Show and Tell: Using Restorative Practices and Asset Based Community Development to Address Issues of Safety and Violence

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SHOW AND TELL: USING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF SAFETY AND VIOLENCE.

TERA LYNN MCINTOSH

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program
of Antioch University
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

SHOW AND TELL: USING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF SAFETY AND VIOLENCE AND CREATE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN COMMUNITIES: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

prepared by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how restorative practices could help increase the social fabric within communities in order to help solve complex community problems. Although literature on restorative practices is bountiful for the purposes of restorative justice and restorative practices in schools, there is little literature on how to use restorative practices to create more restorative communities or neighborhoods. For the purpose of this study I looked at the issue of violence and safety within a particular community and implemented a framework of restorative practices that focused on asset based community development and building healthier relationships. I utilized action research to conduct intentional gatherings of communicative space that were supported by a study circle framework and collected data in ways that included interviews, pre-post surveys, and mapping documents, as well as documentation of all observed outcomes in relation to the study circles. The findings proposed that when communities are given the opportunity to intentionally gather to communicate in a restorative context, citizens learn about new opportunities or assets, and relationships spill over from study circles processes causing actions to occur directly and also on a “second degree level.” These new actions can assist communities in rationing together better ways of solving complex community problems. The electronic version of the Dissertation is accessible in the open-access Ohiolink ETD Center http://etd.ohiolink.edu.
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Chapter I: Introduction

In Chapter 1, I define my epistemological stance as a researcher and how it relates to the overall study. I also give a brief overview of the purpose of the study and acknowledge the gap in literature in reference to civic engagement, restorative practices, and communicative spaces. Lastly I give a brief description of the specific problem and review what the research will cover in Chapters 2 and 3. This study reviews the importance of literature and theory within the community development sector, including civic engagement, building relationships, restoring lost relationships, and the premise for the foundation of this research, which is recognizing citizens’ gifts and their capacity to create a better community through collaboration. It also addresses how to move dialogue to action and how to utilize these relationships (both new and old), assets within the community, and citizen’s gifts to create a safer community in which to live and work.

The Research Question

Will creating more restorative spaces that focus on a different kind of language, building relationships, and highlighting gifts and assets assist communities in building social capital so that they are better equipped to address the issue of safety and violence? This question is reflective of the imagined democracy which I always wished to be a part of, one that says citizens should abide by the laws, vote, and participate in their community. By further exploring the civic duty of participation and building relationships I explored if our communities really could become “a better place”, or rather if citizens can experience a change in awareness, perspectives, and behaviors through their involvement in this study. This is the idea which the research question has bloomed from, allowing me to further develop and question the importance of asking citizens to come together to grow their relationships in the community, restore
forgotten ones, and recognize what their community and self have to offer in creating a “better” or rather, more safe place to be.

**Situation of the Researcher**

I conducted this research within many roles I occupy throughout the City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: my role within the nonprofit sector, my role within the community development field, and my role as a citizen and resident of the city of Pittsburgh. Throughout each of these roles, I have developed relationships that assisted me with the overlapping of each role I carry and have recognized their interconnectedness and how they benefit me when working within the community. For example, my role within the nonprofit sector has allowed me to build relationships with both citizens of hierarchical power status as well as citizens who believe that they possess no power to actually change the community in which they live. These relationships have assisted me as I worked together with both groups relaying what each has to offer the other.

Recently, in November of 2011, the Assistant U.S. Attorney emailed me seeking help for a client he prosecuted years before whom he believed possessed an amazing potential to really make something of himself and become a productive member of society. It is very rare that law enforcement personally reaches out for social services for a past offender, as often in the legal/law enforcement sector there is a lack of appreciation for personal reform or change in regards to ex-offenders. Due to the Assistant U.S. Attorney reaching out beyond his role to seek additional help, I felt as if this collaborative effort could really produce a great outcome. I met with the gentleman a few times and soon saw the potential about which the Assistant U.S. Attorney spoke. As a result, I reached out and connected to a personal friend whom managed restaurants in the downtown area and also a friend that operated concessions in a gym. The gentleman was hired at both positions and works two jobs currently. Had not the Assistant U.S. Attorney went beyond his specific role to “care a little more,” I would not have had the
opportunity to meet this gentleman and offer to him different opportunities that he thought would never be accessible considering his criminal record. When I initially met the gentleman he was extremely appreciative that an Assistant U.S. Attorney would actually extend a hand to someone of his status. Although these two drastically separate citizens usually have little contact with each other in a positive way, the three of us were able to collaboratively come together to connect resources, build relationships, and produce a positive outcome.

As a citizen of this community and practitioner in the community and nonprofit sector working with many different nonprofits and community development organizations, I have a personal and academic commitment to thinking creatively and collaboratively in order to solve some of the most complex community issues like violence, housing, poor education, and city beautification. These complex community issues have often been pushed off on different sectors to figure out solutions, therefore leaving everyone but ourselves accountable for their failure. For example, citizens often look to police to make safer communities, or the business community to fix their problems of gentrification, when in fact citizens are all accountable in creating better ways to solving these complex community issues. I believe that creating spaces where citizens can change the conversation and focus on relationships, engagement, and accountability is core to effective transformation of our communities. I believe that positive spaces can be catalyst for amazing things to occur, given the opportunity for relationships to be built. This is perhaps why I am so fond of what Oldenberg (1999) calls “third places,” or the homes away from home that are at the heart of a community’s social vitality. Oldenburg proposes the idea that the prevailing need in humans to want to associate with each other will inevitably lead to the revival of places where, as the theme song to the TV show Cheers so fittingly describes it, “everyone knows your name.” At the root of this commitment to “third places” are some of the issues that hold the
most value for me. The value of dialogue is significantly important since it is the basis in which true change is addressed and occurs. The value of operating in the role of the connector also is imperative, as I operated as a connector within the Pittsburgh community for some years building bridges and connections among and between people. Furthermore, I am passionate about implementing restorative practices that focus on building community in a seemingly disconnected world. I fervently uphold the importance of ABCD which can provide the framework for people being able to recognize their gifts as well as their own community assets.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) can be seen as a framework for recognizing community and individual gifts. While these practices are core to what I believe in, they are also intrinsic pieces in the process of building safer communities and thus I will further explore them in depth in the next chapter.

I also believe that it is important to define my epistemological stance as it has great importance in how I make meaning of the knowledge around me. I have always been a person who tried to make sense of the world. I can remember when I was young taking apart my radio with a butter knife to see “just how it is working in there.” While some might just consider me curious, I now understand that I am a person that needs to understand the “why” of the world around me, a character trait that has no doubt pulled me towards qualitative research and a constructivist view. How we perceive knowledge and the process of coming to know can often provide a foundation for our research practices. I believe that my stance as a researcher has taken on a constructivist worldview. Murphy (1997) wrote that in the constructivist perspective “knowledge is constructed by the individual through his interactions with the environment” (p. 5), as the constructivist view argues that “knowledge and reality do not have an objective or absolute value or, at the least, that we have no way of knowing this reality” (p. 5). By
constructing knowledge in the way that Murphy (1997) describes I am recognizing that as a researcher I tend to make meaning of my interactions within my surroundings by going through a reflective process that has me re-examining and redefining my experiences so that I get a better understanding of what it truly means to me. By viewing knowledge this way I am aware that there is no single method of validation, but rather a diversity of useful methods in creating such knowledge. This way of constructing knowledge does not always have a tangible measureable end result, but rather can assist me in future experiences of knowledge creation.

By providing spaces that encouraged restorative practices about the issue of safety and violence I did not seek to find a bulleted list of solutions or rather one single useful method to creating more safe communities with less violence, but rather I am attempted to construct, create, or understand the view of violence in regards to safety and what it means to each community by employing a variety of useful methods. Much like how experiences are different for everyone, communities do not share the same view about issues affecting them and thus a single method of knowledge creation might not be beneficial. This is why I relate to the constructivist view that focuses on making sense of experience and continually testing and modifying these constructions in the light of new experience.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide citizens of the Hill District community within the City of Pittsburgh with a communicative space in which they could create a different kind of language and enhance social relationships by using a restorative framework to identify possible solutions that address the issue of safety and violence. I have always liked the Hill District because of its rich music and art history in Pittsburgh’s past as well as its location in proximity to downtown. Over the past couple of years while working throughout the Hill District area I have
come to learn more about its rich past and valuable community assets, as well as its current issues with crime and violence via my role in the Pittsburgh Initiative to Reduce Crime.

The issue of violence and safety can be drastically different for many citizens of the Hill District community. While the Hill District was credited for 11 murders of the city’s 54 murders in 2011 (Pennsylvania State Police Reporting, 2012), there are also safety issues that are not just related to violence. During a weekly meeting with Councilman Dan Lavelle on April 16, 2012 a concerned citizen spoke up about the increased foot traffic throughout her street due to the closure of the housing projects, which has now left citizens worried about drug traffic and violence moving to other locations of the Hill District. Safety and violence can be experienced differently by each citizen and it is important that they share their own stories about how they are affected by issues of violence or safety. By creating spaces for dialogue to occur and providing restorative practices citizens are participating together to share their own meaning of what safety means to them and also creating safer communities for them individually as well as communally. Block (2008) states that the way in which citizens view public safety needs reconfiguring, so that citizens have the ability to craft safe neighborhoods which focus on neighborhood relatedness or connectedness. It is not solely police that make a neighborhood safe to occupy, it is the ability for neighbors to connect. Police are not the solution and our view in thinking they are needs attention (Block, 2008). According to Condeluci (2011):

The fact that social capital keeps us safe, sane and secure cannot be understated. Most of us tend to think that institutions or organizations are keys to safety. Places like hospitals or systems like law enforcement are thought to keep us safe, but the bold truth is that these systems have never really succeeded in keeping us safe or healthy. Rather, it is the opportunity for relationships that community offers us as well as the building of social capital. Simply stated, your circles of support and the reciprocity they create are the most important element in your safety. (p. 2)
Jacobs (McKnight & Block, 2010) stated that “a safe street is produced by eyes on the street. It is produced by people walking around, sitting outside, knowing neighbors and being a part of the social fabric” (p. 19). I know that my neighbor has Parkinson’s Disease that limits his physical capacity to move easily. I also know that he catches the bus once a week for his hospital visits on Tuesdays and so in the winter I make sure that his sidewalk is cleared if it is snowing, not because I have to, but because I care about my neighbor and my community. If I did not participate in opportunities that help me connect with my neighbor or community, would I have as many opportunities to create a safer community for us both? Would this neighbor be at a city council casual forum? Probably not, but he most certainly would be at a community block party, as he loves hot dogs. Opportunities exist in every neighborhood for citizens to become involved, but are these opportunities helping create the connectedness of which Block (2008) speaks? Will this form of connectedness improve safety within our communities and strengthen social connections? The way of approaching safety and violence, in a restorative lens, focuses on building relationships and neighborhood assets, or Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), not on prevention techniques or a higher presence of police. What this means is that citizens create occasions, or “intentional gatherings” as I like to refer to them, for citizens to know each other, to build our relationships and contribute our gifts to building a safe community. Currently, there are many intentional gatherings happening in the Hill District, but how many citizens really participate in them? The last two weeks in April, 2012 that I attended a weekly open forum with the City Council representative for the Hill District community there were no more than 6 or 7 citizens present out of approximately 11,000-15,000 residents that reside in the Hill according to population statistics from the latest census via 2000 (City of Pittsburgh, 2000). The open forum that the city council host should be utilized as a way of strengthening both the
relationships of citizens within the Hill District as well as citizens’ relationship to their City Council representative. As Jacobs (as cited in McKnight & Block, 2010) and (Block, 2008) stated, anything that helps neighbors to know who lives on the street—open conversations, block parties, confronting irresponsible business or property owners, creating citizen based movements, or developing new community programs—strengthens the social fabric, relatedness, and safety within our communities. When citizens come together to assist in bridging the social capital deficits, they also increase the value of civic society (Chrislip, 2002; Condeluci, 2011). By conducting my research I provided a safe space for citizens to come together and discuss the issue of violence and safety. By bringing citizens together in this space they continued to build relationships of trust, learn tolerance, and promote civic engagement for dealing with complex issues by providing a way in which citizens collaborate together to create a deeper practice of democracy within our communities.

**Gap in Literature**

While there is an abundance of research on creating “restorative justice” in communities or “restorative practices” in school settings, there is little information about creating more restorative communities through practices which focus on a different kind of informal leadership, language, and ABCD. Restorative practices in schools include benefits such as more positive and collegial environments among staff resulting in fewer staff absentee days, a higher level of student involvement in school life, and dramatic reductions in the amount of discipline referrals (Mirsky, 2007). Restorative justice practices can also increase benefits such as forgiveness of wrongdoers, community compassion, and less frequency of wronging (Zehr, 2002). There is limited research on how using restorative practices to address the most complex issues in communities can be beneficial to a community’s wellbeing. While I specifically looked at the issue of safety and violence within communities, the intent was that the framework of creating
more restorative communities can also be used with other issues in the community including redevelopment, housing, transportation, health, and substance abuse. There is no blueprint for what a restorative community looks like, as with each community there are many differing factors; however, there is little research about the characteristics of restorative communities/neighborhoods and how creating more restorative practices within communities can be beneficial in specifically looking at the complex issue of safety and violence.

Through creating spaces and opportunities for the community to participate in a different conversation, I used these “intentional gatherings” where others come together to learn from each other (as cited in Block, 2008) to create more restorative practices that addressed the issue of violence and safety within a specific community. These “intentional gatherings” were conducted, observed, recorded, and analyzed through the method of action research (AR) and presented the community with a different opportunity to create social capital. Social capital has the ability to transform communities in many ways. By using the platform of restorative practices (derived from the restorative justice movement) citizens were able to use the strength of social ties and power of relationships (social capital) to build a greater sense of civic accountability as well as better community support systems. Restorative practices have been used to address interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup conflict in many settings, from family welfare to school settings. At all levels of social conflict, restorative practices have been used as a platform for recognizing and repairing harm done to both individuals and groups; thus harnessing the capacity for all citizens involved to advance forward in healthier and more dynamic ways both personally and communally. By conducting this study I was able to gather data that assisted in highlighting ways to learn more about the application of restorative practices and building social capital within the community or neighborhood setting.
Statement of Specific Problem

The Hill District lacks the communicative space in which people gather to talk about key issues and build social capital. There are few places where you can gather, eat, grab a cup of coffee, or socialize other than nonprofits or churches. The creation of dialogue can produce many benefits to civic life. As McCoy and Scully (2002) state, “Most people do not enter community life or politics through doors marked ‘civic life’ or ‘engagement’” (p. 118). Instead they find themselves going through those doors and sitting in the living room after following an issue that they feel passionately about. It is often at this point when citizens realize that in order to make a significant change they must bring to the table “others that care” (McCoy & Scully, 2002). In the case of the Hill District it might be difficult to find these “others that care” as their past presents them with trust issues when it comes to community involvement and development. The Hill District has been presented with many issues in which citizens had to overcome economic and cultural pressures. During those obstacles citizens might have lost faith in once strong relationships within their community, leaving relationships within the community fragmented. It might also be difficult to gather others that care as the area lacks opportunity and places for citizens to gather and build relationships.

The Hill District, an urban jewel nestled just above downtown, is the home to famous playwright and Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson. It did not always lack places to eat, socialize, or gather to make decisions collectively. In the 1950’s the federal government agreed to the Lower Hill Redevelopment plan, which made available $17.4 million in grants and loans to be disbursed throughout the Hill District. Unfortunately, the plan was implemented by clearing out many acres and structures, leaving over 1,500 residents of the Hill District homeless and struggling with no relocation compensation or options for housing. The construction of the
Mellon Arena also displaced many city blocks leaving a taste of distrust and negativity within the neighborhood which affected citizen trust and engagement drastically. (Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, 2012). Along with the trials of the 50’s came the collapse of the manufacturing industry in the Mon Valley in the 80’s leaving many communities with unemployment rates above state and national levels (Gittell & Vidal, 1998).

Citizens would like the opportunity to participate in problem solving processes where they can be participants in creating the information that is needed to address community issues, as current citizens often lack the opportunity to do so or feel as if their input is neglected by elected officials or leaders within their community leaving them civically disengaged (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). When communities feel neglected they remain in an angry and intolerant state, unwilling to be open to new ideas (Condeluci, 2002). Citizens now defer the revival of their communities to public leaders and officials, as they no longer feel heard and welcomed. Fung and Wright (2001) state that “democracy as a way of organizing the state has come to be narrowly identified with territorially based competitive elections of political leadership for legislative and executive offices” (p. 5). Yet, this once productive method is now seen as ineffective in accomplishing our central ideals, citizen consensus, citizen engagement, and dialogue so that citizens can create a better foundation of a healthy community (Fung & Wright, 2001). Citizens must now look to new ways of solving their most complex issues, and produce spaces where they can allow citizens to engage and strengthen their relationships within their community as they address the most chronic issues that plague them. One example of how this is happening in the Hill District currently is the monthly meeting of the “Hill Consensus Group”; or rather a gathering of residents, business owners and nonprofit organizations that discuss what is going on in the Hill District monthly via a reoccurring meeting. By exposing citizens to
opportunities for building relationships we help to construct tolerance to the new ideas Condeluci (2002) speaks of, as our exposure to others in our community challenges us to consider new concepts, or views.

It is not simply the opportunity to engage that creates “better ways,” but good communication while engaging that strengthens connections and working relationships. This engagement can often be implemented through communication or being present together, which can often be developed through civic engagement processes such as public talks, forums, or conversation. In the case of the Hill District, I do not see the opportunity for being present together as accessible as other communities without places to eat, grab a cup of coffee, or gather outside safely. In meeting with numerous organizations across the Hill District I came across a nonprofit based out of the Orthodox Church that offered a space where residents, even just a handful a day came together, by seeking out basic needs services. While the organization provides things such as food pantry, clothing, and employment services, the core of what they believe in is building relationships through these meetings. The old building in which they reside is of no superior beauty or organization, but still provides a safe place for residents to come together daily to sit and eat a hot meal in what appears to be a living room like area. The gentleman I spoke to at this facility kept reaffirming the belief that only by building relationships, both with insider residents and outsiders trying to help, only then—will the community erase the trust and racial boundaries that exist. While methods of civic engagement might differ in names, sizes, or styles, the most important aspect of these gatherings is that citizens are brought face to face to address issues of commonality (McCoy & Scully, 2002). Civic engagement can be defined as creating meaningful connections, not just among citizens, but among issues, organizations, institutions, and even the political system (McCoy & Scully,
As McCoy and Scully (2002) state, civic engagement “implies voice and agency, a feeling of power and effectiveness, with real opportunities to have a say” (p. 118). It is also imperative that these opportunities for increased voice and power are fueled by active participation where realistic citizen engagement can truly make a difference (McCoy & Scully, 2002). Citizens are often unaware of the power in which they or others hold, which is why helping citizens, leaders, and public officials to recognize their individual gifts and power is important so that they change from the usual method of power-over actions to mutually empowering positive relationships within the community (Baker-Miller, 2010). When we look at power as the “ability to move or produce change,” rather than a “winning over or power over” meaning, we create a different view of how power can be a positive influence within communities (Baker, 2010). Citizens possess the power and ability to move change forward when they recognize the power of their gifts and community. Block (2008) stated, “the importance of problem solving leads to an alternative future only when it is embedded in a restorative context, one based on relatedness, generosity, and a focus on gifts” (p. 80). Thus, it is imperative that citizens create spaces where conversations can occur to address the most complex issues within our communities, where they focus on each other’s gifts, what our neighborhood can offer to help with the issues, and increasing our neighborhood connectedness and civic spirit.

In Allegheny County last year there were 84 murders and approximately 1,024 robberies, 180 cases of rape, and 3,287 cases of serious injury as a result of assault. Allegheny County has an approximate population of 1.2 million (Pennsylvania State Police Reporting, 2012). As evidenced above, the problem of safety and violence surrounds many neighborhoods as citizens and communities everywhere search for new and innovative ways to make our communities
safer. While the issue of safety and violence is present throughout every community, it is imperative that citizens recognize the differences in context of these concerns. When citizens engage in dialogue about these issues, it is important that they hear the many varying concerns from residents so that they might more thoroughly dissect them. Many programs have been made available through the city of Pittsburgh; however while these initiatives are important they do not create the opportunity to create a sense of connectedness among neighborhoods or communities. There are countless communities where conversations are still not occurring, thus leaving them with limited opportunities to engage and take action on community issues. Block (2008) states that our constructed view of public safety needs to shift so that citizens have the opportunity to be architects in developing a safe neighborhood.

**Research Design**

I utilized the method of Action Research in order to implement the research question proposed. Action Research (AR) is a model that involves a reflective process of open-minded problem solving led by researchers whom often work with others in groups or teams or as part of a "community of practice" to improve the way they address issues and solve complex problems (Lewin, 1946). While traditional scientific research focuses on producing general knowledge to add to the knowledge area in a particular field of study, action research provides a local perspective (local knowledge) not often provided by traditional research and also generates public knowledge which can be transferred into other settings (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Action research provides a framework for community members to gather together and collaboratively work in a reflective manner in order to generate both local and public knowledge that aims to increase the effectiveness of professional practices, develop individuals, or transform practices and participants (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Thus, with action research being a participatory,
reflective, approach that focuses greatly on dialogue, I found it the best fit for my research question.

Action Research focuses on combining both theory and practice into the research process (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). McIntyre (2008) suggests that the AR process focus on an open commitment to collaboration, participation, engagement, and partnerships which will in turn provide gathered information that could initiate problem-solving action and knowledge. This process was implemented through a structured series of study circles in which I was both a participant and researcher. The design utilized a spectrum of flexible techniques, which includes 1) using a more restorative language, 2) implementing a study circle session format, 3) recording study circle sessions, 4) self-reflective journaling, 5) sound board reflective meetings, and 6) conducting one on one interview. The design will be further discussed in Chapter III: Methodology.

**Limitations of the Study**

Qualitative studies require a lot of precise thought and planning to ensure the most accurate results possible. A qualitative study cannot be mathematically or statistically analyzed, but instead used as a method of obtaining applicable observations that can assist with the issue under attention. As with all AR studies, there is a great possibility that the research process could produce action with little theoretical support, or great theoretical support with little action (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). For this very reason I developed a guideline that was used during each study circle session that included theoretical support as well as proposed action. Using the qualitative approach of AR within the Hill District community resulted in a unique approach that cannot be exactly replicated due to the nature of action research, leaving little room for exact recreation of the research design and process, an aspect that hinders its applicability in other
communities. However, the study could be used as a manual or training tool in addressing complex community issues with this guided format in other communities. Also, AR can often be lengthy, as it is a qualitative process that can span long or short periods of time, sometimes never reaching a complete end (Dickens & Watkins, 1999), therefore leaving the researcher with the responsibility of establishing a clear timeline that will provide the most accurate results. The length of the study could in fact also alter the level of engagement of participants, leaving them not as committed due to an over-commitment of time. In order to address time within my study I included a proposed timeline to help coordinate appropriate deadlines as well as a sounding board team that assisted me with unforeseen complications as I conducted my study. While the issue of time may alter citizen participation, it was also important to address the culture of the community, as their might be difficulty in obtaining engaged citizens to initially participate in the research. For this purpose I utilized my previously established relationships to gather more support for my study. I had also met with numerous nonprofits, businesses, and organizations within the Hill District in order to build my rapport as a researcher and gain more participation and commitment. In order to build relationships in the community to increase possible participation in the study I inserted myself into the community more visibly as a researcher, which could have also produced limitations in gaining trust of the community members to participate in the study. Action Research studies, like many other qualitative studies, can be rigorous, and despite their limitations can create real, personal, applicable, and transferable results.

**Description of Next Chapters**

In Chapter I, I have laid out the purpose and reason for this research study. In Chapter II, I discuss the importance of community based theories such as social capital, social disorganization theory, positive deviance, and the role of grassroots and relational leadership. I
also further explain what community means and the role of practices such as restorative
practices, restorative justice, restorative community practices, communicative space, and ABCD
theory. In Chapter III, I discuss the method of Action Research, why this specific method fit well
within the restorative practices framework, and my general action plan which was used in
creating the study circles along with the theories and practices discussed in Chapter II.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Chapter II will discuss in depth the meaning of community within the research that I conducted as well as core areas of theory including the history of community development, the role of community and civic engagement, social disorganization theory, the theory of positive deviance, social capital, relational leadership theory, grassroots leadership, and restorative practices. After discussing these theories I further explain practices that relate to the core concepts of ABCD, restorative justice, restorative practices, and communicative space.

Defining Community

Anderson (as cited in Freleich, 1963) stated that “it is not possible to compare community studies unless the writers used similar concepts of community and reflected these concepts in their definitions” (p. 118). For this purpose, I found it important to highlight different definitions and theories about what community is, as well as give my own concept of community that remained constant throughout my research. MacQeen et al. (2001) stated that the definition of community “emerged as a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (p. 1929). Condeluci (2002) stated that community is a network of people who gather regularly due to a common reason or celebration. Block (2008) proposes the idea that community is about the experience of belonging. He views community not as a place, but states that citizens are in community each time that they discover a place where they feel that they belong. Block and Condeluci both suggest that community is not defined by physical space, but rather the relationships that are formed within the space shared. Block’s theory of community as a sense of belonging is somewhat similar to that of Anderson (2006) who states that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their fallacy or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined”
Anderson (as cited in Freleich, 1963) also states that most scholars are in basic agreement that community is created by three things—persons in social interaction, persons within a geographical location, and persons having one or more additional ties. Gusfield (1975) states that there are two major applications for the term community. The first use is community as territory and geographical notion of community, i.e. neighborhood, town, or city. The second use of community is the “relational” component which is more directed towards the quality of character of human relationships within a group (Gusfield, 1975).

