to obtain the perspective of the individual team member, it was important to understand not only what the study participant perceived but what meaning they ascribed to these perceptions. The open-ended questions served as invitations to study participants to provide the “rich text” (Chamaz, 2006, p. 18) needed to build grounded theory.

**Preliminary Pilot Findings**

Piloting the interview questions and structure of the interview protocol was conducted to reduce confusion or truncated responses from study participants (Fassinger, 2005). Five professionals representing child protective services, forensic interviewer, law enforcement, mental health, and prosecution from multidisciplinary teams in the North Alabama area were recruited to pilot the interview protocol. These professionals were current members of multidisciplinary teams representing four different jurisdictions. The process for recruitment was much the same as ‘regular’ study participants. Each received an email invitation providing a brief overview of the study along with the informed consent form. I worked with each of these team members in the past and purposively selected them because of their multidisciplinary team experience. Each pilot study participant signed the written informed consent and agreed to be audio recorded. I used the findings from these interviews to evaluate and revise the interview protocol. The content of these interviews was not included in the data analysis intended to respond to the central research question due to potential bias.
Pilot interview participants recommended minor revisions to questions ten and twelve in the original interview protocol. Two pilot interview participants commented that the word ‘harmed’ in question ten sounded harsh and suggested using an alternative. One suggested instead using the phrase ‘made more difficult.’ Both also suggested that the wording of question twelve was confusing, and they were unsure about how to respond. Based upon these preliminary pilot findings, question ten was amended to read “In general, how have your investigations been made more difficult by collaboration with team members?” and question twelve was separated into two questions. Refer to Appendix C for the final scripted interview protocol used to conduct the face-to-face interviews.

**Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness**

A trustworthy study is “one that is carried out fairly and ethically and whose findings represent as closely as possible the experiences of the respondents” (Steinmetz (1991) as cited in Padgett, 2008, p. 184). Padgett (2008) explains three types of threats to trustworthiness that exist in qualitative studies. The first ‘reactivity’ involves how the presence of the researcher affects the participants’ beliefs and behaviors. Paterson (1994) identifies five primary sources of reactivity: emotional valence, distribution of power, importance of interaction, goal of interaction, and the effect of culture. Emotional valence refers to the extent that the study participants feel they can trust the researcher to share information with them. To establish a basis for that trust in the current study, I emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary in the study invitation. Study participants chose the time and location for the interviews. Efforts focused on being straightforward in providing information about what the study was about and how the information they provided would be shared and protected. Prior to beginning the interview, I explained the rationale for the study and the context in which the research was
conducted (i.e. under the supervision of a carefully chosen committee with chair possessing expertise in the area of child abuse investigation). Although I sometimes shared brief information about my own background, I focused on the role of the study participant as the ‘expert’ and their importance to the study. Often times study participants inquired as to whether they answered a question “correctly” or “was that what you wanted?” In these instances, I explained that no right or wrong answers existed and how their perceptions of their own experiences held importance for the study.

The second threat to trustworthiness involves the researcher’s own preconceptions and personal opinions that may affect the researcher’s observations, interpretations, and overall approach to the study (Paterson, 1992). In the current study, I relied upon a key informant to identify the study participants as one way of controlling for sampling bias. For the most part, agency directors and team coordinators identified multidisciplinary team members interested in participating in the study. Although team members known professionally to the student piloted the interview protocol, the findings from the preliminary pilot interviews were used only to construct the final interview protocol. The content from the pilot interviews was not used in the data analysis to address the central question of the research.

Awareness provides another way to control bias on the part of the researcher. In gathering data for the study, I remained alert to the possible influences of my previous relationships and experiences. The qualitative literature often describes the use of “bracketing” (Padgett, 2008, p. 35) to set aside preconceived ideas about either study participants or their experiences. However, Charmaz (2006) discusses how the researcher’s preconceptions “embedded in class, race, gender, age, and historical era may permeate an analysis outside of the researcher’s awareness” (p. 67). Bracketing personal experiences presented a challenge in this
study as constructivist grounded theory requires the researcher to interpret the information obtained from study participants (Charmaz, 2006). When interpreting the data, I sometimes struggled to avoid the temptation to force the data into codes that emerged during the coding of previous interviews. To address the issue, I re-read the interview question and considered the individual study participant and what they said within the context of the interview as a whole. Often I asked myself aloud ‘what is this person really saying here.’ In order to ensure that my codes accurately reflected the perceptions and experiences of the study participants, I wrote a memo related to each interview immediately and whenever possible transcribed and coded the interview prior to conducting the next scheduled interview.

Other doctoral students from outside the study also coded portions of de-identified interview data to compare with my initial coding of the interview data. This exercise helped me determine how my coding reflected the described perceptions and experiences of the study participant and created a clear connection between the data and my codes. Being aware, consulting regularly with my committee, journaling, and peer debriefing helped maintain my focus on accurately reflecting the perceptions and experiences of the study participants.

The final threat to trustworthiness involves ‘respondent bias’ that Padgett (2008) describes as more difficult for the researcher to detect and manage. Respondent bias may present in the form of respondents not openly sharing their perceptions or experiences for fear of not wanting either themselves, or perhaps in this case, their agencies or disciplines to appear in a bad light. Establishing a trusting relationship with the study participant depends upon the researcher’s ability to reassure the study participant about the confidentiality of the information they provide. The researcher must be open with the participant about the use of the information and access to the information. Prior to the interview, each study participant received a written
description of the study, including the purpose of the study and risks and benefits of participation. I informed each team member that participation in the study was voluntary. Before and after each interview, I asked the study participants if they had questions or concerns and their issues were dealt with as openly and honestly as possibly. Participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews and modify the content. During discussions that took place prior to each interview, I emphasized the steps taken to protect their individual identity as well as the identity of their agency and multidisciplinary team. In the following section, the steps taken to ensure the privacy of study participants, confidentiality of data, and other ethical concerns are discussed in greater detail.

**Ethical Concerns**

Prior to contact with any potential study participant or any form of data collection, the Institutional Review Board of The University of Alabama approved the study. Local permissions from the multidisciplinary team, agencies represented on the team, and/or oversight organization were obtained when necessary. Often the agency director or program coordinator sought and obtained these permissions prior to my arrival at the site.

The study posed minimal risk to privacy and confidentiality as study participants were interviewed individually and privately in a location deemed private by the participant. Study participants were over the age of 21 years and professionals currently working in agencies or professions responsible for child abuse investigations. Other than arranging for the study and the actual interview, study participants were not involved in the on-going study; however, they were offered an opportunity to review and edit their respective interview transcripts.

Prior to any data collection, individual study participants received written information about the study in order to make an informed decision about whether they wanted to participate.
Typically the agency director or program coordinator forwarded an email invitation from me that included a brief overview of the study and the informed consent form. I also restated that information verbally prior to the commencement of the interview. The decision of the team member to participate, or not, was confidential and not shared with anyone beyond the participant and myself. Study participants indicated their willingness to participate by signing a consent form that included a separate statement indicating whether or not they agreed for the interview to be audio recorded. The signed consent forms are stored in a secure file separately from other study documentation that could be used to link study participants to data. As anticipated, occasionally the team leader or coordinator inquired about the identity of a study participant. In response, I explained that information about study participants and their participation was confidential. The issue was also addressed in the written study information as well as verbally with potential study participants. Although the study often uses quotes from individual study participants to illustrate or provide support for the interpretations of the data, efforts were made to de-identify the sources to protect their confidentiality. In addition, some study participants shared information “off the record” and in those instances such comments were not included in either the transcribed interview or the field notes. Only the date and time associated with the interview was audio recorded and/or written in the field notes.

Data was protected and kept confidential by transporting signed written consent forms, field notes, and the digital recordings in a locked brief case. Upon return to the University of Alabama, the data was stored separately in secure locations within the School of Social Work. In order to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data, each interview was transcribed within 72 hours, or as soon as possible. Once the interview was transcribed, the audio recordings were transferred to a jump drive and stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office separate
from the signed consent forms, interview protocols, transcribed interview documents, or any other information that could identify study participants or link them to specific data. Once the study is completed and approved by the dissertation committee, the audio recordings will be destroyed.

The transcribed interviews included only the date/time of the interview. Other than the state where the interview occurred, no other information that could be used to identify the study participant was transcribed from the audio recordings. (The name of the state was retained in order to provide the context for the interview data.) The transcribed interviews were stored as password-protected Word documents on a computer that required password access. Each interview was assigned a unique password. The interview protocol form and any handwritten notes were stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. As overnight travel was involved during data collection, the signed consent forms, handwritten field notes, not-yet-transcribed interview audio recordings, and laptop were stored in a locked briefcase. Once transcribed, I uploaded de-identified interviews into the secure cloud storage Box available to University of Alabama students.

A master list of the names of the study participants that included the date/time of each study participant interview was kept separately from the data and stored as an encrypted Word document on a password protected computer. The documents uploaded into the NVivo computer software program did not contain any names or demographic or geographic information that could be used to identify individual or specific teams associated with the study. Data stored on the computer was backed up frequently when information was added, deleted, or revised. Back-up copies of data were stored on external devices (i.e., jump drives) that were password protected and stored in a secure location. Two graduate students involved in peer debriefing received de-
identified transcripts of interviews. Each student received one hardcopy of one interview that they stored in a secure location until returning the copy of the interview and their handwritten notes to me.

**Data Analysis**

Constructing grounding theory requires the researcher move from the experiential text to a theoretic text (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to facilitate this process and ensure accuracy and completeness of the interviews, the audio recordings of participant interviews were transcribed within 72 hours following the interview, or as soon as possible. A corresponding memo regarding the interview findings was written in conjunction with the transcription of each recording. While transcribing the interviews, I engaged in constant comparisons (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) throughout the data collection process by iterative reading of the text and corresponding memos written at the time of the interview transcription. The data analysis plan for the qualitative study involved the following steps: data organization, reading and writing memos, describing the data, classifying the data, interpreting the data, and representing or visualizing the data (Cresswell, 2013).

**Organizing the Data**

In order to begin the process of constructing a grounded theory, the face-to-face interviews were first transcribed into computerized documents then uploaded into the software program. I transcribed the majority of the interviews myself, but employed an experienced professional to transcribe four interviews later in the research process when my time became more limited. In transcribing the interviews, I found value in listening to the study participants as I listened and typed the interviews. The process of transcribing allowed me to focus on the meaning of what they said and be reminded of the emotions that accompanied their verbal
responses. In short, transcribing the interviews enabled me to feel more connected to the data and therefore better able to interpret the meaning of the study participants’ responses.

The NVivo 10 for Mac, version 10.0.3, the software program for qualitative research helped to organize and store the texts once each interview was transcribed. I frequently relied upon the software program to retrieve data during the data analysis.

**Reading and Writing Memos**

The next step in the data analysis involved reading through each of the statements made by the study participant. Taking time to compare the text of newly transcribed interviews helped to identify emerging and recurring themes. This process of constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2013) demands that the researcher read and re-read the texts. It is important to note here that coding and memo writing work together in the construction of grounded theory. A memo for each interview was written usually concurrently with transcribing the interview to record my observations of the data and thoughts and ideas about potential categories emerging from the data. Additional memos were written that explained the rationale for codes identified during the initial phase of open coding. These memos served as the basis for the concepts developed during the axial phase of coding. Refer to Appendix D for two examples of memos written during the course of the data collection. The provided memos are unedited and faithfully reproduced as they were written in the field.

Writing memos about each interview and to explain each code helped to maintain clarity throughout the data analysis. Memos served to remind the researcher of the thinking behind particular codes or why specific texts were coded in particular ways.

**Describing Data into Codes**

Charmaz (2014) describes moving texts through a process that includes three phases of
coding: initial, focused, and selective. These codes are then used to form the categories that become the constructs that support the propositions that become the theory.

**Initial coding.** During the early data analysis, initial coding was used to begin to interpret and assign meanings to the themes emerging from the texts. Even though Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2006, 2014) define individual phases of coding, the process itself is by no means linear requiring movement back and forth between the coding phases as categories and concepts begin to emerge. Rather than coding for topics or themes, gerunds were used whenever possible in order “to gain a sense of action and sequence” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 120) as the study of ‘collaboration’ implies actions and interactions of individuals and groups.

Line-by-line coding was initially used to name each line in the written data. However, I found that fracturing the data into lines sometimes diminished or confused the meaning of the data. For example, the lines “That was important” and “I don’t know” considered on their own do not offer much information. Therefore, it was sometimes necessary to consider that line of the data in conjunction with the previous line(s) to understand the meaning in the data. In other words, efforts were made to code the complete thought conveyed by the individual study participant in order to interpret and code the meaning. Naming codes focused on using the words given in the data as gerunds to interpret the data, such as “valuing team” or “pushing to get something done.” Whenever possible, in-vivo codes using study participants’ terms were identified during the initial coding process to help preserve the meanings given to particular phenomena, such as “taking it case-by-case” or “agreeing to disagree.”

**Focused coding.** Focused or selective coding involves using the most significant and/or frequent initial codes to sift through and analyze large amounts of data (Charmaz, 2014). The first step involved reducing the initial codes to a manageable number. Much of the initial open
coding was revised and/or deleted enabling the remaining codes to become more focused. Duplicate codes were combined under the code thought to more representative of the data. Often initial codes were renamed to provide more distinct and less ambiguous codes.

Focused coding involved organizing and re-organizing the remaining initial codes into categories and writing memos to document the decision-making that took place during that process. I then sorted the remaining initial codes into categories according to the codes that appeared more frequently or significant than others. The initial codes were essentially grouped into new codes or recoded. For example, the initial codes ‘having different roles’ and ‘having different responsibilities’ were combined under the focused code ‘differing roles and responsibilities.’ Often the initial codes remained as sub-categories under each of the focused codes in order to access the actual data supporting each focused code. In order to develop the categories, the coded data within each code was carefully reviewed as to its content and meaning. The memos written during the initial coding were also reviewed/revised and used to guide the decision-making during the focused coding phase of analysis.

At this point in the process, the analysis began to move from the concrete to the abstract by using these selective codes to develop the constructs that formed the theory. Creswell (2013) describes ‘focused coding’ as the beginning of weaving together the findings to tell the analytic story that becomes the basis of the theory. Iterative readings of memos refined the thinking behind the interpretations. Key categories began to emerge during this coding phase leading to the identification of the core category or main theme of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Theoretical Coding

According to Charmaz (2014), the theoretical coding assists the researcher to specify possible relationships between categories developed through focused coding. Theoretical coding
was used to some extent as the framework for observations about the data and in telling the analytic story. Here the existing theories discussed in Chapter 1 and others that emerged during the data collection and analysis are integrated into the explanation of the categories and concepts and how they related to collaboration as perceived by the study participants. In particular interviews, the responses of study participants reflected existing theories that helped to explain why the study participant perceived collaboration in a given way. For example, identity theory holds importance for understanding how study participants perceived relationships with other team members. However, in keeping with the interpretivist framework described by Charmaz (2014), I did not attempt to apply existing theories to the data but allowed theory to emerge from the experiences of the study participants.

**Representing, Visualizing the Data**

The final stage of the data analysis was the construction of a theory to explain how collaboration affects team functioning in child abuse investigations. Reviewing and sorting the memos written throughout the data analysis was the first step. The memos then were used to identify and explain the central category (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The central category linked together the relevant sub-categories and offered an overarching explanation of the study findings. Integrating the memos associated with sub-categories provided the basis for the analytic story explaining the central category. The analytic story and the thought that went into linking the sub-categories form the basis for the grounded theory.

I used diagrams to sort the relationships between categories and to integrate the categories into a visual model of the theory. Diagramming was not limited to representing the final theory but occurred throughout the data analysis process. Even during the initial phase of coding, rough diagrams were drawn by hand to depict early ideas. The final stage of data
analysis involved an intensive process requiring much time for recalling and deliberation. The use of visual representations of categories and concepts were salient to this process by helping to clarify sequence and connections.

**Refining Theory**

The final stage of the analysis involved refining the theory by integrating the categories into a cohesive explanation of one theory that explains the effect of collaboration on multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations. The diagrams and memos helped to organize the categories developed during the earlier phases of the analysis. This process involved reading and refining the memos and writing new memos as connections among the categories emerged and/or became clear. I documented the logic for the decision-making in either a memo or the analytic journal.

The identified core category supporting the major categories provided the basis for the development of a detailed outline for the analytic story. I then reviewed the resulting framework for gaps in the logic and organized the written memos to fill in the information under each major category (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

**Validating Theory**

One method for validating theory in qualitative research involves member checking or taking ideas back to study participants for their confirmation (Charmaz, 2014). Several team members who participated in the study reviewed the concepts identified in the study. Their feedback helped to validate the theory. I also made further comparisons between the relationships among categories and/or concepts identified in the current study and those in the existing literature. The conceptual model was compared to previous models of collaboration developed by researchers in social work and other disciplines. The theory presented in the
following chapters represents one of many plausible interpretations from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The theory specifies the context and conditions under which the theory operates and implications for practitioners from social work and other disciplines.
CHAPTER 4

THE FINDINGS

This chapter reports the findings from the analysis of interviews with study participants. The findings describe the team members’ perceptions of the positive and negative effects of collaboration on team functioning in child abuse investigations. The findings serve as the basis for constructing one theory of how collaboration affects multidisciplinary team functioning in child abuse cases. The chapter includes a discussion of the logic used to identify the major categories leading to the core category. The process of conceptualizing the major categories to construct one theory of collaboration concludes the discussion.

The Meaning of Collaboration

The research question in the current study concerns how team members perceived the effect of collaboration on team functioning. Therefore, understanding the meaning that team members ascribed to collaboration held importance for interpreting the findings. Regardless of the discipline, study participants consistently defined collaboration in terms of interactions with other professionals on each of their respective teams. Often the meaning they assigned to collaboration included issues that became major categories as the study progressed. This section includes a sampling of the study participants’ responses when asked to explain the meaning of the term collaboration.

The team members who participated in the study seemed well aware that one discipline alone did not possess the expertise or resources to deal with the complexity of child abuse investigations. One physician described collaboration as “recognition that none of us do this
alone, that we each bring a particular area of expertise to the table, and that it’s really only
through recognizing the need to work with people who do things other than what we do, that you
are actually going to make a difference for a particular child and family.”

The study participants perceived collaboration as a way of using the other professionals
on the team to compensate for their own limited knowledge or resources. One assistant district
attorney with fifteen years of experience defined collaboration as:

So it’s called a ‘multidisciplinary team’ for a reason. I think every discipline has to have
a voice at the table so what collaboration means to me is each of the disciplines doing the
best they can for the kid with the tools they have as a discipline, bringing that to the table
and then saying ‘ok this what I can do, what can you suggest, what else might I do and let
me suggest, here’s what I can’t do, but I think this case and this kid might need, [and
what or] can the other disciplines pick up the ball in this regard?’

Some of the study participants discussed how collaboration with other team members provided
access to resources that helped them to achieve their own agencies’ goals. One attorney
described collaboration as, “first recognizing that each agency has a different goal and using
collaboration to work toward the goal of your own agency while, to the extent possible, helping
the other team members achieve their goals as well.”

Study participants frequently referred to collaboration as ‘coming together’ or ‘working
together’ and one team member specifically added, “… to effectively work together to help a
child, to share information, bounce ideas off each other, ask for advice, and anything else that
could possibly help the team as a whole and the individual do their job.” One law enforcement
supervisor defined collaboration within the framework of the multidisciplinary team meeting as:
It just means getting together, working together, bouncing ideas off each other, expressing your opinions openly, and that happens and feelings get hurt sometimes, but you know what? That’s not what it’s about. It’s about getting the job done. Some people just ‘air it out’ which is actually really good. It’s a dialog.

Some of the study participants defined collaboration in terms of the need for team members to set aside their egos in order to work together. They used the phrase “checking ego at the door” to describe that aspect of collaboration with other members of the multidisciplinary team. One attorney said the following about egos and the meaning of collaboration:

For the most part I think that it’s the people that have been committed to do this, they really do kind of check their egos a little bit and say ‘ok this is about doing the best we can for the kids.’ Just not coming in thinking my process is ‘the process’ that is going to work here, the only process I have to worry about, and having some concern about everybody else’s process.

Interestingly, the attorneys who participated in the study discussed the need to set aside egos more frequently than other study participants. However, study participants from different disciplines also broached the subject. When asked about the meaning of collaboration, one forensic interviewer made this comment related to egos:

It means egos are being set aside for the betterment of the child or for the betterment of the process. That to me is what collaboration is, it has nothing to do with ego, it has everything to do with we all have the same goal and that is to keep kids safe and we focus on that goal.

Before beginning the study, I anticipated that collaboration would take on different meanings for team members from different disciplines. However, the study participants did not differ
significantly in terms of the overall meaning of collaboration. For the most part, they each perceived collaboration as ‘working together’ and often with a common goal or a purpose. The meanings they assigned to collaboration provide the basis for understanding the major categories that emerged from the data analysis.

**Focusing the Codes**

The first step in the data analysis involved organizing the code names assigned during the initial coding process. The central question of the study ‘how team members perceive the effect of collaboration on team functioning in multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations’ guided the process of sorting and focusing the initial codes into the major categories identified and discussed in the following sections. During the initial phase of coding, I identified 166 codes. Refer to Appendix E for a complete list of the initial codes, definitions, and number of sources and references for each code name.

Relying on the memos written stemming from the interviews and systems theory, I first sorted the initial codes into ‘people’ and ‘interactions’ (Andrae, 2011) to organize the initial codes into categories. I then identified the major categories based upon the perceptions of the study participants as presented in the following sections. The following discussion identifies each of the major categories and describes the initial codes that share characteristics and support each category. Direct quotes from study participants provide support for my interpretations of the data. I chose each quote from the memos because they seemed to best represent the particular category.

**Team Identity**

The discussion of team identity presented here deals with two primary issues that emerged early and remained a constant throughout the study - whether the individual study
participant perceived him/herself as a team member and how he/she identified other members of their respective teams. To provide a basis for understanding, I offer the definition of social identity theory provided by Hutchinson (2008). She defines social identity theory as a stage theory of socialization that describes the process by which individuals identify with certain social groups while developing a sense of differences from others. The primary focus of social identity theory is the relations between different social groups, but it is useful here for understanding within group dynamics of multidisciplinary teams (Hutchinson, 2008). The following sections describe the initial codes that support the major category of team identity.

**Identifying Self as Team Member**

Whether the study participant identified him/herself as a member of a multidisciplinary team often emerged early in the interviews as the purpose of the study was discussed. In the current study, study participants who identified clearly as team members generally perceived collaboration as more important to the investigation of child abuse cases than study participants who did not. Thus, individuals could technically be part of a team and not see themselves as a member of the team.

Study participants in communities using traditional child protective services models struggled with the idea of ‘team’ in general. These study participants from rural areas closely associated being a ‘team member’ with having a child advocacy center. Thus, the study participant’s identity as a team member depended upon the existence of a child advocacy center in the community. They did not identify as being part of a team, because they did not belong to a multidisciplinary team within the context of a child advocacy center. Not identifying as a team member was even found in what appeared to be close working relationships between child protective services and law enforcement agencies in these rural communities. To address the
resulting disconnect with the questions in the interview protocol, I relied upon the study participant’s own definition of collaboration to ask these study participants about what agencies he/she ‘worked with’ when they conducted child abuse investigations.

Regardless of the model used to respond to child abuse reports, a number of study participants also had difficulty identifying as a member of a team with representatives from other agencies outside their own discipline. This seemed particularly challenging for those study participants who perceived themselves as outside the evidence collection or decision-making processes of the investigation. The mental health providers who participated in the study considered themselves more in the role of service providers to the children and families and less responsible to meeting the needs of other team members. When asked about what other team members needed from her to do their work, one mental health professional explained, “I think it’s about the client and the client’s needs. So to me the focus is the client and how can we better serve that client.” However, the issue of team identity was not limited to only those individual team members who perceived themselves in a supportive or service provider role (e.g., case managers, mental health professionals).

**Identifying Other Members of Team**

The second issue related to how study participants identified the team as a group. When asked about the effectiveness of his team, one law enforcement investigator proceeded to discuss at length about how well his team worked together. He then stopped to clarify the meaning of the word ‘team’ and apologized because he had been talking about how effectively the different law enforcement agencies in the jurisdiction worked together. He demonstrated an understanding about the roles and responsibilities of the other disciplines once he began
“thinking multidisciplinary.” However, he proceeded to confide later in the interview that he did not see himself as a member of “that team” - referring to the local multidisciplinary team.

I found that ‘thinking multidisciplinary’ came from how study participants identified with the other multidisciplinary team agencies or disciplines. It also seemed directly connected to whether the individual identified as a member of a team. Clearly, the study participant, described above, was familiar with the other agencies that he routinely contacted for information when he investigated child abuse cases. However, he seemed to perceive these other agencies as ‘there’s a team and then there’s my agency.’ He did not perceive either himself or his law enforcement agency as members of a multidisciplinary team. The individuals who lacked self-identifications as team members appeared more often in communities without child advocacy centers (CAC). However, law enforcement investigators in CAC communities sometimes discussed “using” the child advocacy center while not perceiving themselves as members of the multidisciplinary team.

For other study participants who perceived themselves as members of a team, the question became who the other agencies or disciplines were that served on the particular team. A physician and nurse practitioner from two separate child protection teams both reported effective collaboration among the members of their respective teams. In fact, the physician referred to the multidisciplinary staff of the child protection team as “family.” Both the physician and the nurse practitioner reported that social workers and medical personnel were co-located and that they got along quite well together. However, they did not view law enforcement or child protective services as members of the child protection team.

This somewhat narrow view of the multidisciplinary team was not limited to any one particular discipline or team model. One study participant from law enforcement perceived the
team as the agencies that provide services that assist in his investigation (i.e., forensic interviewers and medical professionals). Although he referred to the ‘other side of the house’, he did not include as team members the social workers or case managers who also worked for that particular agency. The study participant was also unable to identify anything that the ‘other side of the house’ needed from him to do their work. His responded “that’s a weird question” when asked. When asked how collaborating with the team affected his investigative findings, the study participant responded, “it all comes together when it is prosecution time.” Interestingly, he failed to identify the prosecutor or the state attorney’s office as an agency or team member with whom he collaborated.

I present this discussion to illustrate how sometimes investigative agencies may become so focused on their own work that they fail to consider the big picture and how the work of one team member affects that of another. Identifying as a team member with responsibilities to other members of the team appears to be important for effective collaboration to ensure the safety of children (Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1994; Lewandowski & GlenMaye, 2002; VanDerZee, Atsma, & Brodbeck, 2004). This prompts the question of how team identity affects the outcomes for children and families when one team member fails to recognize that their work is just one part of a very complicated community-wide response to child abuse. One attorney described the following situation:

I can’t tell you how many cases I’ve encountered where there has been a mark on a child and the investigator does not even call child protective services. By the time that you find out and tell the child protective services, the mark is gone.

Another obvious issue for teams in larger communities was identifying and relating to specific individuals from other agencies represented on the multidisciplinary team. Identifying the other
agencies on the team seemed relatively easy for study participants from urban and metropolitan areas. These study participants relied upon a central facility for the activities of the team, such as child forensic interviews and team meetings. However, they faced a different challenge related to identifying the individual team members. Study participants from these urban and metropolitan areas described multidisciplinary teams representing diverse agencies not typically seen in teams from smaller communities. These local and federal law enforcement agencies included Homeland Security, Immigration Customs Enforcement, military police, national parks, and transit authorities. One physician from a metropolitan area described how he had contact with 23 different law enforcement agencies making it impossible for him to ‘know’ individual team members.

The structure provided by team meetings, co-location of team members, and written interagency agreements and protocols appeared to strengthen team identity for some study participants. These subcategories of team identity are discussed in the following sections.

**Team identity and meetings.** Another issue related to how study participants often perceived the team as synonymous with having case review or team meetings. It was not until the end of one interview with one law enforcement supervisor when I asked if there was anything else that I needed to understand about his being a member of the team that he responded with his own question, “And when you say member of a team, you just mean [sic]?” He apparently had framed his previous responses to the interview protocol within the context of the bi-weekly team meetings he attended. During a brief exchange, I clarified that “no” the multidisciplinary team in my question did not only refer to team meetings, but also representatives from different agencies working together to conduct the child abuse investigation. I encountered these same perceptions
of the case review or team meeting as team members from various disciplines throughout the study.

