CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

Participatory Action Research, Conflict Resolution, and Communities

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This chapter documents an ongoing participatory action research project (PAR) designed to illuminate the culture of a supportive housing facility that successfully promotes nonviolent conflict resolution among its residents, despite a practice of accepting residents with histories of violence. The residence, Hilltop House (not its real name), was founded and is run by a well-respected community-based organization (CBO) that provides wraparound services to formerly incarcerated men and women. Participatory action research is typically a collaboration between members of a community (usually an underserved community) and academically trained researchers who collaborate to investigate a practical problem or issue that is having a negative impact on the community members. Due to its participatory nature, a PAR paradigm elicits information and extracts meaning that is unlikely to emerge through conventional research methods or community members’ problem solving alone (Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Torre and Fine, 2011). This is why we chose a PAR approach to conduct a case study of Hilltop House.

Hilltop House is located in New York, in a dense urban neighborhood. It has sixty-two beds. Residents on average stay for anywhere between six and eighteen months. Five of the six authors are affiliated with the social-organizational psychology program at Teachers College, Columbia University. The sixth author was affiliated with Hilltop House and a part of the participatory action research team. The academic researchers—students and scholars of conflict resolution—were intrigued by the Hilltop House culture for several reasons. First, very few incidents of violence occur at Hilltop House despite the fact that most of its formerly incarcerated residents come from environments where violence is common—the streets and, most recently, prison. We were also intrigued that the leadership of Hilltop House does not offer constructive conflict resolution as a skill set for residents to learn
and do not (not surprisingly) reference academic theories about cooperation, conflict, and conflict resolution. Yet despite this, Hilltop House offers an environment in which residents almost always resolve conflict without choosing violence. The CBO leadership had asked the college researchers for help in lifting up key elements of how the program at Hilltop House operates. Passionate and clear about their rather unique foundational principles, the leadership is too busy managing daily operations to devote the time and resources necessary to analyze and document their program as a potential model for others. They also wanted help evaluating the consistency and effectiveness of their approach to see which practices were working and where there was room for improvement.

Once the PAR team was constituted, we took the request of the Hilltop leaders and transformed it into an umbrella question to guide our research: “How does the culture of Hilltop House (philosophy, policies, and practices) impact the success of residents when they reenter society?” We decided that it would allow us to respond to the CBO leadership’s challenge and illuminate some additional issues of interest to PAR team members. The breadth and complexity of the umbrella question clearly called for a multistage approach. In phase 1 of the research, team members would collect the necessary data to define the philosophy and policies of Hilltop House. In phase 2 we would address three things: the actual practices that are meant to embody Hilltop House philosophy and policies, the impact of this culture on clients, and working definitions of the meaning of success for Hilltop House. In phase 3, we would collect information about residents’ lives after they left Hilltop House using multiple measures of success. Phase 1 lasted approximately fourteen months, and phase 2 has lasted sixteen months at the time of this writing. Phase 3 has not yet begun.

This chapter describes phase 1 of the project and the state of our work in phase 2. The phase 1 philosophy and policy data can be viewed as the “espoused theory” (Argyris and Schön, 1974) for helping residents change their lives, that is, how the CBO leadership intends for Hilltop House to operate. The phase 2 data describe in part residents’ perceptions of actual practices, or Hilltop House’s theory-in-use (Argyris and Schön, 1974). Therefore, we can illustrate not only how Hilltop House is supposed to operate, but, in some instances, what actually occurs and how it is perceived by the residents we interviewed.

**EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT CAUSAL MODELS**

The strategy of describing the data about the impact of the Hilltop House culture in terms of causal models—both explicit and implicit and—did not
emerge until we began to document the research.\textsuperscript{1} We realized that embedded in the phase 1 and 2 data we collected (Hilltop House philosophy, policies and practices, and definitions of success) are the leadership’s causal models of how Hilltop House culture affects residents and helps to promote new and more culturally adaptive attitudes and behaviors. We concluded that the frame of causal models could be useful to the leadership and staff as they seek to improve Hilltop House effectiveness and to the PAR team as we began to document the project.

As noted, the academic researchers joined the project with a keen interest in how Hilltop House’s culture of nonviolence was developed and transmitted, knowing that it was based in philosophy and experience rather than in psychological theory. While the Hilltop House leadership discussed its “zero tolerance for violence policy,” they did not conjecture about psychological processes that could promote conformance to this policy by residents. Therefore, we (primarily the academic researchers) were excited about examining this implicit model held by CBO leadership (that Hilltop House culture encourages individuals to choose nonviolent responses to conflict) and attempting to describe its operation more explicitly.

This chapter is organized around four objectives:

- Providing a brief review of PAR—its history and principles. While the PAR paradigm has been used with some frequency in applied fields such as health sciences, education, and criminology, its use is relatively underrepresented in the conflict resolution literature.

- Documenting the PAR team process and the findings to date of an in-progress case study of Hilltop House. We investigate its philosophy and policies and how they are embodied in practice, and we present findings to date about their impact on residents. Implicit in the umbrella research question is a causal model: a resident arrives with elements of a common history (e.g., addiction, criminal justice involvement), and, when exposed to Hilltop House’s culture and related experiences, he or she develops new skills, demonstrates changes in behavior and attitudes, and is able to achieve life milestones (e.g., sobriety, employment, desistance from crime) that otherwise would not have been possible. We describe elements of this causal model; some are explicit within the Hilltop House community, and others are implicit.

- Focusing in particular on how Hilltop House’s culture creates the conditions for conflict resolution without violence. Rooted in experience and practice, the lessons learned from the Hilltop House study about promoting nonviolent conflict resolution provide an interesting complement to applications of classic academic theory about cooperation, conflict, and resolution.
• Reflecting on the experiences of PAR team membership. Based on this experience, we compare the culture that emerged within our PAR team, presumably as a result of PAR philosophy and principles, with the culture of Hilltop House. We believe that similarities that emerge between the two may reveal some shared elements of collaborative learning communities (Senge, 2006).

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: A BRIEF HISTORY

Drawing on direct sources and several useful reviews (Adelman, 1993; Fals-Borda, 1979; Freire, 2000; Torre and Fine, 2011; Reason and Bradbury, 2008), we trace PAR’s lineage from three major sources: Kurt Lewin’s commitment to action research and participation beginning in the 1940s; Orlando Fals-Borda’s participatory research approach, designed as an alternative paradigm for studying sociopolitical phenomena as well as social injustice in Colombia in the 1970s; and Paulo Freire’s writings and teachings on pedagogy and oppression, also from the 1970s.

Kurt Lewin, the father of modern experimental social psychology, is widely credited with introducing action research in the 1940s. 2 Lewin was fiercely committed to democratic principles and to promoting cooperation and positive communication between groups. He championed a close link between social psychological research and social policies and practice. He is quoted as saying, “No action without research; no research without action” (Adelman, 1993, p. 8).

Lewin and colleagues identified four types of action research: diagnostic, participant, empirical, and experimental (Marrow, 1969). Of these, the participant action research is the type that most closely corresponds with PAR. Adelman (1993) describes this type of action research as motivated by the importance of involving from the beginning those (individuals, groups, communities) who will benefit from the research—both because they are likely to experience greater commitment due to their involvement and because the knowledge they contribute from their own experience will be likely to make for a better solution.

