

# “Get Therapy and Work on It”: Managing Dissent in an Intentional Community

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*Based on two years of fieldwork in an intentional community that was officially both egalitarian and therapeutic, we examine how community founders used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy to maintain power over newcomers. When newcomers expressed their desire for more financial accountability or for limiting the expression of anger, the founders managed such dissent by (1) reframing community problems as psychological issues, (2) discrediting critics as psychologically troubled, and (3) emotionally attacking recalcitrant newcomers. In contrast to those who argue that a discourse emphasizing emotions fosters equality within social movement and utopian communities, we show that it depends on how people use the discourse. Our study points to the importance of interaction for research on discourse as well as the importance of discourse for an interactionist approach to power.*

In the late 1960s and early 1970s many young people adopted a discourse of “liberation psychotherapy” to escape the social institutions they perceived as responsible for racism, militarism, and sexism (Rice 1996). They believed that being authentic and talking about feelings in social movement and utopian communities fostered equality by allowing people to follow their inner moral compass rather than corrosive conventional culture. Many scholars, however, have since argued that such a discourse blinds people to structural inequalities and thus helps reproduce them (Bellah et al. 1985; Lasch 1984; Rice 1996; Schwalbe 1996). What these scholars tend to overlook, however, is how people use a discourse of liberation psychotherapy to maintain power in everyday life. For example, while Prus (1999) points to the importance of studying power in everyday life, he overlooks the role of discourse.

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We examine how founders of an intentional community we call Aurora Commons used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy and reproduced power inequities despite their commitment to equality. Aurora Commons provides a unique opportunity to examine whether a culture that emphasizes authenticity and emotional expression fosters equality because its founders were committed to both. They aimed to create a model community where people could participate equally in decision making and live authentically with one another. As we show, however, when newcomers brought up concerns about the community or proposed changes, founders used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy and, by doing so, unintentionally managed dissent.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As Rice (1996) and Irvine (1999) point out, advocates of liberation psychotherapy believe that everyone can and should strive for happiness, high self-esteem, personal satisfaction, and, most important, authenticity. Proponents of a discourse of liberation psychotherapy furthermore prescribe that liberating one's "real self" involves escaping the demands of institutional life and social relationships as well as "processing." Processing involves rehashing and reinterpreting childhood experiences with others to "dig down to your 'real self'" (Lichterman 1989:193).

By referring to liberation psychotherapy as a *discourse*, we mean to emphasize that it is a "historically constituted bod[y] of ideas providing [a] conceptual framework for individuals" (Frankenberg 1993:265) and unified by common assumptions shared by a number of therapeutic theories (Gergen 1991). Two key assumptions are that (1) everyone has a precultural benevolent "real self" that should be the "only guide to what you 'need' to do" (Irvine 1999:31) and (2) "conventional culture and society make individuals sick by thwarting the development of the 'real self' in the interests of social conformity" (Rice 1996:29). Believers in the liberation psychotherapy discourse thus imagine their efforts to live authentically as not only a personal quest but as a form of resistance to an oppressive culture that glorifies obedience, rationality, power, and male supremacy (Rice 1992). As a discourse, liberation psychotherapy is a closed system, whereby everyone is either an active participant or "in denial" about their need to participate (Irvine 1999).

Over the past forty years, social movement organizations (Lichterman 1996; Schrock, Holden, and Reid 2004; Taylor 1995); utopian communities (Kanter 1972); support groups (Irvine 2000; Wolkomir 2001; Wuthnow 1994), and popular culture (Kaminer 1993) have adopted liberation psychotherapy. Some lesbians create communities in which safety to express feelings is an unspoken goal (Hoagland 1988), and members of the Green Party often use a "personalized discourse" based on "being vulnerable" and "authentic" (Lichterman 1996). Similarly, members of the global justice movement (Klein 2002) and feminist organizations (Taylor 1995) often use a "process watcher" and "check-ins" to attend to feelings. Ideally, using a discourse of emotions enables free self-expression and small group democracy and equality.

