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Starting and sustaining fruitful collaborations in psychology

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Abstract

Much of psychological science relies on collaboration—from generating new theories and study ideas, to collecting and analyzing data, to writing and sharing results with the broader community. Learning how to collaborate with others is an important skill, yet this process is not often explicitly discussed in academia. Here, five researchers from diverse backgrounds share their experiences and advice on starting and sustaining collaborations. In doing so, they reflect on aspects of both successful (and failed) collaborations with students, colleagues within and outside of psychology, and members of industry and organizational partners beyond academia. Recommendations and challenges of productive collaborations are discussed, along with examples of how collaborative teams can contribute to psychological science, address real-world issues, and make the process of conducting research more enjoyable and rewarding.

KEYWORDS
academia, collaboration, diversity, meta-science, methods, motivation, relationships, team science

1 | INTRODUCTION

> Interdependence is and ought to be as much the ideal of humanity as self-sufficiency.
>
> (Gandhi, Young India, 3-21-1929)

Science is not always a solitary pursuit. From brainstorming ideas to designing research, analyzing data, writing, and disseminating findings to the public, science often requires collaboration and teamwork, which has become more frequent across all areas of science (Frenken et al., 2005; Henriksen, 2016; Levine & Moreland, 2004; Sonnewald, 2007). While there are advantages to having solo investigators in sparking scientific innovation, there are also benefits to cultivating meaningful, productive collaborations among both larger teams to small-scale partnerships of two or more individuals (Wu et al., 2019). Collaboration is defined as "interaction taking place… among two or more scientists that facilitates the shared meaning and completion of tasks with respect to a mutually shared, superordinate goal"s (Sonnewald, 2007, p. 645). Collaboration size and type are likely to vary from person to person and may ebb and flow depending on the research question and available resources.

At its core, collaboration is about relationships. A large body of research suggests that when people feel socially connected to others, they experience increased sense of belonging, purpose, and motivation, whereas when they feel socially disconnected, they experience a host of negative outcomes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Hofmann et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In a similar way, a researcher's sense of meaning and motivation in their academic career is likely to be shaped by the quality of their interactions and relationships with others.

The size of collaborative teams has grown over the past few decades, with larger teams developing ideas and smaller teams advancing the scientific literature through disruptions of ideas and paradigm shifts (Wu et al., 2019). Recent writing in this area has focused on the proliferation, possibilities, and unique challenges of Big Team Science —very large team collaborations in which researchers combine their resources to examine broad, shared questions of interest (e.g., Baumgartner et al., 2023; Coles et al., 2022, 2023; Forscher et al., 2019, 2023; ManyBabies Consortium; Psychological Science Accelerator).

Rather than reviewing the extant literature on best practices in collaboration, we provide a narrative reflecting on our diverse collaborative experiences (e.g., advisor-student collaborations, research with other departments, institutions, organizations, industries, countries). Drawing upon social psychological theory and research when relevant, we address topics such as how to start collaborations, qualities to look for in collaborators, aspects of successful (and not so successful) collaborations, navigating difficulties in collaborations, and suggestions for maintaining collaborations. Table 1 offers key recommendations based on our collective experiences.[1]

1.1 | Lora Park

Throughout my academic career, I have collaborated with undergraduate and graduate students in psychology, faculty in psychology and in other departments (e.g., architecture, chemistry, communications, education, mathematics, sociology), and with researchers at other universities within and outside the United States (U.S.) When recruiting students, I not only seek individuals who are highly motivated, intellectually curious, and enthusiastic about research, but have demonstrated the ability to work well with others and shown evidence of leadership skills, such as taking initiative, making progress, and following through on research-related tasks. In working with other faculty, complementarity in knowledge, skills, or expertise (rather than solely similarity-based collaborations) can be beneficial; for example, sharing overlapping research interests from different perspectives, offering statistical expertise, or having background knowledge in a particular area guide my decisions about collaborating.

Some of my collaborations have begun in serendipitous ways. For example, I attended a talk by a social psychologist who was visiting my institution, and after conversations about common research interests and datasets that we had or wanted to collect, we collaborated on several projects and papers together (e.g., Park et al., 2009). As another example, I once contacted a faculty peer in the field to ask about their findings and discussed ideas for future studies; through these conversations we developed a collaboration based on our shared research interests and questions (e.g., Park et al., 2015, 2023).

TABLE 1 Summary and recommendations for collaboration.