Identifying self as a team member and identifying the other members of the team appeared easier for study participants when the team identity was clearly defined. Co-locating team members in a central location and relying upon written interagency agreements provided a sense of structure and identity for many of the study participants who valued collaboration and the multidisciplinary team approach to child abuse investigations.

**Co-locating team members.** Study participants perceived the co-location of different disciplines in the same building as having a positive effect on resource and information sharing. However, team identity did not appear to be affected by being located in the same building. Agencies retained their unique roles and responsibilities.

In conducting the current study, I interviewed physicians, nurse practitioners, and social workers in child protection teams co-located with forensic interviewers in child advocacy centers in two communities in the state of Florida. In Alabama, one child advocacy center housed prosecution, law enforcement, mental health, and medical personnel. In Alabama and Georgia, the multidisciplinary team members from rural communities were not co-located. In California, two communities housed the district attorney in the same building as the forensic interviewer while one community co-located the forensic interviewer with the local child protective services agency.

Co-location facilitated easy access to other team members and the resources of their agencies. For these co-located agencies, collaboration involved interactions with other team members that constituted an important part of the investigative process. One forensic
interviewer co-located with medical personnel described the following interaction as a ‘collaborative effort’ with other team members:

> Law enforcement and/or child protective services, whoever is here, then medical, and myself, we will all sit together and discuss ‘this child just said this’ and medical will add what they think, we will give our opinion and recommendations. I love it when they are here because it is nice, you got a face-to-face exchange of thoughts, feelings, and opinions about what just happened.

For the most part, the study participants co-located with other multidisciplinary team agencies noted the benefits of consistency and accessibility to resources for children and families. One district attorney also discussed how being co-located within the child advocacy center provided an opportunity to build relationships with the agencies that used the services of the center. Through these relationships, she described being able to address disagreements between team members before they became major issues.

Even when team members were not co-located in the same facility with other multidisciplinary team members, I noted the easy access that law enforcement had to the child advocacy centers. The law enforcement investigators had their own entry codes to the buildings and sometimes office space was set aside where they could work if needed.

However, not all study participants agreed that co-locating agencies in the same facility resulted in effective collaboration among team members. One attorney who participated in the study noted that co-locating team members did not seem to affect the difference in agency cultures. He provided the following example in which he described what he perceived as the culture of law enforcement and child protective services:
I mean this is a constant since day one, so this is not unique here, but for twenty years, even when we were under one roof, you heard the LE investigators say “I removed the child and the CPS caseworker gave the kid right back” and hear the caseworker say “I am so concerned that this child needs to be removed and the investigator is not doing anything.” And that’s the way it is, the way the culture has always been so it is very, very important, just culturally in the system that we recognize that we are a team and that if we allow things to creep into our daily practice, a child is going to end up dying.’

A different study participant commented about feeling “little respect” from the other agencies co-located in the same building. Being co-located seemed to acerbate her feeling that her opinions were not valued or that team members viewed her role on the team as “perfunctory.” However, there may have been other issues occurring with this particular individual or the multidisciplinary team that simply being co-located could not ameliorate.

**Written interagency agreements and protocols.** The importance of written interagency agreements and protocols to team identity varied among study participants dependent upon their role within the team and the responsibility their agency carried for writing and reviewing the protocols. Frontline agency supervisors who participated in the study seemed more aware of the written protocols than team members not in a supervisory role. Often the supervisors contributed to the writing and/or revision of the team protocol. Study participants from teams that functioned within the structure of child advocacy centers seemed more aware of interagency agreements than other frontline team members.
Typically the study participants identified one agency on the team as primarily responsible for writing and updating the interagency agreement. The study participants from multidisciplinary teams within accredited child advocacy centers relied upon written protocols based on the standards of the National Children’s Alliance (2011). One child protective services supervisor was currently serving on a committee to revise the local protocols along with law enforcement and the director of the child advocacy center. A mental health professional from a different team described being responsible for revising the protocols for the child advocacy center where her office was located. The study participants from child protection teams in Florida also described specific written interagency agreements that guided child abuse investigations. When I asked study participants outside child advocacy centers and child protection teams about written protocols, the majority of these team members were not aware of the local team protocol. They explained the policies that guided their interactions with other agencies on the team were written into their own agency or departmental procedures.

**Understanding Roles and Responsibilities of Other MDT**

The current literature concerning multidisciplinary teams identifies the need for team members to clearly understand their individual roles (Cross, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2005; Frost, Robinson, & Anning, 2005; Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Shalinsky, 1989). However, the current literature does not specifically address the need to understand the roles and responsibilities of other team members representing different agencies. The findings in the current study indicate that understanding the roles and responsibilities of other agencies helped to establish expectations that serve as the basis for reciprocal relationships. These reciprocal relationships appear to facilitate communication and information sharing among team members.
In the following sections, I first provide a framework for understanding the roles and responsibilities of team members. I then discuss how understanding the roles and responsibilities of other agencies and disciplines leads to knowing what other team members need and how responding to their needs affect overall team functioning.

**What are the Roles of MDT Agencies or Disciplines?**

This section utilizes information from published research and government websites to describe the roles and responsibilities of the agencies and disciplines represented by the study participants. This discussion provides a basis for understanding the perspectives of the study participants.

Published research and government websites identify child protective services as the central agency responsible for the well-being of children and plays a lead role in coordinating communication among the various disciplines responsible for addressing child maltreatment. It is the agency legally mandated in most states to respond to reports of possible child abuse and neglect. Child protective services conduct investigations regarding suspected abuse, assess the risk to and safety of children, and develop individualized case intervention plans. The child protective service worker who investigates the case must determine whether abuse occurred and take the necessary steps to ensure the safety of the child. The child protective services worker may be required to intervene to protect the child from harm, provide services strengthening the ability of family to protect the child, and, if needed, provide an alternative, safe family for the child (DePanfilis & Salus, 2003).

Because of their presence in the community, law enforcement officers often encounter situations that involve child abuse. In addition to responding to reports of suspected physical or sexual abuse, they may be called to respond to emergency situations where children have been
harmed or face significant risk of harm, such as domestic violence or drug arrests. In the role of first responder, uniformed law enforcement officers often determine if there is probable cause to believe a crime occurred, document observations, collect evidence at the crime scene, and/or remove children from the home when the child’s immediate safety is jeopardized (Cage & Salus, 2010; Rady Children’s Hospital, 2012). Law enforcement investigators determine whether a violation of the law occurred, collect corroborating evidence, identify and apprehend the alleged offender, files appropriate criminal charges, and prepare the case report submitted to the prosecuting attorney.

The role of the prosecuting attorney is to represent the state in the criminal proceedings, seek justice, hold offenders accountable, and impose appropriate penal sanctions (Nugent, 2004). The role of the physician or nurse practitioner is to identify suspicious injuries, diagnose problems of abuse, administer medical treatment to the child, report suspected incidents of abuse to appropriate authorities, and testify in legal proceedings (Hammond, Lanning, Promisel, Sheppard, & Walsh, 1997). The role of the forensic interviewer is “to obtain a statement from a child, in a developmentally and culturally sensitive, unbiased and fact-finding manner that supports accurate and fair decision-making by the involved multidisciplinary team in the criminal justice and child protection systems” (NCA, 2011, p. 10). The role of the mental health professional is to provide “specialized trauma-focused services, designed to meet the unique needs of the child and family” (NCA, 2011, p. 24) and victim advocacy.

Study participants indicated that the overall effectiveness of the team was linked to team members knowing what to do, understanding the roles of the individual agencies, and having a sense of trust around the table. The majority of the team members who participated in the study articulated a thorough understanding of the roles and responsibilities of other agencies.
represented on the multidisciplinary team. Understanding the roles and responsibilities of other agencies provided team members with the framework for understanding what other multidisciplinary team members needed to do their work. This understanding served as a foundation for the collaborative relationships described by many of the team members.

Knowing What Other MDT Members Need

Study participants generally perceived that ‘knowing what other team MDT members need’ as important to collaboration among team members. In the current study, the study participants responded to a question that asked what other team members needed from the study participant to do their work. The responses to the question established a basis for the reciprocal relationships that many study participants described as beneficial to the functioning of the multidisciplinary team. The majority of study participants identified the following subcategories as what other members of the team needed from them to do their work: information sharing, communication, equal partnerships, reciprocity, and accessibility and availability.

Information Sharing

Study participants identified information as what they needed most often from other team members and what others needed most from them. The study participants identified points in the investigative process where opportunities to share case information occurred. These points include forensic interviews of children and case review or team meetings. Aside from face-to-face meetings and forensic interviews, study participants described sharing information electronically via cell phone, text messages, and emails. Study participants often perceived collaboration in terms of their ability to get information from other agencies and their own willingness to share what they knew about the case with others.
Sharing information held importance for team members during the initial phase of the investigative process. Information relates to the allegations of the report, the background of the child and family, and existing agency records. One case manager in a child protection team emphasized the importance of information sharing during the initial phase of the investigation:

"Usually if I’ve called in a report, I am invested in the case and I want to make sure the kids are ok. So I want to make sure that they have all the information they need from me, and anything they need from me, so they can make a complete investigation."

One nurse practitioner described her responsibility to receive information and relay it on to other members of the team. When one agency on the team becomes privy to specific information, she perceived it important for that team member to relay the information for other team members.

Study participants regardless of discipline described the need for accurate and current information to determine what happened to the child. The nurse practitioner also commented, “I would like to have the most current and best information that they have gathered to that point. If I receive inaccurate information, then that is going to translate to the outgoing information that I provide.”

The majority of team members reported positive experiences in sharing information with other team members. One law enforcement investigator from a rural community shared the following comment about getting information he needed from child protective services, “There’s not anything that I need that I don’t get or anything that they need that they don’t get. It’s a hand-in-hand passing of that information.”

However, other study participants reported that information was not so easily obtained. One assistant district attorney described the information that he needed from the forensic interviewer and/or law enforcement investigator during the child interview:
If somebody has done harm to a child, everyone wants to hold that person responsible but a lot of times police officers will not know the elements of the law and will not know what it is we have to prove to a jury specifically. For every crime in California, there are jury instructions that’s got elements one, two, and three. If the officers or forensic interviewer, while doing the interviews with the children, don’t know to ask one, two, or three or don’t get the information out that proves one, two, or three, we’re going to have a problem with the jury six months later when we try to take it to a jury trial.

The ability to share information may be affected by individual policies and procedures within local agencies. One law enforcement supervisor described the sharing of written reports between law enforcement and child protective services as limited. He also discussed his own efforts to ensure that child protective services got the information they needed, “Sometimes they will get a report the next day. If they don’t they will know something happened. We have a memorandum of understanding where we can exchange information, but if it is a sensitive case, I cannot do that.” Asked what was meant by a sensitive case, the study participant explained that child abuse cases “may involve a victim or suspect with a political connection or be a member of law enforcement or a case involving anyone where there is a high probability of media coverage.” He stated that cases involving the media carried a higher degree of confidentiality as the investigations became more difficult to conduct when the involved parties learned of the allegations before law enforcement had the opportunity to contact them. He stated in general that these investigations are conducted more expeditiously than others.

Often study participants discussed how written interagency agreements addressed information sharing and how they shared information despite restrictions regarding
confidentiality. One team member discussed how they allowed other agencies to review copies of their reports but only during team meetings. Some study participants discussed how they provided information verbally to other members of the team. One attorney representing child protective services explained how the local multidisciplinary team worked out their own process:

The DA likes to get our information and we have got it down to a pretty smooth system now where they are allowed under the statute to have access to the CPS records. We have helped them understand the process they have to go through if they want to use it in court in front of a jury that they have to get a juvenile court order.

Regardless of how they got the information, the majority of study participants stated that they received the information they needed from the other agencies on the multidisciplinary team.

The study participants noted how information sharing that occurs among team members benefits not only the multidisciplinary team, but also children and families. Knowing that team members share information may help children and families feel more confident in the investigative process when they do not have to keep repeating the story of the abuse to multiple agencies. Previous research indicates that such duplication and redundancy during the investigation may be harmful to the emotional well-being of the children involved in the case (Cross et al., 2007).

**Communication**

Aside from information about the allegations and the background of the case, study participants indicated that team members need information about current case activity or events affecting the investigation. Several study participants recognized the need to keep other team members “in the loop” about the actions being taken within their own agencies. One child protective services supervisor provided the following example:
I think that they need us to call them and say ‘this what I need to do, how would you like me to approach that?’ ‘I need to interview the perpetrator, how would you like me to do that?’ and maybe have a little bit more open communication and collaboration between the two agencies.

A child protective services worker in a different agency also noted how law enforcement needed to know when child protective services determined a report to be ‘not indicated’ for abuse. She recognized that the burden of proof was higher in criminal cases than in dependency cases. Thus, a child protective service worker’s determination of a child abuse report as ‘not indicated’ may affect the law enforcement investigation and the district attorney’s decision to file charges.

Similarly, child protective service workers needed to know the status of the criminal investigation. Whether or not law enforcement planned to make an arrest may affect how child protective services respond to the safety of the child. One deputy district attorney who participated in the study commented that she probably needed to keep law enforcement and child protective services better informed of decisions about charging alleged offenders. One law enforcement investigator also recognized the need for child protective services to be aware of actions in the criminal case:

They kind of want to know where the case is going criminally so that they can effectively care for the welfare of the child because a lot of stuff happens in-home and if we are going to take a family member into custody or we are heading in that direction, that is going to change the way that they respond to the welfare of the child.

Frequently, study participants expressed thoughts and opinions indicating awareness of the needs of the other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. However, there seemed to be underlying
issues resulting in differing opinions about the importance of the roles and responsibilities of agencies on the team. This issue is addressed further in the following section.

**Equal Partnerships**

Throughout the study, team members representing different agencies discussed the need for mutual understanding that facilitates a “give and take” or “equal partnership.” One study participant from law enforcement acknowledged that she needed the cooperation of other agencies on the multidisciplinary team to do her work, stating, “without them what am I going to do?” She described having the authority to remove a child from a dangerous home, but then needing child protective services to provide a safe place for that child. An equal partnership assumes a level playing field where each team members’ needs are as important as others. However, the findings indicate that some team members may perceive the work of other team members or agencies as more or less important.

Forensic interviewers participating in the study provided a unique perspective because they focused on getting information needed by other team members in order to do their work. Forensic interviewers perceived their role as supportive to the child protective service and law enforcement agencies on the team. A number of the forensic interviewers that I spoke with during the study reflected how their needs were not the issue. Rather, their role was to meet the needs of other team members for information from the child. The literature describes the role of the forensic interviewer as ‘neutral’ and independent of other agencies on the team. However, the majority of forensic interviewers who participated in the study indicated a greater sense of responsibility to attending to the information and clarification requests of the law enforcement investigators compared to the child protective service workers on the team. This greater sense of responsibility to law enforcement may result from more interactions between law enforcement
and forensic interviewers. In some communities, the local multidisciplinary team protocols required that law enforcement be present when forensic interviews were conducted whereas some study participants reported that child protective service workers were not always present to observe forensic interviews.

Forensic interviewers are also trained to address the legal issues first and be attentive to questions that are legally defensible in court. Other topics or more leading questions occur afterwards during the forensic interview. If they happen earlier or prior to the legal issues, then these topics or questions may preclude any criminal use of the forensic interview (L. Steele, personal communication, December 18, 2014).

Faced with a disagreement between law enforcement and child protective services about issues to be addressed, one forensic interviewer called the law enforcement investigator aside saying, “I understand what your role is and what you guys need and we’ll focus on that first and foremost.” The same forensic interviewer described having good relationships with all of the law enforcement officers and felt that she did not need a lot from them prior to interviewing a child. She indicated that she already knew what they wanted her to ask a child to get the information they needed for their investigation, “you learn when you get to know the detectives what each one sort of prefers.”

This attention to the needs of law enforcement may relate to the organizational structure of the multidisciplinary team. The majority of the forensic interviewers in the study worked in accredited child advocacy centers or multidisciplinary interview centers. Historically, the child advocacy center model was developed through the efforts of a district attorney and often the district attorney’s office holds a major role in establishing the facility and leading the multidisciplinary teams (Bell, 2001). Also, the legal burden of proof in criminal prosecutions of
child abuse cases is higher than in dependency cases involving children in juvenile court proceedings. This higher standard for evidence in criminal cases coupled with a sense of responsibility to protect the overall community may also influence the attention to the needs of law enforcement. However, if the information from the forensic interview enables law enforcement to move forward with criminal charges that may also be helpful to child protective services in determining whether or not to substantiate the allegations and how to intervene with the family.

Reciprocity

Based upon the perspectives of the study participants, understanding the roles and responsibilities of other agencies established expectations that served as the basis for reciprocal relationships perceived as mutually beneficial to all members of the team. One attorney who represented child protective services in dependency cases emphasized the reciprocal nature of collaboration among the team members. He discussed his ability to pick up the phone and call another team member when he needed something, and how other team members felt comfortable calling him when they had a question about a case. The reciprocity was perceived as “you help me and I will help you” which connected closely to past experiences and building trusting relationships.

Despite the positive views of many team members, some study participants did not perceive collaboration as reciprocal as reflected in the following response to the question ‘what do other team members need from you to do their work?’ “As far as what they need from us. I don’t know.” The perception that other team members were not sharing information or taking actions that supported the work of the team as whole was a source of frustration among some
study participants. A similar disconnect was noted during an interview with one assistant district attorney who when asked what he needed from child protective services responded:

We don’t have to ask them (CPS) for a lot of things, and they don’t really ask us for a lot of things. The fact that we are both at the interview center and part of the same team is more for the child’s benefit as it relates to CPS than it is for us.

He discussed how child protective services conducted a parallel investigation independently from that of the “primary investigator” referring to law enforcement. Here the language used by the study participant implied that law enforcement’s investigation was perceived as ‘primary.’ So perhaps the investigation by child protection was ‘secondary’ and, therefore, perceived as not as important as the law enforcement investigation.

**Accessibility and Availability**

Study participants described how other members of the multidisciplinary team needed them to be accessible and available to respond quickly to child abuse reports. A majority of the study participants described agency procedures that included being available to respond to child abuse cases on a 24/7 basis. One forensic interviewer who participated in the study described the following process when a report was initially received:

So if a call comes in while you are on-call, someone calls in, we have an answering service, and then they call us at home on our agency cell number and then we triage the case with whoever was calling in, law enforcement or hospital or child protective services.

Study participants from rural communities described the importance of being available to conduct joint investigations. One child protective services worker described being available to work with the local law enforcement investigator as:
Anything that the law enforcement asks me to do or asks me to get involved in, or if they want me to go out on a case with them where they think there’s a situation, or if they call and they’re out at a situation, and there’s kids there, I mean we do it, that’s just our understanding here. If they ask it, we do it.

In response to how effective one law enforcement investigator perceived his ability to meet the needs of other agencies, he responded how he initially did not know what to expect or what other team members needed from him. However, once he began interacting with them, relationships developed, and he felt that he was effective at giving them what they needed to do their work.

Often, study participants expressed frustration when they were unable to meet the needs of other agencies because of high caseloads and competing urgencies. Regarding the issue of differing timeframes, one law enforcement supervisor discussed how child protective services called him when they needed the written police report of the case investigation. He admitted that more often than not he had not even read the case report yet. He pointed out that sometimes the reality was not a matter of other agencies refusing to share their case reports; it was because the reports were not yet written. Either way, not being able to get that information was perceived as a hindrance to collaboration in child abuse cases. One law enforcement investigator recognized, “if we are just sitting there on the case and not moving fast it enough, it makes their [CPS] job hard.”

Throughout the study, team members representing different agencies continued to describe collaboration as not just working cooperatively, but also the degree in which agencies tried to meet the needs of other agencies. One study participant commented, “They want to know what we know and we work very cooperatively to see that they get it if at all possible.”
Frequently, team members commented about how they were going to do their ‘absolute best’ to help the other people on their team do their work.

Throughout the interviews, study participants described how relationships affected knowing what other team members needed and how well other team members met their needs. One law enforcement investigator in a rural community made the following comment about the child protective services supervisor, “And I guess it’s just we’re so used to knowing what each other needs and working so well together that it’s just kind of like second nature. She knows what I need. I know what she needs.” Although there were numerous examples of unique relationships in the study, this particular law enforcement investigator attended high school with the child protective services supervisor. I believe this represents a distinct difference between how multidisciplinary teams located in rural communities and more diverse, densely populated urban areas function.

The majority of study participants regardless of discipline expressed their commitment to assist the other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. As the study progressed, I began to see how the willingness of team members to provide that assistance was to some extent dependent on the relationships among team members.

**Training of Multidisciplinary Team**

Study participants identified the need for training of multidisciplinary team members as a subcategory of knowing what other MDT need. Although systemic issues related to funding affected different agencies’ abilities to send multidisciplinary team members to training, efforts to budget for training were frequently described by team coordinators. Training of multidisciplinary team members helped team members understand the roles and responsibilities
of other team members, but also provided opportunities for building relationships among team members.

At one study site, all members of the multidisciplinary team were trained to conduct forensic interviews. Although the study participants from that team had not yet conducted any child interviews, the training helped them understand the forensic interview process and what and when to ask questions. These team members were particularly supportive of the role of the forensic interviewer as the training helped them understand the specific techniques used to conduct forensic interviews.

A number of the study participants carried the additional role of trainer. Their responsibilities included educating others within their own agencies as well as team members, first responders, and other community persons about child abuse and the multidisciplinary team process. These study participants provided training and education through workshops or conferences as well as agency and team in-service meetings.

Frequently, team members representing different disciplines discussed how they provided in-service training for new members of the multidisciplinary team. One physician discussed how part of his role on the multidisciplinary team was to conduct on-going training for new law enforcement investigators so that they understood their role in referring children involved in child abuse investigations for medical evaluations. The state of California assumes responsibility for paying for these evaluations, but only when law enforcement initiates the referral (Office of Criminal Justice Planning, 1987).

While some study participants described extensive training that prepared them to work as a member of the team, others did not. One law enforcement supervisor responded to the question of whether she received specialized training related to her work on the multidisciplinary team:
I think that in the beginning, we sort of stumbled into it and it basically just ended up being as we were learning our jobs, we began to understand how important the other people’s jobs are to ours, it was just building that we relationship and I think that over the years that just made us a really good team.

Study participants described the efforts to educate team members about the requirements and limitations of the disciplines on the team. One district attorney discussed taking time to explain the requirements and limitations of what law enforcement can and cannot do during the course of an investigation when new team members from different agencies attend team meetings. One child protective services supervisor pointed out the limitations of her own agency as well as the value of collaboration among the agencies on the multidisciplinary team.

A lot of people think that child protective services has a magic wand and that we are supposed to do everything but when you are on a multidisciplinary team, you can break it up and everybody is not duplicating work.

One attorney who represented child protective services identified the need for law enforcement and the district attorney’s office to understand the role of protective services so they would not get frustrated when a dependency case moved quickly through the juvenile court system:

While they are still debating about whether somebody is going to be prosecuted and how the criminal investigation is going to proceed, we may be a week away from a contested hearing. It has been really helpful here to help law enforcement and the district attorney understand if it is an in-home situation where it is a CPS case, our case is going to move really quickly compared to how yours is going to move . . . if it is a CPS case they need to make decisions accordingly in terms of maybe this case needs to have a little higher priority, because you can’t wait two weeks to interview a suspect, because in three days
the suspect is going to have the petition or detention report, possibly copies of police reports that is going to detail everything that we know.

Study participants also emphasized the need for others within multidisciplinary team agencies to be educated about the investigative process used by the local multidisciplinary team. First responders to child abuse may be law enforcement officers or child protective service workers who are unfamiliar with the investigative process or the roles and responsibilities of the multidisciplinary team. The study participants discussed the importance of first responders to recognize the limitations of agencies involved in the child abuse investigation. One child protective services supervisor discussed the need for law enforcement to understand what child protective services can and cannot do. She commented on how patrol officers recently asked her “why can’t you just pick the kid up and take him to the child interview center?” Her response was “that’s kidnapping and we are not allowed to do that.” Aside from the humor, her response indicated the need for first-responders regardless of discipline to receive training about the other agencies on the multidisciplinary team.

Educating team members about the roles and responsibilities of other team members was perceived useful in establishing clear expectations regarding what other team members can and cannot do. Understanding what other agencies can do, as well as their limitations, enables team members to have realistic expectations of representatives from other agencies that enhance relationships and facilitate effective collaboration.

The majority of the study participants described how they learned about working with other agencies on the multidisciplinary team from on-the-job work experiences. Most study participants indicated that they did not have opportunities to attend trainings or conferences with other members of their teams because of caseloads and funding issues. When multidisciplinary
training was available, the study participants in supervisory roles seemed more likely to attend. Once trained, they were expected to bring the information back and train other professionals from their agency and/or team. The opportunity to attend training together with different disciplines from the team may provide one reason that study participants in supervisory roles within their own agencies reported strong collaborative relationships with other agencies represented on the team.

To summarize, understanding the roles and responsibilities of other team members serves as the basis for understanding the needs of other agencies. However, collaboration with other team members in terms of meeting those needs indicates to some extent a willingness on the part of individual team members. Based upon the responses of the study participants, the recurring theme of relationships among team members appeared to be the driving factor for collaboration.

**Using Collaboration to Accomplish My Goals**

Study participants from different disciplines described how collaboration often helped them accomplish what they needed to get done on the case and the goal of the team. They identified consulting with other multidisciplinary team members and relying on other team members as important ways in which they used collaboration.

**Sharing a Common Goal**

The majority of study participants perceived collaboration as “working together for a common goal.” They perceived having a common goal a salient attribute of effective teams. Larson and LaFasto (1989) emphasized that highly functioning teams clearly understand the goal to be achieved and believe the goal to be worthwhile. One study participant observed the following:
We all have this common goal, the end result is just making sure that the kids are protected and that we have the information we need to protect the kids as much as possible. We may all take different paths to get there but I think that ultimately that is the bottom line and I think everybody sees that.

Another study participant shared a similar perception. A deputy district attorney co-located with other team members in a local child advocacy center perceived collaboration with other members of the team for a greater good:

One of those rare occasions when you actually have a job that if you do it right is 100% not about you. It really has to be about the families and the children. That’s who we’re here for and it’s the best thing about this job. That’s how we can do it and be resilient is because we are doing it for a greater good and something outside ourselves.

A majority of study participants agreed that team members generally shared a common goal of protecting the child and perceived the role of the team as finding out the truth about what happened to the child.

**Consulting with Other MDT**

Study participants reported how being able to consult with other team members was one of the ways that collaboration strengthened their investigations. A majority of study participants considered consultation with other team members as a valuable resource.

Study participants responsible for prosecuting child abuse cases frequently discussed the importance of consultation. Attorneys often described how law enforcement consulted with them when initially responding to difficult cases. Consultation early in the investigative process provided law enforcement with the information they needed to get the investigation moving in
the right direction. One attorney from the state attorney general’s office described his role in consulting with frontline law enforcement:

I know from the years of experience, if they are concerned, there is something there.

They feel a child needs to be protected, it’s there, and the attorney just needs to assist them with pointing them in the right direction.

He also identified what many study participants referred to as the common goal of needing to protect the child and how consulting with law enforcement provided direction in order to ensure that the child was protected.

One Florida jurisdiction differed from the other communities where the study was conducted as attorneys employed in the state attorney general’s office were available 24/7 to law enforcement officers at the scene of the crime. According to one state attorney who had worked in other counties, the on-call duty was unique to the state attorney general’s office in that particular jurisdiction. He discussed how being involved from the beginning of the investigation ensured that the investigation move in the right direction and helped law enforcement know what evidence was important for the criminal investigation of the case.

Consultation with other team members was also associated with the forensic interview of the child. Study participants frequently scheduled time to meet to discuss the case prior to and following the child interviews. In one community, the assistant district attorney remotely viewed the child interviews. During interviews, he contacted the investigator in the observation room via cell phone when he had questions for the forensic interviewer to ask the child.

Being available to consult with other team members constituted part of the on-going dialog in meeting the needs of other team members. Consultation occurred throughout the investigative process. Many of the more experienced professionals interviewed for the study
encouraged consultation. One physician made the following comment regarding his own availability to team members:

One of my pet peeves is when people are struggling with something yet they don’t reach out to try and fix it and one of the things that I say all the time is ‘my pager is on 24/7’ which is a true statement and my cell phone which is sitting right next to me is my adjunct pager basically. So I am literally available 24/7. The goal is always to be available.