Lewin’s imprint on the development of modern PAR originated from two initiatives: the philosophy of action-informed laboratory and field research, particularly as applied to group dynamics and organization science, and action-oriented community self-surveys. Referencing the first initiative, Argyris, Putnam, and Smith (1985) cite the Lewinian tradition of action science (that is, research) as “scholar-practitioners in group dynamics and organizational science who have sought to integrate science and practice. Members of this tradition have emphasized the continuities between the
activities of science and the activities of learning in the action context, the mutually reinforcing values of science, democracy and education and the benefits of combining science and social practice” (cited in Adelman, 1993, p. 8).

The second initiative was designed to create social change and promote social justice. The community self-survey was developed by staff at the Commission on Community Interrelations (CCI), the activist arm of Lewin’s Center for Group Dynamics at MIT (Cherry and Borshuk, 1998, in Torre and Fine, 2011). The emphasis was on civil rights and, in the shadow of the atrocities of World War II, prejudice and social justice. To awaken a deeper interest in injustice among citizens, the self-survey emphasized large-scale community participation, educational opportunities as part of that participation, and, especially, hands-on involvement in the data collection process. (See Adelman, 1993, and Marrow, 1969, for reviews of Lewin as an action researcher and Torre and Fine, 2011, for the history of community self-surveys and PAR.)

Which fields have applied PAR methodology? We found only a handful of examples that explicitly described their methodology as participatory action research in conflict resolution journals and books. Our review did discover many examples of PAR in practical or applied domains such as health sciences (e.g., mental health and counseling psychology, community and public health, nursing) and in education (Chataway, 1997; Denzin and Lincoln, 2007; Kidd and Kral, 2005; Macaulay et al., 1998, 1999; Martin et al., 2009; Smith and Romero, 2010). There is also precedent for using PAR in the criminal justice system, usually with prisoners (Fine, 2001). (A significant percentage of these studies were conducted by Canadian or English researchers.)

Regarding the minimal use of PAR in the conflict resolution field, Deutsch and Goleman (2006) note that most studies of conflict resolution initiatives (e.g., training, mediation, intergroup encounters) are examples of participatory action research, whether they claim the label or not, because this research requires “active collaboration between the action personnel—the practitioners and participants—and the research personnel” (p. 828; see chapter 44 in this Handbook). They cite the benefits of successful collaboration (e.g., practitioner engagement, research relevance) but also the challenges (e.g., the time-consuming nature of the research and the disparate goals of the researchers and the participants: advancing general knowledge versus program improvement).

**SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR OUR CASE STUDY**

Before examining the Hilltop House culture, it is important to consider the life histories that most formerly incarcerated men and women share. Growing up in underserved communities where residents face violence,
poverty, inadequate education, and often discrimination, they carry the lasting effects of these conditions with them. After incarceration, these individuals usually return to similarly underserved communities. A brief review should underscore the challenges that these men and women face.

**Sociocultural and Economic Factors and Addiction**

We consider here some of the factors that are likely to have had an impact on the Hilltop House population prior to, during, and after their time in prison. Widely recognized as correlating with criminal involvement are factors such as unemployment, poor quality or minimal education, and substance abuse or addiction. In addition, a psychosociological analysis suggests that life in these communities offers a limited range of prosocial sources of power.

Sociologists, economists, and criminologists have collected reams of data to validate the intuitively obvious connection between high unemployment rates (in “straight” jobs) and crime (Box, 1987; Britt, 1997). While the quantitative data are not conclusive and are methodologically challenging to collect, qualitative accounts indicate a strong connection between these elements (Cantor and Land, 1985). On the streets of underresourced communities, the challenges of earning a living through legitimate means create conditions where many individuals seek alternative opportunities to make money. Poor communities of color face increased risk due to significant inequities in pay and employment. High school dropout rates in underserved communities also contribute to both unemployment and crime (Thornberry and Christenson, 1985; Lochner and Moretti, 2004).

The relationship between drug use, addiction, and crime has been studied extensively (Nurco, Hanlon, & Kinlock, 1991). The relationship between drugs and crime is nuanced; it differs for narcotic and nonnarcotic drugs, in types and frequency of crimes committed by users, and the onset ages of both drug use and criminal activity. However, Nurco et al.’s review of the literature on drugs and crime determined that frequent users of cocaine or heroin commit higher rates of crime than do nonusers or infrequent users. Prisoners and formerly incarcerated individuals have higher rates of both lifetime and recent drug use than does the general population. Criminal justice scholars refer to the abuse of illicit drugs as “criminogenic”—dynamic attributes of an offender that when changed are associated with changes in the probability of recidivism; in other words, getting sober is associated with fewer instances of creating new crimes (Andrews and Bonta, 1998).

**The Role of Power**

Oliver (2006) considers the question of how individuals raised in communities that embody these socioeconomic challenges learn to exercise power
and suggests that they may use toughness and physical aggression to gain respect and power in their community. While toughness may be a valued tenet of masculinity in many cultures, life in impoverished urban US communities creates conditions where physical safety and reputation are constantly undergoing threat. Oliver goes on to say that “males who are unable to convey a credible commitment to ‘toughness’ are at risk of being harassed, exploited, and physically assaulted” (p. 929). Denied access to other means of safety, men and women may be placed in conditions where their physical and psychological safety are in part contingent on their ability to project toughness and aggression. He posits that men in particular in these communities rely on assertiveness and aggression to exercise influence over others.

Goleman (2006), citing McClelland’s (1975) influential work on motivation and power, describes four expressions of power: support, autonomy, assertion, and togetherness (see chapter 6 in this Handbook). Assertion is defined as “acting on, influencing and dominating others.” Referred to as “power over,” this is aligned with Dahl’s (1968, p. 158) definition as “an ability to get another person to do something that he or she would not otherwise have done.” Oliver suggests that men in communities where toughness and aggression are valued learn to exercise power through assertion, that is, through acting on and dominating others.

**Life behind Bars**

In disproportionate numbers, the formerly incarcerated tend to be poor, undereducated, and lacking in vocational skills and experience. Additionally, they are likely to have substance abuse problems (Re-Entry Policy Council, 2005). Historically, they have been disproportionately black and Hispanic. For example, in 2005, people of color made up 30 percent of the population in the United States but 60 percent of those who were incarcerated. Although there have been some shifts in the trends in the racial make-up of the prison population in the United States over the past decade, people of color continue to be overrepresented in city, state, and federal prisons and jails (Goode, 2013).³

As institutions, prison exemplifies the use of power-over practices. Whether it stems from philosophy, that is, seeking punishment for inmates rather than rehabilitation or the practical considerations of managing hundreds and thousands of people, prison authorities by and large use power-over strategies to manage prison life (Craig, 2004). Access to autonomous power for inmates is very limited, except in highly unusual circumstances. Inmates are told when and what they may eat, when they may exercise, and are at times physically restrained and confined to isolation. Extreme examples of inmates’ powerlessness include practices such as shackling
incarcerated women while they are giving birth, which they are forced to do in the presence of prison guards. When inmates are the recipients of power-over practices by prison guards, they are likely to react with feelings of shame, anger, and frustration (Craig, 2004). Viewed from a social learning or modeling perspective (Bandura, 1974), inmates may imitate the forms of power that are effective in their current circumstances.