The term “community” takes on a different meaning for many people. Bazemore and Schiff (2001) state the starting point of community spreads beyond just geographic area and encompasses a variety of networks, linkages, and groups “to which, it is believed, we all belong” (p. 135). This idea of community does not solely focus on where a community can be found, but rather focuses on “communities of care,” or the networks of obligation, compassion, and respect between an individual and everyone who cares about him/her the most, thus not confined by just their geography (Bazemore & Schiff, 2001). As Bazemore and Schiff (2001) stated:

Community in this sense, begins to look like a set of bilateral relations of trust, rather than a dense, complex social order with rule-making capacities and the means to induce compliance, and which is set in a larger social matrix that can, and often does, affect and invade those internal orders. (p. 135)

In this view community can often be perceived as a shared set of collective attitudes without a top-down, organizational-like structure. For this study, I view community as a place (neighborhood) where people interact, share common interests, and are brought together by geographical location or similar social ties.
The Shift of Civic Engagement in Communities

Citizens across the nation are growing increasingly angered and frustrated by the failure of elected leaders and officials to address the most shared concerns of the communities they represent. The crime rate continues to grow; health care for children is shockingly expensive; unemployment rates are at an all-time high. No sole group is responsible for these issues or for the solution to them (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Block (2008) stated that the “social fabric of community is formed from an expanding shared sense of belonging” (p. 9). Only when citizens are “connected” and show care for the welfare and health of one another is a civil and democratic sense of community developed (Block, 2008). How, therefore, can citizens create a good social fabric if they have forgotten the ways of connecting and becoming involved in a greater conversation about their community as a whole? In order to begin transforming our community citizens must realize the power in seemingly insignificant but in fact vital fundamentals of being present with others in the community. They need to carry this shift in thinking and acting along with them as they engage in meetings and establish relationships in order for them to get down to the basics of what Block (2008) stated as “how are we going to be when we gather together” (p. 10). The way of looking at community as an individual transformation that focuses on what one person can do, is no longer important; rather merging and strengthening the fabric and relationships of community as a collaborative effort which starts in “a shift of our mindset about connectedness” has become more valuable (Block, 2008, p. 10). A study of citizen engagement (as cited in Chrislip & Larson, 1994) suggests that citizens are indeed angry and frustrated by politics. They feel left out of the processes, silenced and unable to understand how they can have any real influence on public affairs. They also feel that government is out of reach and does not respond to the worries and needs of individuals, neighborhoods, or communities but rather favors
those with more political and positional power. According to Uslaner and Brown (2005),
inequality plays a significant role in participation of every day citizens. Unequal participation
arises when inequality of resources leads people in lower class groups to abstain from
participating, either because they have fewer resources available to them or because they feel
that being engaged will be unsuccessful because the system of power is consistently a driving
force that ultimately works against them. In communities where inequality is high, citizens
also state that “the indirect effect comes through the impact of inequality on trust. Higher levels
of inequality mean less trust, and this may in turn reduce the level of civic engagement” (p. 877).
According to Chrislip and Larson (1994), citizens want to be engaged and “want their views to
be heard, understood, and considered” (p. 3), so that they have a restored belief that their
involvement can truly make a difference within their community. Perhaps there is a lack of trust
among citizens within their communities that makes them believe that their active engagement
and views will actually have an impact and produce outcomes that could benefit them. Although
they might want their views to be heard and understood (Chrislip & Larson, 1994), they might
feel like they are unable to change the power structure of the systems and policies (Uslaner &
Brown, 2005), thus not actively engaging themselves in community activities that require a
greater commitment from them. What communities need is a “cultural shift” or rather a new
method or idea to be seen as a viable tool in the community (Condeluci, 2002). When
communities feel that this “idea” is effective and believe in it, a cultural shift occurs within the
community causing true change to happen and not leaving citizens feeling unheard. By focusing
on restoring relationships citizens have the ability to create a cultural shift within our
communities. Condeluci describes cultural shifting by relating it to the structure of bridges. He
states that bridges are remarkable structures that are simple yet complex. They have the simple
task of connecting two points, yet the complexity of their engineering and development is far
more difficult than that simple task it provides. We see the need for the reconnection of people
to their communities, which seems a simple challenge, but the real challenge remains in moving
the “car” to the other side of the bridge without any “civic” hands to help push (Condeluci,
2002). We must be reminded that there are many barriers in creating connections within
communities, as communities might still be in a process of healing. Crabb (1997) suggest that
the most effective path to overpowering problems and becoming the persons we were intended to
be is reconnecting with God and with our community. However, reconnecting, at its most basic
healing levels, is no easy task to conquer as a community. To authentically reconnect a
disconnected soul to the lifeblood of community requires time, recognition of the problem, and
an effort to work through the process in much healthier ways. Communities that heal are
communities that investigate and uncover, that help people identify what truly is going on within
them, and positively encourage them to handle their struggles in a more successful way (Crabb,
1997).

However, could increasing trust as suggested by Uslaner and Brown (2005), through
restoring the hurt relationships, and increasing social connections, also bring about higher levels
of civic engagement within our communities so that citizens can address such issues as violence
and safety? As McKnight and Block (2010) state, the “connections among local people are what
awaken [the] power of families and neighborhoods to weave the social fabric of an abundant and
competent community” (p. 83). An abundant community harvests three core principles: gifts or
the raw material for community, associations or the process through which the gifts are shared,
and hospitality or what expands our already established collection of gifts. Each one of these
principles is reliant on each other in order to be effective and follow no specific step by step direction in their use. An abundant community recognizes that our values and capabilities are already nested within us, thus taking what a community already has and making it an asset for all. It places heavy emphasis on the concept that when citizens contribute they make their community grow, thus each person is worth something as each person has something to give (McKnight & Block, 2010). When citizens create abundant communities they open up space for communication that focuses on generosity and cooperation in order to produce more competent communities, that when created leaves us knowing that citizens have the power to define their own possibilities and future (McKnight & Block, 2010).

Citizens can foster positive change within communities and live it out when they create a space where they gather people with different perspectives and organize them into groups in which every one of the group is considered a peer with great value who will be a contribution to the group (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). It is also important that these groups have a clear purpose, a high level of engagement, and the power to decide and implement (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). This very idea is why citizens ask for forums that can provide helpful ways for them to work collectively with governments and officials on shared problems. Citizens would like the opportunity to participate in problem solving processes where they can be participants in creating the information that is needed to address community issues, as today they are showing a higher desire to create a sense of community where they can feel that they are all in this together (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). They hunger for intimate and one on one contact with the most complex issues that distress them and their community (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). In response to this need citizens need to shift their sense of community by focusing on citizens who value each other’s gifts and who show a true appreciation for creating stronger serious relationships. These
strong relationships happen by building trust, a process that will take time and only grow from the experience of gathering together as citizens (McKnight & Block, 2010). Fed up with the vicious cycles and failed political promises, citizens are creating new methods of involvement and thus turning to themselves for internal leadership and initiative. Chrislip and Larson (1994) state that the shift in democracy from “hostility to civility, advocacy to engagement, confrontation to conversation, from debate to dialogue, and from separation to community” (p. 4) is a shift in how citizens are viewing their communities and I believe it is highly intertwined with the values of ABCD, restorative practices, connectedness, and community space.

Allegheny County has an approximate population of 1.2 million. Pittsburgh crime statistics report an overall downward trend in crime based on data from 11 years with violent crimes increasing and property crimes decreasing. Based on this trend, the crime rate in Pittsburgh for 2011 is expected to be lower than in 2009. However, the violent crime rate for Pittsburgh in 2009 was higher than the national violent crime rate average by 130.23% and the city property crime rate in Pittsburgh was higher than the national property crime rate average by 25.75% (Pennsylvania State Police Reporting, 2012).

Many programs have been made available through the City of Pittsburgh, including the Pittsburgh Initiative to Reduce Crime—an initiative to reduce gun homicides focusing on a specific target population; Street Beat—an interactive talk show that informs citizens; The Citizen Police Academy—an initiative that brings citizens in to learn about the roles of police officers twice a year; and Zone safety meetings—a more formal gathering approach among hundreds of people to address broad community issues. Although these initiatives are needed they do not create connectedness among neighborhoods, as they are too infrequent, too large a group to do so, and not specifically focusing on each community. While some programs invite
citizens in to learn about community policing and to meet police officers and learn about their role within the community, others bring to the table only the most valuable stakeholders and often leave citizens at the bottom of the invitation. While these programs are effective in their role of awareness and preventative policing, they do not increase connectedness among neighbors. Block (2008) states that citizens’ constructed view of public safety needs serious alterations so that citizens have the ability to craft a safe neighborhood. It is not merely the allocation of higher police presence that creates a safer neighborhood in which to reside and build a family, it is the ability to connect neighbors that makes a neighborhood safe (Block, 2008). Citizens often rely on police as our universal solution to safety, but police are needed for crime, not safety of individuals and communities. Every neighborhood has opportunities for citizens to volunteer—block watch, safety meetings, handing out educational tools—but these opportunities are seen as crime prevention techniques that are often just utilized as a warning system. While this warning system helps us to identify criminals or prevent situations, there needs to be a shift in the view of public safety that focuses on neighborhood relatedness (Block, 2008). The way of approaching safety/violence through a restorative lens focuses on neighborhood assets and creating spaces for dialogue where citizens are able to learn from each other; it is not an approach that focuses on prevention techniques or solely the presence of police (Block, 2008).

The Foundational Theories of Support

Social capital. Scholars, public stakeholders, and citizens are all asking the same question: What is going on with the health of our civic life? Public officials are issuing reports with ineffective analysis of problems, while scholars are producing more and more reports and books. Current actions within our public life respond to contradictory modifications that either
enhance a shared democracy or weaken the true value of shared public life (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). Are our current actions endangering our future, or are they building a transformative shared democracy within our communities? The victory of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960’s set the stage for a promise of equality within the Constitution. Along with African Americans, many oppressed groups, like women, the poor, homosexuals, or the disabled, began to speak up and raise questions about equality, creating a nation where formerly excluded groups could now raise their voices about key issues. While citizens once only spoke in public forums for political issues, they are now using informal democracy, or less formal forums to address broad causes that look deeper into what is truly good for communities as a whole. The United States has now stepped away from politics that focus on narrow interests and has instead refocused their attention on how to be more inclusive for the public good (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). Could the social network of how people connect and get engaged in community affairs be recreating itself (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999)? While some suggest citizens are becoming more engaged, Skocpol and Fiorina (1999) suggest that many Americans are also becoming less involved with community affairs and politics, as evidenced by statistics like the 25% decrease in voting since the 1960’s. They also state that the notion of “trust that the federal government will do what is right” has fallen drastically, leaving citizens stepping away from the tables of engagement, or center of participation. Citizens who are actively involved often push their own views as a voice of what the whole community needs, even though there are many citizens’ views that go unrecognized, thus keeping those disengaged citizens at an even farther distance (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). Everyday Americans are merely spectators of a rather competitive sport between the public instead of active players.
It is imperative that citizens try to make sense of the conflicting issues of civic engagement within our American democracy. Many Americans blame the troubles of civic engagement on a loss of social ties within society (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). The very solution of solving this loss could be found in a renewal of group life (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). The academic world is now showing how their knowledge can impact public policy and it all started with sociologist James Coleman. Coleman (1988) was known for addressing public issues including schools, and families, but even more importantly he was recognized for his contribution of building “bridges between the individualist, market-oriented thinking of economists and sociologists concerned with social networks, norms, and values” (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999, p. 5). Coleman tagged this concept “social capital” and proclaimed that it had the ability to take social ties and shared norms and increase economic efficiency in various ways like better education, finding jobs, raising better socialized children, and even establishing careers for people (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). Others (Condeluci, 2002) believe that social capital is critical to a community as it gives citizens the ability to dissect problems more easily, lessens our tendency to be aggressive towards others, and also widens our awareness to many more resources and opportunities. Coleman started the conversation about the impact of social capital and left social researchers and economists with the beginning of the idea that social ties and culture affect citizens more than they are aware. According to Condeluci, Gooden Ledbetter, Ortman, Fromknecht, and Defries (2008), our social networks have the ability to not only keep us healthy and happy, but to also assist us in identifying other resources or opportunities that might have not otherwise been made available. Putnam (1995), a researcher who later continued the idea of social capital by Coleman argued that social capital within the United States has worn out significantly in the twentieth century, and thus many Americans are now “going at it
alone,” rather than gathering in the usual sports leagues, bowling leagues, church associations, volunteer groups, civic associations, or unions. Putnam leaves us with the idea that the problems with democracy are highly intertwined with the weakening of social trust and the unraveling of social connections throughout our communities. Coleman and Putnam have initiated the dialogue of public engagement that has been long overdue, leaving us to look deeper into theories of how social fabric within communities can equip us better to deal with the critical issues that plague us.

**The role of leadership within the community.** How do citizens create more engaged communities, or how do they restore relationships that never existed in the first place? Do they look to heroic leaders? Do they rely on their elected officials? Will effective leadership direct citizens towards more open solutions that place a heavy emphasis on relationships, engagement, social capital, and a sense of belonging? Are any leaders left who can manage the challenge? As Coleman (1995) states, many citizens now feel worn out, leaving civic participation dangerously eroded. One can view leadership within communities through many lenses, from shared, to authoritative, to transformative; however, for the purpose of this study I will narrow the many styles of leadership to focus on leadership as a relational process. This process will be formed and implemented by citizens whom those in their community might recognize as their passionate grassroots leaders.

Relational Leadership Theory, a relatively new term, is a framework for leadership that studies leadership as a social influence process. Uhl-Bien (2006) stated that the term is being utilized to describe a unique approach to leadership where leadership and organizations are viewed “as human social constructions that emanate from the rich connections and interdependencies of organizations and their members” (p. 655). Unlike traditional views of
leadership relationships where individuals were independent entities, the new view as “relational” starts with processes and not individual persons. Relational theories of leadership rest primarily on the concept that “posits that we exist in a mutual relationship with others and our surroundings and that we both shape, and are shaped by, our social experience in everyday interactions and conversations” (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1432). If citizens were to lead with a relational lens they would be actively leading through their relationships with those in the community while valuing experiences within the community and recognizing how those experiences could shape us both individually and communally. Relational leadership is not just about creating processes that focus on relationships, but it is also about making meaning of our relationships, creating action, developing and sharing knowledge with others, and sharing experiences in order to gather together everyone’s views (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). By utilizing these concepts of relational leadership citizens build relationships of trust and respect that encourage others to share their experiences, values, and expressions within their communities. As plans of action are initiated within our communities that utilize a relational framework, it is important that space is provided where meanings and actions are discussed between citizens in a dyadic dialogue where there is no authority but rather a common understanding of each other’s visions. This concept of “dialogism” as described by Cunliffe and Eriksen, or talking with people and not to them, is crucial as communicative spaces are developed within communities where the voices of citizens are understood and carried along further in their plans as they develop action for change (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). As we look to leadership as a relational process it is important that we also recognize who will carry out this framework that focuses on social processes, dialogue, and shared mutual understandings. Will it be the outside leaders such as public officials, elected leaders, or will it be everyday engaged
citizens that harvest the true power of social processes and relationships within their own communities and utilize that power from the inside out?

The Kellogg Foundation (as cited in Greenberg, 2000) stated that grassroots leaders are committed to working passionately with others and often seek support from and build relationships with local officials, neighbors, and family members. They are often leaders that embody the concepts of leadership as a relational process, as they are best described as those whom have an intense sense of awareness about their capacity to create activities and processes within their neighborhood that could lead to greater change. According to Greenberg grassroots leaders hold no formal position; they are instead identified by the issues that they so passionately support. The Kellogg Foundation (as cited in Greenberg, 2000), a major investor in research supporting grassroots leaders, suggests that grassroots leaders have strong roots tied to their community and an even stronger conviction for core issues within their community. They are motivated by intrinsic value, and find extrinsic motivation (money, recognition, etc.) of no value, as they lead by their passions and civic commitment to their community (Greenberg, 2000). This same civic obligation to engagement and well-being of their community are some of the key concepts that could serve grassroots leaders well as they create change within their communities that focuses on engagement, building relationships, and crafting an alternative dialogue to creating change. According to Mars (2009):

Grassroots leadership, in the broadest sense, is considered to be the collective efforts of actors at lower hierarchal levels of institutions and/or organizational fields to create and manage desired changes. This bottom up change process is characterized by the strategic mobilization of actors and resources, the alignment with existing networks and social movements, and the expansion of desired change across applicable environments. (p. 2)

Grassroots leaders are those citizens found frequenting their local coffee shop, engaging in everyday conversations with their neighbors on the way to work, involved in local activities, and
seeking a better quality of life by creating processes of change, mobilizing resources, and aligning the community’s wants. Much like relational leadership, grassroots leadership views leadership not as a sole task but rather a collective gathering and mobilization of key actors and assets within their communities (Mars, 2009). In order to seek out alternative ways to addressing critical issues that they care so deeply about they reach out to their family members, other citizens, public officials, and formal leaders, as they believe in the importance of building relationships in order to address complex problems within their community. Grassroots leadership, with a focus on leadership as relational process, could be the exact fuel that communities need in order to address their most difficult subjects where citizens feel valued, engaged, and heard.

**Social Disorganization Theory.** Without initiatives that address our lack of social connections or effective leadership processes, communities could very well be at risk for more problems, including higher poverty rates, increases in violence, and rising unemployment rates (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). According to Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) “social disorganization theory (SDT) focuses on the relationship between neighborhood structure, social control, and crime” (p. 1). While often communities are quick to blame “certain kinds of people” that only commit crimes, SDT focuses on certain neighborhoods that create the opportunity for crime to occur or not to occur (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). The term “social disorganization” better describes the process of a community that is unable to recognize goals and solve continuing complex issues. According to this theory the higher the presence of poverty, residential mobility, ethnic heterogeneity, and weak social networks, the lower the community’s capacity to have better control of people’s public behavior, therefore increasing the chances for crime to occur (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). Could this theory perhaps acknowledge the need for citizens to
exercise social control within their community by strengthening their social ties, or perhaps restoring their once strong relationships? Informal social control could include the simple activities of citizens informally surveying the streets, questioning suspicious activity or persons, informing others about misconduct, or cautioning citizens who are misbehaving within their community (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). By increasing social ties, such as networks of friendships, recreational activities between citizens, engagement at local community events or meetings, a resident’s capacity to engage in processes of social control over other individuals within the community could ultimately reduce crime and disorder within the community (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). This idea supports Coleman’s (1988) concept that strengthening the social fabric through activities such as civic associations, bowling leagues, or unions, will have communities benefit not only in increased education or jobs, but even a possible reduction of crime and disorder. Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) argued that indeed social and organizational characteristics of neighborhoods explain the fluctuations of crime rates and notes that crime is not specifically attributed to neighborhoods that harvest a certain type of individual that commits crimes. In fact they stated that the ability of neighborhoods to recognize their own capacity, values, and gifts as they maintain social control can ultimately lead to more control over violence within their community (Sampson, et al., 1997). Social control can be seen as a method of self-regulation of a group or in this case communities, in which the members of the community regulate themselves according to their own core values and practices that are established. Sampson et al. also propose that social control can be seen as interventions by peer groups to youth hanging around street corners, the confrontation of members of the community who are upsetting public space or property, or the monitoring of various play groups among the community. Informal social control can also encompass a community’s ability to respond to cuts,
needs, and issues effectively so that they promote the wellbeing of the neighborhood (Sampson et al., 1997). My study will ultimately rely on the concept that social disorganization theory suggests: that weak social ties can be attributed to higher incidents of crime, and thus I will address this concept by attempting to increase social ties through building communicative space.

The theories of positive deviance and appreciative inquiry. Jerry Sternin, a former professor of nutrition at Tufts University, carried with him a passion for reducing hunger and starvation in the world that eventually led him to look at the problem with a different lens. Sternin states (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010) that so often when looking at the issue of hunger their research team would bring outside experts in to analyze the issue. Instead of asking the community what they thought the issues were, the experts would just add the community agricultural techniques and solutions that they thought would be effective in solving the issue of hunger (Pascale et al., 2010). With now limited funds in communities to address the issue of hunger as they once did via outside sources, Sternin, along with his wife Monique had to seek out new ways to address the issue of hunger among villagers. They suggested that perhaps they could alleviate the issue of hunger by going within the villages suffering most drastically from hunger and finding those that had the best nourished children, thus learning from them about the things they were doing right. Sternin later coined this term “positive deviance” as it was a situation positively working, which was far from the norm of what the rest of the community was experiencing (Pascale et al., 2010). The villages then learned from the more healthy family by visiting their home to view what the mother was practicing, whether it was portioning meals better or adding more starches. Results of this new positive deviance approach dropped 65 to 85 % of malnutrition within every village that the Sternins worked within (Pascale et al., 2010). What if citizens were able to apply this same idea to what is going right in our communities, or
what are other citizens are doing that is allowing them to be more healthy and safe in our communities? The positive deviance view would then ask citizens to formulate questions about what is working in their community and how can they utilize those answers to better themselves individually and communally, instead of focusing on what is not working within their communities.

Positive Deviance is based on the idea that in each community certain individuals or entities own special practices or creative strategies that allow them to create a better solution to problems than other citizens within their community who possess the same accessibility to the same resources (Pascale et al., 2010). Researchers refer to these individuals as “positive deviants,” and suggest that these individuals have the capacity to develop successful strategies that allow accessibility to all involved, by proposing a new way of looking at the issue which allows citizens to practice the new positive deviant approaches in their own ways (Bolt, Carter, Goldsmith, Smallwood, & Ulrich, 2003). Let us look at the problems within communities as Jerry Sternin looked at starving villages—and look to what is successful, rather than what is not. Let us find our positive deviants within our neighborhoods.

The theory of Positive Deviance might also remind us of the once radical approach of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is an attempt to search for the best in people by focusing on systems, individuals, or organizations strengths and potential. Just as Positive Deviance stopped looking at the negative aspects of hunger, AI also leaves behind the focus on negativity and criticism and instead looks to creating a constructive system of focusing on the positive (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Cooperrider and Whitney explain it best by stating that when an artist is presented with a landscape the imagination is sparked not by searching for “what is wrong with the landscape” but instead by acknowledging those things of value worth valuing
and then being inspired. Appreciation of objects, individuals, or communities, it seems, draws our attention towards a more constructive use. This same idea can also be seen throughout the community development method of Asset Based Community Development where communities address common issues by recognizing the power that the community already holds, and thus focusing on each person’s unique gifts and the assets already inhabiting the community.

**Practices Within Communities**

**Asset based community development.** The shift in participation of democracy has also newly created a shift in how communities are viewed and their abilities to address their own issues from within. In North America, and other places, citizens often rely too heavily on others to fix their most compound problems. They expect doctors to heal them, nonprofits to save them, policemen to keep them safe, city officials to develop solid neighborhoods and fix broken ones, and teachers to educate their children (Green, Moore, & O’Brien, 2006). The need for a new approach to address these problems is growing increasingly more important as Green et al. (2006) state: “more agency leaders, researchers, and policy planners recognize that social and economic problems can only be addressed effectively by involving a larger part of the whole community” (p. 11). This new way of addressing complex community issues involves building bridges with local businesses, human services, and residents by creating partnerships in order to address the most complex issues within communities. Issues such as poverty or AIDS should not just include “some” agencies/individuals at the table dialoguing in the conversation, but should bring all to the table including schools, congregations, residents, and local agencies. The power of recognizing and creating partnerships brings to the table different views, better relationships, and more resources and capacity to make a better community. This new way of looking at communities is called Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), and it develops a wider
network of people working together to address critical issues and recognize the need to reach future goals (Green et al., 2006). Green et al. (2006) stated that the ABCD “point of view encourages people to recognize that their community is a glass half full of assets, not a glass half empty with needs” (p. 12). Is not Green then saying that citizens should recognize their positive deviants within the neighborhood, and focus on what is working, rather than focusing on what is not?

I often think of asset based community development as the long forgotten childhood event of “Show and Tell.” All too often we forget what we have in our cupboards, as they are as not as easily accessible up there, or down there, or we forget what is hidden below the first few shirts in our deep drawers, so we must recognize what is often forgotten. By identifying our community assets citizens are coming to the table with others and “showing and telling” what their community has, and how these assets can help mobilize them into a healthier community. Citizens often forget about their strong senior citizen population, their diverse arts foundations, or even their local 30 year old coffee shop and how those community assets can collaborate. By utilizing ABCD citizens are utilizing their community assets and resources which multiply in value when brought together and made to be productive. Green et al. (2006) stated that “Asset Based Community Development is like a closet organizer to make sense of the messiness of community life” (p. 12).

In building a bicycle there are usually key parts, such as wheels, chains, and handlebars, which can be reproduced thousands of times. Much like bicycles, successful community building also has three central pieces of development that often are the most common necessities to successfully connect and activate the foundation of community (Green et al., 2006). These three central pieces of productive community building are asset based, internally focused, and
relationship driven. Asset based is the concept of focusing on what can be revealed within a community that is productive in that community and that can be seen as a resource for progress (Green et al., 2006). For example, what do communities already have that will allow us to do something meaningful as in strong arts foundations, neighborhood financial resources, or a large pool of volunteers? Internally focused identifies that the greatest take off point for developing a community can be found from inside a community. Green et al. (2006) stated that “relationship driven reinforces the theory that communities only get strong through connections among people that permit people to give their gifts” (p. 13).