The knowledge and expertise of team members is a valuable resource for the multidisciplinary team. However, the decision to call upon these other professionals rests with the individual team member, and team members may be reluctant to call upon other members of the team for consultation because they do not want to appear incompetent or dependent (Lee, 1997).

**Relying upon Other Team Members**

Study participants frequently discussed how they relied upon other agencies to accomplish their work. It was frequently mentioned in conjunction with the recognition that one agency alone did not have the expertise or resources to ensure the safety of the child, the criminal investigation of the case, and/or provide the services needed by children and families. Relying upon other agencies involved acknowledging that one individual agency does not have all the answers, nor do they need all the answers, if the multidisciplinary team is collaborating effectively. One case manager from a child protection team observed, “I think I do a good job, but there is a whole lot that I don’t know, and there is a whole lot that I don’t have responsibility for.” One physician made a similar statement, “I do what I do really well. I’d be a terrible cop. I’d be a terrible social worker, or I’d be a terrible prosecutor.”
Relying upon another agency involved recognizing and acknowledging the strengths or expertise of other team members and/or their agencies. For example, study participants representing law enforcement frequently discussed how child protective services often knew families better than anyone else on the team. Likewise, child protective services observed that sometimes families were more likely to talk to law enforcement officers because of their authority. Both child protective services and law enforcement appreciated the medical professionals who took time to explain their findings and write reports that were clear and understandable. Of all the team members, study participants recognized the forensic interviewers most often for their skills in interviewing children.

In response to the question about how collaboration with other team members strengthened investigations, one child welfare supervisor with 28 years of experience commented about how she often heard “you don’t worry about that, I’ve got it” when the agencies reviewed the findings from the forensic interview. Her statement reflected a sense of comfort in knowing that she could rely upon other agencies to ensure that the needs of families and children were met. In the current study, the majority of study participants consistently commented on how being able to depend upon other members of their respective teams strengthened the child abuse investigations.

The majority of study participants perceived the multidisciplinary team as a resource. One deputy district attorney described how her office used the resources available through the multidisciplinary team to secure an arrest in a serious child abuse case.

So we were able to get the detective hooked up to the victim advocate and the victim advocate hooked up with one of our DA investigators who was able to contact an out-of-state agency and between all these people working together, we were able to get a pretext
phone call where we got a complete admission and were able to get him arrested that night.

Study participants sometimes perceived the need for collaboration because of the stressful nature of the work environment. One law enforcement supervisor viewed collaboration in terms of resources to get the job done:

A lot of these cases are voluminous, comprehensive, and could take months to investigate, so you have to contact people. Contact the doctor, contact CPS. Contact that social worker over and over again and say ‘hey you know I need this, I need that’ and they may need this and that, so it’s all about being considerate as well to their needs and responding in a timely manner, because everybody’s running ragged. It’s a crazy place to work and there’s so much emotion tied up into it that you have to maintain relationships because they do your work for you, they get it done, and as law enforcement, we are trying to get it done for them. It’s all a matter of resources and getting the job done.

Using collaboration to get information needed to complete their part of the investigation involved relationships not only with other team members from different agencies but also relationships with families. One deputy district attorney commented on how child protective services might have a different relationship with the family than law enforcement and therefore more likely to communicate with the child protective service worker than with the law enforcement investigator. She noted that child protective services were often better able than law enforcement in getting families to cooperate and allow the child to be interviewed. She said that whichever agency maintained the best rapport with the family was probably going to be the one “mostly likely to get cooperation from the family.”
One child protective services supervisor also shared the same perspective and related a case example in which the law enforcement detective was going to have to get a court order to get access to confidential health department records. At the request of the law enforcement investigator, the child protective services worker in the case talked to the family and got them to sign a release of information to give the investigator access to the files.

It appears that when collaboration is strong among members of the team that if the family shuts down communication with one agency, then another agency on the team may be able to work with the family to get their cooperation with the child abuse investigation. Frequently, study participants shared examples of where one discipline was more effective at getting information from the family and went out of their way to do so in order to assist other agencies on the multidisciplinary team.

Child protective service workers and supervisors discussed how local and out-of-county resources were utilized to meet the needs of the children and families. These child protective service agencies relied upon formal and informal agreements with forensic interviewers in child advocacy centers located in nearby counties. Similarly, physicians and nurse practitioners specializing in forensic medical evaluations were often unavailable in rural communities. In these circumstances, child protective services relied upon the resources used by child advocacy centers to provide medical services. This is consistent with Faller and Henry (2000) comments regarding non-CAC communities accessed many of the same resources used by child advocacy centers. The researchers found no appreciable difference in the quality of services that children in non-CAC communities received when compared to communities with child advocacy centers. The findings in the current study support the results of Faller and Henry (2000) as services to children were frequently provided through collaboration with out-of-county resources.
The Investigative Process

The major categories related to the key points in the investigative process are discussed in this section. During the course of the data collection, the study participants explained when and how collaboration occurred during the investigative process. Their comments highlight the importance of collaboration throughout the child abuse investigation.

Notifying Other MDT

The initial phase of the child abuse investigation involves someone in the community expressing concern for the safety of the child. In most states, the child protective service agency is legally responsible for screening referrals from the community and investigating child abuse reports. Often, child protective services must also notify law enforcement when the allegations involve criminal acts of child abuse or negligence. The study participants described how collaboration affected notifying other multidisciplinary team agencies about reports and involving other team members in the investigation.

The findings indicated that the initial involvement of law enforcement varied depending to some extent on the caseloads in the community. Study participants from law enforcement agencies in urban and metropolitan areas reported larger caseloads and infrequent opportunities to respond with child protective service workers. Often, the supervisors in the study discussed sending patrol officers instead of investigators to take the initial report for law enforcement. In rural communities, law enforcement typically responded with the child protective service workers when emergency response was required. One child protective services supervisor with 28 years of experience discussed how the multidisciplinary team protocol stated that “on any physical or sexual child abuse report, law enforcement is going to be with us. So they are in on it from the beginning.” Study participants indicated that multidisciplinary team agencies appeared
more vested in the outcome of the case if they became involved from the beginning when the initial report was received.

**Interviewing Children**

One of the most important points in the investigative process is the forensic interview of the child alleged to be the victim of abuse. The purpose of the forensic interview is “to obtain a statement from a child, in a developmentally and culturally sensitive, unbiased and fact-finding manner that supports accurate and fair decision making by a multidisciplinary team that includes representatives from criminal justice and child protection agencies” (NCA, 2011, p. 10). This statement serves as the basis for ensuring both the protection of the child and whether the case needs to go forward in the criminal court system. Child forensic interviewers receive specialized training in order to conduct non-leading interviews that can stand up to cross-examination in criminal court (Lamb, Orbach, Hershowitz, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2007). Interviewers may be professionals employed by a child advocacy center or they may be trained law enforcement, child protective service workers, or other members of the multidisciplinary team.

In the current study, multidisciplinary team members routinely observed the forensic interviews live via closed circuit television. (However, the assistant district attorneys in one community used technology to remote view interviews on computers in their offices.) Observing the interview provides information team members need for their specific roles and responsibilities within their individual agencies.

Study participants perceived the forensic interview of the child as limiting the need for duplicate child interviews by individual agencies. One child protective service supervisor offered this perspective on the value of forensic interviews:
I think that everybody has the capacity to get information in a different way and so I think anytime we share that information, we all sit in and observe those interviews, and we all have the ability to ask questions to gain information that is important to our own investigations.

In addition to being a key point to gather information, the forensic interview provides an opportunity for information sharing before and after the interview when team members come together for those “what do you know” and “what do you think?” moments.

Study participants agreed that the forensic interview provided an opportunity for team members from different agencies to collaborate. For child protective services, law enforcement, and attorneys who observe the interviews, the forensic interview provides an opportunity for them to build relationships with each other. Often it may be the only opportunity child protective service workers and law enforcement investigators have to interact with each other when these investigative agencies conduct parallel investigations of the child abuse case. One attorney provided an example of how observing the forensic interviews of children with representatives from other agencies helped to build collaborative relationships:

You know you may see law enforcement on a couple of cases but when you sit in here and do interviews with them and they have about a two or three year rotation and you see case after case with them, you definitely develop a relationship with them that you would not have otherwise.

Obviously, this study participant experienced good relationships with his fellow team members. The forensic interviewer from the same team reaffirmed the importance of relationships. She emphasized the connections and relationships that develop when team members come together to observe forensic interviews:
They really form connections and relationships so that later when they go out on other investigations, they know who to call. They put faces with names. It’s just not some case that gets sent over to the district attorney. As a social worker, I think it makes a difference to find out what happened to the case criminally.

However, one deputy district attorney who typically watches the video recording of forensic interviews offered a different perspective of observing the forensic interview with other team members. She commented that it was important for her to remain objective. She expressed concern that statements made by others in the observation room might influence her opinion of the child as a potential witness in criminal court. She discussed one case when she was “on the fence” about the child’s ability to testify. Upon hearing the law enforcement investigator describe the child’s family as supportive, she documented that because of family support the child appeared able to testify in court. The deputy district attorney commented that her opinions were more likely to be influenced if she knew and trusted the particular team member(s). One law enforcement investigator expressed a similar concern about the possible influence of the forensic interviewer on his findings from the child abuse investigation:

So she looks at kids, she sees their body language, she’s actually in the room, I’m listening form another room. So when she comes out and she says ‘well, he hesitated when he answered this question’ and those kinds of things, it plays an impact. Now I don’t solely base my decision on what she says but it does place an impact on the findings of my investigation.

How child abuse investigations may be impacted by influence and how collaboration relates to influence are discussed further in the section on implications for practice on page 192.
Despite these concerns, the study participants agreed upon the importance of the forensic interview as a source of information for the child abuse investigation. The value of observing the forensic interview with other team members seemed to outweigh the risks associated with being influenced by other members of the team. Listening to the same information at the same time ensures continuity of the child abuse investigations conducted by child protective services and law enforcement.

**Conducting Joint Investigations**

Conducting joint investigations on child abuse cases provided important opportunities for collaboration for some of the study participants. Cross et al. (2006) studied the effect of law enforcement involvement in child protective service investigations and discussed how law enforcement sometimes accompanied child protection workers to the home. In the current study, the decision of child protective services and law enforcement to conduct joint investigations depended upon state policies, local protocols, caseloads, and/or resources (e.g., time and personnel).

One rural community addressed joint investigations in the local protocol for investigative procedures for law enforcement officers in child sexual abuse cases as:

*Joint investigations and cooperation between law enforcement and child protective services is vital to the goal of protecting the victim and determining the truth of allegations of abuse. It is important to recognize that each report of child abuse brings with it its own set of circumstances making each report unique in some way. Law enforcement agencies will refer to their set of policies and consult with other agency policies and the law when presented with these obstacles.*
The protocol further stated that law enforcement must consult and interview witnesses and parents of the victim jointly with child protective services.

The findings indicated that joint investigations occurred infrequently due to differing timeframes and high caseloads among child protective service workers and law enforcement investigators. One study participant from law enforcement discussed how he sometimes went out with child protective services when the case involved a daycare provider. However, he preferred child protective services not be present when he interviewed alleged offenders because “it is a lot easier just to go in there with your partner and do that.” He said more often patrol officers went with child protective service workers to take the initial report for law enforcement.

In general, study participants perceived joint investigations as an effective use of resources and one way of building relationships between child protective service workers and law enforcement investigators. However, conducting joint investigations appeared to be influenced by caseloads and agency procedures and more the exception that the rule in the communities in the current study. In the following section, a court case that affected joint investigations in the state of California is discussed.

**Camreta v. Greene.** Early in the interviews conducted in California, an attorney referred to a Supreme Court case that directly affected the practice of child protective services and law enforcement conducting joint interviews in child abuse investigations.

The court case stemmed from a child abuse investigation conducted in the state of Oregon. A child protective services worker, Bob Camreta, and a deputy sheriff responded to a report that Nimrod Greene allegedly sexually abused his two children. The child protective services worker and deputy sheriff went to the school and interviewed the nine-year-old child privately for two hours (Gupta-Kagan, 2012). Both civil and criminal charges were filed
resulting in the children being placed in foster care and a grand jury indictment of the father for felony sexual assault. However, further investigation led to both children being returned to the mother’s home. Eventually the criminal charges against the father were dismissed. The mother of the children then filed a lawsuit against the protective services worker and the law enforcement officer for violation of the child’s Fourth Amendment right against unreasonable search or seizure (Cornell University Law School, 2011). The United States Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a district court’s decision that the law enforcement investigator’s failure to obtain a warrant before interviewing the suspected child abuse victim privately at school violated the Fourth Amendment rights of the child. The child protective service worker and law enforcement officer appealed that decision. Almost ten years after the interview with the child, the United States Supreme Court ruled not to hear the child protective service worker and law enforcement officer’s appeal because the child had reached the age of majority (Yourtz, 2013).

According to the study participants from California, the Supreme Court’s decision had left local child protective services and law enforcement confused about the issue of joint investigations. From what I determined, child protective services agencies conducted emergency response interviews of children without law enforcement. If the child disclosed sexual abuse or severe physical abuse, the child protective service worker stopped the interview and contacted law enforcement. Arrangements were then made to have the child interviewed at the local child interview center. Several study participants commented that the court ruling resulted in child protective services and law enforcement being unsure about the legal ramifications of joint investigations.
Attending Team Meetings

Case reviews or team meetings were perceived as an important part of the investigative process. Study participants frequently described how they benefitted from the multiple perspectives available to them at team meetings. Several study participants described meetings when other team members suggested follow-up on an interview or a piece of information that for whatever reason the study participant had overlooked. One child protection investigator found the perspectives of different disciplines helpful in case planning:

Especially with the multidisciplinary staffings when we have someone from psych and we have somebody who specializes in sexual abuse, the legal aspect of it, and the medical aspect of it, all coming together to kind of form one plan or one goal and headed in the right direction.

Study participants frequently mentioned the analogy of how a child abuse investigation was reminiscent of putting a puzzle together. Team meetings were perceived as an opportunity for representatives from different agencies to come together and bring their pieces of the puzzle and through collaboration put those pieces of the puzzle together. One mental health professional described how attending a team meeting provided information she needed to work with a family:

When staffings are done, you are bringing all different people together who are involved in this case. I may only have a small piece of that, what the child or mom or dad are presenting to me. They may not be telling me that dad’s not supposed to be in the picture, but by going to a staffing, I may find out that mom is seeing dad. It just gives me different pieces of what the client may not want me to really know for whatever reason. You know for the child’s safety, the school has a piece of it. If someone is going into the home monitoring the family, they have a piece of it. Sometimes bringing those pieces
together. I may have this history on the family because this was what was given to me and there may be pieces of that someone else is involved with the family or child, and they don’t have that piece.

Team members who did not attend case reviews or team meetings on a regular basis were perceived as making things more difficult. Although most study participants agreed that failing to attend team meetings was not anyone’s fault, one law enforcement investigator explained it as the result of “this business, this world we are in, you never know what will happen.”

Although written interagency guidelines or team protocols often address attendance at team meetings and/or case reviews, study participants reported that agency supervisors frequently attend these meetings rather than send frontline child protective service workers or law enforcement investigators. One supervisor from law enforcement explained that attending team meetings was not an effective use of his investigators’ time. Although he spends several hours preparing for the bi-monthly meetings, the supervisor attends each meeting in order to update the other team members on each child abuse case currently under investigation in his unit.

One particular team coordinator described how the local team adopted what they considered to be a flexible approach to attendance at multidisciplinary team meetings: “We kind of have this joint ‘we’re a team right now,’ so whoever shows up around the table becomes a team member, albeit for that meeting only, but a team member nonetheless.” This flexible stance seemed to aim toward making team members who do not attend case reviews on a regular basis feel welcome and comfortable in sharing their thoughts and ideas. I interpreted the coordinator’s response to mean that she was giving the individuals the benefit of the doubt in assuming that if they came to the team meeting that they were willing to be part of the multidisciplinary team. Although the team coordinator did not perceive this as the ideal situation for building
collaboration among team members, she indicated that welcoming agency professionals to the table when they could attend helped to ensure that their community maintained a functioning team.

The same team coordinator also makes time at the beginning of each meeting to go around the room and each team member introduces themselves and talks briefly about their role within their particular agency. The team coordinator explained that they work with a number of different law enforcement agencies within their jurisdiction. Some of the law enforcement agencies from less populated areas may not have as many child abuse cases as other agencies. Therefore, they do not need to attend the case review meetings as often. The team coordinator explained that introductions are important because they ensure that everyone around the table knows who the other people are and what they do.

One protective services supervisor made the following comment in regard to information shared at the multidisciplinary team meeting:

You know that the DA’s office is there and that everybody has the same information. The information is not lost in a file, so it is all put out on the table. Because you might hear something at that meeting that law enforcement has done because you are not aware of because you can’t be aware of everything that everybody is doing, but when it is brought to a meeting and staffed, it is like ‘oh ok let me tell you what I’ve done.’ It is a way of putting things together to best serve the children and the families that we work with. It is more efficient.

The sharing of information from completed interviews increased efficiency of team members and helped them avoid duplication. Aside from sharing information, team meetings provide opportunities to learn about the roles and responsibilities of other agencies and to build
relationships with other team members. Study participants described the value of “coming to the table together” and listening to representatives from other agencies discuss their work. These discussions helped others quickly understand the parameters of the roles and responsibilities of other team members.

Getting feedback about a child or finding out what happened on a child abuse case held particular importance to forensic interviewers who typically interview the child once and then have no further contact with the child or family. Several forensic interviewers discussed the importance of closure and knowing the outcomes in these cases. Perhaps it may be one reason they perceived case reviews or team meetings as important. The meetings provide opportunities for other professionals not directly involved with the dependency case or criminal prosecution to know what happened. That knowledge may also serve to validate the forensic interviewer’s work with that child and family.

However, study participants indicated certain expectations for case review meetings and for the agency representatives who attend them. Study participants, regardless of discipline, expressed frustration about team members who did not attend meetings on a regular basis or came to meetings unprepared to share information. Study participants often described team meetings as “highly interactive” and sometimes a place where team members confronted others about their work.

**Holding MDT accountable.** One value of the multidisciplinary team approach to child abuse investigations identified early in the study was accountability of team members. Several study participants perceived team meetings as a venue for holding agencies and individual team members accountable for their work. Some study participants described “challenging” other team members as a function of the case review or team meeting. One assistant district attorney
perceived it to be his responsibility as a team member to “challenge other team members in a
respectful and professional way to look at things in a different way.”

When asked how collaboration strengthened child abuse investigations, one forensic
interviewer stated: “I think mainly because it holds everyone accountable. I know there are
some cases where law enforcement did not think there was enough, some other people kind of
did, so we are still investigating and figuring that out.” Another forensic interviewer also viewed
accountability as one-way collaboration with other team members strengthened investigations:

Even though there are so many different people, everybody leaves knowing the name and
number of who is following up on what and then we follow-up with it a month later at
our team case reviews. And then it gets tracked, and it’s just not like sent out to different
agencies and we never hear outcomes. We kind of hear where cases are, why they get
filed or why they didn’t get filed or why CPS got involved or why they weren’t able to
get involved.

One deputy district attorney discussed the effect of peer pressure among team members within
team meetings. She said that pressure to conform often brought the “one standout rotten apple”
into compliance with collaborating members of the team. She described how the members of her
team expected others to be “excited, gung ho, and advocates for families” and that it did not “go
well” for new team members who did not conform to that way of thinking. She stated that team
members who did not conform “tend to standout like a sore thumb” and experience peer pressure
from other team members.

One rural community also designated the monthly meeting of the multidisciplinary team
as the time for the team members to address non-compliance with the team protocol. The written
interagency agreement stated that the team was responsible for resolving conflict or non-
compliance by any member agency. Any issues affecting team functioning were brought to the meeting and discussed.

**Leading the Team.** Leadership of the team was perceived as important to decisions about when and how team meetings take place and generally the direction of the discussions within the meetings. The role and responsibilities of the team leader and/or team coordinator varied among the communities in the current study. Although prosecuting attorneys typically held the leadership role, child advocacy center directors held responsibility for leading and coordinating the activities of the team in three communities in the study.

Many times the study participants credited the team leader and/or coordinator for the effectiveness of the team. When study participants described their particular team as highly effective, I probed into the issue by asking them to explain why. Their responses frequently related to the team leader and/or team coordinator. One team attorney from a multidisciplinary child interview center commented how the team coordinator was able to get cooperation from anybody and perceived the team as lucky to have her, “I worry for us if she ever leaves, she just makes you want to do the right thing and work hard.” One mental health professional commented about how the team coordinator respected the other members of the team and encouraged them to express their opinions:

Somebody says, “So, what do you think?” Drawing out all the team members; highlighting some of the points that have been made; providing support, like “oh wow, that sounds like a tough case.” Respecting everybody’s opinions as well and showing that respect. I have to say the team coordinator is great at that.

The study participants discussed the need for team leaders and/or coordinators to have good organizational and time management skills to keep the team meeting focused. Study participants
discussed being frustrated by ineffective team leaders or meetings where team leadership was not designated or agendas were not followed.

**Experiencing Frustration**

Even though study participants generally viewed collaboration as positive and necessary in child abuse investigations, they described times when working with other agencies resulted in issues they experienced as frustrating. In the following sections, each of the major issues is described often in the words of the study participants. For the most part, these issues remained unresolved as they involved policies and issues beyond the scope and control of the local team.

**Differing Policies and Procedures**

This category refers to how different agencies represented on the multidisciplinary team have different policies and procedures within their own individual agencies that guide when and how they respond to child abuse investigations. The source of frustration for many study participants related to differing timeframes for initiating and completing child abuse investigations. A search of the administrative codes for each state in the study revealed the following timeframes for initiating child contact and investigation completion.
Table A Timeframes for CPS Response and Investigation Completion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States in Study</th>
<th>High Priority</th>
<th>Low Priority</th>
<th>Investigation Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>&lt; 12 hours</td>
<td>&lt; 5 days</td>
<td>90 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>&lt; 24 hours</td>
<td>&lt; 10 days</td>
<td>&lt; 30 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>&lt; 2 hours</td>
<td>&lt; 24 hours</td>
<td>&lt; 60 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>&lt; 24 hours</td>
<td>&lt; 5 days</td>
<td>30-60 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: High priority cases refer to situations involving sexual abuse, serious physical injuries, or a child at risk of serious injury within 24 hours of the report being received.

According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), the state of Alabama averaged a forty-two hour response to all reports of child abuse and neglect while Florida reported an average of nine hours for the most recent reporting period of 2012 (Children’s Bureau, 2013). California and Georgia did not submit statistics for that year.

To complete the child abuse investigation, child protective services must interview all children and adults in the family when the alleged offender resides in the home. If the allegation of child abuse is severe and meets the definition of a criminal offense, law enforcement conducts a parallel investigation of the criminal aspects of the case. Unlike child protective services, no timeframes exist for law enforcement as to when to initiate or complete the criminal investigation. One law enforcement investigator described how law enforcement typically interviews the alleged offender near the end of the criminal investigation which can pose difficulties for both law enforcement and child protective services and could potentially place children at greater risk of harm.
Both child protective services and law enforcement perceived differing timeframes as making collaboration more difficult. Generally, child protective services viewed differing timeframes as a child safety issue when waiting on law enforcement, while law enforcement perceived the risk of alerting the alleged offender when child protective services moved too quickly. How the different agencies and teams handled differing timeframes indicated to some extent the degree of collaboration within the multidisciplinary team. One law enforcement investigator made the following comment related to differing timeframes and what child protective services needed:

But I think just in talking to some CPIs that I know, I think they want to see law enforcement jump on these cases quicker than what we do. I think we try to do that but I don’t think we can get around to them as fast as they have to.

Often law enforcement recognized efforts by child protective services to avoid ‘hindering’ the law enforcement investigation by asking ‘permission’ to go interview the alleged offender accused. The law enforcement investigator stated:

They always ask us for permission to go interview the suspect. They do that for a reason, in case we were going to do those controlled phone calls or if we wanted to do something proactive to try to investigate it. They don’t want to ring the bell and blow the whistle to the suspect.

Upon hearing that child protective services ‘asked permission’ to carry out their mandated responsibilities, two thoughts occurred to me. The first being the safety of the child and how children cannot remain at risk because law enforcement wants to arrange a pretense phone call. The second related to the level of respect for the role of the child protective services worker. Here the law enforcement investigator implied that his work was more important than the child
One deputy district attorney weighed in on the side of law enforcement in the issue of differing timeframes by commenting on how “sometimes you have to wait for somebody.” Here again the question of priority and whether the need to assess child safety or the criminal investigation of the case holds greater importance and how that affects case outcomes. Another attorney offered a different perspective of timeframes and the importance of collaboration in response to child abuse: “We have had cases where from the beginning of the investigation until arrest, it is less than 24 hours. Those are the cases where you need a lot of collaboration between social services and law enforcement.”

Despite the numerous complaints expressed about differing timeframes, one law enforcement investigator offered a positive perspective on the issue. He noted how child protective services may interview the child before law enforcement makes contact on the case. However, he found that “it doesn’t really mess up what we are doing here, because they’re well trained in forensic interviewing as well, so it’s just kind of a supplement.” He commented that child protective service workers bring a lot of information into the collaborative process when they contact the family. This was another example of where a strong relationship with other team members provided an optimistic outlook of what a majority of study participants found frustrating.

The study participants that described their teams as highly effective often were members of multidisciplinary teams that had clearly written guidelines and protocols to deal with differing timeframes. These team members understood the roles and responsibilities of other agencies and
addressed differing timeframes in their policies and procedures. The team members who seemed more effective at responding to this issue also described conversations with the other agencies about handling the issue. Study participants found communication important in dealing with differing policies and procedures and other frustrations associated with collaboration.

Inadequate Communication

Much of the frustration related to differing timeframes for case completion may result from inadequate communication between child protective services and law enforcement. One law enforcement supervisor highlighted the need for good communication and coordination between law enforcement and child protective services to prevent issues related to the differing timeframes from becoming problematic. She described a situation in her jurisdiction where one child protective services worker repeatedly alerted the alleged offender about the allegations before law enforcement began their investigation. The law enforcement supervisor eventually contacted the child protective services supervisor about the actions of the child protective service worker. Admittedly, the law enforcement supervisor experienced frustration by what she termed “sabotaging the child, the investigation, and everything just so she could close her case.” The supervisor found particularly frustrating the fact that the multidisciplinary team continued to receive child abuse reports involving the family “without anything being solved.”

One deputy district attorney who served as the team leader discussed the importance of communication to collaboration among team members. She described communication as the forerunner of collaboration stating, “once you are communicating then you can start to collaborate. You can’t collaborate if you can’t communicate with the representative from the other agency.” She discussed her frustration when team members attended case review meetings and did not communicate with one another and noted that the lack of communication made it
difficult for agencies to do their work. She described a recent case in which a law enforcement officer believed the child protective services worker had not gathered needed information before writing the final report and releasing the child back to the family. According to the study participant, the law enforcement investigator attempted unsuccessfully to communicate his concerns to the child protective service worker and “that didn’t work out so well so there were frustrations on both sides in that particular case.”

One supervisor of a child protection investigative unit indicated that communication with other team members sometimes made her own work more difficult. She explained that at times child protective services “get so caught up in our workloads that we don’t want to get other people involved. Sometimes they don’t give you the answers you want fast enough.” She indicated that collaborating with other team members made their investigations longer and more difficult. She perceived collaboration as “just a waiting game” and how taking time to sit down and talk to other team members could be frustrating.

One child protective services supervisor described how communication between child protective services and law enforcement could be improved in one rural county:

We have someone on-call here 24-7 and we send them that information and they know who we are, but they need to see our face, and we need to go and meet with them more than we do and talk with them more than we do and inform them more than we do, I think, and remind them more than we do, because they have changes in staff, just like we have changing in staff.

Although often study participants frequently reported how they respected and appreciated the work of agencies on the team, respect was also a source of frustration for team members who did not feel as valued as other members of the team. Like many of the study participants who had
experience with teams in multiple jurisdictions, one county council noted how he had worked in other California jurisdictions where he did not experience what he called the “good collaboration” of his current multidisciplinary team. The study participant related “good collaboration” to information sharing. He perceived team members interested in knowing what information other agencies had (as well as their own willingness to share information) as more collaborative. He commented how one agency on a different team had taken the attitude of “we will do our thing and we don’t need your help” and how that attitude undermined the effectiveness of the team in that community. He described the need for team members to recognize the “big picture” for collaboration to occur. He also discussed how team members need to look at child abuse cases holistically and consider the needs of both the criminal and dependency investigators.