Collaboration partners	• Undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars • Mentors (eventually you will want to establish independence in your own research program; this norm may vary based on institution) • Faculty within and outside psychology; within and outside your college/university • Community partners (e.g., universities, charities, teachers, museums) • Government, policy makers, business, industry, corporations, non-profits
Starting collaborations	• Self-initiated (e.g., share ideas or data; invite others to collaborate on a project; research internship) • Other-initiated (e.g., invited by another scholar or community partner) • Third-party (e.g., coordinated by task force, consortium) • Serendipitous (e.g., conversation about shared interest) • Before collaborating, ask yourself: Will this collaboration move my research program forward? Will this collaboration improve the world in some way? Will this collaboration be fun/enjoyable? Will this collaboration allow me to work with people I like? • Send potential external collaborator a list of specific questions (e.g., who owns/has access to data; number of participants that could be involved; whether random assignment is possible; are internal approvals needed) • Create a form for potential collaborators to fill out and submit explaining how they intend to use your data/for what purpose/collaboration plan which you can then evaluate and decide whether you want to collaborate with them
Qualities of a good collaborator	• Responsive, good communicator • Allocates time, resources, attention to collaborative project; meets mutually agreed upon deadlines • Kind, conscientious, supportive of the work • Gives constructive feedback and encouragement; open to feedback • Shared values (e.g., transparency, open science practices) • Overlap in research interests/questions • Offers background knowledge, skills, or expertise (conceptual, methodological, statistical, writing) in an area relevant to project • Student collaborators: Works well with others; show leadership potential; takes initiative; makes progress; follows through on tasks • Outside of academia: Someone who has worked with academics before, has had previous experience in academia, or has access to relevant data or populations of interest
Strategies to create and sustain collaborations	• Clarify expectations about responsiveness, roles, research, tasks • Make time for fun and connection with collaborators; connect in-person, online and/or in real-life • Express gratitude • Create conditions for team members to fulfill basic psychological needs for competence (feeling productive), autonomy (freely choosing to be involved), and relatedness (keeping in touch)

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	• Create written contracts or records to document collaborator roles, order of authorship, contributions • With collaborators outside the field, translate psychological concepts and findings in a way that's clear, easy to understand • When interacting with organizations outside psychology, first meet with people who are in charge and have decision-making power

Benefits and costs of collaborations	• Benefits
	  ○ Strengthens social connections with others
	  ○ Makes the process of doing research interesting and fun
	  ○ Provides meaning and purpose
	  ○ Increases productivity
	  ○ Advances scientific knowledge
	  ○ Can make a real-world impact by addressing important societal issues
	  ○ Helps to address the field's challenges of having larger, more representative samples; increases replicability of findings
	  ○ Increases diversity of research teams
	• Costs
	  ○ Having many collaborators can be difficult to manage
	  ○ May feel anxious or overwhelmed if involved in too many projects
	  ○ Collaborators may not be able or willing to fulfill obligations in a timely manner
	  ○ Can experience conflict or strain when collaborations are not going well

Dealing with difficult issues in collaborations/ Ending collaborations	• Slow/unresponsive collaborators → send short, easy to digest messages with clear action items • Disagreements and/or project usurped by strong personalities → discuss overarching, shared goals to see if you can re-align • Conflicting norms/expectations → discuss differences early on; collectively decide on solution • Conflict avoidance/suppression of needs in collaborations → clearly communicate your needs and desired project outputs early on • Differences in opinion (of authorship order, journal outlet, data analysis strategy) → have hard conversations as issues arise to discuss norms, expectations, ways to compromise • If you want to end a collaboration, make this clear rather than ambiguous • Ask if you can do something to help close out the project • When relevant, offer to provide a deliverable to close out the project (e.g., a white paper, slide deck, change authorship order)

Note: Additional resources:

Questions to ask potential collaborations: https://osf.io/ufcht/; https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/relationships-intimate-and-more/202105/10-questions-to-ask-before-beginning-a-collaboration.

How to have difficult conversation with colleagues: https://hbr.org/2015/01/how-to-handle-difficult-conversations-at-work.

Tips for determining authorship credit: https://www.apa.org/science/leadership/students/authorship-paper; https://www.science.org/content/article/how-navigate-authorship-scientific-manuscripts; https://alexholcombe.medium.com/announcing-tenzing-ceca6789d88c.

Source: Holcombe et al., 2020.

A solid collaborator has many of the same qualities as a good friend. First and foremost, they are responsive. Although perceived responsiveness has traditionally been studied within close relationships (Gable & Reis, 2006), the qualities are similar: responsive collaborators express understanding, caring, and validation. Collaborators can provide support and encouragement in the face of setbacks, failures, and rejection, as well as amplify and capitalize on positive experiences. For instance, when partners respond in positive ways, recipients experience more positive emotions, greater subjective well-being, higher self-esteem, and reap relational benefits, such as greater liking, closeness, satisfaction, commitment, and stability in the relationship (Gable & Reis, 2010). Similarly, good collaborators are not only there to help through difficult times but to celebrate the big and small "wins" along the way.