Reentry into the Larger Society

According to recent national statistics, about 725,000 individuals are released from prison each year, a historically unprecedented number of people returning to society after incarceration. (Between 1970 and 2005, the prison population grew by 700 percent.) Although the incarceration rate in the United States has shown a slight decrease since then (with a .3 percent reduction noted in 2010, Tsai & Scommegna, 2012) for those who return, the prognosis for reentering society without reoffending is not optimistic; approximately 54 percent are reincarcerated within three years.

After release from prison, formerly incarcerated individuals face significant challenges, including barriers to housing, difficulties securing employment, and disenfranchisement. Removed from society for many years, often beginning in their late teens and early twenties, formerly incarcerated individuals usually lack relevant job experience and skills, thus making it challenging to compete in the job market. In addition, organizations are hesitant to hire formerly incarcerated individuals, and felons may be barred, legally or illegally, from certain positions (National Employment Law Project, 2010). There remains a shortage of stable and safe housing; people with criminal records are routinely denied residency as a result of their criminal history. Formerly incarcerated individuals also may lose rights afforded to citizens, such as the right to vote (Re-Entry Policy Council, 2005).

In the interpersonal realm, persistent effects of incarceration create unique challenges for entering into intimate relationships during reentry. Spending significant time away from members of the opposite sex leaves formerly incarcerated heterosexual men and women unskilled at forming healthy intimate relationships. For homosexual inmates, the particular constraints of the prison environment are also likely to interrupt the ability to form equal and mutually supportive intimate relationships. For all inmates, powerlessness may create dynamics where relationships are based largely on who will be able to provide resources, such as drugs or security, rather than mutual support. Relationship challenges provide a backdrop for some of the conflicts seen in formerly incarcerated individuals reentering society.
Other challenges for prisoners during reentry surround their interactions with police. For example, in 2001, the New York City police department implemented a controversial stop-and-frisk policy. In an effort to reduce crime and uncover weapons, police officers were given the authority to stop and search people they consider suspicious. Incidents of stop-and-frisk policing increased by 600 percent between 2001 and 2011. Of the four million New Yorkers stopped under this policy during that decade, 90 percent were black or Latino residents and were innocent of committing any crime at the time of their stop (New York Civil Liberties Union, 2012). In August, 2013, after much public discussion and a court case, a federal judge in New York City found the policy to be unconstitutional and a form of racial profiling. The judge ordered an end to the practice in its current form (Blake, 2013) and has called for an independent panel to monitor and oversee reform.

Interaction with police creates a particular challenge for formerly incarcerated men and women. They often report feeling discriminated against and reminded of their relative powerlessness. If they react aggressively or are uncooperative, they may risk violating parole and be returned to prison for a technical infraction.

All of the forces and conditions we have described combine to create a legacy for formerly incarcerated men and women that promotes the use of violence. Identifying processes and techniques that reduce violence among this population is an important challenge for conflict resolution scholars and practitioners.

**OUR PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS: METHODOLOGY**

The project was initiated shortly after the CEO of the Hilltop House CBO and psychology professor Claudia Cohen met to explore some possible research. The CEO asked for assistance with “holding up a mirror” and creating a detailed analysis of how Hilltop House operates, including what works and what could be improved. The psychology professor expressed an interest in how conflict was addressed and resolved at Hilltop House given the violent backgrounds of many of the residents.

The agreement to move forward was based on mutual interest. The Hilltop House CBO did not provide any funding for the project. The potential tension around surfacing only positive information was also discussed. It was agreed that the project would be valuable to both organizations—both Hilltop House and the college’s psychology program—to the extent that we were committed to investigating both strengths and weaknesses of the current program.
Team Launch

The first team meeting was attended by fifteen people: seven from the college and eight from Hilltop House. The Hilltop House participants included residents, first-line staff, and senior leaders in roughly proportionate numbers. College participants included research assistants and associates, students, staff, and a couple of faculty members. Subsequent meetings focused on team formation: getting to know one another, establishing ground rules, and developing a culture of mutual respect. Shortly after this meeting, we wrote our umbrella question, a framing of the central question that we would attempt to answer.

Bimonthly Meetings

Team meetings, held at Hilltop House, are bimonthly, last about two hours, and are preceded by lunch. Meetings follow a prepared agenda but are open to changes due to group priorities. A check-in period at the beginning of the meeting allows time for team members to discuss issues that are meaningful to them and have arisen since the previous meeting. Agendas during the first six months or so focused on mini-trainings and on discussion about such topics such as defining what a good research question is; qualitative methods, including interviewing skills and questionnaire design; and design issues, such as avoiding the introduction of researcher bias.

Meetings begin and end with whole group discussions. We frequently use small breakout groups for problem solving and idea generation. Detailed minutes are kept to document discussions, decisions, and issues for future consideration.

Developing the Umbrella Question

We used a few different techniques to prepare for the selection of the umbrella question: the wholesale generation of questions, displayed on sticky notes; the affinity grouping of the questions proffered into thematic categories; and a presentation and discussion about what makes a good research question. This was particularly important because about half the team had not previously participated in the design of research.

Ultimately we agreed on the following question: “What is the culture (the philosophy, policies and practices) of Hilltop House, and how does it impact on the successful reentry of residents into society?” While the impetus behind this question was influenced in part by the CEO’s original request for collaboration, the specific framing of the question was developed solely by the team, as were the methodologies used to collect data. Though not explicitly called out in the umbrella question, there was ongoing discussion of how
the culture, as reflected in the policies and practices of Hilltop House, influenced the resolution of conflicts in the residence without the use of violence.

Based on our initial brainstorming session, we develop a long list of short-answer questions to pose to residents asking for demographic information and querying their experiences at Hilltop House. We eventually realized that our set of questions was not appropriately structured to answer our umbrella question. As Kidd and Kral (2005) have observed, the questions asked at the beginning of a PAR project may well be replaced by others as the researchers’ understanding of the issues evolve. We needed to separate, at least conceptually, the description of the culture of Hilltop House from information about the impact of that culture. Our first attempt to generate questions had not been conceptually clear. Though this was not an experimental study (there was no independent variable), we did want to establish a relationship between the culture and residents’ “success” and to make inferences about causality, that is, how the culture has an impact on the success of former residents. So we reset and decided to interrogate and document the culture before attempting to assess its impact on residents.

**Residents’ or Client Engagement**

After we had been meeting for about nine months, residents’ regular attendance at our bimonthly meetings had declined sharply, although other team members from Hilltop House and the college continued to attend. Reflecting on this loss, we had several hypotheses: clients have very busy schedules and needed to prioritize programming, including education and job training; some clients might not have been clear about their role on the team or convinced that they could contribute; and some meeting topics might have been hard to follow. Furthermore, the first group of clients was invited to participate in the PAR team by staff members; it was intended (and perhaps perceived) to be an honor. We decided to open up the opportunity to all clients and let them self-select based on their interest level. We resolved to reflect further on how we could create the space for collaboration that would allow residents to make—and know that they were making—authentic contributions.