Similar to other study participants from outside law enforcement and prosecution, the county council expressed some degree of frustration with the team’s emphasis on the criminal investigation as compared to the dependency case:

There are a lot of people that focus pretty much just on the criminal case and the CPS case is kind of the tag-along and there is a lot of stuff that probably does not get asked because of that. So having her [the forensic interviewer] be flexible really helps us sometimes get evidence that, if she wasn’t willing to do, would not be as effective. He commented about how quickly dependency cases moved through the court system. He also talked about the need for the forensic interviewer to consider the dependency case when questioning the victim. He needed the forensic interviewer to be aware of other children in the home who might also be at risk for abuse and to explore this issue when interviewing the child reported to be the victim. Once again there seemed to be an issue of whose investigation
received priority when the team was working together to collect information about what happened to the child.

Study participants discussed the need to have their opinions ‘heard’ and valued by other members of the team. Although not frequently discussed by study participants, an underlying current of frustration seemed to exist among team members less involved in the criminal investigation and more concerned with the well-being of the child and family. The case manager for one child protection team commented about how she experienced collaboration differently in comparing the two teams that she had worked for in the past. Even though it was several years earlier when she worked for the first team, she continued to identify with that particular team. Unlike her current position, her earlier team experience included her role as a forensic interviewer. The responsibility for interviewing children in her current team belonged to a different agency. The case manager seemed to feel more valued as a member of the team when she conducted forensic interviews. Her comments indicated that other team members did not value her current role of working with families as much as the role of the forensic interviewer, although may have been due to her own valuing of the forensic interviewer role.

**Changing Team Members and Collaboration**

During the theoretical sampling phase of the study, team members were asked about the effect of turnover and different levels of work experience on collaboration among members of the multidisciplinary team. Interestingly, study participants perceived turnover as an issue in both child protective services and law enforcement agencies, but for different reasons.

The General Accounting Office (2003) estimated an annual of turnover rate of between 30-40% in child protective services while more recent studies estimated the annual turnover rate to range from 20-60% (Collies-Cumargo, Ellett, & Lester, 2012; Cyphers et al., 2005; Strand,
Spath, Bosco-Ruggiero, 2010; Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, Trinkle, 2010). Study participants regardless of discipline referred to the issue when addressing how collaboration sometimes makes their work more difficult. One law enforcement supervisor with 26 years of experience described the difficulty of investigating child sexual abuse and how turnover affected the ability of law enforcement to rely upon and trust the other members of the team:

Child abuse, sexual abuse is a very different animal from any other crime and you have to learn it’s a lot more than talking to the child, talking to the mom, talking to the suspect because you have to be able to corroborate what happened and the way you do that is through everybody else [on the team]. Every now and then you get lucky and the suspect will confess and there’s a great sex assault exam that says this happened but that’s 1% and the rest of it is talking to everybody else trying to get some answers so the new player, the new person, be it the investigator or what have you has got to learn to rely upon others for the information and trust their knowledge. So ‘yes’ there is a problem with the turnover.

One of the important findings from the study was how team members not only discussed what made their particular jobs difficult, but they also understood the impact of systemic issues on the work of other agencies. Study participants regardless of discipline described problems with staffing issues that affected collaboration among the agencies represented on the multidisciplinary teams. One attorney described the following issue related to staff turnover in child protective services:

What happens is not enough people to do their job, you have inexperienced people, then you have a tragedy occur, then there is an investigation of the tragedy, and then they come out with all these recommendations for the people that could not do their job in the
first place to do twice as much work, so that the tragedy doesn’t happen again and then another tragedy happens and it is just endless. It is just endless.

One forensic interviewer also commented on the effect of staff turnover in child protective services on collaboration with law enforcement on the local multidisciplinary team:

I think child protective services and law enforcement, it’s up and down with the collaboration between those two departments, because of child protective services getting sued all the time. In this county, there’s been a lot of really high turnover so there’s a lot of new CPS workers and so they don’t work very well with law enforcement right now at this moment in time. We try to help those issues by trainings, by introducing the different departments, by having them come here and learn more about the process, but CPS and law enforcement, it’s just not good. I think that CPS is really scared to do certain things and to talk to the child with law enforcement there. It’s a little hard and frustrating. I think CPS very often, new CPS workers, will go out and talk to the suspect and not give law enforcement the opportunity to do that first. Whereas they will let the suspect know that there’s an investigation so they will flee or they will do something and that really hurts the whole investigation. I think that collaboration needs to be worked on but I don’t see how that can happen with the changing laws about not being able to interview the child together.

Although earlier study participants commented on staffing issues in child protective services, study participants from law enforcement agencies in California and Florida presented a different perspective. In these states, study participants reported that state policy limits the amount of time that law enforcement officers serve in special victims units, such as crimes against children. Study participants described how law enforcement investigators in their jurisdictions worked in
these units 3-5 years on average and then rotated back into patrol units. One study participant made the following comment about staffing issues resulting from law enforcement’s policy in that particular jurisdiction:

Five years probably does not cut it, because at the end of five years, we’re going to be bringing somebody else in cold that doesn’t know anything about it and hasn’t developed those relationships and everything. And you know, that’s really the challenging part, it’s really when I leave, there’s going to be someone else who needs to get caught up on all this. It’s really challenging.

Another issue unique to law enforcement was whether the assignment to child maltreatment or sexual assault cases was a ‘choice.’ The study participants from law enforcement indicated that they chose to work child abuse investigations. However, they emphasized that not all investigators assigned to child abuse units had a choice. Study participants from law enforcement agreed that law enforcement investigators not given a choice typically did not collaborate well with other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. One law enforcement supervisor with 24 years of experience commented on the issue:

I think for the position, the law enforcement person, the actual person who does the child abuse investigations, and is part of the multidisciplinary team, has to want to do it and understand and believe in that team concept. If you just put someone in that position that doesn’t, it’s not going to work and it’s going to affect the rest of the team.

The decision to work with child abuse cases was not limited to law enforcement. One deputy district attorney commented on the willingness of prosecutors to work with child abuse cases:
In our office, because of the nature of the assignment, the child sexual abuse cases, they won’t put you into this assignment unless it is something you are willing to do, because there are some people in our office that just flat out won’t do it. They say it is too hard.

Aside from law enforcement and prosecution, other team members also observed how team members who chose to work in child abuse investigations displayed better attitudes about doing the work and were more likely to collaborate with other agencies. The study participants reported that special victim units where law enforcement investigators opt to work in the unit tended to run more smoothly than units where law enforcement officers were arbitrarily assigned to child abuse investigations. They also agreed the law enforcement investigators that chose to work crimes against children had slightly longer tenures than the ones who had no input into their assignment. Study participants noted “their superiors realize he/she doesn’t want to be there, so they try to get him out as soon as possible.”

Although law enforcement had the option of working with child abuse cases in the jurisdictions in the study, a majority of the study participants did not have a “choice” about how long they stayed in child abuse investigations. The issue becomes even more complex when one considers that multiple law enforcement investigators familiar with the team protocols as well as the other team members may be leaving the team at the same time. This law enforcement policy coupled with the ever-changing landscape in child protective service workers who frequently leave within the first two years of employment (GAO, 2003) presents challenges to collaboration and effective team functioning. Training remains an on-going issue for multidisciplinary teams under these circumstances.
**Experience Affects Collaboration**

One of the more interesting findings from the study involved how different study participants often viewed the same phenomenon affecting collaboration both positively and negatively. The study participants perceived the length of time an individual worked within a specific discipline or agency as positively and negatively affecting the willingness of team members to collaborate. More experienced professionals were sometimes perceived as being inflexible and unwilling to listen while newer investigators were perceived as more willing to engage and open to learning new information. On the other hand, study participants often viewed more experienced investigators as more knowledgeable about what other team members needed and more willing to get that information. One law enforcement investigator commented that more experienced law enforcement investigators did not consult with the prosecuting attorney as often as newer investigators because experienced investigators knew the rules of evidence collection.

There was also an issue of trusting newer members of the team and being willing to share information with them. One law enforcement investigator commented:

> If you are brand new and walked in the door here and this was your first three months on the job, it takes longer. So my experience is very good, positive with these other [agencies] because I have developed nine years worth of relationships. If you are brand new, you might be hearing a totally different conversation from me.

Experience was also important to one child protective services worker who suggested that being invested in the team process, or the value the team member placed on the process, affected team functioning:
They still need to learn how to work with people, but when you are newer and I think sometimes when they come in, it is their first or second job out of college, they have no plans on staying so their investment is it is a little different.

She valued the team process and was frustrated by the fact that newer professionals did not share her enthusiasm or appreciation for the multidisciplinary team.

Although inadequate funding was associated with higher caseloads and staff turnover, funding also affected the ability of study participants to receive training. Study participants who attended multidisciplinary team trainings together with representatives from other agencies described collaborative relationships with other agencies and effective team functioning.

Study participants often viewed these systemic issues as inevitable due to the nature of the work and/or the culture within the individual agency. One child protective service worker expressed frustration about the reactive nature of the work itself. “We’re reactive, there’s nothing proactive that I can do that’s going to stop someone from losing control and hitting their child. So we’re always after the fact and that’s frustrating.”

One child protective services supervisor offered her perspective on dealing with frustration with other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. She encouraged her workers to focus on ‘our job’ and not the jobs of other agencies involved in the child abuse investigation. Although they sometimes described working with other agencies as frustrating, the majority of the study participants found value in collaboration with other team members.

**Valuing Team**

This major category describes what the study participants valued most about collaboration among the members of the multidisciplinary team. Their perspectives are as diverse as their backgrounds and the multidisciplinary team models they represent. In examining
the initial codes, the following sub-categories captured many of the reasons that they found collaboration with other team members to be valuable.

**Differing Perspectives**

Study participants regardless of discipline agreed upon the value of the multiple perspectives provided by the different disciplines involved in the investigation. One law enforcement supervisor described how the involvement of multiple agencies all doing their jobs provided a more holistic approach to helping the family that could help protect the child and hold the person responsible for the abuse accountable, and ultimately help society break the violent cycle.

Another law enforcement supervisor with 24 years of experience provided her perspective on child abuse investigations before implementation of the multidisciplinary team approach in her community:

> When we did it just from our own angle, it really wasn’t very effective and you were able to see that when it came time for trial, where you just did your part and nothing else, because the people that you wanted to help really weren’t well. But once we really started bringing everyone together as a team, you can see the difference in the outcome and it’s huge.

One law enforcement investigator offered the following perspective on the value of diversity as a member of the team:

> We all have very, very different approaches to life and so just on any topic we are all very open and giving our opinions, I mean obviously we give our professional opinions and guidance when necessary, but it’s also just people talking to each other and people
have a lot of different ways of talking to each other and I think that’s like the hugest benefit to me for this team

The study participants perceived differing perspectives as both a positive and negative aspect of collaboration. Differing perspectives also meant different opinions and different ways of approaching the child abuse investigation. Often study participants described how they had to ‘just talk it out’ or ‘agree to disagree’ when they experienced these differences. Study participants, who described their teams as highly effective, often acknowledged that disagreements were sometimes just part of working with other agencies with different perspectives.

Learning from Other MDT

The study participants perceived another benefit of collaboration with other multidisciplinary team members as the opportunity to learn from other professionals with expertise in different disciplines. One study participant from law enforcement shared the following comment about how he learned about the work of other members of the team:

Probably just on the job training, talking with other investigators who are doing our job, I think that's sometimes the best training. It’s talking to a doctor or nurse in each individual case saying ‘oh, so this is how blood gets pushed when a belt strikes.’ I think you learn that in a class and it is like whatever, but if you actually see it firsthand while you are in the field, while you are in that setting, and someone is teaching you about it, it means more. I think that strengthens your knowledge and makes you a better investigator down the road.

The study participant saw the doctor or nurse’s expertise as not just a short-term benefit of collaboration but as training that increased his own expertise in his particular discipline.
While some study participants found value in the expertise of other disciplines, one law enforcement investigator stated that she needed the perspectives of other team members from law enforcement. The investigator worked in a small rural community where she was the only investigator assigned to work child abuse cases. She valued the opportunity to attend team meetings at the local child advocacy center, which served multiple law enforcement agencies, where she heard how other law enforcement investigators deal with issues similar to her own.

One forensic interviewer found the multidisciplinary team valuable because attending the meeting enabled her to find out what happened to the children she interviewed. The literature supports how knowing what happens to the children can serve to validate the work of forensic interviewers and provide satisfaction in that the information from the interview effectively moved the case forward. That knowledge may also serve to reinforce a positive perspective of collaboration with other team members.

Almost all study participants who previously worked with multidisciplinary teams in different communities expressed appreciation for the collaboration among the team members in their current multidisciplinary team. Despite frustrations, the majority of study participants described his/her current multidisciplinary team as “highly effective” and collaboration among team members as “good.” Some of the study participants introduced the idea of “buy in” or support from agencies on the team. When asked how they achieved “buy in,” the responses varied. One forensic interviewer noted the quality of the forensic interviews they conducted and their commitment to doing good work that earned the respect of other agencies.

One law enforcement supervisor with 24 years of experience acknowledged the expertise of the medical professional on her particular multidisciplinary team:
When it comes to children who have any kind of physical abuse or who have gone through the sexual assault exam, the relationship we have with the children’s hospital is huge and we really have a good working relationship with the doctor. With him, it’s really special and amazing, you read a doctor’s report and half the time, you can’t read it anyway, then you don’t understand what it says, but you can call the doctor that we work with and he always explains it in a way that makes total sense and that helps us, it helps the DA, and he explains it to the jury and that’s worth its weight in gold.

Of course, study participants recognized that collaboration can make child abuse investigations more difficult. However, one child protection investigator perceived that as a positive aspect of collaboration:

I mean even my rib fracture case. I had talked to everybody, mom, dad, daycare, hospital staff and they’re like ‘oh, no problem, accidental injury’ and then CPT was like ‘no, no, no, no, this kid was hurt.’ Does that make my job more difficult? Yes, because I need to figure out what happened to this kid.

The forensic interviewers in particular discussed how they often become so focused during an interview that they missed something so they relied upon that ‘second set of eyes and ears’ of those professionals observing the interview to capture the missing details. One child protective services supervisor appreciated how the multidisciplinary team process means that a child abuse cases was scrutinized by multiple agencies and “that has to strengthen anything.”

Frequently study participants recognized the different perspectives of the disciplines represented on the multidisciplinary team. For example, one law enforcement detective discussed how “child protective services was not law enforcement,” and how she looked at things through a different lens than the child protective service workers and supervisor. Despite
the differences, she described having a good working relationship with child protective services. Her experience demonstrated she recognized that child protective services viewed child abuse cases differently. More importantly she accepted the differences and took them under consideration when working with team members from child protective services.

One supervisor from an urban police department acknowledged that law enforcement officers cannot do the job of protecting children alone and they needed other agencies to be “our” resources:

Just reading the cases and attacking it from a law enforcement angle doesn’t get the job done. Some of these cases are more about keeping the children safe and keeping them in a safe environment, which is number one. And you can’t do that unless you have all the resources. All of our resources are everybody else, our CPS, our hospitals.

While collaborating with other agencies presented its share of challenges to study participants, the majority of study participants found working with other agencies beneficial to their own investigations. They frequently provided case examples of relying upon other agencies for information or assistance that made their investigations more complete and resulted in what they perceived as positive outcomes.

**Identifying the Core Code**

The process of identifying the core code involved a careful review of the initial codes and the memos written in support of the major categories. Relying upon the study participants’ definition of collaboration as “working together” for a common goal, the idea of ‘relating to other MDT members’ came through strongly in each of the interviews. The importance of ‘relating to other MDT members’ emerged early during the interviews with study participants. They described the effect of relationships on collaboration with other team members from the
beginning to the conclusion of the investigative process. Study participants often described how the quality of relationships had both positive and negative effects on team functioning. Study participants also described how relationships affected collaboration among frontline team members and how relationships among agency supervisors and administrators sometimes affected collaboration among team members.

The memos written in the field frequently mentioned how “once again” the study participant discussed his/her relationship with other team members and how that relationship strengthened or made the child abuse investigation more difficult. The typical study participant discussed how strong relationships with other agencies or disciplines resulted in more effective investigations while poor relationships made collaborating with other agencies more difficult.

The idea of ‘relating to other MDT members’ linked the major categories identified in the analysis. However, I struggled with the study participants’ emphasis on the importance of ‘information sharing’ when identifying the core category. Study participants emphasized the need for information sharing throughout the investigative process. More than anything else, study participants looked to other team members for information. They perceived information as the key to a complete and thorough child abuse investigation.

I resolved the issue by thinking carefully about how information sharing takes place and under what circumstances. In thinking about collaboration as a process, I considered what was driving the process – relating to others or sharing information. Ultimately, I decided that ‘relating or other MDT members’ held greater importance as how study participants perceived relationships with other team members informed individual decisions related to sharing information with other team members. In reviewing the memos written in the field, it became clear that ‘relating to other MDT’ was the common thread that linked the other major categories
together. Often study participants discussed how they were more comfortable not only sharing information but requesting information from team members representing other agencies when they shared a common history. These team members also discussed how they relied upon other team members and that reliance seemed to depend upon past experiences. For example, one assistant attorney general asked a physician to interpret a medical report. The physician took the time to meet with the assistant attorney general in person in order to explain the medical findings. The assistant attorney general expressed both respect and trust of the physician who served as a member of the multidisciplinary team.

As the importance of relationships emerged during the memo writing, I began to ask study participants to explain more about the importance of relationships and its effect upon collaboration and/or team functioning. The subcategories that support ‘relating to other MDT members’ that emerged from the interviews are discussed in the following sections.

**Relationships Built Upon Shared History**

The study participants with more work experience in their respective agencies described effective relationships with representatives from other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. These particular team members described relationships with representatives from other agencies that were built over the course of time. These relationships evolved through years of experience in working child abuse cases together. One child protective services supervisor with 28 years’ experience in the same county discussed how she developed relationships with the local law enforcement officials in her community:

I don’t think anyone is going to be here long enough right now that is going to say in 28 years ‘oh I was out on the road with . . .’ and that is the truth. The police chiefs of [two cities here] and the county sheriff were road officers during the same years with me. And
I don’t think someone is going to be here 28 years to see that the road officer they are out with now becoming sheriff or police chief.

A different child protective services supervisor new to the multidisciplinary team emphasized the importance of relationships. She discussed how she had observed the interactions between other members of the team who shared a history. She noted that she was new to the multidisciplinary team having only been in current position for a few months. I specifically asked her how she was building relationships with a team of people who already shared a history. She described it as “always a work in progress” and an on-going dialog and “frankly, it needs to be for a team to be effective.” Although she acknowledges not yet sharing a history with the other team members, she said her agency receives a lot of respect for what it does and that her agency respects the work of the other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. She also discussed how they might not share a history yet but they did share a common goal of getting the information they need to ensure that children are protected.

The supervisors who participated in the study often reported the better relationships and the better experiences with collaborating with other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. They also had more work experience in their respective agencies and many had worked in the field with other supervisors or administrators in other agencies.

**Building Relationships**

Asking how they built relationships was also explored when study participants rated their particular team as highly effective because of the relationships between the team members. One child protective services supervisor responded, “I think through continuing to work together and through open communication and dialog, through understanding.”
Study participants described how effective relationships with team members from other disciplines take time to build. One law enforcement investigator from a rural area commented, “I have a very good working rapport with our child protective services here in this county. It has taken a number of years to cultivate that and get it to the point.” One child protective services supervisor discussed what she tells the frontline child protective service workers in her unit about building relationships:

The same thing with law enforcement, you find a person that you can make a contact with, that you can build a relationship with, and that you know will take care of you. And you call that person, you have a relationship with them, if they can’t do it then they are going to make sure that you are taken care of.

Relying upon my own experiences as a child welfare supervisor, I interpreted the study participant’s use of the phrase “taken care of” to mean that relationships with representatives from other agencies support the work of her and her staff. She described how if law enforcement called and needed a child protective service worker, she sent a worker. Likewise, if she needed a law enforcement officer, she counted on there being someone available to help when she asked. The study participant discussed how relationships must be nurtured and how “you take time to put into that relationship because if you don’t take the time, you are not going to have that [relationship] for very long.” When agencies are available to assist each other in responding to child abuse reports, the investigative process appears to run more smoothly and outcomes improve for children and families when activities are coordinated and information is shared among investigative agencies. However, another perspective might be that relationships can become so important that they override the importance of the needs of families and children.
Other study participants discussed how the day-to-day experience of working cases together built relationships. One study participant, an attorney representing child protective services commented that:

You know you may see them on a couple of cases but when you sit in here and do interviews with them and they have about a two or three year rotation for two years and you see case after case after case with them, you definitely develop a relationship with them that you would not have otherwise.

The majority of study participants shared simple ideas for building collaborative relationships that had worked for their own teams. Study participants discussed how they built relationships by attending trainings or conferences together as a team. Study participants who did not have regularly scheduled team meetings noted the need to have meetings more often than quarterly in order to get to know the other professionals on the team.

**Relationships Beyond MDT**

Study participants utilized relationships with other agencies beyond the local multidisciplinary team to secure services for children and families. In rural communities, relationships with agencies in other communities provided resources for medical evaluation of children in the local community. Relationships with multidisciplinary team members in other areas enabled child protective service workers and law enforcement to access the services of forensic interviewers in child advocacy centers.

One law enforcement supervisor discussed the importance of relationships and cross training of other law enforcement agencies. He said that law enforcement investigators from small communities may not be familiar with the procedures used to investigate child abuse cases. He assisted several law enforcement investigators from the county sheriff’s department and local
municipal police departments in conducting child abuse investigations. He said that the local
district attorney and the district attorney’s investigator also assisted in these investigations.
Unfortunately, he said that the supervisors and/or administrators in these other law enforcement
agencies did not always welcome that kind of assistance. He commented how one of the
investigators who sought his advice on a case was reprimanded and another chose not to tell his
supervisor that he requested help from another law enforcement agency. When asked if whether
requesting outside assistance was always perceived as negative, he responded that the more
progressive law enforcement agencies welcomed and encouraged cross training and
collaboration with other law enforcement agencies.

Study participants also described the importance of relationships with agencies outside
the local team when child abuse investigations involved multiple jurisdictions. One law
enforcement investigator discussed one case where he relied upon the relationships that the local
child protective service supervisor had with other child protective service agencies:

We had a child homicide involving a three-year-old where there were multiple child
protective service reports and the child had also been seen here. That family lived in a
different city at the time and had recently moved to a different jurisdiction, so I did not
have access to previous records. So again collaborating and getting all of that together so
we can find out if there are other reports from other agencies to help work that through.

Study participants from different disciplines also recognized the importance of relationships with
families involved in child abuse cases. One deputy district attorney pointed out that sometimes
families did not want to talk to law enforcement. She often found families more willing to share
information with child protective services workers that previously worked with the family than
with the law enforcement investigator.
Conceptualizing the Major Categories

Systems theory provided the framework for conceptualizing the major categories identified in the analysis. The first step was considering the investigation as a process. The major categories identified through the interviews and the memo writing related to both ‘persons’ and ‘interactions’ involved in the investigative process. Interactions often referred to actions that study participants described as exemplars of collaboration (i.e., information sharing, conducting joint investigations). I then considered the nature of collaboration as described by the study participants. Although collaboration was limited in some communities, there were no study participants who reported no collaboration with other agencies responsible for child abuse investigations. Study participants reported varying degrees of collaboration with different members of the team. The degree of collaboration appeared to be closely connected to the strength of the relationships among team members. Having identified ‘relating to other MDT’ as the core category, I began to consider relationships and their effect upon collaboration with other team members.

I offer the major category of ‘information sharing’ as an example here. Regardless of discipline, study participants’ perceived ‘sharing information’ as important when collaborating with other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. The agencies on the multidisciplinary team depended upon information to complete a thorough investigation in order to know what happened to the child. While information sharing holds much importance throughout the investigative process, sharing that information rests with the individual team member. The decisions about when and how to share information or ask for information often depended upon the relationships of individual team members. Interactions during the course of the investigation
connected team members, but relationships guided the individual decisions that determined the quality of these interactions.

The study participants discussed collaboration in terms of give-and-take and equal partnerships. In reflecting on what study participants described as reciprocal relationships among team members, I considered how collaboration may be reinforcing when team members perceived the work of other agencies as equally important as their own. Study participants who had positive experiences working with different agencies on the team continued to do so. These team members expressed a willingness to do whatever it takes to help these other members of the team. They also perceived a similar willingness on the part of these other agencies to reciprocate and to help them in whatever ways they needed. However, study participants who attempted to meet the needs of other team members, but perceived little or no reciprocal effort on the part of the other agencies frequently grew tired and stopped putting the effort into collaborating. One child protective services supervisor had grown tired of asking law enforcement agencies to go out with her workers on cases so her workers conducted their investigations independently of law enforcement. Collaboration as described by the study participants reflects the feedback loops found in systems theory.

The study participants described how collaboration varied depending upon the relationships with other agencies or disciplines on the multidisciplinary team. While collaboration appeared dependent upon the quality of relationships among members of the multidisciplinary team, these relationships appeared dependent upon how much team members knew and understood about the roles and responsibilities of other multidisciplinary team members as well as their ability to respect and trust other team members. Again, these different levels or degrees of collaboration often emerged over time and the experience of team members
working together. The concepts of knowing, understanding, respecting, and trusting other multidisciplinary team members are discussed in the following sections.

Figure A Conceptual Model

Knowing the Work of Other MDT

The basic concept of collaborating with other members of the team involves knowing what other team members do. Study participants were asked to respond to what other members of the team needed from them to do their work. Study participants with knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of other agencies on the team responded in detail about what other agencies or disciplines needed from them to do their work. Often study participants acknowledged the strengths and recognized the limitations of other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. For the most part, the study participants knew well what the other agencies on their team needed from them. Although some study participants learned about the policies and procedures of other agencies through trainings, many study participants indicated that they knew about other
agencies from the day-to-day experiences of working together with them on child abuse investigations.

One law enforcement supervisor in a large metropolitan area described how establishing relationships was key to communication and information sharing among the different agencies on the team. Also, knowing the other team members and being able to put a face with a name was significant for this study participant. She wanted to be able to call other team members and “talk it out” when problems occurred. She served on what she referred to as a “team within the team” in a large metropolitan area. She represented law enforcement on an advisory committee to the multidisciplinary team. That advisory committee deals with procedural issues among the agencies on the multidisciplinary team.

The study participants perceived knowing other multidisciplinary team members as an advantage of the multidisciplinary team process. The law enforcement supervisor linked ‘knowing’ to having respect for that person and understanding the limits of their work, specifically what another member of the team can or cannot do when it comes to working with child abuse cases. One attorney representing child protective services in dependency cases and a recent addition to the local multidisciplinary team commented about his current team compared to jurisdictions where he had worked in the past:

One of the biggest things to me about being on this team is I know all the detectives by first name and I can just pick up the phone and call them if I need something and they can just pick up the phone and call me. That is something I’ve never had.

Asked about the challenges involved in building relationships with other team members in a metropolitan area where one-half million people live, one physician responded “sometimes yes and sometimes no.” He discussed that during the past 15 years he worked with the same
sergeant in-charge of the special victims unit and he previously worked with the current law enforcement lieutenants when they were investigators.

One forensic interviewer offered the following comment that supports the idea of knowing and how it relates to knowing not just the policies and procedures and roles and responsibilities of other team members but really knowing the people on the team: “I think the CPS relationships have been because of my longevity here with the agency and knowing some of the older folks who have just been around for a while.” The forensic interviewer perceived knowing the other members of the team and having them know each other as important to helping her deal with her own responsibilities to the team, and more importantly for the well-being of children referred for forensic interviews.

However, some team members for whatever reason did not know or recognize that other agencies on the team might require some form of assistance from their agency or discipline. Knowing the roles and responsibilities of other agencies on the multidisciplinary team serves as a basis for realistic expectations for what team members can and cannot do. It is the foundation of understanding that what one agency does affects the investigation of another agency and eventually the outcome of the case.