Individuals vary in how responsive they expect collaborators to be. Whereas some people are content working relatively independently with minimal interactions with collaborators, others may want more frequent check-ins to feel connected and stay motivated. Calibrating and communicating expectations are important skills in collaboration; discussing expectations upfront and along the way—regarding responsiveness, extent of collaboration, authorship, and other key issues—are vital to ensuring collaborations are enjoyable and sustainable.

To maintain collaborations, teams should strive to cultivate competence, autonomy, and relatedness. According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), competence refers to feelings of mastery and self-efficacy; in a research context, scientists should feel like they are contributing their expertise and skills to the research process, such as the study design, data collection, analysis, write up, or presentation of results. When people experience autonomy, they feel more intrinsically motivated (e.g., are freely choosing to be part of the collaboration), rather than feeling pressured or obligated to do so, which can lead to resentment and procrastination. Successful collaborations also involve relatedness—a feeling of close, mutually caring relationships with others cultivated through regular contact and communication with collaborators via texts, emails, phone calls, virtual meetings, or in-person gatherings, consistent with the fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

As a researcher who studies the self, motivation, and broadening underrepresented groups' participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, I conduct research with both social psychologists and researchers in other fields. In a recent collaborative project funded by the National Science Foundation, I worked with faculty members from the Mathematics Department at my institution and at another university to conduct large-scale intervention studies to examine the effects of giving different types of feedback to students in introductory college calculus courses. This project required complex logistical and technological planning and coordination, frequent communication with research team members and faculty, and conducting, analyzing, and writing up the results to disseminate widely to the academic community and public. Through this collaborative process, I learned the importance of translating social psychological theories and findings into ideas that researchers and stakeholders outside my field could easily grasp and appreciate.

At times, working with people outside of one's field can present challenges. For example, insufficient clarity about team goals or member contributions can lead to diffusion of responsibility and social loafing. In such situations, seeking clarity early on about one's role in the project is paramount by openly discussing expectations, contributions, and desired involvement. Another challenge is dealing with individuals who are focused on demonstrating or validating their intelligence or competence to others. When people seek to protect, maintain, and enhance their self-image or self-esteem, they experience negative personal and interpersonal outcomes (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Crocker & Park, 2004). Thus, reminding people of goals that are larger than themselves (e.g., the superordinate goal of working together to advance knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon or to address an important societal issue) can help to reduce people's pursuit of self-image goals to validate their intelligence.

Collaborations can also stall when a collaborator takes too long to respond, does not follow-through on commitments, or is non-responsive. In such cases, clear and concise communication is crucial. For example, I used to write long emails to collaborators giving them comprehensive updates and asking a series of questions about our projects. However, this approach often slowed down progress. Now, rather than asking collaborators open-ended questions buried within long emails, I send direct, easy-to-respond-to requests using strategic formatting features, such as bolding or highlighting key points or questions to which I would like collaborators to respond.

Because humans tend to rely on mental shortcuts to process information (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), asking collaborators "What are your thoughts?" via email requires more time and cognitive effort to respond to than asking a question like, "Which option do you prefer, A or B?" which is more likely to prompt a response and an explanation for their choice. Similarly, emailing collaborators to ask when they are available to return feedback on a manuscript may be more effective than sending a draft and waiting indefinitely for them to provide input. In short, providing *less* information in emails and agreeing upon timeframes and deadlines for completing tasks can help to maintain productive collaborations over time (see Rogers & Lasky-Fink, 2023 for more tips on increasing responsiveness among recipients).

Ending collaborations, like dissolving close relationships, also involves effective communication. For example, research on close relationships shows that when individuals have invested time and energy into a relationship, they are likely to use *voice*—actively seeking to improve the relationship, rather than *exit*—ending the relationship, or *neglect*—passively letting the relationship disintegrate (Rusbult et al., 1982). Similarly, when people view their collaborators as friends and have invested time and resources into the collaboration, they may benefit from adopting voice strategies. In contrast, when individuals feel consistently disappointed or frustrated in working with a collaborator, they may engage in active (exit) or passive (neglect) strategies. To maintain collaborations, using active voice—expressing one's needs and expectations clearly and working together to find a solution—is ideal. When a collaboration is eroding and there is little hope for improvement, tactfully ending the collaboration may be best. Ultimately, finding other people who share your passion and excitement for research is vital to sustaining purpose, motivation, and meaning throughout one's career and to advancing science to address important societal issues.

1.2 | Lara Aknin

I have had the pleasure of collaborating with undergraduates, graduate students, peers, senior faculty, charities, coaches, and teachers. Early in my career, most of my collaborations were self-initiated; I would reach out to others with a specific idea of potential mutual interest. For instance, towards the end of my graduate degree, I was curious about whether young children feel good when they give so I contacted a developmental psychologist in my department to see if they were interested in collaborating. Given my training in social psychology, I knew little about how to design age-appropriate studies for toddlers, but my collaborator did, which began a fun and fruitful collaboration that lasted for years (Aknin et al., 2012; Van de Vondervoort et al., 2018).