While the old way of community development concentrates on community problems and the deficits of local citizens—thus creating a “helper” and “client” dependency relationship, the new focus of ABCD focuses on an asset based approach that uncovers the labels brought upon communities from the outsider view, recognizes the skills and abilities of the local citizens and allocates resources available for them to act on their own behalf in creating a better community (Strickland, 2000). In order to establish this new approach, communities must tap into the interest and skills of the greater number of “others” such as organizations, citizens, and associations that are active in their neighborhoods. ABCD shows a different way of looking at communities: using an “assets map” instead of a “needs map,” where map makers recognize “what is there” and what their community already possesses that can assist them in dissecting key issues, fostering new solutions, and identifying goals (Green et al., 2006). While creating the asset maps, which identify community and individual assets in a picture diagram, citizens are asked to look deeper into “who and what do we have” and “what can they do” as evidenced by Figure 2.1 below (Green et al., 2006).
Figure 2.1 The Two Paths—Two Solutions (Needs -old way vs. Assets -new way)

Needs

(What is not there.)

Services to Meet Needs

Consumers

“Programs are the answer”

Assets

(What is there.)

Connections and Contributions

Citizens

“People are the answer”


How do citizens discover these assets that Green et al. (2006) ask them to map out into “community asset maps”? Assets are discovered by building relationships in the community (Green et al., 2006). Communities that are increasing their strength from the inside out have at their core an effort to “build up a wider circle of people who choose to take action for the common good” (Green et al., 2006, p. 30). There is extreme power in building relationships and those communities that are aiming in the direction of a healthier future are the communities that realize “together we are better” (Green et al., 2006). Once citizens have the consensus that together they can mobilize their community, they must keep in mind that citizens, local residents, their associations, and congregations, are at the center of development decisions in this process; as often prior decisions were once made by outside controllers who were deemed to have the solutions to the communities’ most chronic problems. This is a hard concept for the community
to implement as it requires a shift of responsibility and relocation of authority from the outsider agencies to citizens and agencies on the inside (Green et al., 2006).

In the mid-1980s under direction of the Allegheny Conference on Community development, a cluster of corporate and civic leaders from the greater Pittsburgh area were highly concerned about the worsening of economic and social conditions. The region of the Mon Valley was largely supported by employment and taxes from the steel industry, an industry now collapsed and relocated elsewhere. There was minimal effort of local initiated approaches by citizens to fuel these major concerns of community development. The local residents were often submissive in the efforts to establish community development efforts that would increase local capacity about these failing conditions (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). In response to a greater need the Allegheny Conference hired native Michel Eichler, a specialist in community organizing throughout the Pittsburgh region, to address the issue of regional community development. As stated by Gittell and Vidal (1998), Eichler developed a program that focused on “the creation of locally based human and organizational capacity throughout the Mon Valley” (p. 3); that would also establish collaborative relations between residents of the Mon Valley area and key corporate members. Eichler’s approach used a national tool known as the LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) program, a credible national program which focused on organizing development corporations to push the process of community development forward, and thus created a coalition of 17 community development corporations (CDCs), the Mon Valley Initiative, and many other new relationships among the Pittsburgh region (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). Being personally involved over the last 4 years in a variety of community collaborations and initiatives, I have had the experience of observing both outside and inside approaches and their value to communities as well as the greater area. While I value the importance of building coalitions and
relationships throughout the regions in order to share knowledge and mobilize regional assets, I feel the strategy of looking outside in is no longer working within our communities. I am personally aware of the Mon Valley Initiative and have worked with them frequently as a member of the Pittsburgh Initiative to Reduce Crime. Although the Mon Valley Initiative is a powerful resource, it is 9 miles outside of the city, making it difficult for citizens to take advantage of most of its resources. The initiative focuses on many reoccurring needs, such as housing, workforce development and job training, which are just as prevalent in other neighborhoods. Perhaps communities could each allocate or ignite these resources, networks, and assets within their own neighborhoods to increase their community development, as many times communities harvest these resources but unfortunately are not aware of them. As Green et al. (2006) recommend, a shift in responsibility is needed, from starting from the outside to starting from within. Others might call this shift a focus on building a stronger “community capacity” (Minkler, Wallerstein, & Wilson, 2008). Community capacity is the notion that the way a community acts might affect its capacity to identify, mobilize, and effectively handle social and public health issues (Minkler et al., 2008). If citizens perhaps increased their community capacity by more active participation, shared leadership, creating more rich support networks, recognizing skills and resources, they might be better able to deal with community issues without external assistance. What if a community in the Pittsburgh region with a strong community capacity gathered themselves together without seeking outside sources to “put them together,” and why can citizens not establish citizen action without having an organization to fuel the citizen participation? Why does one organization have to formulate solutions; cannot citizens all not come together and propose solutions collaboratively without solely relying on an organization to take the reins? It is true that the LISC model assembles private and public
resources in order to assist local initiatives; but what if engaged citizens were able to coordinate and access those same resources, expertise, and partners to leverage their own capacity and investment without relying on outside help but instead working from the inside out and utilizing approaches such as ABCD and restorative practices?

In order to mobilize our community in the ABCD approach citizens must tap into basic components of their communities—individuals, congregations, associations, institutions—businesses, nonprofit agencies, government agencies, the physical world and the local economy (Green et al., 2006). It is often easier for us to recognize these components by creating an asset map that displays the assets and their connectivity to each other. As Green et al. (2006) state, a community’s history and its current vision is the glue that holds these pieces together. In mobilizing community citizens need to ask people “what are your gifts?”, and then connect those gifts to available opportunities in order for citizens to contribute. The key point is to make sure that citizens are asking each other what they can contribute and connecting those gifts to better the community, as one of the most central focuses of building our communities is conversation. Without conversation citizens are failing to recognize the importance of each other as a whole. Green et al. (2006) stated that “people turning to one another and asking each other what is important to them and what they have to offer to a common effort to work to get what is important” (p. 31), is an action of ABCD that must occur so that citizens acknowledge each other’s gifts.

**Following Our Asset Map**

So now that citizens have a map of what their community owns, how will they utilize that map so that the power of the mapping process is not negated? Words on a piece of paper have no power, as it is the power around relationships and a common purpose that fuel the words. The
central idea of creating an asset map is to construct relationships that mobilize a community’s assets, identify possible contributions from citizens, and the passion and motivation that creates action. It is important that in mobilizing your map you invite offerings that make sense from the contributor’s point of view (Green et al., 2006). Each citizen within a community comes forth with their own unique gift which they are able to offer the group. The mapping process starts off with a direct statement of what the group wants to achieve, what concerns it wants to address, what future goals it wants to reach, and what gifts they want to recognize for the good of the group in relation to their community. Once the group has a clear vision, the group can then identify citizens to invite or connect with and “connectors” that can link the group to these appointed citizens or groups. A connector is someone who knows a considerable number of people and knows many more people than the average person might know (Gladwell, 2002). Connectors can be labeled as individuals that belong to many different worlds, or life worlds; they make a difference by connecting them and leveraging their relationships (Gladwell, 2002). They are individuals who help to extend information and trends throughout our community (Gladwell, 2002), and thus they might be sought out when identifying citizens, stakeholders, or resources that the group might need linked up with. By establishing these connections citizens begin the process of creating relationships in order to begin mobilizing our maps.

It is important that the mapping process focuses on learning conversations that highlight assets. Citizens must also keep in mind that what matters most during the creation of asset mapping is a “genuine interest in learning how an issue looks from others’ point of view and a desire to offer as many people and groups as possible the best chance to contribute to developing their community’s capacity to deal with an important issue” (Green et al., 2006, p. 122). The primary reason for connecting with others in your community is not to assign and delegate a list
of “to do’s” but to activate the unique spectrum of your community’s assets to address a complex issue (Green et al., 2006).

Social Capital and Asset Based Community Development

Social capital can often be referred to as trust, concern for one’s associates, and a willingness to abide and live by the norms recognized by one’s community and to punish those of the community who do not (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Much like ABCD, social capital often encompasses recognition of assets and thus its importance is increasing in the role of development (Dhesi, 2000). According to Dhesi (2000) “a broad consensus is emerging that development initiatives should take into account the role of social capital, that is, shared knowledge, understandings, values, norms, traits and social networks to ensure the intended results” (p. 201). Social capital is naturally social and much like ABCD as it is mostly brought into being through the collective actions of many people (Dhesi, 2000). It is not exclusively the property of any single person who profits from it, rather social capital only exists when it is shared and used for the public good. Social capital collects greater strength when used but is ineffective when not used (Dhesi, 2000).

Putnam (1995) shares the same idea about the power of social capital and believes that educational achievement, the health of a community, the power and strength of local economics within that community, can be heavily dependent on the level of social capital that is nested in a community. He attributes this idea to the unity of citizens within a community or the quality of relationships that exist, and defines this as social capital. If the concepts that Putnam (1995) shares are indeed correct then improving safety, reducing violence, increasing the importance of education and health of a community can be addressed by creating a communicative space where as Block (2008) stated, citizens have “the experience of being connected to those around them
and know that their safety and success are dependent on the success of all others” (p. 5). Sharing social capital can be implemented throughout the framework of ABCD, and utilized collectively in this framework where unity assists in sharing the value of restoring relationships in communities.

The Shift Towards a More Restorative Justice

Since the September 11 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in NY, the U.S. society has taken on a more intrusive approach as to how citizens or communities should respond to wrongdoing that happens in our communities or our nation. When a crime occurs, what should really happen? How should communities act? What relationships do communities need to restore? What does justice entail and what should be our response? These are all questions to be further discussed in the next section. I believe that the western legal system has shaped our view of criminals and justice within our society drastically and thus we are left with the questions above about what really needs to happen.

While citizens recognize the legal system’s approach to justice and its strengths they also acknowledge this system’s limits and failures (Zehr, 2002). The western legal system’s aim is to settle disputes and interpret laws for and in between citizens. This complex system was created so that justice could be provided to regulate situations in government, as well as in the day to day situations of citizens. All too often victims, offenders, and members of the community feel that justice does not correctly meet their needs. On the opposing side, lawyers, judges, probation and parole officers, and prison staff, also consistently express frustration with the legal system’s approach to wrongdoing. Zehr (2002) states that many feel that “the process of justice deepens societal wounds and conflicts rather than contributing to healing or peace” (p. 3).
In today’s society there is a lack of informalization on all levels, from seeing the Physician’s Assistant instead of seeing your actual doctor, to filing a complaint with the city instead of talking to your area representative. This movement towards decreased value of building human relationships is also felt at the community level, leaving citizens with even fewer opportunities to create valuable relationships. While we once spoke to neighbors about key issues and were able to resolve them without formal action or involvement, we no longer have the strong relationships and community support to do so. Viana (2000) stated that “disputes, disagreements and annoyances that once were handled face-to-face between neighbors are now, often anonymously, brought to law enforcement agencies for suppression and control” (p. 1).

Communities were not always run this way, as up until the mid-19th century the community played a key role in establishing its values and codes of behavior as well as enforcing them. The wrongful neighbor was unofficially expected to appear in front of congregation and community to confess his or her sins. This method, used as repentance, was necessary to bring about forgiveness, reconciliation and reintegration back into their community (Viana, 2000). This process was seen as very informal and did not display any rules of evidence or formal procedures, much like the ones that have become so significant in today’s criminal justice system. Viana (2000) states that the goal of the process clearly:

[It] was, first, to reintegrate the offender within the community through public shaming, confrontation, confession and forgiveness and second, to rebuild and strengthen the community ties that had been damaged. This informal process signified a homogenous community that embraced the same faith, values and beliefs. (p. 1)

With the arrival of the railroad, industry, and the spread of “progress” throughout the region the regularity of handling issues within communities was shattered. The former tight control that communities had over its members, mostly through established churches, groups, and organizations, crumbled when people of different races, faiths, cultures, and ethnic
backgrounds, started to surface throughout communities (Viana, 2000). Due to this change the locals felt more liberated by the arrangement of opportunities that did not exist once before, and thus sought out different chances to relocate. While community members were once limited to dealing with the sanctions and wraths of their own community, with more accessibility to opportunities they could now just hop a train to the north to avoid the consequences and tags their community once placed upon them. With the loss of community harmony and basic practices, the new model—now known as the current legal justice system that we see throughout Pittsburgh today—became the controlled process of dealing with wrongdoing. This new model now addressed issues by using a third party, i.e. the state courts, or criminal justice system, as this now had become necessary in order for them to settle disputes that were once resolved informally between neighbors. With the new systems, some groups whose opinion often carried less importance with the old system—women, minorities, and the poor—now gained more status and power under the new systems as they were protected by a new system or court that identified them as valuable and worthy people (Viana, 2000).

**Defining Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is a new approach to address some of the very needs and limitations within the criminal justice system previously described. Restorative justice is a theory of justice that focuses on repairing or restoring the harm caused by criminal behavior. By using this theory, responses to crime include taking inclusive steps by involving all stakeholders involved in the crime and transforming the process into a nontraditional approach where all parties gather together to restore the damage caused (Zehr, 2002). Restorative justice was created as an initiative to deal with burglary and other property crimes, often crimes deemed as minor, however, today it is being utilized with increasingly more severe crimes such as assault, rape,
and even murder (Zehr, 2002). The new paradigm of restorative justice defines crime, not as a violation of state or property, but a violation of relationship, or a violation of one person by another. It also promotes the importance of dialogue and negotiation, with a focus upon problem solving for the future, rather than placing blame for past behaviors or crimes (Umbreit, 1989). Instead of imposing severe punishment, it shifts the view and emphasizes restitution as means of restoring both parties through reconciliation and restoration (Umbreit, 1989).

Restorative justice often can be confused with the initiative of community justice, and so I find it important to highlight their relationship. Community justice is a neighborhood-based, informal, more open, framework that shifts the locus of justice intervention towards those most affected by the crime (Barajas, 1995). While the framework of restorative justice is similar, community justice focuses more on neighborhood-based, less official services that shift the locus of intervention to those most affected by crime occurring or that occurred (Bazemore & Schiff, 2001). Community justice involves high citizen engagement and can take the form of crime prevention and justice activities like community policing, community prosecution, community courts, community corrections, and various other initiatives. This focus seeks to prevent issues (Bazemore & Schiff, 2001). Restorative justice is a shift in thinking that supports the idea, much like Umbreit’s (1989), that crime is a violation of individuals, communities, and relationships (Bazemore & Schiff, 2001). Therefore, restorative justice processes can include responses to crime such as victim-offender mediation, family group conferences, victim-offender dialogue, informal decision making, or other interventions, processes, or initiatives that are designed to include victim, offender, and community in creating a plan for the harm caused. While restorative and community justice carry some of the same principles they differ in some areas as often restorative justice is seen as a way of reacting to crime that has already occurred and
community justice is seen as prevention of future crime (Bazemore & Schiff, 2001). Restorative justice addresses the whole response to crime, including its impact on communities and victims, as well as the offenders (Bazemore & Schiff, 2001).

**Restorative Practices**

Block (2008) states that restorative community practices recognize that “taking responsibility for one’s own part in creating the present situation is the critical act of courage and engagement, which is the axis around which the future rotates” (p. 10). The heart of restorative community building is not economic wealth, political discourse or the capability of leadership; “it is a citizen’s willingness to own up their contribution, to be humble, to choose accountability, and to have faith in their own capacity to make authentic promises to create the alternative future” (p. 48). Just as restorative justice promotes the importance of dialogue, negotiation, problem solving, and no blaming, restorative community practices promote a language of healing, relatedness and belonging without embarrassment (Block, 2008). Much like restorative justice, restorative community practices do not place blame but rather bring to the table a new possibility with the central question “What can we create together?” This idea of creating something positive to address the issue under attention only surfaces from the social space citizens construct when they gather together to build community (Block, 2008).

Restorative community practices and restorative justice both place heavy emphasis on one’s own responsibility for the situation, whether it is getting offenders to take responsibility for their actions or getting families to take responsibility for their kid’s actions (Bazemore & Schiff, 2001). In restorative justice responsibility is often coined “restorative responsibility” and can be deemed passive or active. The western justice system, the system we currently see being used throughout the Hill District today, has mostly been concerned with a passive responsibility as
one is summoned after the crime and either held responsible for the crime or not. With this approach there is little connection between conduct and damage. The different approach of restorative justice places weight on active responsibility which involves the offender in taking responsibility to repair the harm caused and to restore the relationships that were damaged as a result. Much like Block’s (2008) central question, restorative justice does not focus on deficits but instead produces the central question “what is to be done?” Or, what can citizens create from this, instead of looking at what has been done (Bazemore & Schiff, 2001). This might be a lens in which citizens associate a glass half full approach, instead of a glass half empty approach.

Prior to the restorative justice movement society often focused on the damage done by the crime and who was responsible for it, while putting little emphasis on repairing the hurt done. By using a restorative lens citizens now instead look at how they can address the damage caused by the crime done in a positive framework in order to repair the relationships or harm done.

The approach of restorative justice is not just being used in the justice system but is also being spread throughout schools, workplaces, and religious institutions. Talking circles, which are often used in restorative justice, are being advocated for use in restorative practices as a way to work through, resolve, and transform conflicts (Zehr, 2002). Talking circles were first initiated by a judge from Canada whose court first displayed circles in a legal ruling. Since then the talking circle approach has been acknowledged as a peacemaking circle and has been used for various purposes. Talking circles are used to address workplace conflicts, school conflicts, criminal sentencing, and even community dialogue (Zehr, 2002). During the talking circle process participants often pass around a “talking piece” to be sure that each participant speaks one at a time, ensuring that their voice is being listened too. Talking circles often begin with the group establishing a core set of values or expectations of the group in order to ensure respect and
integrity, and are often facilitated by one or two “circle keepers” to be sure that the initial values are being met. Others might use “conferences” as a way to build and heal communities affected with crime. Conferences are usually comprised of victims and offenders. In this process the victim and offender is worked with individually until they both agree to be brought together in a conference like setting that results in an agreement for the offender’s restitution. Family members or community members may be present during these conferences but their role is seen as minimal (Zehr, 2002). Zehr (2002) states that in:

a culture where the western legal and justice systems have often been replaced or suppressed with the normal traditional justice and conflict resolution processes, restorative justice is providing a framework to reexamine and sometimes reactivate these once old traditions in many sectors. (p. 5)

Verity and King (2007) believe that while building trust within communities, restoring damaged social relations, and spreading the ways in which violence and community conflict are understood are some of the key concepts of restorative justice, they also believe that these same concepts can be used in the activities of community development. Just as there is in any relationship, team, family, or close group, communities too can have conflict which presents practitioners with various challenges when implementing change that requires community wide engagement. In creating both restorative justice and restorative communities citizens are asked to change their view on the recognition of the hurt and how it can affect relationships and connectedness.

The Relationship Between Restorative Practices and Leadership

Leadership has to do with relationships, as most leadership occurs in an interactive process between individuals or groups. This is perhaps why leadership today is taking on a different angle known as Relationship Leadership Theory (RLT). Relational leadership theory is a relatively new concept which involves looking at leadership by focusing on identifying
qualities of individuals as they participate in social relationships, as well as looking at leadership as a process of social construction in which a better understanding of our being arises (Uhl-Bien, 2006). There seems to be a relational link when we look at leadership as a relational process and on creating a better community as a process of relationships. The question I want to explore further in this section is how is leadership as a relational process used within communities? Much like relational leadership the way of addressing issues within our communities in a restorative way should be seen as “a process” of growth which involves self and growth fostering interactions. Relational theory, an idea first proposed by psychologists and psychiatrists at the Stone Center at Wellesley College, suggested that growth and development can now be attributed to connection, collectivity, and interdependence, rather than the prevailing model which focused on separation, individuation, and independence (Fletcher, 1998). In other words, we no longer grow and develop from a sole leader who separates him/herself from followers, but rather we develop more fully when we engage in leadership as a relational process that is collective, connected, and reliant on the exchange of mutual social processes to flourish. Fletcher (1998) also suggested that growth and development does not just occur by solely being engaged in the social process, but rather engaged in a two directional relational interaction that displays mutual empowerment and empathy. By participating in this mutual relational interaction and approaching the social process with a shared vulnerability, the research participants can approach the process with a sense of wanting to grow from the experience, as well as a sense of responsibility to contribute to the growth of the each other in the social process. This point of mutual relational practice will be extremely important as we bring together participants in an engagement process where they share gifts and participate in a greater dialogue in order to create more restorative communities.
Block’s (2008) heavy emphasis on relationships and accountability is similar to some of the concepts introduced by Relational Leadership Theory. As stated earlier, the Relational Leadership Theory approach views persons, leadership and other relational components as created in processes (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This concept of not looking at individual entities but rather what relational processes can create is much like Block’s (2008) idea of an individual and communal possibility. According to his idea, restoration begins when citizens think of community as a possibility, not an entity, but rather a “declaration of the future that we choose to live into” (p. 48). Block proposes that we look at leadership not as an authoritative process of achieved results, but rather in a restorative context which presents leadership as a process in which we build relationships and create a greater future by gathering together and interacting in social processes to exchange individual gifts and mutual learning. Fletcher (2004) states that leadership as a relational process occurs in and through relationships and networks of influence, which is why interactions between individuals, or gathering citizens together (Block, 2008), is of great importance. In relational leadership theory, the perspective of relationships being at the core of leadership moves beyond the traditional leader-follower approach and places responsibility not on one formal leader or person, but rather concentrates on the idea that leadership can occur wherever, with more emphasis on processes and relationships of those gathering together. This idea of responsibility of informal leadership within groups is comparable to Block’s (2008) notion that it “is a citizen’s willingness to own up their contribution, to be humble, to choose accountability, and to have faith in their own capacity” (p. 48) in order to create a better future for their community or group.

With emphasis placed on citizens to own up to their part or to be accountable for leading within their own community rather than seeking outsiders or leaders to fix them, it is no surprise
that these ideas can be mixed within the theory of Grassroots Leadership. Grassroots Leadership is a leadership style that involves the collective action of even the citizens whom society tags as being the lowest in hierarchical structure, in order to produce change that is initiated from the bottom of the informal structure upward (Mars, 2009).

Much like the ideas of Block (2008) and Uhl-Bien (2006), Grassroots Leadership is not reliant on established positional authority but instead focuses on the mobilization of actors and groups outside of dominant power structures. Grassroots Leadership takes on a different focus of empowering not through individual leadership (Mars, 2009), or individual entities (Uhl-Bien, 2006), but through a process of collective action (Mars, 2009), or communal possibilities (Block, 2008). Just as Block stated that citizens need to bring to the conversation all different resources and organizations in order to create a better future, grassroots leadership states that they need to create a network of similar, but otherwise disconnected, actors and groups in order to create results of socially-oriented change (Mars, 2009). Grassroots leaders are often the life of communities working to address familiar issues like affordable housing, education, hunger, and poverty. They are effective in providing solutions to these problems and offer valuable insights because they are the citizens that know first-hand and are faced with these issues daily. It is no surprise that even with billions of dollars donated to third world countries there are still many families living in hunger, however new approaches to hunger with grassroots leadership have made great strides. The Hunger Project, founded in 1977, was a nonprofit established to fight the rising problem of world hunger. The organization recognized that rather than being merely another relief organization, that it must let go of the past notions of working against hunger in the typical top down fashion as used by most organizations. In 1990, they took effective grassroots action with a people centered approach known as Strategic Planning in Action (SPIA), and
engaged 21,000 villages in the grassroots movement to empower individuals in improving their health, nutrition, and education (The Hunger Project, 2012). Much like The Hunger Project, the aim of this study was to empower individuals from the inside of villages, communities, or neighborhoods, to improve their own environment into being a better more safe and healthier place to be. Grassroots Leadership could be useful as it collectively engages citizens whose voices were once unnoticed, and brings them to the table in which they restore damaged relationships, increase social connections, and empower civic engagement.

**Restorative Practices in Other Settings: Schools**

Restorative practices are beginning to develop in schools due to a growing international practice in restorative justice with offenders, victims, and communities. Schools all over the world are examining new solutions to concerns about the indiscipline, disaffection, bullying, abuse, and violence among students. The simple principle of restorative justice practices is the need to restore good relationships when there has been conflict or harm, and develop a community that reduces the possibilities of such conflict arising. This principle is a new approach that is beginning to be more commonly accepted in various other settings.

SaferSanerSchools, a program of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), was developed in response to an apparent crisis in American education and in communities as a whole. Ted Wachtel, IIRP president, states that “rising truancy and dropout rates, increasing disciplinary problems, violence and even mass murders plague American schools” (Mirsky, 2007, p. 5). Mirsky (2007) stated that “the IIRP believes that the dramatic change in behavior among young people is largely the result of the loss of connectedness and community in modern society” (p. 5). As schools continue to grow and become less personal,
educators and staff feel less connected to the educational community, the student’s families, and the very students they teach (Mirsky, 2007).

Restorative practices “involve changing relationships by engaging people: doing things WITH them, rather than TO them or FOR them—providing both high control and high support at the same time” (Mirsky, 2007, p. 1). At schools that model the framework of RP, the educational community often provides an enormous amount of support, understanding, listening, and are helpful in various ways to help each student understand their behavior and how it affects others, but at the same time they are not to tolerate inappropriate behavior and are to hold the students accountable for their actions (Mirsky, 2007).

Restorative practice is not a new method in the toolbox of relational practice; it merely represents a fundamental change in returning to the basics of relationships and focusing on the nature of relationships in schools. It is the increased social fabric in relationships in schools, not the specific strategies discussed above, that brings about meaningful authentic change.

As Cameron and Thorsborne (2001) suggest, restorative practices “focus our attention on relationships between all members of the school community and teaches us the value of relationships in achieving quality outcomes for students” (p. 193). A restorative practice refocuses our attention on the quality of connectedness and relationships between all involved in the school community. Blood and Thorsborne (2005) state that repairing the harm “forces us to learn from the ‘experience that has led to the conflict and examine our attitudes, beliefs and behaviors which have contributed to it’” (p. 3). Restorative practice does not just prove effective in schools because of its restorative justice roots but rather because of its collection of proactive and responsive processes which form healthier, more stable relationships and takes a relational
approach to problem solving and conflict resolution. This new but different approach offers the best environment for the development of healthy relationships within schools.

