ABSTRACT

HOLDEN, DAPHNE. Constructing an Emotional Culture in an Intentional Community (Under the direction of Michael Schwalbe.)

The central focus of my dissertation is the process through which people construct and strategically use an emotional culture as an interactional resource. My research is based on three years of fieldwork observing an intentional community's business meetings, retreats, workdays, and social events, as well as interviews with all community members. For many of the community's therapeutic founding members, intense, unconstrained processing was a self-developmental end in itself. They took from therapeutic discourse the idea that it is only through unearthing true feelings that one can hope to process childhood pain and find one's true self. However, other members were interested in the community for political or environmental reasons and didn't like intense therapeutic processing. I show how these differences among members led to micropolitical struggles over community structure, focus, and definition. Therapeutic members had the most control over the emotional culture, creating a context in which there was an unacknowledged stigma attached to not sharing emotions and reproducing the idea that "authenticity" meant appearing out of control. I showed how they then used therapeutic discourse as a resource to preserve a therapeutic emotional culture in which they were seen as the most proficient and brave. The unintended consequences of their use of this therapeutic discourse were to exclude or discredit other perspectives, to shield

the current context from critical examination, and to create an emotional double

standard for men and women.

CONSTRUCTING AN EMOTIONAL CULTURE
IN AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

by

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BIOGRAPHY

I grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina, the youngest of a family with six children. I graduated from Broughton Hill School in 1983 and then enrolled in North Carolina State University, where I received a bachelor's degree in English. I worked for four years as a technical writer for an air emissions testing company before returning to graduate school in sociology at North Carolina State University.

Acknowledgments

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<u>Chapter One</u>

BUILDING COMMUNITY, HEALING SELVES

I first read about the Aurora Commons community in a weekly newspaper in the winter of 1996. The article described the community as 75 acres of rural land owned cooperatively through purchased shares with each member putting down $25,000 in "infrastucture fees" to pay for the land, common buildings, roads, wells, septic, electric system and pond restoration. Members described their goal as living "a spiritual life, one which infuses us with energy and inspiration to live in harmony with our deepest selves and with nature." Moreover, they wanted to use the land in an ecological and sustainable way, to live simply to preserve global resources, to respect each others' similarities and differences, trust one another, and celebrate each others' lives. They wanted to make commitments to each other that were "similar to a marriage."

I was intrigued. It sounded like they were environmentalists, feminists, psychotherapists, and radicals experimenting with cooperative living, non-nuclear family forms, and conflict resolution. I wondered how they would do it, what they would be up against, and what it would be like to live in an intentional community. I wanted to know if people could create small groups that operated well by consensus instead of hierarchy. I thought I might have an entree into the community because I had a friend who lived nearby and knew many of the community members. In the Spring of 1996, I called my friend, and she spoke with Rose, who said that I should call and arrange a meeting.

My first meeting with Rose foreshadowed many of the themes to which I would return over the years of researching and writing. I learned about how many used therapeutic discourse to define situations, and the double-sided nature of being labeled by those who use it. I was supposed to meet Rose at her house in Aurora Commons at 10:00 am. I was able to follow her directions until I reached what I thought was the "first dirt road on the right" after a cross street in a rural area. I took the first and then the second dirt road on the right, passing through swamps and rock quarries, my car grinding, stalling, scraping, and lurching in the mud. I returned to town to find a phone and the mutual friend who knew where Rose lived. Maura led me to Rose's house, down a long dirt road called "Aurora Farm Rd," through woods, past fields, an ancient rotting homestead, and another makeshift home.

Her house—a small 100-year-old cottage she had moved to the land and refurbished—was comfortable and small, with a large deck beyond glass doors. The wooden sign in the front proclaimed her house was "The Way Out."[1] Embarrassed about being over an hour late, I was relieved when Rose—a formidable septuagenarian—enclosed me in a bear hug. I said, "I'm so sorry—as Maura can tell you, I'm directionally challenged." Maura laughed and said, "That's right! Daph used to go home a different way every time, always getting lost. It's a longstanding joke."

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[1] Later I would see how its meaning was twofold for Rose: she considered the community a "way out" of the rat race, and she also thought most people would think of them as "way out."

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When Maura left we sat down in a small living room, facing each other. Rose said, "How do you feel?" She seemed kind and sincere. I said I was flustered and embarrassed. She said, "I'm sure you are. That must have been terrible. Do you have a hard knot inside of you?" My eyes started to tear up. "Yes," I said. She said, "You know. What you should have done is told me that you were directionally challenged. I would have met you in town. It's always better just to come out with these things in the beginning—don't you think?" "Yes," I said. She said that her husband had the same problem. "For five years I didn't know if he was going to make it to work everyday or not."

We talked about the possibility of me studying the community. Rose was enthusiastic because she thought they were building a model community and their efforts should be chronicled. She said I could join them at weekly Sunday night business meetings and potluck parties and "processing" retreats every 6 to 8 weeks. She gave me a map of the community and explained where members' lots were. "Do maps mean anything at all to you?" she asked sympathetically. I said they did.

We then arranged for me to come to the next business meeting and propose my research to the group. She suggested that I tell the group about my directional disability "because that is just something that everyone should know." Referring to Maura's joke about me getting lost, she said, "Tell Maura to fuck off! That it's not funny when you have a problem like that." Trying to defend Maura, and deflect her from imposing an identity upon me as impaired, I said weakly,

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"Well, it is sort of funny." "Yeah, like alcoholism is funny," she quickly replied. I wondered if this label would stick with me but I didn't protest because it excused me for being late.[2]

My interchange with Rose taught me the double-sided nature of being labeled: at once it was seductive and repellent. On the one hand, it was difficult and embarrassing to get lost so frequently, and she was empathetic and accepting of me; on the other hand, I preferred to define myself as having a laughably eccentric propensity to get lost rather than having a disability. But in this situation, I was trapped by my own flippant remark and my wanting an excuse for being late. I learned that in this culture, ironic distance from one's emotions wasn't allowed. My ambivalence about many members' earnest empathy remained as I began to know them better. I was flattered and attracted by their wanting to understand and accept me. But I was reluctant to let them psychologize me in ways that I couldn't control.[3]

In the two years of fieldwork that followed, I discovered that the therapists and founding members like Rose helped others with their troubles but controlled them by defining them and situations in therapeutic ways. This proved to be

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[2] In fact, the label was never brought up by me or Rose again. I learned that it wasn't in good taste to bring up someone else's issues directly. Rose was only letting me know that should I want to discuss it, the community would think better of me.
[3] I believe that Rose gave me bad directions, but since I sometimes can't follow good directions, I can't be sure. At best, they were vague. Casting me as disabled made the adequacy of Rose's directions (or some combination of my skills and Rose's directions) a non-issue.

significant, because at Aurora Commons there were few rules about and no formal penalties for people who didn't do their fair share of chores, meetings, and dues paying. Although they claimed to make decisions collectively, they used emotions micropolitically to control each other informally. Exploring their emotional culture—"patterns of meanings . . . by which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward emotions" (Gordon, 1989: 115)—was thus a way of understanding how members practiced intimacy, solidarity, and small group democracy.

In this first chapter, I set the stage for my analysis of their emotional culture by describing how the community began and how founding members defined it. Next, I discuss how the founding members recruited new members who didn't share their passion for processing. For them, the community should be an alternative to capitalism and also should be collectively engaged in outside political battles. The distinction between founding members and newcomers will be relevant throughout, as I analyze in other chapters how those invested in therapy used therapeutic discourse to quash dissent. Then I describe how I collected and analyzed my data. Finally, I give an overview of the rest of the dissertation.

The Beginning—Friday Night Group

In 1990, Six years before the founding members bought Aurora

Commons property for the community, Marny and her then-husband Chris read Scott Peck's (1987) book about community building, The Different Drum. Peck writes that most people are isolated and in denial about their own and others' vulnerabilities in our culture of rugged individualism. As an antidote to this culture, Peck (1987: 59) thinks people need community, defined as "a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to 'rejoice together, mourn together,' and to 'delight in each other, make others' conditions one's own.'" For Peck, community is defined as a place of intimacy and authenticity.

Peck's book and his group, the Foundation for Community Encouragement, teach people how to build community-building principles into their own groups. The principles as Peck describes them include commitment, inclusivity, consensus, realism through incorporating diverse viewpoints, self awareness, and an absence of hierarchy. Accordingly, people should accept others just as they are without trying to change them; a community should be safe for self-expression. Peck (1987:128) instructs a new group "to refrain from generalizations, to speak personally, to be vulnerable, to avoid attempting to heal or convert, to empty itself, to listen wholeheartedly, and to embrace the painful as well as the pleasant."

Shortly after reading the book, Marny, Chris, and their friend Walt attended a Community Building Workshop sponsored by Peck's Foundation for

Community Encouragement. The idea is that people come together for one weekend and, under the tutelage of Peck or someone he has trained, they get a taste of "real" community. Marny explained the importance of this retreat in an interview:

> Walt, who had never done any kind of touchy-feely personal growth thing in his whole life—he was 64—was taken by the process. And he really got it. And he didn't say much at the workshop—there were 60 people. But he loved it and he knew there was something really important there. And so his enthusiasm and his kind of being an older man, successful, kind of a tough nut in some ways but also always had a real gentle side—him saying "Yeah, this is good. Let's keep doing this. Let's start meeting." And Chris and I really wanted more community in our lives. So we called up everybody we knew and said, "Well, we just went to a community-building workshop and we're tired of being so lonely and isolated and we're going to start meeting on Friday nights." And so we did. And we had a lot of people come and go and a core who said, "Yeah, we really want this." And that core then became the group who formed Aurora Commons.

Marny thought the experience of the workshop powerful enough to convert a "tough nut" into seeing the worth of a therapeutic perspective—in which Marny, a

therapist herself, already had a stake. She implied that Walt's desire to start a group was testimony to the community-building workshop's transformative power. Furthermore, she framed the impetus for starting a group as therapeutic—an antidote to loneliness.

Marny and Chris called their friends, including current community members Rose, Robert, Gwen, and Sam, to participate in the Friday Night Group. Marny and her husband Chris had known Sam and his wife Sara since the late 1970s when they participated in "primal rage therapy" together in San Francisco. The Friday Night Group was an opportunity to continue their group therapy experiences. When I asked Marny to describe what happened at the Friday night groups, she said:

> We'd get there about 7 or 7:30. We'd sit in silence for 2 or 3 minutes and then someone would start talking and there was no structure and no format and no leader. Sometimes we would just talk about something someone was upset about in the news—a political thing. Sometimes somebody would have a burning personal issue in their life. Sometimes somebody was pissed off with someone in the group. Or we'd start talking and people would try to fix whoever was having problems. And we really—over the course of three years—(laughing) [didn't have] very good interactions with one another. Where we'd get pissed off with each other and really were struggling with "how do you do this? And how do you get

close to people? And how do you be there for each other?" And not knowing. And a lot of people gave up. And some of us who are sort of process junkies hung in there. And there just seemed to be something valuable at hanging in there. And then it seems like we kept thinking about it and working on it and working at it and we still—as you know—we still fall into bitter confrontation and then sometimes we break through and are very genuine and supportive and helpful to one another. So over time it felt like there is so much learning here about being human. So, it was a mishmash of all kinds of things on Friday night. But none of it [was] structured—really pretty completely unstructured—except we'd start with silence.

By calling the group's process "unstructured" she meant that the group followed the "Peck model," whereby the meetings don't have an explicit agenda, leader, or organizational process. Instead, following the model presented at the community-building workshops, people were encouraged to speak only "when moved to speak." When Marny said "people were trying to fix whoever was having problems," she was also alluding to Peck's book. "Fixing" was a term Peck used pejoratively to characterize a necessary but early stage of community development in which people try to win arguments. The final stage, and the ultimate goal of community for Peck, was to achieve "emptiness," whereby people empty themselves of barriers to communication such as expectations,

preconceptions, prejudices, and ideology, so that they can accept others' authentic selves. Trying to fix another person indicated that one wasn't empty enough to accept the other.

At the time, most of those (except for the couple, Robert and Gwen) who didn't like the "unstructured" process because of the intense emotionality and frequent angry outbursts dropped out of the Friday night group. The remaining people, who became the founders of the community, stuck with it for another five years. Marny and most of the other founding members thrived on the confrontations and intense emotionality of the Friday night group.

The founding members' shared therapeutic history served many of their emotional needs. Since they believed that growth and authenticity must develop through relationships with others—the more intimate the better—they sought intense connections with like-minded others and developed a community. They basically wanted more of the same. They wanted more connection, more confrontation, and more epiphanies. They were "process junkies," as Marny put it, and wanted to create a safe context for self-exploration and self-expression.

In the founding members' view, how authentically they could communicate was testimony to how safe the community was. The goal of their community was to create a healthy, intimate circle of loved ones. Ideally, the community would allow each individual to fulfill their potential for personal growth, transformation, and healing from the damage that their original family inflicted upon them. Here is the way Rose described it:

I think the ability to share and to exhibit extreme anger and to cry and show one's woundedness and one's vulnerability and be accepted by the group in all phases of these emotional chapters in one's life is the foundation of our community. I think that if you witness that, Daphne, if you are able to understand how we are recreating a family—a healthy family—in the way we relate to each other, I think that is significant. . . . The ability to share with each other the wide range of emotion and still have the community be accepting of us as individuals. That, to me, is what's going to hold this community together.

For Rose and others, emotionality was the means and the ends of a healthy community. Sharing emotional pain for them was living "deeply and authentically" (from their brochure).

The original idea for the community came from the founding members' desire for emotional freedom and authenticity. What gave them the passion to persist, though, was the righteousness of Peck's philosophy, which infused them with a cause: therapy should properly transform the world. Peck and popular psychology reinforced the view that to be a member of the community was to be especially brave and, more importantly, utopian. In this view, to create a community based on Peck's principles was a visionary attempt to create a revolution by example. They collaborated through talk to uphold the meaning of processing—doing psychotherapy—as transformative to self and society. Many

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in the community talked about "our vision," implying that they were making sacrifices for their future, perhaps for future generations.

Marny and Chris were inspired by Peck's message of community building as a way to change the world through personal growth. In The Different Drum, Peck encouraged community builders to view themselves as not only intrepid explorers of their own psyche, but as social visionaries. Peck wrote that people learning to be vulnerable and working through their problems in small groups are the only hope for peace in our time. The arms race and government corruption stem from "being oblivious to the rules of community" (1987: 312). These rules of community, as he defines them, revolve around the importance of being vulnerable. When everyone is vulnerable, the logic goes, people will realize their common humanity and respect each other, leading to the end of violence and war and the beginning of cooperation.

Peck clearly links psychotherapy to social change. He begins his book on community building with, "In and through community lies the salvation of the world. Nothing is more important." He then outlines how his followers can change the world by changing themselves, as therapeutic activists.[4] Peck describes the "transformation" that happens in one of his community-building workshops—where people learn to practice vulnerability—as being one of "see[ing] the suffering and courage and brokenness and deeper dignity" underneath social masks and defenses of others so that we can "truly start to

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[4] Lichterman (1996) uses this phrase to describe groups with therapeutic goals.

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respect each other as fellow human beings" (1987: 69). This "transformation" is more radical, though, than having better relationships with others. He says:

> Experimenting with personally disarming ourselves, the members of a true community experientially discover the rules of peacemaking and learn its virtues. It is a personal experience so powerful that it can become the driving force behind the quest for peace on a global scale (1987: 70).

He implies that this self-work is more important than any kind of collective politics.

His logic isn't idiosyncratic. In Kaminer's (1996) essay on popular psychology and spirituality bestsellers (books in which community members were well versed) she found a pattern of the authors exhorting readers to do self-work in order to change the world. Kaminer characterizes the message of these books as, "If society and everyone in it is addicted, self-destructing, infected with left-brain rationality, then people in recovery are the chosen few, an elite minority of enlightened, if irrational, self-actualizers with the wisdom to save the world" (1992: 16). The assumption of what is "social" in this view of social change is the sum of many individuals rethinking personal values.

In a redefinition of the traditional view of "community" as a group of people with shared experiences and interests, Peck considers it to be a group of people who are vulnerable with each other for one weekend. For Peck, then, a community is an aggregate of self-interested individuals rather than a collective

with a common goal.[5] As a logical offshoot, people who like Peck's philosophy

have produced a Listserv group called "MV2SPK," referring to Peck's idea that in

"true community" one should speak only when "moved to speak." The Listserv is

intended to be an "intentional online community" for people who "have been to a

Community Building Workshop sponsored by the Foundation for Community

Encouragement and are interested in the Community Building methods

described in the writing and teaching of Scott Peck." The dialog in this forum is

remarkably similar in content and tone to the dialog at Aurora Commons. Both

mix therapeutic discourse from popular psychotherapy with Scott Peck's

exhortations to build community and make social change. For instance, a typical

posting on the server talks about the visionary nature of the group:

> More than once during the months I've been part of this circle, I have
>
> thought: There is something crazy about this group—the daily (sometimes
>
> futile seeming) struggle for clarity and understanding, the sulkiness and
>
> short tempers, the tentative offering of broken pieces of selves, the
>
> willingness to stay, for what? The weird mix of tip-toeing respect and in-
>
> your-face confrontation. The (crazy) idealism which often comes through
>
> in an implied sense that there must be a 'way' to do this (even though it's
>
> never been done before) and if the right words or tone or responses are

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[5] Peck cites Bellah et al.'s (1985) scholarship as an inspiration for his own (1987) book about community building. Bellah et al. argue that a lack of a cultural vocabulary about a common social good impoverishes civic life. However, it seems that Peck recreates the same vocabulary of self-interested individuals that Bellah et al. decry, using the rhetoric of "community."

found, community will magically happen. The whole exercise sometimes feels totally nuts—all these multiple personalities trying to communicate in this curious way. Not even knowing who's here.

The author of this post viewed his virtual community in much the way that the founding members of Aurora Commons saw their land-bound community. In both cases, Peck provides resources to view their endeavors as risky and crazily idealistic attempts to change the world by cultivating personal vulnerability in a small group.

By defining their project—first meeting weekly, then building an intentional community—as social activism, community members felt proud of what they saw as the most critical part of shedding defenses, "processing." Paul Lichterman's (1989: 193) definition of "processing" seems to fit what the community members thought they were doing: "digging down to your 'real self' and verbalizing what you find." For them, processing wasn't self-indulgent. Rather, processing allowed them to resolve conflicts, contributing to progressive social change by living more authentically and serving as a model for others. Furthermore, processing, like other kinds of social activism, was difficult and demanded sacrifices. Any difficulties encountered could thus be interpreted in the light of a greater cause, social change. However, in order to make this definition of processing meaningful, they needed continually to invoke and reinforce it in interaction.

Community members talked about processing as extremely hard work that most in our culture are unwilling to do because of its intensity. For them, "intensity" meant that an emotion is deeply felt and authentic, and thus often painful. After the first business meeting I attended, I chatted with Marny and Julie on my way out. I asked them if they were in touch with other intentional communities and they said they had a few friends in the cohousing community in a neighboring city. Marny joked that they shouldn't tell me about other communities because "we don't want you going anywhere else. We want you to stay with us!" She then said proudly, "But we are the most intense group around!" Julie nodded in agreement and said that it was "truly amazing" what they "went through together." This was the first indication I had that they viewed the intensity of their processing as their distinguishing feature.

Often one of the founding members said that forming the community was a difficult and idealistic venture. For instance, when Stacy told the community that she had decided to drop out, Marny's interpretation reinforced their sense of themselves as therapeutic activists. Marny said, "What we're doing is so hard and different—because of the money, the processing, and the experimental septic—so many things are so scary that no one wants to do it except people who already feel secure with this group. . . . Maybe I'm insanely idealistic." In effect she was saying that Stacy and others didn't want to join them because of their high-minded idealism and difficult work. Marny was turning what they already prided themselves on—their therapeutic activism—into an ostensible

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fault so that they could get credit for self-scrutiny. The above quote also shows

that Marny saw "the processing" as similar in kind to forming an ecologically

sound septic system: both were testimony to their political commitment.

An exchange during a business meeting exemplified how they constructed

their community as a place where members had to suffer the consequences of

doing such hard work. In a discussion about her and her husband's potential

membership in the community, Libby, a "seeker" (their term for people who are

interested but haven't paid their money) said that she and her husband "were

very much drawn to this basic struggle," which she thought was happening at

Aurora Commons—"the struggle to live with others." Marny lit up in affirmation of

what Libby said. Marny said when she hears Libby and her partner say that they

"are drawn to deal with core issues of human relationships at a deep level" then

"my arms are open." She continued with, "You're going to have to want it really

bad because it isn't easy. If you want to deal with life at its most essential level,

then this place is for you." The publicly-affirmed assumption was that living in the

community wasn't for the inauthentic or weak because it was a "struggle." Those

who were committed must be especially strong and authentic. For the founding

members, it wasn't enough to process together on Friday nights. It was

necessary to create a community to meet their need for a meaningful, positive,

and clearly defined sense of themselves as part of a social change movement.

Aurora Commons Community

In the spring of 1995, about one year before my fieldwork began, Rose found the rural land—75 acres of woods, fields, and ponds. Rose, Marny, Michael, and Jenny (Chris's then-partner, who never participated in the community) put 20 percent down and borrowed the rest. They intended to carry the payments until others joined them.

Aurora Commons was organized as a housing cooperative, meaning that each member had shares in the corporation based on the appraised value of the individually-owned homes. Three thousand dollars in earnest money was expected to reserve a house site. Everyone was ultimately expected to invest $25,000, which would pay for the land, community house, roads, wells, septic, underground electric, and pond restoration. Each household would propose a payment plan for the $25,000 based on what they could afford per month.

During my three years of research, five households lived illegally on the land—without a septic system, fire insurance, or residency permits. Michael eventually built a 12' by 12' cabin himself (after he and Marny broke up) and there was a ramshackle homestead already on the land, which Stacy bought and fixed up. The other homes were cheap old houses, in various states of disrepair, that they had moved to the community from elsewhere. The oldest resident, Rose, a retired schoolteacher and community activist, lived in a very neat one-story house with a huge deck. At the other extreme, a married couple—Gwen and Robert—brought a dilapidated old house with a collapsed ceiling.

After they bought the land, the founding members decided to invest in an experimental septic system that would remove pollutants from residential wastewater before it was disposed of in a conventional septic field. Once completed, the system would remove pollutants through a sand filter and a constructed wetland (the filter removes sediment while the wetland—filled with soil and lined to prevent any leaching into the groundwater—would use plants and fungi to break down pollutants). A researcher from the forestry department of a nearby university designed and built the system. Although the system would cost more and take more time than a traditional system, community members were excited about its environmental benefits.

During business meetings, more time was spent talking about the construction of the septic system than any other single topic. One reason they talked about it so much was because they helped with its construction—such as using a backhoe to dig the leach fields, shoveling sand and gravel in the wetland, and working with the researcher to get each phase approved by the county—and this work required coordination. Although they were proud of the environmental benefits of such a system, building it generated enormous frustration. Though obviously sincere, their frustration signified how much they were sacrificing for the sake of the environment. As well as being an environmental contribution, the septic system also allowed the founding members to feel good about themselves as environmentalists.

Frustration about the septic system came mainly from rising costs—more than twice the estimate—and longer completion date—more than a year past schedule. In the same way that frustration demonstrated their commitment, so did financial troubles more generally. For community members, financial problems—while not purposely generated—served their need to see themselves as sacrificing middle-class privileges in order to live up to their environmental convictions. As I will discuss later, financial problems were used as a resource by those who pushed to process "issues around money."

Marny successfully applied for non-profit status for the Aurora Commons Educational Association for their work with the septic system. The non-profit mission was to "promote sustainable living" by providing funds and labor to develop conservation projects, such as the septic system, and "training and education in a wide variety of subjects pertaining to sustainable living: water conservation, waste-water treatment, sustainable agriculture and forestry management, energy conservation, and pollution prevention." In keeping with their therapeutic focus, the Educational Association—"recognizing the importance of family and community in the pursuit of sustainability"—would also "provide training in small group development, community building, family-life skills, communications, human relations and leadership."

Of the 17 community members, nine were men and eight were women. Their ages, occupations, education, marital statuses, and relationship to the community are noted in Table 1. Several others—Rose's son and daughter-in-

law, an old friend of Rose and Marny, Sam's wife, and the woman Michael was dating—sometimes attended community potluck dinners and retreats but had not expressed interest in living there. Everyone involved in the community was white and either single or in heterosexual relationships.

Table 1
Aurora Commons' Members

Name	Age	Occupation	Education	Status in Personal Relationships	Relationship with Community
Rose	72	Retired Schoolteacher	Bachelor's Degree	Widowed	First Resident
Marny	45	Therapist	Master's Degree	Divorced, mother of two teens with Chris. Ex-wife of Chris, Ex-partner of Michael (with whom she moved to the community)	Second Resident
Robert	46	Carpenter, guitar teacher, Webpage designer	Highschool Diploma	Married to Gwen, father of two teens	Moved a house to the land, hasn't yet moved in it
Gwen	46	Battered Women's shelter worker, message therapist	Bachelor's Degree	Married to Robert, mother of two teens	same as Robert
Sam	52	Occasional Therapist, part-time carpenter and handyman	Bachelor's Degree	Married to Carol	Wanted to build a house at community, but was negotiating with Carol, who did not
Chris	48	Recently started teaching at son's charter school	Master's Degree	Long-term relationship with Jenny (not a community member), father of two teens with Marny	Resident
Stacy	53	Recently started school to get teaching certification	Ph.D. in psychology	Joined community with partner Ed. When they broke up, Ed left and Stacy stayed. Currently single	Owns renovated farmhouse but doesn't live there. Has given $3,000 to community, occasionally attends meetings. Eventually dropped out
Michael	49	Therapist	Master's Degree	Divorced. Started a relationship with Anne (who attended retreats sporadically). Father of one adult son. Ex-partner of Marny	Second Resident with Marny
Peter	72	Works on Stacy's house in exchange for rent. Does various odd jobs.	Bachelor's plus grad work in chemistry	Divorced. Father of two adult sons on the West coast	Resident, but hadn't committed to staying there by putting down money

Table 1(continued)

Name	Age	Occupation	Education	Status in Personal Relationships	Relationship with Community
Dan	36	Therapist	Master's Degree	Married to Jessica. Father of their 2 year old son	Lived in Marny's home, participated like full community member. Undecided about becoming a member
Jessica	39	Part-time artist, fulltime mother	Bachelor's Degree	Married to Dan. Mother of their 2 year old son	same as Dan
Diane	55	Grants manager in research firm	Bachelor's Degree	Divorced.	Lived in neighboring city. Invested downpayment, but stopped participating
Neil	43	Accountant	Bachelor's Degree	Partnered with Julie	Immediately put down $3,000, but later left community after problems with Marny
Julie	40	Acupuncturist; holistic health practitioner	Bachelor's Degree	Partnered with Neil. Mother of 2 young children from previous relationship	Same as Neil
Nancy	39	On disability; does various work like babysitting and housesitting	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Attended business meetings and retreats, but didn't have intentions to live there.
Libby	38	Trained as computer programmer and engineer	Ph.D. in engineering	Married to Paul; Mother of their 3 year old son	Immediately wanted to join community. Dropped out several months later over skepticism about community members environmentalism
Paul	37	Teacher	Bachelor's Degree	Married to Libby, Father of their 3 year old son	Same as Libby

As indicated above, Marny was once married to Chris and had two children, now teenagers. Chris lived up the gravel road and the children alternately stayed with each of their parents. Shortly after Marny divorced Chris eight years ago, she became involved with Michael. She and Michael were living

with her two children and his son when they all moved to Aurora Commons. A couple of years later, they split up and Michael subsequently built his own small house beside Marny's.

Because their choices were unconventional, members considered themselves radical (and politically liberal). They often referred to themselves as "a bunch of old hippies." While many of the founding members of the community weren't in a traditional political movement, they all participated in the 60s and 70s cultural revolutions—sexual, artistic, therapeutic. Especially important to them was their participation in the human potential movement that gained full sway in the 70s. Five of the founding members of the community, two couples (Marny and Chris, and Sam and Sara) and a single woman (Susan, now only an occasional visitor), were in "rage therapy" together in San Francisco in the 70s. Marny and Gwen homeschooled their teenagers together for two years.

Sam and Chris (founding members) had each spent time in their youth in communes. They considered these experiences--Sam's in a free-school-cum-commune and Chris's in a rural commune—crucial in their growth and their decision to start Aurora Commons community. Importantly, they each interpreted their experiences in these communes as the best experiences of their lives, but ultimately short-lived due to an inability to handle conflict among commune members. Sam and Chris's short histories in the communes and their interpretation of how they failed were part of community mythology: others told

me about their experiences as examples of communities that dissolved because they didn't "deal with conflict." Robert put it this way:

> I've been in all kinds of group things where things are always left hanging. People have all this resentment about this or that and don't even know it half the time because no one really talks about it. Everybody avoids each other. And it's like they get more pissed off and all this stuff. . . . This group is really different in that way.

Founding members, and most others who joined later (even the generally non-therapeutic), wanted to believe that processing emotions together was essential to the community's growth, and they defined this against the counter examples of Chris's and Sam's commune experiences. They wanted to believe that Aurora Commons, with its emphasis on group processing, would succeed where others failed.

Community members prided themselves on making all decisions by consensus. They talked through all decisions until everyone was in agreement or until dissenters agreed that they could live with the decision. Since the community was new and largely unfinished, members met often. They had much to decide: legal stipulations about limiting equity to discourage speculation; policies about hunting, gardening, logging trees and keeping animals; building the experimental septic system; housing specifications; guest policies; speed

limits on roads; restoration of common land; and perhaps most importantly at this stage, recruitment.

RECRUITING OTHERS

The founding members' ambitious plans for the community required recruiting more people. They wanted to have 15 homes, a community building with a large eating and meeting area and other common rooms, a community garden, office spaces, a library, guest rooms, a meditation room, an arts and crafts studio, a darkroom, and a retreat facility. Their small group of committed households—seven total—was short of the 15 necessary to afford even the minimum of a septic system, roads, and community house (based on the $25,000 buy-in fee).

Prospective members of the community were invited to attend weekly business meetings, an occasional potluck dinner, and a community retreat. They were expected to participate in consensus-building discussions by sharing their views on issues and listening to others. They learned the appropriate way to participate in this community through experience. After prospective members had attended at least three business meetings and one retreat, they could ask the community to reach consensus on their membership. During my three year association with the community there were 11 prospective members. Out of these, only two couples put down money to join. One couple later left the

community and the other lived in Marny's house with her. Peter lived in Stacy's house, but never decided if he wanted to buy in.

Belief in the political radicalism of the community gave the founding members license to recruit people who were political progressives and/or environmentalists. They saw their own goals as essentially congruent with the environmental and political goals of people who didn't necessarily want to process.

However, some of the newer recruits were frustrated with the emphasis on processing and brought up their political and environmental commitments to try to influence others to take collective action. When members suggested collective politics, though, others shot down their suggestions or asserted the radical nature of what the community was already doing. The founding members believed, and wanted the newcomers to believe, that the community was already sufficiently engaged in emancipatory politics by virtue of processing and the environmental septic system.