**PAR and Methodology**

One embodiment of the PAR paradigm’s commitment to action is the explicit identification of stakeholders for the results of the study (Fine et al., 2001): individuals or organizations with the interest and the power to act on or create change as a result of what is learned from the project. Identifying our stakeholders and reflecting on their interests and concerns influenced our decision making about the types of information to collect. We asked about
each stakeholder: What information will be important to him or her? What format will make the information most usable and compelling (e.g., statistics, narrative, qualitative description, photographs and videos)? We identified our stakeholders as the residents of Hilltop House, policymakers and funders of supportive housing facilities, other CBOs who currently manage or develop supportive housing facilities, criminal justice researchers, students of constructive conflict resolution and violence reduction, and the CEO and other leaders of the Hilltop House CBO. Recall that the CEO was interested in identifying policies or practices that could be modified to better meet the needs of residents and in a grounded description of the policies and practices that are currently most effective in helping residents to successfully reenter society.6

**Interrogating the Culture**

In describing Hilltop House’s culture, we focused on three components: philosophy, policies, and practices. Using the insider knowledge within the team, we determined that we would learn the Hilltop House philosophy best through in-depth interviews with senior leaders. Nine interviews were scheduled with senior leaders of the Hilltop House CBO. The interviews, lasting between forty-five and ninety minutes, were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by the university researchers. Interviews were not conducted by PAR team staff or resident participants so that power differences would not interfere with the candor of the responses or create strains on ongoing relationships. In order to document Hilltop House policies, we chose archival data: nineteen documents identified by staff that included human resource manuals, employee handbooks, welcome packets for new clients, annual reports, and newsletters.

Both the interview transcripts and the archival documents were coded by cross-organizational pairs (one college team member and one Hilltop House team member) in order to identify key themes. While we expected to learn about the organizational philosophy primarily from the interviews and identify policies from the documents, we looked for information about each in all of our sources. Working with a sample subset of the material (two interviews and three documents), a cross-organizational sub-team developed coding categories at a very granular level (109 categories describing philosophy and 112 categories for documenting policies). Then cross-organizational pairs coded the rest of the material using those coding categories. Coding phrases ranged from strings of several words to multiple sentences and paragraphs.

A qualitative data management tool, NVivo, was used to produce reports for each coding category. Some categories had multiple pages of instances
of the code, while other codes were populated with instances only a few times. In order to make this prodigious amount of information easier to summarize, we created condensed “making-meaning” reports for the most highly populated (those that appeared most often in the material) coding categories (e.g., safety of residents, residential responsibilities). These making-meaning reports were constructed in two columns, with a summary of the elements of each code on the left side and representative quotes from the interviews or documents on the right side. Each team member constructed at least one of these reports, and their diverse strategies were integrated into a template for creating additional reports. A sub-team created the remainder of the reports.

With what we determined to be a good foundation for documenting the espoused culture—the philosophy and policies gleaned from the leadership interviews and CBO documents—the next phase of the research would focus on two additional elements that were necessary to flesh out the implicit causal model of how Hilltop House works. The first element was actual practices—or lived policies and philosophy—as experienced by the residents and staff. The other element, which would consume many months of discussion, investigation, and reflection, was the definition of “client success” and appropriate measures to capture success.

Realizing that it would be impractical to create two separate instruments—one to ask residents about Hilltop House practices and one to elicit their definition of success—we constructed a single client experience interview document. Resident team members were particularly adept at crafting a compelling explanation of the research purpose as well as the specific phrasing of the questions. We asked clients how they learned about Hilltop House, what surprised them about it when they arrived, what worked well for them and what did not, and what could make Hilltop House better. Other questions focused on their own journey and asked them to describe examples of challenges they faced and reflect on how they handled them. Finally we asked about how they would define success for themselves and for other residents on leaving Hilltop House to reenter society.

We practiced interviewing skills and techniques and emphasized the importance of confidentiality and how we could keep interviewees’ responses anonymous. Interviews were conducted in pairs, with one resident and one college researcher posing the questions. Twenty-nine residents were interviewed. Interview subjects came from one of three resident statuses: new arrivals (less than one month at Hilltop House), intermediates (four to six months), and alumni, who no longer live at Hilltop House. Some of the alumni remain closely connected with the CBO; others have a more distant relationship with the organization.
Defining Success

The team faced an unexpected challenge in seeking to address the second key element of the umbrella question: how elements of Hilltop House culture affect former residents’ ability to successfully reenter society when they leave the facility. Intent on identifying a definition of “reentry success” that we could adopt, we consulted the reentry and desistance literature. The Pew Center on the States (2011) defines reindulgence as “measured by criminal acts that resulted in the re-arrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's release.” In the ongoing discussions of how to measure success, the different perspectives and life experiences among team members became palpable and powerfully affected our construct development. I (C.E.C.) was struck by how profoundly inadequate it seemed to rely on an objective third-person measure of desistance in the context of the daily struggles with sobriety and other difficult choices that our co-researchers vividly described. Consistent with the identification of multiple stakeholders, we determined that our ultimate goal would be to define and collect multiple measures of success with relevance for different stakeholder groups (e.g., standard measures of reindulgence for policymakers and funders, client experience measures of success that may be useful to other agencies, formerly incarcerated individuals, and scholars of individual change and desistance from crime). Due to its many challenges and cost of time and resources, we decided to allocate the collection of reindulgence data to phase 3 of the research. For phase 2 of the research, as noted above, we designed a set of questions for the client interviews to measure the first-person experience of success: what it looks like, how individuals know when they are moving toward it, and what gets in their way.8

HILLTOP HOUSE CULTURE AND ITS IMPACT

A comprehensive description of the Hilltop House culture and its impact is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, we highlight here elements of the culture and what can be concluded about its impact. The elements were chosen as representative of one of two different ways of viewing it. First, we present some examples in which the causal model of Hilltop House culture and its impact is either particularly well-articulated (explicit) or is quite silent (implicit). Second, we describe elements of the culture that appear important to the creation and transmittal of a culture of nonviolent conflict resolution.9 (Similarly, some of these elements have been noted explicitly by CBO leadership and staff as contributing to nonviolence. Others are not explicitly identified as such but emerge from client interviews and
PAR team discussion as elements that support the nonviolent resolution of conflict.)

Explicit and Implicit Causal Models

A Laboratory for Change. Many members of the senior leadership team used “laboratory” as a metaphor to describe Hilltop House—a place where residents experiment with new behaviors and skills. Moving out of one’s comfort zone is encouraged, and attempts at new behaviors are applauded. Leaders readily expressed the CBO’s philosophy about how to interrupt recidivism and encourage desistance from crime.