Creating Restorative Communities

The framework of restorative communities is making its way into social science. Restorative practices, as an emerging field, may gradually become a primary tool for building relationships and social capital, for executing decisions, and for responding to conflict and wrongdoing within communities. This same idea of restorative practices can be attributed to the shift in leadership styles, like grassroots leadership and relationship leadership theory that focuses not on formal authoritative styles of leadership, but rather leadership in communities that involves collective action (Mars, 2009) and focusing on the social influences that create more restorative communities (Uhl-Bien, 2006). So what would a restorative community look like to an outsider? What leadership styles would surface as restorative practices are implemented in bringing together conversations about safety and violence? Restorative approaches vary in communities, organizations, education, healthcare, social work or criminal justice. More recently restorative practices in communities are defined as communities where citizens choose to identify their responsibility in the present situation and come together in processes that create a different future (Block, 2008).

According to Wachtel (2005) when thinking about a restorative community we must:

Imagine a community where people regularly express their feelings to one another, including anger, in a safe and respectful way, and where conflict usually reaches quick resolution. Imagine a community where people routinely confront one another for their inappropriate behavior and where wrongdoers are expected to reflect on what they have done, whom they have harmed and how they have harmed them, and then suggest how they can repair that harm. Imagine a community where people routinely run circle groups for themselves and their peers to help manage behavior and even deal with chronic issues, like substance abuse. Imagine a community where managers earnestly solicit employees’ views in making decisions, explain decisions when they are made and clearly spell out their expectations. Imagine a community in which those in authority actively
engage families and sometimes extended families in critical issues, such as setting goals for treatment or deciding where an abused young person should live or planning how to support a family member in maintaining sobriety. Imagine a community where people minimize gossip and try to deal with concerns and conflicts in an honest and direct fashion. (p. 1)

Using the kinds of restorative practices just described, citizens have the ability to change communities in a more empowering way. According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices, this perspective is emerging as a new social science that is called “restorative practices” and is defined “as the science of restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision making” (IIRP, 2012, para. 8). Why are restorative practices so different? Restorative practices foster the expression of affect or emotion. They also foster emotional bonds and connectedness. The late Silvan S. Tomkins’s (1991) research about psychology of affect declared that human relationships are healthiest and at their prime when there is free expression—which entails a process of decreasing the negative, exploiting the positive, but always allowing free expression in the process of these relationships (Tomkins, 1991). Donald Nathanson (1998), director of the Silvan S. Tomkins Institute, further proposed that it is through the ongoing mutual conversation of communicated affect that citizens build a sense of community. He further implies that citizens also create community by crafting the emotional bonds and relationships that link them all together (Nathanson, 1998). Restorative practices such as gatherings, circles and conferences, as described earlier, offer a safe setting and space for people to express and “give-and-take” these powerful emotions (Nathanson, 1998). A conference is a forum where individuals deal with wrongdoing by having all participants speak, express their feelings, and have a part in the outcome (O’Connell, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010). These restorative practices are facilitated by using a different language and a different approach for
presentation. As Block (2008) says, “the idea of community restoration becomes concrete when we grasp the importance of language” (p. 52), a language that helps citizens begin the process of restoration within communities by creating a different kind of conversation then what was used in the past. Therefore it is important for us to create spaces like circles, conferences, small group gatherings, where this different kind of conversation can occur, as dialogue and “intentional gatherings” have the authority to move the environment from punitive communities to more restorative communities (Block, 2008).

These spaces that Block (2008) refers to in restorative communities are the same spaces I created by developing intentional gatherings where researchers and participants could redesign their understanding of complex issues that they are engaged in by utilizing the method of action research (McIntyre, 2008). Much like the theories of restorative practices, by including citizens in participation and decision making both action research and restorative practices have the ability to change communities in a more empowering, action oriented, and theory supported way. The similarities in these theory based concepts, such as participation, co-development, and citizen engagement, have guided me in conducting my research on implementing communicative spaces through developing intentional gatherings. These gatherings were places in which citizens could address complex issues, such as public safety, by utilizing the method of action research and study circles. The gatherings also incorporated leadership styles such as relational leadership theory and grassroots leadership; theories such as ABCD and restorative practices to rebuild relationships and increase social fabric within communities.

**Value of communicative space in communities.** A communicative space is a proposed “space” where issues or problems are positively dissected for discussion. Participants involved in this space experience their interactions as a way of fostering the democratic expression of diverse
views where people are encouraged and permitted to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what they should do about these issues or problems (Wicks & Reason, 2009). Action researchers will usually refer to engaging with participants in an ongoing cycle of action and reflection. This process helps to address issues of practical and demanding importance in the field in which they are working/researching (Wicks & Reason, 2009). Researcher Kurt Lewin often referred to this process as a spiral of steps, each of which involves a circle of planning, action and fact finding about the outcome of the action (Wicks & Reason, 2009). Researchers opening a communicative space can involve creating a space for the expression of participant’s interpersonal needs and also the development of social contexts in which those participants’ needs are met and heard (Wicks & Reason, 2009).

Bodorkos and Pataki (2009) refer to communicative space as a “social arena for constructive dialogue and creative problem-solving among stakeholders on issues of common concern” (p. 314). The effectiveness and quality of communicative space can often be judged or measured by the building of trust and working relationships, the space created for multiple forms of communication, and the construction of common ground for action (Bodorkos & Pataki, 2009). Bodorkis and Pataki (2009) also stated that communicative spaces can “further be judged by the extent to which they provide a sense of agency for each person participating, ideally leading to the transformation of power relationships in the direction of a greater democracy, and broader and more equal participation” (p. 314). With those concepts in mind it is important that they be considered in regards to transformations that occurred, when evaluating the quality of communicative space. Creating open communicative spaces and informal communities is important as communities dig deeper into the most complex issues affecting them today. Bodorkos and Pataki (2009) stated that “the concepts of participatory democracy,
communicative rationality and discursive communities require gearing the sustainability agenda towards social learning processes with a real participatory nature rather than projected sustainable future outcomes” (p. 315).

**Creating Direct Change and Spill-Over Change**

As a result of creating communicative spaces it is expected that change will occur as a result of the dialogue. This change could happen directly as participants of the study become more aware of available community assets or resources in which they can engage more. However, as found in the data and referenced in Chapter IV it is possible that spill-over change might occur as well. For the purpose of this study we will refer to spill-over effect as a change in behavior that occurs indirectly from the initial source of motivation. For example, a person not initially involved in the study circle sessions might begin to volunteer at a local shelter not because of their involvement in the direct dialogue about the shelter via the study circle sessions, but because a peer involved in the study circles shared with them their experience and invited them to participate. This effect could also be seen as a catalytic affect, or rather an affect that creates reactions as a result of influence from a person or catalyst (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). However, I do not view spill-over change as a reaction to influence from others but rather a transformative experience shared with a small group of peers that causes a new awareness or perspective of how they can help create change. The way in which spill-over effect occurs, by sharing stories and experience to create true change, displays a more detailed and authentic difference between how one might view a catalytic influence of change.

**Complications With Research**

There are, however, some critiques of the restorative justice model when used within the framework of restorative practices. The nature of community can be viewed as drastically
different within the two models. While restorative justice focuses on bringing together the victim/offender and those who support both—restorative practices in communities looks to involve more entities and support in which there is no victim/offender dialogue among the gathering process (Verity & King, 2008). At the core of the process of restorative justice is the offered opening for both the victim and offender to have the opportunity to share their stories. The strength of this approach in community development is that attention can be focused on identifying the harm done to individuals and communities and thus this creates an opportunity for healing of the community (Verity & King, 2008). However, despite the differences in who is specifically sitting at the table, both practices are bringing together communities to acknowledge harm, whether physical harm by offender, social harm, distrust, etc., done within the “community,” and how to actively identify some healing actions in fixing the harm in order to restore relationships. In using the restorative justice lens the aim was to restore the relationships caused by the hurt, while in the community, it might be used to restore relationships caused by a lack of attention to complex problems, or neglect within the community. Verity and King (2008) state that:

Community-based restorative gatherings, in which community members name their experience and the effects on them, have their hurt recognized and recognize the commonality of the experience and work together on strategies to repair the harm, offer the opportunity to break the cycles of silence about these issues. (p. 479)

By using this approach to address issues within communities and open the gathering to incorporate more perspectives, communities could bring many more aspects of confronting harm into the dialogue, but also bring many more complicating factors with the incorporation of more views. Verity and King (2008) suggest that if communities and citizens widen their processes they might also address such issues like employment for their youth, environmental
improvements or methods to increase opportunity for social connections in communities where the social fabric is broken or in need of restoration.

With the restorative justice model being primarily founded within the criminal justice system and systematically guided by social control agencies of the states they are in, its relation to community development can be relatively complex, as communities do not particularly have a guided system in control but rather have a mesh of influences in control including: class, race, power, or hierarchical status. The nature of communities which I addressed throughout this research is not founded or controlled by any governing agencies or regulations, but rather made up of complex social classes, sometimes uneven hierarchical social class culture, and many other social and power underpinnings that span communitywide. This is perhaps one of the biggest critiques in utilizing the approach of restorative practices within communities.

**Integrative Summary**

Theories of community development, civic engagement, and social capital have forced us to look further into how to be more effective within our very own communities. Positive deviance, social disorganization theory, and social capital all focus on the value of creating relationships and recognizing what is working within our communities rather than what is not. These theories are only effective when citizens are kept at the core of engagement and are given tools to create the practices of restoring relationships and building assets by opening up communicative spaces where a different kind of conversation occurs and fosters each citizen’s contribution. It is important that citizens recognize the inter-relatedness (See Figure 2.2) of civic engagement, social capital, social control, and asset based community development as they move from being “stuck communities” to communities that embrace a new sense of belonging where
relationships, gifts and assets are brought to the surface in order to create better solutions to complex community issues.

*Figure 2.2 Venn Diagram of interrelated concepts within the study.*

**Conclusion**

After review of the literature that supports community engagement and the role of relationships and social fabric within communities, more questions within this framework have surfaced. Is the theory of restorative justice an effective basis for restorative practices? Is involving all stakeholders and creating different conversations an effective way of dealing with
wrongdoing or other issues within communities? Is the problem of crime really a lack of connectedness in communities? Is intentionally gathering citizens to address complex issues really increasing the strength of social fabric within communities? Will strengthening the social fabric and connectedness in our communities create better communities to live in? Does involving the “whole” help to move communities from a state of “stuck” to a state of action? Will formal leadership from the outside be the rescue line for our neighborhoods, or will internal collective leadership pull neighborhoods out of their most complex issues? Bazemore and Schiff (2001) stated that the very act of restoring communities “suggests a return to some pre-existing state” (p. 136). With this in mind, are communities attempting to seek out a quest for recovery of old traditions or ways, or are they trying to create a tradition of authority, genuine human identity, connectedness, and reciprocity? By using the aforementioned theories, I utilized this research endeavor to formulate the answer to these questions and to show the effectiveness of building relationships and recognizing gifts within communities.

Through a commitment to establishing a restorative practices framework and an effective process of action research, I was able to create knowledge that will include personal and professional growth through participation as well as an increased role in community empowerment, engagement and connectedness. According to Herr and Anderson (2005), “good research deals with significant issues and attempts to answer significant questions about the issues” (p. 69). There is no doubt that citizens recognize a need to address the problem of safety and violence within communities, however, how they answer the questions about the issue draws serious attention to a shift in engagement and connection within their own communities. I will discuss the “how” by further exploring the method of action research in the next chapter.
Chapter III: Methodology

In Chapter III I will review in detail the method of action research, as well as its complications, limitations, and benefits. I will then further describe the details and value of using study circles when engaging in action research. Lastly, I will include my action plan and my position as a researcher. Additional documentation is provided in the appendices.

What Is Action Research

Action research (AR) was developed as a research model in the mid 1940’s by social researcher Kurt Lewin. He developed this model to respond to problems he perceived in social action brought to the surface by the challenging time of World War II. Lewin recognized the gap between social action and social theory and the lack of collaboration amongst practitioners and researchers and thus called for a model to bridge theory and research in addressing practical problems (Lewin, 1946). Without collaboration, practitioners engaged in uneducated action while researchers developed theories that lacked any kind of application or transferability (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). Without this connection or “union” neither researcher nor practitioner developed consistently successful results. This new methodology of action research would provide practitioners a method to conduct research about their own actions with the intent of making them more effective, while at the same time working within and toward theories of social action. Lewin (1946) looked at action research as a continuous cycle back and forth between surveillance of the problem (within the persons, organizations, and systems) and a series of research based action experiments. His initial definition of the cyclical process of action research consisted of these concepts: analysis, fact-finding, conceptualization, planning, execution, more fact-finding or evaluation; and then a repetition of cycle of activities. Although Lewin first formulated the definition and theory of AR, he left little work to describe and expand his early definitions into a more systematic theory before his death in 1947 (Dickens & Watkins,
The lack of research and supporting facts left the field of action research open to be explored by many similar minded researchers who found action research a unique approach to connecting theory and action.

Practitioners of AR engage in a variety of research projects that can be found in different contexts throughout many disciplines and practices. Much like Dickens and Watkins (1999) described Lewin’s way of investigating practical problems, Hansen and Brady (2011) described how action research can be seen as a “systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives” (p.82). Stringer (2007), a researcher who has written volumes about action research, suggested that AR provides “the means by which people in schools, businesses, and community organizations may increase the effectiveness of the work in which they are so passionately engaged” (p. 82). This unique method assists them in working through the complexity of issues within these different contexts to make their own work more meaningful and fulfilling. This is perhaps why action research is used so commonly in community initiatives with complex problems. Action research was built upon the traditional scientific paradigm of experimental manipulation of different ideas and observing the effects from those experiments. In a simple way of understanding, the research can be seen as this: A problem is identified, a change is made and the results are studied in order to inform future change efforts thus creating new knowledge to the area being studied.

**Action research and community.** Just as Lewin recognized the gap between social action and social theory and the lack of collaboration amongst practitioners and researchers (Dickens & Watkins, 1999), I also recognize this gap among our communities. Lewin’s idea of combining theory and research on practical problems continues to echo throughout our communities today. Not only do action and theory not support each other, but collaboration
among citizens, community stakeholders, and political figures does not exist, either. Citizens are embedded in communities where elected officials often do not listen to the common people as they attempt to be active participants in problem solving processes—thus leaving citizens feeling as if their input is neglected (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Working collaboratively is not important just because it provides us with another strategy for achieving results within the public sector, but rather when it is effective it lessens conflicts between competing views, engages citizens passionately in addressing the problems that distress them and their communities, and builds the capacity to handle future conflicts in processes that better represent the common good of the community (Chrislip, 2002). As Chrislip (2002) stated, “Working together creates the networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate communication and cooperation for mutual benefit, building bridging social capital rather than destroying it” (p. 28). Chrislip’s (2002) ideas can support the method of action research, where researchers seek to gain a better vision about how restorative practices, like building relationships and participating in respectful dialogue, can increase engagement and social fabric within communities in order to improve a community’s way of dealing with their most complex issues.

More specifically by utilizing the process of AR, where researchers frequently collaborate with insiders who have a stake in the issue, there could be a greater impact on the setting due to a shared democracy (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This shared democracy can also increase the sense of belonging within the community, where citizens can imagine that the greater their connectedness is within their community the stronger their democracy will become (Block, 2008). Therefore, it is important that I utilize an approach of conducting research and initiating change through a process that involves a collaborative community where I seek to engage the members of our community in the process of learning and change (Herr & Anderson,
This method does not just increase a sense of community and shared belonging, but rather also focuses greatly on building relationships, a key concept in the idea of restorative practices and ABCD.

**Benefits of action research.** As stated by Herr and Anderson (2005), one of the many benefits of utilizing the AR methodology is that it aims to help people participate in a larger conversation and become more familiar with and aware of the constraints that have hindered them from participating and engaging fully in their communities to produce real change. It seeks to enable them to not just recognize the issue that they care so passionately about, but to take action and even propose the possibility of change on multiple levels (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This action sometimes referred to as praxis or reflection, can often lead to meaningful social change (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2007). This approach challenges the mental model that legitimate knowledge lies only within privileged experts and instead includes local expert knowledge and the voices of those being researched in a continuous cycle of collaboration as they share experiences through this dynamic process of action and growth. It has also been argued that when the researcher and the community of interest work together in a collaborative way, knowledge, expertise and insights develop through those relationships that otherwise would not have been possible. These relationships of the researcher and community working together develop greater insights and access to broader expertise which ultimately provides for more practical creative solutions to the problems being studied (Walters, 2009).

One particular example of the benefit of using an action research approach, in this case participatory action research (PAR), was evident in a study by Vatsyayann (2008). This study, conducted in the small community of Atiu in the Cook Islands, demonstrated how PAR enhances service delivery and health by bringing the community together towards a common goal and
bridging any cultural gaps or distrust of researchers. The awareness that surfaced through the PAR process created a sense of urgency to personal and community health. This change became evident as changes in personal hygiene, behavior patterns, health and sex education at schools were recognized and documented. The process of PAR in addressing health concerns also helped to promote health education through workshops and media, and even aided in the development of the formation of a Health Promotion Committee. The method of PAR spurred a viral movement in the awareness of community and personal health. The PAR in this community not only helped with the previously listed short term outcomes but also helped to establish long term outcomes such as: a further study about “Atiuan household Economics,” establishing priorities in public and private building, and new curriculum planning for public health education. The path that the Atiuan community developed with their PAR method became a model for other neighboring communities. Much like Vatsayayann’s study, I intend to use action research to address short term outcomes as well as establish long term outcomes so that restorative practices, ABCD, and study circles can be used in multiple ways throughout the Hill District community to address various complex community issues.

How can the benefits of AR listed above support my action research study? As stated above, because action research has the ability to propose individual as well as community growth (Herr & Anderson, 2005), I sought to provide a different framework in which citizens could grow and learn about the issue of violence and safety through collective dialogue and action. By working together in this process of engagement we increase the fabric of our social relationships. These relationships developed by the group help to develop greater insights and accessibility to a wider variety of expertise (Walters, 2009), which ultimately provides for more practical creative solutions to the problem of violence/safety that was addressed. In order to gain a wider spectrum
of expertise I invited to the table a diversified group and also implemented the theory of ABCD. Also, by building a communicative space in conducting my AR study I was able to open the dialogue so that citizens could recognize the impact of increasing social relationships within communities, and how utilizing those relationships and identifying their assets could help them with the issue of violence and safety, or other issues within the community.

**Complications in action research.** Dickens and Watkins (1999) state that action research has been criticized as either “producing research with little action or action with little research” (p. 5). I addressed this critique by having a specific action plan that outlined the steps I took with each session, but that also recognized the importance of the dialogue in creating its own action. I also addressed this critique initially by establishing short term goals throughout the action research method that helped the study circle focus on the initial question, as often the question shifts as the process evolves. Post study circles I met with a sounding board composed of Dr. Dee Flaherty and Dr. Harriet Schwartz. This sounding board team assisted me in my reflection phase as I made meaning of the gatherings and data collected in order to inform the appropriate next step of action. Herr and Anderson (2005) call this sounding board a board of “critical friends” or a validation team, which assist the researcher in debriefing the process and dissecting their own involvement. My validation team also assisted me in the complexity of my roles as a researcher, insider, or facilitator, and helped me to address different levels of understanding (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Herr and Anderson suggest that another critique of AR is that it is lacking the rigor of true scientific research or legitimate academic inquiry, and thus it has limited use in contributing to the core body of knowledge. To be sure that I was meshing theory and practice within my methodological framework, I incorporated many theories such as ABCD, communicative space, social disorganization theory, restorative practices, the use of
study circles, relational leadership, and grassroots leadership in order to support my action plan as well as the formation of next steps. Due to the complexity of my roles throughout the research process I kept a daily research journal in which I recorded my own thoughts, feelings, and observations, as well as used it to track my ethical decisions made during the process (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I also used the journal in order to visually chart progress and to be able to better recognize the repetition of issues or the flow of collective process during the study circles. The other difficult issue for AR is the research end date, as unlike most other research methods, which usually have a specific timeline for results with a clear starting and stopping mark, the outcomes of AR could continue until the problem is resolved. The ongoing process of AR could perhaps allow the study to continuously repeat, maybe even forever, without solution due to its continuous improvement nature. The important concept that must be defined for researchers is, at what point is the problem solved or where should we end with our research (Herr & Anderson, 2005)? For this purpose, I included a general timeline for scheduled study circles and post study circle soundboard meetings in the action plan to ensure a timely manner of the actual process of creating this communicative space. In addition, I conducted one on one interviews and documented all branches of action that grew from the initial study circles in order to utilize many different levels of data collection and analysis.

**What Are Study Circles?**

Originally established in Scandinavia at the end of the 1800’s, study circles surfaced as a tool for social action where uneducated citizens could come together in a process and learn about critical issues and practical skills that affected them. Kurland (1982), a U.S. researcher who studied the use of study circles in Sweden and helped introduce their use in the United States, suggested that study circles could help solve some of our current complex problems and function
as a way to systematically engage citizens about critical public issues and also provide education on those same issues. Today study circles are still utilized as non-formal approaches that focus on processes that are learner centered (Christensen, 1983). They rely heavily on the idea that learners learn from each other as well as resources and new material. They also stress that the learning processes are democratic in nature, the boundaries of the topic are not previously drawn out and that the learning occurs without a primary “teacher” with formal authority (Christensen, 1983). One of the developers of study circles in the United States, Osborne (as cited in Christensen, 1983), states that study circles often use guides or some written material that are utilized to “foster and support group decisions, provide direction as well as open-ended, thought-provoking ideas and questions” (p. 212). Study circles require a high level of engagement from the participant and emphasize the importance of creating a safe space where participants feel protected enough to engage in deep discussion, participate in democratic decision making, and even disclose individual goals (Christensen, 1983). The leadership that takes place within study circles should focus on a shared and collaborative approach where participants become responsible for their own learning through their level of engagement. The empowerment that is developed among these study circles will be most successful if it continues to develop either personally or communally long after the study circles cease (Christensen, 1983). Study circles can be used within many settings as well to identify many issues within those settings. Study circles have been noted for use within universities to focus on issues of welfare and make recommendations to the county, as well as utilized for issues of farm crisis, immigration, and crime (Oliver, 1987). With a focus on creating processes that are democratic and focus on the participants, study circles should be beneficial in an action research study that focuses on engagement, building relationships, and learning about the critical issues of violence and safety.
Considerations When Using Study Circles

Creating communicative space. A communicative space is a proposed “space” where issues or problems are positively sliced apart for an in depth discussion. The participants involved in this space experience their interactions as a way of fostering the democratic expression of diverse views where people are encouraged and permitted to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what they should do about these issues or problems (Reason & Wick, 2009). The dialogue that is occurring in these spaces has occurred for many years, but the format of study circles offers a new lens of not just talking with each other in these spaces, but thinking together in these spaces on how citizens can move forward to create significant change (Jacoby, 2009). Often action researchers will refer to engaging with participants in an ongoing cycle of action and reflection. This process helps to address issues of practical and demanding importance in the field in which they are working/researching (Wicks & Reason, 2009). As I conducted the study circles sessions I utilized a positive approach in addressing all issues in order to provide a communicative space where participants feel encouraged and safe. This positive approach can be seen in the welcoming of participants, the acknowledging of shared concerns, thanking participants for sharing their input or stories, and establishing values and common respect for all members of the group.

Physical space. Block (2008) states that physical space is more decisive in creating a sense of community than we are aware of, as often we do not notice the simplest of things that might hinder or benefit our dialogue with others. Most gathering spaces can be designed for control, negotiation, and persuasion, pending on the setup of the space we provide. While we rarely can change the room itself (size, layout, color etc.) we might not however have the ability to rearrange and occupy whatever space we are given (Block, 2008). Community is built when
you put life into it (Block, 2008), and while I was not able to control the whole space I did pay attention to the aspects of the space in which I could fix. I put great consideration into developing a space that tells the study circle participants that they are in the right place and that everyone is welcome. I addressed the seating, offered refreshing food and drinks, and set the room up for optimal engagement that encouraged relatedness (Block, 2008).

**Benefits and Limitations of Study Circles**

Study circles have been attributed many positive benefits including the breaking down of barriers between diverse groups in order to produce collective thoughts on how to address social issues such as safety and violence (Christensen, 1983). They focus on sharing creative gifts in a way that promotes the recognition of the issue without losing individual contributions and empowerment. They have been known for creating a welcoming space that encourages personal comfort and increased participation in collective sharing. This increased participation nurtures the built relationships that have carried on much longer post study circle sessions (Christensen, 1983).

As with all research, study circles also propose distinct complications in their implementation. Study circle organizers could find difficulty in organizing groups and gaining commitment from a group of people who often do not even know each other (Leighninger & McCoy, 1998). This complication could lead to a lack of sustained involvement during the entire study circle process. There has also been recorded difficulty in remaining focused throughout the study circle sessions and staying with a dialogue of positive action. In a study conducted with artists on the value of clean water consumption in Minnesota, the artists needed to be redirected as discussions moved from one of empowering solutions to those of complaining...
problems (Jacoby, 2009). It was important as a researcher that I noticed this shift and tried to take the discussion from one of awareness to one of action when it did occur.