I found that members could be put into three categories, based on their beliefs about therapeutic processing: Venters, Sharers, and Communards (all are my terms, not theirs). The founding members consisted of four Venters (significantly, all of the residential members who were Venters), two Sharers, and one Communard (married to a Sharer). Communards—with the exception of Michael, a founding member—were the new recruits, many of whom didn't stay in the community. I will describe the main differences among each group, and

then show how these differences led to difficulty in recruiting and to the micropolitical struggles that I will explore throughout this dissertation.

<u>Venters</u>

Marny, Rose, Chris, and Sam are the community members I characterize as "Venters." Nancy wasn't a community member—she didn't put any money down for a house site or pay community dues—but she often attended business meetings and retreats. She too falls into this category. Marny, Chris, and Sam were practicing therapists, while Rose and Nancy had been in therapy, and Nancy had done "pillow work," similar to the philosophy of rage therapy (i.e., therapy as releasing toxic anger).

Venters believed—and affirmed this belief in interaction—that people mask "true" emotions because our culture has propagated the unhealthy belief that it's discrediting to have emotions such as fear, rage, shame, or sadness. In our culture, these emotions signify an uncontrolled, damaged, or pathological self. Drawing from popular recovery and self-help discourse, family systems theory—and their own therapy—they believed that we all have damaged selves and claiming otherwise is evidence of denial.

For Venters, rather than being discrediting, expressing the unhappy feelings that result from damaged selves signified being courageous enough to work through issues, or "process." Processing meant digging down to find the self which is the "nougat center of a bonbon, and our public roles merely tasty

and decorative wrapping." (McCarthy, 1989: 66). Venters believed that most strongly-felt emotions have a root cause in the self which isn't usually apparent without processing. For these folks, the more painful the emotion being disclosed, the more creditable was one's presentation as a growing person. They interpreted revealing any "difficult" emotion, such as anger, fear, or grief, as healthy, authentic communication and a contribution to the community.

Sam's character as a Venter was apparent when he told me in an interview:

> There's been times that I felt that we still have so much healing to do as a
> group that maybe we're not going to make it. That maybe we're just too
> crazy. And then as soon as I say that, it's like, I would rather be with
> these people as I struggle through healing and becoming whole. I'd rather
> be with these people than be with nice people. Cause these are the
> realest people I have in my life.

Sam saw the community as a place where the important work was "healing and becoming whole." He also admiringly contrasted community members to "nice people," who to him are superficial and in denial. For Sam, Marny, Rose, Chris, and Nancy, growth required that one express emotions—regardless of how others' might interpret them or feel about the expression. Once expressed, Venters could process them, which largely consisted of mining childhood

experiences for evidence of their source. By unearthing the source in childhood, Venters felt they were better understanding their real selves.

Sharers

There were six community members who had some reservations about the Venters' model for the community: Julie, Neil, Michael, Peter, Gwen, and Stacy. Michael was the only practicing therapist in this group, and Michael, Gwen, and Stacy were part of the initial membership of the community. Neil and Julie were a new couple who decided to join the community, put money down, but then dropped out a few months later after having conflicts with Marny and Sam. Stacy also eventually left the community after experiencing conflicts with Rose and Marny (more about conflicts in a later chapter). Out of this group, only Michael and Gwen remain actively involved in the community.

The reservations they had about the established group process were similar. For instance, Gwen's complaint was typical. She said in an interview:

> I liked it best when people wanted time to share and they shared their joy and their pain and that the group was just there. I didn't enjoy the times when people were at cross currents with each other and did it in a very angry way.

In contrast to Sam's pejorative assessment of what "nice" means, Gwen praises a later retreat because "there weren't any real painful exchanges. People were

sharing as I remember it. I just felt that that was really a nice one." All of these

people wanted to distinguish "sharing" and "being vulnerable" from expressing

anger. They believed that the former was healthy and productive but the latter

was dysfunctional and counterproductive. Michael's criticism of how the Venters

expressed their anger was most direct:

> It has seemed like there is a kind of apology for unbridled anger—kind of
>
> an excuse for it that openness and directness meant you didn't have to
>
> treat each other very well. You could be really harsh and furious and
>
> hurtful in the name of honest communication.

For Michael and others, "unbridled anger" shouldn't be permissible, because it's

merely an excuse to hurt others without compunction, rather than a necessary

part of personal growth. Similarly, Julie felt that she was implicated and thus

"personally assaulted" in a monologue in which Sam raged about how angry he

felt because "some people" weren't paying their full community dues. Sam's

rage was directed at Julie (more about this later).

Although they felt uncomfortable with expressions of anger, Sharers

enjoyed sharing their problems, weaknesses, and fears. Sharing made them

feel closer to others and happy that they were in a community where people felt

"safe enough" to confess potentially discrediting information about themselves.

As Julie put it: "I really appreciated people's vulnerability Saturday night and the

way they expressed their fears." When I asked for an example, she said: "When

Kurt [Rose's son and occasional community participant in retreats, potlucks, and other social functions] was talking. He was talking about his fears. I just have so much awe for people who can speak their fears. Because once you speak, it tends to lessen their hold."

Like the Venters, Sharers subscribed to the belief that emotional expression is the key to personal growth, and personal growth is their goal. They also believed that childhood wounds had to be revisited to be healed. Unlike the Venters, however, they didn't think that any expression should be permissible. They drew the line at directly attacking others through expressing anger.

Gwen, Julie, and Stacy each separately told me that they would like the community to establish some explicit rules about emotional expression. Julie said, for example, "I want ground rules that there will not be any violent outbursts. And there will not be any name calling. There will be a conscious effort to appreciate other people. And just be careful with each other…I would like to get things out on the table but much more important to me to do it moderately and kindly and graciously." Similarly, Gwen and Stacy said they'd like to establish "boundaries" about what could happen at business meetings and retreats. More specifically, Gwen recommended that "there'd be an agreement that there will be so many people present to help with the conflict or …some process where there's some agreement in terms of how far you can go."

As I will show, the Sharers participated in the processing when it came to expressing their own pain and fears, but they did not express anger toward

others. As I will also show, while they often shared their emotions and cried, they never had public epiphanies in the way that Venters did. Because the founding members described the community in their literature and on their webpage as a place for environmentalists and those interested in living cooperatively—as well as for those interested in therapeutic processing—the Sharers and Venters attracted another group, the Communards, some who felt processing was unnecessary and others who believed it was good but should not be an end in itself.

Communards

Robert, Dan, Jessica, and Ed were troubled by the community's emphasis on processing or what they described as "group therapy." They did not join the community for personal growth. They wanted to create an alternative to capitalism and alienation, share and cooperate with friends, or merely have a convenient place to live.

Robert, along with his wife Gwen, was one of the founding members of the community. Ed was partnered with Stacy when she became a community participant and bought the original homestead on the community land, but dropped out shortly after when he and Stacy broke up. Dan and Jessica were the only newcomers the community successfully recruited after buying the land. They built a house and were living in the community with their three-year-old son. Dan was the only Communard who was a practicing therapist.

Robert and Ed were skeptical of therapy. Robert, perhaps because he realized that it was important to his wife, framed his skepticism this way: it wasn't useful for him personally although he could see how it helped some people. Robert was interested in living cooperatively among friends, or "having a group of people who have similar interests and want to help each other on a daily basis is a big plus. . . . where people care and want to help each other to live and if you have a problem, they can help you with it." He added, however, that "even though I didn't like the processing part of it, I realized it's something I have to be involved in at some level to be in this group." Rather than trying to change the way community members interacted, Robert took it for granted as an unfortunate and uncomfortable aspect to an otherwise good arrangement.

Ed, perhaps because he had broken up with Stacy, put his skepticism bluntly. He was frustrated by the lack of efficiency in the consensus decision-making process where "everyone shares their feelings" and he "would prefer a more delegated authority." He described being in a business meeting when people were sharing their feelings and thinking that the processing was "irrelevant to what we're discussing now."

Dan and Jessica, the newcomers to the community, were uncomfortable with the therapeutic processing as a community but not with therapy per se. They joined the community for political and economic reasons, not personal growth. Believing that sharing resources and land was itself a political act, they wanted community members to work together growing, cooking, and building—

and to them, processing wasn't "work." Dan said, "I have a lot of motivation and energy and I find that working with people is fun and non-alienating [but] I have a lot of resistance to sort of thinking like, 'I want to be in a therapy group with these people forever, because there's just endless challenge and shit I've got to work out with people.' "

Jessica also thought that the group therapy atmosphere would drive people away: "You're not going to gain anybody from the outside who doesn't know you coming into this intense thing, and just all of a sudden be open and vulnerable with these strange people who are really having temper tantrums and outbursts." While Jessica and Dan were not philosophically opposed to therapy, they didn't think it was appropriate as a community focus.

Similarly, Peter wanted the community to work toward sharing resources. A soft-spoken political radical with no apparent possessions other than a computer and an old car, Peter dropped out of a marriage and a high-paying career as a chemist for Boeing in 1970 to join work collectives and travel the country exploring alternatives to capitalism. He worked with the War Resisters League and then joined a local Green Party to try to create a local currency. He told me:

> I'm excited about the possibility of commonizing our finances and having
> joint ownership of cars. [Q: Do you think that will happen?]. I would bet
> that down the line that's gonna be seriously considered. [Q: Have you

talked to other people about that?]. Not so deeply. Philosophically,

they're in line. But I think that we're in a practical way not close to it yet. I

liked what was happening at Twin Oaks. There, each person was sort of

obligated to bring in money every year. So they would work two or three

months outside. But to come to Twin Oaks, you brought all of your

possessions and all of your obligations and that became community

responsibility. And I like that. I like that sort of common fate approach. I

like it because it really provides a solid footing for trust and I think that's

what I want most out of community. It really needs a whole close look and

reworking about what security means to us. Cause a lot of what we've

done to provide our security seems to me to be isolating. [Q:

Accumulation of stuff?] Insurance, separate homes, separate

entertainment centers, private finances. ...When I talk about disarmament

stuff and wanting to have no interest on money, not wanting to have wage

labor or private property, I know that's what I want and I think it is

necessary for long-term survival.

Peter was initially drawn to the community because of its collective ownership of

the land, with individuals owning shares according to their investment in their own

dwellings. We can see from his above comments, however, how his

interpretation of what this meant was much more politically radical than the

founding members had in mind. He remained financially uncommitted to the community, in case he decided he didn't want to stay there.

Libby and Paul wanted to join because they were interested in having control over their environment, in a way that was impossible living in an apartment complex that sprayed chemicals on the lawn and gardens. I characterize them as Communards because, while they liked sharing, they wanted a political community like they had found while living in Chiapas. However, it became apparent that they were too radical in their environmentalism for the more mainstream community. For example, at a business meeting, Libby asked if she and Paul could organize an informal meeting at the community for people interested in fighting against the local nuclear power plant that was planning to expand its capacity to store spent fuel rods. During the ensuing discussion, Chris said that he thought that some people "are called to do political work and some aren't," and he didn't want the community to take on any specific issues. Gwen agreed with Chris and thought that Libby and Paul should do their political work on their own, rather than using Aurora Commons as a sponsor. Rose and Marny each said that they supported the work, but didn't want to pressure people to become involved. Founding members Gwen, Chris, Rose and Marny asserted the primacy of their therapeutic view that activism was a matter best left to the dictates of individual self-development. Even though members could opt out of participating, in their view, making it a community

event would be too much of a community endorsement and presumably could pressure people who weren't personally "called" to do it.

Libby seemed frustrated and said she would like to revisit this discussion, because to her, working against a nuclear storage facility was critical in protecting the health and well-being of the community. The founding members of the community did not want to define the community in this way, however. For them, engaging in an outside political battle would divert attention away from the more important job of discovering the authentic self in the context of community.

A few months later, and just after they had told the community they would like to join, Libby and Paul decided instead to move to California. Though I didn't get a chance to talk with them, others told me that Libby and Marny had clashed about Marny burning treated wood outside her house. While it's not surprising that Libby and Paul didn't fit into the environmentally mainstream community, it is revealing that the community founders had initially presented themselves in such a way that Libby and Paul thought they had found a home there.

In a similar attempt to push the community toward more environmentalism, Dan and Jessica once proposed that visitors should park their cars in one lot at the beginning of the community land and residents should have one parking space along the cul-de-sac by most people's houses. They argued that it would foster more community to have people on foot, it would reduce impact on the land and cost of maintaining the roads, and it would discourage car use in general. Gwen objected to having only one parking space nearby,

because she and Robert used two cars. Dan said it didn't seem unreasonable to him because cars were "inherently evil." Marny said, "I wouldn't be happy if I couldn't pull my car up to the house, if my kids couldn't pull their car up to the house, or if my visitors couldn't pull their car up to the house. Life is hard enough. It's just hard enough." The item was tabled for lack of time at the facilitator's (Dan's) suggestion, and to my knowledge never brought up again.

It is revealing that when challenged by newcomers for not living up to their professed goal of living "a lifestyle based on our commitment to preserve dwindling global resources," the founding members portrayed the newcomers as "extreme" in their environmentalism rather than reevaluate their own behavior. For the founding members the third goal of their mission statement was defined only by the environmental septic system. That is, they were environmentalists by virtue of what they had already done rather than what they were committed to doing in the future.

Most of the founding members—Venters and Sharers—wanted to believe they were radical political actors, yet wanted to act as therapists. They weren't interested in challenging the nuclear power plant, giving up their cars, or even sharing their resources. What they did want was to continue to process together and feel good about themselves by defining it as social change work. By defining themselves as a political and environmental group, however, they attracted anti-capitalists and environmentalists who challenged the status quo and became

disillusioned. Defining their goals as congruent with these others thus impeded

finding like-minded folks who might like to live in the community.

Designing a community for a therapeutic purpose, then defining it as being

congruent with others' non-therapeutic goals, has been called "frame extension"

in another context (Snow et al. 1986). Using data from a study of peace and

justice groups, Snow et al. (1986: 472) found that the group used the strategy of

"portraying its objective or activities as attending to or being congruent with the

values or interests" of potential members. Similarly, the therapeutic members

defined—to themselves and to others—their activities and beliefs as congruent

with those of people who were interested in political and environmental

alternatives. Snow et al. (1986) say that frame extension is often a "hooking

process" used to interest nonmembers until they begin to redefine their goals

from the group's perspective.

In summary, the Venters, Sharers, and Communards shared a sense of

themselves as opposing the mainstream. However, members used two different

kinds of rhetoric taken from the '60s counterculture as resources to define the

community. Venters took the discourse of the human potential movement, which

held that suburban, middle-class life as their parents knew it was alienating,

repressive, and conformist. Nonconformity, in this view, was about rejecting

roles and finding one's true self, often through experimenting with relationships

(see Turner 1976). Communards, however, whether anti-capitalist or

environmentalist, used the political and environmental discourse from social

movements such as the anti-war efforts of 60s, feminism, and anti-nuclear movements of the 60 and 70s (with the exception of the two apolitical Communards, who just didn't like processing).

Giddens distinction between "lifestyle politics" and "emancipatory politics" (1991) can clarify the difference between Venters/Sharers and many of the Communards. Lifestyle politics is an offshoot of the Human Potential Movement and politicizes individual choices, such as one's dress, sexuality, or recycling habits. In contrast, emancipatory politics politicizes collective resistance to vested interests, such as joining a union or protesting with a group of others. For the founding members, practicing lifestyle politics, the pertinent political question was "who am I, and how should I act as such a person?" In contrast, Communards asked the emancipatory political question of "how should we organize ourselves as people committed to changing X,Y, or Z?"

Lifestyle politics has become deeply entrenched in Western culture. "Working on" our emotions for self-growth and self-discovery is normative (McCarthy 1989; Simonds 1992; Erickson 1996). Furthermore, how authentic we feel has become the self-referential standard by which we can gauge our progress. Schwalbe (1996) and others (Giddens 1991; Gamson 1992; Taylor 1996; Melucci 1989; Klapp 1969) point out that many contemporary social movements, such as the mythopoetic men's movement, are about creating groups within which to feel authentic and meaningful rather than about changing society.

This culture of "expressive individualism" (Bellah et al. 1985) is continually reinforced by a political economy whereby people need to be continually persuaded to consume unnecessary "lifestyle" products (i.e., products used for self-expression). As Tom Frank (2000: 57) points out, "liberation marketing imagines consumers, with the help of the brand, as breaking free from the old enforcers or order, tearing loose from the shackles with which industrial order has bound us, escaping the routine of bureaucracy and hierarchy, getting in touch with our true selves. And finally finding authenticity, that holiest of consumer grails." Therapeutic culture fashions the same model of the self that consumer culture continually reinforces: an object that continually needs to be remade and improved upon (see Simonds, 1992).

And like consumer culture, the culture of "expressive individualism" isn't equally available to all. At Aurora Commons, those proficient with therapeutic discourse were trained therapists, people who had been in therapy, or those who had worked in other human service professions. These occupational skills translated into a kind of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1977) in the community. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, habits, values, and tastes that one acquires through education and family and peer socialization that reflects and reproduces one's material resources. Because status as a processing, self-actualizing person is theoretically open to all, those who claimed the status most frequently (the Venters) were credited with having the most motivation and ability rather than with being proficient with a kind of specialized, stratified discourse.

The tension between the two discourses of the "political" in the community is parallel to that described by Lichterman (1989) in an anti-battering collective led by men. The organization's early years were defined by men who became engaged through the women's movement to fight sexism and violence against women. However, men who worked in the human service professions began to gravitate toward the political aspect of the work as a political addition to and natural extension of their careers. As the human service worker's therapeutic discourse infused the organization, it changed toward one that focused on a depoliticized "male role" rather than one that considered men's relations with women in society.[6] However, as at Aurora Commons, the tension between political activism and professional psychology remained, as activists wanted to use feeling talk as an entree into political work while therapists wanted to define psychotherapy as political activism.

In Aurora Commons, the two countercultural rhetorics of "the political"—the one lifestyle and the other emancipatory—easily blended in the community since their proponents' appearances and lifestyles were indistinguishable. The de rigueur thrift store cut-offs, Birkenstocks, and ratty T-shirts could signify resistance to consumer culture, authority, and prescribed roles; a woman's unshaven legs could signify a challenge to patriarchy and a rejection of conformity; and an emotionally expressive man could be a product of feminist

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[6] See also Taylor (1996) on how women's postpartum self-help groups borrowed from both feminism and psychotherapy, with the result being an emphasis on individual adaptation to male domination.

education or therapy. In each case, the former is meant to be a challenge to a political and economic system, while the latter is meant to be a challenge to individual doctrines of conformity. While the signs were the same, the meanings were different among community members.

As I will show, these differences created conflict about the emotional culture in the community. Those invested in therapy, the Venters, wanted to maintain a culture in which authenticity was the prime mandate, while Sharers wanted less anger, and Communards wanted less processing. How these different interests play out in this context will be the heart of the dissertation.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Because I was interested in how member of Aurora Commons created and assigned meaning to their community, I used a symbolic interactionist perspective in my data collection and analysis (Blumer 1969). Adopting a symbolic interactionist perspective meant that I tried to understand the perspectives of the community members toward each other, the community as a whole, and the larger culture. Over time I found patterns in how community members negotiated with each other, defined their social world, and strategically tried to resolve the problems they faced.[7] I also examined the unintended consequences of their joint actions and how, in turn, they dealt with them.

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[7] When I talk about "strategic" actors, I do not mean that they are manipulative, or necessarily even conscious of their action as strategic. I mean to invoke the pragmatist assumption that all humans interpret and act toward their social environment—take "lines of action"—in ways that

Qualitative methods are necessary to study how interaction occurs in real life situations (Blumer, 1969; Prus, 1996). Therefore, my research was based on participant observation (Adler and Adler, 1994), in-depth interviews (Fontana and Frey, 1994), and analysis of paper and electronic documents. I wrote detailed fieldnotes after each visit to the community from the spring of 1996 through the winter of 1998. I observed business meetings, community retreats, potluck dinners, workdays, and other social gatherings. When I attended business meetings, I was able to write fieldnotes as I observed. On other occasions, I wrote notes after leaving the field.

In addition to writing fieldnotes, I wrote notes-on-notes as soon as possible. In notes-on-notes, I explored analyses of my observations (Lofland and Lofland 1984). I also noted my own experiences of being in the community (Kleinman and Copp 1993) that I used as grist for analysis. While I didn't assume that my experiences were identical to those of others, I used my experiences to stimulate hypotheses about their experiences. Furthermore, I noted patterns and marked questions as they occurred to me so that my vision was honed for the next time I was in the field. These notes-on-notes were an ongoing part of my analysis of the setting.

I conducted in-depth and open-ended interviews with all community members at Aurora Commons at least once and interviewed residential members at least twice. In addition, I interviewed three people who dropped out of the

serve their interests as they define them (such as cooperating with others and feeling good about

Friday Night Group or the early community before I started my research. The interviews with community members were loosely structured to elicit accounts of initial interest in community, first contact with Aurora Commons, and experiences at Aurora Commons. My strategy for the interviews was to probe for detailed stories of the topics mentioned above. Furthermore, I used my own observations as sources of interview questions. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

I also collected data from two Internet e-mail Listservs: an "on line community" for adherents of Scott Peck's philosophy and a discussion group for people interested in cohousing. These were public groups in which anyone could ask questions or tell stories by posting a message. Anyone with access to Internet news groups could read such messages and respond to them, and everyone was able to read the responses. I printed relevant messages or took notes off the screen. Reading these online accounts helped me become better acquainted with the discourse used by members of Aurora Commons, and gave me perspective on how they differed from cohousing members.

I was a nominal participant as well as an observer. While I did not participate in the consensus-based decision-making process, I did sometimes offer suggestions as they occurred to me in business meetings. I worked during the workdays and ate and socialized during the potluck dinners. Though I did have personally revealing one-on-one conversations, I never shared during

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themselves) (Blumer, 1969).

retreats and did so only superficially if I felt compelled during check-ins (round-the-room personal monologues), like some of the Communards.

I thought it was important for me to participate to understand their perspective. Unlike a mere observer, my participation opened me to the emotional contours of community experiences. For example, I gained insight into how it feels picking up a "talking stick" at a meeting and commanding others' undivided attention; trying to socialize as a newcomer among longtime friends; sitting through long business meetings when arguments arise; and seeing someone break into tears. I thus also learned about what they expected of me as a community member. In this way I had data about what it takes to be a competent member of their community. Participation in this sense was a way of using my own feelings and actions to gain insight into others' feelings, meanings, and definitions of the situation (cf. Emerson 1983: 93-107).

Though I usually felt engaged with others and absorbed in the experiences of participating, I would put my own sympathies—by sociological training and political bent—in the Communard camp. From this perspective, I could see how the Venters had the most power to define the community's emotional culture. Also I felt the tension when the Communards' views got short shrift. My attunement to the feelings of the Communards ultimately allowed me to see how the emotional culture worked to preserve the status quo and squelch dissent. As a Communard (who also identified with Sharers), I was perhaps better able to have some distance and analyze Venters' communication as a <u>discourse</u>,

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constructed in social interaction and carrying unacknowledged assumptions, more so than if I had studied a community of sociologists. It was more challenging for me to take the perspective of the Venters.

I used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data (see Charmaz 1983; Glaser and Strauss 1967). I used my notes-on-notes, where I first explored hypotheses and noted patterns in meanings or interactions, to start the analysis. When I coded fieldnotes, interviews, and supplemental data, I used tentative categories developed in these notes-on-notes. For example, early on I noticed how Venters talked about conflict among community members as a testimony to the safety of the community and the authenticity of its members. As I looked through fieldnotes and interviews, I paid special attention to how others talked about conflict and coded accordingly: "conflict is healthy," "conflict is aggressive." Once I realized that there were differences of opinion about conflict, my next step was to code interactions according to what issues produced conflict and how it was used: "squelching talk of finances," "mining childhood experiences for epiphanies," and "quashing dissent." As I saw new analytic patterns and themes, I had to recode data accordingly to test (look for negative cases or contradictory evidence) and refine my hypotheses. Starting and ending with my data kept me inductive and grounded in community members' interactions and perspectives. The analysis thus unfolded through a process of continual revisions forced by comparing interpretations to data.

After all of this work, and several attempts to group themes together in extended analytic memos, the data seemed to coalesce logically into three basic themes: constructing an emotional culture; using the emotional culture; and gender, power, and emotional culture. I then analyzed each of these themes individually, focusing on the interactional micropolitics of each. It is to each of these that I now turn to in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively.

Chapter Two

MICROPOLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF AN EMOTION CULTURE

Community members, like most others in our culture, defined feelings as signifiers of their true selves. In other words, what you feel tells you who you really are. In this view, one can't alter <u>true</u> or authentic feelings for the situation, others, or one's duties—thus they signify who one really is more than anything else. True feelings emerge beneath one's conscious control. Community members believed that feelings were authentic to the degree that they were spontaneous and couldn't be elicited or shaped by the actions or words of others. The felt indicator of the authenticity of the emotion was its intensity: the more intensely felt the emotion, the more authentic it was.

For them the authentic self signified by intensely felt spontaneous emotions was a prediscursive one. That is, the self was a mystical core that's forged in childhood and remains unchanged, however obscured, throughout one's life.

Community members collaborated to define certain kinds of emotional expressions as "authentic" and thus transformative, brave, and pleasurable. Popular self-development discourse provided resources for this interpretation. They measured the success of a retreat, for example, by how "authentically" people expressed their emotions—as evidenced by their intensity, rage, or tears—rather than by the consequences for members' relationships later. As

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Peck asserts, in this ethos, authenticity means communicating vulnerably, which "is most often made manifest by revealing our woundedness: our brokenness, our crippledness, our weaknesses, our failures and inadequacies" (1987: 231). For many, authentic emotional expression signified that one was making progress in psychological growth toward healing old wounds.

As Gordon (1989) points out, what people experience as authentic varies by "emotional culture." One person may feel like her "true self" when she's doing her job well while another may feel like her "true self" only when she's impulsively laughing or crying, breaking social norms. Understanding the different subjective experiences of authenticity requires looking toward each person's culture and the social construction of authenticity. As the rules for showing others that one is being authentic are socially negotiated within particular emotional cultures, so is ultimately the subjective experience of it. For example, Schwalbe (1996: 127) found that men in the mythopoetic men's culture defined their emotional reticence as deeper and more authentic than women's emotional effusiveness. In contrast, many members of Aurora Commons defined emotional circumspection as being repressed. I discuss how community members learned and negotiated these standards for experiencing and showing authenticity through emotional expressions, paying particular attention to how this process was a contested one and some had more power than others.

CONSTRUCTING AUTHENTICITY

Community members collaborated to mark some emotional expressions as "authentic" and others not. By policing the boundaries, the Venters and Sharers delineated the parameters of authentic interactions. The way that the group produced their desired outcome, an emotion which could be interpreted as "deep" or authentic and could be processed, was patterned. In general, someone must first share an emotion in an authentic way. The therapeutic members believed that emotions coming from a "deep place" required processing in order to fully understand and aid in personal growth.

These authentic emotions then could be processed with the help (or often merely the passive listening) of others so that the person experiencing the emotion came to a larger understanding of it, or an epiphany. Epiphanies were usually about how the cause originated in childhood relationships, usually with a parent. At times, the epiphany was about how the current feelings were experienced in other contexts. They defined a pattern of similar emotions coming up in different contexts as an "issue" about whatever triggered the feelings. In both cases, their goal was to process these feelings to reveal their source, a damaged self.

They then collaboratively defined these epiphanies through talk as indicating that they were growing emotionally and spiritually through being a part of the community. Continual processing meant for the therapeutic members that they were continually growing as people, becoming more authentic. This self improvement story can be historically and culturally situated in the "grand

narrative of modernism" (Gergen, 1991), which holds that there's an inevitable historic path of continual improvement, as evidenced by scientific progress. Their personal growth was then held as evidence of community success.

Public processing and epiphanies were thus important in reproducing the self development culture. That is, if members did private processing, it wouldn't have let the whole community take credit for their epiphanies—and it also wouldn't have allowed the Venters to credibly call for more processing, nor to frame problems as psychological ones. Francis similarly found that therapeutic ideology functions in support groups to reproduce itself by propagating its own definition of the situation (and subsequent need for itself): "a common ingredient to support group ideology is therefore the promotion of the group" (1997: 92).

Having these retreats to reaffirm the importance of self-development discourse was a structured part of the community. Aurora Commons' vision statement declared that:

Members agree that learning to be open and vulnerable, to develop a deep understanding of one another, is the most effective way to resolve conflicts and meet people's real needs for love and acceptance. The community will hold community-building retreats with the expectation of everyone's participation to provide the time to create a safe place for intimate sharing as one way to promote this kind of understanding.

The Venters called for retreats and controlled the agenda. Perhaps because the

Venters usually had professional expertise, or they frequented therapeutic self-

development workshops, others credited them with having "tools" that everyone

could use. Their control through scripting interactions was thus unquestioned.

Expressing Emotions Authentically

It was important for community members to indicate to others that an

emotional expression was deeply felt, and thus authentic. That is, they needed

to prime their audience to interpret their expression as authentic. The Venters

did this by (1) avoiding the appearance of being influenced by others; (2)

showing how scary self-disclosure was; (3) expressing anger; and (4) having

epiphanies. However, as I will show, the Venters had more power than the

others to define these expressions as authentic. They defined authenticity in a

way that put them in the best light while altercasting other less-proficient or less-

willing self-disclosers as cowards or "in denial."

Avoiding the Appearance of Being Influenced by Others. Rather than focusing

on the event or conversation that evoked the emotion as a topic of discussion,

therapeutic community members usually turned their attention first to the emotion

itself as the object of importance. In this way, it seemed to others that the current

context and the present others merely triggered the expression of pre-existing

emotion. Focusing on the emotion as the object of importance made it probable

that community members would describe previous experiences that also evoked the same emotion. In this way, they could ultimately have an epiphany about the common thread—originating in childhood—running through each instance in which they experienced the same degree of anger, grief, or fear.

For example, at a "separation retreat," specifically called so that people could deal with "unresolved issues" around Marny and Michael's break up—such as people feeling torn between conflicting loyalties—they used a "talking stick" so that people who were "moved to speak" could have the floor for as long as they held the stick. After a couple of others spoke, Rose took the stick and started crying. She said she had "been going very deep into [her] stuff" the previous evening because Marny and Michael's separation brought up "earlier grief" about her husband killing himself.

Rose used the time to talk about her older grief rather than focusing on her feelings about Marny and Michael's separation. That the separation itself and the subsequent change in community dynamics were mainly ignored reinforced the tacit belief that feelings that arose due to the separation were necessarily related to deeper and older unhealed issues. Current feelings had sources in older feelings, produced by deep wounds in the self. That is, Rose believed that processing her "earlier grief" meant that she would be better able to handle her grief about Marny and Michael's separation. These beliefs thus allowed them to talk about feelings while largely ignoring current relationship problems.

Not only did the Venters imply that previous wounds produced the feelings they had about the separation, but they created the appearance that their emotional expression had nothing to do with others in the room. Members wanted to ensure that no one discounted their expressions because they appeared only to respond to others or to worry about how others might interpret or feel about what they said. Rather, they wanted to signify that their emotions emerged spontaneously and independently of others in the setting.