This philosophy makes explicit assumptions about an underlying model of human change. In brief, even individuals who have committed egregious offenses against society and individuals can change their reactions and behavior and develop a more prosocial identity if they are motivated. Not surprisingly, this belief is consistent with two popular cognitive-behavioral theories and tools used at Hilltop House and in many other therapeutic settings as well: the transtheoretical model (TTM) of intentional human behavioral change (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983) and the motivational interviewing (MI) counseling approach developed by Rolnick and Miller (1995). Both approaches identify two barriers to change: lack of belief that change is needed and/or lack of motivation, and lack of confidence in one’s ability to change.

Hilltop House’s philosophy about individual change includes the belief that for their clients, change is a nonlinear, gradual process, not a switch that toggles between two states: the old undesirable one and the new preferred one. Rather, the philosophy is that clients may well stumble and fall on the path to their new identity. The challenges of reentry may even result in lapses into self-destructive habits or behaviors (Maruna, 2001). What Hilltop House emphasizes to residents is the courage for individuals to get back up, ask for help if needed, and try again.

Unlike most other supportive housing facilities, Hilltop House provides some flexibility in how infractions of many policies are administered. Reflecting the philosophy about the nonlinear nature of individual change, policies may allow for second and third chances when rules are violated or ignored. Clients and resident PAR team members cited somewhat mixed reactions to this flexibility. Many clients, particularly newer ones, cited this as evidence that they are valued by this community because they are given a second chance. Other clients and some PAR team member staff cited frustration that some residents “get away with stuff” and are not taking the rules seriously.

A lack of confidence about the ability to change poses a strong barrier for many formerly incarcerated individuals (Maruna, 2001; Prochaska and
DiClemente, 1983). Recovering from drug and/or alcohol addiction makes the change process even more difficult. An experimental laboratory-like climate allows residents to try new behaviors despite lacking the confidence that they will be able to succeed on the first or second try. This is linked with another explicit element of the philosophy: lifetime commitment to clients.

**Lifetime Commitment to Clients.** Explicit in Hilltop House’s philosophy is a promise of a lifetime commitment to each client. This is expressed in the policy of allowing former residents to reenter Hilltop House if they fall back on destructive habits after they leave, even giving priority to returning former residents over new ones. This policy has been a cause of controversy between the leadership and some first-line staff and residents, the latter groups believing that those slots should be reserved for new clients who have not yet been given a chance. Aside from the impact of having multiple chances to make it in reentry, what is less clearly articulated is the psychological impact this philosophy has, in the view of Hilltop House leadership, on current and former residents.

The lifetime commitment policy is connected to another core element of the philosophy: Hilltop House as home and family. As in an idealized family, clients are welcomed back again and again if they need support, regardless of the circumstances surrounding their departure from Hilltop House. Both lifetime commitment to each client and the family metaphor suggest a kind of lifelong belonging and acceptance that is virtually unique in supportive housing facilities and was probably scarce in the family-of-origin histories of many residents.

**Hilltop House as Home and Family.** Informal analysis of client interviews found that residents said that unlike any other program they had experienced, Hilltop House feels like home. They cited factors such as a staff that genuinely seem to care about clients, a physical environment that is not too institutional looking, and the work details to keep the residence clean and functioning that all residents are strongly encouraged, if not required, to participate in.

Another theme that emerged almost universally from the client interviews is that Hilltop House is a place of safety. The theme of feeling safe was echoed by the resident PAR team co-researchers. One team member remembered that when he first arrived, straight from prison, he slept on top of his few items of clothing, so they would not be stolen. He soon realized, to his immense relief, that this was not necessary. It is worth noting that any discussion of formerly incarcerated individuals returning home to underserved communities will almost certainly address public safety. It is striking that formerly incarcerated men and women crave a place of safety,
while at the same time, their reentry triggers concerns about public safety in surrounding communities.

What are the impacts of this feeling of safety engendered in residents by Hilltop House culture? Adult learning models indicate that feelings of security are instrumental in acquiring new knowledge and skills (Brookfield, 1988). The sense of security that Hilltop House promotes in many residents may allow them to focus more fully on making progress toward their developmental goals. In addition, resident PAR team co-researchers and other clients described their passion and determination to remain at Hilltop House. This determination may heighten their willingness to follow the rules.

**Experiencing and Managing Emotions.** Finding new ways to experience and handle emotion is an important area of experimentation for residents. Clients and resident co-researchers report that prison culture encourages inmates to suppress the expression of emotion for fear of being perceived as vulnerable. Hilltop House culture explicitly identifies letting out emotions as a necessary first step toward interacting socially in productive new ways. Staff, leadership, and experienced Hilltop House residents frequently reinforce the benefits of talking about feelings in this safe environment rather than hiding behind the “prison face.” They quite purposely model emotional expression at group meetings and in individual encounters and provide encouragement for residents who take risks articulating how they are feeling. These meetings are carefully facilitated to guide residents through raw and honest emotional expression while avoiding being perceived as threatening, overly critical of other residents or staff, or as not taking personal responsibility for their actions.

**Residents’ Relationships with Staff and Leadership**

An explicit element in the Hilltop House culture is the hiring of staff whose life experiences mirror those of the clients. Fifty percent of CBO staff members are themselves formerly incarcerated and have sociocultural life experiences that are similar to those of most residents, including histories of addiction. Eighty percent of staff members are people of color, also reflecting the composition of residents. The addiction and recovery literature promotes the use of the “professional ex” (Brown, 1991), and agencies and centers that treat addiction often employ people who have progressed along the path to recovery to work with their clients.

The CBO’s hiring and development policy for staff is unusual within the service provider community serving formerly incarcerated men and women. This is despite the fact that this model was suggested by a noted criminologist, Donald Cressey, as early as the 1950s (Cressey, 1955). From a social learning perspective, the role of modeling in learning behaviors
(including both aggressive and nonaggressive behavior) is borne out through extensive research (Bandura, 1974). Of relevance here, modeling is more likely to occur when qualities of the model are similar to one’s own, as in the case of same-sex modeling (Bandura, 1973), or, we suggest, a similar life history, such as, “He was incarcerated like me and now he is employed and respected like I want to be.”

A rather unique aspect of the Hilltop House culture is the amount of ongoing direct contact that leadership team members have with residents. This element is explicit in the open door policy and “each client is everyone’s client” philosophy. These both translate into the notion that clients address issues directly with the leadership, sometimes causing confusion with their own case manager or resident assistant. Members of the leadership team often take part in the weekly all-hands evening meeting. They take care to learn each client’s name, listen with respect to their thoughts, and follow through with clients’ suggestions when appropriate.

Not voiced in the leadership interviews but reported consistently by clients is the powerful impact of the attitudes and behaviors of the leadership. Residents reported that the respect and interest shown by the CEO and other leaders makes them feel worthwhile, (e.g., “If she thinks I am worth listening to, I must be better than I think I am”). As a direct statement of the CBO philosophy, the organization’s founder is often quoted as saying, “People are much more than their worst crime.” Because the CBO leaders are individuals with a high degree of power, their modeling of and responsiveness to culturally consistent attitudes and behaviors from the residents (e.g., acceptance of responsibility, assertive yet nonaggressive expressions of opinions, nonthreatening displays of emotions) may accelerate the power of residents’ learning.