Recently, collaborations have started in other ways. For instance, after giving a talk, speaking with a journalist, and publishing an Op-Ed, I was invited to partner with both researchers and organizations. I have also been involved in collaborations sparked through third-party connections, such as being invited to chair *The Lancet*'s COVID-19 Mental Health Task Force in 2020. Since both of these types of collaborations were inspired by others' initiatives and timelines, I received wise guidance from my former graduate advisor to consider whether potential collaborations fulfill at least two of three criteria: (1) the project is fun, (2) offers an opportunity to work with people I like, and/or (3) improves the world in some way (E. Dunn, personal communication, May 2022). If so, I typically sign on.

My collaborations have ranged from two people to over 25. Regardless of team size, ensuring that each member has a clear purpose, contribution, or expertise to bring to the project helps to reduce feelings of imposter syndrome (commonly felt in early career stages; see Jaremka et al., 2020) by assuring collaborators that they do not need to know everything and can instead focus their efforts on a specific area. Inviting each collaborator for a particular purpose also delineates roles and helps to avoid diffusion of responsibility, a common occurrence in groups where people avoid doing necessary tasks because they feel a reduced sense of responsibility when others are able to contribute (consistent with the Bystander Intervention Tree; see Darley & Latané, 1968).

My favorite—and most productive collaborations—have been with individuals who are kind, conscientious, responsive, humble, open-minded, good communicators who hold similar research values for ethical and transparent science. Collaborations with these individuals are energetic and reciprocal. Often (but not always), collaborations represent opportunities to work with friends on questions of shared interest. This insight guides my thinking on what makes for and sustains a good collaboration. First, make time for small talk and fun. Collaborative projects are more than laser-focused work conversations. One of my most productive and long-lasting collaborations often includes brainstorming sessions on a sun-soaked patio with a mojito in hand. The enjoyable mood and conversation not only build interpersonal trust, but also spark creativity, consistent with the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Fredrickson, 2001).

Second, whenever possible, make time to meet. Emails and shared Google docs can move a project along, but connections—either in person or online—fuel interest and excitement. Finally, take time to express gratitude to collaborators for their contributions and expertise. Articulating thanks is critical for establishing and strengthening relationships (as suggested by the Find, Remind, and Bind Theory of Gratitude, see Algoe, 2012), and expressions of gratitude are often appreciated more than we realize (Kumar & Epley, 2018).

I have found these principles effective in most collaborations, including those that span countries and disciplines. For example, the *Lancet* Mental Health Task Force team I was on included an economist, public policy expert, and two statisticians based in three countries spanning eight time zones. Despite the distance in our training and physical location, Zoom meetings were a delight. Each member came prepared, shared their expertise, listened to one another, and made good use of the face-to-face meeting time by problem-solving and brainstorming. More than that, we laughed, developed inside jokes, and shared pictures and stories from our vacations, which led to new friendships. This international collaboration was productive and fun, largely due to the respect and relationships formed through genuine interaction and gratitude.

Cross-discipline and international collaborations can reveal different norms and assumptions that may need to be explicitly discussed. For example, in the final stages of one collaborative project, an economist and I were finalizing the manuscript. We exchanged several drafts before I noticed that we had simply been revising the tense used throughout the manuscript; he was using present tense (common in economics) while I was using past tense (common in psychology). Once we noticed that this difference was the source of our delay, we discussed and agreed upon a solution (using past tense to describe completed studies and present tense for ongoing surveys). Being prepared to communicate the norms of conducting research, open science practices, and writing style within one's field can reduce misunderstandings. These conversations may seem awkward or challenging at first, but the distinct information and perspective that each scholar brings is a key strength of international and interdisciplinary collaborations and may help to explain why these types of papers are cited more often (Frenken et al., 2005).

One important dimension of research that differs across fields and countries is authorship order and recognition. In psychology, authorship order usually reflects the level of contribution—with first-author being the principal author—as recommended by the American Psychological Association (2015). This sequence is often reversed in the natural sciences, with the senior author/lab director appearing last in the author list (Pain, 2021). However, the norm in the social sciences might be changing; an informal poll conducted in 2021 by the Psychology Methods and Practices Facebook group found that a majority of respondents now mostly publish with senior authors last and the principal junior author first. In addition to determining authorship order, norms may shape *who* one collaborates with. Like the other authors on this paper, I am based at a North American university where the common expectation is to publish with student advisees and not with one's former mentor to demonstrate independence in one's research program. However, this norm may not be common at other institutions (e.g., outside of North America; teaching-focused vs. research-focused institutions) where publishing with former mentors may be encouraged.