**Using Restorative Practices and ABCD in Study Circles**

According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices, RP is emerging as a new social science and is defined “as the science of restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision making” (IIRP, 2012, para. 8). Restorative practices foster expression, emotional bonds, and connectedness, which are also key concepts in using study circles. The late Silvan S. Tomkins’s (1991) research involving psychology of affect declares that human relationships are healthiest when they are given the opportunity for free expression—in which they are part of a process that minimizes the negative and maximizes the positive (Tomkins, 1991). This is why I chose to use study circles: they encourage the free expression of each other’s views in a positive way, as well as focus on building individual relationships among participants and relationships within their community. Restorative practices use more inclusive strategies which Mirsky (2007) states “involve changing relationships by engaging people: doing things WITH them, rather than TO them or FOR them—providing both high control and high support at the same time” (p. 1). Much like restorative practices, study circles help communities come together in highly participatory discussion that offers the opportunity for everyday people to make more of a difference in their communities. They are supportive and bring to the table many residents who live and work in our neighborhoods but who are often not at the table when decisions are being made about key community issues. By bringing them together to participate in a participatory process that focuses on addressing the issues of violence and safety, it promotes civic participation and connectedness within the community, a cornerstone of RP. The concept of RP
that says citizens should exploit the positive is very similar to the also inclusive strategy of asset based community development. By identifying the community assets and recognizing each person’s unique gifts (Green et al., 2006) citizens are coming to the table with others and showing what their community has in a positive framework. By highlighting the importance of ABCD within the study circles, participants were better able to recognize their individual gifts, community assets and resources, which multiply in value when brought together and made to be productive (Green et al., 2006).

**Plan of Action**

I used study circles as communicative spaces where I implemented the framework of restorative practices and utilized ABCD in order to address the issue of violence and safety within a community.

**Setting.** The study took place in a local neighborhood called the Hill District located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I arranged the use of the community room located in the heart of the Hill District’s Hill House Association. The Hill District (or as some call it, the Hill) is considered by many to have great cultural life and is home to over 17,000 people. Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay once called the district "the crossroads of the world," referring to the neighborhood's prime life in the 1930s–1950s. It is recognized for its outstanding arts and music culture, and has heard the music of greats like Lena Horne and George Benson. The Hill District lies just minutes from downtown Pittsburgh and is the home to famous playwright and Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson. In 1955 the federal government agreed to the Lower Hill Redevelopment plan, which made available $17.4 million in grants and loans. This plan called for 95 acres to be cleared and 1,300 structures to be demolished, leaving over 8,000 residents displaced. Approximately 1,239 African American families and 312 Caucasian families were...
affected by this plan to redevelop the Hill. Of these families approximately 35% went to public housing communities, 31% to private rentals, and 8% purchased homes. About 90 families declined to move, leaving them living in deficient housing situations. Citizens affected by this plan received little relocation compensation, leaving them with few options. The new construction of the Civic Arena leveled dozens of city blocks in the core of the community, leaving a negative social impact. The Civic Arena, along with other development that never materialized was just the beginning of a community wrecking ball. Not more than a decade later, the brutal assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. started riots throughout the Hill that further destroyed the community. As of 2012 there is new redevelopment to support the reconnection of the Hill and downtown, as the Hill has seen the opening of a new arena and is also slated to be the home of a Shop and Save, new hotel, coffee shop, and YMCA (Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, 2012). Although the Hill District has its positives of music, art, culture and location, it unfortunately also yields one of the city’s highest crime rates with approximately 8 homicides, 69 robberies, 127 assaults and 386 cases of property crime in 2010. In 2010 (as statistics are not yet available for 2011) 68.4 % of the city’s 57 homicides occurred in five of the city’s 90 neighborhoods, with the Hill District being one of the five (City of Pittsburgh, 2010). Although there is a heavy presence of crime in the Hill, there is even a stronger presence of people who believe in the value and rich history of the Hill, thus guiding me to further explore my research in this area.

**Research participants.** I located participants by reaching out to different community based development organizations and coalitions in the Hill District area to assist me in the recognition of stakeholders and everyday citizens, both engaged and separated from the community. I chose this method so that I would have a cross sectional representation sample of
many different sectors and levels of participation within or outside of the community. The specifics of the make-up of the sample can be found in Chapter IV. I extended the invitation to my personal professional network as well via email notification. I also reached out to the City Council Representative to place an article in the monthly district newsletter about my research to rally any citizens interested in participating in the study (See Appendix A). The City Council district also took my initial flyer and distributed it to residents of the Hill District when distributing their monthly safety meeting flyer. Because I used restorative practices and focused on ABCD, a community development method that focuses on gifts and assets of individuals and communities, I wanted participants to be from a variety of different backgrounds and professions. As ABCD research suggested, it is important that the collaborative group include people with diverse backgrounds, and even different views about the issue (Green et al., 2006). As Chrislip (2002) states, “Collaborative initiatives bring together broadly inclusive groups to address issues of shared concern” (p. 36), and they intentionally engage community members with diverse, even opposing views or stances in order to develop better decisions and avoid stagnant processes (Chrislip, 2002). I wanted to gather 12-15 participants who live, work, or know of the Hill District, as the suggested ratio for study circles is approximately 5-20 people (Christensen, 1983). Once I gained a pool of interested applicants, I was sure to take into consideration the diversity of their role in the community, sector, residential status, or employment status to be sure that I was obtaining an inclusive group. I also documented all new relationships formed and each meeting in order to utilize this new knowledge throughout the study circle sessions that involved identifying assets within the community.

I intended to keep the research participants interested in the ongoing process by creating an important sense of community that focused on them being the key agents of real change
within communities. I took time before the start of the first session to build relationships with the research participants as well as reached out to a variety of citizens that I might know who helped encourage continued participation in the process. I continued to build relationships and propose my suggested research topic with those citizens that I met with via a weekly forum with the City Council representative. I had also established a relationship with a key member of the Zone Safety Council from which I gained support and interest in my research topic area. I linked up with key organizations within the Hill District as well as a community development organization called Renew Pittsburgh, which also assisted me in gathering participants together whom they believe to be real and worthy partners in the change process. It was important that I had at least five participants but no more than twenty for suggested study circle format, which left me as the researcher with a great deal of flexibility during recruitment. Focusing on building relationships with the neighborhood and with the participants was an important aspect of the process in order to sustain participation throughout the implementation of the study circles.

**Implementation of the study.** The emphasis of this study was to utilize an action research study that focused on the recognition of assets and how building relationships within communities can be beneficial in addressing community issues such as violence/safety. I implemented this study by following the general format of study circle processes and also including the suggested steps in identifying assets and mobilizing assets as proposed by the theory of ABCD. With this study I was not aiming to develop a bulleted list of solutions to violence or safety issues, rather I was aiming to increase social fabric within communities through communicative space and study circles where citizens identify their gifts and assets so that it may better assist them in solving complex community issues while learning from the experience of being involved.
Processes

**Stage 1.** In order to learn more about the Hill District I met with current City Council Representative Dan Lavelle, as well as local organizations and community groups located throughout the Hill District (The Hill House, The Hill Alliance, The Hill House Medical Center, etc.). By meeting with these stakeholders I was better positioned to learn about current issues in the Hill District as well as the allocation of assets available in the Hill District. This was extremely useful when implementing the creation of asset maps throughout session 3 of the study circle series. I journaled each meeting and gathered documentation that helped in the recognition of services and assets within the community that later on assisted me as I prepared for the study circle sessions.

**Stage 2.** After selection of the participants I sent out personal invitations for the initial meeting of the study circle. Personal invitations were sent out informally via email correspondence with the location of the sessions and a menu of food provided. Study circle sessions lasted no longer than two hours and occurred every Monday starting July 9th until the completion of four study circles on July, 31, 2012. I also begin cultivating new relationships with these participants prior to the start of the study circles, as well as some of the networks that they belonged too in order to gather more support from the community.

**Stage 3.**

**Study circle session 1: Building community.** For the initial session I wanted to establish the study circles as a safe place in order to build trust that would encourage participants to open up about their experiences and expected role in the group. I implemented this safe space by welcoming everybody and being honest and upfront with my reason for gathering them all together. According to McKnight and Block (2010) welcoming citizens is extremely important
as they all have special gifts and desperately want to give what they have to offer. As a “circle keeper” it was important that I become that of a hostess, or great inviter, which opens the space to those whom were once not connected and invites them to participate in community life. The sign of a great community is one that welcomes those on the margin with hospitality (McKnight & Block, 2010). I arranged the room in a circle format around tables that encouraged connectedness and allowed everyone to see each other while speaking. I began the session by introducing myself and discussing areas of my research very informally as to not defer anyone’s interest by overwhelming them. I highlighted the guidelines for each participant and invited any additional guidelines to be added from the participants. Some of the guidelines reviewed were the importance of the talking object (or an object held) to signify that at that time that person is the only one speaking while others should listen without feedback. I also suggested that in feedback participants be respectful in their discourse but open to different lenses, and that they also keep their comments relatively brief to allow each participant the opportunity to engage. I passed out a brief list of guidelines (see Appendix B) so that participants could use them as a reference. I also stressed the importance of civic engagement, participation in all study circles, and a commitment to achieve change through the completion of the study circle process. Following this initial introduction I then passed out the informed consent and reviewed it with the participants so that I could assist with any questions they might have before they chose to sign it. (See Appendix C.)

I then allowed individuals to introduce themselves, tell a bit about themselves, and invited them to answer at least two of the questions that pertained to them that were presented on a drawing board. These questions are further discussed in Chapter IV.
I initially intended to process the session with the group with generic processing cards called “Climer Cards” developed by experiential consult Amy Climer, which display water colored pictures of a huge spectrum of different pictures of objects or feelings. Processing cards are a general processing tool used by facilitators to help participant’s further process how they feel about an experience. I often have used processing cards as a tool in my role as a Certified Recreational Therapist Specialist to further provoke participants’ experiences of what is currently going on within themselves during sessions. Each participant would have been asked to pick a card that displays a picture of how they might feel about their neighborhood or their role in their neighborhood. However, the depth and connection of the group did not need further processing with the Climer Cards and so I chose to move the activity until a later study circle. During the discussion I did use the speaking object to gather each participant’s views, and then opened it up to a greater conversation among the entire group. As per Zehr (2002) speaking objects work well in order to effectively listen to everyone with attention and concern. I then concluded the session by thanking all for their contributions and distributed a reading for the next session. I asked the group that when they return for the next session to bring with them the Peter Block: Chapter 1 reading and three highlighted points of how the reading affected them or whether they could or could not relate to it. They were asked to take particular notice of the difference in what their community is today, and how it can be more like a community that Block (2008) describes. The participants were given a copy of Part 1: “The Fabric of Community,” a chapter pulled from Peter Block’s book Community: the structure of belonging, with copyright permission from Peter Block.

**Study circle session 2: Community assets.** Session two continued building trust within the group while learning the processes that can assist in the bringing together of community in
order to address issues of violence/safety. I discussed the reading that was given at the end of session one and welcomed each person to share their three highlights as well as have a discussion about the reading. Participants who were not present for the first session were provided a copy of the reading to review prior to the session. Some participants shared their own highlights while other participants shared responses to others highlights. I then shared Block’s main highlights about the power of individual gifts and asked participants to share the gifts they might possess if they felt comfortable. I explained that these gifts might be the ability to organize, the ability to communicate passionately, or even simply the ability to take notes or fundraise. Individual gifts are different from community assets, as they describe what the individual has to offer, rather than what the community has to offer. As participants began sharing I charted the gifts on the board so that they were aware of the multitude of gifts that were present in the room as will be shown in Chapter IV.

I then passed out community mapping templates to each participant as well as showed a sample asset map and explained the importance of asset mapping in order to address issues within communities. (See Appendix D) I had participants individually take 20 minutes to make their own asset map starting with the individual’s gifts (as previously noted) of themselves in the middle of the map, and working outward with assets and gifts the community offers. I then brought the group together and had them engage in offering unto the group some of the assets they listed on their individual maps to be a part of a bigger asset map in which all participants will contribute. The larger study circle map was also recorded on a community mapping template and highlighted items given by the participants can also be seen in Chapter V. Once the map was completed I reviewed with the participants the map and highlighted how each of our gifts and community contributions have come together to form a community asset map. I then closed
the group by thanking them for their participation and I distributed to the group pieces of paper with four questions listed on them. The questions asked were to help the participants recognize their own gifts in relation to the community assets and how they can start connecting them together to address safety and violence in the next session. I asked the participants to answer them and to take them home with them to complete and bring them when they return for session three. These questions were to assist participants in recognizing assets as we progressed forward in discussion during the third session about community assets and individual gifts. (See Appendix E.) These questions are further dissected in Chapter IV.

**Study circle session 3: The parking lot.** I opened the group with a welcome and began the session by discussing the questions sent home from session 2. I invited the group to share in discussion about an experience that they have had with violence or safety in the Hill District. I then invited the group into a discussion on how utilizing our own gifts and community assets, as identified on their questionnaire, can have effects on violence. I used a drawing board and listed ideas in response to the question, “What can we offer the group that could assist us in making our community a safer place to live?” I then pulled common themes or views from the ideas and highlight those views (whether they are higher police presence, more community engagement, and new opportunities for our youth, etc.). I recorded all shared ideas. I then passed out a paper called “the parking lot” and asked the participants to add to the parking lot the themes which they see reoccurring. (See Appendix F). For the next session I asked them to think about the ideas in their parking lot and how they can get their ideas (cars) moving with more action, or more specifically what can they do or create together to address these common themes.

**Study circle session 4: Action plan.** I started the session by welcoming the group and thanking them for their continued participation. I then reviewed their parking lots individually
and formulated a bigger chart to collect the action ideas of all participants. I then opened up the
dialogue for feedback about the ideas of all participants. I listed the ideas and grouped them
together based on theme. I then, along with the group, developed an action plan of how the
group can turn the ideas into actions. Each participant took their own action plan home with
them with their own role on how their gifts could individually as well as communally help the
issue of safety and violence. Before the close of the session I brought to the table the Climer
Cards which were to be used earlier in the sessions and asked participants to take a card or cards
that expressed how they felt about the process or their community. I encouraged the participants
to exchange contact information as long as they felt comfortable in doing so. I again thanked
them for their continued participation and discussed with them the future schedule for the
remainder of the research process. (Stage 3 also included daily journaling and post session
soundboard meetings.)

**Stage 4.** After the completion of Stage 3, I individually met with or had a phone
interview with each participant of the study circle sessions who had attended at least 2 of the 4
sessions. The one on one interview helped to further discuss the study circle process through
some previously formed general questions that assisted me in learning about the impact the
sessions had on participant’s learning or view of community relationships, assets, violence, and
safety. (See Appendix G). I then utilized these transcripts to measure the initial goals of the
study circle process. (Stage 4 also included daily journaling and post session soundboard
meetings.)

**Stage 5.** I was planning to conduct a focus group comprised of the same participants
involved in the stages 1 through 4. However, the study circle process was so effective in its
earlier stages I chose not to have another session but to close the process in session four.
According to Christensen (1983), the empowerment that is developed among these study circles will be most successful if it continues to develop either personally or communally long after the study circles cease. I felt confident in the relationships that were formed and thus felt it was indicated to end the study circle series after session 4. I also felt that ending the sessions after the fourth session would not be a problem as the recommended study circle guide format suggested a series consist of just four sessions. I also thought it was important to not extend the sessions as when I was present in the Hill District I had observed many people voicing their opinions about the overuse of “meetings” in the Hill District that ended without any tangible results. I informed the participants of the noted change due to the already established cohesiveness of the group.

**Timeline**

- July 9th-July 31st Study Circle Sessions (Every Monday)
- August 1st-August 20th Interviews conducted
- August 20th- September 15th transcribe data
- September 15th Begin interpreting data

**Procedures for Collecting Data**

I collected data through various methods including:

1. Transcriptions of all four study circle sessions.
2. Collected documents, maps, and parking lots from participants.
3. Transcribed audio recordings of one-on-one interviews with some of the participants.
4. My personal journal in which I documented my own personal growth as a participant of the study circles as well as my role as a researcher in the process.
5. Collective of summaries of my meetings with my sounding board post study circle sessions.

**Procedures for analyzing data and providing credibility.** In order to establish more confidence and credibility within the study it is important to be careful and explicit in describing data collection procedures (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1998), therefore I further explain in detail specific procedures in which I used to cross check my data. Qualitative research often involves making clearly visible the role of the researcher in the reporting process, which is why I chose to record all study circle sessions so that I could be more fully engaged in the study circle process as researcher and participant and ensure more accurate documentation of the process (Locke et al., 1998). By recording all four sessions and transcribing them I was able to locate common themes among participants as well as recall their expressed concerns and experiences within their community. By collecting documents I was able to grasp better the process of planning to action and note all common themes addressed within the documents collected. By highlighting themes within the session transcriptions and collected documents, I was able to recognize points within the processes that seemed powerful or useful for application with the next study circle session. I also collected these powerful points to search for a deeper meaning behind the story in order to acquire a sense of the complexities involved (Locke et al., 1998). By collecting my own thoughts, the patterns of relationships within the processes, and documenting interactions between participants I was able to utilize my personal journal to help measure my own personal growth and balance my roles as both a researcher and active participant. As Freire (1998) stated, “critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes “blah, blah, blah” and “practice, pure activism” (p. 30).
Lastly, I conducted interviews with participants in order to gain a better understanding of how they experienced the process.

**Criteria for Success**

Some data might require minimal processing to make meaning of the results, however, qualitative data and more specifically action research data must undergo more detailed analysis (Locke et al., 1998). Throughout the process of analysis I used the following criteria for success in evaluating the study circle processes and interviews:

1. Increased awareness of violence and safety issues within the community (Did participants share stories of violence or safety? What were some of those stories?). Increased awareness of individual gifts and community assets (Did participants know about all assets in community? What are some examples of those who did not?).
2. Ownership of utilizing those assets and gifts-measured via interviews (Did the participant state how their gifts could help a community? Were they aware of this before?).
3. Visibility of new community relationships being formed (How many participants knew each other?).
4. New action and collaborative efforts i.e. (watch group, block party, new partnerships etc.)

Below (Figure 3.1) you will see a Theory of Action Diagram for success in which I used to address the effectiveness of the proposed four criteria stated above so that I am better able to evaluate how awareness, ownership, visibility, and action have been achieved.
My intention throughout the study circle process was to provide a new lens through shared views and to build relationships during the sessions. The sessions were to also educate citizens on the issues of violence, safety, their own individual gifts, and available assets within their own community so that they may become more aware of how these issues affect a safer community. With the new knowledge and relationships learned I aimed to provide citizens with a new sense of ownership, visibility, and changed perspective in how they viewed these issues. I will be able to further clarify if the change of perspective has led to a change in behavior and action by the 4 Criteria of Success listed above. Some examples might be: Did citizens share stories, offer differing views, learn about unfamiliar resources, assets or gifts? Did citizens apply any new learned knowledge when developing the plan of action for violence and safety during the fourth study circle? Did citizens show empowerment and further clarify new ways of dealing with the issue of violence/safety within their own community? What were these new proposed ideas? Did citizens show further awareness or action during the forum or interviews? Did new relationships form after the study circle process concluded? By focusing on the criteria of success, I used this theory of action to determine whether new perspectives and behaviors have come about as a result of the awareness created through shared stories, relationships, and new knowledge.
Ethical Considerations

Ethical codes are not rules but rather moral guidelines for researchers, to keep research participants safe from harm and provide procedures and processes that are judged morally and ethical in regards to design (Kvale, 1996). In order to implement the research processes suggested throughout Chapter Three I first submitted an application to the Institutional Review Board of Antioch University. Once the application was approved I then began my study.

Before I asked the participants to engage in any study circles I explained the purpose of an informed consent form to the participants at the beginning of session 1 (See Appendix C). This form apprised the research participants about the overall purpose of the study, the main purpose of the design, and any risk or benefits from participating in the study (Kvale, 1996). Once I reviewed those important details I then answered any questions and obtained consent. It was also imperative that I reemphasized that at any time if the participant felt uncomfortable they may withdraw from the study.

Private data identifying the subjects was not fully reported within this research study. In order to ensure confidentiality within the study the participants were only recognized via initials or participant number. However, their initials/number and role within the community were made visible, as well as their responses in the study circle and on their collected documents. Confidentiality is even of greater importance as I conducted the one-on-one interviews which allowed participants to further explore more in depth meanings of the processes, and thus I explained to them the importance of not identifying them by their true names.

Position of the researcher. It is important to reflect on where I come from as a researcher and participant in this study. By being both a researcher and participant I needed to identify the complexity of my roles that were being brought into the study. By acknowledging
my role initially I was able to recognize what I brought to the process in terms of my own values, experiences, and beliefs. As Reason and Bradbury (2006) stated, the “primary rule” in action research practice is to recognize the choices and decisions I made throughout the process and what their consequences might be. Thus, I made myself aware of how my full self might affect the choices I did make in the research process.

In relation to the community in which I conducted the research I could be tagged both on the outsider and insider continuum. Although I do not live in that community, nor was I born in the city of Pittsburgh, I have been involved in many roles while working in the Hill District community. For two years I worked for a nonprofit in the Hill District, often with many nonprofits to alleviate barriers for both at risk youth and gang members, and therefore I have some pre-established relationships already in the community. While doing that work I was also involved with a city initiative (Pittsburgh Initiative to Reduce Crime) that helped reduce gang and group related homicides, which also lead me to developing relationships in the Hill District. My involvement in this program, as well as my past 10 years working with at risk-youth and violence is what fueled my interest to be focused on how citizens can use the value of relationships and communicative space to address different ways in which they can improve safety or propose better solutions to violence in the Hill District area. Lastly, I am currently involved in the Hill District via a nonprofit that I co-founded called Project Coffeehouse. Project Coffeehouse opens up nonprofit coffee shops in emerging areas and gives the revenue they create back to the community to continue building it back up. Most recently, Project Coffeehouse acquired a project in the Hill District to open a coffee shop in the childhood home of famous playwright August Wilson. While the coffee shop is not operable yet, I have been able to build some relationships with citizens that showed interest in being involved. Although
my outsider presence could hurt the situation as I am not fully engaged in the community as a fulltime employee or resident, it might also serve to be valuable in my role as participant. My past experiences and current project in the Hill District could help me in my role as participant in the study circles, as it will help me recognize some of the assets the neighborhood already possesses as well as also identify some concerns or issues I have run into as a developer and concerned insider/outsider citizen.

Personally I believe that conversation and safe spaces have the ability to create meaningful change throughout groups, teams, and communities by increasing the social fabric that was once not there due to ineffective communication or spaces for people to gather. I have especially noticed this in emerging communities that now lack ways or places in which they can informally gather together. My passion for this can be found in my love for “Third Places,” as I believe they are catalyst informal spaces within communities that can initiate great change.

Oldenberg (1999) states that third places, like coffee shops, are often the heart of the community. He suggests that these homes away from homes are places where communities gather together and where unrelated people come together to relate and share. I believe that places such as these will serve as informal gathering places where communities come together and share ideas, concerns, and resources.

**Conclusion**

AR is a unique method used to combine aspects of education, community-based research, and action for social change. This method is different for many reasons, but it has great value in this research as it emphasizes collaboration within marginalized or oppressed communities or with those whose voices often go unnoticed. It works to address issues within these (individuals, communities, organizations) through a process of collective commitment, a desire to engage in
collective reflection, engagement with individuals, and the building of relationships to produce
research with both practical solutions and theory. AR makes an important contribution to the
continuing development of critical approaches to practitioner inquiry by combining theory and
practice that is able to address broader views across a multitude of disciplines to gather a
different lens that might not have otherwise been recognized. While there are many benefits of
utilizing this approach, I must also recognize the limitations, including the length of time that the
AR process could take, sustaining participation among research participants, and producing
research with little action or action with little research.

Through this study I attempted to bring to the surface citizens and stakeholders whose
voice often goes unrecognized in communities by bringing them together in a collaborative space
that focuses on identifying the issues of safety, violence, individual gifts, and asset mapping
within their community while building social fabric during the processes. By shifting the locus
of control to those who have traditionally been seen as research “subjects,” there is also a shift in
our way of thinking that everyday citizens can ultimately possess some of the best local
knowledge in proposing solutions to complex community issues all while building a sense of
community in the process.
Chapter IV: Results

Chapter IV will summarize the data collected through various methods. Data will be described in detail and procedures for analyzing the data and content analysis will also be further described. The purpose of this research study was to bring together citizens in a study circle process in order to build relationships while discussing the issue of safety and violence within the Hill District. Among transcription segments, data and results, you will also find my personal reflections as well as my sound board team reflections.

Setting for the Conversation

The conversations happened every Monday in July, 2012 starting on July 9 and ending July 30, 2012. The sessions began at 6:30 pm and ended at 8:30 pm. The Hill House Association, a centerpiece of the Hill community, allowed us to use their conference room at a much discounted rate. The space was open, well lit, and warm. I arranged the chairs and tables to be in a circle format so that everyone was visible when talking to each other. Food allergies and special requests were accommodated via pre-registration and meat or vegetarian options were available. Participants were of different sectors, communities, and positions within the Hill District. Below in Table 4.1 I have summed up the cross sectional overview of participants involved in the overall study, and have also included an Individual Participant Summary in Figure 4.2 to better explain the diversity of the group. While there were only 5 current residents who live in the Hill, there were many others who spent a great deal of their time working in the Hill or owning businesses in the Hill. While some may see this as an underrepresentation of participants residing in the Hill District, ABCD research suggested that participants be of different backgrounds, professions, and positions, as more diversity helps to create better decision making and avoid stagnant processes. Please note that all 17 participants did not attend
all sessions and further detail about session attendance will be highlighted during the individual session breakdown.