Venters used scripts to reduce the appearance of interference by or dependence upon others in the current context. For example, in retreats someone cautioned everyone at the beginning to "speak only when moved to speak" or to "speak from the heart." Before one retreat, Michael suggested that everyone say their name before speaking, as in "I am Michael and I feel. . . ," so that "we are sure we are speaking deep within ourselves." Framing the subsequent conversation as being authentic helped sustain the appearance of people being internally compelled to speak, without regard to others in the room. Their explicit statement of what's usually assumed in interaction—that others are "speaking only when moved to speak"—points to the function of it as creating and reinforcing the idea that they were being authentic.

At retreats members often used a "talking stick," where the explicit rule was not to interrupt while others were holding the stick. But there were also implicit rules about not directly commenting on others' authentic expressions. During "check-ins" at business meetings, we went around the room with

uninterrupted monologues. A subsequent person rarely directly commented on what the previous person said, even if it was about them. They believed that what they call "cross talk" in such a situation—commenting on what someone else said—had the potential to shame others and inhibit free expression.[8]

The implicit norm that one should appear unconcerned with others' judgments in order to get credit for offering authentic feelings kept people from expressing nervousness or discomfort about their performance. In another context, Watson found that prisoners who wanted to appear to be ready for parole had the double-bind of "appear[ing] manipulative simply through the effort that they devote to seeming otherwise" (1982: 189). Similarly, community members couldn't appear to worry about their self-presentation without discrediting themselves. This stifling of worry talk (e.g., "I'm nervous that you all might think that I sound phony or shallow") served to reproduce the emotional culture in which authenticity was a paramount virtue.

M. Scott Peck (1987) describes "true community" as a group in which people naturally don't need to respond to each other. He describes the most advanced stage of community development as "emptiness," during which "a member will speak of something particularly poignant and authentic. Instead of retreating from it, the group now sits in silence, absorbing it. Then a second

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[8] As I will show in the next chapter, sometimes this implicit rule could be strategically broken by Venters, if they did it in an authentic way. Also, often members commented on others' expressions indirectly, seemingly while in the process of disclosing their own authentic truth.

member will quietly say something equally authentic" (1993: 275). He says that after one person had spoken "very deeply," then the next person:

> is not trying to heal or convert the first person. He's not even trying to respond to her. It's not she but he who is the subject. Yet the other members of the group do not sense he has ignored her. What they feel is that it is as if he is laying himself down next to her on an altar (1987: 103).

According to Peck, then, not commenting on what someone said is an act of supreme understanding—a sign of advanced growth—rather than a slight.

Furthermore, the assumption was that if members knew that others could argue or dialog with what they were about to say, they might alter it. But if they knew no one would comment, then they could freely express their true selves. Supposedly, then, everyone would feel safe because there was no danger of being shamed or rejected. Authenticity, they believed, was thus ensured.

I never heard anyone express guilt about expressing an emotion and the effect it had on someone else, or shame about having the emotion in the first place. Within a therapeutic self-development discourse, guilt and shame are "interpretive" or "derivative" emotions—i.e., ones that don't "naturally" arise (Brabant, 1997). Since community members believed that it was difficult to express emotions authentically, one should be proud of doing so, not guilty or ashamed. To express guilt or shame would show that one was being influenced

by thoughts of others' imagined judgments, so one wouldn't get credit for being authentic.

As they didn't express guilt or shame, they also didn't proffer sympathy to each other, violating the larger culture's sympathy norms (Clark, 1987). When someone cried and expressed emotional pain, others intently and sympathetically listened but didn't express sympathy. As Clark (1987) shows, most are aware that sympathy claims can be used manipulatively. Expressing misfortune could be used to call forth sympathy from others and giving sympathy means that you are indebting the recipient. Offering sympathy could therefore imply that the discloser was merely asking for sympathy rather than expressing something authentic.[9]

When expressing emotions, therapeutic community members often linked them to their body, giving the impression that they were merely reporting what they felt at the more intuitive level of their bodies rather than reacting to others in the room. They situated the emotion in a particular place in the body (e.g., the stomach) and often a particular sensation (e.g., a tightening or queasiness). Presumably, what was felt in the body was real and unmediated by the mind— and thus the discloser should acknowledge the feelings to others in order to be authentic. For example, in a business meeting Chris said he was upset about the lack of planning for the upcoming retreat. He described a physical sensation

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[9] Like many therapists who refrain from displays of sympathy, members of the community furthermore didn't want to signify that others' emotional pain was pitiable. Rather, they wanted to indicate that emotional pain is normal and its display a sign of growth.

he was feeling when others were talking. He said, "I could feel anxiety moving up from my stomach to my throat. I felt hot flashes."

Showing It's Scary. Although many members, especially the Venters, gave themselves credit for working through much of their fear of disclosing "painful" emotions, they did create the belief that it was always a "scary" undertaking, one that could be terrifying. That they felt safe enough—despite their fears—to participate attested to the community's success at providing a safe enough place to be authentic. They often constructed the situation as inherently scary by proclaiming and talking about being scared.

For community members, sharing was inherently frightening because one risked exposing oneself and then being rejected or discredited by others. In this view, the few who were able to work through their fear—signified by sharing— were thus the most brave. Conversely, those who didn't share were less emotionally advanced.

Often Venters and Sharers prefaced what they said with "I'm scared to say this, but…." In one particularly telling moment during a retreat, Kurt (Rose's son) said he was "scared to talk" but thought that he should. He explained that "It is my fear that is really the issue. I've got this scared little boy inside of me." Underscoring the value community members placed on working through fear, Kurt was saying that he was scared of showing others that he was scared. He could get points for overcoming his fear of talking about it and for making

progress toward dealing with his fear of being an adult. At other times, community members hesitated, struggled with the words, or teared up while they were talking. However they indicated the difficulty in what they were saying, they got points from others for saying it <u>despite</u> their fear.

One of the ways they signified how scary self disclosure felt was through the earnestness with which they disclosed. They never joked about or otherwise distanced themselves from their emotional pain. I realized that the popular self-help discourse from which they drew their strategies for emotional expression didn't allow them simultaneously to express and distance themselves from the expression. Because they took earnest intensity as a sign of authenticity, distancing was interpreted as dissimulation—a cowardly copout. Their rules of emotional expression, which demanded intensity rather than distancing, reinforced their beliefs that a true self should express itself without the appearance of obfuscation—and this was risky work.

They generally didn't want to give others an out such as minimizing or joking about their disclosures. Rather, they wanted others to affirm both the seriousness of what they were saying and their courage for saying it. They got this affirmation only if others recognized the essential sacredness, seriousness, and riskiness of what was being disclosed. While the participant's obligation was to tell the truth, no matter how unpleasant the evoked emotions were, the listener's obligation was never to judge or discredit an authentic expression. To do so would be a betrayal of the discloser's trust.

Others usually congratulated the discloser for saying something so apparently difficult and scary. In fact, Marny once publicly appreciated <u>herself</u>. In the appreciation circle at the end of the retreat Marny said, crying: "I have to appreciate myself for having the courage to say what I needed to say." In this interpretation, those who expressed the most difficult emotions the most often were the most brave. That is, like a mountain climber, the frequency and the intensity of the climb gives one status for having courage, endurance, and expertise.

Before going to my first retreat, Neil and Marny counseled me about what to expect. Neil said, "I know it will be scary for you. But don't worry because we will be there for you. Maybe I'm projecting, because I know it's scary for me." During a break at the first retreat I attended, during which I was silent, Michael told me, "You are one courageous woman!" By telling me this, they were guiding me to interpret my experience as frightening and also bolstering their view of themselves as people brave enough and emotionally advanced enough to do this difficult work. But they would be there to help me if I needed them, positioning themselves as more proficient through their practice.

At other times, Venters let me know that they thought that I would learn and grow through my participation, and that I too would eventually share. For example, Rose said:

[Participating in this community] will probably change your life (matter-of-factly). I think probably it will change the way you go about and do everything for the rest of your life. And you're a participant in this. Even if you just stand around and observe. If you want to share, you can share too. …I would be willing to bet that if you stick around long enough you will share just like everybody else. How 'bout them bananas, Honey?!

Rose and others believed that the community would eventually make me feel safe enough to share. The unspoken assumption was that I wasn't sharing only because I felt too scared. Her teasing at the end implied that I probably wouldn't believe that I too would become less repressed and would one day be able to self-disclose like the Aurora Commons regulars.

The belief that newcomers and reluctant Sharers were less emotionally advanced than the proficient and eager emotional disclosers—who had presumably overcome their fear—was shared by the Venters, and to lesser degrees by everyone. Defining sharing as an inherently "scary" undertaking thus best served the interests of the Venters by reproducing the culture they created and liked. Since sharing did feel scary, to me and to others, it was easy for the Venters to advance this interpretation. It felt true. However, the idea that the most therapeutic were the most emotionally developed obscured other plausible ways of making sense of why some people didn't like to share with others.

The retreats and often the business meetings when "sharing" was on the agenda <u>were</u> scary, but not necessarily because expressing sadness or emotional pain was inherently scary. I was scared because I worried that I would be judged by others as emotionally repressed and in denial about all the emotions I needed to process. And since I was a newcomer, I was insecure both about my place in the group and the right way to self-disclose.

The situation was staged in a way that maximized the fear of participants. For example, rather than saying "Let's set aside this time to chat and find out how everyone is doing and be careful not to interrupt each other," participants used the "talking stick" and heightened the atmosphere of drama by making the event into a ritual. Participants sat in a circle and needed to pick up the stick from the middle of the room, then return to their seat with it. After delivering their monologue, they returned the stick to the floor in the middle of the room. There was always a long pause between speakers during which people stared at the floor or into space, seemingly to go deep into themselves.

When people were cautioned to pick up the "talking stick" only when "moved to speak," it pressured people to say something meaningful and poignant. If others are defining what you're saying as being a core truth about your authentic self, then you don't want to appear superficial. You must muster up something really good. So you're an actor who has to supply your own lines while being evaluated by a critical audience. Furthermore, the lines you were to

deliver were about yourself—your True Self. You didn't have the luxury of taking on another character.

I struggled with how much pain, vulnerability, and weakness was <u>enough</u> to disclose. Could I just talk about having a difficult time with my class (which was easy for me), or must I reveal something more gritty, like a relationship problem, to give a creditable performance? Once, during a retreat where we used a "talking stick," it became apparent to me that <u>everyone</u> was expected to pick up the stick and say something. From my fieldnotes:

> I was nervous the whole time, wondering what I was going to say. The longer I put it off, the more difficult it was going to be, I knew. I couldn't stop thinking about what I was going to say, and it was difficult to listen to others in my self absorption. I definitely didn't want to go last. This would leave me at risk of having to go after the most emotional person. Someone could break down in sobs and then I'd have to go next and talk about some dumb thing like feeling anxious and stressed out about a prelim. I was intensely jealous of my repressed compatriot Robert who actually went first and just said something about the Web page. I wondered if I could just pass, but I knew it would be obvious and someone would say something to me. So I grabbed the stick, which felt as burning hot as my cheeks.

Even after I spoke, it took some time to slow down my heart and quell heightened self-consciousness enough to focus on others.

I think my experience points to several things about this context. First of all, to the degree that others were like me, sharing emotions was "scary" because participants had to navigate through the treacherous waters of revealing too much for their own comfort and being judged by others for not revealing enough—all in a context in which self-consciousness was orchestrated and magnified. Sharing was scary, though, not only because of the orchestrated self-consciousness. As I will show in the next chapter, sometimes Venters took the opportunity afforded by sharing to express intense anger. Others told me that if they knew some strife between members was brewing, they would be "afraid" that some intense conflict would surface.

While self-disclosing was supposed to be voluntary and spontaneous, and thus authentic, the reality was that the Venters and to a lesser degree the Sharers pressured people to participate. It happened only once during my participation in the community that someone did not take the talking stick—and it was me. I decided to take them at their word that one should share "only when moved to share." After everyone else participated, Rose gestured toward me with the stick and said, "Daphne? Do you want this?" I felt embarrassed that she had publicly pointed to my non-participation and just shook my head no (I felt unprepared to make something up on the spot). When everyone sat in a small circle and used a talking stick, it was obvious who had spoken and who had not.

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Another time, someone participated but evaded sharing. Stacy picked up the stick during another retreat and said only, "I just want to say that I do not feel safe right now." Rose called me to account for doing something unexpected and unacceptable, and Stacy provided an account—indicating that one was needed.[10]

The Communards felt similarly uncomfortable about the compulsory nature of "sharing" at some community gatherings. During sharing sessions, Robert, my repressed compatriot of above, talked in a very casual way about his week, such as how his painting was going, progress on the community Web page, and general comments about it being a "good week" or "frustrating." He often preceded his comments with a sigh and a remark like "well, I guess I'll go ahead and go," after which I could all but hear "if I have to." His strategy was one of reluctant compliance with the implicit rule of participation, but noncompliance with the implicit rule of sharing deeply felt emotions.

When the retreats were larger, Robert could more easily opt out all together, because he wouldn't feel so noticeable. Speaking in an interview about a retreat previous to my participation, he said, "During the three-day retreat, I didn't say a single word. I was one of the few people there that didn't speak— only two people out of 40 didn't speak.[11] I was one of them." His awareness of

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[10] She also cleverly used therapeutic discourse to opt out of participating in it. She simultaneously got credit for revealing something difficult by not revealing anything at all. She would have to explain later, though, when people asked her about it.

[11] Retreats were open to the "larger community," and thus community members' friends and family used to attend them.

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who had spoken points to his knowledge of the group norm that everyone should speak, despite the fact that the rules of the retreats were to "speak only when moved to speak."

The therapeutic members of the community—Venters and Sharers—used the fact that not everyone participated as testimony to the authenticity of their process, despite the fact that it happened so infrequently. Venters reassured me when I first start participating that processing was voluntary and not everyone did it. Robert and others' occasional noncompliance with the group norm was thus functional for the therapeutic members. If everyone always processed, it would be difficult to sustain the belief that it was voluntary, spontaneous, and authentic. For them, the exceptions proved that there wasn't a rule about participation.

Others chose to admit that they were uncomfortable. For example, at her

second retreat after revealing that she and her husband Dan were still deciding if the community was right for them, Jessica said, "As far as sharing personal stuff, I don't really feel like I know people well enough to do it," to which Rose interjected irritably, "how are we supposed to know you if you don't?" Since no one called Rose on breaking the explicit rule forbidding interrupting anyone who held the talking stick, it appeared that others supported what she said. Jessica responded good humoredly that it would have to wait for another time. Rose sanctioned her for her noncompliance and pointed to the therapeutic assumption that "true selves" can be revealed only with disclosing talk.

At another retreat, Dan said that he was "apprehensive sitting and waiting for the retreat to begin," and that it was an "odd experience for me to be in a community with people who were much more emotionally expressive than I am." He went further and said that sometimes what people said "moved me very much" while at other times "it curiously didn't." I thought he meant that he thought emotional expressiveness was sometimes inappropriate. He confirmed this later in an interview:

> I think that there can be a style of putting out your stuff in a way where there's sort of no—where the value is <u>not</u> to have emotional constraint. Somehow in itself that's good. You know, 'if I feel like yelling, I'm gonna yell.' You know, and my vision is that that's not necessarily effective communication and you ought to, like, put a lid on it.

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Jessica and Dan participated, like Robert, but unlike Robert admitted that they weren't participating in a way that others wanted: a way that revealed their authentic selves.

It's significant that although some members of the community didn't like sharing with others, and often tried to opt out of it in various ways, they never said to the others: "I'd like to propose that we talk about not sharing, because I'm not comfortable doing it with you all or in this group context." At the very least, they could have suggested that sharing be reserved for designated times when they wouldn't have to attend, rather than being periodically inserted into business meetings. I think that they didn't want to mark themselves as people who didn't like processing, because they knew that others would evaluate them as not on the road to being self-actualized. If the Communards didn't share with others, they were not part of the intrepid emotional vanguard. Perhaps in this culture, not sharing with others was more risky, in terms of others' judgments, than sharing personal feelings. However, the stigma attached to not sharing with others was unacknowledged.

The therapeutic members were able to advance the belief that they were the most emotionally advanced while the non-processors were repressed. As would be expected, almost everyone eventually shared with others, despite their initial reluctance to do so. Those few who didn't share were newcomers or those who eventually left the community. Robert, the exception, could opt out of

sharing without suffering consequences due to his gender and the fact that his wife Gwen was a Sharer (I will take this up further in Chapter Four).

In one important way, Aurora Commons was similar to a commercial ropes course analyzed by Holyfield (1997). In both cases, the "appearance of fatefulness in a controlled or semi-controlled environment" (1997: 258) allows participants to believe that they could be doing something risky. She says, "the excitement, fear, and apprehension are perceived by customers as spontaneous, yet constructed within a context of organizational constraint" (1997: 275). The customers strategically believed in the riskiness of their endeavor in order to have the kind of experience they desired (much as a moviegoer believes in the reality of the images on the screen in order to enjoy the film). Likewise, members of this community wanted to believe they were doing something emotionally risky, despite the fact that in this context expressing emotions was normative and admired by others. In both situations, participants' satisfaction depended upon successfully dramatizing authenticity.

By doing what seemed risky—expressing fear, vulnerability, grief, weakness, anger, or rage—community members publicly affirmed that in this community, people were emotionally liberated, or authentic enough to let everyone see their pain. They were simultaneously displaying their own liberation and the vitality of the community as a place safe enough to truly "be yourself." Others congratulated those who put their inner struggles out on display, especially if they also showed how difficult it was.

While sharing with others in a "vulnerable" way wasn't something that everyone wanted to do, those who weren't comfortable with it didn't openly contest it. Perhaps because they weren't as expressive to begin with—and thus didn't like being forced into a position where they had to be—they didn't have the resources to challenge the community's practices. The one Communard who had been in the community from the beginning, Robert, was vastly outnumbered by the Venters and Sharers. For a long time, he was alone in his aversion to sharing. Ed, similarly not therapeutic, started participating because of his partner but quickly left after they broke up. Dan and Jessica, as the undecided newcomers during my stay, focused their critique on whether they wanted to stay rather than changing the community. They could, however, join the Sharers in challenging what seemed like the Venters' obvious excesses. The Sharers' critique of the Venters centered around their expression of anger, which they often interpreted as hostile rather than authentic.

Expressing Anger. By labeling their emotional displays "intense" rather than "destructive" or "dysfunctional" (two descriptions I got from ex-members) the Venters could bask in the knowledge that they were feeling deeply. Unlike self-help groups that invoke a "norm of silence" to avoid conflict (Wuthnow 1994), in this culture members interpreted displays of anger as signs of a healthy community. The Venters often alluded to Peck's book and his idea of "pseudocommunity" to justify their expression of anger. As Scott Peck says:

In pseudocommunity a group attempts to purchase community cheaply by pretense. It is not an evil, conscious pretense of deliberate black lies. Rather, it is an unconscious, gentle process whereby people who want to be loving attempt to be so by telling little white lies, by withholding some of the truth about themselves and their feelings in order to avoid conflict. But it is still a pretense. It is an inviting but illegitimate short-cut to nowhere (1987: 88).

The essential dynamic of pseudocommunity is conflict-avoidance. The absence of conflict in a group is not by itself diagnostic. Genuine communities may experience lovely and sometimes lengthy periods free from conflict. But that is because they have learned how to deal with conflict rather than avoid it. Pseudocommunity is conflict-avoiding; true community is conflict-resolving (1987: 88).

What is diagnostic of pseudocommunity is the minimization, the lack of acknowledgment, or the ignoring of individual differences. Nice people are so accustomed to being well mannered that they are able to deploy their good manners without even thinking about what they are doing. In pseudocommunity it is as if every individual member is operating according to the same book of etiquette. The rules of this book are: Don't do or say anything that might offend someone else; if someone does or

says something that offends, annoys, or irritates you, act as if nothing has happened and pretend you are not bothered in the least; and if some form of disagreement should show signs of appearing, change the subject as quickly and smoothly as possible--rules that any good hostess knows. It is easy to see how these rules make for a smoothly functioning group. But they also crush individuality, intimacy, and honesty, and the longer it lasts the duller it gets (1987: 88-89).

By framing politeness and "niceness" as merely "pseudocommunity," Peck gave the Venters a way to think of their expression of anger as signifying community health.

The Venters believed that forging deep connections to others was difficult and painful because it required that one process one's own emotional pain, especially anger.[12] Otherwise, one will merely react to others with projections and delusions born of denial. In this view, only those who process can deeply connect with each other. In a circular fashion, true intimacy with others was worthwhile because only in such a relationship can one feel safe enough to be authentic and heal one's own wounds. In other words, processing leads to the ability to have intimacy, and intimacy allows for processing.

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[12] Anger usually implies a judgment about another's actions, in contrast to envy or jealousy that may be experienced as a reaction to one's own status relative to another. As such, to express anger is usually to engage in direct conflict with another, a more difficult and thus more worthy and brave endeavor than expressing envy or jealousy. Furthermore, anger can be easily linked to past wrongs from one's childhood, whereas envy and jealousy imply a reaction to a current context. Venters' emphasis on expressing anger is consistent with their experiences in "rage therapy" together and the larger popular psychological culture.

Marny was typical of the Venters as she described what "knowing others deeply" means:

> You know, I've known these people for more than 10 years and they've seen me really whacked out. And they expect me every once in a while to just go tilt and it used to scare and bother people. But that's part of knowing people for a long time, and really knowing them deeply. We don't have to be perfect with each other. And people have seen your junk and still love you.

For her, others "seeing your junk" and still accepting you was intimacy. Often, "junk" included intense expressions of anger. As Sarah Hoagland points out, many in our culture believe "that to really feel or express something, to be authentic, we must be out of control" (1988: 185). Appearing out of control shielded Venters from the charge that the intent of their anger was manipulation or control of others.[13]

Many others, however, were made uncomfortable by the Venters' displays of anger. Since the group started meeting as the "Friday Night Group," people had been dropping out and complaining that the anger was dysfunctional for the group and personally threatening. For example, one psychotherapist joined the Friday Night Group because he had just moved to the rural community and "they

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[13] This is the same cultural strain that allows men who batter the excuse of being "out of control." However, as Tavris (1982) points out, anger can be viewed as an interpersonal strategy, not an impulse.

were the alternative people." While he said the group "was very authentic a lot" and "shared deeply a lot," he nevertheless shortly quit after Marny was "in my face screaming at me . . . 'you want me to be your fucking Mom!'" Later people told him "Marny does that to everyone, don't take it personally" and he "learned that the group had a reputation" for angry outbursts. He said it was the "irregularity" of the angry outbursts, about once every four meetings, that made it so difficult for him, and that Marny's attack "really hurt me. It took me weeks to restabilize."

We can understand from this something else about why sharing was scary in this community. Although it didn't happen all the time, one could never be sure when mere sharing would become intense angry outbursts from the Venters. I was told that the angry outbursts by the Venters had considerably lessened by the time the Friday Night Group became Aurora Commons community. However, as I will show, others in the community still thought it was a problem.

The Venters knew that current and ex-community members were uncomfortable with their displays of anger. When I asked Marny how she liked the process in the Friday Night Group, she said:

> (Pause). I pretty much liked it. (Pause). Because I'd done so much therapy and I've had so much shit in my life, I have a pretty high tolerance for difficult feelings. People having difficult feelings, me having difficult feelings. And that's always seemed more comfortable than people being

nice and people being in denial about what's really going on. My family

had so much denial that even when it's messy, I prefer the messiness

over the neatness. I'm more comfortable with a mess in a lot of ways than

having it all looking good but not feeling good. So I was pretty comfortable

with it. A lot of people weren't. And aren't. So, that's been an ongoing

thing.

She was aware of others' discomfort but equates it with the desire to "be nice"

and be "in denial." Marny did not consider the possibility that expressing anger

per se wasn't the problem but rather how she expressed it. For her and the other

Venters, their emotional expression felt authentic and therefore was authentic,

and thus should be immune to criticism. Discussing how to express anger

appropriately would make its expression constrained and inauthentic.

However, others said that they would like the expression of anger to be

more gentle, not that they wanted to ban anger altogether. Stacy, a non-

practicing Ph.D. psychologist who bought the homestead on the community's

farm land, had recently been to her second retreat. She said:

So I was apprehensive about going [to the latest retreat] because I had

heard through the grapevine what kinds of things happen. [At a previous

retreat] we got together for a whole day to do the bylaws and we never

covered the bylaws because Neil and Marny started fighting. And they

used, like, what was to me very frightening voices. They were very angry

and at one time I thought Neil was going to lose it and just become

physically violent. ... And after that, I came back to the [next] meeting and

I said that I didn't feel safe and I didn't think that that was necessarily the

most productive way to communicate, just by just venting and rage. …I'm

not planning on participating in meetings where that kind of stuff is going

on, because it frightens me. I don't want to go that way. I was thinking

'gosh, a bunch of therapists who just want to go and do vent therapy,

forget it.'

Q: How did they respond?

They listened. …It seemed like the assumption of the community was that

the more you vent, the better. And I don't believe that. I think that's just

masturbation. Give me a break. I'm only learning how to express my

anger, but I don't choose that route. I was apprehensive about this

retreat. And that's why, the first night I said something about how I wasn't

sure that I wanted to be in the community. I just don't fit in with that kind

of behavior. I had felt good when I went to the meeting and said 'I want to

bring this gentler way.' And people responded and said, 'yes.' And Chris,

I had talked to Chris and he said, 'a lot of people feel that way, but there

are a few people who tend to dominate the meeting and they're not the

gentler people.' It looks like that's the prevailing mode of operation.

Q: What had you heard about the retreats that made you apprehensive?

Well, that people were, as I had witnessed at that day-long meeting—that they were vocally violent to each other. Some of my friends had responded negatively to it. They used to be in Aurora Commons and they had left. That wasn't the whole reason, but__. This has been going on for a few years before I joined, my friend joined first. And I would hear from them that this had gone on. Ranting and raving and people attacking each other.

The retreats she described where people were "ranting and raving" used a process community members called the "unstructured Peck model." The usual format for the Friday Night Group and community retreats, the Peck model, meant sitting in a circle with people speaking when moved to speak, with no one intervening. According to Peck and the Venters, as people were worn out and finally "emptied" themselves of judgment and the desire to fix others, true community could arise and everyone would feel the buzz of connection with others.

Stacy felt positive that she had had some influence on the others about a gentler process. She was happy at the next retreat, to which Chris brought some "tools" that people could use to work through their conflicts. That is, rather than let people rage until they felt "empty," Chris intervened. Rose brought up her difficulties with Stacy, and Chris directed each of them to first "rage and vent"

about each other, giving into and even exaggerating the emotion they felt. Rose screamed that Stacy had treated her "abominably!" and she felt betrayed and hurt by her distancing tactics. Stacy said that she was sick of Rose's demands on her and needed some distance. Chris then instructed them to "step into responsibility," which meant to identify "what is it about my past or programming that made this conflict inevitable?" The therapeutic assumption here was that once you finally see how your childhood issues shape your actions in previously unacknowledged ways, you're in a better position to choose to act differently next time.

As designed, the question led Rose and Stacy into an epiphany about how childhood experiences made them likely to take this particular situation badly. For example, Rose recounted how when she was a child, everyone expected her to take care of all the bullies. She finally said that she had learned that she didn't have to help everyone or take care of everyone else's problems. Rose and Stacy embraced, finally, and the others around the circle beamed. Rose exclaimed with relief, "I'm so glad we worked through this!"[14]

At the end of this retreat, community members joined hands in a circle and expressed their appreciation for each other with tears in their eyes. Marny's interpretation was typical: "I was really glad they did it in front of the whole

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[14] However, when I interviewed Rose later it was apparent that she was still angry with Stacy. This example points to the function of such public displays of anger as a ritual dramatizing the meaning of the community as a place where people are courageous enough to express intense anger rather than as a means to resolve relationship problems. That is, while Rose didn't feel

group. 'Cause whenever you do something with the whole group, the whole group benefits from it. … And everybody gets to see both people get vulnerable and everybody's heart opens." She and others interpreted the joy and closeness they felt at the end of the retreat as the irrefutable evidence that the community was doing its job, helping them grow and become more authentic.

How was this process different from the "unstructured Scott Peck," and why did Stacy like it better? Rather than allowing participants to vent and rage unabated for hours, Chris's intervention cut it short and psychologized it. The whole thing took only about 40 minutes. Since the anger was quickly channeled into a therapeutic discourse that linked it to their childhood, it didn't have the same sting or intensity that it would if they raged <u>at each other</u> before they turned to their childhoods. Under Chris's tutelage, they could quickly reinterpret the anger as a <u>personal</u> rather than interpersonal issue.

For example, the "structured" model (i.e., Chris's intervention) allowed Stacy to interpret Rose's anger as Rose's own psychological issue rather than a reaction to being wronged. When I asked Stacy if it upset her when Rose went inside the house and filled the porch where Stacy and I were sitting with the sound of her sobs, she said she had become just "a person listening to her story. She could have been talking to anybody." Stacy said, "It didn't have much to do with me. It was like I was the target. I was the trigger. So when she got into that, it was her feelings and who knows what it's related to, but it doesn't matter

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any better about her relationship with Stacy, their processing made others feel better about being

and you've got these people to comfort you, and love you." She interpreted Rose's anger toward her, then, as symptomatic of Rose's deeper pathologies.[15]

In the group rather than a one-on-one situation Stacy could allow Rose to express her anger, knowing that others would intervene and bring Rose back to her own "stuff," freeing Stacy from having to take Rose's anger personally. She liked the tools Chris brought, and to her the retreat was "gentler." By hurrying along the therapeutic process with scripts, the Venters could still feel authentic about their emotional expressions, but they also could make concessions to the Sharers who were uncomfortable with hours of "venting."

However, as I will show in the next chapter, "gentler" retreats didn't preclude expressions of anger that others interpreted as personally assaultive. Rather than framing it as being angry at someone, the discloser could make his or her anger at another seem incidental to his or her own processing. In this way, the Venters could still vent and rage at others and simultaneously get credit for being courageous enough to do processing (by others who weren't the targets of the anger).

After this retreat and some business meetings during which Venters displayed intense anger at others, a few of the Sharers again raised concerns about the process, mainly in terms of how it explained why the community wasn't attracting newcomers. Perhaps since it was also a time in which two new

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in the community.

couples were visiting the community, the Venters appeared ready to concede to holding an even more "gentle" retreat.

During the next three retreats over a 7-month period, members sat in a circle to "share" using the talking-stick method described above. In contrast to the earlier retreats, I never witnessed any displays of anger. Rather, members used the opportunity to share about such things as difficulties with their children, grief about losing a friend, fear of changes in their lives, and marital troubles (in this case, Sam's wife wasn't participating in the community). They often cried, but didn't scream or yell at others in the room. At the beginning of the first retreat of this kind, Marny said that she'd like "to explain a little bit about the ground rules" before they began. Among other things, she said that "we're committed to being gentle in the process." During and after this retreat with the talking stick, Venters Rose, Marny, and Sam all separately mentioned to me with pride how "gentle" the retreat was.

The "talking stick" retreats appeased the Sharers. They were able to get what they wanted: a sense of connection, personal growth, and authenticity in the context of community—without the anger.[16] The Venters, however, later interpreted the "gentle" retreats as a concession to those who weren't ready to "deal with their shit." As Marny said:

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[15] This is the same logic used by the Venters: others shouldn't take their authentic expression of anger personally, because it is merely the epiphenomenon, the disclosers' own deep issues related to childhood being the "real" issue.