Balancing collaborations and other obligations can be tricky. For students, I recommend being open with your supervisor about your interests and projects. Ideally, your supervisor can help you manage your commitments and see the bigger research program. One of my graduate students had several ongoing collaborations that I was

unaware of which led them to respond slowly to my requests. Once I learned the load they were carrying, I was able to help them prioritize their projects. As a faculty member, I also try to include my students in collaborations whenever possible which gives my students a chance to build their network, learn new skills, and observe and contribute to collaborations early on.

Like many aspects of research, collaborations can fail. For example, I partnered with a non-profit organization and researchers to conduct a large, well-powered, pre-registered experiment with a youth-focused philanthropy program. Early team meetings were pleasant and productive, allowing us to carve out roles for the researchers and community partner—with the former seeking funding, drafting a registered report, and managing data collection, while the nonprofit partner would recruit schools for data collection and assist with study costs. After a year of preparation with ongoing conversation, the research team received a grant and had a stage 1 registered report accepted for publication and was prepared for data collection. However, the partner organization was unable to follow through with reaching the target sample, so the study was ultimately halted, and the manuscript was withdrawn.

In retrospect, there were a few warning signs. Despite early and regular contact, the partner organization was slow to reply, unorganized, and noncommittal which led to our partner missing several internal deadlines. This misunderstanding may have been a result of us (the researchers) communicating with various representatives, none of whom were certain of their responsibility in upholding the recruitment intentions. Ending the collaboration was not easy and led to mixed emotions. I felt frustrated about the time and money invested in the project that could have been better directed elsewhere. My strongest emotional response was guilt; I felt responsible for not noticing or pointing out concerns earlier which may have allowed us to salvage the project. However, after several honest (and sometimes difficult) conversations, the research team agreed that ending the collaboration was the right thing to do because our shared goals were not being met in a reasonable timeframe. Keeping written notes of the decision to terminate the collaboration and proof of the closure via email helped to avoid later confusion. Ultimately, this experience was an exception among many fun and productive collaborations and has taught me valuable lessons for the future.

1.3 | Sarah Gaither

Collaborative science is the only type of science I know. Although noteworthy breakthroughs have come from individual scientists over the years, many modern-day social science discoveries involve a team of collaborators (Henriksen, 2016). The diversity of a team can influence a group's outcomes. Whereas some studies suggest that cultural diversity may reduce creativity through negative social interactions among team members (Leung & Wang, 2015), other studies reveal positive benefits from contact with diverse others, such as living abroad in a foreign country (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009) and multicultural experiences (Leung et al., 2008; Tadmor et al., 2012) predicting increased creative thinking and performance.

Finding a superordinate goal—such as reminding yourself why you wanted to work with others on a project in the first place—may help to reduce intergroup conflict (consistent with classic prejudice reduction strategies; Gaertner et al., 2000; Sherif, 1958). Despite potential difficulties when working in diverse groups, we can always learn something new from those who are different from us, based on their own lived experiences or because they possess a certain perspective, which can make science more meaningful and worthwhile.

Diverse teams can expose people to new information and approaches that can improve team innovation and performance by providing opportunities for discussion and integration of new ideas and insights to solve tasks (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Whereas surface-level diversity (e.g., racial diversity) in teams is unrelated to performance, deep-level diversity (i.e., holding different beliefs) enhances team creativity and innovation, especially among culturally diverse teams (Wang et al., 2019). In fact, whereas mere demographic diversity in teams is often

unrelated to performance, job-related diversity in knowledge or expertise tends to show a positive relationship with performance (Eagly, 2016).

In my experience, working in diverse teams—with graduate students, undergraduate research assistants, and post-doctoral scholars— has been beneficial. Diversity in lived experiences based on students' minority identities (and in my case, being more aware of current identity-based terms people use in society) helps to ensure that my research methods are reflective for current and future generations. If a project focuses on an underrepresented group, seeking someone who is a member of that community to be on your research team can improve science and ensure that our field is inclusive.

Another way to think about diverse collaborations is extending beyond working with one's former mentor and working more with peers. For example, collaborating with fellow graduate students or junior scholars can increase productivity by using the divide and conquer approach; you decide which papers or projects you will be first author on (vs. co-author), which not only makes research more collaborative, but also helps improve both your and your collaborator's curriculum vita simultaneously. Although the first-author notation does not apply the same way in all fields, this general approach in diversifying the seniority status of co-authors is another way to improve your science.

Conferences are another great avenue to find collaborators. When I first attended the Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference, I met another graduate student at a poster session who happened to live in the same geographical area as I did and had similar research interests in the developmental origins of identity. Our discussions led to a long-time collaboration and friendship which later led to a unique cross-cultural collaboration opportunity. This type of connection is another benefit of collaboration: making the world smaller and research more interesting. If you lack funds for international data collection, finding a remote collaborator through conferences or directly contacting others with similar interests can allow you each to contribute to unique data collection at your respective locations without travel costs. Another valuable approach to identifying potential collaborators is realizing what skill sets (or access to certain populations) you have and what your areas of growth are; you can think about your research as going through a sink and identifying where your collaborator can help unclog the sink.