The Hilltop House leadership also provides opportunities for clients to interact with powerful people in the wider society, including high-ranking politicians, parole officers, and members of the arts community. Guests attend meetings with clients and listen to their stories. At least one client reported feeling a sense of responsibility to represent Hilltop House and other formerly incarcerated individuals honestly and articulately. Treating formerly incarcerated men and women as though they are the nonviolent, participating citizens of the larger community they aspire to be appears to facilitate the adoption of new behaviors, perhaps a classic instance of a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Brophy, 1982). More than one resident expressed sentiments along the lines of “they [Hilltop House leadership and staff] believe that I can be the person I want to become before I do.”

**A Culture of Nonviolent Conflict Resolution**

The CBO opened its supportive housing facility in part to meet the housing need for residents with a history of violent offenses as most
post-incarceration housing facilities reject potential residents with violent charges. And yet a nonnegotiable policy at Hilltop House is the prohibition on violent behavior on the part of residents (or staff), including threats of violence. Violations of this policy result in immediate discharge. The causal model behind this prohibition appears to be straightforward: the residence must provide safety from violence to residents for any number of reasons (e.g., legal, creating a learning environment, funders’ concerns). Adherence to the policy of nonviolence is remarkably high. For example, during the past three years, there have been only seven instances of violence or threats of violence from this community of sixty-some residents. In fact, five were threats of violence; only two were actually violent acts.

The PAR team sought to understand which elements of Hilltop House culture (in particular, policies and practices), contribute most powerfully to the nonviolence of the community, especially given the culture of violence that many residents came from. From the data analysis to date and from insights offered by PAR team members, we first review the formal Hilltop House program offerings and services that address violence. Then we consider other elements of the culture that we believe may contribute to nonviolence and constructive conflict resolution skill building.

**Preventing Violence: Treatment Services and Formal Program Offerings.** The CBO offers a number of therapeutic programs designed to help residents understand and control their emotions and interact in a nonaggressive manner. CBO treatment services provides skill training groups based largely in cognitive behavioral therapies including anger management and moral reconation therapy (MRT) (Armstrong, 2003). The anger management curriculum, which employs a social learning framework, teaches that behaviors are learned from one’s environment early in life in response to triggers (e.g., pain, anger, shame) and can feel hard-wired. However, learned responses do not represent something fundamental about an individual and can be unlearned with practice. Furthermore, it notes that anger is a normal, natural emotion, though violence in response to anger is not. Since violence is a learned response, a new, nonviolent response to anger can be substituted.

Moral reconation therapy, like much of cognitive behavioral therapy, focuses on helping individuals to examine their thoughts and behaviors, notice the linkage between thoughts and negative emotions, and interrupt destructive patterns. Like the twelve-step programs that most formerly incarcerated and/or addicted individuals have experienced, MRT also uses group dynamics to help people accept responsibility for their behavior.

These therapeutic groups help clients to develop tools and strategies for altering thinking patterns in order to learn new ways of reacting to
stressors. Because the CBO helps clients manage their other needs (such as housing, substance abuse, physical and mental health, education), residents can focus on self-efficacy, including the identification and regulation of their emotions, which comprises a significant portion of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2006). Clients work in individual counseling sessions to reinforce self-awareness of triggers of destructive behavior and strategize how to handle current problems.

**Socialization Opportunities and Support.** Leadership interviews cited the dual-occupancy policy of residents’ rooms as an explicit strategy for preventing isolation and encouraging social skill building. However, we learned in PAR team discussions that many current residents and staff do not view room sharing as an opportunity for skill building. They pointed out that because the relationship is time limited, individuals may not put the effort into working out roommate issues even though evidence suggests that they will face similar issues with future roommates after they leave Hilltop House. This finding provides an opportunity for CBO leadership to reassess their efforts at encouraging purposeful skill building around resolving conflicts with a roommate.

Residential staff is available around the clock so that there is always someone available to clients who feel unsafe, need to talk, or are having trouble managing a challenging situation. In addition, the size of the residential program is small enough that residents get to know each other and have many opportunities for addressing interpersonal disputes.

**Conflict Resolution Skill Building.** As noted previously, formal training in conflict resolution, based on academic theories of cooperation and competition, needs and interests, and interdependence, is not part of the Hilltop House curriculum (see chapter 1 in this Handbook). At this point in our data analysis, it appears that conflict resolution training is embodied almost exclusively through social learning and modeling (Bandura, 1973). For residents to choose nonviolent means for resolving conflict, they must have the power to advocate for themselves using methods other than verbal and physical aggression. As noted, most residents came from environments (violent households, the “streets,” and prisons) in which people frequently exercised aggressive “power over.” To demonstrate to clients that their voices will be heard—even when speaking relatively quietly and without threat—sends the message that they do not need to use aggression or violence to stand up for themselves in the residence. Hilltop House models and respects power with, not power over (see chapter 4 in this Handbook).

The weekly all-hands meeting serves as a forum for modeling power with and discussing current disputes and how to handle them. Observation
by PAR team members supports the conclusion that skillful facilitation of this meeting by a senior leader or staff member helps to carefully modulate the depth of emotion that is shared by participants as well as the length and the direction of discussions about individual disputes. An explicit element of the model for handling disputes constructively is that an appropriate expression of emotion prevents the buildup of unexpressed anger.

We have also learned, from discussion in PAR team meetings, that some senior leaders and staff members purposefully use daily disputes about mundane matters (e.g., putting the silverware away in the kitchen) to model power with using negotiation and mediation skills. (See chapter 6 in this Handbook.) Again, these are based in staff and leaders’ lived experiences rather than inspired by conflict resolution theory. The CBO also relies on longer-term residents, further along in their journeys, to model and support effective ways of addressing conflict. Older clients, who are past the peak years of engaging in violence, often mentor younger clients, who are not.

We look forward to further analysis of the client interviews for additional data about how a culture of nonviolence is created and transmitted. A few of the interview questions are especially targeted to solicit information about the skills that residents believe they have learned and experiences with applying them that may surface information about conflict resolution.

THE PAR TEAM EXPERIENCE AND WHAT WE LEARNED

In this section we reflect on the PAR team experience from several perspectives. First, we look at what we learned about Hilltop House culture and its impact that we would not have discovered had we used a traditional nonparticipatory methodology. Second, we look at the impact that PAR team participation has had on team members as well as indirectly on Hilltop House policies or practices. A third perspective is a comparison of the PAR team culture with that of Hilltop House. We noted similarities between the two that may highlight some elements of collaborative learning communities.

What we learned from the PAR team experience that went beyond the data we collected emerged during our bimonthly team meetings. Team members sometimes shared powerful events in their lives during check-in; at other times, CBO team members shared stories of dramatic personal experiences during discussions of policies or practices. Emotionally charged descriptions of the lived experiences and challenges of residents were shared at many meetings. During these vivid narratives, team members appeared to practice active listening (Rogers and Farson, 1957); psychology researchers may have drawn on their training, while CBO
researchers may have practiced listening skills that were modeled within the Hilltop House’s culture.