I always think it's best if conflicts can get worked out in the context of the big group. 'Cause everybody gets something from that. But sometimes it's just too painful for people. And different people are at different places in their growth and development. So it's too threatening to just kind of bare one's soul in front of the whole group.

In effect, they thought they had to stifle some of their authenticity for the sake of the therapeutically less developed. They began to resent it.

At the last retreat I attended, the "separation retreat"—called by Chris and Gwen in order to allow the community to process Marny and Michael's separation—Chris evoked the Venters' rhetoric to describe the community in which he wanted to live, implying that having to stifle anger compromised this vision. From my fieldnotes:

Then Chris said that to begin with, he'd like for people to just "get down into themselves" for 10 minutes. He suggested writing with our opposite hand because sometimes that "brings stuff up for people." We all silently wrote for 10 minutes. When 10 minutes were up, Chris said that they'd start with the talking stick, and he'd like to remind people to speak only when "moved to speak." He quickly took the stick. He said that he didn't want to come this morning because he knew it would be more of that

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[16] However, this compromise was one in which the Communards were disregarded. While anger wasn't displayed, with the talking stick sharing became compulsory. In contrast, in the "Scott

"processing shit." He said that sometimes he would get so mad at Marny

because she's always the one who says "soandso is not dealing with their

shit" and it makes him mad but later when he really thinks about it, he

realizes that she's usually right. And now he doesn't know if he's

supposed to "let everything out" or if he should be "gentle and respectful."

He said that he "didn't know what to do." He was going to be 49 in a few

months and "I don't know the first thing about relationships." None of his

relationships had been what he'd wanted them to be. He didn't know the

first thing about "being in community"—about "caring for others

intimately"—but he didn't think he was alone. "I don't think anyone knows

how to do that." Maybe people in villages in South America but they can't

teach us. He wants the community to be "like a village." "A place where

everyone can be crazy and it be all right." He said that sometimes he

goes on his deck and "screams and cries" and he doesn't know why, but

after he does it he feels better. He said he wanted to be able to express

"pain, fear, anger, and sadness" and wants others to "be there" when he

needs them. At some point in all this, he started crying really hard—

almost like a child would cry. It was gut-wrenching to me. Gwen was

nearest Chris, and she leaned over and put her arm around him

reassuringly. …This was short and he seemed much better afterwards.

Peck retreats," often the Communards merely watched without having to participate.

Chris indicated that he didn't want to do that "processing shit" because it was painful, but he knew, like Marny said, that it was ultimately necessary. He posited "letting everything out" as being the only alternative to "being gentle," reproducing the Venters' idea that one couldn't gently and authentically express anger. He would like the community to be like a rubber room where everyone could feel free to be "crazy" and presumably not be responsible to others for what they say or do.

Like Chris, Marny was resisting the compromises she was making toward the Sharers. She told me she stopped going to the business meetings because she wasn't "getting any of that need for personal support met" there. She said:

> If other people aren't feeling the need for more personal support and sharing, as a community, then screw it. I'm not going to be the sacrificial lamb that keeps bleeding out there so everyone can get their vicarious emotional goodies. I want to see other people bleed too. You mean, you're all doing fine in your lives?! (laughing). Nothing bothering any of you?!

Marny was striking. If there was a shift in the culture toward instrumentality and away from processing—due to the influence of the Sharers and the Communards—then she wouldn't participate. And she realized that because many in the community felt good about being members precisely because of the self-development work that happened, they would suffer without her presence.

She probably also anticipated that her absence would precipitate a retreat and some processing around the issue—and she would most likely get to vent some anger.

That Marny would quit going to business meetings after Sharers asserted some control over the emotional tenor of the meetings and the retreats shows how important it was to her to that she and others be allowed to vent. We can see how the Venters could ensure there could be no constraints placed on their own emotional expression by continually reasserting the mandate of authenticity. Why did the Sharers allow this mandate to remain unchallenged? As I have argued, the Sharers were similarly invested in therapeutic growth through authenticity. While they may not have liked anger, they didn't have a way to challenge it without also bringing up for question their own dearly held assumptions about emotional expression. They too liked basking in the idea of difficult self-growth done in the community by folks being "vulnerable" and "authentic." In fact, I never heard a Sharer say publicly that intense expressions of anger were <u>inappropriate</u>. Rather, what they said was that it was scaring potential newcomers away. We can see how the basic assumption that authenticity is necessarily unconstrained was never directly challenged by Sharers, allowing Venters to continually reassert their prerogative for intense anger.

<u>Having Epiphanies.</u> Sometimes when Venters expressed negative emotions, such as anger, pain, sorrow, or fear, they had epiphanies[17] about the emotion's "real" or "root" cause, situated in childhood.[18] As Denzin says, in an epiphany something previously hidden about one's character is revealed (1989: 15). Sometimes this required guidance by others—as in the scripts that the Venters used in retreats—but often epiphanies could be generated from a monologue. Talking about oneself authentically and emotionally was enough. In fact, others' participation could be interpreted as unwanted "cross talk."

Processing meant that participants linked an emotion either to their childhood or to a current "issue" that they had across different relationships (such as fearing intimacy). While community members interpreted the expressed emotion as spontaneous and thus authentic, they didn't expect that having an epiphany should be. In fact, for them, epiphanies required hard work—work that most in our culture were unwilling to do because it might be emotionally painful to dredge up old emotions and memories. The Venters who did this work, then, were valued by therapeutic others as especially fearless.

Authentic feelings for the therapeutic are ones that aren't muddied by social conventions or pressures but rather spring from a personal essence. As such, feelings that can be linked to childhood are more authentic than feelings

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[17] Epiphany is my term, not theirs. I heard members talk about "breakthroughs" and one member described it as "get[ting] released."
[18] Joy was never linked to one's childhood, nor did it need processing. In much popular psychology, a self uncorrupted by culture is joyful and true; thus joyful emotions were manifestations of a true self and didn't require processing.

that merely spring up currently, because children are less corrupted by social prescriptions. Furthermore, they believed that childhood baggage that isn't dealt with continually emerges in new guises—so returning to the first experience of the emotion and understanding it is a way to exorcise adult demons. The epiphanies they either described to others in group contexts or later to me were about linking current emotions to childhood traumas.

During an interview, Rose described the power of her epiphany when she went into the house during a retreat and sobbed on Robert's shoulder. This was after Rose and Stacy expressed their feelings to each other about their troubled friendship and someone called for a bathroom break. She told me how moving the experience was for her:

> And I realized that when I was in doing the dishes or something. And when I went to pieces and sobbed with Robert, the depth of my grief was just huge. And it wasn't just losing Stacy. That's sort of not it. It's unleashing the emotions of ancient grief. Whatever the grief was it goes back to the first time I was ever abandoned. That's what I was crying over with Robert. And I've never broken down in a retreat like that. I've never had such deep grief. And it was very, very powerful to me. It was wonderful.

Rose's crying wasn't merely about her conflict with Stacy on the deck, it was "deep grief," or a grief that she has been burdened with since she was a child.

Crying presumably freed her from this grief in a cathartic way, but it also allowed her some insight into her present emotions regarding her conflict with Stacy. She interpreted her experience as "wonderful" because it made her feel like she gained some important self-knowledge.

Linking current suffering with childhood experiences enabled members to feel good about themselves in several other ways. Each time Rose had a relationship problem and she linked it to being abandoned as a child, she didn't have to feel bad about herself. For example, she could think she was merely a victim of her parents' abandonment, rather than a perpetrator of wrongs against Stacy. In this view, Rose's true self was good, even if it had been sullied by others' transgressions. She could feel compassionate toward her adult self by seeing herself as a victim of someone else's actions. Additionally, she could see herself as someone with the courage and will to overcome her psychological obstacles through processing.

Venters experienced a political solidarity similar to that which victims of "repressed memory" have for one another as agents in a recovery movement. In both cases, they felt a part of a liberationist movement, based upon the idea that coming to terms with trauma in one's past releases untapped potential that was transformatory to self and ultimately to one's world (Acocella, 1998). Rose felt closer to others in the community knowing that, like her, they were part of what she thought of as a progressive social change movement.

As a flash of recognition of or understanding about the essence of our character, epiphanies make our world and our place in it sensible anew. If, as Marny said, the Venters were "process junkies," then epiphanies were a quick shot of the drug they craved. Psychological epiphanies gave them a feeling of insight into the core causes of their personal struggles and difficulties. Furthermore, they are especially powerful because people can have them through their own intuition and emotions without books, theory, or experts (though all these can help). Unlike the cerebral epiphany of using one's reason, therapeutic epiphanies are confirmed by the walloping intensity of the feeling that emerges from the insight. Epiphanies gave the Venters incontrovertible evidence that they were progressing in therapeutic self-understanding. Others' admiration further buttressed their own intense feelings about how important the insight was.

That the community was credited with enabling epiphanies and personal growth came up frequently in interviews, with the Venters but also with the Sharers and Communards. Though they didn't participate, even the Communards thought that it was testimony to the community's safety that others could share their feelings. For example, Robert, a Communard, said:

Any time you see people go through some kind of transformation on the spot—it's always significant. When you see them having some sort of either temporary breakdown, kind of getting restructured, or whatever. It's very powerful. Like what Sam went through and his release and how the

group supported him to get through that. He could have not gone through that without help. And he felt comfortable enough with a few people there that he was able to get released. And I've seen that happen numerous times, where somebody is really stuck and the group helps them get unstuck. Because we all get stuck. It's just how long you hold on to it and how painful it is and to have someone able and willing to help you is a pretty amazing thing.

We can see that despite his personal skepticism about therapy, Robert nevertheless believed that Sam's epiphany about his current suffering (because his mother molested him when he was a baby) was a credit to the community. It was especially significant in this case because no one intervened or helped Sam in his monologue in any way. Though he did it alone, the witnesses to it were able to feel good about being partly responsible. As members of the community, Communards gave themselves credit for others' epiphanies even though they didn't participate therapeutically.

At times Venters would report an epiphany that they had already experienced outside the group. For example, at one business meeting Marny told the four of us that she and her partner, Michael, were separating. She then said that what she had to say "was difficult." She said that she wanted to work on "her issue" which was "about control." Her father was a "dry alcoholic" (reformed alcoholic) who had just decided to quit one day and so—"white

knuckled"—he just did. As an alcoholic, he had to have control over everybody and everything. She said that she learned from him how important control was and she was "twisting herself up like a pretzel to make Michael happy or trying to make him change." And she realized that she couldn't make him change because "he is his own person." She was intermittently crying while she was speaking. Marny showed the others how much she was growing: although it was a painful lesson, she now understood how her relationship to her father made her try to change Michael.

Rose congratulated her effusively. She said, "That's really huge, Marny. That's really just huge. It is a testimony to our capacity for growth." Marny was congratulated because she had confessed a weakness to the rest of us, despite its apparent difficulty. She also successfully linked her weakness, trying to control Michael, to a childhood experience and identified it as "an issue" that arose elsewhere.

There was thus a double level of feeling evoked during the retreats and at many business meetings. First of all, the participants, such as Stacy and Rose, felt emotional epiphanies by linking their present circumstances to their pasts. Then secondly, all who witnessed such epiphanies felt moved by what seemed to be the exposed raw emotions of others and the progress others were making in working through their issues. They then interpreted this as a sign of community success. In both cases, the excitement, sorrow, and ultimately joy after having an epiphany were necessarily experienced as emerging from an authentic self.

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Policing the Boundaries

It is instructive to consider a case when someone expressed feelings in a way that others <u>didn't</u> recognize as authentic. Neil was a newcomer who dropped out with his partner Julie shortly after the following events. He consistently didn't use therapeutic discourse, but instead challenged the core group about finances in a rational way. Others told me later that there had been tension between Neil and Marny for months. Marny told him and others that he was constantly criticizing but not contributing.

At a retreat, Neil tried but failed to gain credibility with other members with his unconventional self-presentation. When he had the floor, he stepped into the center of the circle and went into a very dramatic monologue about being down at the creek, "pissing in my pants! I'm a grown man pissing in my pants!," and finding a rock that symbolized his gift to the community—which he ceremoniously presented to Rose—before he announced "now I am going to show you all a side of myself that I never showed anyone before." He slowly crouched down, making himself so tight that his arms were shaking as he went into a ball, fists clenched. He emitted a long, low, loud howl.

In my fieldnotes I wrote that I was annoyed with him rather than moved, because I found his performance histrionic, and I wondered how others reacted. I expected that others would be taken in by his performance because of its

novelty. I believed that others would think that to do something that potentially

discrediting must be vulnerable and authentic.

I was surprised by others' reactions. Nancy was typical of everyone I

interviewed when she told me, "It felt to me kind of shallow. He went into it so

easily, he came out of it so easily . . . it felt like it was very planned." Rather than

crediting him with the courage to show his anger and pain, others responded

negatively. After Neil spoke, Chris said that he felt frustrated because he didn't

want to hear about Neil's "creek experience," and no one challenged Chris's

interpretation. During the "appreciation circle" at the end of the retreat (holding

hands in a circle), Neil was the only person, including me, for whom no one

expressed appreciation. He pointed this out to me later, saying that it really hurt

him.

I learned from this that displaying a strongly felt emotion in an

unconventional and thus potentially embarrassing way wasn't enough to gain

points from others for authenticity. What did he do wrong? Unlike others, he

didn't connect his anguish to a childhood issue. His audience couldn't interpret

his actions as coming from a "deep place." Instead, his too-quick <u>tearless</u>

transformation made them feel cheated. His dry eyes and extended story did

make it seem as if he had planned the performance. Furthermore, he didn't

show how difficult or scary it was to reveal so much to others, but rather it

appeared that he transformed <u>easily</u>. His poor performance brought up the

unacknowledged: feelings can be strategically induced and used.

When I interviewed people later no one accused Neil of being manipulative, though they did go as far as saying that it seemed "planned." Instead, they talked about how Neil had some emotional problems and wasn't yet ready to deal with them. What could have potentially been seen as manipulative was thus rendered into a deeper psychological issue. As symptomatic of a psychological pathology, Neil's inept performance called Neil's credibility rather than the community's (as staging such displays) into question. Furthermore, if in the future Neil skillfully gave an authentic self-display, others would be well-positioned to interpret it as evidence of the power of Aurora Commons to transform him.

Neil didn't reveal anything about himself other than that he felt strongly and was willing to act unconventionally in expressing it. What set this emotional display apart from the successful ones was that Neil didn't reveal any of his "issues" or give others glimpses into his psychological pathologies, his barriers to growth and healing. As I will show in the next chapter, this made the Venters uncomfortable and set Neil apart as someone who couldn't be trusted to treat their own authentic self-displays as unassailable.

In this chapter, I have shown how community members learned and negotiated standards of showing authenticity through emotional expressions by avoiding the appearance of being influenced by others, showing how scary it was, expressing anger, and having epiphanies. I also showed how the Venters had the most control over the emotional culture, creating a context in which there

was an unacknowledged stigma attached to not sharing. The Venters' idea that expressing any emotion—even anger toward others—was healthy was challenged by Sharers and Communards, resulting in a few months of "gentle" retreats. However, Venters were increasingly frustrated at what they perceived to be unfair restrictions and asserted that authenticity couldn't be regulated. The Venters thus used therapeutic discourse as a resource to preserve a therapeutic emotional culture in which they were the most proficient and brave. In the next chapter, I will explore further how Venters, and Sharers to a lesser degree, used therapeutic discourse as an interactional resource, stifling dissent and reinforcing the emotional status quo.

EMOTIONAL DISCOURSE AS INTERACTIONAL RESOURCE

Community members used popular self-help assumptions, as well as Peck's ideas about community building, to treat authentic expressions of emotions as if they were as sacred as a person's palpable self. As discussed previously, Peck (1987) thinks that to do otherwise—such as to challenge, judge, assess, or discredit—would mean trying to heal, convert, fix, or change others. In contrast, within Peck's ideology, unconditionally accepting others leaves them "free to discard defenses, masks, disguises; free to seek [their] own psychological and spiritual health; free to become [their] whole and holy self" (1996: 68).

Accordingly, to the people of Aurora Commons, authentic self-disclosure meant that they trusted each other enough to be "vulnerable," meaning that they could discard defenses and the fear that others would use their self-disclosures against them. Vulnerability thus was understood to take courage, which in turn was taken as evidence of the safety of the community.

I will show, however, that the Venters and, to a lesser degree, the Sharers and the Communards, used the emotional culture to enforce conformity. Venters could simultaneously gain interactional advantage over others and position themselves as fearless therapeutic activists by expressing themselves authentically and psychologizing others' experiences and words. As a

consequence of how Venters used the emotional culture, dissenting voices were stifled and the emotional status quo was preserved. As I argued in the previous chapter, the emotional discourse—with notions of authenticity at its core—reinforced the prerogatives of the Venters in this community. By displaying the most authenticity, the Venters appeared to have a sophisticated understanding of therapeutic values—and to be in the best position to evaluate others. The preservation of the emotional discourse thus served to preserve the Venters' power in the culture.

AUTHENTICITY AS INVIOLABLE

A challenge to an emotional expression delivered in an authentic manner meant saying, in effect: "I'm going to hold you responsible for how what you say you feel is making me feel" and/or "I think your feelings are based on faulty assumptions." It's instructive to consider an unusual case when someone did challenge an emotional expression—which would normally be interpreted as authentic, and thus inviolable—in order to underscore how difficult it was to do.

After an outside consultant spoke about by-laws during a business meeting, Chris expressed his dissatisfaction with how the events unfolded. He said that he, unlike the others, had been there on time. He felt embarrassed when the consultant arrived because it looked like no one else was coming. Then, he said, Rose told him the meeting was going to move to Marny's house and he felt angry because he didn't want to move there just because it was going

to be convenient for Marny and her partner, Michael. He added that Marny and Michael had "come waltzing in" twenty minutes late and "I felt angry."

Chris framed what he said as an authentic emotional expression by stating it as "I felt angry" rather than "I think you were rude." In the emotional culture of the community, "I" statements with an emotion meant that one was doing important self work by acknowledging one's feelings instead of hiding from them.

However, rather than admire Chris for his authentic expression of anger as she did in other situations, Marny blasted him. She said righteously, "Do you know why we wanted to meet at our house? Because I am picking nits out of Susan's hair and will probably be up until midnight tonight. Well, why don't <u>you</u> pick nits out of Susan's (Marny and Chris's daughter) hair?!" Chris said evenly, "I hear what you're saying. I didn't know all the facts about what was going on." Marny said, "Well, I wish you would find out before you say that you are mad. Why didn't you just ask me why I was late and I would have told you? I think you need to give me some credit for my dedication to this place." Chris said quietly, "I was just reporting my experience. That I felt angry." Marny didn't reply. The meeting shortly adjourned and Michael (Marny's current partner) gave Chris an extended silent hug.

Marny said that what Chris implied—that she was being irresponsible and negligent in her duties to the community—was unjust. She thought Chris's feelings were based on incomplete information, and she was indignant because she was in fact caring for their daughter. Chris, however, was able to regain

control by insisting in an even tone that he was merely "reporting his experience." He implied that Marny erroneously thought his emotional expression was intended to chastise her. The fact that he appeared self-assuredly unrepentant indicated that he knew his audience shared certain popular self-help assumptions that let him off the hook: it was always good to "report" authentic feelings and that authentic feelings by definition can't be generated to chastise someone else (and by implication, if someone feels chastised, they have misunderstood). Community members affirmed interactionally that authentic feelings emanate from self.

In this context, then, Chris wasn't responsible for how his expression made Marny feel. So although Marny herself didn't give Chris the credit he might otherwise receive for being authentic, Chris didn't apologize. Michael's hug publicly affirmed him for saying what he did, despite Marny's anger. Marny's challenge, based on a claim to injustice, was deflected by Chris' warrant to be authentic.

This example shows why challenges of this kind to someone's authentic emotional expression were so rare and ineffective. Marny was the most sophisticated in using self-help discourse. If her challenge could be so easily deflected, then others realized that the insistence upon authenticity—which could by definition have no outside validity checks—would always give the discloser the upper hand. What most didn't do was challenge the emotion discourse itself by

saying "expressing feelings is as subject to context and interpersonal politics as expressing thoughts. You have to take responsibility for what you say."

Community members didn't want to undermine the basis of their collective moral identity: therapeutic activists doing hard emotional work that others don't have the guts to do. Challenging the discourse would be challenging the worthiness of the whole community.

At other times, community members preempted potential criticism by confessing their insecurities or a transgression (such as missing work days) in a way that signified they were being vulnerable and working on the "issue." In this way, others would interpret the confession as part of a personal growth process. The public confession—that was ostensibly difficult and deserving of credit—was seen as a large step toward healing or clarity. It seemed as if the transgressor was processing the issue and deserving of congratulations rather than a scolding.

If someone didn't successfully locate their expression of emotion in the self-development discourse of authenticity, however, they could be challenged. For example, at a business meeting, Chris said how frustrated he was at the group's slow progress with the septic system, and emphatically suggested that the community give him power to "get it worked out." He was implying that the larger group was being inefficient and the consensus process was impeding progress.

Neil responded, "I understand your anger. I just wish you had said it differently. It really made me feel that you were beating up on us when you said it like that." While Neil was speaking, Marny winked at Michael, as if in approval of what Neil was saying. Chris didn't respond to Neil, and later Marny went back to it. She told Chris that he needed to "address Neil's pain about what you said." Marny framed Neil's comment as an admission of pain caused by Chris' statement. Neil let her interpretation stand, probably because he knew it gave him the upper hand with Chris. Because Neil said that he felt <u>hurt</u> by Chris' comments, his feelings were given more legitimacy than Chris' vague frustration, which grew out of community actions. Admonishing Chris also sent a message to everyone: feelings will be respected only if they are about one's <u>own</u> (authentic) issues.[19]

Community members couldn't challenge others' emotional expressions by saying that they were unjust—based on faulty assumptions or a misunderstanding—or by saying that the display was inappropriate—overly aggressive, intense, or inconsiderate. At Aurora Commons, to say either of these things would signify that one didn't understand that emotional expression should adhere to the dictates of self-development rather than social conventions. To criticize others for not using judgment and discretion in their emotional

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[19] This is the opposite of what Rothschild-Whitt (1979) found in a collectivist organization wherein people were discredited if they articulated a problem as a personal rather than collectivist concern. Here we can see the contrast between an individualist and a collectivist culture.

expression would be construed as pressuring them to stifle their true selves and self-development.

In this culture there was thus a compulsion either to participate in the self-development discourse or to leave the community. If participants couldn't challenge the discourse, the only way to participate in the group was to use the discourse to their own advantage (since everyone else did). In a circular fashion, those who did use the discourse—the Venters, Sharers, and at times the Communards—reinforced its hegemony and stifled criticism of it.

I will show how Venters used the emotional discourse to control others by attacking and discrediting community dissidents. To the extent that others feared being attacked and discredited through therapeutic discourse, they too were controlled. By using the therapeutic discourse, Venters were controlling others and simultaneously claiming superiority to those whom they were controlling by appearing to be the most therapeutically advanced, free, and admirable.

Attacking Others

Because authenticity expressions were unassailable, it was possible to use them to attack someone in a way that left the attacked persons no opportunity to defend themselves or even to apologize. That is, if in the course of authentically expressing emotions one person attacked another, the target could not offer any defense without seeming to discredit the other's authenticity.

For example, during a retreat, Sam challenged Neil and his partner, Julie. Early in the retreat, while Chris was teaching community members about "baby breathing" (breathing from one's gut while letting one's stomach rise and fall), Sam began to wail: "I'm so fucking angry! I can't take anymore! I'm so fucking sick of always being so goddamned nice that I can't fucking STAND IT!" Several people went to him and "laid hands" on him (supporting him by putting their hands on him). He cried and yelled about being molested as a baby and he would "never never let anyone do that to him again!" Raging about "always trying to please, always smiling," he then said that he was "sick of people not paying their [community] dues!"

Chris' relationship "tools"—used for previous conflicts at the same retreat—weren't used to work through a conflict between Sam and those who weren't paying their dues because it seemed that Sam was merely sharing something deeply personal (rather than interpersonal). The assault on others seemed incidental to the main therapeutic work that was happening.

At the end of the day, in the "appreciation circle," Sam said how much he appreciated others getting him through his pain. However, Julie and Neil did not congratulate him for getting so deep, like others did. Later I found out that they felt he had been aggressive toward them by raging about people not paying their dues (no one else mentioned this when describing how moving Sam's pain was to them). Julie told me:

And then I felt that when Sam did his thing that—I felt that it was

directed at Neil and I. When he was so angry and what he was

saying was, 'Why don't they just pay?', I felt personally assaulted.

I had no idea of his rage about this issue. . . . That's why I sat over

there and was just like shaking and crying. 'Cause I really like

Sam. And I thought we had a very nice relationship. . . . I had

never been the target of somebody's rage like that.

When I spoke to Julie about the retreat a week later, just before she and

Neil dropped out of the community, she said she was sick, mentally and

physically, for days after the retreat. The intensity of Sam's emotional display

"felt violent" to her. Significantly, Sam presented his anger in such a way (a

deep, authentic way) that Julie and Neil couldn't challenge him, offer excuses,

talk it out, or even apologize. Since he was sobbing so hard and talking about

being molested as a baby, they couldn't have given voice to their concerns

without appearing insensitive. During this retreat, no one ever subsequently

brought up the issue of dues paying for discussion.

In one sense, it was Sam's own psychological issue. But in a very real

way, his expression of feeling defined Julie and Neil's actions as abusive—like

his mother who molested him. In this sense, his expression of feelings was

defining a social reality, of which Julie and Neil were a part. When he framed it in

terms of a psychological issue, however, he got credit from others for bravely expressing very difficult feelings and being authentic.

This exchange shows how telling another about your secret fears or perceived weaknesses can keep them from criticizing you. Julie and Neil's expressed criticism after Sam's show of vulnerability would be a betrayal of his trust. So despite the fact that Julie told me afterward that she felt "personally assaulted," she could not and did not bring up her feelings in this context. The dues issue was never discussed in this retreat. Although he appeared vulnerable, in reality, Sam as the discloser had the upper hand.

This was an extreme example of someone using the emotional discourse to chastise others. Usually Venters didn't link attacking others so directly to their personal growth experiences. Though Venters sometimes yelled at others, they relied on the underlying assumptions of the emotional discourse to cast themselves as authentic rather than controlling or aggressive.

Sam had a stake in believing in the therapeutic value of venting his anger in an authentic way, and he could also use this venting for micropolitical ends. Others, of course, could also have used this strategy. But being uncomfortable with confrontations, the Sharers and Communards did not attack others. Perhaps over time they might see its utility and use it in order to assert themselves in the culture. We can see from this example how the Venters could use the emotional culture to define social realities in a way that gave others who disagree few options to resist, other than participating as a Venter. Attacking

others authentically, however, was the most overt way to exert social control. As

I will show below, more often (and more insidiously) Venters controlled others by

resisting others' attempts to make the community more accountable to a set of

explicit rules and by discrediting others' resistance.

Resisting Regulation

I began to realize that when community members talked about being

discouraged because attendance was low at business meetings or workdays, or

the community was facing financial or recruiting obstacles, a Venter or a Sharer

often called for a retreat. The Venters, and to a lesser degree the Sharers,

attributed obstacles—whether financial or interpersonal—to the fact that the

community wasn't "dealing with [their] shit," or processing together. Not "dealing

with [their] shit" meant to them that people were repressing feelings such as

anger, fear, and sadness, living inauthentically, and ultimately impeding

community growth.

Community obstacles were rhetorical as well as practical. Community

members used "financial problems" to portray the community as a place of

therapeutic activism and visionary aspirations—as opposed to a place where

accountants count beans. As Kleinman found in a study of a holistic health

center, "if we understand members' poverty in the light of the identity they

desired, it becomes something they wanted rather than something imposed on

them from the outside" (1996: 13). For the Venters, and to a lesser degree the

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Sharers, talking about financial problems presented them with the opportunity to process around "money issues."

The implicit goal of processing about practical problems was to render financial difficulties into "issues around money." This meant that money difficulties were a psychological, not practical problem. Talking about money, or practical ways to generate money, didn't interest most community members. Occasionally someone suggested something mundane like placing an ad in the local weekly to generate interest from potential members, but soon the issue was dropped when a Venter suggested that there was a "deeper" issue at stake.

For example, the community's experimental septic system was costing much more than they had expected. The engineer initially estimated $45,000, and half-way through its construction they realized it would be at least twice as much. Often at business meetings someone would bring up the septic system and the attendant financial difficulties. At one such meeting, Chris and Marny asked the community to call a special money retreat to discuss ways they could "resolve their money problems." They told the others of the promise of a book they had been reading about how to remove "barriers to manifesting abundance." Since everyone knew that retreats were set aside to process, Chris and Marny were framing the money issue as a psychological one. Others at the meeting seemed interested and agreed to settle on a date.

During the next meeting and before the next retreat, Marny established the therapeutic reality that processing was necessary before practical issues

could be resolved. Chris started a discussion about how much it would cost for him and a few others to get building permits for their houses. He wanted the community to authorize him to spend whatever he needed, up to the last two thousand dollars in their account. Stacy said that she'd like to see the estimates before Chris spent the money "so that I feel informed." Marny interrupted their discussion to remind them of the upcoming money retreat. She said:

> We are talking about money issues. We need to clear out issues around money before we get all freaked out. Chris, be patient with us. Realize that we will have to raise a bunch of money. When we are able to line up with the universe after the retreat, then we will know how much to give you.

Marny reframed the issue here, as she did many times, as being about "issues around money" rather than money itself. The therapeutic perspective she invoked led them to explore psychological issues. In contrast, if they viewed the lack of money itself as the problem, they might have discussed issues such as financial planning and recruiting new members. Invoking the retreat and the promise of dealing with "deeper" issues "around money" thus meant that they didn't talk about how much money Chris could spend, nor did they talk about Stacy's initial issue, holding members accountable for how much money they spent.

At the "money retreat" the following weekend, Chris and Marny came with therapeutic scripts or "tools" obtained from the book they had read and a self-development workshop Chris had attended. They had prepared questions for groups of two and three to ask each other and discuss: "What were your parents' core beliefs about money and abundance?," "What are your core beliefs about money and abundance?," and "What would you like to believe about money and abundance?" As scripted, participants linked their own beliefs to their parents' beliefs, then linked their current financial situation to their current beliefs. The questions they answered pushed them to assume that their parents' beliefs about money were more consequential to their own beliefs than current matters such as their income and the cost of living.

Whatever participants said was already framed as being <u>core</u> beliefs about money and presumably reflective of the participants' authentic selves. The direction the subsequent discussion took also assumed that their authentic "ideas about money" were formed in childhood and were shaped only by their parents' beliefs (rather than, for example, the economy during their childhood and their parents' occupations or opportunities). They also assumed that their ideas about money controlled how much money they made (rather than, for instance, their occupation or the economy) and becoming aware of their beliefs would free them from their hold.