As faculty, I have been fortunate to collaborate with many scholars. If you are thinking of academic tenure-track jobs, one piece of advice I received was to limit who I collaborate with (especially since I study a niche area) so that there are still individuals left in my specific discipline who can review my work without conflicts of interest for promotions. Another way I sought to make my mark early on was through a National Science Foundation Collaborative grant, a unique funding mechanism for collaborative science. In my case, researchers reached out to me based on my regional location and expertise. Five scholars across the U.S. contributed to data collection of over 700 children and 14 pre-registrations to be among the first to test generalizability across commonly used developmental tasks. Another method is the Psychology Accelerator (Moshontz et al., 2018) in which researchers collect data across multiple sites to pool participants together to test a specific research question. My graduate student volunteered our lab to participate in one of their projects for a nationwide replication study testing stereotype threat (Forscher et al., 2019), providing her with a unique publication opportunity.

Another method that is largely underutilized in collaboration is working with one's own university. Every university or organization collects data, yet much of that data is never published. After seeing my published work on the benefits of cross-race roommates in college (Gaither & Sommers, 2013), my university reached out to me to assess roommate relationships on campus once a new randomized roommate policy was announced, which led to 2 years of collaborative data collection and the write-up of multiple manuscripts.

Finally, learning to say "yes" and "no" are important skills for collaboration. Saying "yes" is advisable when you could learn from someone who is prominent in the field or has a skillset you do not have. Saying "no" may be preferable when you have too many other commitments or when you feel forced into a project to which you do not have strong ties. Asking about a person's working style and expectations before agreeing to a collaboration is critical. Someone may be a great academic friend and support system but may not be the best collaborator. In

looking for collaborators, I look for people who share similar values surrounding data sharing, method practices, communication, sticking to meeting times and deadlines, and having a good track record of collaborating with others.

At the beginning of any project, it is important to ensure that you and your research team have explicit conversations about authorship and contributions. Some people even write out contracts (e.g., with clear deadlines, authorship order, financial commitments) so that everyone's roles are clearly defined. Although this approach may seem business-like and not collaborative, adopting these practices can help protect you and the partnership if the collaboration starts to suffer. At times, learning to end a collaboration is also a valuable skill learned only through the experience of collaboration.

In sum, as a diversity scholar, I view collaboration as a valuable opportunity to diversify the way I think about psychological science more broadly. The phrase "walk in another person's shoes" is a saying that has always resonated with me, because without someone else's perspective you may miss out on a deeper understanding of people's psychological experiences.

1.4 | Emily Impett

Almost 2 decades ago, I went on my first job interview for a faculty position at an elite, "ivy league" institution in the U.S. In my meeting with the chair of the department, I asked how the department felt about collaboration, and the chair told me that he strongly believed that "the most important advances in science are made alone." This is not an isolated viewpoint, and I knew immediately that I would not take the job if it was offered to me. Now, on my office wall, I have a picture with the quote "keep calm and collaborate on" to serve as a constant reminder that I made the right choice to join an institution that values and encourages collaboration.

Much has changed in the intervening years since my first job interview that has shifted the landscape and conversation about collaboration. The replication crisis in psychology ushered in a new era in which concerns about statistical power are paramount (Maxwell et al., 2015). As a result, people are working in larger teams (e.g., Henriksen, 2016; Wu et al., 2019) and combining datasets (with statistical techniques such as integrative data analysis; Curran & Hussong, 2009) to maximize statistical power. There is also growing concern with obtaining more diverse samples (i.e., non-Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic; Henrich et al., 2010), and this concern has been noted in my particular subfield of relationship science (McGorray et al., 2023; Williamson et al., 2022).

Almost all my papers have been collaborative. Being able to ask and find answers to important questions about relationships and teaming up with others to do so is the reason why I pursued a career in academia. My most common collaborative experiences have been with graduate students, either my own graduate students or those supervised by my colleagues or from other universities who have reached out to me. For example, many years ago, I was approached by a (then) graduate student who asked me a question after one of my conference talks. Fast forward to 2024, and this student (now professor) and I have published 60 papers together (e.g., Muise & Impett, 2016). This single question sparked a collaboration that significantly impacted the direction of my career and led to a lasting friendship. Many collaborations that I started with graduate students are so fun and productive that I continue them once these students begin their own faculty positions. The upside of this practice is creating a large research family that is continually expanding; the downside is that if you maintain all these productive relationships, your responsibilities will grow exponentially over time.