In contrast, other scholars argue that a discourse of liberation psychotherapy reproduces unequal power relations. Gergen (1991:119) argues that discourses that rest on asocial and ahistorical foundations—such as notions of authenticity—create pernicious hierarchies that “render the believer heroic and the nonbeliever a fool.” Others argue that a discourse of liberation psychotherapy blinds people to structural inequality, undermining the motivation for collective action (Bellah et al. 1985; Frankenberg 1993; Kaminer 1993; Lasch 1984; Rice 1996; Schwalbe 1996). Drawing on Foucault, others show how discursive rules are systems of authority that structure people’s self-understandings (Rice 1996; Schrock and Reid 2006). While discourse may indeed play a role in creating hierarchies, subjectivity, and individualism, little is known about how people interactionally make discursive assumptions meaningful and consequential, suggesting the utility of an interactionist approach.

While some interactionists have recently theorized about power (Dennis and Martin 2005; Prus 1999), they have generally neglected the role of discourse. In his recent systematic attempt to create an interactionist approach to power, Prus avoids reifying power as “social structure” or “macro-level” processes and argues instead that power is an interactional phenomenon. According to Prus (1999:152), “Power implies *an intent and a capacity to influence, control, dominate, persuade, manipulate, or otherwise affect the behavior, experiences, or situations of some target.*” Prus catalogs such tactics, including searching for target vulnerabilities; fostering loyalty in targets; making overt suggestions or requests; convincing targets that compliance is in their interests; and disqualifying ideas deemed inappropriate and discrediting people who hold them (pp. 167–200).

While not situating their work as studies of power, several interactionists have shown how people use therapeutic discourse to influence others. Loseke (1987) shows how staff at a women’s shelter used a discourse of therapy to label clients’ stated love for their abusers as denial, discrediting clients’ perspectives while positioning themselves as having superior judgment. Fujimoto (2001) shows how the director of a group home for teen mothers used a discourse of therapy to coerce reluctant clients into self-disclosure, then interpreted the disclosures through the lens of their therapeutic assumptions. Others have found that therapists use a discourse of liberation psychotherapy to “constrain certain expressions and elicit others” (Hardesty 1987) and guide clients toward seeing themselves and their social world in ways dictated by the discourse’s assumptions (Francis 1997).

Although Kleinman’s (1996) ethnography of a holistic health center focuses on moral identity rather than discourse, her analysis shows how people officially committed to egalitarianism can nonetheless use therapeutic discourse to enact and maintain power. On one occasion when the largely unpaid support staff challenged highly paid practitioners’ beliefs that the center was egalitarian, practitioners reframed the staff’s concerns as indicative of psychological problems. Practitioners thus used an assumption of a discourse of liberation psychotherapy—the idea that interpersonal problems originate in individuals’ personalities—to limit discussion about and help reproduce organizational inequality. Kleinman also

shows how “many inequalities may be reproduced beneath conscious awareness” (p. 138) because people can remain unaware of contradictions between what they profess and the consequences of their actions. Kleinman thus suggests that regardless of intentions (cf. Prus 1996), people may use a discourse of liberation psychotherapy to successfully manage others’ dissent.

Overall, the research on the discourse of liberation psychotherapy shows how influential and culturally ubiquitous it is and suggests that its assumptions lead people to act in ways that reproduce inequality. Less is known, however, about how people use the discourse in interaction. Although Prus (1999) theorizes that strategic actors produce power in interaction, he neglects the role of discourse. Our analysis draws from both of these separate lines of scholarship and shows how they can inform each other. Doing so helps us better understand how actors can enact and maintain power inequities, regardless of their intentions.