As an antidote to these "limiting beliefs," they tried to form new beliefs, which they believed would yield more money. For example, by working through

the exercise, Marny had an epiphany that her parents made her feel guilty about having and spending money, and her guilt was holding her back from having and spending more. The unspoken assumption in her logic was that one's emotions about money, such as guilt, manifested in subtle ways and could constrain her from being as successful as she might. For the Venters, emotions rather than thoughts were the core of their idealist suppositions: changing one's emotions will change one's material reality. She realized that rather than thinking that there wasn't enough money for everyone (and thus feeling guilty), she wanted to believe that "there is enough for everyone" (thus alleviating her guilt). Beliefs, unlike emotions that needed processing were framed as infinitely and easily malleable.

Chris guided Marny and others in interpretations that led to epiphanies. According to a workshop that Chris attended, money was like love—the more you spent, the more you got, though only if your spending was emanating from the right sort of belief. If one "felt abundant," then one was more likely to "manifest abundance" (a euphemism for "getting rich"). Marny decided that her thrift came from the same guilty impulse instilled by her parents about money. She publicly resolved to withdraw $2,000 from her savings and buy new clothes and "nice things" for her house so that she could "feel abundant." The others clapped for her.

This was a typical example of how the Venters defined a "problem" as a lack of processing, then came prepared with a therapeutic script that required

participants to frame their feelings in a therapeutic way. It seemed to everyone that Marny had worked through something that was important to her. The epiphanies that individual members had made everyone feel that the community was doing important work and vindicated the original emphasis on processing.

It makes sense that the Venters instigated the processing about "issues around money," because psychologizing money benefited them the most. More was accomplished for Marny here than the epiphany. By depoliticizing differences in income, the Venters' therapeutic "tools" guided community members to view the richest members as the most psychologically advanced.[20] Since Marny was one of the higher wage earners in the community, the view that one's psychological health shaped one's financial success made her look good compared to others. It also allowed her to spend her money on vacations and luxury items without feeling guilty that she wasn't helping those with less money or the community as a whole. Indeed, Marny told me that the "underfunctioning" members of the community, like Robert—a part-time music instructor, musician, and handy person—"didn't want to succeed or didn't believe [they] had what it took to succeed." Those with less money, time, or energy needed to process more and ask their parents for money, according to the Venters.

So in a meeting about community money problems, processing led Marny to feel good about spending more on herself. As Marny's epiphany reinforced

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[20] Best-selling popular psychology is rife with the assumption that barriers to making money are only psychological. See Sinetar's (1989) Do What You Love, the Money Will Follow and Ormand's (1996) The Nine Steps to Financial Freedom.

the community identity as a place where people were willing to process, so did it bolster her own superiority as therapeutically advanced and deserving of her higher income. In a previous business meeting, Marny had offered what she called a "testimonial" that since she had been applying the principles of the Hendricks' tapes (a popular psychotherapist from whom she and Steve acquired their "tools") "my practice has been buzzing." In effect, she was saying that anyone else who wanted to make money should just apply the principles as she had.

Out of the day-long "money retreat" not one plan of action about how to generate more money emerged, yet participants told me later that they thought the retreat was successful. The goal of the Venters was to do therapeutic processing, and money issues with the septic system became a resource for them to do it.

Similar to early feminist groups, where an emphasis on informality meant that many were informally shut out of powerful cliques (Freeman, 1972), the structurelessness of the community benefited the most powerful. A lack of formal rules governing dues paying and community work participation enabled the Venters to psychologize community issues and entrench their own power. That is, if the community had by-laws and a financial plan governing who paid what amount (rather than each person paying whatever monthly figure they decided they could afford), how the work was divided, and accounted for contingencies that arose, the Venters couldn't continually invoke processing. Rather, it would

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be an organizational rather than psychological matter to figure out how to handle finances.

Occasionally, someone tried to bring more formal regulation into the community. For instance, Marny, Rose, and Dan decided at a business meeting to fine people who didn't show up for workdays. Since Marny and Rose, themselves Venters, almost always participated in workdays, this regulation didn't threaten them. Furthermore, because they had the highest incomes in the community, being fined would affect them the least. However, Stacy (who was trying to quit participating in the community) and Sam didn't want this regulation and blocked consensus after the meeting (allowable retroactively after the first consensus was made).

The newcomers and Communards Dan and Jessica were disheartened by the lack of participation in the collective workdays and potlucks, and called for a "commitment" retreat with the goal of gaining "clarity about agreements and expectations" about participation. That way, if people consistently missed workdays, they would know they were violating community expectations of them (rather than having the implicit expectation be that people participate as much as they want, until people periodically get angry with them).

At the commitment retreat, Sam said that he was "idealistic enough or had enough faith to believe" that "things will get done by people giving when they have the juice." He further said that he thought "efforts to regulate this are symptomatic that something else is going on." As Brissett and Edgley (1990:8)

point out, "the phrase 'things are not what they appear to be' may be seen as an interpersonal strategy for persuading one's audience to see things another way." Sam, as a Venter, liked the unstructuredness of the community because it allowed for continual processing. "Efforts to regulate" such as sanctioning missing workdays, made him feel constrained. In the therapeutic discourse in which Sam was steeped, actions that are "symptomatic" of something else are pathological and should be processed. He was thus framing the efforts to organize rather than the disorganization itself as the problem.

Marny affirmed Sam's interpretation. She said to Jessica, "If you and Dan hadn't raised this issue, I don't think we would raise it because of what you're saying, Sam. What I hear you saying is that this is an organic, changing process. We're flying on blind faith that money and people will come, and so far it has. When you point out that 5 years ago we were just talking about it, I realize 'this is tremendous!'" Sam laughed and said excitedly, "I can say now that it is going! It's flying!"

Jessica, however, challenged them by saying, "That's a good metaphor. Both of us [she and Dan] would be more comfortable with a flight pattern." Sam then asked, "How many times have we come up with long-term plans, diagrams, and charts [laughter in the room] and then found out how to improve and change them as we went along. It's evolutionary!" Sam and Marny were insisting that trying to impose some planning on the community would impede its "evolutionary" and presumably authentic development.

Though Jessica said that she "would like to see a set of agreements that accommodate lulls" in people's motivation and schedules "so that people don't have to feel guilt-tripped if they don't show up for something," this suggestion was forgotten by the end of the retreat. Jessica finally suggested that they alternate workdays for the community and for people's personal houses, because she thought people would participate more if they knew they were getting something back themselves. Chris said, "Let's have a revival! I'm proposing that we have a revival to raise passion and feelings about being here!" The others laughed and didn't treat it as a serious proposal. However, his joke framed the lack of participation (including his own) at workdays and potlucks as being about personal feelings rather than community structure. He was also implying that Dan and Jessica's efforts to hold people accountable was an effort to fix what should properly be seen as a personal matter.

Although community "problems" with money and recruitment (there was a "recruitment" retreat which was similarly about processing) remained after processing them in retreats and meetings, attendance at workdays and business meetings did increase because members felt like they were a part of something truly transformative and brave. In essence, the retreats were rituals that increased solidarity for those who participated in them. Psychologizing community issues and invoking retreats to process them thus did serve a practical community purpose. Community members then interpreted increased participation of members as the successful outcome of the difficult processing

they did at the retreat. Their basic therapeutic assumption that the cause of their financial, recruiting, and personal problems was due to not communicating their feelings was reinforced.

As the ones who successfully diagnosed the community problem as a dearth of processing, and the ones who scripted the retreats, Venters reinforced their positions as leaders. Furthermore, since Venters were the most proficient in the use of therapeutic discourse, psychologizing community issues and invoking the need for more processing put them in the best therapeutic light—they more than others were brave enough to really "get down into their shit."

However, treating money as an issue to be processed rather than a material constraint was a luxury in which some of the Venters could best afford to indulge. Others who had decided not to join the community told me that one reason was because investing in the community was financially risky. Several newer current members, Stacy, Neil and Julie, were unhappy with the community's lack of financial planning. Others who wanted to process needed a way to discredit these members' concerns without seeming to stifle differences of opinion.

<u>Discrediting Others</u>

After going to the community for weekly business meetings for a few months, I was getting annoyed by the fact that people usually dragged in half an hour late, especially since the meetings usually exceeded the scheduled two

hours and I had a 40-minute drive home. Once when I was waiting for the

meeting to start on Rose's back porch, she joined me and said, "Where is

everybody? I thought we were having a meeting tonight." I joked about how I

really <u>was</u> a prompt person, despite our first meeting when I was an hour late

because I got lost. She said she was like that, too. When she was late she

could "feel it in my body." Me, too, I said. Then she said, "It's a real sickness. It

goes back to our families. I can remember being severely punished for being

late. Can you remember that, too?" I said that I didn't remember it and she

replied, "You must have repressed it." Annoyed, I responded that it made me

tense because I thought it was inconsiderate to keep others waiting. She

responded, "Yeah, that's part of it," and then changed the subject.

In this exchange, Rose used psychological discourse to interpret the

situation in a way that would discredit any annoyance I might have felt toward the

others for being consistently late. Describing myself as "prompt" cast the others

as inconsiderate. Rose reframed this by implying that my need to be prompt was

pathological, stemming from harsh punishment as a child. In her view, then, it

wasn't that the latecomers were inconsiderate but that I needed to process about

my punctuality. Of course, if I had repressed the source of my punctuality

pathology, then her interpretation even subsumed my disagreement. She

preemptively discredited any potential criticisms I could have leveled at the late

comers.

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This was an example of what would be a strategy used by the Venters for more consequential aims. Venters used the psychological discourse in similar ways—that is, to psychologize potential or actual criticisms of the community—to discredit those who challenged the status quo by wanting more financial security.

For example, Stacy was continually at odds with Marny and Rose because she didn't want to process and she pushed for financial planning. Stacy bought the rural homestead on the community land and invested some money and time in refurbishing it, but then dropped out of the community. She told the others that she had "found community" where she had been living and was happy there. Prior to her decision to drop out, she had been consistently more upset than others about the rising costs of the experimental septic system. Initially, the engineer estimated the cost at $45,000, but two years later the cost had exceeded $100,000. She wanted the community to reevaluate the decision to build the expensive system but Marny insisted that the community had already formed consensus around this system and would not reevaluate it, regardless of costs. It was not unprecedented, however, to reevaluate previous consensus decisions and form new consensus around new decisions—though no one brought this up, apparently in support of Marny.

Stacy's reluctance to pay more (understandable, given both her increasing reluctance to participate in the community and decreasing standard of living) threatened others. First of all, as I showed in Chapter 1, the experimental septic system was the community's main claim to the identity of "environmentally

sustainable." It was the basis of their non-profit status, allowed them to ask others for money, and also generated the identity-serving resource of "money problems." Her emphasis on money as a personal constraint rather than "money issues" as a psychological reality also challenged the Venters' framing of community issues and their invocation of the need for more processing.

There were several times I saw others psychologize Stacy's concerns. That is, they made her concerns seem pathological, indicative that she needed to process more. During one meeting when Stacy brought up financial concerns, Marny said that she thought people ought to "value themselves enough to ask for help from their families." Here, and during other times Marny, Michael and Rose—three members who had paid the most toward their full buy-in—equated going into debt and borrowing money from family with being committed to the community and with psychological health.

During a subsequent business meeting, Stacy said that she found out she could get an electricity transformer put in for free rather than paying to have it put in underground. Marny said that they had already figured the money into the buy-in fee, so it would be something that she'd have to pay anyway. She alluded to her previous comment when she asked Stacy directly, "Do you have any family resources?" Everyone knew that Stacy's parents were rich. Stacy hedged, and later in the meeting Rose said, "I feel hurt. I would like you to do more. I borrowed so much money to put into this community. If there's any way for you to borrow, it would sure help." Stacy didn't respond. During this meeting,

Marny implied again that Stacy's money troubles could be alleviated if only she "valued herself," or was psychologically advanced enough, to borrow money from her parents. Then Rose came back with a previous strategy ("attacking others")—using her "hurt" feelings to attack Stacy in a way that stifled a discussion about what Stacy could and couldn't afford.

Stacy told me in an interview that she felt that as an adult, she needed to live with the consequences of the decision she made to change into a lower-paid career. She didn't think it was fair to ask her family to pay her way because they earned their money and could use it themselves and she didn't think it would be healthy to depend on them financially. The next meeting Stacy attended, she said that she decided to leave the community. She used their self-development rhetoric to escape the community. She essentially said, "You're right. I'm not committed enough. I must not belong here." Community members couldn't argue with her, because that's what they'd been insinuating all along. The Venters Marny and Rose left her few options for staying and bringing up money concerns in a way that wasn't discreditable by their psychological discourse.

Like Stacy, Neil and Julie, two newcomers to the community who had immediately paid a $3,000 down payment, had financial concerns. They wanted to protect their financial investment by having the community hire an accountant to get their records in order and by having the community finish their by-laws to protect each member's money (in case of bankruptcy or other exigencies). Neil

was resistant to psychologizing community issues, angering the Venters and threatening the status quo.

Neil did not use therapeutic discourse when he challenged the core group of founding members (the Venters) about their failure to make and stick with financial plans. He brought up and pressed for practical solutions to what otherwise seemed like rhetorical "problems." He didn't want to process "money issues" at the expense of seeing financial documents and asking an accountant to help them make a financial plan. Marny told him publicly that he was constantly criticizing but not contributing. She and others challenged him to reveal what was <u>really</u> behind his financial concerns. The Venters wanted Neil to see the community's financial concerns not as a practical problem but as an opportunity to process.

Furthermore, Marny said at a business meeting that <u>she</u> personally "didn't have the need to get an outside accountant." She said that she had given "everything she owned and more to this community" because she had faith in it. Marny also told Neil in a retreat, "I wonder how much of this is really a money issue for you and how much of it is just fear." She and others defined Neil's concerns as a commitment pathology.[21]

Marny, and to a lesser degree others in the community, were angry with Neil for pestering them about by-laws and financial documents. There was also

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[21] Ironic considering that Neil and his partner put down a $3,000 deposit on their membership within a week of coming to their first business meeting—hardly a fearful action.

a conflict (that I only heard about later) between Neil and others regarding an understanding about the placement of his house. He insisted that he didn't want to be able to see any other houses from his house, and others thought he was being churlish. He and Marny had had a harsh altercation at one retreat, as others reported to me.

As the next retreat approached, Robert told me that he feared a showdown between Marny and Neil. He said it had been brewing for some time. After Neil performed his failed authentic demonstration of his feelings at a retreat (previously described), it was time for Marny to speak. She said she realized she was holding back because she didn't want to get people mad at her. She said that instead of just "speaking my truth," she blamed others. However, the "truth" that she wanted to speak was critical of Neil. She said:

> What I'm about to say will probably make Neil very mad. But it is my truth right now and I want to be authentic and say it. It might not be true tomorrow, but right now it is true. . . . It upsets me that I have given everything I own to this community, and others who haven't committed at all have the same power to steer the boat as I do. Their voice is equal to mine in consensus. I feel that sometimes Neil is ripping up the boards of the boat that I have worked so hard to build and he isn't replacing it with anything new. We are trying to repair the damage that he's doing and that isn't allowing the rest of us to go anywhere. I understand if you aren't

ready to commit to getting in the boat with us. But I wish that you could leave the boat. If you aren't ready, then come back in it when you are ready. I want the ones in the boat to be able to take off in it. But I don't say this, because I think people will get mad at me. When I think about [saying it now], I get this feeling that starts at the end of one hand, [goes] through my chest, and out the other hand. But it makes me feel alive.

She was alluding to the way Neil and Julie said that they didn't want to give more money to the community until they finished the by-laws.

She framed her critical comments as being about her own struggle for authenticity. In order to say them, she had to transcend her own fears of people getting mad at her. Saying what she said was thus a personal growth triumph. Thinking about expressing her feelings—despite her fear of others' reactions—was so powerful she felt it in her body and it "made her feel alive."

This dramatic narrative—of truth being so pressing that it heightened her self-awareness to the point of being physically apparent—certainly was destined to have a different meaning than the same thing said in a flip or casual way. After the retreat, no one except Neil and his partner Julie was critical of what Marny had said. Since Neil was getting on most everyone's nerves, and certainly many were uncomfortable with Neil and Marny's altercations, perhaps they wanted to believe that Neil deserved what he got from Marny. However, whether or not they believed that Marny was being critical of Neil and couching it in

authenticity, they had to publicly honor her dramatic warrant to "speak her truth."
As I will show in the next chapter, public affirmation didn't preclude private
reservations.

Others backed up Marny's assessment of Neil. From my fieldnotes:

Neil said, 'I just can't believe that you think that I am only being
destructive. I do a lot of positive things around here that no one seems to
see.' Marny said, 'for example, you both said a while back that you would
call the lawyer and weeks have gone by and you still haven't done it.'
Julie responded, visibly upset and defensive, 'Yes we have, Marny! We
called and left several messages with him and he hasn't called us back.'
Sam said 'I know what Marny is saying, Neil. I can't exactly put my finger
on it, but the way that you criticize doesn't feel helpful.'

Sam affirmed Marny's assessment of Neil as being an impediment to the
community, and did it in a similarly therapeutic way. Rather than saying anything
concrete about either the content of Neil's criticisms of the community or the way
Neil expressed them, Sam said that it "doesn't feel helpful." Neil was left with no
way to counter Sam's statement, since it was presented as a description of
Sam's internal state. Furthermore, Sam's assessment that it was the way that
Neil expressed himself that bothered him so much is congruent with my analysis:
Neil wasn't using the right kind of therapeutic discourse and expression rules
and, as a result, others wanted to and could challenge his claims.

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That was the last retreat Neil and Julie attended. Julie reported to me that she was angry about what Sam had said, and Neil was angry about what he experienced as Marny's attempts to control him. He told me:

I feel like Marny is really interested in helping everyone else work on themselves but not very interested in helping Marny work on herself. And so it makes for real condescension. . . . Where one person perceives they know what's best for the other individual, you know. 'Well, if you'd just have a little more trust, then everything would be fine. If you'd have a little more faith, then life would be OK.' Or 'if you need help working through those emotions, you know, I help you work through the fear. If you've got fear, let me help you work through it and then you can see everything my way.'

Neil was implying that Marny tried to make his differences of opinion about community matters into a psychological problem that she could help him through. Here he posited that psychological health, for Marny, was seeing things her way.[22]

The retreat, and Marny and Sam's emotional expressions, did neutralize Neil's threat to the status quo since he and Julie ended up leaving the community. Others interpreted their dropping out, however, as confirmation of what Marny and other Venters suspected all along: they weren't psychologically

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[22] This is Gergen's (1989, 1990) critique of psychology itself.

healthy enough to experience growth through the community process. Rose told me later "a lot of what's happening to [Neil] is that he's blaming the community for things that are really within himself." Similarly, Marny said:

> But the best part of me is believing that he knows this is stirring up tremendous amounts of stuff for him and he's going to have to work on this himself. That part of entering the community is going to bring up everybody's stuff about their original group, their family. …And I think he's in therapy and I really hope that he'll hang in there.

Once a psychological label stuck with someone, it served as a stigma (Goffman, 1963). All of Neil's history and actions—however contradictory—were interpreted through the light of his "unresolved issues," once defined as such by Marny and Rose. The Venters could push people out by psychologizing their dissent, then use their dropping out as vindication for psychologizing them in the first place.

The psychologizing of dissent, however, couldn't appear overt, or the Venters couldn't claim to be people who encouraged diversity of viewpoints and built a safe community. When psychologizing others publicly, it was important not to appear to use previous revelations against them. This would make the therapeutic environment obviously <u>un</u>safe. In effect, this meant that one could allude to the fact that perhaps another had an "issue," but one could not actually spell out what the issue might be. For example, at the same retreat when Marny said that she thought Neil wasn't contributing to the community, Sam raged at

Neil and Julie for not paying their dues and he also said later, "Neil, I know you have so much rage inside of you. What I'm asking you is to work on it. Get therapy and work on it. There is something about you that triggers this thing in me and I find it difficult to even deal with you sometimes." Since this was Sam's monologue, Neil never responded to him. Sam, however, was discrediting Neil by casting him as someone who needed much more self work, meaning that Neil's actions were a manifestation of unresolved anger rather than legitimate concern with how the community operated. Significantly, what Sam didn't say was his theory about Neil's anger, such as "your concern with the community's finances is symptomatic of your unresolved issues with your controlling mother."

The difference between telling others they need to process and theorizing about the origin of their issue is that the former allows the others to do the necessary self work and discover for themselves the cause, claiming some status in the community. Neil was situationally discredited, but he could still have some hope of achieving the status of "dealing with his shit" at a later time, for which he would get credit from the others. If Neil had claimed status as someone processing his anger, he would have vindicated the Venters' emphasis on therapy rather than looking at community finances. Neil didn't choose this route, however. Instead, he dropped out of the community.

But the latter kind of discrediting—using specific information—would preclude Neil naming his own pathologies and getting credit for his own epiphany. Furthermore, if others could easily see the specific connection that

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Neil was missing, then Neil would appear therapeutically unsophisticated. Stealing an epiphany out from under someone by positing a theory about how his current behavior was linked to childhood wouldn't give him a face-saving chance. The only chance to save face in this situation, therefore, would be for Neil to affirm what Sam charged—that he needed therapy.

The strategy of alluding to another's generic "issue" without bringing up a specific theory works at another level. It follows the logic of a therapist who may recognize the classic symptoms in her patients but also realizes that it's more therapeutic for the patient if she figures out her own issues. In this way, telling someone "you need therapy" sends a "social place" (Clark 1991) message of superiority: "I have the therapeutic sophistication not only to see what your issue is, but also to know that you need to figure it out yourself." By saying that Neil needed therapy, Sam thus discredited Neil and positioned himself as more therapeutically advanced than Neil.

Though I never witnessed someone using specific information to discredit others directly, I did hear lots of pathology theories from individuals behind the backs of others (albeit to me, a researcher). For example, during an interview, I asked Marny about her relationship with Neil. She said:

> But man, put us together in this working relationship in the community and our stuff comes up. And, I get threatened and feel criticized and all my old junk comes up and apparently, so does his. I don't want to lay my cards down and become completely vulnerable if I don't see him laying at least a

few of his down. And I haven't seen him laying his cards down very much, in terms of saying--. He admits it, but he doesn't really show it. Like he'll say, 'this is old stuff.' But he doesn't tell the details, so I'm still holding my cards up. Because I'm afraid to lay 'em down because I'm afraid he'll say, 'Yeah. That's just your shit with your dad. That doesn't have anything to do with me.' And it's like, 'Yeah. It's my shit with my dad that makes me overreact to things. But you're still not willing to fix the holes in the boat. You're still not doing enough.' And then he goes, 'I've done a lot!' He's got to defend, because he was called irresponsible by his father. . . . I'm willing to hang in as long as he is. And I think that's all it takes. Just an absolute commitment to say, 'We'll just keep working at it.' And if Neil will do that, I'll think he'll experience tremendous healing. Because I've experienced tremendous healing when I got with a group of people.

Here Marny describes her fear that others will use her vulnerability against her to discredit what she's saying. As a result she feels safe being "vulnerable" only when others are vulnerable. That is, if others had psychological leverage over her—such as knowing about her troubled relationship with her father—then they could discredit what she said by psychologizing her. Neil could say that he thinks she reacted to him not because he was irresponsible, but rather because he was triggering her "old junk," or issues with her family. However, if she had equal knowledge of his "old junk," then they both are constrained not to use their leverage to discredit the other, because they in turn could be discredited. Marny

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didn't trust Neil because she didn't think he had exposed enough of "the details" of his issues, so it made her feel over-exposed to him.

Ironically, however, Marny went on to do the very thing she was afraid he would do to her—discredit what he said by psychologizing him. Rather than reconsider her claim about Neil's slackness, Marny characterized his reaction as defensive and arising from his unresolved family issues. She evidently <u>did</u> know enough about his family background to deftly turn his defense against her charges into a psychological pathology stemming from issues with his father.

I think Marny's admission here of how expressions of vulnerability could later be used against the person shows why it was a threat to the Venters and the Sharers if someone was not vulnerable. It's akin to the logic of "nuclear deterrence": if everyone has nuclear weapons then everyone can believe that no one will use them because of the threat of retaliation. However, if someone was "invulnerable" by hiding their weak spots, then others could not trust that person not to target them. Marny and the other Venters and the Sharers thus felt safest around people who exposed their weaknesses and shared like they did.

What Marny was fearing more than a direct discrediting of her views was that Neil could use his psychological leverage against her with others, behind her back—like she was doing to him with me. Marny, Rose, Sam, Robert, Gwen, and Michael all gave me a similar account about Neil's dropping out: the community brought up his issues with his conservative family—that he had rebelled against—and he wasn't ready to deal with them. Regardless of whether they had

talked to each other about it (which the similarity of their accounts suggested that

they had) it was significant that they could employ such an account to discredit

his criticism of community functioning. They also knew, then, that others could

employ such an account to discredit what they might say—even if others never

openly stated it.

What were Neil's options in responding to Sam's discrediting? He could

tell Sam that he thought trying to discredit him by invoking a pathology that Neil

couldn't deny was a cheap shot. If Neil was able to be critical of the

psychological discourse enough to have this analysis—which, by the end of his

community tenure, he was—he could have said something to that effect.

However, he also knew the community members well enough to know that such

a defense would be ineffective. For the Venters, this would have only been

further proof of Neil's denial. Furthermore, Neil would have looked really bad for

being insensitive enough to discredit Sam's authentic feelings. Sam probably

would have responded that he "felt the need" to tell Neil, implying that Neil was

inappropriately defensive.

He could have also come back at Sam using Sam's own strategy—telling

Sam that his view that Neil needed therapy was symptomatic of his own need for

therapy. The fact that no one ever employed this strategy was probably because

it would have seemed ridiculous, like a child's defense of "Not me! It's you!" It

would have exposed the infinite regress implicit in this discourse—if everything

can be construed as symptomatic of something else, how does one know when

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one finds the core? Neil—despite his criticisms of the community and feelings

that he was being scapegoated—had a stake in believing that one did have an

authentic self that could be found through lots of processing.[23] By exposing the

weakness of Sam's charge he would have had to also expose the limits of his

own dearly-held assumptions.

I have shown how the Venters used the psychological discourse to wield

and maintain power in the community. They attacked others in ways that others

couldn't rebut, and invoked processing to resolve financial problems. Invoking

processing, and subsequently using retreats, psychologized differences of

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[23] In fact, he told me after the first meeting I attended—when he was still enthusiastic about the community—that he thought the community really helped him to find his "authentic self."

opinion about how best to structure the community. The result was more

processing and few practical solutions. The Venters psychologized those who

didn't want to process about financial and organization issues and ultimately

pushed them out of the community. In this way, Venters preserved the culture in

which they had power.

As I will show in the next chapter, however, not all the Venters had equal

resources to fashion moral identities as community leaders. The women

Venters—Marny and Rose—though publicly acclaimed when they had

epiphanies and helped others process, and privately acclaimed when they drove

out annoying people like Neil—were not respected by many others as leaders. In

fact, they were scapegoated for scaring away potentially good members because

of their intense displays of anger. However, male Venters also displayed anger

but weren't scapegoated for community problems. I will argue that this is part of

a double-standard in the community, whereby women were constrained by sexist

images and assumptions about emotionally inexpressive or angry and powerful

women but men could express emotions however they wished.

Chapter Four

GENDER, POWER, AND THERAPEUTIC DISCOURSE

As I visited the community, I noticed that the men were open about their feelings—not more so than the women there, but much more so than most men in our culture (Sattel, 1976; Rubin, 1983; Seidler, 1991). Here a gentle masculinity was practiced: men were openly affectionate with one another, often splaying arms and legs over each other on the couch during business meetings. Men participated equally with women in making food for the potlucks and cleaning up afterwards.

The women of Aurora Commons were opinionated and boisterous and were as likely as men to offer their insights in business meetings. Two of the women, Marny and Rose, both Venters, residents, and founding members, were especially powerful. As I have shown in previous examples, Marny and Rose— through proficiency with therapeutic discourse and through the time and money they invested in the community—often prevailed in disagreements and had considerable say so in community organization and direction.

One man I interviewed who initially came to the community as Stacy's partner and left shortly after their breakup, thought the community was a "matriarchy" because "the women sort of controlled it." When I asked him how he knew this, his evidence was the fact that "the retreat was all about feelings. It was just all feelings, and what do you feel about this and what do you feel about

that." For Ed, and for many in our culture, a place where feelings are taken seriously must also be a place where women have control, the assumption being that feelings are the province of women. Ed didn't give the women <u>credit</u> for being leaders, then. To him, their power was illegitimate, as a traditional man would view homemakers who place demands on husbands as being henpecking, harping, or manipulative. Though Ed didn't describe Marny and Rose with those words, it was clear that he thought the women placed unreasonable demands on men to express their feelings.

Here was a community in which women were among the leaders and had the power to control others and shape community actions. Feelings were taken as seriously as rational argument. As Ed's opinion reflects, though, and as I will further demonstrate, women and men in the community both held double standards about emotional expressiveness, especially reflected in their views of the woman who was considered to be the most powerful, Marny.

Women were evaluated negatively—often by other women—for expressing too little emotion as well as for expressing too much anger. In contrast, I never heard men criticized by anyone in public or private for their choices of emotional expression. The community provided a freer emotional space for men than they generally had in our culture. But it was not so for women, who were still constrained by the sexist images and assumptions about emotionally inexpressive, angry, or powerful women.

The therapeutic discourse used in the community didn't give members a way to talk about how emotions are generated through interactions in a social and political context. Rather, community members essentialized anger and other emotions as authentic expressions of a core self. As a result, women weren't able to perceive and challenge double standards about emotional expressiveness and in general couldn't use their anger as an "emotional pathway" (Hochschild 1990) to change their relationships or their context.

Compulsory Nature of Sharing for Women

As I discussed in Chapter Three, sharing was often compulsory—during "check-ins" and retreats. I gave several examples of people trying to opt out of sharing. Robert, Dan, Jessica, and I—all Communards—decided not to share in various ways during retreats. When the talking stick was used, Robert always talked about relatively impersonal matters, such as the community Webpage. When the talking stick wasn't used at retreats, Robert simply didn't talk. Similarly, Dan spoke when he had to, but didn't reveal anything personal— although once he publicly admitted that sometimes he felt less "emotionally expressive" than others and sometimes he "curiously" wasn't moved by what others shared. No one responded to his comments.

Ed, the man who left the community after he and Stacy broke up (and before I started participating), told me he was uncomfortable with processing. He described his and Stacy's "strategy" in the community whereby "She'd do all the

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heavy emotional stuff and then I'd just do my time and get out." When I asked

him if anyone had ever reproached him for not sharing his feelings enough he

responded:

> No. One of the things I said at the retreat, I said, 'Look. I feel like
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> everyone here is wondering about me. And so I think the way it should
>
> work is that if you have a question about me, ask me a question, because
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> I don't want to sit here talking about myself.' So that's the way I put it.
>
> And then they would ask me some questions. . . . Is that a more manly
>
> thing to do? Maybe I should have began rambling about, you know, what I
>
> was doing. I don't feel comfortable just sitting and talking about myself.

By saying that they could ask him whatever they wanted to, Ed implied

that the point of the retreat was merely an exchange of relevant information,

rather than a means to connect with others authentically and pursue self-growth.

After Ed used this rational discourse to exempt himself from having to talk about

his feelings, he felt comfortable participating in the community in a marginal way.