**Understanding the Reciprocal Nature of Collaboration**

One of the issues that emerged during the study was the need for collaboration to be reciprocal and for there to be give-and-take relationships among the agencies in order for them to share information and work together effectively. I interpreted the basis of these reciprocal relationships as more than just knowing the roles and responsibilities of other team members but knowing that the actions of one agency affects that of another. Being able to accept that one agency alone does not have the expertise or the resources to handle every aspect of the child
abuse investigation was the rationale for establishing a multidisciplinary team approach to child abuse investigations. This involves accepting and acknowledging the limitations of the individual team member’s own agency or discipline. It also means acknowledging the strengths of other agencies on the team. Being unafraid to be vulnerable and being able to ask for help from other agencies are also essential to a collaborative relationship. Study participants that described effective team functioning were open in acknowledging the limitations of their individual agencies. They were also open to asking for help and using other agencies on their respective teams as resources.

One law enforcement investigator perceived the other agencies on the team as making his job easier. He described how he relied upon other team members, which served as a basis for trusting the other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. This particular law enforcement investigator clearly identified the other members of his team and described the nature of their roles and responsibilities on the team.

While the study participants provided numerous examples of the willingness of team members to assist other agencies on the multidisciplinary team, some team members described one-sided relationships that resulted in poor collaboration. Some study participants described how they grew tired of helping other agencies on the team, only to be rejected when they asked something in return. These study participants stated they just stopped asking for assistance from other agencies on the team. Poor collaboration resulting in child abuse investigations conducted independently of other agencies presents only one agency’s perspective of the child abuse case. It fails to provide the “big picture” that a multidisciplinary approach to the child abuse investigation offers.
Respecting Other MDT

Respecting other team members was perceived as an important part of collaborating with other agencies on the team and often identified as something needed from other team members. For some study participants, the concept of respect involved the entire team, but for others respect held importance for team members as individuals.

The idea of respect emerged early during the study interviews stemming from the responses to the interview question ‘what you need from other members of the multidisciplinary team to do your work.’ One child protective service supervisor emphasized the need for mutual respect from the standpoint of her own agency’s workers as well as the other members of the team: “Our workers need to respect them and understand their job.”

Another study participant discussed how the agency representatives respected the other team members involved in the child abuse investigation. According to one forensic interviewer, collaboration requires understanding that develops over time:

You know it used to be a little bit like people getting used to the idea about having a social worker do their forensic interviews but now it is the norm. There is an understanding that this team has been around from the beginning or one of the first collaborative MOUs that was signed in the county.

Study participants who perceived their role on the multidisciplinary team as more of a service provider than an investigator identified respect from other team members as what they needed. Interestingly, two study participants from the medical profession used the word ‘civility’ to describe what they needed. The concept of respect became an important subcategory of relating to other team members.


**Trusting Other MDT**

Throughout the study interviews, team members expressed appreciation for the diversity and the different perspectives offered by different members of the team. Even though they did not always agree upon how child abuse investigations should be carried out, a majority of the study participants discussed how differing perspectives were valued when team members were open to sharing their thoughts and opinions. The study participants shared similar thoughts about trust across disciplines and team models. The study participants frequently provided examples of how the diverse perspectives of other team members strengthened case investigations. But there appeared to be more going on than other professionals bringing different perspectives to the table. While knowing the roles and responsibilities of other multidisciplinary team members and understanding what one team member does affects the work of another, the concept of ‘trusting’ holds importance for collaboration because it involves a personal choice of the individual team member.

While the concepts of ‘knowing’ and ‘understanding’ emerged early and continued to be reinforced by the study participants, I struggling when thinking about ‘trusting’ versus ‘respecting’ and found myself vacillating between which of the two held more importance to collaboration within the context of a multidisciplinary team. For the study participants and team members in general, the concept of ‘trusting’ held greater importance for these professionals working under what one termed “unique circumstances.” One forensic interviewer explained the dynamic as:

Because it is just a weird dynamic that we work in, we talk about really private things before 9:00 in the morning. Just having to share some of those intimacies and talking about things that are pretty disturbing. You have to trust that people can take that; people
are going to be able to deal with that. I think that just on the level, the depth of our investigations and what we are talking about sometimes builds at least relationships, you know, not how we want them to be built but it is kind of a unique environment. I always say ‘I can’t believe we are talking about sodomy at 8:45 in the morning’ and having to just be talking about things I think it builds relationships in a weird way too.

Study participants regardless of discipline identified trust as an important aspect of collaboration. Believing in the honesty and sincerity of other team members served as the basis for being able to rely on other agencies. Many study participants reported that trusting relationships were built through shared experiences over time. Organizational level issues, including staff turnover and overwhelming caseloads, were perceived as barriers to building trusting relationships.

Study participants also linked trusting other team members to being competent to do their work. One law enforcement investigator explained that his local multidisciplinary team does frequent training for its team members leading to his conclusion that being trained and knowing how the team works supports understanding and trust:

There is a lot of trust here on the team, so because of that level of trust and level of confidentiality, all I have to do is ask and they will give me the information, and it is a lot easier than being in the field and doing something outside of [the team].

One attorney representing child protective services in dependency cases described how the team coordinator in one jurisdiction arranged for training opportunities to build relationships outside of sitting in a room together observing child interviews. He gave the example of being on a plane to Huntsville, Alabama for six hours as an opportunity to get to know other team members.

One of the most common ways that forensic interviewers described as a way of building relationships was simply to be ‘friendly’ and engage other team members in conversations that
show you are interested in getting to know them as people. Often forensic interviewers may not have the peer support that team members from larger agencies get from their co-workers. Therefore, they seem to look to team members from other discipline for that support and validation.

When asked how one law enforcement supervisor and the detectives in her unit built relationships with professionals from other agencies, she said they build relationships when they are working cases together. Her comment supports findings from earlier interviews where law enforcement and child protective services that worked cases together described strong relationships and effective collaboration. Law enforcement and child protective services that for whatever reason conducted parallel investigations reported little collaboration and fewer close relationships. The same law enforcement supervisor commented that building relationships outside one’s own discipline was ‘hit or miss’ and how the only opportunity outside of working cases together was the annual collaborative meeting. She added that was not enough but realistically with the current staffing situation in her department that she did not see that changing.

One criminologist with five years’ experience as a member of the multidisciplinary team in a metropolitan area perceived herself as having strong relationships with other team members. I think that one of the interesting things about her situation was that she was with the multidisciplinary team from its inception, so she shared a history with the other members of the team.

**Constructing the Theory**

Corbin and Strauss (1990) discussed adding process to the concepts to construct theory. They described process as giving life to the data. In constructing the theory for the current study,
I considered the process that team members follow in order to investigate child abuse reports to apply the concepts of knowing, understanding, and trusting to the research question. I chose this process because the child abuse investigation provided opportunities for collaboration among different agencies and/or disciplines from the initial child abuse report until the completion of the investigation. Based upon the findings from the study participants, I identified key points in the investigative process where opportunities for collaboration among different agencies exist.

For purposes of applying the theory, I chose to divide the child abuse investigative process into three phases in order to provide greater detail when I diagramed information sharing. The initial phase of the investigation occurs when agencies responsible for child abuse investigations become aware of the suspected abuse from the community. The second phase begins with the forensic interview of the child and includes the actions of team members to collect evidence that support information from the forensic interview. The final phase deals with team meetings or case reviews and the outcomes of the child abuse investigations. Because of the study participants’ emphasis on collaboration and information sharing, I identified key points in the investigation where information sharing holds importance.

The analysis of the findings presented here offers one theory for how collaboration affects the functioning of multidisciplinary teams in child abuse investigations. Based upon the perceptions of the study participants, I found that relationships anchored collaboration with other multidisciplinary team members at different points throughout the investigative process. These key points in the investigative process provide opportunities for collaboration and information sharing that affects the thoroughness of the investigation and ultimately outcomes for children and families in child abuse investigations.
Collaboration among members of the multidisciplinary team at critical information points in the investigative process affects decision-making and ultimately case outcomes in terms of child safety and criminal prosecution. Ultimately, professionals responsible for child abuse investigations need to make informed decisions based upon complete and accurate information, if possible. Based upon the findings from the study, the degree of collaboration varies depending upon the strength of the relationships among team members. The theory presented here suggests that the strength of relationships among team members affects the ability of individual team members to work together and the overall functioning of the team. The strength of these relationships is based on the concepts of knowing what other agencies need, understanding the reciprocal nature of collaboration, respecting other individuals and agencies on the team, and trusting the other team members and agencies. Study participants closely identified the ability of team members to work together with how well they perceived the functioning of their respective teams.

**Summary**

Despite the diversity of the study participants, the ways in which they perceived the effect of collaboration upon team functioning were in many ways similar. Overall, they perceived collaboration as the ability to work together toward a common goal that many study participants defined as ensuring the safety of children. The needs they described for themselves were essentially the same as what they expected from other members of the team. Study participants identified information as what they most often needed from other team members and what others needed from them. Collaboration related to information sharing among the agencies represented on multidisciplinary teams was perceived as important to the overall functioning of the team. Frequently, study participants associated the degree of collaboration with the
relationships among team members. In general, study participants who reported strong relationships with other team members perceived the overall functioning of the team as effective.

However, collaboration was not always perceived as positive or equal partnerships among different agencies on the team. At times, study participants described the importance of the criminal investigation as greater than that of the child protective services investigation. Only one attorney representing child protective services took issue with how other team members treated the criminal investigation as more important. Otherwise, it appeared to be accepted as part of the culture of the multidisciplinary teams.

Although the majority of team members perceived collaboration positively, study participants also recognized that collaboration could make their work more difficult. Differing time frames between child protective services and law enforcement resulted in issues related to initiating contact with the child and family. Study participants observed that collaborating with other agencies could make the investigation take longer because they had to wait on other members of the team. Communication was perceived as key to working through differing policies and procedures.

This chapter presented the findings from the study and how study participants perceived the effect of collaboration on team functioning. The findings included how team members defined collaboration, what different disciplines needed from each other to do their work, and what team members valued and found difficult when collaborating with other agencies in child abuse investigations. The findings led to the identification of ‘relating to other MDT’ as the core category of the study and the concepts of knowing, understanding, respecting, and trusting. The concepts and how they affect the degree of collaboration among team members provide the basis for one theory of collaborative relationships and its effect upon team functioning in child abuse
investigations. In the next chapter, the theory of collaborative relationships in multidisciplinary teams is applied to the child abuse investigation and how collaboration related to information sharing at different points in the investigative process affects case outcomes for children and families is discussed.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The theory of collaborative relationships in multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations discussed in the previous chapter offers one explanation for how collaboration affects team functioning in child abuse investigations. The findings emphasize the importance of collaborative relationships throughout the child abuse investigation to ensure needed information sharing and effective team functioning. During the child abuse investigation, opportunities exist for team members to share information with other team members that may affect the investigative process and case outcomes. The theory of collaborative relationships helps explain how relationships among team members affect collaboration and information sharing at key points during the child abuse investigation.

Relationships among team members determine the extent of collaboration and subsequently affect the information shared at these key points. Each team member makes decisions about the information they share when they collaborate with other members of the team. The decisions that individual team members make regarding information sharing may affect the investigation findings and outcomes for the children and families involved in the investigation. Based upon the study findings, the theory of collaborative relationships guides the decisions that individual team members make about information sharing. The discussion in this chapter focuses on applying the theory to the typical child abuse investigation process while considering the effect of collaboration at key information points in the investigation.
Children abuse reports referred to the multidisciplinary team for investigation typically involve allegations of child sexual abuse or severe physical abuse or neglect. When someone from the community reports suspected child abuse, the investigation conducted by the multidisciplinary team aims to find out what happened to the child. This study focuses on the central question of how collaboration affects team functioning in child abuse investigations from the perspectives of multidisciplinary team members. The following analytic story weaves together the theory and how relationships among team members determine the extent of collaboration at key information sharing points during the child abuse investigation.

The Analytic Story

A sign posted in the team meeting room at one of the sites in the study captured the idea of getting the child’s ‘story’ in order to find out what happened to the child. Frequently, ‘finding out what happened’ involves putting together or integrating the different pieces of information provided by individual team members. Similarly, the analytic story in qualitative research refers to the integration of the major concepts in support of the core category. The analytic story here intends to give meaning to the identified theory by applying it to the process used to investigate child abuse reports.

In order to tell the analytic story, I divided the child abuse investigation into the following three major phases: initial report, gathering information, and decision-making related to case outcomes. During each phase, I identify and describe the specific actions and interactions of team members and the types of information available to be shared. The discussion explains how information shared at these critical points may affect team functioning and subsequent individual and team decisions related to case outcomes.
The Initial Report

The initial child abuse report involves finding out that something may have happened to the child and/or notifying and involving other multidisciplinary team members in the investigation. Someone in the community initiates the child abuse report when he/she suspects that a child may be abused or at risk for abuse. The initial referral may come from a mandatory reporter required by law to report suspected child abuse. Reports may also be made anonymously or come from the child victim, relative, neighbor, or others in the community. Community persons may report their concerns through national or statewide child abuse hotlines or they may directly contact either child protective services or law enforcement. Most states require cross-system reporting among child protective services, law enforcement, and prosecution (Children’s Bureau, 2012). The initial screening determines whether the information in the referral meets the statutory guidelines of a child abuse report, and, if so, assesses the urgency of the response to the report.

While each state in the current study process initial referrals somewhat differently, all states rely upon a 24/7-response system for screening child abuse referrals. The following sections provide an overview of how each state in the current study responded to initial referrals of suspected child abuse and neglect.

Statewide Child Abuse Hotlines

In the current study, child protective service and law enforcement agencies in Florida and Georgia relied upon statewide child abuse hotlines to screen referrals from the community. A centrally located unit of trained individuals screens the initial referrals from the community to determine whether the allegations meet the definition for abuse. If so, the child abuse hotline electronically forwards the report to the appropriate child protective services and/or law
enforcement agency responsible for the child abuse investigation. In Florida, child protective services or the county sheriff’s departments then refer cases involving sexual abuse, serious physical abuse, or medical neglect to the local child protection team for assessment. The statewide hotlines appear to reduce the need for collaboration at the beginning of the investigation process by emailing the reports directly to child protective service and/or law enforcement agencies. Thus, individual child protective service or law enforcement agencies are no longer required to notify each other about the existence of the report. The study participants from both Florida and Georgia did not report any instances of where they were not made aware of initial child abuse reports.

Reports Direct to CPS or LE

The need for collaboration appeared greater in communities where child abuse and neglect reports were screened at the local level. The child protective service or law enforcement agency accepting the initial referral from the community assumes responsibility for notifying the other multidisciplinary team agencies of the child abuse report.

In Alabama and California, the child protective services intake worker and supervisor screen the initial referral and decide whether the allegations constitute a child abuse report or whether to screen out the referral. If the information meets the definition of a child abuse report, the supervisor determines the urgency of the response and assigns the report to a child protective service worker for investigation. The worker assigned to the report then contacts the appropriate law enforcement agency, if the allegations involve sexual abuse or severe physical abuse or neglect.

Child abuse reports received directly by law enforcement agencies must be referred to child protective services for investigation. The state law in California requires law enforcement
agencies, when responding to a report of possible child abuse, to cross-report to the local child protection agency immediately, or as soon as practically possible, so that the case can be evaluated and a protective service worker assigned (Rady Children’s Hospital, 2012). Depending upon the nature of the allegations, child protective service agencies in Alabama must report to the district attorney and law enforcement, according to statewide policy and local written interagency agreements (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2014).

**Notifying Other MDT Members**

State laws and child protective service policy often requires the prosecutor or district attorney be notified when the allegations involve child sexual abuse or severe physical abuse or neglect. According to study participants, being involved from the beginning of the case ensures that prosecuting attorneys receive the information they need to make decisions regarding the criminal investigation. One assistant district attorney emphasized the helpfulness of collaborating with law enforcement early when the child abuse report comes to the attention of law enforcement. He indicated that consultation with the prosecuting attorney assists law enforcement by providing information about what the prosecuting attorney needs when he/she is “putting the case together.” He stated that it helped when law enforcement consulted with him on “day one of the investigation” rather than waiting to submit a lengthy report six months later and finding critical pieces of information missing from that report. He commented that the law enforcement investigator may waste valuable time gathering unnecessary information that may be avoided by asking for help. The assistant district attorney described how he must then send the law enforcement investigator back into the field to collect additional information.

One physician identified the importance of getting the referral from law enforcement during the initial phase of the investigation so that the state, rather than the family, paid the cost

Study participants reported that involving the multidisciplinary team early in the child abuse investigation offered the advantage of team members being available for information and consultation. Several study participants described local systems that supported collaboration during the initial phase of the investigation. For example, deputy district attorneys from two jurisdictions in the study rotated on-call 24/7 to be available to patrol officers and law enforcement investigators during the initial phase of child abuse investigations. In one metropolitan area, physicians shared on-call duties to be available to consult with law enforcement regarding child physical abuse and sexual assault cases. One deputy district attorney perceived that being more involved in the initial phase of the investigation enabled him to be better positioned to guide the law enforcement investigators in deciding next steps, if needed. The physician that served on the multidisciplinary team in that particular jurisdiction also discussed how the law enforcement members of the team had his cell phone number. He encouraged them to call and ask questions whenever they needed to consult.

Study participants agreed that team members were more invested in the child abuse case when they became involved early in the investigation. In one jurisdiction when deputy district attorneys observed the forensic interviews, they did not know whether the case would be assigned to them for prosecution or what criminal charges, if any, would be filed. The supervising attorney in the district attorney’s office was responsible for making those decisions after the completion of the criminal investigation. For this reason, the deputy district attorneys
did not appear as closely connected to the cases or as ‘invested’ in the case outcomes as prosecuting attorneys assigned at the beginning of the child abuse investigation.

Several study participants offered examples of child abuse cases where investigative agencies did not receive adequate notification about child abuse reports. One law enforcement supervisor provided an example of when information about child abuse allegations was not shared with law enforcement resulted in what he believed to be repeat maltreatment of two children. When the multidisciplinary team discussed the case at a meeting, the law enforcement investigator became aware of previous sexual abuse allegations investigated by child protective services and determined to be not substantiated. One assistant district attorney from a rural community described a similar case in which child protective services investigated two prior child abuse reports with no law enforcement involvement. A subsequent law enforcement investigation resulted in the criminal prosecution of the individual responsible for the abuse.

The findings in the current study indicate that cases investigated by either child protective services or law enforcement agencies pose unanswered questions as the investigation offers only the perspective of the investigating agency. In the above case examples, it is not known whether notifying law enforcement at the time of the prior reports would have resulted in different outcomes in terms of the criminal investigation. Similarly, child safety and/or service provision to children and families remain unclear when child protective service workers are not involved in investigations focused only on the criminal aspects of the case.

**Emergency Response Interviews**

Both child protective services and/or law enforcement may respond immediately depending upon the allegations. Child protective service agencies must be available to provide 24/7 emergency responses when reports involve sexual abuse and severe physical abuse and
neglect. Most states develop their own criteria for urgency of response dependent upon the allegations. The criteria include the level of severity of the incident or the harm to the child, the person responsible for the alleged abuse, and the family’s situation (DePanfilis & Salus, 2003). Child protective service agencies also consider risk factors (i.e., the child’s age and special needs that make the child more vulnerable to abuse.) Child protective services may conduct an emergency response or fact-finding interview with the child depending upon the level of urgency assigned to the allegations.

Law enforcement may also make an immediate response depending upon statutory requirements and/or local protocols. When law enforcement responds immediately, uniformed law enforcement officers typically determine the existence of probable cause to believe a crime occurred, document observations and collect evidence, and determine what notifications need to be made for further criminal investigation to proceed (McCulloch, 2012). The study participants stated that uniformed law enforcement officers sometimes accompanied child protective service workers conducting emergency response interviews to ensure the safety of the worker and to complete the initial law enforcement report. According to one study by Cross, Finkelhor, and Ormrod (2006), both child protective services and law enforcement involved in conducting emergency response interviews together perceived collaboration as positive at this level of the investigation.

However, I did not find that conducting joint interviews to be a common practice among the child protective service workers and law enforcement investigators who participated in the current study. One law enforcement investigator said he avoids talking to the child until after the forensic interview and defers to the child protective service worker to make the initial contact with the family and schedule the forensic interview. Frequently, the study participants reported
that caseload size made conducting joint interviews with the child and/or family difficult to coordinate.

**Consulting with Other MDT Members**

As mentioned in the previous sections, the study participants frequently described the need for different agencies to consult with each other during the initial phase of the investigation. Consultation with different agencies enabled study participants to learn important background information about the families. Law enforcement investigators agreed that it was helpful to know if previous reports of suspected abuse had been investigated by child protective services; while child protective service workers wanted to know whether law enforcement had previously responded to domestic violence or substance abuse in the home. Law enforcement frequently identify individuals, or addresses, in their computer databases where contacting the family may present risks. Consultation with law enforcement alerts child protective services to home situations that present potential hazards to the child protective service worker going into the home.

However, consultation among agencies appeared dependent upon the relationships between individual team members and how comfortable they felt calling upon another team member from a different agency for assistance. Although consultation between law enforcement and prosecuting attorneys seemed standard for most communities, consultation between child protective services and prosecuting attorneys was mentioned less frequently. Prosecuting attorneys also described how some law enforcement investigators called regularly while others did not. The study participants said it depended upon the individual team member as to whether he/she sought advice from the prosecutor. The decision to consult with the prosecuting attorney may also be affected by the experience level of the law enforcement investigator. Study
participants with more work experience expressed confidence in knowing what evidence they needed to collect and consulted the prosecutor only when questions of how to get that information legally.

The study participants regardless of discipline agreed that medical records provided important sources of information in suspected child abuse cases. In jurisdictions with child protection teams, consultation with the physician or nurse practitioner was also considered a valuable source of information. Often children suspected of being physically abused receive medical evaluations at the time of the initial report, so consultation with medical professionals provides critical information for both child protective services and law enforcement. Medical records may also provide information about whether a history of child physical abuse exists within the family.

**Collaboration and Initial Child Abuse Report**

During the initial phase of the investigation, collaboration primarily involves sharing information about the report with other agencies responsible for assessing the child’s safety or investigating the criminal aspects of the case. Both child protective services and law enforcement are legally mandated to notify the other, if either agency receives the child abuse report directly from the community. Collaboration involves communicating promptly with other agencies about the report and providing complete and accurate information. While the statewide hotlines eliminate the need for agencies to notify others about the initial report, coordination of emergency response and information sharing among team members remain crucial during the initial phase of the investigation.

The type of information to be shared varies depending upon the agency or discipline. Child protective services may have information related to prior child abuse reports and/or
services that the family is currently receiving from the agency. Statewide computer systems enable child protective service workers to know whether anyone in the family was involved in a child abuse investigation in another county or state. Information from financial assistance programs may provide demographic information about the family members or identify relatives that may provide additional information. Law enforcement records may offer information from previous incident offense reports involving the family. The law enforcement database available to law enforcement may indicate the number of calls to which uniformed officers have responded in the past and the basis for these calls. Law enforcement information related to prior arrests or a history of domestic violence or substance abuse would be helpful for child protective service workers to know before attempting to make contact with the family.

Upon receipt of the child abuse report, communication with other team members ensures that the appropriate agencies receive timely notification and respond appropriately to the allegations. Failing to notify other agencies responsible for child abuse investigations may leave gaps in the investigative process. The study participants described how child abuse investigations conducted by child protective services alone fail to address the criminal aspects of the case, while law enforcement only investigations do not adequately address child safety or service provision to children and families. Similarly, failure to consult with other team members or seek information available in agency records may result in important information being omitted from decision-making. Several study participants provided case examples involving previous investigations of abuse allegations determined to be unsubstantiated. Although unsubstantiated, repeat allegations may indicate patterns of abusive behavior within the family.

The following Figure B illustrates key points early in the investigation when team members may interact. These key points provide opportunities to share information about the
initial report that may benefit other team members. The initial report begins at the point of a child abuse report and continues through the beginning steps of the investigation. Figure B includes potential ‘actions’ and ‘information’ that involve collaboration among team members.

Figure B Phase 1 The Initial Report
Gathering Information

For purposes of the study, the second phase of the investigative process refers to gathering information about the allegations in the child abuse report. I relied upon the feedback of the study participants supported by government and non-profit publications to identify opportunities for team members to collaborate and share information about what happened to the child. The key information points identified and described in the following sections include the forensic interview, interviews with other children in the home, interviews with parents or caregivers, collateral contacts, and the interview of the alleged offender. I discuss the purpose of the information, the agencies involved in obtaining and sharing information, and how information sharing affects team functioning and the child abuse investigation.

Forensic Interview

The child’s statement offers an important source of information for team members investigating the allegations of abuse. The standards of the National Children’s Alliance [NCA] (2011) defines the purpose of a forensic interview as “to obtain a statement from a child, in a developmentally and culturally sensitive, unbiased and fact-finding manner that will support accurate and fair decision making by the involved multidisciplinary team in the criminal justice and child protection systems.” The forensic interview aims to be scheduled and coordinated so both child protective services and law enforcement observes the interview to eliminate the need for investigative agencies to interview the child a second time about the abuse allegations. Although many teams rely upon a specially-trained forensic interviewer employed by a child advocacy center or multidisciplinary interview center, child protective services workers, law enforcement investigators, mental health professionals, and other multidisciplinary team
members may also be trained to conduct forensic interviews (National Children’s Alliance, 2011).

The policy involving forensic interviews varied among the study participants depending upon the state where the multidisciplinary team was located. In California, the state policy requires law enforcement to be present at forensic interviews of children. The findings from the current study also indicate that forensic interviewers need and want child protective services and law enforcement to observe the child interviews. According to study participants, these agencies provide information that helps the forensic interviewer improve the quality of the child interviews.

The forensic interviewers who participated in the study reported that they often act as the gatekeeper when seeking information from the child. Forensic interviewers are trained to use specific protocols to interview children (NCA, 2011). Two forensic interviewers involved in the current study discussed “standing my ground” when other team members wanted to ask children leading or suggestive questions. Forensic interviewers sometimes found other professionals on the team focused on the immediate needs of their own agency rather than the admissibility of the child’s statements later on in criminal proceedings. Often forensic interviewers discussed educating newer child protective service workers and law enforcement investigators about the information that interviewers need prior to talking with the child. When asked how collaboration with other agencies made their work more difficult, forensic interviewers expressed concerns about not getting accurate or complete information and how other agencies questioned children prior to the interview.

The study participants also explained that inexperienced team members observing forensic interviews did not understand when to suggest questions to the forensic interviewer.
Typically, the forensic interviewer wears an in-ear device that enables individuals observing the interview to suggest questions to the interviewer. Here again, the forensic interviewers discussed how they often trained new investigators from law enforcement and child protective services about what questions should be asked and when to suggest questions during the child interview. The forensic interviewers recognized the impact of turnover in other agencies and did not perceive educating the new investigators as burdensome but as a way of ensuring that they – the forensic interviewers – receive what they need to do their jobs effectively.

Throughout the study, forensic interviewers expressed the need for other team members to be present during the child interview. One forensic interviewer discussed that she never knew what the child was going to say so she appreciated knowing a team of professionals were watching and supporting her in case she drew a blank or asked a leading question. Because the child’s statement provides an important source of information in the child abuse investigation, child protective services and law enforcement being present to observe the interview holds importance for the decisions that determine the outcomes of the investigation. Being present to observe the interview enables investigative agencies to hear the same information at the same time and ensure consistency in the child’s statement regarding the allegations. Observing the interview enables child protective service workers and law enforcement investigators to obtain reliable and thorough information about the abuse. However, study participants reported inconsistency among law enforcement and child protective service workers to observe the forensic interviews leading to the conclusion that child protective services and law enforcement sometimes interviewed children outside the forensic interview. This seems to occur even when these services are available through a local child advocacy or interview center. According to the study participants, this practice may or may not be problematic depending upon the training of
the child protective service worker or law enforcement investigator and the circumstances that necessitate the interview. Relationships among individual team members also appeared to influence their perceptions of child interviews conducted outside the forensic interview. Study participants who described more collaborative relationships with their fellow team members did not seem to be as concerned when other team members interviewed children outside the forensic interview. They knew the training and experience of other team members and trusted them to collect forensically sound information they would then share with other members of the team. These study participants tended to view the practice as a necessary part of other team members’ jobs, such as situations requiring emergency response, and not problematic to their own investigations.