### AURORA COMMONS

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 the emotional chapters in one’s life is the foundation of our community.  
—Rose, cofounder of Aurora Commons

As young adults in the 1970s, founders of the community learned about liberation psychotherapy in alternative organizations, graduate school, and various therapeutic groups. Marny, Sam, Chris, and Sara were involved in a variation of liberation psychotherapy called “primal therapy.” For primal therapists, it is necessary to reexperience the pain repressed from your past to release the “true self.” According to the Primal Center (2006), group work and retreats are important so that participants can “trigger each others’ feelings,” experience feelings in a safe environment, and see how others work through emotional pain. Liberating one’s self requires unrestrained expression of emotions, especially anger and grief, and “kicking, screaming, [and] pounding on the walls for hours are essential” (Janov 1991:330).

Founders later became fascinated with M. Scott Peck’s (1987) best-selling *The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace*. Peck adopted key assumptions of liberation psychotherapy: conventional culture makes people sick by repressing the true self in the interests of conformity, and the true self, uncontaminated by culture, is childlike, peaceful, and good. He also argued that people can and should build nonrepressive communities that enable members to communicate authentically without worrying about “being nice” or others’ judgment. It is only in a “true community” that people can be their true selves, because they are with a group of people who do not demand pretense—unlike others in mainstream culture. Peck’s group “The Foundation for Community Encouragement” held weekend retreats

where participants could practice being in a “true community” by processing their feelings together and reaching a transcendent state free of others’ judgment.

After attending one of Peck’s community-building workshops, Marny and Chris started the “Friday Night Group.” Over the next six years, most of those who would become the community founders met on Friday nights to share feelings about their lives and each other. Consistent with primal therapy and Peck’s retreats, group members sought to free their true selves through processing painful childhood memories, which sometimes involved screaming in anger or wailing with grief. They believed such expressions were deeply authentic and that they testified to the group’s emotional and relational health.

About four years into the Friday Night Group, members decided to buy land in order to give their community a geographic base. They eventually found seventy-five acres of undeveloped land located thirty miles from two midsized southeastern cities and collectively took out a mortgage. They moved or built seven homes on the land, but wanted eight more households to share the financial burden and bring diversity to the community. All of the founders were white and all except Robert were therapists, had been in therapy, or had worked in other human service professions (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Founders

Name	Age	Occupation	Personal Relationships	Community Tenure
Rose	72	Retired teacher	Widow	1995–present*
Marny	45	Therapist	Single; ex-partner of founder Michael; mother of two teens with founder and ex-husband Chris	1995–present
Robert	46	Part-time carpenter, music teacher, and Web page designer	Married to founder Gwen; father of two teenagers	1995–present
Gwen	46	Social worker and massage therapist	Married to founder Robert; mother of two teenagers	1995–present
Sam	56	Therapist and carpenter	Married to founder Sara	1995–present
Sara	50	Unknown	Married to founder Sam; dropped out of the community	1995–96
Chris	48	Teacher	Partnered with founder Jenny; father of two teenagers with founder and ex-wife Marny	1995–present
Jenny	45	Unknown	Partnered with Chris; dropped out of the community	1995–96
Michael	49	Therapist	Ex-partner of Marny; recently began a new relationship	1995–present

\*The first author’s research lasted from May 1996 through November of 1998. “Present” refers to end of fieldwork.

Founders required newcomers to attend regular business meetings where they discussed practical matters such as road development and septic system construction and at least one daylong retreat where they used self-help tools to process personal and community problems. If the founders agreed, they asked newcomers to join the community. Newcomers had to pay \$3,000 to reserve a house site and make sliding-scale monthly payments until they invested a total of \$25,000. The community used this money for mortgage payments, pond restoration, and other infrastructure such as roads, wells, a garden, an environmentally sensitive septic system, and an underground electrical system. Founders hoped to eventually build a retreat facility and community house with a library, guest room, meditation room, arts and crafts studio, and darkroom.