More importantly, others allowed him to feel comfortable by not challenging his

assumption that it wasn't important for him to share feelings in order for others to

get to know him. I never witnessed or heard in interviews anyone disparaging or

challenging a man for not sharing enough.

However, Jessica and I <u>were</u> sanctioned for not sharing appropriately.

Once Jessica said, "As far as sharing personal stuff, I don't really feel like I know

people well enough to do it," to which Rose interjected irritably, "How are we supposed to know you if you don't?" Since no one called Rose on breaking the explicit rule forbidding interrupting anyone who held the talking stick, it appeared that others supported what she said. Similarly, I didn't pick up the talking stick during the retreat and Rose violated the "speak when moved to speak" rule by asking me if I wanted it after everyone else had said something. Her attention to my noncompliance pointed to the implicit rule of sharing.

Perhaps Robert and Dan weren't sanctioned because they never directly opted out like I did once, or explicitly said they didn't want to share like Jessica did. However, other statements community members made about these participants indicated there was a double standard for men and women when it came to the compulsory nature of sharing. That Jessica and I were sanctioned and Robert and Dan were not reflects a more general expectation that women should share, but men had the option not to share.

Other evidence of a double standard about sharing was how Robert and Jessica, both Communards, were evaluated differently by Marny. Marny once publicly lauded Robert for holding Rose when she was sobbing beside him. In the "appreciation circle" at the end of the retreat, she said, with tears in her eyes, "Robert, I appreciate you for comforting Rose. When I saw you in there I saw the kindest, most gentle man that I always knew was there but had never really seen come out like that." She was implying that underneath his reticence, he was emotionally available. However, about Jessica, who was more emotionally

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expressive than Robert and at the time living in her house, Marny said, "and it's really hard for me to live in a house with a woman who doesn't want to hug. You know. <u>Never</u> initiates. And <u>never</u> talks personally. And <u>never</u> cries and <u>never</u> falls apart. It's like 'ah! You're missing out! There's a lot to be had here!'" It is significant that Marny specified that it was "a woman" being emotionally controlled that wasn't acceptable. In contrast, I never heard anyone say anything critical about Robert, or even bring up the fact that he wasn't expressive. Robert could opt out of sharing in ways that women members could not.

This meant that women members had to share in order to gain any status in the community. It wasn't an option for them to gain status as a "quiet but deep" member. As Kleinman (1996) points out, since women's emotionality is held as "natural" in our culture, women don't get points from others for its display. In this context, women were expected to show some emotion. Robert, on the other hand, got extra points for his passive display of emotionality, holding someone who was crying. Usually, however, he could remain silent or inexpressive and still be admired by others.

In the context of the larger culture wherein women are often expected to do the emotion work for their heterosexual partnerships—with the consequence of leaving them vulnerable to criticism for being overly-emotional—it would take this community's active challenging of such ideology to allow men and women to rethink their assumptions about gender and emotionality. Since I never heard anyone challenge <u>any</u> sexist attitudes or statements in the community, I doubt

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that I missed the discussion about how it's unfair that more pressure is put on women to do the emotion work for the community and for their relationships. By leaving such assumptions unquestioned, and sometimes reinforcing them, the community's culture reproduced the idea that women should process and men have the option to process—with more acclaim than women—or not.

Women Cast as Too Angry

As I showed in Chapter Two, the Venters and Sharers and to a lesser degree the Communards were proud of the community's "intensity"—the emotional heat that testified to the extraordinary self-work going on there. If such intensity led others to think that Aurora Commons was weird or dysfunctional, then that was the price community members were willing to pay to live authentically. While they appreciated intensity in theory and used it to bolster their identities as therapeutic activists, I showed in Chapter Two how Sharers and Communards nevertheless often criticized the Venters' displays of anger. Sharers wanted to have it both ways then: they had an oppositional identity as people who lived deeply and authentically despite the difficulty of doing so, and they criticized a few members for displaying authentic anger toward others. As I will show, not all members were criticized for their anger. The burden of the community's discomfort with therapeutic ideology (taken to its logical end, open expression of all emotions, including anger) fell on the shoulders of the two women Venters, Marny and Rose.

In addition to scapegoating Marny and Rose for the community's problem recruiting newcomers, at times it became evident that some members resented Marny's leadership, seeing her as too controlling. While it may be the case that Marny controlled others through her use of therapeutic discourse (as I have argued), she was acting consistently with the community's therapeutic ideology by being authentic. She should have been admired for her therapeutic leadership. Community members' views of Marny as too controlling depoliticized her status as a woman in a male-dominated society and reinforced the controlling and misogynist image of a powerful woman as a "bitch." As I will show, this controlling image was something Marny deflected by pathologizing her behavior as symptomatic of PMS.

Scapegoating Marny and Rose. As I interviewed community members, a common theme in their talk emerged: people blamed Marny for the community's failure to recruit newcomers and for people dropping out. Specifically, many saw Marny's style of processing and her intensity as dysfunctional. Sharers and Communards publicly critical of the "unstructured model"—in which everyone screamed with no intervention—privately named Marny and sometimes Rose in interviews as the only ones who really needed reining-in. Though therapeutic discourse prevented community members from publicly challenging those who gave a creditable authentic performance (because a challenge would be a

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betrayal and create an unsafe environment, according to the logic), they nevertheless did blame Marny and Rose in private.

For example, Sam—himself a very vocal Venter—responded to my question about why he thought the community had trouble recruiting new people:

> I think that people were scared of Rose and Marny's anger. . . .I've been around a lot of anger as a therapist. I've had lots of people angry at me, and I handle it pretty well. But the rock-bottom truth is that it's pretty scary. So I think, based on how scary it's been for me to confront—and I guess that's what it is, a confrontation with Marny—that it would be very very scary for other people and they're not going to touch it. . . . How do you create a safe way of people coming to a group to say what they think and feel? A really, truly safe way if they've seen explosive rage coming from a leader? A woman who is making the damn thing happen?

Sam described what could otherwise be called authentic as "explosive rage" from Marny—rage that drove away frightened seekers. What Sam didn't acknowledge was that his own rage and intensity scared others. For example, as I described, at one retreat Sam raged at newcomers Neil and Julie for not paying their dues. They told me later that this was part of their decision to leave the community.

Similar to Sam, Marny's ex-partner Michael blamed Marny for Libby and Paul leaving the community:

Marny cannot stand to be questioned or criticized, and people come along

and they have questions and criticisms, and she has a very hard time with

that. She takes it very personally. She gets very distressed and she . . .

discredits people in some way or finds some way to make them wrong. . .

As I listen to people talk about why they—who hasn't come or why they

haven't joined—Marny's name comes up repeatedly. [They say that] her

anger and her control and her intensity is off-putting.

Michael and Sam's criticism of Marny absolved the community for its inability to

attract and retain newcomers. Sam and Michael were both therapists and

enjoyed status in the community as therapeutic sophisticates. Both of them took

pride in being members of a community where people had the courage to

connect intensely and authentically with each other. Rather than critically looking

at community organization and culture—such as mandatory processing retreats,

"check-ins" at business meetings, and the use of authenticity to discredit others—

it was easier for them and others to blame Marny. They were invested in the

same practice for which they were criticizing Marny, which is why they couldn't

say anything publicly about what she did.

The only two Venters taking the rap for scaring away newcomers were the

two women, Marny and Rose. Unlike Sam and Chris, they didn't say they

thought the community was too "intense" (discussed in Chapter Two) and

needed to quit scaring away newcomers. Marny did express anger more than

anyone, including the other Venters. She was also the most "intense" in other ways: she cried and pushed to process more than others. She wasn't in any position to criticize the practices she used more than anyone.

Rose, however, didn't display anger, grief, or other intense emotions more than Sam or Chris, the male Venters. I saw Rose express anger at someone twice; Chris, twice; Sam once. Sam's expression of anger was the most intense—involving screaming and tears. I saw Rose, Sam, and Chris all break down and cry very intensely once. But the men were never mentioned as culprits in scaring away potential recruits. There was thus a double standard when it came to evaluating women and men for similar behaviors. Women were evaluated negatively for expressing anger while men were not.

Stacy, herself a Sharer, was one of the biggest critics of the Venters' expressions of anger. However, her comments about Chris and Sam, the two male Venters, showed that she didn't evaluate them similarly to Marny and Rose. She said:

> Chris is a big role model for me. So when I go to a meeting and get real
> upset, I'll call Chris and say, 'Chris, they attacked you. It just looked like it
> just rolled off your back. How did you do that?' It just amazed me. And
> so he explained to me how he did it. He said, 'that's why I have my art.
> I've become the artist and am totally into it.' (laughing). 'Oh, OK.' Cause
> I knew at this retreat that Rose was going to attack me and I didn't want to

take it personally. I didn't want to feel attacked. . . . I was really happy that Sam got some of his work done. I adore Sam. He's another one of my role models.

Stacy thinks of Chris as a victim of Marny and Rose's anger just like herself. When she said that Sam "got some of his work done" she was referring to the time that Sam raged at Neil and Julie for not paying their dues and cried about being molested as a baby by his mother. For Sam, she upheld the interpretation that what he was doing was "authentic" and thus immune to criticism. However, as I showed previously, she thought Marny and Rose, as well as Neil were "vocally violent."

Neil, a man, was the exception to the gender pattern I've been describing. Like Rose and Marny, he was considered by many to be "too angry." However, unlike the other venting men and women, Neil didn't use therapeutic discourse to frame his anger as authentic as others did. For example, as I showed, at a retreat in which Neil expressed dissatisfaction with the community's financial status, Sam commented that it was "something about how" Neil expressed himself that rankled. After the retreat, others told me that Neil's emotional outpouring seemed "planned" and he went into it and come out of it too quickly. Unlike others, Neil never cried or presented his feelings as if it were extremely difficult for him. It makes sense, in this light, that others would criticize Neil's expressions of anger. He didn't give them the satisfaction of seeing someone

authentically processing and working through difficult personal issues. Rather, he appeared to others to be merely complaining.

Reinforcing the 'Controlling Bitch' Image. At one business meeting I attended, there was a public confirmation of the underground reality that many thought Marny was controlling. Chris, Marny's first ex-partner and father of her children; Michael, Marny's current partner (soon to be ex); Sam, Marny's one-time romantic interest; Gram, Marny and Chris' teenage son; and Nancy, an occasional visitor to the community were present. Chris was deciding where to put his house. He could move into the site right beside Marny and Michael— where he would have easy access to electricity and septic—or he could move to a site farther away.

Chris said, "I don't want to live right beside my ex-wife." Michael responded by asking, "Can you tell us what your misgivings would be?" Marny chimed in, laughing, "Because she's a controlling bitch!" Chris and Sam laughed uproariously. Chris said, "Wouldn't that be a great Karmic act to be living next to…" and Sam interrupted, "the controlling bitch!" Everyone except me laughed again. Later in the meeting Chris asked if they had consensus about him picking one of the two sites and Marny said, "It's already in the minutes," to which Sam replied, again in a joking voice, "You really are a controlling bitch!" Michael then said, "Yeah. I want to live up the hill too!" Sam said "controlling bitch" once more during the meeting, and after Gram made a joke about revoking an outsider's

hunting privileges in the community's woods, Nancy said jokingly, "Are you related to Marny?" Nancy invoked the running joke and implied that doing something mean-spirited was like Marny, a "controlling bitch." During this meeting, then, everyone except Gram and I had made a joke at Marny's expense. To my surprise, it appeared that Marny was enjoying it.

It surprised me because the word "bitch", though generally socially acceptable, is the political equivalent to racial epithets used to justify violence, discrimination and hatred toward African Americans. The word "bitch"—applicable only to women—is inextricably bound with misogynist notions about women's place. After all, it's only a woman who violates expectations that she should be subservient—by offending a man, expressing anger, or being in a position of power—who is at risk at being called one.[24] In this way, we could call it a controlling image that all women must contend with in one way or another, either by distancing themselves from it and embracing its alter—submissiveness, domesticity, and purity—or suffering the consequences of being labeled one.

The intensity of the laughter in the room seemed telling. The men—all with previous or current intimate relationships with Marny—were enjoying the joke a lot. They were generating solidarity with one another as men by reinforcing an image that cast her as emasculating and themselves as her

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[24] Carol Tavris puts it well: "The very fact that there are so many ugly words to describe angry women (such as bitch, virago, termagant, scold, fishwife, shrew) and only a couple of mild words that might specifically be applied to chronically angry men (hothead, grouch) is itself irritating evidence of the stereotype, which seems to allot women no choice other that Bianca the Meek and Katharina the Shrew" (1982: 198).

victims. The fact that Marny enjoyed the joke at her expense does not negate

the political consequences of reinforcing this controlling image that assaults all

women in the community and in our culture. Marny, the note-taker for the

meeting, even put it in the minutes—distributed to all community members and

various other community supporters—that "Chris doesn't want to move next to

Marny because she's a controlling bitch."

Marny's heterosexual history with the men surely accounted for the

acceptability of the joke (that is, it wouldn't have been acceptable among

strangers and perhaps not so in a friendship circle) and had meaning for her and

the men in the context of their personal relationships. However, I sociologically

the joke had a different significance than that of which they were aware. Many

members thought that Marny was the most powerful person in the community. In

the context of Marny being blamed for scaring away newcomers, the joke

reinforced a powerful message to all women: women who are leaders with

therapeutic discourse might be powerful, but they still can't escape male-defined

standards of feminine acceptability.

Why did Marny introduce the joke in the first place? Perhaps it was a

compensatory way to undercut her status as more of a therapeutic expert and a

high wage earner than the men in the community. Similarly, Hochschild (1989)

describes how women who out-earn their husbands often need to "make up for it"

by doing most of the housework. In this "economy of gratitude," a wife owes her

husband for being "unusually understanding" about her higher earnings that

undercut his male status. In the community culture, rather than garnering

gratitude for her high earnings, therapeutic sophistication, leadership, and

emotion work, Marny feels grateful to others for their unusual understanding of

her displays of anger. As I will show, she subsequently indicated that she

needed to process about her issue with control and also said that her anger was

a result of PMS. Marny tried to deflect the sting of others' judgments about her

anger by showing she was processing it.

Marny Confessing Her Inadequacies. As I have pointed out in the previous two

chapters, Venters used therapeutic discourse to attack and discredit community

dissidents and control others who might fear being attacked or discredited. By

using therapeutic discourse with proficiency, Venters could claim status in the

community as self-actualizing individuals who had the courage to be authentic

and process. In many ways, Marny's status as a leader in the community thus

depended upon her proficiency with therapeutic discourse. If she hadn't

processed herself, Marny could hardly have discredited others by claiming their

dissent was a manifestation of a pathology that needed to be processed. Not

only did Marny need to process to maintain leadership, she needed to process

more courageously and intensely than the others. As I've already described,

Marny used anger more than other Venters. As I will show in this section, in

addition to intense anger, Marny's processing often took the form of telling others

"her issues," or confessing her inadequacies in order to demonstrate that she knew what they were and she was working on them.

However, Marny's processing took a form that I never witnessed from anyone else. She revealed publicly what she perceived as her shortcomings in her intimate relationships. For example, during a "check-in" time at a business meeting, Marny talked about her marital problems. From my fieldnotes:

> Marny said, "I am embarrassed right now." She said she ate a lot of sweets yesterday and today she had PMS and it made it worse, which she always forgets. She said today she really had a horrible PMS bout and she took it out on Michael. . . . She doesn't want to be critical—because he tells her she's too critical and she knows he's right—so she holds things in. They don't get dealt with and they don't go away. PMS makes it all come out and it isn't dealt with. She talked to so-and-so who is an old friend—used to be a neighbor. She turned around her marriage. There was no "harshness." She started crying and said "it feels like too much to hope for that I can communicate vulnerably with Michael and he can do the same with me" but she thought they both had it in them to do it.

A month later, Marny shared something similar with the community. From my fieldnotes:

Marny said that she would like to check in. She said that what she had to say was difficult. She said "some of you probably noticed through the crack in the door at the last meeting that I was walking around looking awful and depressed." She continued that she didn't want to pretend that everything was all right when it wasn't all right and she thought it would be better if people knew that she and Michael were having serious problems and were talking about not living with each other anymore. She said that they were both getting therapy separately and they decided to wait for 6 months to give it a chance and that was all right with her. . . . She said that she wanted to work on her issue, which was about control. She said that her father was a "dry alcoholic" who had just decided to quit one day and so white-knuckled, he just did. As an alcoholic, he had to have control over everybody and everything. She said that she learned how important control was and she was "twisting herself up like a pretzel to make Michael happy or trying to make him change." And she realized that she couldn't make him change. That he was his own person. She was intermittently crying while she was speaking. . . . She said she wanted to "eliminate harshness" from her life. That she wanted to work on it and she told Michael and her kids that if she said something that they perceived as harsh she wanted them to tell her and she promised to take a deep breath and think about it for five minutes. She said that she wanted us to do the same for her—if she said to us or we hear her say to anyone anything

harsh, then she would really appreciate it if we told her. She would be

"very grateful" for that. She realized that she was much more powerful

when she was vulnerable and kind and she didn't need to be harsh

anymore. . . . She said that she was "very grateful" that she had this

community and "you all" (said lovingly looking around at everyone

including me) She grabbed Chris's hand (he woke up about mid-way

through Marny's check-in)[25] and said with tears streaming down her face

how much she appreciates him because he is proof that two people can

change their relationship without ending it.

In these passages, Marny publicly confesses that she's too harsh, critical, and

controlling—qualities that threaten her partnership. She even asks other

community members to police her and tell her if she sounds harsh to them.

Marny's self-derogation can be seen as the flip side of her intense

expressions of anger. She was demonstrating to others in the community that

though sometimes she was intensely angry—albeit in the service of her personal

growth—she recognized that this itself was an issue she needed to work on. In

this way, she could preemptively deflect criticism about her anger. If others

directly criticized her for being angry or harsh after such an admission, it would

be insensitive, since obviously it was something with which she was already

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[25] I saw Chris fall asleep during meetings at least a few times, even when others were checking
in. No one seemed to mind, perhaps because he was labeled as "ADD." It could also be
because he was a man and they didn't expect him to pay attention to others' emotional
expressions.

grappling. The rules of the therapeutic discourse protected her, in a sense, from

the feedback she was requesting.

Michael never talked to the community about problems in his relationship

with Marny, nor did he ever talk about his character flaws like Marny did. While others, including many men, confessed to their fears about their relationships, Marny was the only person I ever heard who asked for others' help in dealing with a personal fault such as being overly harsh, controlling, or critical. As the most therapeutically-oriented, it wasn't surprising that Marny wanted to tell the others what she perceived her issues to be.

By doing so, however, Marny simultaneously reinforced her leadership as one who processed the most courageously (and thus had the authority to guide others in their processing and set community agendas) and undercut her respect as a leader by exposing what she perceived as her inadequacies. While she got credit for processing the most, her emotionality could only be seen as "her junk"—by herself and others. Just as Marny's leadership couldn't be challenged, it also couldn't be credited. As I will discuss more fully in the conclusion, it is problematic for a community to have unacknowledged criteria for leadership, such as proficiency with therapeutic discourse, because leaders can't be held accountable and because they can't fully get credit for all the work they do.

In both of the above incidents, and in many others, Marny alluded to her "PMS" as the reason she was harsh. It is worthwhile to examine the gender ideology pervading the meaning of PMS to understand why Marny became so attached to it in this particular context. As Markens (1996) points out, the gender politics of PMS is contradictory. On the one hand, the medicalization of women's premenstrual symptoms gives them legitimacy and transforms what was once a

symptom of insanity into an illness. On the other hand, PMS renders physiological symptoms pathological (as "syndrome" implies) rather than a normal monthly fluctuation, and reinscribes sexist ideology that women's anger—especially in intimate relationships—is symptomatic of an illness rather than a sane reaction to powerlessness. It also denies that men are prone to anger the whole month, given our culture of emotions.

Marny was understandably sensitive about the very traits that others saw as unappealing in women. Her personal issues didn't emerge in a social vacuum. Rather, they are a product of a culture in which anger in women is seen as unwomanly bitchiness. When Marny confessed her issue about anger to others in an authentic way, she reified the very controlling image that made her insecure about herself in the first place. She was establishing herself as trustworthy to the men by showing that she recognized her "weakness" and abhorred her menstruation as much as any man would.

What did Marny gain by describing herself as suffering from PMS in addition to saying that her control issues came from her father's alcoholism? As one's authentic emotional expressions were publicly unassailable, one's bodily mandate—raging hormones—to express emotions was even more inviolable. Marny could thus appear to be a victim of her own physiology and resist the double standard that said that angry women are strategically controlling. So that others wouldn't criticize her as being a manipulative, angry woman (i.e.,

"controlling bitch") she was saying in effect, "my anger is my illness and you should respect me for working through it."

The fact that Marny felt the need to draw on her physiology to excuse her behavior shows that she was aware of the cultural loathing of women who exert power through anger. Like a female coal handler in a male-dominated workplace who must be careful to appear feminine and pleasing to her male coworkers to avoid the label of "bitch" or "lesbian" (Padavic 1991), Marny resisted the image of "controlling bitch" by drawing on the powerless image of "PMS sufferer." According to PMS ideology, women are mere victims of their raging hormones before menstruation and can't be held accountable for their actions. In this way, she reproduced the notion that powerful or angry women are pathological and irrational. As I will discuss, reinscribing this belief meant that she was foreclosing—for herself and for other women—the opportunity to be justifiably angry about her relationships or the undue burdens she may carry as a woman.

Consequences of Emotion Culture for Women in the Community

Since I have been focusing on Marny, I'd like to return to the broader question of the gender politics in this community. How does a "woman's culture"—a place where people can find emotional support and show emotionality (Taylor 1996)—subvert or reproduce male power? Verta Taylor (1996) asserts that women's self-help groups "make a special claim to a better way of organizing society by constructing a distinctive women's culture of caring" (1996:

105) and are ultimately liberatory, despite critics' claims to the contrary. Unlike mainstream society, Aurora Commons is a place where "feminine virtues" are highly valued—whether displayed by men or women.

I will show, however, that this culture of authentic emotionality is contradictory for women. On the one hand, it prevents men from using inexpressiveness to control the relationship and reap the masculine cultural advantage of being "rational" (Sattel 1976). Women said that this was good for their relationships with male partners. On the other hand, the prerogative of authenticity also undercut the possibility of women's politicized view of their own emotions and context. By looking inward, and expecting others to do the same, women in the community didn't examine community organization and culture for the ways it reproduced women's subordination. As a result, it was a culture in which women's solidarity and resistance was forestalled.

Men Could Have a Broader Emotional Repertoire. Men in this community were unusual because they did share their feelings and process. It was just as common to see men crying and talking about their childhood pain as women. In this way, the community was countercultural because men are usually less emotionally expressive than women, less grounded in their own emotional reality and less able to identify and articulate feelings (Seidler 1991)—and heterosexual women commonly complain that their need for intimacy isn't being met by their male partners (Rubin 1983).

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As others have argued, emotional inexpressiveness in men is a way of maintaining control in intimate relationships. As Seidler points out, speaking of his experience as a man in intimate relationships with women, "We find ourselves automatically withholding our love, more or less as way of asserting our control in relationships, making sure that others love us more openly than we can love them" (1991: 83). Similarly, Sattel points to the micropolitical function of inexpressiveness when men use it to "validate the rightness" (1976: 352) of their position and to shut down against a threat to their control of the situation. Male inexpressiveness also serves to squelch women's articulation of their experience of marginality. As Dorothy Smith points out, women's emotionality is often an expression of subordination that men (or their representatives in the psychiatric profession) can delegitimate or trivialize by calling it crazy or irrational—but only if they themselves are seemingly "rational" and in control.

But at Aurora Commons, men couldn't maintain control by pretending to be governed by rationality, because emotional expression was considered brave and important. Several women in the community told me they thought the emotion culture in the community either benefited or would benefit their relationships with their male partners by helping the men become more emotionally expressive. For example, Gwen, a Sharer, told me that since joining the community she and her partner Robert, a Communard, had worked on their relationship more than ever. She said:

I think for myself and Robert one issue had been um--. And this is not uncommon, I think, for many men and women that for the woman to feel that on an emotional level her needs are so much greater than her partner and that her partner can't always satisfy her emotional needs. And so that one has been--. We've worked on that. Because I think in part because of the community group and kind of the consciousness that's been raised around that. And that's been real positive. And I think for Robert knowing that that there are men in that group who are going to support him and help him with that has been really good. There's been a way to talk about it. . . . 'Cause he grew up, both of us grew up in homes where you just didn't talk about that—but him more so. Where emotions really get squashed. It's been helpful for us as individuals and it's been helpful for our relationship. So I'm really grateful for that.

One consequence of the community's emotion culture, then, was that men had to acknowledge the importance of talking about feelings. Women could thus talk about their feelings with the respectful attention of their male partners. And their partners, as a result of being a part of the community, couldn't say or imply that the women were overreacting. It was understandable that women liked this emotion culture and thought it was good for their intimate relationships.

<u>Anger is Depoliticized</u>. However, while feelings were held as important, they were also stripped from their social and political context. We can see especially from Marny's example how the emotion culture empowered women to <u>express</u> anger, but pathologizing anger disabled women from using it politically. Marny's anger—especially in her personal relationships—should tell us something about her experience as a woman in a patriarchal culture. However, the fact that she reduced her anger to PMS, her family issues, and an alcoholic father reinforced the idea that she was just messed up as an individual. Marny was thus left to struggle through her anger alone—because it was a psychological problem— rather than being licensed to look for its sources in social arrangements.

While Marny was usually the dominant figure in shaping group interactions, she also did more of the community work than others. In addition to single-handedly getting the community's septic system a nonprofit status (and enabling members to take tax-deductible contributions of $6,000), nominated Rose three years in a row for a $10,000 community service award (that she eventually won and donated to the nonprofit community organization), participated in almost every workday, and took the most responsibility in formulating the by-laws, Marny also attended more of the business meetings than anyone else. As I have previously implied, Marny did the most emotional labor on behalf of the community by praising and pointing to (and also defining) community achievements.

The community's emotion culture didn't allow Marny to challenge as unfair either the amount or kind of work she did. In the following instance, for example, what started as an angry challenge to men's inattention to Marny's work was redefined as yet another symptom of her pathology. During this meeting, Sam brought up wanting to get compensated for his volunteer hours on the septic system, as the community at one time promised to him, Chris, and Peter. The question was whether they were promised payment in lieu of their monthly buy-in, or simply credit to be subtracted from the total buy-in that they owed. Sam and Chris understood it would be the former, and Marny, Rose, and Michael understood it would be the latter. Marny said, "I don't need to be compensated for my volunteer hours" because the community had cash flow problems. She said to Sam that she felt "resentment because you space out on financial and business issues and someone's got to pay the fucking bills!" She said, "I want both of you to worry about the burden. You don't feel responsible because you don't have the money. Do you know if we're going to make the land payment in October?! Do you worry about it?! I do!"

Marny was bringing up two different issues of justice. The first was about why Sam, Chris, and Peter—all men—should be compensated for their volunteer hours for doing manual labor on the septic system while she wasn't compensated for her work as treasurer (nor for a myriad of other tasks). The second issue she brought up was about how the burden of ensuring the community met its land payments fell on her shoulders. She took out credit card loans and also loaned

money as the community needed it. It wasn't just the extra time involved that was an issue for Marny, though. She resented having to do the emotional labor of worrying about the community financial shortfalls while Sam and Steve were clueless about it.

Sam responded, "I'm not willing to worry about it. But I will get a loan if we're about to lose it." Sam not only wasn't giving Marny credit for worrying about paying community bills, he implied that it was something she could opt out of doing like he was. Marny said, "I think I overfunction in the area of making sure we float." She started to cry. Referring to her proposed loan to the community to make the land payment, Marny said angrily, "I want to say that I want to take my thousand and go to the Caribbean because I've never done that! I've gone to my parents but you don't seem to want to do that!" Sam responded defensively, "I did go to my parents. I told you that!"

Jessica interjected that the community needed financial agreements to make each person accountable for their monthly buy-in agreements. However, no one responded to Jessica's point. She implied that their present predicament was more about bad planning than about psychological issues. Chris then said, "To me we're talking about clearing up money issues." He went on:

> I've been underfunctioning around money for a number of years. It's been a pattern over the years. I'm turning a corner around my attitude about work. Inside I get scared about it. I've lived the last couple of years on the

edge financially. It's been scary and I've had to look over and over again at integrity issues around money. I've had to work through shame. I'm interested in pulling my weight.

He added, "Money flows from how we care about each other." While Chris was acknowledging his irresponsibility about inconsistency in his community payments, he was deflecting what Jessica said about planning, and pushing the discussion toward a therapeutic resolution. Furthermore, he was implying an equivalence between Marny's "overfunctioning" and his own "underfunctioning around money." In this light, they both seemed equally pathological and in need of processing. This discourse obscures the fact that his "underfunctioning" had worse consequences for the community.

The discussion ended with Sam saying to Marny that she should "go to the Caribbean with the thousand you've got earmarked" and Chris offering $1,000 to the community that he was going to use to go to Australia. Michael told Marny that she shouldn't put in additional money when the community had a shortfall, because it prevented the others from taking responsibility. Issues of community budgeting, members paying dues promptly, and Marny shouldering the work were evaded.

This interaction shows how the issue of Marny's responsibility for the finances was turned into her psychological issue: she is "overfunctioning" around money just as others are "underfunctioning." Because therapeutic discourse is a

power-evasive one, talk about gender and power was precluded. If Marny had

had a feminist or power-cognizant discourse with which to approach her feelings,

she could have pointed to the pattern in our culture of women's work being

under-acknowledged and under-compensated (see DeVault, 1994). If this had

been the case, she could have pushed members to scrutinize their inequitable

valuation of men's work—manual labor rather than the ongoing work of keeping

track of community finances. She could have also examined the community

organization—as Jessica wanted to do—for fairness. That is, she could have

pushed the community to examine why Chris was able to evade consistent

monthly payments and why Sam thought it wasn't his responsibility to worry

about the community's finances.

This example illustrates the more general point that, at Aurora Commons,

women didn't have a discourse to link their feelings of anger to broader patterns

of gender inequality in our culture and economic system—thus they didn't have

any way to scrutinize community organization and culture to see how it was

reproducing or subverting these broader patterns. As Dorothy Smith (1990)

demonstrates, psychiatric discourse[26] serves to pathologize women's emotions

and disconnect them from an awareness of power inequality and the possibilities

for change. Furthermore, if Marny's undue burden of work is psychologized as

"overfunctioning" (i.e., her own fault), then she and other women in the

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[26] Therapeutic discourse, generated by the self-help movement, can be viewed as a popular form
of psychiatric discourse and shares assumptions about isolating and treating psychological
pathologies—psychiatric discourse with drugs and therapeutic discourse with processing.

community don't have a way to meaningfully connect their experiences in this context as women and thus have no way <u>collectively</u> to challenge and change the community.

I have shown in this chapter how self-help discourse at Aurora Commons allowed men a wide range of emotional expression. Robert, a quiet introvert, was as respected by others as Sam, a therapist who often cried and raged at others. In contrast, Marny and Rose weren't respected as women who vented, and Jessica wasn't respected (at least by Marny and Rose) as an introvert but rather was seen as a cold woman who didn't share. The community reproduced the same patterns as in the larger culture where anger (Venting) is the prerogative of men and "subordinate feelings," such as fear, caring, and sadness (Sharing), are compulsory for women[27] (see Hochschild 1983).