One study participant from law enforcement stated he wanted to be present for the interview because of what he perceived as his responsibility to hold the forensic interviewer accountable. He explained that he experienced a few situations when the forensic interviewer did not “bring their A game” and he did not feel the forensic interviewer put enough effort into getting the child’s statement. The same law enforcement investigator appreciated the opportunity to share information with the child protective service worker observing the interview. Frequently, study participants discussed how they shared information immediately before the interview and after the interview. He also discussed how he and the child protective service workers often dialoged about the case during the interview.

Medical Evaluation

Another key point in the child abuse investigation that provides an opportunity for collaboration and information sharing is the medical exam of the child. Depending upon the child’s description of the abuse, a medical evaluation can corroborate the child’s statement from
the forensic interview. The primary purposes of the medical evaluation include assessing the extent of the child’s injury, identifying the need for treatment, and reassuring the child of his/her health and well-being.

Several study participants stated that they preferred for the medical evaluation to be conducted after the forensic interview so the physician had access to the child’s description of what happened. An important point for collaboration and information sharing occurs following the forensic interview and prior to the medical evaluation. The medical evaluation provides opportunity for the physician or nurse practitioner to obtain a medical history of the child that provides information not asked by other agencies involved in the child abuse investigation. The medical history may differ from interviews or histories obtained by other team members because of its focus on the health and well-being of the child (Finke & Alexander, 2011). The medical history involves careful questioning of the child by skilled, compassionate, and nonjudgmental medical personnel. The parent or caregiver also provides information to the physician or nurse practitioner relevant to the allegations.

One law enforcement investigator described the role of the physician as “number one” because “law enforcement is going to consult the physician to see what they think about the child’s injuries.” According to one physician interviewed for the study, the role of the medical professional on the multidisciplinary team is to provide “a clear written or verbal statement depicting what an injury is or is not.”

Collaboration and information sharing among child protective services, law enforcement, and the physician or nurse practitioner responsible for the medical evaluation holds importance for the outcome of the medical findings. Physicians and nurse practitioners consider the information obtained from the child and parent or caregiver, along with the historical details
provided by other members of the team, to form the medical diagnosis. One physician commented on the medical opinions he provides to child protective services and law enforcement. He stated the information he receives from other agencies involved in the investigation may strongly influence his medical opinion. He described a case where he examined an eight-month-old child with a fractured arm. He initially thought the injury resulted from the child’s arm being yanked, but the parents reported that the child fell from the bed. At the physician’s request, the child protective service worker went to the home where she photographed and measured the height of the mattress. Upon reviewing the information from the child protective services worker, the study participant said he revised his initial findings and found the source of the child’s injury to be ‘indeterminate.’

The medical evaluation provides an important opportunity for team members to collaborate and share information. The physicians and nurse practitioner in the current study found information about the circumstances of the alleged abuse or neglect helpful prior to the medical evaluation. The medical history provides corroborating information for the medical findings and the information may support previous findings from the forensic interview of the child. A majority of study participants perceived the medical evaluation and the availability of the physician or nurse practitioner to explain the medical findings and/or testify in court to be “invaluable.”

**Interviews with Other Children in Home**

Interviewing other children in the home provides information about what they may know about the alleged abuse or neglect of a sibling, but more importantly helps child protective services determine whether the other children in the home may also be at risk of harm. Although forensic interviewers often conduct these interviews, child protective service workers may
interview children at school, daycare, or in the child protective service agency because of the timeframe involved in speaking with these children. In Alabama, child protective service workers must interview all children in the home within fifteen days of the receipt of the child abuse report. Because law enforcement may not be involved in interviewing the other children in the home, child protective service workers must coordinate the scheduling of forensic interviews in child advocacy centers or forensic interview centers to ensure the presence of law enforcement and/or share information from child interviews conducted elsewhere.

**Interviews with Parents or Caregivers**

Information from interviews with parents or caregivers hold importance for both child protective services and law enforcement. Child protective services must assess the parents or caregivers’ ability to protect the child from harm, if necessary. Law enforcement needs information about what the parents or caregivers know about the allegations to determine whether or not that individual has information important for the criminal investigation. Typically, study participants representing child protective services and law enforcement conducted these interviews separately because of time constraints. However, study participants subsequently shared the information from these interviews with each other through informal communication as well as written statements and case reports.

**Collateral Contacts**

In addition to other children in the home and parents, child protective services and law enforcement typically interview other adults in the home and individuals outside the family who may have information about the allegations. Depending upon the nature of the allegations and the family composition, the number of interviews may be extensive. Collaboration provides opportunities for different investigative agencies to share information and avoid duplicate
interviews that may result in conflicting information. How individuals recall specific events may change overtime; multidisciplinary team members who conduct separate interviews at different times may receive conflicting information.

Some study participants described how individuals may perceive agency representatives differently and be more or less likely to share information with team members from specific agencies. For example, one study participant described how individuals from the community were sometimes more likely to speak with child protective services than with law enforcement, if they had prior negative experiences with the judicial system. The study participants discussed the importance of sharing that information with the multidisciplinary team so all team members received a complete picture of what happened to the child.

**Interviewing the Alleged Offender**

While forensic interviewers or child protective services typically interview children, law enforcement usually takes the lead in interviewing the person allegedly responsible for the abuse. As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, collaboration among team members related to the interview of the alleged offender resulted in frustration for a number of team members. Generally, the study participants perceived the responsibility of interviewing the alleged offender as belonging to law enforcement and how law enforcement investigators were more skilled at interviewing alleged offenders. However, one law enforcement investigator acknowledged child protective services often discussed the allegations with the alleged offender before he did because of differing timeframes. He noted child protective services then provided useful information to the law enforcement investigator for his interview of the alleged offender.

Study participants reported that state law and/or local law enforcement policy require video and/or audio recording of interviews with alleged offenders. Law enforcement may share
the video with child protective services and other agencies on the multidisciplinary team depending upon local protocols. In addition, law enforcement investigators may polygraph alleged offenders as part of the criminal investigation. These law enforcement interviews do not typically involve other team members, but the results may provide valuable information that informs the decision making of other team members.

**Collaboration and Gathering Information**

In summary, several opportunities for collaboration related to information sharing occur while the multidisciplinary team members try to find out what happened to the child. The study participants identified the forensic interview as a key information sharing point in the child abuse investigation where collaboration among team members may occur before, during, and after the forensic interview. Information gathered from the forensic interview may then be shared with medical professionals responsible for medical evaluations of children suspected of being abused or neglected.

Although some forensic interviewers described their ability to conduct a ‘cold’ interview where they possess little or no information about the allegations before interviewing the child, the majority of the study participants agreed that information helps the forensic interviewer conduct a more thorough interview. For example, one forensic interviewer perceived knowing the names of the other persons living in the home as helpful information when interviewing children with speech difficulties.

During the forensic interview, child protective service workers, law enforcement investigators, district attorneys, and other team members observe the interview and suggest questions to the forensic interviewer that provide needed information about their individual investigations. The study participants indicated that collaboration was sometimes made more
difficult when team members perceived that priority was given to law enforcement’s need for information over other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. Following the forensic interview, study participants described how they frequently met informally with the forensic interviewer to assess the information obtained during the course of the interview. The study participants discussed how information from the forensic interview guided them in deciding next steps in the child abuse investigation. They also discussed how information provided by the child often suggested other information to be gathered.

On the following page, Figure C illustrates key points in information gathering during the second phase of the child abuse investigation. For purposes of this study, information gathering begins with the forensic interview of the child and addresses different ‘actions’ and ‘information’ that may involve collaboration among different agencies and disciplines.
### Phase 2 – INFORMATION GATHERING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forensic Interviewer</td>
<td>Forensic Interview of Child</td>
<td>Child’s statement of ‘what happened’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Protective Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician or Nurse Practitioner</td>
<td>Medical Exam</td>
<td>Evidence of physical injuries, STDs, and/or corroborates child’s statement regarding allegations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>Corroborating Information</td>
<td>Photographs of child injuries or physical evidence or eye witness statements collected at scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forensic Interviewer</td>
<td>Interviewing siblings</td>
<td>What sibling knows about abuse allegations; whether sibling may be victimized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Protective Services</td>
<td>Interview parent or caregiver</td>
<td>What parent knows about allegations; whether protective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>Collateral interviews</td>
<td>What other adults in community know about child and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecuting Attorney</td>
<td>Interview Alleged Perp</td>
<td>Statement re: allegations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Decision Making

For purposes of the study, the team meetings or case reviews serve as the beginning of the third phase of the investigation designated as decision-making. Although case decisions occur throughout the child abuse investigation, the study participants emphasized team meetings as the time when team members come together to share information and discuss their findings in the investigation. The decisions made during the course of team meetings affect not only the work of other team members but the outcomes for children and families involved in the child abuse investigation. The study participants frequently described team meetings as holding team members accountable for their actions or inactions. In the following sections, I discuss the specific multidisciplinary team agencies and the information they share with other team members and the information they need from other members of the team to make case decisions. The implications of collaboration associated with information sharing and decision making conclude the discussion of this phase of the child abuse investigation.

Child Protective Services

Child protective services frequently have substantial information from their contacts with the child and family that may be shared at team meetings. For child protective services, the investigative process may move quickly when a child depending upon the urgency of the allegations. The child protective service workers and supervisors who participated in the current study perceived team meetings as an opportunity to get information from other members of the multidisciplinary team and to share findings from their own information gathering that other agencies and disciplines on the team needed for their investigations.

The decision making phase of the child abuse investigation for child protective services involves compiling and reviewing the information gathered and determining whether the
allegations of abuse and/or neglect are substantiated or not. If the child protective service worker determines the allegations of abuse to be not substantiated, the worker closes the investigation and no further services are offered to the family. Alternately, the child protective services worker may develop a safety plan with the family and opens the case to on-going protective services if the child is found to be at risk of abuse and/or neglect. When allegations of sexual abuse or severe physical abuse and/or neglect are substantiated, the child protective services agency may seek an order from the court to place the child in an alternate living arrangement.

Although the child protective services worker and supervisor may discuss the case with other team members and/or present the case to the multidisciplinary team at case review meetings, the decision to substantiate the allegations typically rests with the worker and the supervisor and occurs outside the multidisciplinary team meeting. These decisions hold importance for team members representing law enforcement and prosecution. Because the burden of proof is lower in civil cases than criminal cases, the law enforcement investigators who participated in the study explained that once child protective services finds the allegations of the child abuse report to be not substantiated, then there is no need to continue the criminal investigation. This is an important reason for child protective service workers to share information with law enforcement and prosecution about the outcomes of the protective service investigation. Similarly, service provision to children and families may be affected by child protective services.

**Law Enforcement**

The majority of law enforcement investigators who participated in the study perceived the multidisciplinary team meeting as an opportunity to discuss their investigation with the prosecutor and to receive feedback. However, law enforcement investigators and supervisors
reported that they do not have stringent timeframes for initiating contact or completing child abuse investigations. One study participant commented how child abuse investigations may take months or even years to complete depending upon the complexity of the allegations. Unlike child protective service workers and supervisors, law enforcement investigators may not have investigative findings to share when they attend team meetings, but team meetings may provide important opportunities for law enforcement to hear what actions child protective services may have taken because of the timeframes that govern their interactions with persons involved in the investigation. They may also glean helpful information from service providers, such as mental health providers and family advocates, who can provide current information about the child and family. One study participant discussed how law enforcement often received ideas about additional sources of information from the prosecutor or other team members when they came to the table for team meetings.

**Prosecution**

The primary decision faced by the prosecutor assigned to the child abuse case is whether the information supports charging the individual believed to be responsible for the abuse with a crime. According to the prosecuting attorneys who participated in the study, the team meeting provides an opportunity for the investigative agencies to share information about their individual investigations.

On-going child protection workers or case managers that provide services to families need to maintain contact with the prosecutor responsible for the criminal case. The criminal court case may occur long after the child protection investigation is completed. The outcome of the criminal case may affect the safety of the child and the case plan established by the on-going protective services worker (Jones, 2006). For example, the abusive boyfriend of the mother may
be found guilty and sentenced to the maximum period ensuring that he no longer presents a risk to the child victim. On the other hand, he may be allowed to plea bargain to a lesser charge that results in early release from prison. Thus, the child may be placed at risk if he is allowed to return to the home. It is important for child protective services to know when events in the case are scheduled, whether the child may be called as a witness, or the terms of a plea bargain (Jones, 2006). Similarly, the prosecutor needs to be informed of the dispositions in the child abuse investigation as well as dependency hearings and decisions regarding child placement.

Medical Professionals

Whether or not medical professionals attended team meetings varied depending upon the needs and resources available in the local community. Medical professionals co-located with other team members appeared more likely to attend team meetings. In Florida, the leadership of the multidisciplinary team was often the responsibility of the medical professional or their designee. In rural communities, the role of the medical professional on the multidisciplinary team was not as clearly defined. Frequently, the teams in these smaller communities did not rely upon a specific physician or nurse practitioner to evaluate children. When available, they used the resources of medical professionals in child advocacy centers in nearby larger communities. Depending upon the urgency of the child abuse allegations, study participants sometimes relied upon local hospital emergency rooms to conduct the medical evaluation of the child.

Mental Health

The national accreditation standards for child advocacy centers require team membership to include representatives from mental health. Although mental health professionals attended team meetings, the study participants described their role at the team meeting as more of a consultant to the team. Unless the mental health professional was providing extended forensic
evaluation or mental health counseling to help a particular child tell what happened, then the mental health professional did not have information that contributed to the investigation of the child abuse report. The mental health professionals indicated that they served as a resource to other team members when questions about the psychological effects of child abuse emerged during team discussions.

**Putting the Pieces Together**

Team meetings or case reviews provide an opportunity for team members from different agencies to collaborate with other team members to get the “missing pieces” of their investigations that for whatever reason they do not have. For the majority of the study participants, team meetings involved sharing the “pieces of the puzzle that each agency had collected thus far in their investigations. Often they described how each team member brings his/her own agenda to the meeting and what they want to get from the meeting may differ from other members of the team. For some of the study participants, the team meeting provided an opportunity to consult directly with the district attorney to get direction on the case. Study participants frequently described how other team members identified information that the investigator overlooked. The source of that information may be someone else the child told about the abuse that perhaps law enforcement did not interview and maybe the child protective service worker did interview.

Often the child abuse investigation is discussed, at not just one case review meeting, but also a series of meetings depending upon the multidisciplinary team protocol. Once law enforcement and/or child protective services initially present the case at a team meeting, the team members identify existing gaps in the investigation and missing details. The team members responsible for obtaining the missing information are asked to report back to the team within a
set timeframe. In addition, the team identified and assigned other tasks needed to complete the child abuse investigation. In general, I found case review meetings generally focused on the criminal investigation as child protective service investigations needed to be completed within specific time frames. Child protective service workers need to complete their tasks early in order to assess the risk to the child and initiate service provision for the family. On-going criminal investigations may last months and law enforcement may present the criminal investigation for review by the team frequently during that time.

Some study participants discussed how collaboration that occurred during the team meetings strengthened the child abuse investigation by helping team members get to the “bottom of things” and “make the right decisions.” Other study participants discussed how team meetings “at the least steer the investigation in the way it needs to go.” Here the study participants referred to how collaboration with other team members could provide ideas, information, and/or direction for team members when their investigations reached an impasse. One district attorney summarized the team meeting as “we kind of go over ‘ok here’s what happened,’ ‘here is what happened in the interview,’ and hear what next steps we are taking, what is going to happen with this case so that we are all on the same page. Then once you find out what happens you can take steps to ensure that the child is protected and that the person responsible is held accountable.”

Collaboration and Decision-Making

To summarize, the outcomes of collaboration and its effect upon decision-making appear to be reflected in child protection and criminal investigations. Child protective service workers often consider information from other team members to determine whether or not abuse or neglect occurred and, if so, what steps must be taken to ensure the protection of the child.
Frequently, study participants discussed how child protective service workers completed the child protection investigation was completed prior to the criminal investigation. Because of the difference in burden of proof between child protective service and law enforcement investigations, child protective service outcomes affected the need for further criminal investigation when allegations found to be not indicated.

The study participants indicated that ‘agreeing to disagree’ resolved differences of opinions about investigative issues expressed in team meetings. A majority of the study participants valued team meetings because they offered the opportunity to share information and ‘talk out’ differences of opinion. Despite collaborative relationships, various study participants described instances of unresolved issues when team members “agreed to disagree” during team meetings and elsewhere. Those study participants who described strong collaborative relationships seemed to be able to put aside differences of opinion and continue to work with other team members in these situations.

For the study participants that did not have regularly scheduled case review meetings, the decision-making occurs in informal settings involving conversations with other team members. Study participants reported they may gather after interviews with children or adults in the field or they may meet in the offices of other team members to ask the question “what do you think?”

Figure D Phase 3 decision-making on the following page illustrates key information-sharing points related to decision-making. The figure focuses on the case review and team meeting and the decisions different agencies on the team make regarding the allegations in the child abuse report.
Validating the Theory

Asked about ‘testing’ the conceptual model in grounded theory, Charmaz (2014) responded: “Both Glaser and I have argued that grounded theory is not a verification method. When you engage in theoretical sampling, you do check your theoretical categories but that is not the same as verifying them.” To validate the model of collaborative relationships in child
abuse investigations, I first relied upon member checking with representatives from different agencies or disciplines who previously participated in the study. I then conducted a search of the existing research concerning multidisciplinary and interagency collaboration to find existing models to compare to the conceptual model developed in the current study.

**Member Checking**

Three study participants from the state of Alabama agreed to meet with me separately to discuss the theory and the supporting conceptual model and provide their feedback. One assistant district attorney from a rural county reviewed the theory. Although he agreed about the importance of collaborative relationships and occur over time through team members working together, he commented about the personality characteristics of the individual team members. He indicated that the willingness of individual team members to want to “do the right thing” depended upon that individual’s personality. He did not agree relationships influenced the individual’s decision to work collaboratively with other members of the team. He contended the motivation to work with other agencies stemmed more from the work ethic of individual team members.

We discussed the need for collaboration and information sharing at critical points in the investigative process. Similar to other study participants, he encouraged law enforcement investigators to contact him early in the investigation about questions concerning evidence collection, or if they needed information about criminal charges. He said criminal investigations often take longer when law enforcement investigators fail to consult with him early and then submit their ‘completed’ reports without critical information. Similar to other prosecuting attorneys in the study, he discussed sending the law enforcement investigators back into the field to collect key evidence in child abuse cases. He also reviewed the diagrams explaining the
investigation process and indicating points where collaboration affected information sharing. He stated that his need to collaborate with other members of the multidisciplinary team ended when he presents the case to the grand jury.

I consulted one mental health professional to validate the findings from the study. This particular mental health professional counsels child abuse victims and supervises forensic interviews in a child advocacy center. She agreed mental health professionals usually become involved with children and families later in the investigative process. Typically, the child protective service worker determines the need for mental health services and makes the referral to mental health. The mental health professional rarely collects information for either the child protective service assessment or criminal investigation. However, this study participant actively participated in team meetings on a weekly basis because of being co-located with law enforcement and the assistant district attorney. She validated the importance of relationships and the concepts used to identify different levels of collaborative relationships – knowing, understanding, respecting, and trusting.

The third study participant I contacted to help validate the theory represented law enforcement. He supervised the unit responsible for child abuse investigations, and he also carried a caseload that included child sexual and severe physical abuse reports. He agreed with the conceptual model depicting the factors that affect relationships and collaboration. He also helped to identify specific information shared during the evidence-gathering phase of the child abuse investigation. He explained that often law enforcement in his county does not make the initial contact with the child and family with the child protective service worker because of limited time. He preferred to make the initial contact with the family when the forensic interview occurs at the local child advocacy center. He verified that much information sharing
occurs immediately before the interview, while observing the interview, and following the interview. He agreed the team meeting often represents the last opportunity, prior to decision making, to collaborate with other agencies about the child abuse investigation. Unless the team leader or team members present needed additional information, the study participant explained that his responsibility becomes writing and submitting law enforcement’s report of the investigation to the district attorney.

**Comparison to Existing Models**

The second method used to validate the theory involved comparing the conceptual model to collaborative models found in the existing literature. Each of the following articles presented a conceptual model for collaboration among professionals involved in providing services for children and families.

Orchard, Curran, & Kabene (2005) proposed a “client-centered collaborative practice model” (p. 1) to transform traditional approaches to healthcare service to delivery into a more interdisciplinary approach including shared decision-making among healthcare professionals and service users. The researchers identified what they termed ‘enablers’ that affected the transition toward more shared decision-making. Similar to the current study, the researchers identified the importance of valuing the role of other team members and respect for each other based upon their contributions to the team. The researchers also described the development of trusting relationships where each team member trusted the knowledge, decision-making capacity and sense of ethics of each team member. They also discussed how power imbalances constituted a barrier to a client centered collaborative practice. I found this barrier similar to the perception that the needs of one agency outweigh that of another as sometimes described by participants in the current study. However, the researchers used the model to show how they would work with
patients to understand the value of each team member’s role and how power could be shared. They did not address how they would resolve the barriers with the professional members of the team. In addition, the researchers described the conceptual model as ‘interdisciplinary’ but the application they described was limited to medical professionals and their clients.

Tseng, Liu, & Wang (2011) proposed a conceptual framework to evaluate the impact of influential factors on interagency collaboration. The researchers defined collaboration as “fully shared services among agencies and an increasing loss of autonomy of individual agencies replaced by collective decision-making” (Tseng, Liu, & Wang, 2011, p. 798). Similar to the findings in the current study, the researchers found that factors such as leadership, funding, perspectives, and time constraints impacted interagency collaboration. The researchers also noted the importance of monthly meetings that “provided a regular basis over the years for members to build connections and work together” (Tseng, Liu, & Wang, 2011, p. 801). While differing perspectives interfered with collaboration, training helped to resolve these conflicts as reflected in the findings from the current study. The conceptual framework described by Tseng, Liu, & Wang (2011) also stressed the importance of ‘duration’ that correlated with how the team members who participated in the current study described agency longevity and experience.

A third model of collaboration used to compare to the collaborative relationship model in the current study was the model of interdisciplinary collaboration developed by Bronstein (2003). The researcher proposed a two-part model that included four influences on collaboration. These influences included professional role, which incorporated the social work ethic of respect for other members of the team. This finding was consistent with the current study in which I determined ‘respecting’ as one factor affecting influence relationships and the degree of collaboration among team members. Similar to the current study, the researcher also
described what she called “reciprocal respect” (Bronstein, 2003, p. 303) as required to promote collaboration. However, the Bronstein model most closely identified with the current study in what the category of ‘personal characteristics.’ Here the researcher identifies “personal characteristics include trust, respect, understanding, and information communication between collaborators.” (p. 304) which corresponds directly with three of the four factors affecting relationships identified in the current study.

To summarize, the study participants who reviewed the theory of collaborative relationships generally agreed with the conceptual model and the supporting findings. Although not specific to multidisciplinary teams in child abuse investigations, the conceptual models in the literature also supported the findings related to trust and respecting others involved in working together and decision-making processes. Similar to the findings in the current study, the literature also identified longevity and experience as factors that affect the ability of different agencies to work together.

**Discussion of Existing Theories**

The existing theories discussed in Chapter 2 provided a background for the interpretations of the findings in the current study. In the following sections, I discuss how the study participants’ perceptions of collaboration and team functioning related to systems theory, social interactionism, and social constructivism. Turner (2011) discusses the idea of overlapping theories in social work practice that supports the findings in the current study. I observed how multiple theories were useful to interpreting the findings. Along with identity theory discussed in Chapter 4, systems theory corresponded with social interactionism and social constructionism, as study participants described varying experiences with collaboration. The
existing theories provided the background for understanding the importance of collaborative relationships among multidisciplinary team members responsible for child abuse investigations.

**Systems Theory**

The study participants frequently discussed how collaboration related to systems theory. Team members recognized the child abuse investigation as a process and the multidisciplinary team as a “system” that required interaction and communication to function effectively. One mental health professional perceived the multidisciplinary team as a system and explained collaboration as understanding the roles of individual agencies as the basis for collaboration. She discussed the importance of needing to know who to reach out to and understanding the roles of other team members. The study participant described how other team members understood her agency’s role and “if they need something from us, they know where to go. To me, it’s all about really understanding how a system works and who does what.”

The study focused primarily on the mesosystem level of collaboration within multidisciplinary teams. How study participants perceived interactions with different agencies and individual team members was discussed earlier in this chapter. In addition, macrosystem level policies, procedures, and systemic issues may also impact these interactions and subsequently collaborative relationships among team members.

Study participants described collaboration at the macrosystem level that affected how different agency representatives on multidisciplinary teams work together. Two study participants from the same jurisdiction discussed how the administrator of one department worked to facilitate collaboration among the administration of the agencies involved with the local child protection team. The study participants described the department administrator as “proactive in addressing communication” and other procedural issues affecting team functioning.
The administrator’s actions were perceived as positively affecting collaboration among individual team members.

One law enforcement supervisor discussed the importance of being supported by the administration in her own agency. She described her current supervisor’s shared history of being a police officer and sergeant responsible for child abuse investigations. She described his “passion” for child abuse investigations. She contrasted the relationship with her current supervisor to a different lieutenant she met at a recent multidisciplinary team training who did not share that “passion” or “buy in” for the team process. She commented how that lieutenant’s negative attitude affected the functioning of multidisciplinary team in that jurisdiction. She described how she returned from training with a greater appreciation for the support she received from her current supervisor for her work with the multidisciplinary team.

One attorney who participated in the study provided an important example of how macrosystems, (i.e., the ruling in the Oregon court case Camreta v. Greene) affected the multidisciplinary team process and collaboration between law enforcement and child protection agencies in the state of California:

We have had some questions and part of that is based on a case that came down about four or five years ago having to do with interviewing kids at school from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal in Oregon which said if you interview a child at school that’s a seizure in violation of the fourth amendment. It went up to the [United States] Supreme Court and the Supreme Court didn’t exactly rule on it, unfortunately, they just basically de-published the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal opinion so it’s not good law anymore. So we are trying to go back now to if we have a referral and it really looks like it’s a serious
physical abuse case or sexual abuse case that law enforcement should be given the opportunity to at least meet us there if they can to do the interview jointly.

Study participants with frontline experience working child abuse cases reported particularly strong relationships with the administrative and supervisory personnel of other agencies represented on the multidisciplinary team. Often these relationships occurred over time and following years of experience working together in the field.

A physician from a multidisciplinary team in a large metropolitan area relied upon systems theory to explain his perception of collaboration:

If you take a step back and look at a systems standpoint, trying to figure out, not just for this child, but for all kids in your community, how are you going to change things so that in the unfortunate reality that something bad happens for another child tomorrow that they don’t find themselves kind of stuck, prosecutions don’t happen, safety assessments don’t happen, and the medical evaluations don’t happen, and the way you do that is by recognizing what other people do and then having a realistic expectation that you need to do your piece and they need to do their piece.

Systems theory supported the categorization of the initial codes during the data analysis. Relying upon ‘persons’ and ‘interactions,’ I focused the initial codes into categories that led to the identification of the core category ‘relating to other MDT.’ The use of systems theory also reinforced the idea of the investigation as a process and collaboration as the mechanism moving the child abuse case through the investigative process.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

Bloomer (1976) described how members of certain groups develop their own meanings of things within the social interactions of that group. The theory of symbolic interactionism was
reflected in the responses of study participants to the interview questions. For example, when asked how effective she thought other team members were at meeting her needs, one study participant responded, “I don’t know about other MDTs because I have only been associated with the one here in this county, so it’s hard for me to say anything about any others or compare anything.” This study participant’s responses were so unrelated to the question at times that I reviewed the interview recording to determine whether I asked the questions correctly. In all cases, I asked the questions correctly but clearly the study participant was hearing the questions and interpreting the questions differently than how I intended.

Study participants also described unique words that held special meanings related to the multidisciplinary team and the child abuse investigation process. When interviewing the child protective services supervisor and deputy district attorney from the same jurisdiction, they both referred to the child interviews conducted at the local multidisciplinary child interview center, not as ‘child interviews’ but as ‘MDICs’. Thus, incorporating the team process in the language used among the members of this particular team. I encountered the ‘language’ among team members during several study interviews. During one pilot interview, the study participant used the word ‘teaming’ to describe the process of presenting a case to the multidisciplinary team at a case review meeting.