The founders also created the official ideals of the community, which emphasized living authentically, ecologically, and equally. They believed that in a competitive and hierarchical society, most people were unwilling to endure the pain of deeply felt emotions and were embarrassed to express them for fear of appearing rude or pathetic. As an antidote to this corrosive culture, the community's mission statement listed their first goal as living authentically. Following Peck (1987), founders believed that if everyone had the courage to be emotionally open and expressive, the world would become more peaceful and just. The mission statement also stated that the community would use the land in an environmentally sound way and that each member would have equal decision-making responsibility and power. Together, these three ideals served as vocabularies of motive (Mills 1940) that ennobled their enterprise, allowing founders to think of themselves as social visionaries who were creating a model community.

Like founders, newcomers experienced mainstream culture as alienating, wasteful, and isolating. Newcomers joined Aurora Commons to share resources, be connected to others, and have more control over their lives and community. While they believed that therapeutic work could help members work through the interpersonal conflict endemic to consensus decision making and close relationships, they did not share the founders' background in primal therapy and Peck's community-building workshops. All of the nine newcomers were white and had college degrees, but only one was a therapist (see Table 2).

## METHODS AND DATA

I (the first author) first learned about the existence of and became intrigued with Aurora Commons when I read a newspaper article about the group. In the article, members described themselves as environmentalists, feminists, psychotherapists, and radicals experimenting with cooperative living and conflict resolution. I wondered how they would do it, what they would be up against, and what it would be like to live there.

After an initial meeting with Rose, I attended a business meeting, where I explained to the group that I was interested in learning about their efforts to build

TABLE 2. Newcomers

Name	Age	Occupation	Personal Relationships	Community Tenure
Stacy	53	Unemployed; pursuing teaching certification	Single; joined the community with ex-partner and newcomer Ed	February 1996–September 1996
Peter	72	Part-time carpenter	Single; divorced father of two	July 1996–February 1999
Dan	36	Therapist	Married to and joined the community with Jessica; father of one toddler	September 1996–present*
Jessica	39	Part-time artist; full-time mother	Married to and joined the community with Dan; mother of one toddler	September 1996–present
Neil	43	Accountant	Partnered and joined the community with Julie	February 1996–July 1996
Julie	40	Acupuncturist; holistic health practitioner	Partnered and joined the community with Neil; mother of two children from previous relationship	February 1996–July 1996
Nancy	39	Unemployed; on disability	Single	January 1996–August 1996
Libby	38	Computer programmer	Married to and joined the community with Paul; mother of their one toddler	April 1997–July 1997
Paul	37	Elementary school teacher	Married to and joined the community with Libby; father of their one toddler	April 1997–July 1997

\*The first author’s research lasted from May 1996 through November of 1998. “Present” refers to end of fieldwork.

community. Members were positive about the research, saying they believed their efforts should be chronicled. Through a consensus process, members gave me permission to join them in all of their collective activities, including weekly business meetings, potluck parties, workdays, and “processing retreats.” Members never indicated that they expected anything from me, and I did not present myself as an expert in community building.

Over the next two years, I attended over sixty community events, where I was a nominal participant. I did not participate in the decision-making process during the business meetings or the emotionally intense psychotherapeutic processing during the retreats. However, I did self-disclose during one-on-one conversations with members and shared personal issues and contributed to discussions during retreat check-ins and business meetings. I was a much more active participant during workdays (which involved pond restoration, road repair, and house painting) and the informal

potluck dinners. During each visit (with the exception of workdays and potlucks) I jotted notes about ongoing activities; these jottings consisted of (1) brief descriptions of exchanges and (2) as close as possible verbatim quotes during especially emotional testimonies or exchanges. I wrote detailed field notes after returning home.

In addition to fieldwork, I conducted semistructured interviews with eight founding members (interviewing four of them twice), eight newcomers (interviewing one of them twice), and two people who dropped out before participant observation began. I guided interviewees to discuss their biographies, history with the community, relationships with others, and interpretations of specific interactions and events, such as recent business meetings or retreats. I transcribed all of these interviews.