Although Marny's and Rose's public behavior was unassailable because they were proficient with therapeutic discourse, privately others scapegoated them, going so far as to apply the misogynist image of "controlling bitch" to Marny. While Marny had the most control in the community in that she was the most proficient with therapeutic discourse and usually voiced her opinion and prevailed in community negotiations, she also paid a high price for it. When Marny processed about "her issues" she reified the very controlling images that exist in our culture against strong women. In order to deflect others' sexist

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[27] Arlie Russell Hochschild says "In my view, culturally mandated expressiveness [for women] is not so much a privilege as a job" (1983: 261).

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negative evaluations of her, Marny self-derogated and thus undercut her status as a leader.

As I have also shown, the emotion culture had consequences for all women there, not just Marny. Gwen, Libby, and Julie all told me they thought an environment in which feelings were given primacy was or would be good for their relationships. In contrast to many heterosexual relationships in which women report that their partners can't or won't talk about feelings, Aurora Commons was, or seemed, pro-feeling. While the emotional culture benefited these women in some ways, it was disempowering in the collective because it precluded talking about gender inequities in intimate relationships and in our culture in general. Sarah Hoagland addresses this constraint of therapeutic discourse for women:

> The increasing influence of therapy as a way of life is another indication
> that we've turned to psychologizing and coping with our emotions. Again,
> the institution of therapy reinforces the idea that our issues are individual
> and our feelings private; it focuses us on inner states rather than on the
> context from which our feelings gain their depth of meaning. And it
> ignores the interactive nature of growth, healing, and change. As a result,
> we ignore the political nature of our anger: that its meaning emerges both
> through our interactions and in a social and political context (1988: 182).

As I've showed in previous chapters, Marny and Rose often used expressions of anger to control others. That anger can be used strategically to control others,

however, doesn't negate the fact that anger can also be a response to a perceived injustice. If women, people of color, and other historically oppressed groups lose the right to assert the judgments implied in anger ("I am angry because I perceive this to be unjust"), then they lose the ability—and perhaps the will to try—to change their context collectively.

There is a good parallel between medicalizing premenstrual symptoms and psychologizing feelings through therapeutic discourse. In both cases, women have fought to have their experiences taken seriously. However, their experiences were coopted into a professional discourse that rendered them pathological and individual. "Authentic" feelings and "physiological" symptoms are by definition not social or political. Rather than an essentialism based on gender, this community inscribed an essentialism based on therapeutic notions of individual authenticity to which men and women could equally aspire. However, since sexist cultural notions permeated the meaning of community interactions, it wasn't equally in men's and women's best interests to essentialize anger. For women, anger could have been a tool for change rather than an authentic expression of their personal pathologies. When women realize that anger is constituted by relationships in particular contexts, then they can evaluate the judgment implied by their anger. In order to make more liberatory spaces for women, a critical evaluation of an emotion requires a close examination of

gender politics.[28] If one determines that the judgment behind anger is sound, then one can see the need to change the context rather than change oneself.

As I will discuss in the conclusion, such a culture has implications for the success of small-group deliberative democracies in other contexts. When interests and feelings are individualized and essentialized by therapeutic discourse—or masculinist rational discourse—people of color, queer men and women, or other politically marginalized groups lose their ability to challenge the ideologies that prevent them from fully and equally participating.

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[28] Baba Copper says that to evaluate any judgment, "there are basic questions which 15 years of feminism have taught us to ask: Who profits? What are the hidden assumptions? Why have we ignored it? How many of the culturally mandated attitudes have we internalized?" (1988: 31).

CONCLUSION

When I told people about my emerging analysis of therapeutic discourse in the community, I was discomforted by many who reacted as though they believed I was criticizing emotional expressiveness per se. Or worse, that I was equating emotional expressiveness with manipulating and controlling others. If I have emphasized the way that members of Aurora Commons failed to reach their goals of respecting and celebrating differences in points of view and establishing trust and intimacy, it isn't because I didn't respect these goals or their attempts to reach them. On the contrary, I respected members of Aurora Commons for spending their time grappling with the crucial matter of how to live with and create meaningful connections with others. They shared meals and resources, had a communal garden, worked on each others' homes, cared around the clock for a member recovering from quadruple-bypass surgery, and turned to each other for emotional sustenance and a sense of belonging. In an age of isolated nuclear families who turn to drugs, television, spectator sports, and shopping malls and paid therapists for culture, connection to others, and escape from the daily grind, members of Aurora Commons were remarkable in their willingness to experiment with creating more meaningful lives, in a way they knew others would find flaky—and they suffered for it. In addition to using therapeutic discourse to gain micropolitical advantage, members also used it as a resource to listen to,

nurture, and respect each other. Although I respected some more than others, I thought community members were brave on the whole and I left them with a conviction that I too wanted to live more cooperatively and forge deeper connections with my neighbors and daily acquaintances.

Though the way they went about it was unconventional and, as I have argued, self defeating, I can see in their struggles the common desire to have more control over their lives and community and make their relationships more intimate and meaningful. In a culture in which intimacy is usually reserved for one primary relationship, working things out with a group of people is foreign to most of us. The political potential of people creating democratic spaces in which to make decisions concerning their collective well-being cannot be underestimated.

Food and book co-ops provide democratic alternatives to market-based and profit-driven organizations; collective households and intentional communities offer a chance to learn to cooperate and share resources with neighbors; and political affinity groups allow people to participate directly in democracy by protesting globalization, genetically-modified food, and nuclear weapons proliferation, among other things. One important thing about these grassroots alternatives is that each gives people a taste of what it is like to have some control over their lives and local communities—in the context of valuing human relationships over profit. Furthermore, partnerships can benefit from knowing how to create equality in negotiations. My analysis and critique thus

grew out of taking their endeavor seriously and grappling with the obstacles they encountered rather than from skepticism about talking about feelings, cooperating with others, or creating alternatives to competitive hierarchical relationships and nuclear families.

How can people create egalitarian, democratic contexts with more equality and less coercion? The core sociological issues of this study revolve around the issues of respecting and incorporating a diversity of perspectives (allowing for productive dissent) and creating an absence of coercion in small decision-making groups—and how discourse can enable and constrain these attempts. I believe that each of these are also prerequisites for an intimacy between or among people that's based on equality and trust.

Thus far, I have examined how members of Aurora Commons created an emotional culture of authenticity and used the culture micropolitically. I also discussed how the emotional culture reflected sexist double standards about women and men's emotionality, resulting in men having more choices than women about their emotional expressiveness. In this chapter, I will apply my findings to two key issues of democracy in small groups: allowing for and incorporating dissent, and fostering critical appraisal of group dynamics. My focus will be on the ways that using therapeutic discourse—infused with assumptions about authenticity—can impede both in an attempt to further our understanding of the connections between discourse and democratic practice. I

will contrast my findings with others in scholarly literature to draw out lessons relevant across different contexts.

Next I will turn to the literature to discuss the political nature of emotional discourse. Specifically, I will show how discourse often naturalizes the status quo by presenting political assumptions as reflections of authenticity, truth, or other essentialist claims. For example, those oriented by therapeutic discourse would not pay attention to interactional micropolitics if they believed people were speaking "from the heart." A discourse of authenticity thus had a reactionary consequence. I will show how therapeutic discourse is part of a larger cultural movement toward experiencing feelings as a central indicator of a true self. As a consequence—as people increasingly believe they need to and can become happier through self work—feelings have become objects to scrutinize, share with others, and work on. Examining emotional discourse—the way we think and talk about our feelings—in a particular context allows us to be more self conscious about its usually unexamined political consequences.

Finally, I will return to Scott Peck's ideas about community building through emotionality and contrast them with those of the radical democratic theorist Jurgen Habermas, who emphasized rationality. I will suggest that relationships based on equality and democracy need both rationality and emotional expressiveness.

THERAPEUTIC DISCOURSE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY

Central to my analysis has been how community members used therapeutic discourse to define and act upon notions of authenticity. The founding members created the community to have a place where they could be authentic with intimate others. For them, this meant freedom of emotional expression in the context of a supportive community.

Venters and Sharers took from therapeutic discourse the idea that expressing true feelings is necessarily healthy and part of an individual's growth process. It is only through unearthing true feelings that one can hope to process childhood pain and find one's true self. The moral authority and status of the Venters and Sharers came from the idea that, unlike most in our culture, they were authentic enough to let others see their pain.

The true self revealed when one is authentic is a <u>personal</u> rather than social self. For community members, being their true selves meant disregarding the influence of others. I showed in Chapter Two how community members signified that they were speaking without regard to others in the room when they set aside time to share: delivering monologues rather than having conversations, imploring each other to "speak only when moved to speak" and "speak from the heart," refraining from expressions of guilt or shame (emotions obviously evoked by others), and linking feelings to their bodies. Furthermore, rather than focusing on current contexts as evoking emotions, often Venters and Sharers opted to talk about childhood or previous trauma as the source, and often had epiphanies in which current feelings were explained by remembering past ones. This way it

seemed as if the current context was only a trigger for a deeper and more authentic emotion.

In the community culture, the apparent difficulty and riskiness of revealing one's true self through emotional expression meant that others had a responsibility to respect the essential sacredness of what was revealed. That is, after an authentic disclosure, others were obliged to affirm the courage of the discloser and never discredit or judge him or her. To discredit another's personal truth would be a betrayal of their trust and make the community unsafe.

Members interpreted each authentic emotional display as testimony to the safety and health of the community. Venters, and to a lesser degree, Sharers, took from Scott Peck (1987: 88) the idea that a community in which members "withhold some of the truth about themselves and their feelings in order to avoid conflict" is "pseudocommunity." Community members' pride in intensity was a reaction against the perceived shallowness of other relationships.

I have also shown that many members thought authenticity meant appearing out of control. For example, uncontrollable crying signified to others a peeling away of the constraining layers of social convention and a revelation of the real person underneath. For the Venters, appearing out of control included the intense expression of anger toward others. Though the Sharers and Communards didn't like it, intense displays of anger were consistent with the basic assumption that one needed to "speak their truth" regardless of its consequences. The Sharers and Communards were thus prevented from

publicly challenging or criticizing angry displays by the Venters. Expressions of anger served to heighten members' senses that what they were doing was scary work, and ennobled their enterprise as one that few would have the courage to undertake.

The unintended consequences of their use of this therapeutic discourse, with its emphasis on authenticity, were to exclude or discredit other perspectives and to shield the current context from critical examination. For an inclusive small group democracy, these consequences were pernicious. I will now turn to each in turn.

Excluding and Discrediting Other Perspectives

The community's vision statement had broad goals that mentioned "respect[ing] and celebrat[ing] the similarities and differences in our points of view," "trust[ing] one another with our vulnerabilities," and "liv[ing] a lifestyle based on our commitment to preserve dwindling global resources." However, there were differences among members about what the community should emphasize and how to define each of these. Rather than openly talk about their differences, the Venters used therapeutic discourse to squelch or discredit opposing views. Therapeutic discourse allowed them to do this without seeming to, while further buttressing their authority as the most therapeutically sophisticated.

The founding members wanted the emphasis to be on "communicat[ing] more authentically, more intimately, more vulnerably" (also from vision statement) while others wanted more sharing of resources and working together. For example, Jessica, a Communard, was sanctioned at a meeting for expressing discomfort at "sharing personal stuff"—pointing to the therapeutic assumption that true selves are revealed through disclosing talk. Furthermore, continually congratulating others on having the courage to say something difficult implied that the only impediment to processing was fear. It was a way to implicitly cast those who did not therapeutically self-disclose as cowardly. The idea that those who didn't like to process needed to work through fear precluded other perspectives on processing and self-development.

Because Jessica and Dan were interested in the community being an alternative to capitalism, people working together rather than processing indicated the community's success to them. In Dan's words, "working together becomes an important expression of a shared fate, or a shared creative process, and for creating a simple lifestyle based on sharing and environmental sustainability." Here he meant sharing resources rather than sharing emotional experiences. We can see, in retrospect, how framing Jessica and Dan as too fearful to share precluded any challenges to the assumption that processing is valuable.

Libby and Paul, other newcomers to the community, were interested in working on environmental goals in the community. In contrast, founding

members believed that the septic system alone defined their environmentalism. But when Libby proposed that the community have a meeting for those interested in fighting the local nuclear power plant's plan to become the country's largest depository of radioactive spent fuel rods—a threat so great to her and Paul that they would move to California if it came to pass—Chris, Marny, and Gwen said that they didn't think the community should endorse political action because it could make some feel "pressured" to participate, reproducing the notion that activism should be subordinated to personal self-development and authenticity. Rather than say that they weren't interested in that kind of political work, these community members could use therapeutic discourse to make it seem as though their position was based upon a sophisticated understanding of what was best for the community as a whole. As a result, Libby and Paul's efforts to mobilize the community to join a collective environmental political struggle were stymied without an open discussion about differing visions of what it meant to be an environmentalist.

When intense expressions of anger were being questioned by several Sharers as scaring potential newcomers away, the Venters yielded somewhat and had some "gentle retreats" with only sharing. However, they asserted their right to be angry later by using therapeutic discourse to maintain that they didn't want to be in a "pseudo-community" where everyone bridled their real feelings. Chris said he wanted to "let everything out" and have the community be "a place where everyone can be crazy and it be all right." The unquestioned assumption

was that intense expressions of feeling were more authentic than restrained or circumspect expressions of feeling. It is common in our culture to equate being "out of control" with authenticity.

It would seem that authenticity as the expression of anger was incompatible with the community's recruitment needs, and perhaps the long-term survival of the community. Indeed, during my association with the community, only one couple was successfully recruited (i.e., put down money and built a house) out of 11 people who visited, participated but remained financially uncommitted, or put down money but shortly thereafter left the community. As I have shown, Venters' squelching of dissent left malcontents few options.

One option could have been for Sharers and Communards to exert pressure collectively on Venters to stifle the intense expression of anger—a criticism of the Venters they shared. As I described, they did successfully challenge angry outbursts as scaring away potential recruits, and for a time there were "gentler" retreats and business meetings. However, no one ever suggested that the community have a discussion about expressing anger and other feelings and investigate different points of view. The Communards and Sharers, though often disliking the intensity, had no vocabulary to challenge the basic assumption that true feelings were necessarily uncontrolled. To discuss how best to express anger would make it seem constructed and constrained and therefore inauthentic. This would have threatened the legitimacy of the epiphanies, the

sharing, and the moral identity staked on being more authentic than most in our culture.

Furthermore, Venters continually reinforced the assumption that uncontrolled expressions of anger were authentic—and thus inviolable—by using therapeutic scripts to process it. For instance, when Rose and Stacy were angry with each other—Stacy feeling smothered by Rose and Rose feeling abandoned by Stacy—Chris had them "vent and rage" at each other and then asked them to answer the question, "What is it about my past or programming that made this conflict inevitable?" In this way, each participant was pushed to have an epiphany about the real source of their anger, in their childhoods. Anger, then, was a personal rather than interpersonal experience. The immediate social context of the anger was stripped away so that neither participant could complain that the other's anger toward them was inappropriate or unjust—because obviously it really wasn't directed at them. It was merely triggered by them in this view. Under such conditions, Sharers and Communards who complained about expressing anger would be cast as insensitive or repressed (as was Neil when he left the community after being yelled at).

It is important to understand that in such an individualistic culture, leaving the community was always a viable option. Members knew that as mandates of self-development brought them to the community, they could also carry them away from it. In fact, even members who were critical of the Venters' power in the community framed their exit as being about fulfilling personal needs rather

than about leaving an intolerable situation.[29] For example, Neil described his decision to leave the community as following the needs of an "inner self":

> I guess there was a point when my inner self said "this is not good for you. You need to leave. It's not healthy. You're not at a place where this is beneficial in your life and it would be better for you to leave than to try and force your life into this life." . . . And I realized that it's foolish to try to push people to give you what you need. It's better to go get what you need elsewhere. So that rang clear in me that this wasn't my path—this particular group of people at this point in time.

Similarly, Stacy told the group that she was leaving the community because "I decided I just need to let go. I feel sad on one hand, but on the other hand, that's just what my life is right now. I am changing directions and it feels right." Framing their leaving in a self-development discourse protected them from others' anger for being disloyal and not working harder to stick with the community through difficulties.

Ironically, the therapeutic discourse they used to leave the community was the same one Venters used to squelch their dissent and drive them away. In this way, their leaving undercut the material economy of the community but

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[29] That is, those members who left after initial money or time investments. Others who visited for only a short time said they didn't like all the processing in the community.

supported rather than challenged the therapeutic ideology.[30] Though founding members had a goal of expanding to 15 diverse households, the community could nevertheless survive with only the founding members. Although they could not expand the way they had planned—such as building a community house and other community facilities—they could make the land payments without new recruits. They were not thus obligated to compromise to ensure community survival.

In all these cases, the hegemony of therapeutic discourse—preserved by Venters and Sharers continually stifling dissent or driving dissenters away—precluded having open discussions and incorporating others' perspectives on community direction, definition, and focus. Lichterman (1996) similarly found that the Greens of his study used a middle-class, educated discourse of political expression—what he called "personalized politics," being authentic and placing one's political narrative in context of one's biography. In contrast, he also looked at a community-based African American political group whose members articulated their political outlook in terms of communal obligation and in context of specific community needs. He found that the Greens "assumed that individualized expression was naturally good, and that it belonged in any good political relationship. . . . In practice, the universalism of Green multicultural

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[30] This can be contrasted with a strong collectivist culture like the Israeli Kibbutz of the 1950s wherein people needed community permission to leave—and only under dire circumstances, otherwise they would be seen as traitors. In this culture, expressing dissent and changing the culture over the long haul, or suffering silently, was the viable option for malcontents (Rosner and Cohen, 1983).

ideology ended up being parochial in ways Greens did not imagine" (1996: 142-143). Furthermore, the individualized expression of personalized politics was a kind of "cultural capital"—skills that are valued by cultural elites—available only to those with middle-class education, experiences, and resources. At Aurora Commons, thinking about and talking of these stratified skills as "authentic" essentialized and fundamentally obscured the class privileges of those who used therapeutic discourse. As a symbolic resource, their proficiency with therapeutic discourse would exclude potential others who weren't steeped in the middle-class value of self-transformation through processing.

Just as authenticity hid the fact that emotions were being used micropolitically in the community, Freeman (1972) found in her analysis of early feminist groups that informality was used to obscure how power was operating. Because explicit rules about leadership were seen as necessarily authoritarian (and unnecessary for social equals), people excluded from the powerful informal cliques didn't have a way to challenge the implicit criteria for exercising power— such as one's class background, personality, or how much time people could give to the cause. If a challenge did occur, rather than examine the informal structure of power, members of the elite would rationalize the exclusion of some by discrediting them, for instance by engaging in "lesbian-baiting," "straight-baiting," or "reformist-baiting." Their exclusivity was thus hidden by the seemingly egalitarian discourse of "informality." As at Aurora Commons,

dissidents not only weren't given a voice but were constructed as being unenlightened and not worth listening to.

Shielding Current Context From Critical Examination

In addition to excluding or discrediting others' perspectives about community definition, direction, and focus, therapeutic discourse limits talking about how the current context, and the relationships of power within it, shape interactions. As many critical social theorists from Marx (1978) to Patricia Hill Collins (1991) have pointed out, people who hold power in relationships are usually least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are usually more aware of its existence and how it underlies group dynamics, such as who speaks or remains silent and whose words are given more or less weight. This means that in a culture or relationship in which power dynamics aren't discussed or treated as important, it is the perspective of the least powerful that is squelched.

One basic assumption of therapeutic discourse is that people need to be free to express themselves—in actions or talk—according to the needs of their self development, rather than according to outside, and presumably inauthentic mandates. For the founding members of the community, formal regulations governing who must do or say what, how, and when, would have been constraints on self-expression. However, as I showed, newcomers Neil and Julie wanted a financial plan so that they could feel comfortable giving their money to

the collective. Newcomers Libby and Dan wanted the community to have a more explicit statement about community goals and hold people accountable for meeting them. Julie and Stacy were uncomfortable when they felt attacked by Venters. All of these concerns could point to the community's need to examine the context and ask questions such as "What assurances do people have about their money?" "How do we set commitments and hold people accountable to them?" and "How do we decide what kinds of emotional expressions are consistent with what we want for the community?" However, Venters consistently turned the expression of such concerns into opportunities for more therapeutic processing rather than addressing them directly.

As people who were unhappy with the status quo left the community, their leaving was then used as vindication of the therapeutic judgments leveled against them. As Rose said about Neil's leaving: "A lot of what's happening to Neil is that he's blaming the community for things that are really within himself."[31]

The discourse didn't allow women to critically evaluate or challenge the gender politics in the community. Marny and other women didn't have a discourse with which to challenge the double-standard about emotional expression. Others valued men equally for displaying anger (venting) and displaying fear, caring, and sadness (sharing). In contrast, others respected

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[31] This is consistent with Peck's treatment of dissent. His only explanation of why someone left one of his Community Building Workshops was that "the few who depart have only one thing in common: something they feel they must hide—from themselves if not from the group" (1993: 280).

women only for sharing. In fact, sharing was compulsory for women, but not for men. Marny and Rose, women who vented, were scapegoated by others for scaring away newcomers.

Oriented by therapeutic discourse, Marny and other Venters and Sharers preferred to think in terms of psychological well-being rather than feminist politics, making it difficult to see that feelings are connected to and shaped by larger political realities. Simonds' (1992) analysis of women and self-help culture finds similarly that self-help culture gives women license to be angry, but it also defines their anger as an individual problem. She argues that self-help culture leads women to adjust themselves to the status quo individually rather than to change it collectively.

Other social analysts have talked about how cultures of confession and emotionality can disempower women when political realities are ignored. Bartky (1990) talks about how social subordinates often have to hear the pain and sorrow of those who are oblivious to their social realities. Men's "fear and insecurity" are the "offstage companions of competitive displays of masculinity" that can serve to coopt heterosexual women into colluding with them in their own mistreatment by creating a false sense of equality (1990: 115). What gets mystified is that the man's superordinate social position is not relinquished by being vulnerable with a female partner, nor is the woman's subordinate social position in any way changed by it.

In the same way, white women "being vulnerable" with black women about past racism gives them more rather than less control in the situation. As Hoagland (1988: 105) points out, the "confessor" expects the social subordinate "to feel grateful, surprised, relieved, even hopeful, and to regard her, thus, as trustworthy for having exposed herself, admitted her sins, and thereby somehow assured that with this newfound knowledge and understanding, such acts and ideas will never occur again on her part or in her presence without interruption." Most importantly, the social subordinate—whether a woman in a relationship with a man or a black lesbian in a relationship with a white lesbian—is constrained not to criticize such an enlightened person in the future for fear of being seen as ungrateful or betraying. In these relationships among social unequals, "trust" and "safety" can become an excuse for expecting collusion from the subordinate.

In a study of an anti-sexist group for men, Lichterman (1989) showed how this culture wherein men were emotionally expressive inadvertently reproduced male privilege. He says "the difficulty in practicing an anti-sexist politics lay in that the predominant language available for discussing masculinity is the human potential language, the language of 'process'" (1989: 200). He shows that the language of process—with its emphasis on personal growth—is one in which male privilege can't be grappled with. Rather than working toward collectively dismantling male privilege, the men worked on feeling better about themselves through self-growth.

Political realities other than patriarchy likewise aren't examined and changed within an individualistic therapeutic discourse. Bellah et al. (1985) point out that therapeutic discourse doesn't problematize the institutional contexts in which feelings of worthlessness and a loss of control arise:

One's "growth" is a purely private matter. It may involve maneuvering within the structure of bureaucratic rules and roles, changing jobs, maybe even changing spouses if necessary. But what is missing is any collective context in which one might act as a participant to change the institutional structures that frustrate and limit. Therapy's "democratic side" lacks any public forum (1985: 127).

These institutional structures that "frustrate and limit," such as the nature of capitalist production, institutional racism, or the realities of modern life remain untouched by a collective of self-actualizing individuals.

People who are most victimized by oppressive social organization would be most excluded by participation in a culture or relationship in which their political realities are minimized or erased. At Aurora Commons, "being authentic" was defined as sharing painful emotions and linking them to one's childhood to the exclusion of talking about one's social experiences in and outside the community. A black feminist entering the community might define her emotional pain in the context of patriarchal white supremacy rather than her childhood. In this context, however, her political analysis would be seen by others as dodging

the "real" issue of personal transformation through processing. She would have good reason to distrust that others would understand that her emotional and political realities can't be teased apart.

I have shown how members of Aurora Commons used therapeutic discourse micropolitically, as all of us use discourses with which we're proficient. We don't recognize we're using a "discourse" because discourse is a conceptual framework that orients us to our environment. I'd like to step back and consider discourse itself, as a socially-created interpretive framework that people bring with them into social contexts and modify as they interact with others. I will consider how discourse orients people to their own and others' emotions and what it means to consider the political implications of a discourse. I will argue that some discourses—rational masculinist as well as therapeutic—obscure the nature of political realities and thus impede intimate and equal relationships and democratic decision making.

THERAPEUTIC DISCOURSE IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

When we examine discourse sociologically we can see that it's humanly created and historically situated. Ruth Frankenberg's (1993: 265) broad definition of discourse is apt here: "historically constituted bodies of ideas providing conceptual frameworks for individuals, made material in the design and creation of institutions and shaping daily practices, interpersonal interactions, and social relations".

These "conceptual frameworks" contain ideas about how the world works, what's important, and what constitutes morality and a good life. Cultural discourses contain and shape the stories we tell about ourselves and others, orienting people to social objects in particular ways: "How am I to understand myself in relation to this social object (e.g., parenting, scholarship, my friends, community)" is the underlying question guided by different discourses. The stories shaped by discourse—including plot, setting, and characters—confer meaning on selected past, present, and imagined future events and give them and us coherence (Mason-Schrock, 1996). They also allow us to make ourselves intelligible to each other: "I am this kind of person, and as a result you can expect me to act accordingly." People situate themselves narratively in more than one discourse simultaneously: a legal secretary can be professionally immersed in a legal discourse while situating her "true self" in a therapeutic discourse vis-à-vis her coworkers. The guiding stories people tell about themselves and others change over time, depending upon the exigencies of the context and the discourse in which they situate them (see Maines 1993; Gergen and Gergen 1988).

In this view, the stories we tell about ourselves and others don't reflect our opinions and attitudes but rather are a socially-constituted reality. Speaking or writing is at once expressing an inner world of mind or heart and borrowing from and adapting culturally available interpretive repertoires and reproducing them in specific contexts for specific purposes.

Gergen (1973, 1985) and other social constructionists (Lutz 1988; Gordon 1989; McCarthy, 1989) talk about emotions as a form of discourse. That is, while people feel emotions personally, they necessarily experience them through a historically-constituted discourse that accounts for origin, causality, consequence, performance, and appropriateness of any emotion (Gordon, 1989). Communicating emotions to others is a way of defining selves and situations, as surely as telling others how one thinks about the situation. To speak of one's feelings of anger, for example, is to characterize an event as being unjust rather than fair, and to suggest that actions ought to be taken to remedy the situation. Expressing the emotion thus is not only to express an inner reality, but also to characterize and shape outside events. As Lutz (1988: 5) points out, thinking about emotions as a kind of discourse used in specific contexts means that "emotion can be viewed as a cultural and interpersonal process of naming, justifying, and persuading by people in relationship to each other."

In the sociological literature, the therapeutic discourse I've been describing and analyzing takes an "impulsive" orientation to the true self, in contrast to an "institutional" orientation to the true self (Turner 1976).[32] Ralph Turner (1976) observed that in our culture, people find evidence of their true selves either in impulsive or institutional feelings and actions. He describes finding evidence of one's true self within an institutional orientation as "adher[ing] to a high standard, especially in the face of serious temptation" (1976: 206) by

maintaining control over one's actions. In contrast, an impulsive finds her true

self when she spontaneously does something despite social standards and

convictions, losing her inhibitions. For an institutional, a true self must be

achieved, while for an impulsive, a true self must be discovered. Furthermore,

for an institutional, hypocrisy would mean "failing to live up to one's standards"

(1976: 206), while for the impulsive, hypocrisy means adhering to standards that

violate one's impulses.

Turner says that though both impulsive and institutional orientations can

coexist comfortably in the average person, over the past thirty years—under the

influence of Freud and economic transitions—there has been a substantial shift

away from the institutional locus of self to the impulsive locus of self. Others

have observed that between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s, Americans have

become increasingly likely to define their happiness in terms of personal rather

than institutional successes (Verhoff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981; Bellah et al.

1985). Bellah et al. (1985: 82) argue that "clearly the meaning of life for most

Americans is to become one's own person, almost to give birth to oneself." In

this view, one's individuality has an inherent sacredness apart from one's place in

the social world. The pervasive impulsive orientation to "true self" has been

variously described by cultural analysts as "expressive individualism" (Bellah et

al. 1985); "therapeutic ideology" (Lasch 1979); "the culture of self-fulfillment"

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[32] By referring to a "real" or "true self," sociological analysts are describing people's subjective
sense of who they are rather than a reality of what people "really" are.

(Taylor 1991); "personalism" (Lichterman 1996); and "therapeutic individualism" (Schwalbe 1996).

Americans often turn to social groups in order to have opportunities to reflect on their biographies and articulate their unique selves publicly. In fact, four out of every 10 Americans have joined small groups—even religious ones—in order to meet needs for emotional support while they are doing self work (Wuthnow 1994). As Turner (1976) points out, impulsives can discover their true selves socially by establishing intimacy with others through expressing feelings and transcending conventional boundaries among people.

The Human Potential Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was part of the shift from an institutional to an impulsive orientation to self-conception (Potter and Wetherell 1987), entailing as well a shift in how emotional expressiveness was commonly interpreted. Humanistic theories in psychology (Perls, 1971; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961) popularized the view that people had true selves underneath the veneer of accumulated social debris. Liberating oneself from oppressive social roles and latent childhood pain became a lifetime quest for self fulfillment. As Bellah et al. (1985: 126) put it, "Many of us share the cultural conviction that the meaning of our lives lies apart from the rules and regulations that surround us." The Human Potential Movement emphasized feelings as a province of authenticity. In a sense, it took the devalued "personal" sphere of feelings and elevated it to the realm of sacredness. One's "true feelings" became as sacred as one's "true self."

Myerhoff's (1978) study of Jews in a retirement center illustrates a group with an institutional orientation to self, and provides a useful contrast to the emotional discourse of Aurora Commons. For these elderly Jews:

Loss of control was regarded as an embarrassment and sometimes as shameful. And their solidarity was too fragile, their mutual trust too thin to support disclosure to each other of their great hurts and needs. Furthermore, they held themselves accountable and responsible for good behavior; emotions, inner states, motivations were not included in their code of honor (Meyerhoff, 1978: 180).

If an offense was perceived as great, they would prove their moral superiority through silent reproach or "heart hardening." They thus would get credit for control and for being in a position to judge another for a wrong doing. In their view, the people of Aurora Commons would demonstrate a shameful lack of dignity by appearing to lose control; while to Aurora Commons' members, the retirement center visitors' emotional control would appear repressed and inauthentic. My point is that each operates within a different emotional discourse—community members oriented to emotional expression by a therapeutic discourse, and the elderly Jews of the center oriented to emotional expression by a discourse rooted in their experiences.