Table 4.1  Cross-Sectional Overview of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>17 total participants of the whole Study Circle Sessions: 16 people + self = 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 of whom live in the Hill currently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 of whom used to live in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>15 of whom have worked in the Hill or Work in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>13 of whom currently work/volunteer in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 of whom do not work or live in the Hill currently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>9 were females, 8 were males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>13 were African American, 4 were Caucasian.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Individual Participant: Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Lawyer who used to work in the Hill, and currently works for a University department dealing with small businesses/nonprofits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Community advocate who is in and out of Hill working on policies etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Nonprofit leader who works for leadership organization that works in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Self-works in hill part time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Not a resident of the Hill, but grew up in the Hill, and volunteers at organization in the Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Grew up in the Hill, Lives and works in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Resident that Lives and works in the Hill and is security guard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Nonprofit worker that does not live or work in the hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Re-Entry specialist that works in the Hill and used to live in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Student that works in the Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Student that does not work in the Hill but used to live in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Doctor/Therapist that grew up in the Hill but no longer lives there, does not work in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13</td>
<td>City official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P14</td>
<td>Hill resident that works in the Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>Hill resident and director of a NPO in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P16</td>
<td>Therapist that does not work or live in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P17</td>
<td>Resident of the Hill that lives and works in the Hill.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Gathered by Sessions

Above in Table 4.1 I have summed up the cross sectional overview of participants involved in the study, and have also included an Individual Participant Summary in Table 4.2 to better explain the diversity of the group. The participant numbers listed here will be a key to the remainder of transcript segments found throughout the rest of Chapter IV.
Session 1 July 9, 2012. The first session was comprised of 11 participants, including myself. Session one was utilized as relationship building session in which the general aim was not to dig into the focus subject of violence/safety but rather to share background or stories of those present in order to build a safe place filled with respect and sharing. My main purpose of this session was to be a welcoming host that invited everyone into the room and made them feel respected and heard. Before the session even started participants were introducing themselves independently and engaging in conversation while waiting for their turn in the food line. Once all participants were settled I explained the importance of the informed consent and collected the required documentation. I then begin to briefly introduce myself and the role of our gathering. I thought it was imperative to discuss the importance of the guidelines set forth on a paper that was passed out to each person individually prior to the start of the session (See Appendix B). Following the explanation of guidelines I began to briefly introduce myself as a citizen and welcomed the participants to do the same. Each participant was eager and willing to share as they utilized a speaking object (an object that signifies who is talking) as they shared their background, connection, or no connection with the Hill District. Participants shared their backgrounds which I have highlighted above in Table 4.2. Following the initial introductions, participants were asked to answer one of the following questions:

- How would you describe your neighborhood?
- In what ways do you feel connected to your neighborhood?
- Is there an experience that you can highlight that made you feel connected?
- What do you like best about your neighborhood?
- What are your hopes and concerns for the neighborhood?
• Describe an experience that made you feel like you did not belong in your neighborhood.

These questions were groundbreaking conversation starters that lead to rich discussions among the group. A few of the responses from participants can be found below.

P9 - Um…what I like best about the Hill. I have a tendency to walk……I live in Homewood and will walk down Center and just come up and just walk. So last Saturday when I walked…by the time I got to the Hill District…when I got here….there was ummm…some kind of festival going on…I didn’t see anything the whole length of Centre Avenue…once you come up over the Hill…..and then you start down and there is nothing nothing…and then you get in our block…the 2300 block and there is kind of nothing…and then finally there is this explosion of people and they are selling stuff…and there is music…and so I said so there are people who have stuff… who want to do stuff…and they are just looking for a place and a time to get together and do things collectively and so. What I like best is there are people working together…maybe you don’t see them maybe you don’t know them…maybe you are looking at the news or hearing these other things and it’s not necessarily the whole story about the Hill.

P5 - I too can remember days when there was the Hill…and activities. My father was a gospel singer and they used to sing up in front of Black Beauty. The things like that when you go back to all the days when there was so much fun….there was so many activities and it was even fun even when you were not doing anything.

P13 - As someone who is visited Hill…instead of living here…among other places…it is stressing to see the amount of time harping back to the old days and not looking forward to something new and better that would happen. There is opportunity now to create a neighborhood that is not segregated……that actually can be the only integrated neighborhood….or an affluent neighborhood…and this could be it if we embrace a vision for it. We say…I wish it was that…or this .It’s going to be different than before…it could be better…or it could go away.

P3 - I am going to pick up where P13 left off. Um… I think he is right…we can’t look at the Hill to be exactly way it was during Wiley Days. I do think…that one of the things I have learned is….you take the best part of what was then and bring it forward to now. Some of the negative things were segregation, poverty, there are a few different things that we definitely don’t want to bring forward….but I think some of the things we do definitely want to bring forward is definitely that spirit of entrepreneurialism that goes back…that support of black businesses that were so prevalent back then—number one cause you couldn’t shop anywhere else. There was a lot of support for black businesses and there was a lot more black businesses…those are some things we definitely want to bring forward.
P15 - I guess in the same spirit of things...the question that jumped out at me at the
board.....is what do we hope our community to be...interestingly enough. I would have to
say....I hope our community is a community that is really characterized by love beyond
all else. We learn about the Hill District being segregated place but actually before 1958
it was probably the most or maybe one of the most integrated neighborhoods in the
United States. We have a picture in our office of a congregation straight from
Syria...right up here on Bedford Avenue, they were here...this church over here was
built by Czar Nicholas the 2nd, the Russia, the last Czar of Russia built this church right
across the way. The thing is that Folks lived in community and they were not just African
Americans, they were from all corners of the world. That’s why we had the Kaufman
resettlement house here...not only to help African Americans from the south resettle here
in the north but there were a lot of immigrants here. From...Russia from Ukraine, from
Syria, from Lebanon, from Italy...and they were all living in community...but the things
is we have a tendency to give up I think far too easily no . That’s one of our problems in
the community and I’ve seen it. One guy walked through our door and just needed an
ID...he was very very angry. He walked in and demanded his ID. Since that time he has
turned out to be one of the most gentle souls I have ever met...and I think the reason why
he walked in with that attitude is that he had this experience of having to fight for
absolutely everything he had......one of his favorite......sayings.... is the system is very
fast on the way down but very slow on the way up......And this is his experience and
there are so many people coming from those experiences, and yes are community was
torn apart. We do think about that strong African American heritage that we have here
and we should be very proud of it. We should seek all of those things that all of our four
fathers and mother have brought to us—of even the days of slavery. This very rich
spirituality...this very healthy positive world view...amidst suffering that carried our
people through generations of suffers...I think we have lost that now...we look back and
that’s what characterized struggles of that day....but also in this community in particular
that they were able to live in community with people from diff races and you know
what.....it was hard work.....very hard work...it was not this utopia...you were living
next door to people who were actually immigrants...from a different community and we
did not always understand everything that everyone said but that did not mean we were
gonna hall off and punch them—like happens to be the tendency now. We are raised to
believe if I don’t get it now, or it does not make sense now, or if it’s not easy, that I am
just gonna take it out in a hard way. That’s actually very weak. Love is very very hard
work...and to build a community with the spirit of love....it has to be built one person at
a time...and it requires a lot of hard work and dedication...it also means that we don’t
give up on the people that most of our society has given up on.

P6 - The history of Hill....in my heart I was feeling the loss of the love and I was not
even there.....After MLK died got killed. And after they tried to destroy hill.....I just did
not feel the love. 1985 came along ...that’s when black people started getting stronger
again....You could see the killing of one another....no caring...the loss of hope after
MLK died...kills me tremendously...It’s not about getting same thing in Hill...but about
renewing it with the love. We gotta come together...we gotta tell our people...our young
people...what they lost, what they are missing, and try to get it back...through love.
P12 - Wylie Avenue is not coming back.....it does not have to come back...but at least let me make the decision of what’s going to happen in my neighborhood. When I grew up in the 70’s…I used to be afraid of the Hill...not because you would beat get up....but because you knew you did not go into the Hill and disrespect anyone. We have let outsiders come in and take away our neighborhoods. And it started in 70’s....When drugs came in....people went out. At least let me make decision on how to clean my house, or let me clean it up myself... (as an example).

As evidenced above by the participants’ responses the initial discussion did not require as much facilitation for shared conversation as I thought it might, leaving me with more time to put into being a part of the research process as a participant. The common themes that arose during the discussion seemed to follow the role of the Hill “back then” and what it had and does still have and also how it lacks recognition for those very things. Following the closing of this discussion I passed out Chapter 1 of Peter Block’s (2008) *Community: The Structure of Belonging* for the next session and asked participants to highlight 1-3 parts that really resonated with them. I thanked each one of them for their participation and sent leftover food home with others to share with their family.

**Self-journaling session 1.** My journaling for session one included the importance of setup and structure. Going into session one I had a guideline for how the session should somewhat flow, however still leaving the discussion open as that is what is imperative in action research studies. My self-journaling allowed me to further explore the importance of knowing my role as a researcher and participant. I also was initially worried about the participant turnout but was encouraged upon the presence of many individuals whom did not even previously register. Sustaining rapport with those initial participants was a critical component as study circle sessions evolved. I chose to encourage participation with follow up emails thanking participants for what they had shared and sometimes even noting their exact words and how I
could relate. Post first session I had received an email from a participant whom I had in fact not emailed first. His email read:

Ms Tera
I enjoyed the session. I love group research and development. I plan to participate with you!

In the social theory of criminal desistance I’ve been exploring the intersection of Blumstein, Nakamura, Petersilia, Maruna and others on the issue of redemption, reentry rites of passage and restoration circles for parole and probation completers.

Last night I observed how personal memory/experience manufactures our sense of community and how our personal 'history' may discount or 'mark-up' the potential of our current community....

see you soon

This email was further clarification that my continued relational building with these participants was imperative to the success of getting to the table those that care. It was also clear that sharing experiences and stories was indeed invoking a sense of community through building relationships.

**Sound board session.** Following each study circle session I met with critical review friends Dr. Harriet Schwartz and Dr. Dee Flaherty. Through this session we were able to further explore the division and balance of my role as researcher and participant. Through discussion we recognized that most of the facilitation for these circles happened beforehand (building relationships, getting people there, spreading the word), etc., leaving not much work to be done once we gathered as the relationships seemed to start budding on their own. Through dialogue in this process I became more aware of the tension between Tera as a researcher and Tera as a participant. As a researcher I was more aware of the flow of conversation, time limits, and digging deeper for richer explanations. As a participant of this study, and many others, I was not
always aware of these limits and rather would find myself lost in the flow of discussion. This recognition allowed me to be more aware of my roles going into the second study circle session.

Session 2 July 16, 2012. The second study circle included 12 participants, however, two participants from the previous session were not able to make it but another three were, leaving us with a total of 12. I reviewed informed consent and guidelines with the new participants prior to the start of the session and also provided them with a copy of the reading for the second session. The second session again began with conversations initiated by the group during the retrieval of dinner and drinks. I officially welcomed the session participants and again had everyone briefly introduce themselves as there were new participants and I felt it necessary for us to again welcome everyone and share our stories. Following introductions I shared with the group my three important highlights of the chapter which we read from Peter Block. The reading of Peter Block was one that focused on building communities that focus on individual gifts and associational life, rather than focusing on deficits and systems. Some of the highlighted discussion pieces that arose in discussing this chapter are below:

P10 - Umm just being someone who works at a Psych hospital…that’s what we do…we focus on what is wrong with people. They come in. We have a lot of regularly people…Some of them are sick…some do not have housing…some do not have family. They have gone 85% of the stories I have heard they have gone through some kind of traumatic event in their life that have lead them to the diagnosis they have. As safety officers we do not work directly with them. Sometimes we wonder if certain people are just diagnosed just for the sake of diagnosing them. In order to get funding you have to have a diagnosis. It’s frustrating for me from the first point you were making is….There is not a lot of continuity between nonprofits/hospitals…but also these people are now living with this label that they have….that I am bipolar, I am depressed, I am schizophrenic….and think that’s their life…..and they don’t focus on what they are capable of. It’s come to I don’t know how much I can continue doing it…. It’s hard for me to support that kind of system.

P9 - Just in continuing the conversation. Systems according to the text…..systems are not the vehicle for community change….he gave change through associational life…..so the systems that are set up…they are not the vehicles that will change the community. They will continue to assist the community and continue to hand out labels. Those systems are not in place to associate with you and march with you hand in hand and
create the language that we can discuss to assist you in making a change within your personal life. That personal bubble that you get when you walk into (the organization represented at the table by another participant)…..that personal associational life……or in that coffeehouse when you are one on one with someone…..Language is a vehicle for change…not the system….In our community…most of the systems we come together with…..the fire department…the police department…they are not necessarily interested in changing anything…they apprehend…so I get the point that these systems are not necessarily the vehicle for change.

P15 - There is so much that our community has to offer and that is absolutely true…Personally we have had a lot of success by capitalizing our community assets and seeing what gifts people have to bring to the community and allowing them the opportunity to use those gifts and that was one thing that was lacking. It is absolutely imperative that healing has to be central in moving forward. We cannot underestimate the pain and suffering that a lot of folks have experienced here. There is a healing that has to occur if we want to live with one another in community.

P13 - We had this discussion in the city office about systems caring. The question was do you really care. I had to tell people I was talking too- that the city can’t care, the city is an institution so they can’t care. People don’t want to hear that, but people care. I care, people care. It’s not up to the city to care it’s up to people to care. It’s a very difficult truth…If you want someone that cares you better get to the ballot box and elect someone that cares.

P14 - I think sometimes institutions brainwash people into thinking you can’t do this and you need my help to do it.

P15- If we remember that much of the solution has to with the relationships that have-that we talk about in this community. Having these relationships where we love each other. We should not neglect having like relationships with people outside of the community. Because let’s just imagine…if we are going to do something like open a business, start a ministry, or establish a church. …much of this property is owned by the URA. If we really want to get that property or if we really want to obtain what we need to have success…it has to do with relationships. Whenever you walk into a place….people say, who are you what relationships do you have…who are you in relationship with so actually whenever when we think about it…and actually speaking from a Christian perspective….it’s an opportunity to love someone else.

This discussion seemed to focus around building relationships and using those relationships and gifts for who and what we are and not who and what we are not, to create change among our community. I highlighted this theme that surfaced as it closely connected with the next step in the study circle process. Following the discussion about the reading I passed out a sample community asset map so that participants were aware of how individual gifts were the
core of communities and how identifying assets was important in utilizing the gifts and assets that communities already possess. The group was eager to participate and identified many individual gifts of their own, as well as assets within the community, as pictured below in Figure 4.1.

*Figure 4.1 Diagram of Assets and Gifts*

Some of the themed assets given were housing stock, history of arts, being the main corridor to downtown and Oakland, the people, the Library, green space, and strong political power. Participants also explained their gifts by giving examples of their being passionate, creative, good at organizing, good listeners, and committed. Following the completion of this activity I passed out a questionnaire (See Appendix E) and asked participants to bring it back for the next session.
The proposed questions were as follows:

1. What have you learned from listening and talking about your gifts?
2. Are there assets in your neighborhood which other participants provided that you were unaware of?
3. What are some ways that you can utilize your own gifts to connect to the assets of the community?
4. How do you think utilizing your own gifts and what your community already possesses in gifts can help us deal with issues within the community? Do you feel it could help in addressing violence or safety? How?

I thanked them again for their participation. Following the completion of this session I noticed a lot of the participants still standing around in conversation with another. As I listened, I could hear plans being made without my prompting. Before the close of the session I had offered to donate the food to whoever wanted it. The therapist was offering to bring the food down to an organization in the Hill the next day (an organization run by one of the other participants) as she had never been there and wanted to see what the organization was all about. Also, post session I noticed one of the participants (the business student) conversing with another participant (one opening a business in the Hill) about setting up a time to meet to develop a business plan. After 10 minutes of post session conversations among the participants the group finally broke up.

**Self-journaling session 2.** Going into the second session I was again concerned about the possibility of nobody returning as we had not even begun to talk about the issue of safety or violence yet. I was fortunate enough to have many people return and participate fully in the process. The second session threw off my tentative plan of progress as participants were already
capitalizing on each other’s gifts and building relationships. This was something that I thought might not happen until the 3rd or 4th session. Due to the progress and sense of community of the group, the process was occurring much more rapidly than I had planned. This progress is what started to fuel my thinking of possibly only needing four study circle sessions and not a forum as well. I kept this thought until later on in the process when I could re-evaluate the group.

**Sound board session 2.** Through dialogue with my critical review team we discussed the importance of process and content throughout the study. One question that circulated: was it the content or the process that was already driving the relationships to occur? It was then that I noticed that I did not have a distinct line drawn between the content and the process and what really was truly forming the progress. The conversation had not even touched yet on the issue of safety and violence and though I did not want to minimize the importance of that topic, I do feel that the conversations were occurring because of the space and the dialogue occurring in that space. By looking at each person’s gifts and listing assets I believe that the process was one focused on positivity and a declaration into what the participants could give to each other after highlighting both gifts and assets.

**Study circle 3, July 23, 2012.** Before the session started I observed many of the participants in conversation with each other. While transcribing data later on in the process and re-listening to the session I noticed that so much conversation was going on it was too hard to even isolate any one conversation. I began the session by welcoming everyone and thanking them for their continued participation. There were 12 people present for the third session including myself. Following the welcome I collected the questionnaire that was distributed the week before during session 2. Not all questionnaires were turned in nor were all questions answered as represented in Table 4.3, and will be further discussed below.
Table 4.3 Questionnaire Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What have you learned from listening and talking about your gifts?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1 - I heard a long list of assets from the Hill, some of which –I had forgotten.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5 - I am guarded about my own gifts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12 - That I have become more confident in expressing them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13 - Everyone has valuable gifts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P16 - There are so many different ways that people can make a difference, and no way is too small—it all makes a difference.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10 - A lot can come from focusing on positive things in communities. I begin to feel a lot of motivation and even more passion for change when we reviewed our gifts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P17 - I learned about a lot of assets that were going on that I was completely unaware of.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are their assets in your neighborhood that other participants provided that you were unaware of?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1 - The Overlook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5 - No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6 - Yes, Utility assistance, ID recovery, rental assistance,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15 - Yes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12 - Possibly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13 - Yes, always, I never knew about Focus!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P16 - N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10 - Most specifically the rich quality of Housing surprised me. That’s awesome!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P17 - Yes, I was unaware of some of the programs going on even though I have been working throughout the Hill frequently these past few months. I never thought about the Hill</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
being the main corridor from Oakland to downtown….or about the available housing options and diversity.

3. *What are some ways in which you can utilize your own gifts to connect to the assets of the community?*

   P14 - Attend community meetings and share my experiences.
   P1 - Connect people to others
   P5 - Collaborate!
   P6 - Lifelong experiences and new learning experiences.
   P15 - Use them to help empower others and develop creative and innovative community initiatives.
   P12 - Not sure, possibly more networking.
   P13 - Let people know about my gifts.
   P16 - Volunteer more, become involve in various organizations.
   P10 - For me, being passionate about service and helping others would benefit the connection to the community.

4. *How do you think utilizing your own gifts and what your community already possesses in gifts can help us deal with the issues within the community? Do you feel it could help in addressing violence or safety? How?*

   P14 - I can become part of a growing sentiment in the community around addressing violence through inclusion of the neighborhood.
   P5 - I must share with others to magnify our strengths and overcome our individual shortcomings.
   P6 - My experiences in knowing the pain and trials of my own life and what methods I used to overcome my issues can apply to helping others overcome their own.
   P15 - I can address violence in our own community by helping redirect energy into positive, community owned initiatives.
   P12 - Not sure, I believe there is too much talk, not enough trust and consistency. I can help reduce but not end it. It starts with how I react.
   P13 - All gifts are needed to rebuild a community.
   P16 - Outreach, or get others involved, or focus on MB/BH treatment for those who need it.
P10 - I think if we have enough committed and passionate people dedicated to the cause, we can help address better safety within the community.

As evidenced by some of the answers above, not all citizens are aware of the assets that lie directly within their community. It also seems that the recognition of collaborating, connecting, and sharing is important, but that we might not always know how to go about using the gifts we have. The results of the questionnaires were shared indirectly during the fourth study circle process as I had passed out a sheet highlighting the assets that they identified via session 2 and through their questionnaire, so that they might have a guide in creating an action plan. I also used results from the questionnaire to prompt ideas for action in the last study circle. I often used specific comments that participants verbally suggested or wrote down when recognizing or connecting possible action ideas during the 3rd and 4th study circle sessions.

Following the collection of the questionnaires, we then initiated our discussion about violence and safety. Displayed on the board was this question: “Share an experience about safety/violence that you have had in the Hill District or in your own life.” The question elicited numerous responses, and among those responses common themes included: relationships with police officers, attitude of residents towards police officers, attitude of the community, etc. Some responses of the residents are given below.

P16 - When I worked for an organization …we had to go pick the kids up from the community and bring them to the program. I had to pick up a new girl up on Derod Street by the Jubilee kitchen and it’s a dead end street and so I had to go get her…there was a turn around and we got to the turn around and all of a sudden there were kids shooting, they were not shooting at us but we are in the middle of it. They were not shooting us but we were in the middle of it. It was very traumatic and violent….they continued to run up the hill into this tree area…and so we went to leave and get out of there and this woman was on the side of the road, and she looked dead and we had to drive around her. When I drove to the end of the street the police were talking to a utility driver and I told them you have to go up there you have to go up there and they did not have a strong sense of responsiveness which really confused me. I said I think she is dead. It was very sad to see the reaction of people nonchalant about it, people on their phones standing in their doorway. It was a very disturbing incident.
P10 - In response to what you are saying about the Police, it’s funny how there is nationwide coverage about this event that happened in a movie theatre in Denver in the suburbs...people did not expect that and I get that...but if the same thing happened in a movie theatre in the Hill...would there be a similar response...probably not. ...almost certainly not...that’s one of the most frustrating things from me...it’s just a double standard....either way you are dealing with people’s lives....I mean I guess it’s unavoidable when you think about the quality of society...there is a hierarchy regardless...but it’s just frustrating that some people’s lives are valued more than others just based upon where they are. I can’t believe that the police were not even fazed by gunshots 100 yards away.

P16 - This sets a precedent that this is ok.

P17 - It’s ugly the way that crime is everywhere yet it is only recognized in the Hill district, in a black community.

P15 - Before we began tonight P13 and I were talking about the attitude of violence which is the word P13 used. And if I have to say that if I could summarize up my experience of violence in the Hill that would be the word. It is attitude. We can do all the violence prevention we want, we can stop the events from happening, we can stop people from stabbing one another in that particular moment, but it’s a deeper issue...The issue is when it comes to the prevention of violence we have to really understand that there are actions we can take to stop incidents of violence but it is a much deeper thing. We need to understand that peace is not the absence of violence but the presence of harmony...in harmonious relationships and we have to understand that the way that we get to that is a spiritual issue, there is a serious illness in our community that we have to really work to address in very deep way and of course relationships are at the core of that action. It is a lot of hard work but I have to say again I think one of the things we can’t do...is we cannot give up. We need to train ourselves to recognize when we see this attitude emerging we need to step forward as a community and say this is not acceptable, this is not civilized behavior, this is not normal, this is not healthy and we have to understand that until we make a concentrated and direct effort to address that....we are going to have these problems creep up again in different forms over and over again because if we take guns off the street—people will use hammers or baseball bats....And that’s the issue we are dealing with now and we need to think about it in a deeper way.

Following these questions I then read an article I found via Pittsburgh Post-Gazette that talks about the importance of building relationships, among business owners, residents, police officers, in order to create a more safe community in a neighborhood about ten minutes from the Hill District. I then asked participants to share what they thought of the story. Their responses are below.
P15 - Well, I do appreciate the article and initiative. That is not what is happening here. It’s a definite challenge to get our police to do anything that fosters good relationships to be quite honest with you. I have had some very negative experiences with police. When we had the St. Peters and Paul’s day community celebration and we had hundreds of people that came through….we invited the commander and outreach officers and they said they would come and none of them came. We have been trying to provide opportunities with them to build those relationships and I just do not think they are interested at all. Things are different up here and we have to be very honest about the steps we take to build relationships with our police department…they really don’t go anywhere. And I think we have some work to do as a community but I think the police department also has some work to do and I think there are different initiatives in different communities and I think that should be really part of the conversation as a city. And then we say why don’t people call the police, but why would you at the point.

P13 - Let me respond, as I work with the police directly- a lot. I can’t argue with what you are saying. Your experience is your experience. There are some good people there and the best thing for us to do is to find the ones we can work with. Not all police are bad.

P10 - I see the angle that the article is trying to take. When it comes to a neighborhood like the Hill where people don’t trust police, how good will attempting to build relationships go. I think it’s important to tackle the deeper issues of the community.

P17 - Out here in this community I teach my kids to go to the police if you need help. There was an incident when I tried to call the police for help and they wouldn’t help. And then the guy was arrested in the library for a different incident, but when I called nobody listened to me. Because of the police….I am bitter.

P12 - We have school teachers that are horrible. I know because I have dated a couple. We have therapists that are horrible, I know because I’ve worked with them. We have judges, politicians, janitors who are horrible, we have people working at McDonalds who will spit in your food, does that mean we shut down McDonalds? It is not just police officers. They are human like the rest of us. A police officer is one person who probably has three blocks to patrol. They can’t see everything. There are people in the Hill getting their car broken into. How many of us are willing to step up and say “hey stop that.” If we see someone getting molested, or in a fight. Penn State is a good example. They got penalized because they ignored what was going on.

Tera (Researcher) - I also had an experience with the police here when I was trying to get some police officers to be involved in this study. When I went into the Zone 2 police station I shared my research and the point of it with the police officers there, one officer spoke up and said, what does this have to do with us? I told him that their representation would be good for the group and it would allow some the community to interact with them in a different context. He told me to leave a flyer. A few weeks later I got an email from a community outreach officer stating that she could not attend as she had class. And then a few weeks later I went to a Zone safety meeting in the Hill and when I walked in there were four people there, just four people. A police officer then walked in—one who introduced herself and was the same officer who had contacted me earlier—and sat
down at the table with the four of us present. Her demeanor was negative from the moment she walked into the room and as I sat there she said to the lady in charge of the meeting, what’s going on—there are four people here, this is a waste of my time to come to these with four people. I just do not think you should say stuff like that in the presence of community members [whom] you are there to protect and serve. This is not the positive way of handling what she wanted to express—which could further make those four people not be present the next month even… However, I do not believe it is just our relationships with police we need to fix, I also think that there are broken relationships in this community among businesses, citizens, and outsiders.