Our analysis developed inductively, sparked by the first author's experiences in the field. While I often felt moved when community members helped each other with emotional difficulties and practical tasks, I also felt uncomfortable witnessing some founders' intense emotional expressions. Founders did not seem uncomfortable with such expressions, even when they were the targets of others' anger. By coding the interview transcripts and field notes, I noted that founders and some newcomers described emotional intensity as "healing," "growth," and "vulnerability," which they believed attested to the safety and health of the community. Writing analytic memos and frequently sharing and discussing them with the second author led me to understand how some members evaluated emotional expression solely on how authentic it appeared. My resulting dissertation (Holden 2001) focused on how members constructed authenticity and how they used its assumptions as interactional resources.

Later, the second author and I returned to the data and focused on how members used assumptions of authenticity in ways that had consequences for small group democracy. Following Kleinman's (1996) analysis of subordinate challenges and elite responses, we systematically looked through the field notes for instances in which newcomers tried to change community practices (see Becker 1998 on sampling). We found that, except for one instance, the founders did not address newcomers' stated concerns. We then asked how founders accomplished such dissent management. By comparing and contrasting these interactional sequences, we deduced that founders used assumptions of authenticity with the effect of managing dissent by reframing, discrediting, and attacking.

We then searched for interview data whereby newcomers and founders talked about these occasions. By comparing and contrasting these accounts, we determined that while founders viewed their actions as promoting individual development and community health, many newcomers who eventually or had already dropped out of the community defined founders' actions in terms of power. We then came to understand how their different definitions of the situation helped explain why almost all newcomers dropped out and why founders did not address the reasons they dropped out. We only later recognized that founders' assumptions were part of the larger cultural discourse of liberation psychotherapy and that our study had implications for an interactionist approach to power. We produced the present

article by taking turns writing and revising various sections as well as working together on line-by-line revisions.

## MANAGING DISSENT

At weekly business meetings, potlucks, retreats, and workdays, as well as during informal socializing, most members—including newcomers—often invoked a discourse of liberation psychotherapy to talk about difficulties with children, grief about losing a friend, fear of changes, and relationship troubles. Newcomers said that they often felt supported by founders and that founders' therapeutic expertise helped them better understand their emotional difficulties.

Newcomers were concerned, however, that there were no bylaws stipulating community agreements and no budget, as well as problems recruiting and retaining other newcomers. Furthermore, newcomers wanted rules for environmental practices, participation in community events, and the expression of anger. They expressed their dissatisfaction by bringing up their grievances in business meetings, proposing alternative community practices, withholding commitment, withholding payments, and ultimately dropping out.

Stacy, Neil, and Julie raised concerns about the bylaws and budget soon after they arrived. Neil and Julie eventually decided to stop their monthly payments until the founders addressed their concerns. Dan and Jessica advocated for community regulations aimed to bolster members' participation in workdays and events. During the first author's fieldwork, they remained uncommitted until they felt surer about the community's future. Libby and Paul, committed environmentalists, wanted more regulations on environmental practices. They also remained undecided until they felt more convinced of members' environmental commitment. Before the two young couples formally joined the group, they also wanted to see the community recruit other newcomers with children.

All newcomers except Nancy had concerns about founders' expressions of anger. They were uncomfortable with people yelling at each other, and they did not interpret it as signifying community health. Most newcomers revealed during interviews that they wanted the community to regulate the display of anger. Julie, for example, said, "I want ground rules so that there will not be any violent outbursts [or] name calling." Stacy said she would like "boundaries" for emotional expression at business meetings and retreats. Although they brought up such concerns privately, the first author never heard them talk explicitly about such concerns at business meetings or retreats. Newcomers did not have a way to challenge the assumption that intense expressions of feeling were more authentic than restrained or circumspect expressions without discrediting themselves as therapeutically unenlightened or afraid. Eliasoph (1996:272) investigated discrepancies between frontstage talk and backstage sentiments in three groups and similarly found that each group's hegemonic discourse made "some ideas hard to express." Aurora Commons' newcomers expressed their concerns about anger indirectly,

by saying they were concerned that members' intensity made it difficult to recruit and retain new members.