This sharing of individual experiences had two striking effects. First, it brought to the table issues that were live at Hilltop House but had not surfaced during regular daily or weekly all-hands meetings. And there were in-depth discussions that happened between individuals at differing levels of the hierarchy within the CBO—exchanges that were unlikely to have occurred otherwise. In addition, our CBO co-researchers mentioned that some of the conversations would not have been as productive had the university researchers not been involved. The lack of firsthand experience with many of the issues surrounding incarceration and reentry led the university researchers to ask naive questions that otherwise would not have been asked. And the university researchers’ expertise with framing questions and generating alternatives when problem solving was also perceived to be useful.

One heated topic concerns the Hilltop House policy about intimate relationships between residents: the house policy manual forbids them. Common therapeutic wisdom (from twelve-step programs; Kurtz, 1990) holds that until one has developed self-insight and can take care of oneself, it is unproductive or even dangerous to become intimate with others. Given the large proportion of residents with a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse at Hilltop House, the adoption of this policy is not surprising. Another reason for the policy is the high-priority concern with safety. Although very few incidents of violence occur annually (one to three), most that have occurred in recent memory were linked to romantic triangles or relationships gone wrong. So the leadership decided many years ago that it would be safer to forbid them.

There was much lively discussion about the “no intimacy” policy at several of the bimonthly PAR meetings. Residents expressed their concerns about the limitations of the policy and asked, for example, “How do I prepare to reenter society hampered by an inability to develop and sustain healthy romantic relationships? If this facility is a laboratory for developing new attitudes and behaviors, shouldn’t I be learning and practicing them here?” Other researchers suggested that the policy was inconsistent with the philosophy; there should be programming about forming healthy relationships, maybe even a couples’ group. Senior CBO PAR team members witnessed the level of energy expressed by residents and staff about this particular issue and heard their thoughtful perspectives and were motivated to raise the issue with the leadership team. The policy remains a topic of serious discussion at senior staff meetings as the pros and cons of the policy are reconsidered, along with the possibility of offering programming independent of the policy (e.g., a relationship development workshop.)
The energy generated during PAR team meeting discussions had other consequences as well. For example, some resident members described how much they had learned from being part of the PAR team and said that they wanted to demonstrate their learning in some tangible way. A college PAR member took the initiative and created a template for professional-looking certificates, documenting the skills and competencies the PAR team members had acquired (e.g., interviewing skills, qualitative coding experience, questionnaire design, facilitation skills) and that clients could put into their portfolios to show to prospective employers.

On a couple of occasions, PAR team members participated in academic conferences, sharing their process and results to date. In each case, the group representing the PAR team members consisted of both college and Hilltop House team members, the latter represented by residents, staff, and leadership. At one of the conferences, residents stood by a complex poster board and fielded questions from audience members. Attendees found the firsthand experiences of residents highly compelling and asked question after question. After the session ended, one of the residents voiced his proud wonderment at the depth of interest these college-affiliated individuals expressed about what he had to say; he shook his head and reflected on the fact that just six months before, he had been incarcerated with little sense of self-worth.

We have not measured individual PAR team members’ experiences of the bimonthly team meetings. However, every six months, our meeting agenda has included reflections on the PAR experience. At various times, different team members expressed a sense of frustration, feeling confused about the process, impatient with the amount of time it has taken to develop the methodology or analyze the data, or wanting to spend less time planning and more time doing. At the same time, team members consistently voiced a powerful commitment to the project, gratitude about being part of an extraordinary learning experience and a deep sense of connection to their co-researchers.

The value of the PAR experience was reflected in generally high attendance figures (80 percent or more) for CBO leaders and staff and for university researchers. Clients, with less control over their schedules, attended at a rate of closer to 50 percent. Exemplifying a depth of commitment to the project, two CBO leadership team PAR members who left Hilltop House continued to be a part of the PAR project despite the change in their employment status.

**Defining Success—Revisited**

The PAR methodology was responsible for our decision to define and collect multiple measures of success, with varying degrees of relevance for different stakeholder groups. Using a traditional case study research
methodology, we would not have directly experienced the enormous gap between the definition of successful reentry used by criminologists (“measured by criminal acts that resulted in the re-arrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner’s release” [Sabol, West, and Cooper, 2009] and the reported experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals as they attempt to follow, day by day, a new trajectory (e.g., sobriety, completion of education, reuniting with family). We dubbed the criminal justice definition of successful reentry a “third-person measure,” because it provides a consistent, objective metric uncluttered by concern with the barriers to successful reentry that make the achievement of this milestone so challenging. As a result we decided to also develop a first-person measure based on the definitions of successful reentry that clients proffered in their interviews.

Interestingly, it emerged in discussions of success that there was an additional measure, both temporally and psychologically between the other two: what we dubbed a “second-person measure.” These are criteria that describe intermediate milestones residents may pass in their journey to successful reentry, whether or not they ultimately manage to avoid reincarceration for three years. Some of these are milestones to be accomplished during the time the resident remains at Hilltop House (e.g., attendance at daily meetings, accomplishment of goals determined in conversation with the case manager) and others referring to criteria for “graduation” from the House, (e.g., sustained a source of income or engaged in a meaningful activity; drug and alcohol free for six months; engaged with at least one family member or community support person; obtained health care, including mental health).

As a result of our ongoing dialogue about success at PAR team meetings, CBO leadership and PAR team members were stimulated to reinvigorate a discussion of success criteria that had lain dormant at staff meetings. The conversations at PAR team meetings, with the input from college team members and Hilltop House residents and staff, influenced the path and outcome of the staff meeting decisions. These in turn influenced the PAR team meeting discussion and so on. The cross-pollination between the work of PAR and the operation of the CBO organization is a rich example of the impact that a dialectic between reflection and the daily demands of organizational operation can have.

We look forward to analyzing the interview questions that ask clients about their “first-person experiences of success”: what it looks like, how individuals know when they are moving toward it, and what gets in their way. Collecting data on recidivism (as defined by the US Department of Justice) will occur in phase 3 of the project.
PAR Team and Hilltop House Cultures: Collaborative Learning Communities?

Forming a PAR team within an intact organization rather than among a willing coalition of interested community members is not the norm. It appears that the Hilltop House community—residents, staff, organization—has been enriched through its involvement with the PAR process. For example, clients said that they appreciated being asked to talk about their experiences at Hilltop House and being heard (e.g., they were asked, “What works for you about Hilltop House?” and, “What could be improved or added to make it better?”). There should be additional benefits when the client interview data have been fully analyzed and reported on. The CBO leadership views Hilltop House as a learning organization, and they are eager to receive confirmation about what works and to make changes to what could be improved. As noted, leadership and staff conveyed what they learned during the PAR meetings to their peers at CBO staff meetings, prompting discussion and reflection and sometimes action. It is likely that some modifications to policies and practices will be made when the final results are available.

Had the Hilltop House CBO culture been different, (e.g., more hierarchical, more power over than power with, less interested in reflection and organizational learning, less willing to communicate), the PAR process and the collaboration between the two communities might not have worked so well. The model of open communication at Hilltop House greatly enriched the learning experiences of the college PAR team members.