When looking at relationships/safety/violence within the Hill District, the theme that kept resurfacing was changing the attitude of residents and police officers in order to create healthier relationships. As the discussion concluded I handed out a “Parking Lot” (See Appendix F) blank paper and asked the participants to take the issues we talked about in the session: attitude, relationships with others and police, and individually doing more to create that safe space within your community, and to think about what action we can take to work on these issues.

**Self-journaling session 3.** As the sessions continued to progress I could now see my role as participant and researcher more clearly. As discussions got deeper I had to redirect some conversations that went off topic in order to not get lost in the process and remain focused in a restorative context that highlights positive thinking and language. I was more aware of my role as researcher to be sure and thank those who chose to share their most personal stories as well as those who chose just to listen.

**Sound board session 3.** During discussion with my critical review team we had discussed my role of researcher in being able to probe for deeper meaning, which was why I chose to read an additional article during the study circle session 3 about building relationships in order to initiate some deeper conversation. We also discussed the need to redirect when subjects took an off-course, which is what I chose to do in my last response by noting that it was not just the relationships with police that we should focus on. We discussed the observable progress that was going on pre-sessions as well as out of the sessions. We also again touched on
the subject of what is exactly driving these relationships to be formed? Was it the space, the people, food, or the pre-built relationships I had with each one of them? We also talked about the possibility of the fourth circle being the finale pending on how the session played out, as progress was happening more aggressively than I had imagined.

Study circle 4, July 30, 2012. I welcomed everybody to the group. Session 4 included 12 participants again including myself. By the fourth session the participants were no longer hesitant in joking around with each other or individually addressing each other. They were using each other’s names without their name cards prior to the start of the session. I placed upon the board the three main themes we had talked about at our last session: Attitudes/images of community/police, relationships with police/others, and doing more as individuals. We spoke about the different ways in which we could address these issues. One gentleman (who was new to the session) explained that he lobbies for ex-offenders and their image among neighborhoods and that he was going to be speaking with the City Council about building better opportunities for ex-offenders the next week and invited each person to come. Another participant suggested building opportunities for community residents to get to know a police officer so that we may begin changing the attitudes of both involved. I had introduced the idea of perhaps inviting a police officer to participate in violence trainings that already do occur at an organization represented by a few participants in the study circle. We also discussed the importance of just saying “Hi” when they do see a police officer or other community members. Some other comments can be found below.

P15 - One of the things I think-This community is at a critical crossroads. We are skeptical of development because of past experiences which I understand very well, however I think that we could find that development and use it in creative ways to use those opportunities to build relationships. There is actually a Jesuit priest out in Los Angeles that started Homeboy industries that brings together rival gang members to work
in a bakery…something like that… Money should be rewarded to developers who are
going to partner with agencies in the community to build the community.

Tera (Researcher) – You (to P10) work as a safety officer, I am sure there is some
knowledge you can share with P15 and his organization when they do their trainings on
safety and violence.

P10 - Yeah definitely…

P13 - We should start with the people who are willing to help us out.

P6 - We need to unionize, everybody is so divided and respect each other’s being and try
to find a common ground.

P10 - Maybe we could bring more attractions to the Hill, if we have a coffeehouse, then
people have a reason to come here and see what the Hill actually is and then they won’t
have this false advertisement of what is really here.

P4 - Does the Hill District have an asset book? Where we can see what there is in the
Hill?

P15 - The CDC might have a book like that online but I am not sure about a copy of one
that communities could use.

P10 - It’s little things that make a difference. If you are just walking around, even in a
different neighborhood, just say hi to someone. It’s the little things. And the next person
who says to me the Hill is so dangerous, which is what I am used to hearing, I can say
have you been there? No? Well…just do these little things to change others’ perceptions.

P15 - Yes, exactly, If we are going to build relationships it is going to start one by one.

After discussing possible ways that the group could take steps I asked each individual for
three ways that they could individually create a more safe community and to write them down on
a paper I provided to take with them. I did not ask the participants to share what they wrote but
told them to think about it as they reflect on this process. I told the participants that I would
touch on them individually in our follow up interviews. To close the session I passed around the
Climer Cards and told participants to take one picture card that expressed how they felt about
their experience in this group or how they feel about their neighborhood. Out of 12 responses 11
were positive responses. I closed the group with telling the participants that each individual
possesses the capability to create a more safe community in our own ways and it is up to us to carry that on.

Below are the responses to the Climer Cards:

P4 - I picked this light bulb because I feel energized in the light of new conversations and new people.

P10 - I picked the alarm clock because I think it signifies the fact that there should not be any wait period with this stuff. There are people who are currently suffering, it’s important to kickstart a greater movement to get below the surface. The time to act is always now.

P9 - I have a puzzle piece, it signifies that we are a part of the whole.

P13 - I picked the butterfly because the butterfly represents things that have changed and have been done and that is how I feel. There is change already—we have to see it, grasp it, and encourage it.

P15 - Mine is fish in the pond so I chose this card because the fish in this pond are all swimming in the same direction. Who we are is oneness of mind and we have that commitment to change this community, person by person it happens. Though we might not convene in the same way, these relationships...these relationships have been built and years from now we will look back at this experience as a catalyst for a new day.

P6 - I still feel that I am standing alone like on this card, and I am climbing mountains to where I want to get be.

P12 - I chose a question mark because every time I come to a meeting like this I walk away with more questions both internally and externally.

P16 - I picked a telephone because I think it’s about making connections, I have been able to make connections, I have witnessed others make connections. This really was just a catalyst and I hope to get really involved.

**Self-journaling session 4.** My journal entries about session four were very conflicting. The process was smooth and the end was very rewarding, as evidenced by the comments of the participants. However, as a community organizer I am used to continuing the action with others, if not doing it all by myself. I had some hesitations about pulling away after four sessions but felt as if the group would carry on the relationships they had made, as evidenced by one
comment made by “P15: that although we might not convene in the same way, these relationships have been built…”

**Sound board session 4.** Through discussion we were able to recognize that even though the process was shorter the outcome was just as great. I also, through reflection with my team, was able to recognize the hesitation I had of letting go of the process in hoping that it would continue on without me. This allowed me to realize that I was working in a different space than what I am used too. As a community organizer and connector I am unconsciously programmed to continue on and carry out the plan of action, but with my role of researcher I had to let go of that competing commitment.

**Data Gathered by Interviews**

I waited two weeks to follow up on the experience after the study circle process broke up. I conducted 1:1 interviews via telephone or in person that lasted no longer then 25-35 minutes. I conducted 11 interviews, as two people did not want to be a part of the interviews, and the other four were not interviewed as they had not attended two or more sessions. I had a general outline of questions to use for the interviews but only chose 5 questions in which I thought would be relevant to my research question, the overall process, and the relationships formed. The study circle process was better able to help me narrow down the criteria in which was relevant to my initial questions as based upon the criteria for success. Below are the responses to the questions that were asked.

1.  **How did you hear about this opportunity? What made you want to participate in the study circle?**
   - Tera (7 people had answered me)
   - Others (4 people answered participants of the group told them about it)

2.  **Prior to the study circles, had you ever engaged in a process such as this which brings citizens together?**
-5 answered yes
-6 answered no

3. Did you know everybody in the room? Were you able to form any new relationships that you did not come into the study with?

2 People knew absolutely nobody except myself
4 people knew two people in the room
4 people knew three people in the room
1 person knew four people in the room
Self: I knew 13 of the 17 people who participated.

New Relationships:

P9 - Absolutely, I have been meaning to meet with P15 as I heard about his organization and had never gotten around to it the last four months. This space opened up that opportunity and time. Because of this relationship we are currently working together on bringing “Pardon Me” trainings for ex-offenders to his organization. We also worked together on a project the week after the circles commenced where 13 individuals from his organization accompanied my organization and others to the city council building to meet with our area representative and talk about issues of employment and re-entry in the Hill for ex-offenders. I also exchanged contact info with many others.

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective, Change in Behavior, Action)

P13 - Yes, I exchanged info with a few others. I have however been meeting with P15 at his organization to learn more about his services and how we can use them on the program I work on. I was actually just there on Monday.

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective, Change in Behavior)

P10 - Yes I got P9 and P15’s information. I am interested in shadowing what they do to learn more about counseling as this is something I am interested in for my internship.

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective)

P1 - I did exchange info with P13 as we are both attorneys and I thought we might be able to work on some things together.

(Change in Perspective)

P16 - Yes, I actually have been meeting with P15 in order to assist in developing a new mental health program that they will be creating soon. I am also volunteering there every Wednesday and have gotten one of my friends involved who just built two new picnic tables for the nonprofit in the Hill’s community day.
P15 - Yes, actually P13 was just here today and we discussed street outreach. He also said he is going to see about bringing the new police commander they just hired down here to talk to us and get to know us.

P17 - I exchanged info with P2 as I thought some of the trainings he was offering could help me, he actually was here on Thursday (August 3rd) to possibly set up some trainings with me and the organization. We also talked about taking some of the participants from our organization down to Philadelphia to actually sit in on some Pardon Trials so people with criminal backgrounds can see how the that works.

P11 - Yeah, I actually met with P14 to discuss a business plan for her coffee shop.

4. During the study did you feel that your view was listened to in a respectful manor and that you also feel that you gave the same respect to others when they spoke and shared their experiences?

8 people answered yes
1 said, yes, anyone that spoke or disagreed were all handled in a mature way.
1 said absolutely—the diversity of viewpoints and understanding was amazing.
1 said yes, even though at times I feel as if I am the challenging one.

5. Think about your participation in the study circles, what part of the processes stood out to you, or what was your experience like?

P3 - I really liked the speaking object—it reminded people to be respectful to whom was speaking.

P10 - The climer cards were crazy—when you ask people to express how they feel with something other than words you are challenged to create a more deep powerful metaphor of meaning.

P1 - I was thankful that we used the speaking object, however I wonder if there could have been a time limit for each of us.

P16 - I really liked doing the tangible things—like creating the map of what was there as I did not know what the Hill had. Our group just had a unique successful set of dynamics, a lot of diversity, some really polar opposites, which just managed to work out positively even when our opinions were contradictory.
P12 - When P6 talked about her experiences with police that created a lot of questions within me.

P15 - The whole experience was excellent. Whenever you do bring people to the same table with like hearts and spirits there is a lot of positive fruit from that—which distinguishes this circle from other community meetings, as this one actually provoked positive communication.

P6 - The conversation that started when we talked about people actually caring or not caring. I would hope people care outside of their families.

P17 - The safety issues with police really stood out to me—it made me really think about what is going on here.

P13 - I really enjoyed the process, it felt comfortable, challenging. Solutions are already out there we just do not see them and this helped in deliberately creating relationships. That’s a good start.

P9 - The speaking object was a great leveler of voice within the group.

Reflection of Data Based on the Criteria for Success

As stated in the plan of action there were four main criteria which I chose to assist in the evaluation of the study circle process. Some data might require minimal processing to make meaning of the results; however, qualitative data and more specifically action research data must undergo more detailed analysis (Locke et al., 1998). Throughout the process of analysis I used the following criteria for success in evaluating the study circle processes and interviews:

1. Increased awareness of violence and safety issues within the community (Did participants share stories of violence or safety? What were some of those stories?). Increased awareness of individual gifts and community assets (Did participants know about all assets in community? What are some examples of those who did not?).

Participants did share stories as evidenced by the transcriptions above in Session 3. Participants shared stories of their relations with police, specific incidents of encounters with the neighborhood and the police, their hope for safety, etc. More specific details can be found in the Session 3 summary above. As stated by the results of the questionnaire above, some participants
already knew of assets while others were not familiar with ones currently present in the room as well as in the community. Others were not aware of the rich housing opportunities, the overlook, the Hill being a main corridor, about different organizations present in the Hill, etc. Participants also became more aware of the various organizations present throughout the room during introductions. They also were able to identify individual gifts as well as community assets as seen in Figure 6.1 above.

2. Ownership of utilizing those assets and gifts-measured via interviews/questionnaire’s (Did the participant state how their gifts could help a community?)

P14 - Attend community meetings and share my experiences.
P1 - Connect people to others
P5 - Collaborate!
P6 - Lifelong experiences and new learning experiences.
P15 - Use them to help empower others and develop creative and innovative community initiatives.
P12 - Not sure, possibly more networking.
P13 - Let people know about my gifts.
P16 - Volunteer more, become involve in various organizations.
P10 - For me, being passionate about service and helping others would benefit the connection to the community.

Their responses could be characterized into three main areas: Connecting, Acting, and Communicating. As evidenced by the responses it is important for citizens to connect, collaborate, and network in order to use their gifts efficiently. Citizens also felt that they could better utilize their gifts by becoming more involved in new experiences and by communicating with others their passions and sharing their experiences.

Visibility of new community relationships being formed (How many participants knew each other?).

2 People knew absolutely nobody except me
4 people knew two people in the room
4 people knew three people in the room
1 person knew four people in the room
Self: I knew 13 people throughout the 17 that participated.

New relationships were clearly visible. During the session participants were meeting outside of the sessions. By session two the group seemed comfortable and wanting to share. This was evidenced by their recognition of names, conversation, and post-session conversations.

3. New action and collaborative efforts i.e. (watch group, block party, new partnerships etc.)

As evidenced in the interviews there were many new collaborations and partnerships. Below in figure 4.2 you will see a Study Circle Connectivity Analysis Map of New Collaborations based upon the relationships formed that have led to further action outside of the study circle process. While all participants in the study group now “know each other” this map specifically identifies the relationships in which further “action” developed.

*Figure 4.2 Study Circle Connectivity Analysis Map of New Collaborations*
Review of Theory of Action Diagram

Below (Figure 4.3) is a Theory of Action Diagram which was also referenced in Chapter III. This tool was used to assist in measuring success of the effectiveness of the proposed four criteria stated above so as to better evaluate how awareness, ownership, visibility, and action have been achieved.

Figure 4.3 Theory of Action Diagram

As mentioned before my intention throughout the study circle process was to provide a new lens through shared views and to build relationships during the sessions that would ultimately lead to unintentional action. I was able to initially address this new awareness of view by inviting participants to share stories and connect within the first two study circle sessions. This invitation was used for participants to share their stories and to provide more knowledge to other participants about key issues throughout the community. These issues are shared earlier in this chapter as participant’s share experiences of what once was and what is now within the Hill District. (Change in Awareness). The second and third sessions were utilized to educate citizens on the issues of violence, safety, their own individual gifts, and available assets within their own community so that they may become more aware of how these issues affect a safer community. By sharing new knowledge about the community, participants were able to gain different perspectives by listening to outsiders, insiders, persons who worked in the Hill, or
just lived in the Hill. (Change in Perspective). By both process and content (or new knowledge and relationships) I aimed to provide citizens with a new sense of ownership, visibility, and changed perspective in how they viewed these issues. I asked them to contribute to the conversation of ownership by building their own asset map and formulating a parking lot of ideas of how they might take more accountability on their own to create a safer community. (Change of Behavior). I was able to further clarify if the change of awareness and perspective had led to a change in behavior through action by the 4 Criteria of Success listed above. Some examples might be: Citizens sharing stories during the sessions, citizens applying the knowledge they read in Peter Block’s reading to using their gifts to enhance community, participants learning about the assets of the Hill listed above, applying what they learned in the circle process and continuing efforts outside of the process, showing empowerment, connecting individually without prompts, carrying on ideas post circle sessions, or involving others to act. By focusing on the criteria of success, I used this theory of action to determine whether new awareness, perspectives and behaviors have come about as a result of the shared stories, relationships, and new knowledge, which I will share in my summary in Chapter V.
Chapter V: Making Meaning

This chapter discusses the key findings and academic contribution that this study makes to the scholarship on social capital, restorative practices, and other relevant theory as supported by the data. The research question was “will creating more restorative spaces that focus on a different kind of language, building relationships, and highlighting gifts and assets assist communities in building social capital so that they are better equipped to address the issue of safety and violence?” I highlight the process and content contexts and dissect them in greater detail in order to recognize the successful/unsuccessful indicators of this study. Additionally, I reflect on the action research/study circle process and also make recommendations for additional research. The research recommendations include my own observations of the process as well as those that emerged from members of the study circle group when identifying possible actions in making their community a safer place to live.

Separating Researcher/Participant Roles

I came to the study being fully aware of my responsibilities as a researcher and participant in the study circle process. As a researcher I needed to be aware of the conversation happening in the room, to remain unbiased despite my own experiences in the Hill District, and to be cognizant of time constraints, the flow of conversation, and the general guide of what I was aiming to address throughout this process. As a participant I found myself engulfed in the process and wanting to continue facilitating the action or relationship building after the completion of the study circles. It was important to balance out these roles—and thus to have a sounding board team to assist with my own self-evaluation as both researcher and participant. Through the reflection process I did become more aware of my own internal dilemma in letting action carry on itself without me facilitating its progress. One might look at this competing
commitment as a result of being both an insider and outsider of the community or due to a “shift in power” of my usual role (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). However, I found comfort in observing the powerful relationships that already occurred during the four sessions and thus felt more positive when letting go of my role. Due to the study circle process being a process of empowerment, I found it important for my role to not continue on in such a profound present way. However, I did continually check in with participants to see if relationships were still occurring or if indeed their engagement ceased post study circle series. By checking-in I was able to informally support and observe the continued creation of social capital. This handing over of carrying out change without my help along each step was a new challenge for me.

Discussion of Significant Findings

Due to the research study mainly being focused on building relationships as a result of process, the themes identified by discussion of the content were not as heavily measured as the reflection of the process. However, they were still important as they are the key barriers in what the participants saw as hindering their ability to create a more safe community. For this purpose I will discuss significant findings in two different contexts: Content and Process.

Content Findings

Among discussions within the group I was able to pull out common themes. These were: attitudes/images of community/police, doing more as individuals to change those attitudes/images of the community, and relationships with police/others. I will address these common themes below and how they might relate to relevant theory.

Toward a more asset based community. There seemed to be common discussion about what the neighborhood had been seen as before in its prime years and what both insiders and outsiders see it as now. During the beginning session’s one could notice that the language was
more directed towards what Green, Moore, and O’Brien (2006) would recognize as the “old way” where conversation focused on what the Hill District no longer possessed. Following the second study circle session the use of new language and attitude began to surface as the group identified community assets present as well as their own individual gifts. At this point the conversation and language used within the group started to shift into a more asset based alternative of what the community does have. I noticed that the language moved from a state of complaint to more of a state of commitment. This new shift closely follows the theory of Asset Based Community Development where we instead move from a state of lacking, to a state of abundance. This shift is what McKnight and Block (2010) described as the three steps of awakening a community. At first people must see the abundance that the community and individuals possess, learn about the power of creating connections and relationships, and recognize that these new connections are no accidents but rather an intentional action by each one of us. This new awareness was able to even help the group with their attitudes and visions about the Hill District community. In order to change the attitude and view of the community, a theme mentioned above, the group suggested that it should start with each individual doing more small things. The group suggested that they could take action on things such as telling stories about positive experiences, inviting outsiders in, or creating businesses or attractions so that outsiders can see the Hill District for something different than what it might usually be perceived. I proposed that in order to change one’s view you must be presented with a different view either by someone who shared theirs or be directly present in experiencing it for yourself. For example, an outsider involved in this study never had any experiences with the Hill District except for her family telling her that when she attended college near the Hill to not walk through the neighborhood alone. While she was a participant in this study she met many new people and
also learned about positive community assets which helped to produce a clearer view for her of what the Hill District truly did possess. She later suggested that she hopes to share her new experiences with others when people ask her about the Hill District area. Her experience in this process can be seen as what Lewin (1946) might suggest as “relearning” during an experiential learning process. By learning new information during the study circle process, the participants’ already established beliefs and ideas about a particular topic were challenged. Once given new knowledge and experiencing it for herself she was then able to reexamine its validity, test new ideas, and integrate her new experience with firsthand, more refined ideas. This action of re-learning also closely relates to Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformational learning. The essence of transformational learning suggested that as adults we have learned through experience or already have pretty definitive concepts, values, feelings, or conditioned responses that help us to make sense of our own life-world. While what we believe might be hard for us to let go, transformative learners allow a more inclusive and self-reflective experience that allows for their preconceived notions to be challenged and either fit their once mental mold or reject it with new learned knowledge. If this re-learning helps to break down already established views of the Hill District, then it would seem beneficial to continue to provide opportunities in which outsiders or insiders might experience the Hill differently.

**The importance of social capital.** During the discussions about the theme of relationships within the community among citizens, organizations, and police officers, the participants were able to share stories that represented a lack of togetherness among residents, business owners, and police. This weakness in their ability to build and sustain social capital was addressed by many participants as the study circle process explored the role of citizens, police, and safety. Many past research studies provide us with the theory that our local safety is
dependent upon two major elements: how many neighbors we know by name and how often we are present and associated in public—outside of our homes (McKnight & Block, 2010). With research suggesting that police activity is just a minor protection compared to these other community efforts, should not police leaders advocate for better relationships between citizens and citizens, as well as citizens/business owners and police? Based upon the data collected via narrative and storytelling during the sessions there seems to be lack of awareness or recognized importance placed upon the value of relationships, or social capital, among police and citizens. Would these “disconnected” relationships not only hinder community safety when police call on citizens for help or information, or when citizens need help and feel that they cannot contact Police? That disconnect and lack of trust between police and citizens could continue to hinder creating safer communities. This is perhaps why participants suggested initiating or continuing small steps that would aim to increase relations with police. Putnam (1995) suggests that interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to one another, and to weave social fabric, thus reinforcing the idea that we must build social capital in order to create a healthier community for us all.

**Humanistic philosophy and positive deviance.** The disconnected relationships in the Hill District remind me of what Kumar (1997) refers to as war-torn societies. Communities with once healthy social patterns between different groups within the community are now replaced by distrust, apprehension and anger, which hinder the restorative healing of communication, understanding, and protection (Kumar, 1997). The Hill District has many assets and individuals that care who can stomp out the threat of return to war within their community. The social damages of mistrust must now be a focus if we aim to create more positive and authentic relationships with police officers and others within the community. We must start this process of
building trust by healing our broken relationships. Perhaps, a return to the importance of “humanistic philosophy” will help us as we step forward into a state of healing those relationships. Humanistic philosophy teaches us that we’re all essentially good people, whether citizens, public officials, therapists, ex-offenders, or police officers (Crabb, 1997). It teaches us that goodness lies deeper in our beings and our hearts than badness, and that our badness is simply a reflection of once corrupt surroundings. There are plenty of good people whom we could seek out to build relationships with and many “bad” people whom it is also important to embrace with goodness in order to restore those once damaged relationships. Not all police officers are bad and by thinking this we close the doors in which we can truly learn and create more positive relationships. This very idea was highlighted by two different participants within the study as shown below.

P12 - We have school teachers that are horrible. I know because I have dated a couple. We have therapists that are horrible, I know because I’ve worked with them. We have judges, politicians, janitors who are horrible, we have people working at McDonalds who will spit in your food, does that mean we shut down McDonalds? It is not just police officers. They are human like the rest of us. A police officer is one person who probably has three blocks to patrol. They can’t see everything. There are people in the Hill getting their car broken into. How many of us are willing to step up and say “hey stop that.” If we see someone getting molested, or in a fight.

P13 - Let me respond, as I work with the police directly- a lot. I can’t argue with what you are saying. Your experience is your experience. There are some good people there and the best thing for us to do is to find the ones we can work with. Not all police are bad.

Just as participants of the study suggested, not all police offers are bad and we must find the good in others in order to push forward into a more restorative community. This concept of finding the good closely relates to the theory of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a return to a search for the best in people, their organizations, their communities, and the surrounding world. When we use theories such as AI we practice asking questions that support a system’s capacity to capture and heighten their possibilities to be positive (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). It is
not always easy to hunt for the good or look for the strengths, but much like we did in our conversation about community assets, we must recognize the good in others and what we can do to heal our relationships. When we meet someone’s badness with goodness often something healthier comes out of us (Crabb, 1997). If we eagerly search for the good going on in individual’s minds and hearts, we will notice that we have to do this task less frequently. When badness is exposed for the purpose of revealing more the depths of the pain or hurt, we move towards a better intent to restore and develop kindness and loving hope within our relationships (Crabb, 1997). This idea might also be linked to the theory of Positive Deviance. Positive Deviance is based on the idea that in each community certain individuals or entities own special practices or creative strategies that allow them to create a better solution to problems than other citizens within their community who possess the same accessibility to the same resources (Pascale et al., 2010). If we used the theory of Positive Deviance by focusing on the good “people”, or what is working rather than the “bad” people who are not working effectively within the community we might produce better results and eventually affect those “bad people” in an indirect way.