Relationship scientists tend to have rich datasets as our work often requires that we collect data from both partners, in couples' daily lives, and over long periods of time, sometimes when couples are going through important life transitions (e.g., parenthood, job relocation). Datasets can take years to collect—from developing research questions to designing measures, developing protocols, recruiting and tracking participants, and the arduous process of cleaning and preparing a dataset. With all the effort required to conduct studies like these, we try to

include as much as possible in these datasets. Many of my collaborations have started with someone sharing a question they are interested in, followed by my offering data (often multiple datasets) to test that question (e.g., Johnson et al., 2022). This process has more recently been formalized by an organization, The Love Consortium (www.loveconsortium.org), which offers training resources and hosts an online dataverse where scholars can post descriptions of their datasets, measures, and data. The inclusion of multiple high-powered studies in a paper means that our findings are more robust, and we can be more confident in our conclusions.

There are several qualities that I look for in collaborators and that I also strive to be as a collaborator. First, each collaborator needs to have a specific set of skills, competencies, and expertise to contribute to the project such that the ultimate product of the collaboration would not be the same without each person's contribution. Second, each collaborator needs to be giving of their time, resources, and attention to make the collaboration as productive as possible. Third, all collaborators need to be open to trying new things, seeing ideas through new perspectives, but also openly admitting mistakes and errors, which inevitably happen. While each of these qualities is essential, I do not think contributions by individual collaborators have to be "equal." In fact, they never will be; collaborations are like a family in which some members have stronger needs than others and some members might have greater capacity to give than others, which can fluctuate over time, an idea consistent with Clark and Mills' (2011) theory of communal and exchange relationships.

Not all collaborations are successful. Although I have not had to actively break ties with a collaborator, some collaborations have fizzled out due to one or more parties prioritizing other projects. I am okay with this—we cannot pursue every single question we have, and some questions might be worth dropping—but my lab has also recently developed a new way to evaluate collaboration requests that may lead to more successful, harmonious, and mutually exciting collaborations. Given the large volume of requests I receive to share data, my lab developed a standard proposed project Google form for potential collaborators to complete so that I can evaluate their request for data. This form reads as a short research proposal where people share their research idea, indicate which of my datasets (and measures) they want to use, and describe their proposed analysis plan and intentions for preregistration. The information provided allows me to evaluate potential collaborators' attention to detail, statistical skills, and depth of theoretical ideas so that I can choose collaborations that are likely to be fun and successful.

People often emphasize the importance of "networking," which can sometimes lead to productive collaborations. If you are a graduate student and admire a more senior scholar, enlist the help of your mentor to make an introduction. If you are a mentor, try to be mindful that not all your students may be comfortable asking for help, so look out for opportunities for students to make connections with others, sometimes with the express purpose of starting a collaboration. We live in a world in which collaborative teams are growing in size (Henriksen, 2016), so a crucial part of mentoring is helping to set up collaborative, supportive networks for students.

1.5 | Ashley Whillans

Over the years, I have collaborated with numerous external partners including government agencies, non-profit organizations, consulting firms, and researchers at technology companies. To ensure successful collaborations with external partners, starting from a place of shared understanding and working on mutually beneficial projects is paramount. This advice is consistent with research on conflict management, which shows that framing issues around commonly agreed upon goals and identities is a key strategy for collaborating with parties that have different motivations and perspectives (Van Zomeren, 2013). I personally learned the importance of sharing a clear 'north star' with external partners through a failed field collaboration. As a first-year faculty member, I was eager to build on my previous experience working with government agencies to collaborate with a government agency to launch a time management experiment. My graduate student and I spent months preparing materials, submitting the institutional review board application, and having many research-related conversations. I made plans in the

middle of a busy teaching semester to fly to the organization, give a talk, lead a workshop to train employees, and start implementing the study that same day.

Despite many phone calls to coordinate logistics, when I showed up on site, the managers had no intention of participating in our study. I had been coordinating with the department manager (not the managers themselves) and the manager had framed my engagement as a talk and workshop, not as the launch of an experiment. When I brought up the idea of running a study, I received push back; the manager did not want to burden busy employees and had not mentioned the option of study participation. Being a new professor, I backed off from the discussion of the experiment entirely. I gave a free workshop, thanked the organizers for their time, and left.

Upon reflection, I should have been more transparent about my need to implement a publishable study and about the effort that my graduate student and I had already undertaken. By being too accommodating, the field partner was unable to understand the career implications and time costs of their decision. Ironically, research suggests that being transparent about the effort that you are expending to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome can increase trust, appreciation, and reciprocity (Buell et al., 2017), which I should have done from the start in this case.