What about the PAR team culture? The PAR team is a diverse group of individuals bound by a common goal and clear interdependency who developed special relationships through their shared PAR experience. All team members shared the goal of answering the umbrella question: “How does the culture (philosophy, policies, practices) of Hilltop House impact the successful reentry of residents into the larger society?” At the same time, there are diverse interests and multiple reasons for asking the same question: practical versus conceptual (e.g., enhance the Hilltop House program versus creating knowledge about developing and transmitting a culture of non-violence) and specific versus general (e.g., to benefit Hilltop House’s future residents versus to benefit supportive housing residents in future programs more broadly). While we were flawed at times in our implementation, our team ground rules called for decision making through consensus, respectful listening, and honoring the value of each member’s contributions.

Answering the umbrella question effectively required collaboration; the lived experience and observations of the CBO team members and the training and skills of the college researchers are both necessary and not interchangeable. As Druckman (2005) notes, the participatory nature of
PAR means that a social research project is enriched by the participation of organization or community members with subjective, constructivist knowledge about the topic of research as well as by the contributions of researchers with tools for collecting and creating objective, positivist knowledge. Knowledge flowed from college researchers to Hilltop House residents and staff through the sharing of relevant literature and cross-training on skills (such as questionnaire design, interviewing). College researchers learned from Hilltop House residents and staff through narratives that were often starkly emotional. Many of the college researchers had relatively privileged life experiences compared to those of Hilltop House residents and many of the staff. Stories of police harassment, homeless shelters, and childhoods influenced by parental addiction or abandonment continued to challenge assumptions held by some college team members (e.g., individuals are unlikely to be harassed by police when they are genuinely doing nothing wrong) in a profound way.

The PAR culture mimicked the Hilltop House culture in many ways, including demonstrating mutual respect, supporting one another’s challenges and losses (e.g., illnesses and even death befell some team members), and celebrating one another’s good fortune (e.g., completing a GED, getting married, entering graduate school).

**CONCLUSION**

Though PAR is not traditionally framed in this manner, PAR projects almost always form around the problem or issue about which there is conflict. Consider this hypothetical example. Residents in a underserved community (with high levels of poverty and unemployment) are upset by the local government’s proposal to locate a waste disposal plant in their neighborhood. Some residents may avoid engaging in the conflict, feeling overwhelmed by daily demands and pessimistic about the likelihood of overturning the decision. Other residents, however, choose to attend community meetings and angrily voice their concerns. If the community residents were to join forces with trained researchers, they could identify additional options for analyzing the conflict and taking action. For example, they might create a community self-survey, and as a result both inform community members and collect data about the strength of support for and opposition to the initiative. Researchers might suggest that the group approach the conflict as an integrative negotiation and work with them to study the needs and interests of the politicians and the developers. Or, using a more competitive strategy, they may systematically investigate where waste disposal facilities are located in a range of cities, finding that they are sited in low-income
areas in the vast majority of cases. These data might well interest journalists and residents of other neighborhoods, resulting in increased visibility of the issue and possibly a shift in public opinion toward the community members’ concerns.\textsuperscript{14}

In the dual concern model of conflict resolution styles (Thomas, 1992; Rahim, 2001), collaboration is considered both a highly cooperative and a very assertive style. The purpose of the cross-organization collaboration engaged in by PAR team members was not to address (and resolve) an existing conflict, but rather to gather information and create new knowledge. Working across differences to accomplish a shared goal and experiencing a form of positive interdependence (see chapter 1 in this Handbook) has been powerful and led to a deep level of commitment to both the project and to other team members.

This suggests that there may be more to explore at the intersection of collaboration, conflict, and knowledge creation or learning. The constructive controversy literature (see chapter 4 in this Handbook) describes many positive effects (e.g., creativity, improved memory, social skills development) of engaging with more than one perspective when learning new material (see chapter 4 in this Handbook). Another example of the power of goal interdependency and collaboration is found in the work of Varshney (2002). In a decade-long study of violent Hindu-Muslim conflict in India, Varshney found that in cities where Hindus and Muslims worked together collaboratively in civil society (men’s services clubs, symphony guilds, road safety task forces), there was far less interreligious and ethnic violence than in cities where the fabric of civil society was less tightly interwoven. While causality could not be proven, Varshney hypothesized that individuals become far less susceptible to politicians and other leaders who incite violence when individuals have partnered across ethnic lines in civil society. Of course, there are the many tragic instances in which interethnic violence has been stimulated by leaders and groups (Rwanda, Bosnia, Kenya), often through their control of the media. The role of collaboration between individuals toward a shared goal, across differences, and its impact on constructive versus destructive conflict is a fruitful avenue for continued study.

Notes

1. Thanks to Morton Deutsch for this very helpful suggestion.

2. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all of the potential influences on the development of action research. John Dewey is also credited with influencing intellectual thought in the development of what Argyris et al. (1985) call “action science” through his spirited criticism of the traditional separation of knowledge and action in education and in social practice.
3. Over the last decade, there have been dramatic changes in the incarceration rates for black, white, and Hispanic women. Between 2000 and 2009, the number of black women incarcerated dropped by 30 percent while the number of white women in prison rose by 47 percent, and the number of Hispanic women increased by 23 percent (Goode, 2013). Although no single factor can be identified as solely responsible for these trends, experts identify changes in drug offenses and sentencing as a major factor (Goode, 2013.) For example, the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1970s to 1980s included very stiff sentences and resulted in the incarceration of disproportionately more black women and men. Large numbers of these men and women are now leaving prison. In addition, an increasing number of whites and Hispanics, including women, are serving mandatory sentences for methamphetamine abuse. The connection between racial and ethnic differences in drugs of choice, sentencing guidelines, and the make-up of the prison population is an interesting one.


5. For a more local view, in New York State, about 26,600 individuals were released and about 40 percent were returned to custody within three years. In addition, nearly 75 percent of those who returned to custody were recommitted within the first eighteen months after their release.

6. Beyond a few informal updates, the CEO has had no involvement with the ongoing work of the PAR team.

7. Some researchers prefer a measure that excludes “technical violations” (violations of parole or other infractions), as many observers see the parole system as unrealistically restrictive and unfairly punitive.

8. Recidivism data will not be collected until phase 3. Data about the subjective impact of the culture on the prosocial attitudes and behavior of client residents (phase 2) is in the process of being coded and analyzed. What we describe here are impressions gleaned from listening to client interviews and from the input from resident co-researchers during PAR team meetings.

9. These elements are cited in client interviews and from resident co-researchers as important.

10. Residents can request a hearing with a review panel to consider the possibility of reinstatement after a specified number of months.

11. The anger management groups are based on curricula developed by the US Substance and Mental Health Services Administration.

12. Because of the reduced incomes of most Hilltop House residents when they enter the community, living with roommates is a more commonly occurring outcome.

13. This should not be interpreted to mean that confidentiality was breached. Statements were not associated with individuals. Conversations were reported in terms of questions or themes.

14. Of course, this scenario is possible only if there is sufficient lead time before a final government decision is made and the development project has begun.
References