At times, the language used by study participants appeared to reflect their underlying beliefs and subtle notions about working with other agencies or disciplines on the team. Throughout the study, the study participants referred to “our CPS” “our hospitals” “my law enforcement” “my team” “our coordinator” as they discussed the multidisciplinary team. The use of these possessive pronouns conveyed a sense of connection to other agencies and to the multidisciplinary team as a whole. For many study participants, the words they used and their
tone of voice when they spoke about the team conveyed a sense of belonging and appreciation for being on the same team with different disciplines.

Some study participants used words that implied the roles and responsibilities of other team members were less important than their own. For example, the comments of one assistant district attorney in a supervisory role reflected an ‘I’m in charge’ attitude related to decision-making compared to team members who perceived decision-making as a ‘shared experience.’ While this may reflect my own interpretation to some extent, my observation stems from his comment “they [law enforcement] will call me because I’m the one who has to decide whether to file the case or not. Typically, I have more interactions [on the case] when the law enforcement are trying to convince me to file the case.” The comment gave me the impression he considered his role to be more important than the law enforcement investigators who were trying to ‘convince’ him to file charges against the alleged offender in the case. Although he may have the authority to make these decisions, he did not seem to recognize that his decisions rely upon the information law enforcement brings to him.

Relating to the theory of collaborative relationships, the findings from the study also revealed different relationships at different levels that affected collaboration. Study participants noted the importance of agency administration’s awareness of the need to work with other agencies and also how they used positive relationships with other agency administrators to discuss and work through problems with communication and/or procedures. The supervisors from different disciplines reported strong connections with supervisors in other agencies represented on the team built over time and often through working cases together when they were on the frontlines investigating child abuse together. Ironically, because of staffing issues and overwhelming caseloads, it is often these supervisors who attend the monthly case review or
team meetings. Study participants described the team meeting as an excellent opportunity to build relationships, which could explain why study participants on the supervisory level were more likely to describe close relationships with team members from other agencies than frontline child protective service workers or law enforcement investigators.

**Social Constructivism**

How the study participants constructed their meanings of ‘team’ relates closely to the previous discussion of team identity in Chapter 4. Identifying as a member of a multidisciplinary team responsible for child abuse investigations was an issue for several study participants when asked about being a member of the multidisciplinary team. If I did not specify the context of the team, study participants sometimes described the teams where they were most comfortable and felt a more close sense of identity. Study participants often identified with teams in their own discipline that were not multidisciplinary in nature. Often these professionals so closely identified with intra-agency teams that they failed to identify their work with other agencies in response to child abuse as being a part of a multidisciplinary team.

For some, the case review meeting was ‘the team’ and they did not relate to their process of working with other agencies as a ‘team’ simply because they did not gather for formal meetings. One particular interview with a law enforcement detective made me think further about how individual team members identify as being part of a team. Early in this particular interview, the study participant seemed a bit perplexed each time I asked a question that referred to her as a member of the multidisciplinary team. Only when she talked about sitting down with the different agencies involved in the child abuse investigation did she seem comfortable talking about the case staffing as a ‘team’ and herself as a member of the team at the table. In settings outside the current study, I often asked other professionals “do you have a team?” and frequently
the response to that question was “yes, we meet once a month.” Constructing or defining the ‘team’ as a meeting may explain why some agencies that collaborate with other agencies in response to child abuse reports do not view themselves as being part of a team. Instead they see themselves as agencies working on the same cases and experiencing more or less contact with each other based upon the individual needs and responsibilities of their particular agency.

One student participant did not think of the child protection team as multidisciplinary. She indicated that the child protection team does not include the professionals normally thought of as a multidisciplinary team. Further, she perceived the child protection team as having a separate identity from other agencies, with team membership limited to the professionals employed by the child protection team. She viewed child protective services, law enforcement, forensic interviewers, mental health counselors, and others as professionals from other agencies who work with the team, but not actual members of the child protection team.

Often the language used by the study participants appeared to indicate whether he/she identified as being a member of the team. For example, one forensic interviewer described consulting with representatives from other agencies during a break in the child interview, “During that break, I’ll have the child go into the playroom and that’s my chance to go in and staff with the team, if a social worker is present with my law enforcement, and also the district attorney if they are observing.” The phrase “my law enforcement investigator” implied a greater connection with the law enforcement investigator that the social worker or district attorney. Her comment implies that law enforcement was going to be observing the interview, while child protective services and/or the district attorney may or may not be observing.

One important implication is how team identity affects relationships among team members from different disciplines. If team members identify as being a member of a team, then he/she
seems more likely to collaborate with other professionals that he/she perceives as members of “our team.”

**Implications for Practice**

Throughout the study I observed how ‘knowing’ the work of other agencies on the multidisciplinary team holds importance to practice and how collaborative relationships were informed by both training and on-the-job experiences. Study participants regardless of multidisciplinary team model, recognized the importance of team member training. A cross-section of study participants discussed training as a valuable tool for knowing the roles and responsibilities of other team members and providing opportunities to build relationships among team members. Study participants pointed out the need to educate team members further about establishing collaborative partnerships with other professionals and/or agencies outside the multidisciplinary team.

Study participants also identified training provided to other agency personnel as important to the child abuse investigation. Study participants often discussed training first responders from their own and other agencies about child abuse and the work of the multidisciplinary team. As the participants indicated, agency staffing and turnover issues frequently results in less experienced and less trained child protective services workers and law enforcement patrol officers being the first to have contact with the child and family. Hicks and Tite (1998) noted that child abuse victims typically encounter not the ‘team’ but individual members of the team one-on-one early in the investigative process. Often these frontline team members have limited training about the dynamics of child abuse that may affect their attitudes about child abuse victims and connecting the child and family to appropriate resources (Tite, 1998).
As indicated by team members in the current study, uniformed police officers frequently assist child protective service workers that conduct emergency response interviews with children. One law enforcement supervisor noted the shortage of manpower within the investigative units in her particular jurisdiction. She discussed how when child protective services calls and requests assistance she usually cannot send a detective, but instead she sends a uniformed patrol officer to accompany the child protective service worker. The need for additional training also holds true for after hours and emergency response teams involving child protective services and law enforcement that respond to child abuse cases in emergency situations. The current research describes the poly-victimization of children and how at least one-half of sexually abused children experience multiple types of victimizations, such as physical abuse, witnessing family violence, or community violence, that require immediate response by law enforcement and/or child protective services (Turner, Hamby, & Banyard, 2013).

One study participant discussed how training facilitated team identity among team members while educating the community about child abuse and the work of the multidisciplinary team. As the team coordinator, she reported that different groups contact her for information. She stated that her particular organization includes training for multidisciplinary team members in their annual budget. When team members attend conferences funded by the local multidisciplinary team, the expectation is that they will share the information at in-service meetings for the other team members and presentations to the community.

Aside from training, study participants described how on-the-job experiences holds importance for collaborative relationships and effective team functioning. However, the findings indicated systemic issues related to agency staffing and the demands of large caseloads sometimes affected the ability to know other members of the multidisciplinary team. Team
members from urban areas reported a greater sense of autonomy in terms of the team and often conducted investigations independently of other investigative agencies.

Even though study participants discussed frustration and difficulties associated with collaborating with representatives from other agencies, collaboration was generally perceived as positively affecting team functioning. One of the positive aspects study participants associated with being a multidisciplinary team member was the opportunity to interact face-to-face with other team members when observing forensic interviews or attending case review meetings. Although the current technology enables team members to consult remotely, some study participants voiced concerns about the potential for technology to affect the amount of face-to-face interactions among team members. For some study participants, the use of technology seemed to eliminate the need for face-to-face interactions resulting in fewer opportunities for team members to build collaborative relationships that facilitate information sharing. One example of technology being used to maximize time and resources was observed in one jurisdiction in California where the assistant district attorney remote viewed the forensic interview while it was being conducted live at the local interview center. Although favorably perceived in terms of saving the prosecutor’s time and allowing him to multi-task, the study participant explained that “something actually lost a little bit” in not being in the observation room with the law enforcement investigator. Based upon the current study, that “something” could mean not being privy to the information shared during face-to-face discussions among law enforcement, child protective services, and the forensic interviewer before, during, and after the child interview. It could also mean the lost opportunity to build relationships with other team members that impact communications and interactions in future child abuse investigations. It should be noted the forensic interviewer in the same jurisdiction commented how she did not
know and “literally would not recognize” the district attorneys she works with on a weekly basis. Assuming that technology continues its rapid advance, its effect upon collaboration in multidisciplinary teams appears to be an area requiring further research.

The study revealed that effective multidisciplinary teams rely upon collaborative relationships. The ability of team members to work together affects not only how the team functions but also informs investigative outcomes and hence services to children and families. Throughout the study, team members discussed how collaborative relationships do not occur by chance and care must be given to nurture and build relationships among professionals responsible for child abuse investigations.

**Implications for Social Work**

The study holds importance for the social work profession as it provides one theory that explains the effect of collaborative relationships on how different agencies work together in response to child abuse reports. However, the importance of collaborative relationships extends beyond child abuse investigations to other interdisciplinary settings where social workers work with professionals having different roles and responsibilities. The information provided by the study participants relates to social work education and preparing social work students to become effective practitioners skilled at working with other disciplines and agencies.

In searching the literature, information about the work of child protective services often fails to include working as a member of a team in response to child abuse reports. Much of the existing research emphasizes the principles of working with families to provide children a safe and permanent home. The current study begins to address the intricacies of child protective service workers and supervisors working with other agencies as part of the multidisciplinary
team. The findings emphasize the importance on not only knowing and understanding your work but the work of other agencies and disciplines.

In the current study, a majority of the child protective service workers and supervisors reported educational backgrounds in social work. As one child protective service supervisor commented, collaborative relationships take time to build and often experiences that occur over the course of years form the basis of these relationships. While training holds importance to knowing what other team members do, relationships are formed through the day-to-day experiences team members share when they investigate child abuse and neglect reports. According to a majority of the study participants, the staff turnover within child protective service agencies significantly impacts the ability of child protective services to build collaborative relationships with other members of the multidisciplinary team. In terms of social work education, I believe the study makes a contribution to the knowledge base by providing an insider-look at how multidisciplinary teams function from the perspectives of frontline team members from different agencies and diverse backgrounds.

Unanswered Questions and Implications for Future Research

Often qualitative research leaves the researcher with additional questions to be explored. I found the same to be true for the current study. The findings provide a rich foundation for my future research agenda.

Balance of Power

The question of equal partnerships and the balance of power among multidisciplinary team members and agencies remains unanswered here. In listening to study participants discuss the child abuse investigation, I often questioned whether the criminal prosecution of the case was perceived as more important than child safety when considering the needs of child protective
services and law enforcement. There were indicators that the needs of law enforcement investigations received priority over child protective service investigations. Yet, the majority of study participants regardless of discipline agreed that the overarching goal was the protection of the child. However, the criminal justice system does not appear to work quickly enough to protect the child in all situations.

However, that willingness to assist may also be affected by the underlying issue of how team members perceive the importance of the work of other agencies. Whether the needs of one agency held greater importance than the needs of other agencies emerged in response to exploring the questions of what the study participant needed from each other to do their respective jobs. While I can only speculate here, given the current information, the findings indicated criminal investigations and the needs of law enforcement and prosecution agencies often received priority. The issue of power and influence requires further study to learn more about its potential effect upon the overall functioning of multidisciplinary teams and child protection and well-being.

**Influence and Collaboration**

Several of the attorneys who participated in the study mentioned the question of being influenced by other team members through collaborative relationships. One assistant district attorney seemed to prefer watching a video recording of the forensic interview, so that what other team members said about the child did not affect her opinions of the child’s ability to testify in court. I also had similar concerns about whether the opinions of child protective service workers could be influenced by information from law enforcement investigators when they shared close working relationships. Faller and Henry (2000) found limited support that
child protective service workers were sometimes influenced by law enforcement to close child abuse reports as unsubstantiated.

**Dealing with Stress**

One issue that continued to emerge throughout the study was that of ‘dealing with the stress’ associated with investigating child abuse reports. It often emerged toward the end of the interview in response to the question about how effectively they thought their team worked together or sometimes even after my closing remarks and the recorder was turned off. The idea of ‘dealing with stress’ appeared unrelated to collaboration, but law enforcement supervisors and investigators continued to introduce the topic into the conversation. I coded the issue when it appeared in interviews and even wrote a memo entitled ‘dealing with stress.’ I speculate here that study participants connected collaboration with sharing a common bond and building trusting relationships with other team members as a way of coping with the day-to-day challenges of investigating child abuse. The policies that limit the length of time that law enforcement investigators work in units responsible for child sexual assault appears to be an attempt to address the issue. Similarly, the choice of giving law enforcement officers the option of working in investigative units responsible for these cases is another way that organizations help law enforcement investigators deal with stress and prevent burnout.

Dealing with the stress associated with what study participants described as “difficult work” clearly held importance for many of the study participants. This aspect of multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations appears to need further study based upon the perspectives of the law enforcement supervisors and investigators who participated in the current study.
In terms of future research, study participants representing law enforcement frequently mentioned the need for continued research on stress management among professionals responsible for child abuse investigations. This was apparently an issue not often discussed with the law enforcement officers who participated in the study. They appeared to view the interview with me as an opportunity to talk about how they handle the stress. The importance of the issue to them became obvious as they continued to broach the topic when asked about other information. Only two persons outside law enforcement mentioned dealing with the stress associated with investigating child abuse, so I do not know if stress was just not an issue for them or if they simply did not choose to introduce the topic into the conversation.

**Team Leadership**

Also, the role of leadership and how the team coordinator affects team functioning suggests another area that appears to need further research. Frequently, the study participants credited the team leader or team coordinator for teams perceived as highly effective. One particular team coordinator described being responsible for recognizing team members for their good work. She often communicated verbally and in writing with agency supervisors and administrators about the good works of individual team members.

Training coordinators and other associated with multidisciplinary teams in child advocacy centers identified training and preparation for team leaders and coordinators as an area needing further research. The findings from the current study indicated that training of team leaders and coordinators varied depending upon individual communities.

**Technology**

Clearly, the means of communication and the accessibility to other team members made possible by the current technology positively affects collaboration. In one county, remote
viewing of child forensic interviews drew mixed reviews by the different team members. One multidisciplinary team had arranged for the local district attorneys to ‘live stream’ the child interviews at the child advocacy center, which saved the assistant district attorney considerable drive time and allowed him/her to attend to other duties at the office. If the prosecutor had questions about the interview, he/she simply called the cell phone of the law enforcement investigator during the interview. While viewed as a more efficient use of time, the deputy district attorney felt that something was ‘lost’ by not being in the same room observing the interview.

Perhaps the same technology would allow district attorneys, child protective services, law enforcement, and any other team members observing the interview to ‘conference’ live before and after interviews. This could take the form of video teleconferencing to give the team members the opportunity to ‘meet’ face-to-face. This form of meeting could also be extended to case reviews and team meetings enabling frontline team members participate in information exchange in an interactive environment. Although perhaps not as optimal as live face-to-face, team members would still have the opportunity to ‘know’ the other members of the team.

**Rural Versus Urban Differences**

Another question relates to the differences in collaborative relationships among team members in rural versus urban areas. The findings revealed that collaborative relationships in rural areas meant that child protective services and law enforcement investigators were more likely to conduct joint investigations. While in urban areas, large caseloads and staffing issues made joint investigations impractical.

While study participants described strong relationships among frontline law enforcement investigators and child protective service workers in rural areas, the study found more
collaborative relationships on the supervisory levels in more urban areas, often having to do with longevity in their individual agencies. Perhaps future research needs to examine more closely the differences between multidisciplinary teams in rural and urban areas so that training can be geared to the specific needs of these communities. Training related for multidisciplinary team members needs to consider the varying degrees of collaborative relationships among communities of diverse populations.

**Services to Children and Families**

Another unanswered question relates to ‘Do we have everybody at the table that we need?’ The assessment conducted by child protective services focuses on the safety of the child while the law enforcement investigation focuses on the criminal aspects of the case. Although the study participants verbalized the importance of keeping the child safe, little emphasis was placed upon what happened to the child and family once the investigation was completed. The role of the parent or caregiver was seldom discussed. Similarly, services to support the child and family through the process of the child abuse investigation were not often mentioned, and only then in passing comments. Mental health professionals perceived their role as service providers after the investigation was completed. It seems that teams may not be taking advantage of the resources provided by these professionals as well as family victim advocates and case managers who provide on-going services to children and families.

One area not addressed in the current study relates to collaboration between first responders, specifically child protective service workers and law enforcement officers, and the multidisciplinary team. After hours on-call responsibilities for responding to child abuse reports are often shared among child protective service workers who may or may not be familiar with working with other members of the multidisciplinary team. Similarly, the first person at the
scene for law enforcement is typically a uniformed patrol officer and not someone trained in child abuse investigations. Although at least one study participant conducted on-going training for first responders from child protective services and law enforcement, the current research provides little information about the preparation these professionals receive to respond to initial reports of child abuse. I believe there is much that we need to learn more about the work of these individuals related to the initial child abuse response and perhaps more research on integrating first responders into the multidisciplinary team.

**Sharing of Resources**

One of the major purposes for the policy establishing multidisciplinary teams was the effective use of community resources in response to child abuse reports. Different agencies and disciplines have different resources and by combining their resources they can provide better services to children and families in child abuse cases. The question then becomes how do the resources of the individual agency or community affect collaboration among team members? Are agencies in communities with limited resources more inclined to share resources or hold them more tightly? My experiences in conducting the current study left these questions still unanswered. The resources available to multidisciplinary teams were as diverse as the communities where they were located. It appears on the surface that sharing of resources, including information, depends upon the relationships among the supervisors and administrators in many of the agencies who are responsible for overseeing the work of the teams. I believe that agency administration and their attitudes and knowledge about the work of the team may strongly influence the sharing of resources regardless of the extent of the resources themselves. Again, the administrative level of agencies represented on multidisciplinary teams may provide a valuable source of information for future research on this topic.
Limitations of the Study

While the participants in the current study provided diverse perspectives of collaboration, the findings reflect the experiences of team members based upon the specific needs and resources available in their particular communities. The study participants represented multidisciplinary teams having somewhat different policies and procedures even when following the same model in responding to child abuse reports and/or acting under the same statutory requirements.

There was also a degree of bias involved in the sample in that study participant self-selected to participate. Although one or two of the study participants took the opportunity to complain about other agencies on the multidisciplinary team, the majority of team members seemed to perceive being interviewed as an opportunity to talk about the strengths of the team and how well the different agencies worked together. The majority of the study participants voiced how they valued collaboration with other team members and discussed pride in the work of the multidisciplinary team as a whole. Thus, the majority of the study participants described as highly effective with strong collaborative relationships. The study participants who perceived their teams as ineffective with poor collaborative relationships were limited. This also limited my ability to examine negative cases or ask study participants “what went wrong” or “why?”

Another limitation of the study related to the fact that I was not able to include the perspectives of more medical professionals - only three medical professionals were interviewed. Even though their perspectives offered important contributions to the study, the medical professionals were not as available to be interviewed as other agencies or disciplines represented on county multidisciplinary teams. Likewise, the study was limited as none of the study participants identified as family victim advocates. The role of family victim advocates holds
importance for providing education and support of parents and caregivers when children are referred to child advocacy centers. Although the case managers (3) who participated in the study held similar responsibilities, I feel the perspectives of family victim advocates could have provided more insight into the impact of collaboration on services to children and families.

The study also did not include child protective service workers or uniformed law enforcement officers often responsible for emergency response in child abuse cases. Although an important part of the initial response to the child abuse report, often the child protective service workers and uniformed law enforcement officers collaborate with other members of the multidisciplinary team and the information available provided through their initial contacts with children and families may determine the direction of the child abuse investigation.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Although study participants generally perceived collaborative relationships as positive, concerns about relationships and/or collaborating with other team members emerged during the study. When relationships were perceived as strong, there seemed to be the potential for relationships to become more important than the needs of children and families. While the team may function effectively because team members work together well, the individual team members may not reach the right decisions for children and families, if relationships with other team members influence these decisions. On a positive note, several team members discussed the issue of influence and were aware of the potential for other team members to influence their opinions. Another concern that I perceived among some agencies on the multidisciplinary teams was how child protective service workers need for information was not given the same priority as that of law enforcement investigators on some multidisciplinary teams. Several reasons exist for the perception of the importance of law enforcement’s investigation to the team. Historically,
prosecuting attorneys have led multidisciplinary teams relying upon the child advocacy center model. Prosecutors rely upon the law enforcement investigation for decisions related to criminal prosecution. Also, the standard of evidence is higher in criminal cases than in civil cases, such as dependency cases involving child abuse and neglect.

One study participant representing child protective services emphasized the importance of ‘knowing’ case information, but she also commented about how ‘knowing’ people affected collaboration. This supervisor also emphasized relationship and the importance of relating to team members and how these relationships can impact collaboration. This holds particular importance now and for the up-coming generation of social workers who rely upon social media and electronic means of communication and not so much “picking up the phone and calling” as described by this particular child protective services supervisor. This was how she built what she considered to be a strong network of professionals who support her work. But this is not a one-way street. She supports their mission as well and how if the other agencies need something they call and she gets a worker for them. She mentioned that ‘we’ are proud of what ‘we’ do here which indicated to me that she was proud not of the work of her own agency but the work of the team in general. Her comments impressed me as not only her valuing team but also seeing how other agencies and team members contributed to that perception of value. I was again struck by the language when I heard this study participant use the words “we” and “our” denoting ownership and investment in the team. She also discussed the nurturing relationships and the importance of trusting relationships with team members from other disciplines. She described the relationship with law enforcement as being like a friendship and having the same responsibility to take the time to answer the phone and listen to them “run this by you” as she would her personal friends.
Relationships were perceived as important to team functioning, but the opportunities to build relationships for frontline members of the team were frequently perceived as limited. Except where team coordinators or team leaders took proactive steps to ensure on-going training for multidisciplinary team members, training with other members of the team was inconsistent. Team members appeared to be well trained within their specific disciplines, but study participants described how learning to work with other agencies on the multidisciplinary team was more or less learned through on-the-job experience.

In Chapter 2, the existing literature described some of the various models communities use to respond to child abuse reports that served as the framework for selecting a diverse sample of study participants. While the findings did not indicate any obvious differences between how these team members’ defined collaboration or issues they found frustrating, some unique differences for study participants from different disciplines may be of interest for future research related to multidisciplinary teams responsible for child abuse investigations. For example, there were subtle differences in how team members expressed the importance of their roles and responsibilities compared to other agencies on the team. These differences were most often reflected in the words they used to describe their work compared to that of other disciplines. There was also a definite emphasis on the importance of the criminal investigation when prosecutors led the multidisciplinary teams.

The study participants found strength in the different perspectives offered by the multidisciplinary approach to child abuse investigations. Although perceived as frustrating at times, disagreement with other team members was not always viewed as a negative. One forensic interviewer who participated in the study described collaboration as exchanging thoughts and ideas and then added that people sometimes misinterpret collaboration as having to
agree. She commented that sometimes the best results of collaboration occurred when team members did not agree because then they worked together to find alternative solutions.

The findings from the study emphasize how multidisciplinary team functioning depends upon the relationships among team members. Team members in rural counties without benefit of formal team agreements described highly effective relationships between child protective services and law enforcement. However, the effectiveness of these teams relies upon the individuals who established these strong reciprocal relationships over time. The question must be asked what if something happens to one of these team members. Changes in administration of different agencies represented on the team may also affect collaboration among agencies. While written interagency agreements and protocols cannot address every contingency, these agreements are needed to provide a framework for how teams function. The district attorney’s office, child protective services, and law enforcement in communities that do not have specific programs, such as child advocacy centers, child protection teams, or multidisciplinary interview centers, need to make efforts to establish written protocols to guide the investigative agencies in working together.

The value of a different perspective and what I describe here as an “atypical” resource for the multidisciplinary team was that of a criminologist who specialized in DNA evidence. She described her role on the multidisciplinary team as similar to a consultant who helped other members of the team understand the importance of certain pieces of evidence that could be collected along the investigative process. Despite the uniqueness of her work, the study participant identified closely with being a member of the multidisciplinary team and felt that her role was valued and perceived as important by other members of the team. She had worked with
the team for five years and she admitted that the other team members’ views of her role had evolved over time.

My final thought serves to remind the readers that while we live in what is truly the most remarkable age of information and technology that we must take care not to overlook the value of the relationships. We as social workers have always relied upon our ability to connect with others where they are. It is equally, if not of more important for the multidisciplinary team members responsible for child abuse investigations to engage in meaningful interactions with other team members. Through their relationships with others, they become more knowledgeable about the work of other disciplines that helps the overall team functions more effectively. As many of the study participants emphasized to me, they are their own best resources and through each other they achieve the goals of their agencies and teams. They must not become so dependent upon technology that they fail to invest in the time that it takes to build relationships with other team members, but find ways to use technology to enhance collaboration with other team members in order to nurture those relationships.
References


Staller, K.M. (2012). Epistemological boot camp: The politics of science and what every qualitative researcher needs to know to survive in the academy. Qualitative Social Work, 0(00), 1-19.


Appendix A

February 3, 2014

Teresa Young
School of Social Work
Box 876314

Re: IRB#: 14-OR-033 "A Grounded Theory Study of Collaboration in Multidisciplinary Teams Responsible for Child Abuse Investigations"

Dear Ms. Young:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on January 28, 2015. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carmennia T. Mylles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance
The University of Alabama
November 7, 2014

Teresa H. Young, MSW
School of Social Work
The University of Alabama
Box 870314

Re: IRB # 14-OR-033-R1 (Data Analysis Only) “A Grounded Theory Study of Collaboration in Multidisciplinary Teams Responsible for Child Abuse Investigation”

Dear Ms. Young:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on November 6, 2015. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpaneto T. Myles, MSM, CIP
Director of Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance
APPENDIX B

AGREEMENT BETWEEN
THE
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
AND
TERESA YOUNG, PH.D. STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

WHEREAS, the State of Alabama Department of Human Resources (hereinafter "DHR") is authorized by Alabama law to provide child welfare services (i.e., child abuse and neglect investigations, child protective services child foster care, and child adoptions), adult services, child support, TANF (formerly AFDC) and food assistance services in Alabama; and

WHEREAS, Teresa Young (hereinafter referred to as "Young") has requested access to child welfare staff, who also participate in multidisciplinary teams, in selected counties for the purpose of face-to-face interview in her "A Grounded Theory Study of Collaboration in Multidisciplinary Teams Responsible for Child Abuse Investigations" project (hereinafter referred to as "Project") aimed at conducting a qualitative study to learn how front-line members of multidisciplinary teams perceive the effects of collaboration on team functioning in child abuse investigations, and;

WHEREAS, DHR case records are confidential under state law, and the unauthorized release of information is a criminal misdemeanor pursuant to Code of Alabama 1975, § 38-2-6(8); and;

WHEREAS, DHR Administrative Rule 660-1-.09(16) allows the Commissioner of the State DHR, or his designee, to approve access to DHR records and information to persons engaged in bona fide research projects and said approval having been duly granted by the Commissioner; and

NOW THEREFORE, the parties agreeing to be mutually bound, agree as follows:

1. DHR shall allow Young to conduct face-to-face interviews, under the direction of The University of Alabama, in selected county offices, with child welfare staff participating voluntarily. Young will utilize the attached "Interview Protocol" to conduct said interviews. The selected counties are: Dale, Franklin, Geneva, Greene, Lawrence, Marion, Sumter, Wilcox, and Winston.

2. Young agrees to maintain the confidentiality of information, and documents received and conduct her activities in a manner designed to protect all documents and the information contained therein from improper use or disclosure. Young shall not publish, release or disclose the identities of the persons described in the records or information disclosed in any reports or interviews. Young further agrees she will not copy or disclose any document or information contained therein to any person or entity without the prior consent of DHR and that she will not retain any copies of documents or information contained therein or any summary thereof after completion of the work approved by DHR. Young agrees to require all agents, and assigns involved in this project to read this Agreement and sign written statements agreeing to abide by its terms. Young shall
provide DHR with a written list of all assistants, e.g., secretaries, etc., involved in the project along with written statements from them agreeing to abide by the terms of this agreement.

3. Young must submit to DHR prior to release and DHR reserves the right to review, object and change or delete any confidential information contained in the report or paper before it is released.

4. This agreement shall become effective upon the date of the execution of the last signature below and is subject to immediate termination by either party upon written notice to the other party.