**Process Findings**

The outcome of the study circles as a result of the process itself can be more thoroughly described by the criteria of success that were highlighted in Chapter’s III and IV. In Chapter IV I wrote about the exact relationships formed, the action that arose from those relationships, and more thorough results of the four criteria of success. Below, I will further dissect the process context of the study circle and pull thematic data that I came across after post study circle sessions.
Building a more restorative community. While the topic of how to create a more restorative community was never discussed with participants, characteristics of how to create a restorative space were implemented through actions and implementation of the study circle process. The space in which the process occurred was a place of respect, accountability, and ownership. This initial group atmosphere and norms were created through such measures as the speaking object, introductions of one another, a hard copy of the brief guidelines/expectations for the group, and a warm space in which sharing dialogue was appreciated, recognized, and thanked by the researcher as well as other participants. Block (2008) suggested that restorative community practices promote a language of healing, relatedness and belonging without embarrassment. The language of healing and relatedness that occurred during the study circle process was evident as participants shared stories and engaged in a different kind of language as discussed above in the content section of Chapter V. The group of participants initially established a safe space where there was no blame but rather a true effort to bring to the table a new possibility of what they could craft together. This idea of creating something positive to address the issues that were under attention during the sessions only surfaces from the social space citizens construct when they gather together to build community (Block, 2008). What was evident in the process is that relationships started occurring faster than what was expected. Participants were initiating conversation before session two in the food line and exchanging contact information without prompts. As a result of the study circles many new relationships were formed thus building even greater opportunities for the community to create more possibilities for their future when addressing issues of safety, violence, and other issues. After conducting post study circle interviews I was able to further examine the depths of those relationships and if they did continue to progress after the end of the study circle. While
reviewing the relationships I noticed that there was specifically more connections or relationships built toward a specific participant. This could be attributed to the fact that the participant ran a nonprofit organization in the area that served as a common place for some to gather. Oldenberg (1999) describes how third places can be a catalyst for relationship building. This could also be credited to this participant speaking strongly about the value of community, healing, and relationships and so others might have been more drawn to connecting with him, or because he might be seen as what Gladwell (2002) describes as a “connector”, or someone who knows everyone. These very ideas are the reasons researchers should focus on participants who possess such strong linkages that could continue to sustain change throughout communities.

**Social Network Theory.** In mapping the relationships I noticed a dense cluster of lines linking the above stated participant with others. Some might call this a “cluster” within a network or community. Networks are often used for describing social, technological, or even biological systems. Clusters within these so called systems will often be visible within densely linked or overlapping nodes that correspond to what may be happening in the community (Mishra, Schreiber, & Stanton, 2008). The theory of networks, clusters, ties, and nodes (or actors and their relationships) can be attributed to Social Network Theory, a view of social relationships introduced by John Barnes (1954). A cluster can be seen as an assemblage of individuals with dense friendship patterns internally and scarce friendships externally (Mishra et al., 2008). However, the data did not show that this particular cluster displays any lack of friendships externally. This cluster is working within the “community” of the Hill District, but also seeking others external to their community to join in their network as evidenced by the outsider connections made post study circle sessions. Perhaps we might term this particular cluster an “open cluster” that attracts both internal and external friendships which focus on the
heart of relationship building and community. Could these “open clusters” be the focus of attracting more “others that care” to the table? Should we invite more people to be involved in the cluster, or does the cluster limit our ability to reach out to external participants? How do we go about connecting different clusters within the community so that we link our power in relationships? Will being connected to a cluster help promote more civic engagement or help to sustain citizen engagement? As evidenced by the data recorded in Chapter IV, this particular cluster seems to be beneficial in initiating relationships and sustaining those relationships over time. They invited outsiders in to help them create new programs and formed additional clusters through those new connections. Understanding the nature and the span of these clusters within this community network might be critical to planning engagement efforts. For example, if I were a community organizer developing a community engagement effort I might want to trace an individual’s social connections to identify leaders within that particular community. I might also use social connection mapping to understand community patterns, successes, and issues (Minkler et al., 2008).

**Direct change and spill-over.** Another evident stream of data seemed to show that the initial connections made in the study circles could also spill-over into more connections or change. In order to explain spill-over I first must explain and describe the direct change or action that happened as a result of the study circle process. I have highlighted below the documented outcomes from the criteria of success in which direct change occurred between participants. I have also highlighted how each of them can be connected in reference to the theory of action diagram displayed in Chapters III and IV. Was there a changed awareness, a change in perspective, a change in behavior, and did action occur, as those are all definitions of direct change caused by the study circle process.
P9: Absolutely, I have been meaning to meet with P15 as I heard about his organization (awareness/perspective) and had never gotten around to it the last four months. This space opened up that opportunity and time. Because of this relationship we are currently working together on bringing “Pardon Me” trainings for ex-offenders to his organization (behavior). We also worked together on a project the week after the circles commenced where 13 individuals from his organization accompanied my organization and others to the city council building to meet with our area representative and talk about issues of employment and re-entry in the Hill for ex-offenders (action). I also exchanged contact info with many others.

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective, Change in Behavior, Action)

P13: Yes, I exchanged info with a few others (awareness/perspective). I have however been meeting with P15 at his organization (behavior) to learn more about his services and how we can use them on the program I work on. I was actually just there on Monday (action).

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective, Change in Behavior, Action)

P10: Yes I got P9 and P15’s information. I am interested in shadowing what they do to learn more about counseling as this is something I am interested in for my internship (awareness/perspective).

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective)

P1: I did exchange info with P13 as we are both attorneys and I thought we might be able to work on some things together (awareness/perspective).

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective)

P16: Yes, I actually have been meeting with P15 (awareness/perspective) in order to assist in developing a new mental health program that they will be creating soon. I am also volunteering there every (behavior/action) Wednesday and have gotten one of my friends involved who just built two new picnic tables for the nonprofit in the Hill’s community day.

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective, Change in Behavior, Action)

P15: Yes, actually P13 was just here today and we discussed street outreach (awareness/perspective). He also said he is going to see about bringing the new police commander they just hired down here to talk to us and get to know us (behavior/action).

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective)

P17- I exchanged info with P2 as I thought some of the trainings he was offering could help me (awareness/perspective), he actually was here on Thursday (August 3rd) to
possibly set up some trainings with me and the organization (behavior/action). We also talked about taking some of the participants from our organization down to Philadelphia to actually sit in on some Pardon Trials so people with criminal backgrounds can see how that works.

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective, Change in Behavior, Action)

P11: Yeah, I actually met with P14 (awareness/perspective) to discuss a business plan for her coffee shop (behavior/action).

(Change in Awareness, Change in Perspective, Change in Behavior, Action)

In the examples above are two common themes among theory of action results. If participants did indeed initially experience a change of awareness they either carried on through the next stages until action, or stopped at the second stage of change of perspective. The abrupt stop after the second step could be attributed to the third and fourth stages requiring actual movement and implementation. Participants who got to the change of behavior stage all carried on through to complete action. This raises questions like: is the hurdle between perspective and behavior more difficult than that of awareness to perspective? How can we as researchers or community organizers provide that leap more easily so that citizens choose to follow through on their change of behavior and action and remain engaged in their community?

While we note above that the study circle process created direct change and action among participants, we also note the spill-over of the process to others inside and outside of the community. Chavis and Wandersman (1990) might refer to this spill-over as a result of catalytic change, or rather the way a sense of community can affect local change by altering one’s perceptions of the environment, social relations, or perceived empowerment or control. With reference to this idea, participants engagement in the study circle series played a catalytic role as they influenced others participation. For example, one participant of the study circle committed to volunteering at the other participant’s nonprofit one time per week. While volunteering there
she asked another friend to come visit the site. The participant’s other friend then became
involved with the nonprofit and even decided to donate and build three picnic tables for the
nonprofit to put outside so that people have a place to gather and eat when they host community
days. In this specific example, the connections among the initial participants continued to “spill-
over” on to others outside of the study circle who might not have been ordinarily involved in any
activities within the Hill District. This spill-over concept was also acknowledged between a
participant of the study circle who was a lobbyist for ex-offenders and with the participants who
were again associated with the “connector participant” and his nonprofit. Due to their initial
relationship within the study circle process, thirteen additional people were gathered through
their organization to participate in a meeting with the city council representative that talked about
ongoing issues, employment, and rights for ex-offenders within the community. In this example,
the initial relationship spilled over into involving thirteen additional individuals within the
community. As supported by Putnam (1995) we can see that the initial act of joining and being
involved in associational or organizational groups has the ability to make significant impacts
upon many areas of the community by continuing to spill-over onto others outside of the initial
interaction. However, in this case it took someone who had experienced change first hand in
order for spill-over to occur. Some might relate this concept to the Theory of Diffusion which
attempts to explain the perspective of social change/innovations/ideas and why those
changes/innovations/ideas are either adopted or not passed on (Dearing, 2004). Was the small
connection of knowing someone “directly” involved enough of a tipping point to make civic
engagement spill-over on to others? While diffusion theory specifically looks at the spread of
ideas and concepts as a movement, spill-over looks at the spread of action from individual person
to person. Participating in community is not necessarily a new idea that could be adopted or
forgotten, but rather a long forgotten activity in which citizens might need a jump-start to get involved. That jumpstart could be as simple as a conversation with a colleague or friend who shares their experience as a participant in the engagement or change process. This idea closely relates to what Diffusion Theory calls Opinion Leadership (Dearing, 2004). However, the sharing of dialogue that occurs in Opinion Leadership does not happen initially between peers like it does in spill-over but rather occurs first between a person of higher status and a small subset of adopters or rather, citizens. Dearing (2004) stated that when people choose to adopt an innovation they might choose to do so because of what they think of the innovation, what they think others think about the innovation, and what they think of the innovation compared to other innovations. If this indeed were to explain the phenomena of how ideas spread then we could use processes such as the study circle sessions to invite citizens together in hopes that by sharing their experience they will cause more citizens to come to the table. If we use the study circle process to gather citizens together to discuss “what they or others think” about ideas or innovations happening in the community could we be the tipping factor which might cause change to spill-over into communities person by person? This spill-over effect from citizen to citizen warrants further exploration into the reasons why citizens who were not directly involved in the study circle process chose to engage in the action that occurred as a result of those directly involved with the process. In order to better understand the concept of Spill-Over I asked a classmate of mine Mark Bloemhard to interpret the data and create an image that could help explain spill-over, as he is a trained graphic designer who specializes in branding. I shared with him my own thoughts as well as both Chapters IV and V of my dissertation. As a result of what he read and learned he was able to create a symbolic graphic below in Figure 10.1.
Reflection on the Action Research Process

The most important step in the research process was the use of the study circle format within the Action Research process. By offering and inviting participants to share their
experiences and stories I believe that the group was able to progress in their relationships much more rapidly than initially expected. Bruner (2003) stated that we should never write off the power of a story to shape our everyday experiences. During these sessions, I was able to become more aware of the power of relatable narrative in which outsiders and insiders of the community both shared together. For in the process of creating a more safe community, they were “in community” together while sharing their experiences and stories through narrative. Stories often are provided as models of the world, or community, or what was expected and what passed (Bruner, 2003). However, the process of using a more positive and restorative language within these study circles was able to re-shift the story of “this is what happened” to a more accountable question of “what shall come”? For storytelling and story sharing make us deft in imagining what might happen if…., a question that harvest much more fear if not shifted into a restorative context of “what might we create now” (Bruner, 2003). Throughout sessions 1, 2, and 3, as evidenced in Chapter IV, participants initially acknowledged what was before in the community, but then shifted their language creating an alternative future. For example you will notice below a response from a participant about what the Hill District was:

P5 - I too can remember days when there was the Hill…and activities. My father was a gospel singer and they used to sing up in front of Black Beauty. The things like that when you go back to all the days when there was so much fun….there was so many activities and it was even fun even when you were not doing anything.

As shown in the above text, participants were initially referring to what was and not what currently is or could be. As the language started to shift there was an evident turn of how one might look at creating an alternative future for the Hill District. Notice below a participant acknowledging the “old way” of conversing and shifting to a more restorative language:

P13 - As someone who has visited the Hill…instead of living here…among other places…it is stressing to see the amount of time harping back to the old days and not looking forward to something new and better that would happen. There is opportunity now to create a neighborhood that is not segregated…..that actually can be the only
integrated neighborhood….or an affluent neighborhood…and this could be it if we embrace a vision for it. We say...I wish it was that…or this .It’s going to be different than before…it could be better…or it could go away.

The future that this participant acknowledges, much like the one described by Block (2008) in discussing restorative communities, is one where citizens must not dwell on what was, but instead create a vision of a community better than what has passed.

**Significance to the Field of Community Development**

As evidenced by this study there is no “one way” in solving complex community issues. The chronic issues that plague communities today can be more widely addressed by inviting to the table all, with unique gifts, when we recognize what our own community possesses and change our way of thinking and acting.

Communities such as the Hill District can be found in cities throughout the United States. I believe that the root of their transition is heavily embedded in the process of creating a more restorative community that focuses on changing our language, inviting all to participate, and recognizing our community assets and individual strengths. As per the data, when you provide spaces to gather using a restorative framework, new ideas, efforts, relationships, and even tangible actions become just some of the many results. This new positive-asset based approach is just one of the many ways in which we can continue to create change among the neighborhoods which we hold so dear. This study helps to further explore the use of implementing restorative intentional gatherings in which citizens have the opportunity to engage, connect, and learn. Simply put, change "... is more likely to be successful and permanent when the people it affects are involved in initiating and promoting it" (Thompson & Kinne, 1990, p. 46). This concept provides us with the insight that a critical element of community engagement is participation by the individuals, community-based organizations, businesses, city
officials, law enforcement, and institutions that will be affected by what is changing or needs changed.

Further theory, such as the use of connectors, collaborative leadership, ABCD, social network theory, positive deviance, humanistic philosophy, restorative practices, clusters, and spill over change are all ways that we might continue to add to the better development of our surrounding communities and those in which we live, work, and play.

Implications for Leadership and Change

Chrislip and Larson (1994) looked at the attributes of great civic leaders in communities across the United States and came to the conclusion that collaboration needs a different kind of leadership. This different kind of leadership is exactly the style that I aimed to create as I invited citizens together to be a part of a process of change and collaboration. Rubin (2009) states that collaborative leaders are those who have accepted responsibility for building and who have helped a team to achieve a collective purpose. As represented by the data, I joined a community who all accepted responsibility for achieving a collective purpose of building social capital in order to create a more safe community. As we look to better our communities we must dare to do differently in our leadership styles and focus on coming together in order to strengthen our social capital. It is important that we utilize approaches of initiating change through processes that involve a collaborative community where we seek to engage the members of our community in the process of learning and change (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In my own study this was a key concept in creating a space that welcomed and appreciated everyone at the table. By inviting all to the table from multiple backgrounds and or statuses, I provided a space where learning and change occurred. This method does not just increase a sense of community and shared belonging,
but rather also focused greatly on building relationships, a key concept in the idea of restorative practices and ABCD.

Green et al. (2006) suggested that leaders must not be at the top of the pyramid with citizens on the bottom but instead leaders must be inside a circle with other partners. This concept was a basic guideline I used as I implemented the study circle series. The Action Research process allowed me to lead a reflective process where I was able to work with a team as part of a “community of practice” in order to generate new local knowledge. The method of Action Research also forced me to look at change in a different context, rather than the old-style idea that traditional research is the only way of creating true real knowledge. The reflective process of open-minded problem solving as a group was crucial as we looked to citizens to improve the ways they address issues and solve complex problems. It is important that we remember that citizens do in fact have the answers. When we provide opportunities to gather people together and work with them and not above them, we allow those answers to be shared in ways that contribute to effective change throughout communities.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In bracketing bias I found a struggle between how much I should self-disclose as I was acting both as a researcher and participant. One particular example is when the group was sharing their thoughts about relationships with police. Since I also had a few negative experiences with the police in the Hill District area I was unsure if my experience would show further bias or be a story to which participants could relate. After choosing to tell my story, I made a point to also share the good experiences I had with police in order to not display bias towards a specific area that would alter participant’s views within the discussion.

Throughout the research I found little struggle of being considered either an outsider or insider and would attribute this to my already established relationships and involvement in the
Hill District area. I would recommend that future researchers primarily focus on building authentic relationships prior to the sessions as those relationships did help to sustain participation as well as add to the discussion when participants brought up certain people or organizations within the neighborhood. By knowing about the assets and people in the Hill District prior to the start of the sessions, I was better able to understand their frustrations, concerns and relate to their stories.

In the future I believe that the process of utilizing study circles would be a template that is effective in many communities. I also believe that one might achieve better success in the study circle process if they choose to use a restorative practices framework which focuses on accountability, respect, and ownership. This framework would also be highly successful if it were based around core concepts such as asset based community development, where it would reveal citizens’ gifts and available community assets. Without these three core ingredients (study circles, restorative practices, and ABCD) I do not believe that this experience would have been as individually rewarding to the participants, I therefore recommend that it is important to use these key concepts in modeling this study in other communities.

Further recommendations might include a deeper look into the role of clusters and networks within communities. Perhaps mapping out clusters would assist communities such as the Hill District in strengthening the relationships which participants expressed are lacking currently. Also, with such heavy emphasis on the damaged relationships of police and citizens it might be imperative to continue to develop a second study circle process within the Hill District that might include more presence of police, in which results of the first study circle sessions were shared in order to better create solutions in restoring the damaged relationships that have already occurred within the Hill District. Furthermore, it might be beneficial to monitor participants post
study circle sessions for up to a year after their involvement in order to map out the length of
time that they stay engaged in the process of civic engagement or perhaps to further investigate
the difficulty in the leap from change in awareness to change in behavior. This study might also
further develop into a two tier study in which “spill-over change” is documented for longer
periods of time post study circle sessions. Further exploration of what made “spill-over” occur
might be an area for consideration if we wish to know more about what makes citizens finally
choose to participate in civic engagement.

Reflection on My Own Learning

On reflection, I believe that the integration of new theory and practices such as the ones
heavily described in this chapter will help me grow professionally as a community organizer and
leader throughout many roles I hold within the City of Pittsburgh. The process of “shifting the
language” from a state of lacking to a state of abundance is a tool which I can see myself
applying to my everyday life, in meetings, community gatherings, classrooms, or even my own
personal or social relationships. The once repetitive behaviors of looking for what’s lacking are
no longer effective, and so it is important as researchers and change agents that we look to
alternative creative solutions in fixing our most critical problems.

It was my hope that by changing the way in which I went about implementing
community participation, I would offer participant’s greater opportunities to relate to the
capacity of their own learning, and in doing so help them to recognize their own gifts to integrate
back into their community. Through this implementation process I learned about the importance
of unintentional gatherings, creating restorative spaces and their value in creating a healthier
community. By gathering together such a diverse sample of citizens I was able to learn about
some of the most serious issues, both good and bad, affecting the neighborhood of the Hill
District. I also found this process very educational in learning about the importance of clusters and how those networks can ultimately hinder or help a community to thrive. This concept was familiar to me; however I now realize its importance in creating sustainable change. Lastly, it is important to me as a researcher to leave the research process with greater knowledge then what I had entered, as well as new thirst for questions unanswered. I feel as if a greater look into how spill-over change can be more effective in civic engagement is a new focus area which I would like to further explore in more depth so that it might assist me as I continue my journey in building more engaged and healthier communities.

Conclusion

While the study circle process itself or the content explored did not solve the issue of violence and safety within the Hill District, they both did take steps forward in creating a more safe community by creating various new opportunities. Citizens learned of new resources, neighbors now know more neighbors, new trainings have developed, new safe spaces have been established, a new mental health program is being created, views of the Hill District have changed, as well as new collaborations and relationships among nonprofits, city officials, insiders, and outsiders. Just as Asset Based Community Development suggested, mobilizing resources that are already present in a community enables citizens to recognize what their community has in order to build a stronger community (Green et al, 2006). When citizens focus on discovering what can be productive in the community and what the community already possesses, they open up the possibility for more productive efforts in making their community a better place to live (Green et al., 2006). When a group of people discover what they have, they find power (Green et al., 2006). This power, when used in a restorative context, has the ability to create change throughout communities within Pittsburgh and many other cities.
Safer communities are those that have well-united sectors, teams, and citizens that share responsibility to resolve problems and enhance the well-being of the community. It is increasingly recognized that to successfully address a community’s complex problems, it is necessary to promote better collaboration and coordination of resources from these multiple community sectors, groups, or citizens. It is also imperative that we recognize each citizen for their individual gifts and contribution to creating a more safe community. When we involve others, we restore once damaged relationships, initiate new relationships and continue to increase the strength of our social capital and networks within our community. Engagement of citizens calls for us to create more opportunities for citizens to come together and engage in a more restorative conversation about the important issues that affect them. When we create these intentional gatherings we create more opportunity for our communities to create direct or “spill over” change and to strengthen their social capital which works towards creating a healthier, safer community.
APPENDIX
Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Letter

Are you a resident of the Hill District, do you work or own a business there? Would you like to learn about how community engagement that focuses on bringing together individual gifts and assets within our own community can help communities deal with complex community issues such as violence and safety? If so I would like to invite you to participate in an upcoming collaborative project.

Participants will be asked to commit to four sessions lasting no longer then two hours, as well as one post focus group session. Sessions will begin Monday, July 9th and end Monday July 31st. Sessions will take place at The Hill House located on 1835 Centre Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pa 15219. As a participant you will be asked to create with the study circle group a community map of assets which will be displayed within the Hill District community.

These sessions will be a part of a Ph.D. dissertation and will be audio recorded and transcribed so that I can utilize these experiences to reflect on the learning and engagement within the group. Participants will also be asked to have 30 minute audio recorded interviews with me at the end of the series of sessions so that I can explore the study circle impact on them, their learning, and development. If you are interested or have additional questions please do not hesitate to call or email me at (xxx)xxx-xxxx or tmcintosh@antioch.edu.

Thank You,

Tera McIntosh
Appendix B

General Guidelines for the Study Circles

- Sincerity-speak from your heart and own personal experiences
- Respect-listen to and respect all views of participants
- Curiosity-seek to understand others views rather than force yours upon others
- Meaningfulness-go for honest communication and depth but be aware of your time
- Acceptance-try not to judge others
- Openness-discover new views that question your old ones.
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

You have been invited to be a participant in a research project that uses study circles to engage members of your community to learn more about recognizing assets and building relationships in order to dissect issues such as violence and safety within the Hill District community. You have been selected as a participant as you have expressed interest in being a part of the study circles.

The purpose of this study is to provide a communicative space where citizens of the Hill District community can come together and engage in restorative practices that highlight each other’s gifts and community assets in order to further investigate the impact of violence and safety within this community. If you give permission to participate you will be asked to complete the following:

1. To attend four (4) study circles session lasting no longer than two (2) hours which will be audio recorded.
2. To read a chapter from a book (Chapter 1 from Community: The Structure of Belonging by Peter Block)
3. To complete two (2) take home assignment sheets throughout your participation provided by the researcher.
4. To attend a two (2) hour focus group forum post sessions to review your experience of your previous four sessions. Time and date will be communicated later.
5. To assist in the creation a Community Assets Map within the study circle that will be displayed at the new coffee shop on Bedford St at the August Wilson historic storefront.
6. To participate in a 30 minute (approximately) follow-up interview to gather more information that will assist the research wherein all quotes will be reviewed directly and only published with your approval. Should you prefer to remain anonymous only your initials or a pseudonym will be used as an identifier.
7. To give consent to allow pictures of community maps and other documents (i.e. individual and community maps, gifts questionnaires, parking lot handouts, climer card process, and group process) for use in newsletters, books, websites appropriate credit for which will be given to you as the creator; or if choosing to remain anonymous, by use of your initials and/or pseudonym.
This study will likely produce minimal risk, however if at any time during the study circle sessions you feel uncomfortable you may either withdraw from the study or decline any questions being asked and recorded. My notes, transcriptions, and audio recordings will be kept private and store in a password protected computer file and lockbox until the study is completed. The data will also be kept following the study for further follow up or development related to the research conducted. It will be properly stored and protected in an electronic version.

The researcher conducting this study is Tera McIntosh and she may be contacted at tmcintosh@antioch.edu or xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant of this study, please contact Dr. Carolyn Kenny, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Ph.D. in Leadership & Change, Antioch University, ckenny@phd.antioch.edu, and xx-xxx-xxxx.

Statement of consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in this research project.

Please print your name: _____________________________________________________

Signature: ___________________________ Date: _______________________

I agree to allow photographs of my community map to be reproduced in research journals, newsletters, web site, books, or newspapers with appropriate credit to me as the creator.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: _______________________
Appendix D

Sample Community Asset Map

Individual gifts/assets

- Businesses, Nonprofits
- Congregations/Parks/Recreation centers
- Citizen’s Associations and local groups.
- Local Institutions
- Hospital
- Book Clubs,
- Cultural Groups
- Community College
- Youth
- Elderly
- Income
- Artists
Appendix E

Gifts Questionnaire

Initials:______

1. What have you learned from listening and talking about your gifts?

2. Are their assets in your neighborhood that other participants provided that you were unaware of?

3. What are some ways in which you can utilize your own gifts to connect to the assets of the community?

4. How do you think utilizing your own gifts and what your community already possesses in gifts can help us deal with issues within the community? Do you feel it could help in addressing violence or safety? How?
Appendix F

Parking Lot Sample Worksheet

(Picture of a Car- Image removed due to copyright restrictions)
Appendix G

General Outline of Interview questions

1. How did you hear about this opportunity? What made you want to participate in the study circle?

2. Prior to the study circles, had you ever engaged in a process such as this which brings citizens together? If so, where. If not, had the opportunity been available to you?

3. How did you used to view the Hill District, was there any changes in your view of what the Hill had, as a result of this study?

4. Did you know everybody in the room? Were you able to form any new relationships that you did not come into the study with? Do you think those relationships will assist you as you continue to be a citizen of the Hill District? If so, how.

5. During the study did you feel that your view was listened to in a respectful manner? Do you also feel that you gave the same respect to others when they spoke and shared their experiences?

6. Do you think coming together in study circles like this could be beneficial in addressing other issues within the community? If so, what?

7. Think about your participation in the study circles, what part of the processes stood out to you? What major themes surfaced through your participation in the study circles?

8. What was it like being in a circle with citizens throughout many areas of the community?

9. Did any ideas arise for you as participant in this study? If so what will be your next step of action individually or as a group?
References


Oliver, L. (1987) *To understand is to act: Study circles*. Cabin John, MD: Seven Locks Press.