According to Charles Taylor (1992) "the ethic of authenticity" has a moral force in modern culture. That is, one's real and original self is a moral compass,

so contacting it should properly be an end in itself. Furthermore, as Rebecca

Erickson points out, "Members of contemporary Western society spend a great

deal of time, energy, and money 'working on' their emotions," and the irony of

this cultural strain is that "we must 'work on' our emotions if we hope to

experience our 'real' selves" (1999: 5-6). Erickson posits that as a result of a

therapeutic culture, emotion work is normative. She argues that we expect to

work on our emotions, not necessarily because we feel we're violating feeling

norms (see Hochschild, 1983), but rather because we want to feel better about

ourselves—for example, more confident, authentic, or moral—due to a popular

psychology culture that exhorts people continually to become happier through

self work.

As a result, people commonly seek to define experiences as opportunities

for self work and growth. For example, Lori Holyfield (1999) looked at how

people use commercial ropes courses to experience the "authentic" thrill of

traversing 40 feet above ground using elevated cables and harnesses. The

guided group interpretation included framing the events as risk-taking and

ultimately confidence-boosting, with bodily arousal touted as testimony to the

experience's authenticity. In a different context, Smith and Erickson (1999)

examined how phone solicitors for an environmental group accepted the

organization's definition of their work as important social activism because it

allowed them to feel authentic about asking people for money over the phone.

These are examples of people defining situations in ways that make them feel

authentic (rather than silly or coerced). Similarly, people at Aurora Commons continually reinforced in interaction the belief that any obstacles or difficulties people experienced in the community were testimony to the authenticity of the process.

This dissertation has been an attempt to look at the way that one social group has come to think and talk about emotional experience, how they used emotional claims micropolitically, and unintended consequences of these claims for equality and democracy. Though I show how some used emotional expression to control others, this does not discredit their motives. Rather, I think they used this kind of discourse because they believed it would help them create a more just, caring, and viable community, and they drew upon the same discourse to negotiate relationships with others. As Berger (1981: 19) says, "I take it as a matter of course that beliefs are likely to have a self-serving component for the individuals or groups who espouse them." A culture's or an individual's emotional discourse isn't discreditable merely for being self-serving (since this is endemic to all discourse) but rather because the self-serving nature of it is hidden or its consequences are pernicious. That is, it's important to show how any discourse obscures its political nature (and thus isn't open to a fair debate) and how it reproduces misery, injustice, or inequality (see Berger 1981). Aurora Commons' members used therapeutic discourse to do both, <u>despite</u> good intentions. I will now examine in more detail how discourse can elucidate or

obscure the socially-constructed nature of reality and how power shapes interaction.

Political Implications of Discourse

Any discourse has political consequences because it carries assumptions about what is right, normal, moral or sensible and as such can be used to discredit or promote others' perspectives. For example, Celia Kitzinger (1989) looked at how modes of discourse about lesbianism within a liberal humanistic perspective have reactionary political implications because they reproduce the same assumptions implicit in a heterosexist discourse. She argues that in resisting the notion that lesbians are pathological, liberal humanism propounds homosexuality as the equivalent to heterosexuality in focusing on "true love" and "true happiness." This discourse presents lesbianism as "a normal, natural and healthy sexual preference or choice of lifestyles, and [is] widely applauded within the gay movement" (1989: 84).

The limitations of this discourse are apparent when one considers its hidden assumptions about "normality." Kitzinger argues that the discourse reproduces the dominant culture's rhetorics of "falling in love" as a legitimation of sexuality and of "personal growth" as a focus on personal development rather than political action. These rhetorics assume that "falling in love" is normal— whether heterosexual or homosexual—because it's a product of inner drives and

independent of social control. Rather than challenging the notion that love is "natural"—whether heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual—liberal humanist discourse simply tries to widen the perimeter of "normal" to include homosexuality (and thus pathologizing bisexuality, asexuality, or non-monogamous sexuality). Liberal humanist discourse about sexuality, then, shares with a right-wing heterosexist discourse the idea that sexuality is a private and individual matter, unconnected to the political and thus ultimately pathological if agreed-upon boundaries of acceptability are violated.

Similar dynamics were at work at Aurora Commons. Emotions were preserved as the province of the "private sphere"—i.e., that which is not political or contested because it's an expression of an inner reality—much like liberal humanist discourse that defines sexuality as private and individual. By thinking of emotions and sexuality as wholly private, these discourses depoliticize matters that are humanly constructed and defined by power. These are both discourses that allow people to redefine the political as personal and thus obviate the need for political analysis and struggle.

Gergen (1991) writes that people who use discourses resting on such asocial and ahistorical foundations—such as notions of naturalness (as in the therapeutic discourse) or correctness (as in a rational masculinist discourse)—necessarily create pernicious hierarchies and silence those marked as "deviant."

Many of our major problems in society result from taking seriously such terms as reality, authenticity, true, worthwhile, superior, essential, valid, ideal, correct and the like. None of these otherwise awesome distinctions possesses transcendent foundations; they are all constructions of particular language communities, used for pragmatic purposes at a particular moment in history. Yet when these traditional shibboleths are put into serious practice, they begin to establish divisions, hierarchies, insidious separations, oppression, and indeed mass liquidation. Every "reality" makes a fool of those who do not participate; every "valid" and "true" proposition creates a class of the deluded who do not share that language. For every "superior" position, those deemed "inferior" are pressed into silence (1991: 189).[33]

At Aurora Commons, those most invested in and proficient with therapeutic discourse, the Venters, used it to exclude or discredit other perspectives and to shield the current context from critical examination, ultimately impeding their efforts at intimacy and democracy.

Though Venters used the discourse to micropolitical advantage, they and others also used it to acknowledge the importance of each others' feelings. Respecting the right to have everyone's feelings taken seriously is subversive in a larger culture in which "superiors have a right to have their feelings count; inferiors' emotions are discounted as invisible." (Clark, 1991: 319). In the

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[33] On the left, an equivalent silencing discourse would be that of "false consciousness."   200

community, feelings weren't discreditable or even arguable—and thus rational arguments supporting an objective perspective weren't necessary to gain others' respect. It makes sense that women felt their participation with their partners in the community strengthened communication in their relationships, because they weren't unilaterally discredited by emotionality. Although the therapeutic discourse depoliticized the context (and thus squelched dissent and prevented an organizational restructuring), it nevertheless seemed better to the women than the assumptions of the masculinist rational discourse with which most of the men grew up. At least therapeutic discourse demanded that they take their own and their partners' feelings seriously.

I want to briefly examine rational masculinist discourse—based on assumptions of rationality rather than authenticity—because this is the prevalent cultural alternative to authenticity as a means to negotiate relationships between individuals or among a group of people. In many ways, the ethic of authenticity is a reaction to this disengaged rationality propounded by enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes and Locke (Taylor, 1992). Although both disengaged rationality and the ethic of authenticity are individualist, the latter elevates affect over rationality. The value that people of Aurora Commons placed on feelings, intimacy, and self-disclosure only makes sense in the context of a larger culture wherein the feelings of many are devalued as irrational, manipulative, and discreditable. I will argue that rational masculinist discourse shares with therapeutic discourse assumptions that similarly naturalize and obscure the

political nature of interaction. While they seem like opposites—rational

masculinist discourse valorizing rationality, and therapeutic discourse valorizing

emotional expression—they are merely two sides of the same coin.

Rational Masculinist Discourse

Feminists have been criticizing what I'm calling rational masculinist

discourse for the same basic reason I criticize therapeutic discourse: both

obscure the political nature of decision-making and interaction itself (Jagger,

1989; Benjamin, 1988; Smith, 1990). My focus in this section will be on how

rational masculinist discourse—with an exclusive focus on rationality—impedes

perspective taking and critical appraisal of group dynamics. I do this to show

how people must have a way to incorporate emotionality as well as rationality in

order to reach fair agreements.

Rational masculinist discourse is one that eschews feelings for rationality.

In this view, feelings are distorting influences to be controlled and transcended.

Feelings are irrelevant at best and manipulative at worst. Human potential is

achieved through the exercise of rational thought. Standards of fairness should

transcend the individual.[34]

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[34] This view of emotion is linked to the rise of positivist science. A "dispassionate investigator" is one who stifles his personal judgments, values, and emotions in order to see reality clearly (Jaggar 1989).

I call this rational discourse "masculinist" because it reproduces male

privilege.[35] For example, according to Seidler (1994), men often assume the

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[35] Although it could privilege anyone who used it, depending upon the context, my point is that men benefit from it more than women to the degree that women are disproportionately assigned to preserve and protect personal and emotional life. Women who use the discourse run the risk of being seen as cold, unwomanly, or a bitch. Moreover, it reproduces the political status quo (a male-dominated one) by discrediting observations and claims of those outside the malestream as "biased" or "political" (i.e., clouded by personal values and emotions).

rhetoric of impartiality to maintain control in interpersonal negotiations. Rather than revealing his own emotional interests or needs, a typical rational masculinist presents a seemingly objective argument. If others acquiesce, it will appear to be due to the rightness of his position rather than a concession deserving of reciprocation. In this way, the political nature of the negotiation is hidden. He can have his way while maintaining his superior position of (apparent) impartiality. In this view, "If others talk more personally about what they want, they are being 'personal,' 'self-interested,' or 'emotional' so that their voices can easily be discounted. It is the language of impersonalised reason that assumes power and control in the situation" (Seidler: 1994: 37).

This discrediting of those who express themselves emotionally prohibits many from full participation in small groups. Mansbridge points out that when small-group deliberation requires a "demonstration of logic," it excludes those "who cannot work their emotionally felt needs into a neat equation" (1990: 127). She posits that women in particular are excluded because of a lifetime of training in which sanctions enforce subordinating their own needs to the desires of others. Mansbridge (1990: 130) says:

Knowing how easy it is to keep one's wants indefinite makes women realize that deliberative assemblies must work actively at helping participants discover and create what they really want. Preferences themselves, let alone interest, are not given. They must be tentatively

voiced, tested, examined against the causes that produce them, explored, and finally made one's own. Good deliberation must rest on institutions that foster dissent and on images of appropriate behavior that allow for fumbling and changing one's mind, that respect the tentativeness of this process.

By holding rationality as the standard, rational masculinist discourse doesn't acknowledge that tentativeness of expression, contradictions, fumbling, and emotionality could reflect a useful process of exploration. It's like saying, "unless you can explain yourself in a rational way and muster evidence to support your anger, I refuse to hear you."

In addition to providing a set of standards by which to discredit others' perspectives, rational masculinist discourse makes it easy for social dominants to avoid taking others' perspectives into account. As long as men interpret their own emotions as a weakness, they will continue to be closed to others' emotional expressions, impeding understanding and empathy (Schwalbe 1992). Rational masculinist discourse serves as an "emotional anesthetic" (Schwalbe et al. 2000) for those with more power. For example, Cohn (1987) shows how the discourse used by defense intellectuals prohibits them from taking seriously the potential suffering of those hit by their missiles. Rather than talking about nuclear war with a sense of "horror, urgency, or moral outrage," (1987: 690) Cohn characterized

their talk as using elaborate abstraction and euphemism such as "collateral damage" for human death.

Moreover, Cohn (1987) learned that to participate in the world of defense intellectuals required her to speak from the perspective of the users of nuclear weapons rather than its potential victims. The same is true in the business world, where talk of people's suffering after being "downsized" would be seen as irrelevant and mark the speaker as simpleminded. By discrediting talk of feelings, rational masculinist discourse privileges the perspective of the social dominant at the expense of those who may be hurt by his or her actions. In intimate relationships, also, rational discourse privileges the perspective of the unemotional person rather than that of the hurt person. That is, in order to have a conversation, rational masculinist discourse requires that any expression of pain be squelched so that the interactants can negotiate "objectively."

One major assumption of rational masculinist discourse is that there can be an objective reckoning about what's fair in a negotiation, and rationality alone can find it. This assumption doesn't take into account the way that some have more power to define what's fair than others. For example, in the case of figuring out who does more work in maintaining a relationship, what counts as "work"? The work that dominants do (for example, paid work) is culturally valued more than the work that subordinates do (for example, unpaid work such as mothering and maintaining relationships). "Objective" negotiations disadvantage social subordinates because social dominants decide what is culturally visible and

valued. The rhetoric of disinterested impartiality shields the negotiation from this kind of political analysis, much like therapeutic discourse does so with the rhetoric of authenticity. In the case of the former, dissenters are discredited as self-interested or irrational, while in the case of the latter, dissenters are marked as inauthentic.

Lutz (1988) points out that both therapeutic and rational masculinist discourses about emotion happily coexist in Protestant European middle-class cultures. Emotion is simultaneously held to be subjective, irrational, and inferior to thought, and natural and authentic and superior to disengagement and self-estrangement. She also points out that while one may be envied for presenting oneself as authentic and emotional (rather than emotionally repressed or numbed), one is nevertheless not respected or rewarded for it to the same degree as appearing rational and in control. While emotional authenticity prepares one to have good personal relationships, a demeanor of stoic rationality marks one as fit to head corporations or make important decisions about the economy. In the dominant culture, rational masculinist discourse is valued more and confers more power on its practitioners than therapeutic discourse, which is usually confined to the private sphere.

Therapeutic discourse nonetheless shares with rational masculinist discourse the twofold commitment to a transcendent standard and the suppression of dissent. These similarities betray the extent to which therapeutic discourse can be a power-sustaining rather than egalitarian tool. Because

rational discourse is the dominant one, and confers social power on those who are proficient in its use, therapeutic discourse should rightly be seen as a reaction to it. However, as I have shown, once established as a standard practice and enforced by the powerful, therapeutic discourse can reproduce that which it set out to subvert—inequality and coercion. Now I will more explicitly compare this dualism, and suggest ways that a different discourse might better orient community members and others to practice small-group democracy.

THERAPEUTIC DISCOURSE AND SMALL-GROUP DEMOCRACY

I contrast Habermas and Peck in this section because they each represent one side of the emotion/rationality dichotomy. Habermas' ideas reflect rational masculinist ones, while Peck is oriented by therapeutic discourse. I will give a brief overview of each democratic theorist, then I will discuss three main shortcomings of each: they advocate one side of the dichotomy to the exclusion of the other; they emphasize transcending differences rather than grappling with them; and they emphasize either individual or social obstacles to democracy, giving little practical help to those who would like to restructure small groups to make them more democratic. After each critique, I will show how another discourse that incorporates both reason and emotion could better serve intimacy and democracy.

Habermas (1984) points out that any form of domination will prevent the free and equal dialog necessary for establishing democracy in small groups and

in society at large. He posits that power dynamics that impede free negotiation can be transcended through an "ideal speech situation." Such a situation requires that everyone have an equal chance to argue and question, without those who are more powerful, confident or prestigious having an unequal say. Participants need to be radically reflexive and willing to question assumptions and traditions. In such a situation, an objective (and therefore fair) position would prevail because it would be based on many points of views reconciled through the use of reason. In this view, coming to a fair decision is possible only through engagement with others in a free debate rather than through a supposedly value-neutral and distant standpoint.

Habermas's ideas differ from the rational masculinist model because of his insistence that a fair discussion or decision must be an outcome of a real conversation, uncorrupted by inequality. Those oriented by rational masculinist discourse would not take into account everyone's perspective, nor would they acknowledge that differing social positions or cultural capital could distort communication—because failing to recognize how power differentials can block access to the marketplace for ideas, they believe that rationality is equally available to all. However, in other ways Habermas is advocating a rational masculinist way to think about forming consensus and negotiating difference.

The ideal speech situation is one in which emotions have been transcended so that reason can prevail. As with rational masculinist discourse,

such thinking stymies efforts at empathetic understanding and excludes those who cannot neatly summarize their views or immediately understand their needs.

Scott Peck's ideas about building community and resolving conflicts in many ways resemble Habermas's. He says that a true community must be inclusive, operate by consensus, encourage individuality and a variety of points of view, foster awareness of group dynamics and a willingness to fix problems (1987:67). A diverse community for him is an "ideal decision-making body" because so many perspectives will make decisions more inclusive and realistic (1987: 65). For Peck, the consensus that can be achieved will transcend individual differences.

Unlike Habermas, Peck's consensus is based on expressing emotions. It is "see[ing] the suffering and courage and brokenness and deeper dignity" underneath social masks and defenses of others that allows people to "truly start to respect each other as fellow human beings" and reach consensus (1987:70). Once others see that someone has let down their defenses (and seemingly break social roles by losing control of emotions) then they can do it too. And once everyone sacrifices themselves on the alter of community, the group can achieve "emptiness" and transcend individual differences. This state is rapturous; Peck describes it as similar to falling in love. Emotionality, then, is both the means and the end of community: expressing true selves through emotions allows people to feel intense connections with others, allowing them further to express their true selves. In this view, empathy rather than reason will allow people to make

decisions that are good for everyone. I will now turn to what I think are the three main shortcomings of Habermas' and Peck's approaches to small group democracy.

Dichotomizing Reason and Affect

Both Peck and Habermas dichotomize reason and affect, and advocate one at the expense of the other. Habermas thinks that it is through reason that people can resolve differences. While reason is certainly an important aspect of negotiation, I think his perspective devalues affect and excludes from the democratic table those who live with the anger, need, and passion of the dispossessed. He also doesn't acknowledge the elitism and exclusion built into his ideal of consensus: the ideal speech situation would look like a debate among graduate students at Harvard rather than a negotiation between a woman with kids to feed and her caseworker. Privileged people's experiences and cultural capital would give them the upper hand in conducting Habermas' consensus-building conversations. As Fraser (1985: 115) points out, capacities for speech and equal dialogue with others "are in myriad ways denied to women and deemed at odds with femininity." Habermas's exclusive focus on a critical, self-reflexive, and impartial use of reason excludes some from the conversation. Furthermore, he doesn't acknowledge how thought is always embodied, relational, cultural, and emotional.

Peck, on the other hand, exclusively advocates affect over reason. As I have shown, however, at Aurora Commons empathy of this kind (i.e., feeling someone else's pain) often precluded reasoning with the person. When one person's emotional expression is held as authentic and thus inviolable, another person is no longer free to reason with him or her about their perspective on the situation.

In contrast to Peck and Habermas, practicing small-group democracy requires incorporating different means of self-expression, including emotionality, rationality, tentativeness. As Mansbridge (1990) points out, small group democracy works best when people can express their needs tentatively and without the immediate need to be "rational." Often for members of marginalized groups there isn't a discourse with which to articulate their anger, resistance, or reluctance. "I can't explain why, but it doesn't feel right to me" could be a legitimate place to start a conversation. With the help of others, small group democracy could be about learning to articulate previously undefined needs and good reasons for them.

As Jagger (1989) points out, communities can hone their collective political acumen by creating a supportive context for "outlaw emotions"—those that are incompatible with the dominant perceptions and values.[36] In such a context, people reflect on initially puzzling anger, irritability, or fear in order to understand how a taken-for-granted definition of the situation or practice

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[36] Jagger writes about scientific communities, but the same logic could apply to a lay community.

obscures the reality of subordinated people (Jagger, 1989: 161). However, after

reflection, one might determine that such feelings are reactionary rather than

liberatory: that is, the feelings may incorporate sexist or racist values. Reflecting

on outlaw emotions helps community members envision and make more

liberatory social relationships, while reflecting on reactionary emotions evokes

new emotional responses to past and present situations. In a dialectical

relationship, more liberatory social contexts stimulate new emotional reactions,

and new emotional reactions stimulate critical insights and observations about

the social context. In this way, we "reeducate our emotions" (Jagger, 1989: 163)

as we are changing our social environment.

However, a context that encourages such explorations should not confuse

it with being "authentic," for as I have shown, authenticity comes from a

discourse that stifles dissent. Hoagland (1988: 194) argues that the goal of

"safety" in a community is counterproductive because it "obscures the possible

conflict here. In making a space safe for one to express her feelings, we may be

making it dangerous for another who is, for example, the subject of attack or of

ignorance." Taking others' expression of feelings seriously should necessarily

mean being able to address the judgment implied in such an expression and to

explore the links between such feelings and the immediate and larger social and

political culture. In this way, the context would be much safer for those whose

political and social experiences leave them with feelings and ideas that differ

from those of the white, middle-class, Protestant, heterosexual community

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members. Rather than recruiting and attracting only those who look and think like them, the community could better achieve its stated goal of "embracing diversity." In the context of a community—or any other small group that wishes to create relationships based on trust and equality—it is necessary to encourage emotional expression <u>and</u> critical appraisal of those expressions.

Emphasizing Transcendence Over Cognizance

Another problem with both Habermas and Peck is their emphasis on <u>transcending</u> rather than grappling with differences. An ideology of transcendence serves those who have unacknowledged power. That is, when there are differences of opinion, and interests can't necessarily be reconciled, those with the most power in the situation benefit from a veneer of consensus, and those with the least power can't challenge this definition. At Aurora Commons, for example, Venters believed that sharing emotional pain allowed members to "achieve community" in a transcendent emotional state. Communards, however, did not experience such a state and remained unable to have their perspectives taken into account.

Communitarians, because they use Habermasian assumptions to prescribe remedies to modern social problems, are an instructive case.   Like Habermas, they believe that we should have a national debate about values and reach some consensus about the common good. Ready to lead the debate, Communitarians (e.g., Etzioni, 1993) rationally describe how valuing nuclear

families, character education, an ethic of helping others, law and order, and increasing social responsibilities would lead to a better social world. Like Habermas, they posit that a consensus on values would benefit us all. By focusing on values rather than the contexts in which people make decisions, however, communitarians fail to acknowledge that divorce, crime, and social isolation are part of a web spun by unemployment and poverty. For women, the outcome of divorce is particularly devastating to their families not because one person can't adequately care for a child, but because unequal opportunities in the labor market and a lack of social support for child care define the context in which the mother-provider must struggle for her family's survival.

Communitarians are making political judgments under the guise of benignly suggesting better values. Emphasizing "values" over alleviating poverty does not benefit all equally. Furthermore, advocating and emphasizing the "public good" relegates the knowledge and everyday practices of women—who do most of the "private" and unpaid labor—to a de-politicized sphere (see Fraser, 1985). Relationships, as well as a polity, should be open to critical scrutiny. What's hidden by Communitarian discourse are real conflicts of interest that can't be reconciled by a discourse of value consensus.

For both Habermas and Peck the consequences of the goal of consensus is to obscure how power inevitably marks human negotiations. As Chantal Mouffe (2000: 34) points out, rather than trying to "erase the traces of power and

exclusion," a democratic discourse should make them visible in order to foster dissent and critical appraisal of conflicts of interest.

Rather than pretending that there can be discussions or contexts in which some don't have more influence than others, people should be looking at how power is operating. One way to bring power to the fore is for a group to have a rotating person whose job is to monitor interactions and note patterns in elite voices being dominant and others being silenced or silent. He or she could point to ways that people were silenced due not only to interruptions and bullying, but more subtly due to unquestioned sexism, class privilege, and heterosexism. This process was commonly used in early anti-nuclear groups (Downey, 1986) and is central to the small affinity groups that make up the present day Global Justice Movement (Starhawk 2000). With such a structured commitment to equality in group dynamics, everyone—including the most powerful—would become conscious about how interaction unfolds.

Aurora Commons did in fact have a designated "process watcher" during every business meeting. However, I discovered that having a process watcher was usually only a formality. Usually he or she didn't comment on the process. When the process watcher did intervene, she or he focused on an individual's feelings that weren't being sufficiently resolved (i.e., "I'd like to point out that Sam is still very upset"), or made a general statement about the emotional tenor of the meeting (i.e., "I'd like to point out that this has been a very difficult meeting, especially for Marny and Neil"). Incorporating a politicized "process watcher"

could have enabled members to incorporate diverse individual viewpoints and socially-situated perspectives. Specifically, in this community, a process watcher could have pointed to the ways that therapeutic discourse was used to quash dissent.

<u>Emphasizing Individuals or Social Structure as Obstacles</u>

Finally, how Habermas and Peck each conceive of obstacles to democracy reveals the practical inadequacy of their ideas. For Habermas, human reason is channeled by the relations of the market and the state into a merely instrumental and means-end calculation. Furthermore, because of a highly rationalized and stratified system of production, people don't share the same "lifeworlds," or systems of meanings. Without using reason more broadly—to understand others, find truth, or decide morality—and without sharing common assumptions about validity claims, our potential for communicative agreement is atrophied. Habermas thus offers little for those who would like to create a more egalitarian group or society barring massive social restructuring. Though I think there <u>is</u> a need for the massive social restructuring Habermas advocates, I believe it's important to create egalitarian relationships, especially given the highly stratified and rationalized world in which we live.

Peck, on the other hand, assumes that obstacles to reaching consensus are individual rather than social ones. Peck assumes that true community is possible if individuals are sufficiently committed, loving of others, humble, and

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vulnerable. He outlines and describes stages of spiritual progression of individuals: a Stage I person is chaotic and antisocial ; a Stage II person is formal and institutional; a Stage III person is skeptical and individual; and a Stage IV person is mystical and communal. He calls these stages "a paradigm for healthy psychological development" (1987: 197) and "analogous to the development of community" (1987: 200). In community, Stage I, II, and III people have the capacity to behave toward one another in a Stage IV manner—meaning like those who "become practiced at emptying themselves of preconceived notions and prejudices and able to perceive the underlying fabric that connects everything" (1987: 193). In other words, community can give unenlightened people a taste of nirvana. What is significant here is that Peck considers individual characteristics rather than community organization the causes of community success or failure. Like many members of Aurora Commons, he assumes that any structuring—even a democratic one—impedes authenticity and the true community that emerges only from true selves.

This individualistic assumption kept members of Aurora Commons from critically evaluating their group work: "we are all authentic here" translated into "we can't change the way we do things together because that would make us inauthentic." Peck's assumption that community failures are due to individual characteristics is the same one that enabled Venters, and sometimes Sharers, to

discredit others who wished to do things differently or left the community. Peck's

model, in other words, sets people up to scapegoat one another.[37]

Furthermore, Peck's individualism impedes understanding others. Like

the rational masculinist discourse (albeit unlike Habermas), this kind of

therapeutic discourse is mired in the liberal assumption that social actors have

equal resources and opportunities. For example, women—seen through

therapeutic discourse—aren't systemically disadvantaged to the psychic and

material benefit of men. Rather, they are held back by their own internalized

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[37] In fact, Peck (1987: 124) calls the few individuals who "are not only unwilling to subordinate any of themselves to the needs of the group but also seem consciously or unconsciously motivated to actively destroy community. . . . evil members" (my emphasis). He has a few pages about how communities sometimes must violate the rule of inclusiveness in order to expel these "evil members." He asserts that such people exist, without giving any way to distinguish them from those who express "heretical ideas" and bring increasing complexity and sanity to a community (1987:245). He's more specific in a later book (1993:282) in which he says that "one person in 20 seems incapable of participating constructively in the community building process. This incapacity seems to be solely the result of individual psychodynamics…"

psychological timidity, feelings of inadequacy, and dependency upon men—
issues about which they need to process. A more holistic intimacy and
understanding is precluded by the exclusive focus on the psychological barriers
to self development.

In contrast to Habermas' grand theorizing and Peck's individualism, Jo
Freeman's (1972) "principles of democratic structuring" focus on the group's
organization. She advocates: (1) Delegation of specific authority to specific
individuals for specific tasks by democratic procedures; (2) Requiring all those to
whom authority has been delegated to be responsible to those who selected
them; (3) Distribution of authority among as many people as is reasonably
possible; (4) Rotation of tasks among individuals; (5) Allocation of tasks along
rational criteria; (6) Diffusion of information to everyone as frequently as possible;
and (7) Equal access to resources needed by the group.

Her assumption is that "structurelessness"—rather than fostering or
signifying authenticity—leads to an unacknowledged and depoliticized structure
wherein leaders aren't chosen, accountable, or acknowledged, and criteria for
group membership aren't explicit. Lichterman (1996) found similarly that for the
Greens of his study, leadership couldn't be talked about because there wasn't
supposed to be a leader (see also Vogel, 1980, on the anti-nuclear movement).
Aurora Commons is an example of such a group wherein the elite group of
founding members ruled by unacknowledged criteria and without others' consent.
Following Freeman, some of these problems could have been avoided had the

group been better structured for democracy. Of course, such structuring (in Peck's theology, corresponding to a rigid Stage II person who needs rules to follow) would have violated the fundamental therapeutic assumption that people need to <u>transcend</u> social rules in order to be authentic.

To create an environment that fosters intimacy and democracy, It is necessary to avoid the dualism of rationalism versus emotionalism. Each discourse rests on assumptions of truth, normality, and authenticity that end up reproducing hierarchy. If users of the rational masculinist discourse believe that withholding emotional expression signifies strength and integrity, then they will see the emotionally expressive (often women) as weak, out of control, and manipulative. And if users of therapeutic discourse believe emotional expressiveness signifies authenticity and courage, then they will see the emotionally reticent as inauthentic and fearful. Inherent in each discourse is a way to discredit or silence those who have different perspectives or different emotional needs.

In contrast, a discourse that orients social interactants to how power operates in a specific setting and in our culture in general creates the possibility of being reflexive about who is being excluded. Frankenberg (1993) writes about how white liberals use a "power-evasive" racial discourse that focuses on the underlying similarity of all people and simultaneously shifts attention away from the political and material reality of racism. White liberals think of themselves as moral to the degree that they can treat people equally <u>despite</u> racial differences,

rather than to the degree that they can be critical of their own privilege and complicity as whites in a white-supremacist society (and seek to redress the inequities). Frankenberg calls the latter a "power-cognizant" discourse. People who use a power-cognizant discourse don't uncritically accept their own terms (such as "authentic," or "rational"), and they take seriously others' claims of exclusion. While a power-cognizant discourse in the community would not have prevented some from being more influential than others, and would not prevent decisions that benefit some more than others from being made, it would have opened the space for discussion about power and group process and thus allowed for a more open exchange of perspectives and thus fostered mutual understanding.

Implicit in the discourse of authenticity at Aurora Commons was an ideal of freedom as a release from relationship with and need for others. However, in the pursuit of this prediscursive and presocial "true self," community members worked together to make a culture in which authenticity was signified and recognized. They couldn't acknowledge how the group culture created their emotional experiences—for this would have undermined authenticity as they defined it. Similarly, people who believe they express their "individuality" through consumption must sustain disbelief in the mass-produced and mass-marketed nature of the products they buy. In each case, the premise that we can find freedom in an authentic self, free from the influence of others, is false and counterproductive. Such a model of freedom diverts us from working with others

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to create a participatory democracy, which presupposes a critical awareness of our mutual interdependence.

Once we de-essentialize emotion, it becomes possible to use emotions as clues to understanding the context. When we realize that feelings come from social interactions in particular contexts and cultures, we can understand that lessening pain means changing relationships and interactions. Rather than using a discourse that posits an unchanging essentialist core, we should talk about feelings in a way that enhances our ability to understand each other and change our social environment. What we need to create sustainable democratic communities is a sociological discourse with which we can talk about the social basis of emotion, the emotional basis of social life, and the impossibility of separating the two.

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