When newcomers disagreed with founders' financial management of community funds or their expressions of intense anger, some founders invoked a discourse of liberation psychotherapy to manage dissent. Founders did this by (1) reframing community problems as psychological ones, (2) discrediting critics as psychologically troubled, and (3) attacking newcomers. Founders' dissent management left their authority intact and made it difficult for newcomers to gain a hearing for their grievances. As we discuss, founders' dissent management led many newcomers to drop out of the community.

### Reframing

When newcomers raised concerns about community practices, founders often initially reframed the problem as an "issue" and called for a retreat to address it. At the retreats, founders used their self-appointed position as retreat leaders to guide everyone to process their issues in order to unearth what they believed was the root of the problem. Importantly, founders' participation in processing showed that they were taking some responsibility for community problems. Although such reframing did not address newcomers' concerns, this processing often made newcomers feel more authentic and connected to others. The following two episodes are typical examples of the interactional process of reframing.

At a weekly business meeting, Sam, a founder, asked for authorization to spend community money on building permits. Stacy, a newcomer, asked how anyone could approve this request because no one had compiled information on the community's income and expenses. Marny, a founder, said there was no point in talking about this until they "clear out issues around money" at the next retreat. Stacy and other newcomers had increasingly brought up their concerns about the lack of financial records and planning, which led Chris, a founder, to call for a "money retreat."

At the "money retreat," Chris used therapeutic tools from a self-development workshop to guide members to dredge their biographies for the causes of the community's money issues. He began by asking everyone to reflect on the question: "How did my parents' feelings about money shape the way I feel about money?" Marny told a story about how her father was often concerned that their family would run out of money. She then had an epiphany that her parents made her feel guilty about having and spending money.

Chris then asked Marny to think about the question "What beliefs do I need to change to open myself to manifesting abundance?" Marny, who usually bought her clothes at thrift stores, then vowed that she was going to let go of her guilt and take "\$2,000 to buy nice clothes and nice things for the house." Others applauded her breakthrough. Marny demonstrated to all how beneficial processing was for resolving "money issues." Chris proceeded to help newcomers and founders produce similar narratives. Chris thus used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy

that reframed community financial problems as grounded in members' childhood dysfunctions.

For the last thirty minutes of the seven-hour-long retreat, participants brainstormed "ideas for generating income." Chris recorded members' suggestions: ask family and friends for contributions, look for foundation money, have a "guided meditation retreat to invoke energy," and sponsor "community healing days" with workshops open to paid participants. Generating the ideas energized people, and Marny asked if someone would summarize the retreat for the newsletter so that others would think, "Wow! They are really dealing with this shit!" Excluded from this brainstorming was Stacy and other newcomers' initial suggestion to have an actual financial plan. While members may have done some successful processing and generated some fund-raising ideas, they did not discuss whether or how to collectively implement them, so no one was accountable for doing so. As Freeman (1972–73:157, 161) shows, unstructured groups often benefit unrecognized elites because they do not have to "be responsible to the group at large" or "open to formal challenge" by other members.

Founders' use of a discourse of liberation psychotherapy also reframed newcomers' concerns about recruitment and retention of other newcomers, raised during a series of business meetings. Dan and Jessica, newcomers, said that they wanted to see the community successfully recruit other families with young children and said they worried that the "intensity" of the processing scared away potential members. Eventually Marny called for, planned, and led a "recruitment retreat."

The retreat began with Marny asking members to brainstorm about "limiting beliefs" that impeded recruitment and financial stability. At first several members mentioned community beliefs that were off-putting to "rich people." For example, "We don't want rich people and they don't want us," "Rich people will have to pay for everything," and "We're wonderful, but not competent with money." Founders thus used the discourse to reframe the recruitment problem as their *belief* that they were goodhearted free spirits who would put off rich people. The assumption was that this belief manifested in their inability to recruit wealthy people.