Additionally, because of my excitement about having *any* field partner who was potentially willing to collaborate with me, I was not explicit or firm enough about my needs to proceed with the opportunity. Since then, I have become much clearer about what exactly I need to make a joint external-academic partnership worthwhile. By having clear requirements and a back-up plan (e.g., how a project will progress if I cannot run a field study), I am less tempted to enter into unfruitful external partnerships. This approach is consistent with research showing that parties with stronger alternative options are more likely to enter into agreements that are a better "fit" and leave both parties better off (Pinkley et al., 1994). In this scenario, enthusiasm clouded my judgment, and I did not establish back-up plans or safeguards—a common decision-making error among optimistic people (De Meza et al., 2019).

When trying to form partnerships with new external organizations, I recommend having initial conversations with individuals in charge of the data and putting together 1-2-page pitches for possible project ideas. I present these proposals in a flexible way, starting with the simplest design and then offering more complex designs that would take more time and resources to implement. This "tiered" proposal process signals flexibility and a willingness to collaborate that keeps feasibility and the organization's interests in mind, consistent with research showing that perspective-taking promotes discovery of negotiation solutions that create value for both parties (Galinsky et al., 2008).

For non-academic collaborators, I look for partners who have experience working with academics, who were once academics, or have access to data I want to use. Early in my career, I would excitedly talk about the possibility of running an experiment with a field partner with the *wrong* person. I would put together proposals and have meetings, only to find out later that the person I was speaking with was not the decision-maker, so all that time building the relationship was wasted. To avoid this situation, I now ask for the first meeting to be with the group of people who are responsible for the program or project. In this first meeting, I ask specific questions about who owns the data of interest, the number of constituents who could be recruited for a study, whether random assignment is possible, and what internal approvals are needed. See https://osf.io/ufcht/ for a list of questions to ask field collaborators before partnering.

Luckily, asking (even hard) questions can promote positive interpersonal relationships (Hart et al., 2021). To ensure that the organizational partner has considered my questions and to reduce my own anxiety, I email this list of questions in advance. With non-academic partners, if a study does not work out as intended and I am not planning to run another study, I clearly let them know that I will not be writing up a paper on the results. Then, I directly ask whether I can do anything to help them close out the project, such as writing a deck, sending an email to a manager, or giving a presentation. Consistent with research on negotiations, reciprocation (Gal & Pfeffer, 2007) and providing something of personal value to the other party (Malhotra & Bazerman, 2007) are beneficial for maintaining relationships long-term relationships; you never know when a working

relationship that you have developed with an organization could result in a future opportunity or securing desired outcomes.

Finally, working with external partners often involves working with diverse stakeholders. I have been involved in field projects with consulting firms and technology companies that include a range of people, from vice presidents and managing directors to researchers with backgrounds in sociology, public policy, organizational behavior, economics, and qualitative psychology. When working on complex field projects with multiple stakeholders, it is critical to have reoccurring conversations about your needs, timelines, and goals. Corporate collaborators often require quick, descriptively accurate findings to make prompt corporate decisions. In contrast, sociologists may spend months conducting qualitative interviews, while economists may use field-specific statistical approaches to test their questions of interest.

As part of these teams, we have frequent check-ins to make sure the work is progressing in a mutually beneficial way. When we see a project veer in a direction that might benefit one stakeholder at the expense of the project, we adjust. For example, each researcher may take the lead on a paper from a multi-year project; this solution can be ideal because the methods used in academic-corporate partnerships are often distinct and can include both qualitative ethnography and big data approaches. Research projects can also be split into subprojects based on the same data source, where I take the lead on an academic article while the external partner leads a company's internal reports. This decision allows us to produce outputs we both need and can efficiently resolve differences in timelines, reporting, and framing.

Overall, my advice for working with non-academic collaborators is to be flexible with your requests, find mutually beneficial ways of working together, be clear and transparent about needs, timelines, and effort being expended on the project, and discuss any deliverables that the organization may want, regardless of whether you publish your results. Just like any collaboration, clear communication with the *right* stakeholders is critical for success.

2 | CONCLUSION

Collaboration is about building and maintaining relationships. While there is a large body of research on what makes close relationships satisfying, there is relatively little emphasis on what makes intellectual collaborations with others motivating and fulfilling. Thus, the goal of this article was to share our observations and insights on collaboration, which we hope will spur others to reflect on their own collaborative experiences and provide guidance to researchers, especially early career scholars, on how to form and maintain collaborations. Ultimately, if we are to make advances in psychological science that make an impact, our field needs to pay more attention to how researchers can both start and sustain productive collaborations over time, while also identifying when a collaboration might not be beneficial.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article because no new data were collected or analyzed for this manuscript.

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ENDNOTE

[1] In writing this article, we acknowledge that we are all full-time tenure-track women faculty working at research-intensive universities in North America, and women are especially likely to endorse communal, prosocial norms that support collaboration within the open science movement (Murphy et al., 2020). Thus, our recommendations stem from our own experiences and perspectives, which may not necessarily generalize to other cultures or fields.

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