Date: March 7, 2014
by: Teresa A. Young, Ph.D., Student
The University of Alabama

Date: March 21, 2014
by: Carolyn B. Lapitney
Deputy Commissioner for Children and Family Services
Alabama Department of Human Resources
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Script: “Thank you for participating in this study. For the record, you have already signed the informed consent in which you agreed for this interview to be recorded. Today is (today’s date) and the local time is (current time). I’d like to start off by asking you to tell me a little bit about your background with your agency and the multidisciplinary team.”

Background Questions

15. What discipline do you represent on your team (i.e. law enforcement?

16. How long have you worked in that discipline?

17. Tell me about how you came to be your agency’s representative on the team.

18. How long have you served on the team?

19. What is your role on the team (i.e. team member, coordinator, or leader)?

20. Have you received any particular training as a member of the multidisciplinary team?

“Next I’d like to ask you to tell me about your work as a team member and talk about some of the experiences that you’ve had related to collaborating with other members of your multidisciplinary team.”

Collaboration Questions

1. Describe your work as a member of the multidisciplinary team.

2. What do you need from other team members to do your work?

3. How effective would you say that other team members are in meeting your needs?
4. What you think the other team members need from you to do their work?

5. How effective do you believe you are in meeting the needs of other team members?

6. How does working with a team generally affect your investigation findings?

21. Can you provide an example of how working with a team affected your investigation findings?

22. What does the term collaboration mean to you?

23. In general, how have your investigations been strengthened by collaboration with team members? Can you provide examples?

24. In general, how have your investigations been made more difficulty by collaboration with team members? Can you provide examples?

25. Overall, how well do you think your team works together? Why?

26. Is there anything else you think that I need to know to understand about your work as a member of the multidisciplinary team?

27. What about collaboration with other members of the team?

The following questions to be asked only during the pilot testing of the interview protocol:

28. What revisions or deletions would you make to the existing questions to enhance the ability of study participants to response to the central question of the study (how team members perceive the effects of collaboration on multidisciplinary team functioning).

29. What additional questions, if any, would you suggest in order to help study participants describe their experiences with collaboration on the multidisciplinary team?
Concluding Comments: “Thank you very much for taking time to meet with me and allow me to interview you for this study. Once this interview is transcribed, I will contact you to provide you with the opportunity to read the transcription and make any revisions or additions to your comments. If you decide that you do what to review the transcribed interview, I will email you an encrypted document and call you to provide the code that you will need to open the document. You will have 10 days to make revisions and return the encrypted document to me. Do you have any questions for me about the study or anything we’ve talked about today?”
Appendix D

Memo 9
April 17, 2014

Here again the study participant talks about the multidisciplinary team in terms of a regularly, scheduled meeting. She refers to the team meeting as really just a walk through. Perhaps walking through as a code to describe routine processes followed by the team in response to child abuse cases. It occurs to me that I need an open code that describes joint training attended by multiple members of the MDT as well as training just specific to the interviewee’s discipline. In the previous interview, I spoke about the specialized training that he received to do child abuse investigations but I do not think that CPS or other disciplines were included. It was strictly for law enforcement. I also think that even though they are attending the Child Abuse Symposium are they really cross-training when they attend these trainings together or are they following the track aimed at issues in their own particular disciplines. Perhaps they are going to the same conference at the same time, but they are not really together. Although secondary to the major themes already emerging in the data, I think this remains an important issue to consider as the literature tells us that training together enables disciplines to address challenges to team process (i.e. confidentiality/information sharing, turf issues, need to understand roles). I think a strength that I talked about was how she and LE sought out relevant trainings and shared that information with each other.
She made an interesting comment when I asked her what collaboration means to her. Here’s the quote: *A lot of times we have to explain to the families that what we do and what law enforcement does is separate but we work on it together, and we use that word ‘we work in collaboration with each other.’* Although no one has mentioned it yet, I see this as one of the drawbacks to collaboration in how families may not understand the separateness of the two agencies and families may become confused about the roles of the different agencies.

On page 5, I again see an example of the codes *knowing, understanding, and respecting* the procedures of the LE investigator when I talks about not wanting to mess up their investigation when their CPS policy tells them they need to make contact with the alleged perpetrator. On the same page, she also talks about *depending upon the interview from the CAC* before they interview the alleged perpetrator, lending importance to the role of the forensic interviewer, even though in this particular instance, they do not really see the forensic interviewer as a member of the team, perhaps *perceiving team membership* or *seeing the team member* as a code to explain team membership or *recognizing* particular disciplines as members of the team. This interview reinforces issues between law enforcement and child protective services described in earlier literature, Cross, Finkelhor, & Ormrod (2006), about concerns about CPS policy about interviewing alleged perpetrators conflicting with law enforcement investigations and also not sharing information that does not specifically relate to child protection.

How this CPS supervisor described the importance of collaboration with law enforcement in terms of training the new frontline CPS worker: *It’s just so important that we have a good working relationship with our law enforcement especially. The prosecutor too, but especially with the person who’s going to be right there with us, next to us.*
This supervisor also talked about taking it on herself to facilitate the team process by compiling the list for case review when the newly elected prosecutor did not. Perhaps a code that suggests stepping up or filling gaps to facilitate team process, maybe initiating or facilitating team process to facilitate collaboration.

Once again, a study participant mentioned the issue of political elections and how they can impact team process. Elections indicate change in leadership that may affect the team directly as when that election involves a new team leader (i.e., new county prosecutor) or when an agency gets a new leader (i.e., new sheriff) who either brings in new investigators or changes current procedures or workload assignments.

This sounds kind of silly but when there’s an election, if there’s a new sheriff that takes over, that kind of flips everything upside down for us because we’ve been through a few where the new sheriff comes in and lets everybody go from the old staff and we have this working relationship with drug task force, we have this working relationship with the investigator, they can pick up the phone and call, the school resource officer knows our numbers directly, you know those kind of things, and then when it’s new people coming in, then that kind of messes everything up in the way they work and we work. She also pointed out a difference between the level of proof required by law enforcement in their investigations and the best guess of CPS [actually referred to as preponderance of evidence in juvenile court standards in Alabama].

Knowing and understanding the language of the team also emerged in the following quote from page 9, she stated that “we’ve had law enforcement before say ‘that child is just not going to make a good witness.’” We also see recognizing the inter-relationships and how child safety may mean getting the person responsible for abuse off the street, which protects not only the child named in the report, but other children in the community. This leads me to think about...
knowing and understanding how the goals of one team member’s agency relates to the goals of the other agencies on the multidisciplinary team. It makes me think back to a previous interview with a different CPS supervisor who seemed so caught up with the work of her own agency that she did not see beyond [or perhaps only superficially] the goals and needs of her own agency.

She offered another powerful story, but this time when collaboration among agencies did not work as well. Here’s the quote from page 11: *That child is now thirteen years old. To be put in foster care on your birthday, to have experienced the sexual abuse, now she’s in a residential facility. We want her to be able to have some closure, some justice, something for her. We think it’s important so we’ll keep pushing that.* She laughed ever so slightly when she said this, maybe a bit frustrated, maybe recognizing it as an exercise in futility.

Why collaboration is important and why *being there when the child is interviewed* remains an important piece of this collaboration puzzle. Being there provides an opportunity for communication but more importantly I’m hearing [and perhaps seeing] the same thing you’re hearing and saying. Now let’s talk about what we saw and heard during the interview means to me and what that means to you in terms of this child and this investigation. She went on later to describe a positive outcome of collaboration when law enforcement was present for an interview conducted at the CAC.

As Cross, Finkelhor, & Ormrod (2006) described, the study participant talked about how law enforcement provided a protective factor to the CPS investigations where worker safety was an issue: *If we’ve got a case where we don’t feel safe, someone has said ‘this man’s crazy, don’t go out there by yourself’ then we’re picking up the phone and calling him [sheriff’s investigator] and saying ‘can you go with us to this residence?’ and even if he himself can’t go, they’ve got a deputy ready for us.*
Another potential code emerged near the end of the interview and that is wanting to do better even though she described how she thought their team was collaborating and working together and everything was going good, she commented that doesn’t mean that we can’t do better. So another code might be wanting to do better, we see this in several previous interviews with not only CPS workers and supervisors but also assistant prosecuting attorney – pilot interview 3 – where he said they could do better so therefore wanting to do collaborate better. And I feel strongly here about the wanting part because there are certainly team members who voice knowing they could do better but is collaboration affected by the desire of wanting to collaborate better. To me this is different from just knowing you could collaborate better. She also used the term commitment to each other – so perhaps being committed to helping the other agencies on the team is another potential code that goes beyond just knowing, understanding, and respecting the other agencies on the team.

Memo 40
Thursday, June 26, 2014
8:05 AM

The study participant was a investigations supervisor from Special Victims Unit of a police department in a metropolitan area. The sergeant brings 24 years of experience with law enforcement that includes six years as a sexual assault investigator and six years as supervisor of that unit.

She initially talked about the importance of the expertise of other team members AND their willingness to share that expertise and knowledge with law enforcement: When it comes to children who have any kind of physical abuse or who have gone through the sexual assault
exam, the relationship we have with children’s hospital is huge and we have a really good working relationship with Dr. [name]. And with him it’s really special and amazing, you read a doctor’s report and half the time you can’t read it anyway, then you don’t understand what it says, but you can call Dr. [name] and he always explains it in a way that makes total sense. And that helps us, it helps the DA, and he explains it to the jury and that’s worth its weight in gold.

And again the importance of relationship is introduced early on in the interview when the study participant is responding to my question on training. I think that in the beginning we sort of stumbled into it and it basically just ended up being as we’re learning our jobs and understanding how important the other people’s jobs are to ours, it was just building that relationship and I think that over the years has just made us a really good team. Later on she talks about how establishing relationships is key to communication and information sharing among the different agencies. Also, having a name and a face that you can call and talk it out when problems occur also was significant for this study participant in terms of how collaboration affects team functioning. In this large metropolitan area there is a team within a team in that the child advocacy center provides the venue for a program advisory group made up on different professionals from different agencies and the primary function of THAT team is to address systemic issues that impact child abuse investigations. She described the group as a kind of team building.

On page 7 of the interview, she noted the shortage of manpower when CPS calls and wants an investigator to go out into the field with them. Often there is no one available to go so they will rely upon patrol to go out and help them. I think this has implications for further study about the training of these frontline uniform officers and the impact that it has upon child abuse investigations. This would also hold true for after-hours when both CPS and law enforcement
responders may not be knowledgeable about procedures for initiating child abuse cases in terms of talking to kids and what kind of evidence is needed and especially the roles and responsibilities of the other agencies involved in the case. I suspect that this is more or less learned through experience.

She also provided this thoughtful response to how working with the team generally affects investigation findings: *Even though our goal is enforcing the law, when it comes to children, putting somebody in jail isn’t necessarily the best way to go, you want to make the family a whole, and so we understand that and we think that child protective services, victim advocates, the child advocacy center, the mental health group that provides the counseling in the long run that’s very, very important and that the well-being of the child is more important than necessarily prosecution. But I also think that since we have all these teams that work together to make the family stable and good as a whole that when we do prosecute, the family is more on board and they are healthier when it comes to that process because that’s not an easy process at all. And that together all the different teams and the different pieces and parts kind of helps break that cycle where they just keep going back to people that are going to abuse them whether it is domestic violence or sexual [abuse].*

She had this response to the effect of working together as a team on case outcomes: *Everyone has a job and ultimately it is to help the victim, and when we did it just from our own angle, it really wasn’t very effective and you were able to see that when it came time for trial, where you just did your part and nothing else, because the people that you wanted to help really weren’t well. But once we really started bringing everyone together as a team, you can see the difference in outcome and it’s huge. She provides a good example on page 10 of the interview.*
I also thought her description of differing timeframes and their implications for collaboration important to note: *Because everyone has the same goal but they have a different agenda of what they have to do and sometimes their rules and our rules conflict. So like CPS can have a ten-day timeline where they have to talk to the suspect. We talk to the suspect last after we’ve done the whole investigation so that can be a problem and if you don’t have good communication that can make it a real mess.* The outcome of poor communication and coordination between CPS and law enforcement was explained through this example she provided: *I had one particular CPS worker in mind because she’s done this several times and we’ve had to talk to her supervisor about it. It’s like ‘you are sabotaging the child, the investigation, and everything just so you can close your case’ and that doesn’t help anybody because you’re going to have another case because nothing is getting solved.* Ultimately collaboration affects the case findings and whether cases get solved or resolved affects the well-being of children and families.

Later on she discussed the current lieutenant over the unit and how he had a history as an officer and a sergeant responsible for child abuse cases and how he had a passion for these types of cases. She was contrasting him with another lieutenant she met during a training that had not bought into the MDT concept and how his attitude seemed to affect the MDT from that particular county. As heard in other interviews, the passion, or caring, must be present throughout the MDT structure and that includes agency administrators responsible for personal involved in the MDT process.

Using almost the exact words of another interview with law enforcement, she had this to say about law enforcement’s work with the team: *I think for the position, the law enforcement person, the actual person who does it for law enforcement, has to want to do it and has to*
understand and believe in that team concept. If you just put someone in that position that doesn’t, it’s not going to work and it’s going to affect the rest of the team.

And looking at the child abuse cases from a systems perspective: Ultimately we are here to help somebody. If we just do our job it’s just one straight angle, but if everybody is helping then you get it from all sides and you get a well-rounded healthy person and that is going to ultimately help get a case charged, help society in the long-run, help break this cycle. We’d like it so we don’t have these cases anymore. We’re reactive; there’s nothing proactive that I can do that’s going to stop someone from losing control and hitting the child. So we’re always after the fact and that’s frustrating. We do try to put out education things, everybody does, but ultimately we are reactive and so when we react we want to have the best approach so we can do whatever we can and not make the violent circle continue.

Here was her response when asked how her LE investigators build relationships with other team members: They build their relationships with them when they are actually working the cases. So you’re right it’s a hit and a miss and the only opportunity that they really have is when they do the collaborative training and that’s once a year. So is it enough? No, but realistically right now with the manpower overall I don’t know how we would change that. She recognized the problem with that being that because of differing timeframes the only time they are ever really working side-by-side together is when they are observing the forensic interviews. The good news here is she forgot to tell me earlier about the monthly case review held at the child advocacy center that lets everybody know what happened on his/her particular cases.
## Appendix E
### Initial Codes Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging Strengths of Other MDT</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Skills or abilities other MDT agencies; perceived a helpful or positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising other MDT</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Giving advice or guidance to other MDT members or agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affecting case outcomes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Events or case examples of effect of collaboration on case outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affecting collaboration</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>Events or case examples of factors that affect collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affecting findings</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Events or case examples of how collaborating w/ MDT affected investigative process</td>
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<td>Alerting alleged offender</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Actions taken that inform alleged offender/perpetrator of pending allegations prior to LE involvement; perceived as negative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking for help</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Seeking assistance from other MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Relates to questions MDT members may have during forensic interviews; deciding what/when to ask</td>
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<td>Attending team meetings</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>Refers to both formal and informal meetings w/ other MDT agencies to discuss aspects of investigation; case review meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding duplication</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Policies or procedures aimed at preventing duplicative efforts by agencies responsible for child abuse investigations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being heard</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Having a ‘voice’ at team meetings; feeling that people listen to and respect my views/opinions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Best interests of the child</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Actions perceived as protective and/or in best interest of child well-being</td>
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<td>Building relationships</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Builds or improves connections between team members</td>
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<td>Burning out</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lack of enthusiasm and/or motivation resulting in reduced professional efficacy</td>
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<td>Buy into MDT</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Willingness to actively support or participate in MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Count 1</td>
<td>Count 2</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>Caring about child victim family</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Expressing concern for child or family well-being</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring about needs of MDT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Expressing concerns for needs of MDT members</td>
</tr>
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<td>Caring about what you do</td>
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<td>Expressing concerns about what you do and wanting to do good work</td>
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<td>Challenging other MDT</td>
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<td>Difficult in ways that provoke interest, thought or action</td>
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<td>Changing team members</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Working w/ different team members; may be new to agency or just new to MDT</td>
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<td>Checking ego at door</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Putting aside ego; understanding it’s not about you</td>
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<td>Choosing to work CANs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Refers to being assigned or choosing to work child abuse investigations; related to LE primarily</td>
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<td>Co-locating MDT agencies</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Different MDT agencies or disciplines located in same facility</td>
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<td>Communicating w/ other MDT</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>Exchanging information or expressing ideas or thoughts to other MDT members</td>
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<td>Conflicting w/other MDT</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Being in conflict or opposition to actions of other MDT</td>
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<td>Consulting w/ other MDT</td>
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<td>Giving expert advice to other members of MDT</td>
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<td>Coordinating MDT activity</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Efforts to organize investigative activities of multiple agencies for effective use of time and resources</td>
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<td>Corroborating preserving evidence</td>
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<td>Securing and maintaining information that supports and helps to prove the child victim’s statements</td>
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<td>Creating comfortable environment</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Establishing an environment where MDT members feel they can be open in engaging and/or sharing information w/ other agencies</td>
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<td>Dealing w/ stress difficult cases</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Comments about ‘stress’ or difficulty of working w/ child abuse cases; debriefing w/ MDT</td>
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<td>Dealing w/ differing policies procedures</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Efforts to deal w/ policies and procedures different from your own agency</td>
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<td>Deciding next steps</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Decision making during investigation involving other MDT agencies</td>
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<td>Defining collaboration</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>What term ‘collaboration’ means to study participant</td>
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<td>Having a common goal or focus of MDT</td>
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<td>Describes roles and responsibilities of agency or discipline represented on MDT; who does what and when</td>
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<td>97</td>
<td>Describes my agency policies or procedures; what my agency does</td>
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<td># of References</td>
<td># of Words</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>Describing agency structure</td>
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<td>Who works in my agency and what they do</td>
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<td>Describes the role of my agency on MDT</td>
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<td>Describes background of MDT; the history of the team in that county or jurisdiction</td>
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<td>Describing difficult case</td>
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<td>Describes case example of where multiple agencies were involved in investigation</td>
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<td>Describes how MDT members become involved in child abuse investigation</td>
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<td>Processes used to investigate cases w/in context of MDT</td>
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<td>Describes the part my agency plays in response to child abuse reports</td>
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<td>Specific to the background of study participant; how they came to work in their discipline; work experience; not related to work w/ MDT</td>
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<td>Describes college degree held by study participant</td>
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<td>My part of the MDT process; may overlap w/ agency role</td>
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<td>Describing my skills</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Describes study participant’s area(s) of expertise; what I do really well</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Describes what the study participant’s agency does overall; not limited to child abuse investigations</td>
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<td>Differences between MDT &amp; other teams</td>
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<td>How working w/ MDT in child abuse cases differs from other teams I have worked w/; may refer to MDT in other counties or jurisdictions</td>
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<td>Differing agency cultures</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Refers to differences in expert skills or knowledge; MDT members or agency personnel in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing opinions perspectives</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Refers to individuals having different opinions or views; MDT members or agency personnel in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing personalities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Refers to individuals having different personality traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing polices and procedures</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Refers to agencies or disciplines having different policies and procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing timeframes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Refers to how different agencies or disciplines have different timeframes for initiating or completing investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreeing w/ other MDT</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>When agencies or disciplines disagree about issues in child abuse investigations; includes efforts to resolve disagreements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline experience</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>How long study participant has worked in their particular discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing my job</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Following my agency policies and procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing what needs to be done</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Taking actions that move the investigation forward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating other MDT</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Study participant trains other MDT agencies or disciplines about work of team; study participant conducts workshops, in-service training specifically for MDT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolving as a team</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Changes MDT made overtime, or are making now, to resolve issues and improve team response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchanging info w/ other MDT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sharing info back and forth w/ other members of the team; face-to-face or electronically</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expecting other MDT to</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>What one member of MDT anticipates that another team member will do in given situations; based upon the study participant’s knowledge of that agency’s policies and procedures and/or previous experiences w/ a particular agency or team member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing frustration</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Expressing annoyance related to actions or inactions of MDT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing collaboration</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Indication or case example MDT not working together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling supported by my agency</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Feeling that my agency is aware and sensitive to my needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting a conviction</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>MDT efforts result in offender being found guilty in criminal court</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting along</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Meeting each other’s needs; being agreeable w/ and supportive of the other MDT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting multiple perspectives</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Having opportunity to hear differing points of view</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting direction from MDT</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>MDT suggests different ways to approach investigation or possible sources of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting giving input</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Getting or contributing info or perspective to case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting info for other MDT</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Getting info for other MDT members that they cannot get</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going out on cases together</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Conducting joint investigations; being at the same place, same time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding interagency agreements</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Written agreements, protocols, or MOUs involving different agencies represented on MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having multiple roles on MDT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MDT member represents an agency and serves as team leader or coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having resources available through MDT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Being able to access information or resources because of MDT involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having written protocols</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Written agreements, protocols, or MOUs involving different agencies represented on MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping me do my job</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Describes how other MDT members or team participation provides information or assistance that helps the study participant perform more effectively their role on the MDT or in his/her agency or discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering my job</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Procedures or policies or actions taken or not taken by other MDT that interferes with work of the study participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering their job</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Procedures or policies or actions taken or not taken by study participant that interferes with work of the study participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring the right people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Efforts to hire persons w/ ‘right’ qualities to work w/ child abuse cases or be effective member of MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding persons accountable</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ensuring that MDT members do what they are responsible for doing as a member of their respective agencies and as a member of the MDT; participating in team meetings; updates on cases to MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying as MDT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Whether individual perceives him/herself as a member of a multidisciplinary team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying the MDT</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Refers to group outside the individual that study participant perceives as ‘team’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing opinions viewpoints</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>How other MDT may affect or skew my opinion one way or another; viewed both positively and negatively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting w/ MDT</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Talk or do things w/ other MDT members that may affect each other’s actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving other MDT in case</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Actions taken to notify or bring other MDT into the case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just not doing their jobs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Actions not taken, but perceived as needed by study participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing other team members</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Recognizing and knowing who other MDT members are as professionals and as people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing what happens to cases</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Being aware of case outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing what others need</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Being aware of what other MDT members need to do their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing what to do</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Being knowledgeable about agency/MDT policies and procedures; handles difficult situations competently and effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing what’s happening</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Being aware of what is currently occurring in terms of child, family and/or case investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading the MDT</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Study participant identifies the individual or agency responsible for leading or coordinating the overall work of the MDT; also the activities associated with leadership role, such as chairs case review meetings; plans agenda for MDT; schedules meetings, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning information</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>How team members get information during the investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to other MDT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Paying attention to what other MDT members say; the flip-side of advising other MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for the right stuff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Screening for MT members/agency personnel for certain character attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making things more difficult</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>Policies, procedures, or actions taken or not taken that make investigating the case more difficult; includes case examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting my needs</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>How effective other MDT members or agencies are at giving me what I need to do my job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting their needs</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>How effective they think they are at meeting the needs of other MDT members or agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing details</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Information or parts of investigative process missing and needed to complete thorough case investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing from me</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>What other MDT members need from me to do their work; may refer to attitudes or information or actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing from other MDT</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>What I need from other MDT members to do my work; may refer to information or actions or attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing information</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Information study participant needs to do his/her work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not doing the job</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Typically refers to perception that other MDT members not doing what they need to be doing in terms of the investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not getting what I need</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Describing situations where study participant did not get from other MDT what he/she thought they needed to do their part of the investigation; may refer to actions, communications, or different forms of info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Description</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not so regular team members</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Agency representatives who for whatever reason do not attend case review meetings regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notifying other MDT</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Making other team members aware of child abuse report or actions taken on case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing child interviews</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Refers to watching forensic interview from observation room at interview site or via remote live stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orienting new team members</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Steps to orient new MDT members to policies and procedures for investigations followed by the local team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing MDT cases</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Treating child abuse cases involving the MDT as more important; paying more attention or delegating more time and/or resources to these investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the child</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Policies, procedures, and/or engaging in actions to ensure safety of child; desired outcome of CPS; sometimes referred to as ‘goal’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting wrongfully accused</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Alternative to ‘getting a prosecution’ or another outcome of investigation; important to law enforcement or prosecution agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing to get something done</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Strongly advocating for action(s) to be taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting it all together</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Assembling case information to inform decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting the pieces together</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Assembling case information to inform decision making; refers to investigation as ‘puzzle’ or viewing case holistically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating effectiveness of meeting needs of other MDT members</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>How study participant perceived his/her own ability to meet the needs of other members of the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating team effectiveness</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>How study participant perceived the overall effectiveness of the team in terms of working together to investigate child abuse cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing limitations of other MDT</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Describes areas where other MDT members may be limited; may refer to time and/or resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing my limitations</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Acknowledging personal limitations or resources of individual or agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to other MDT</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Referring cases to other team members for advice or assistance w/ services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to other MDT</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>How study participant describes relationships w/ other team members or agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relying upon other MDT</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Putting trust or confidence in other MDT for specific activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting MDT process</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Oppose team procedures or policies or working w/ other MDT agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting other team members</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Admiration for other MDT member as a result of his/her skills or qualities or work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to community</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Being aware and taking action(s) to address needs of community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to needs of MDT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Being aware and taking action(s) to address needs of MDT as a whole or as individual members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing or staffing cases</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Formal or informal meetings or conferences to review cases under investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling case reviews</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Relates to scheduling team meetings or case review meetings; usually responsibility of team leader or coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servicing children and families</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Providing services to children and family involved in child abuse investigation; may be provided by MDT agency or linkage agreements w/ agencies in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing a history</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Having worked together with MDT member over a long period of time; feeling sense of connection because of lived experiences they share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing info w/ other MDT</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Sharing what I know about the case w/ other MDT members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing what I know</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Openly and freely sharing whatever info I know about case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing up when you need them</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Refers to other MDT members being available when study participant needs them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing affects collaboration</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>How staffing issues (turnover, new hires, burnout) affects working together w/ other MDT members or agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening investigations</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>How collaboration makes investigative process more effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic or procedural problems</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>System-wide issues (i.e. turnover, funding) affecting collaboration or team function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking it case-by-case</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Treating each child abuse case as separate and distinct from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking pride in work of MDT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Expressing satisfaction w/ work of MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking to children</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Refers to interviewing kids; forensic or emergency response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracking MDT cases</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Procedures or systems for monitoring child abuse cases to ensure awareness and no child ‘falling through cracks’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training agency discipline</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Relates to child abuse but not directly related to or involving MDT; training exclusive to one agency or discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training MDT</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>Relates to child abuse or MDT; participation includes multiple agencies or disciplines; local workshops, state or national conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning from DCF</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Specific to the state of Florida describing transition from Department of Children and Family Services being responsible for child abuse investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating MDT cases differently</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Recognizing unique nature of child abuse cases; how investigations handled differently from other types of crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting my agency</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Belief in agency to take appropriate actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting other MDT</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Belief in honesty/sincerity of other MDT agencies or team members to do the right thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding dynamics of child abuse</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Comprehending properties of child abuse and its impact upon children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding MDT</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Comprehending the policies and procedures of MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding work of other MDT</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Comprehending procedures and policies of other MDT members or agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using collaboration to accomplish my goals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Working w/ other MDT members to accomplish the goals of my agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using out-of-county resources</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Relying upon or coordinating investigations w/ resources in other counties or jurisdictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using technology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Using technology to assist in investigation or my role on MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing team</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Work of MDT perceived as important and beneficial to child, family, MDT agencies, and/or community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting on other MDT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Not acting or carrying out your role or responsibility pending action(s) of other MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who’s on my team</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Identifies agencies or disciplines study participant works w/ in response to child abuse reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working alongside</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Conducting joint investigations; being in same place at same time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in small community</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Study participant refers to being in ‘small community’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on my own</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Working outside MDT protocols or investigating cases w/out involvement of other MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working together</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Used to describe whether or not MDT agencies perceived as communication and coordination of activities in child abuse investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working w/ child family</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Refers to direct actions of MDT members to talk w/ or involve children or families; may involve emergency response activities or removing children from caregiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working w/ judge or court</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Having to do w/ court systems; testifying in court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working w/ multiple counties</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Relates to coordinating investigative activities w/ multiple counties or jurisdictions or agencies in other states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working w/ who is available</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Not knowing who or even whether other MDT available to assist in case investigations; perceived as negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>