Marny and Sam—who were the most emotionally intense of the founders—then brought up that the belief that "intensity is necessary" alienated potential recruits. Marny said, "To be here, you have to be incredibly intense, and you have to enjoy being around that." Raising his voice, Sam quickly added, "People are dropping like flies because we're so goddamned intense! We have initiation rites that would kill a horse!" Although Sam mentioned actual practices rather than merely a collective belief, members did not discuss regulating emotional displays in order to retain newcomers. With the hope of changing the limiting belief, members committed themselves to "accepting all kinds of people," including those who were not intense.

Like therapists who channel client disclosures in such a way as to presuppose the need for therapy (Hardesty 1987), founders' reframing of newcomers' concerns as

psychological issues had the effect of defining newcomers' dissent as requiring community processing. As Francis (1997:71) points out, a discourse of therapy "tell[s] us not only how we ought to think about the world, but how to feel about it and, by extension, what to do about what we are feeling." Founders called for and led retreats to further process, which enabled additional reframing of newcomers' issues. At the retreats, one founder asked members guiding questions about their beliefs or feelings that, according to liberation psychotherapy, were the "real issues" underneath community problems. Then another founder answered the questions and had an epiphany about the root belief responsible for her or his issue and demonstrated to newcomers how to change their limiting belief. Consistent with liberation psychotherapy, founders believed that healing individual dysfunction would ultimately fix community problems. As Marny said during the second retreat, "We must change beliefs first, and then manifestations will change."

Although participants did not discuss financial accountability or regulating anger at the aforementioned retreats, community members viewed the retreats as successful and credited founders with seriously grappling with their own pathologies. Retreats made them feel close to one another, authentic, and proud of their processing prowess. Newcomers said they felt they were a part of something truly "transformative" and "brave," and attendance at business meetings increased immediately after retreats. For example, whereas an average of six people attended weekly business meetings for the month prior to the first discussed retreat, an average of twelve members attended the following two weeks' meetings. Kleinman (1996:77) similarly found that members of an alternative organization used therapeutic retreats "to make them feel that they constituted a special community, one in which they trusted each other enough to disclose anger, distrust, or hurt" at the expense of debating organizational problems.

### Discrediting

When founders invoked a discourse of liberation psychotherapy and reframed newcomers' concerns, they acknowledged the problem and accepted partial responsibility for it by processing at retreats. In contrast, when founders discredited newcomers, they suggested that the dissenter needed therapeutic help, in effect denying that there was a problem and stifling discussion. Founders' proficiency with a discourse of liberation psychotherapy enabled them to use it in a way that discredited newcomers while appearing to care about them. By discrediting newcomers, founders implicitly defined themselves as therapeutic sophisticates, stifled dissent, and limited newcomers' control over community processes.

For example, at a business meeting, Stacy said she talked to the septic system contractor, who told her that each household would need to pay an additional \$6,000 or \$7,000 to complete the project. First she suggested that the community should get another estimate. Marny interjected irritably, "We decided a long time ago" to go with the current contractor. Stacy asked, "Can we afford it?" Marny then

said that anyone who “is having problems dealing with money should listen to the Hendricks tapes,” which promoted self-actualization as a way to “manifest abundance.” Stacy did not respond. Marny thus discredited Stacy’s concern about the rising expense by suggesting she needed psychotherapeutic help.

Sometimes founders’ discrediting relied on newcomers’ previous disclosures. For example, Stacy revealed that she felt controlled by her wealthy parents and therefore did not want to ask them for money. When she again raised the issue of the rising costs of the septic system during another meeting, Marny replied, “People ought to value themselves enough to ask for help from their families.” A few weeks later, Stacy said she was concerned about the expense of underground electrical wires. Rose said to Stacy: “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 did not respond. Marny thus equated borrowing money from her parents with self-esteem, and Rose implied that if Stacy were sufficiently committed, she would borrow money. Although founders used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy in a way that discredited Stacy, it did not prevent Stacy from bringing up the issue again. Founders thus managed but did not squelch her dissent.

When using previous disclosures against newcomers, founders tried to preserve their definition of the community as a safe environment for the expression of authentic emotions. In the previous examples, Marny and Rose alluded to rather than directly mention Stacy’s psychological issues. In another example, Neil, a newcomer, had previously revealed having difficulty with anger at his controlling father. Rather than directly mention Neil’s issues with his father during a retreat, Sam, a founder, said:

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.

If Sam had brought up Neil’s specific issue with his father, others may have thought he unfairly used Neil’s previous revelations against him. Although Sam only alluded to Neil’s specific problem, he used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy to clearly express the solution: “Get therapy and work on it.”

Founders also used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy in a way that discredited Julie for bringing up her financial concerns. During a series of business meetings, she and her partner Neil complained that there were no bylaws stipulating what would happen to their money if they dropped out or if the community itself went under. Interviews revealed that it was common knowledge that Marny, Sam, and Rose were angry with them because they had stopped paying their buy-in fee until they had more assurances.

During the next retreat, Julie said that she wanted to get an outside accountant because she “needed to feel safe” about what she was doing with her money. Marny replied, “I don’t need an accountant” because “I know that we can make it.” She advised Julie to “follow your heart and trust your instincts about this community.”

Marny then said, "I may be going out of bounds here, but I wonder how much of this is really a money issue for you and how much of it is just fear." Julie later said to Marny, "I feel like you were being a little condescending. I know that some of my issues are fear. But there is also the material [reality]." No one followed up, and Marny never apologized. Here we can see newcomers sometimes did not take founders' discrediting passively. Even so, members did not discuss getting an accountant or indicate they were willing to work on the bylaws.

We can see how founders discredited newcomers in a way that seemed heartfelt by couching their remarks in a "rhetoric of healing" (Fujimoto 2001:14). Like staff at battered women's shelters who discredit clients' perspectives by labeling their love for their abusers denial (Loseke 1987), founders used their authority as founding members and therapeutic sophisticates to name others' pathology in order to help them work through it. Furthermore, telling someone "you need therapy" sends a message of superiority: "I have the sophistication not only to see what your issue is but also to know that you need to figure it out yourself." Founders thus used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy and discredited troublesome newcomers, avoided accountability for what might have otherwise seemed tactless or insensitive, and bolstered their own identities as therapeutic healers.

### Attacking

Founders' use of a discourse of liberation psychotherapy allowed them to attack each other and, less frequently, newcomers. In contrast to discrediting, where founders invoked their therapeutic authority to help by saying or implying that dissenting newcomers needed therapy, when they attacked they yelled at others and linked their anger to their own unresolved childhood issues. According to primal therapy and Peck's (1987) version of liberation psychotherapy, such "out of control" expressions were particularly authentic because they signified freedom from conventional proprieties. Founders' attacks against each other made newcomers uncomfortable and worried that they could also be attacked. Although interviews revealed that founders attacked newcomers prior to fieldwork, the first author observed only two instances in which founders attacked dissenting newcomers, both at retreats.

At one retreat, Chris, a founder, encouraged participants to get in touch with their bodies and emotions by "baby breathing," a primal therapy technique in which one lies prone and breaths from the gut. During this exercise, Sam, a founder, began to wail: "I'm so fucking angry! I can't take it anymore! I'm so fucking sick of always being so goddamned nice that I can't fucking *stand it!*" After several people placed their hands on him in support, he cried and yelled about his mother molesting him as a baby and said he would "*never, never* let anyone do that to me again!" Sam also raged about "always trying to please, always smiling." Alluding to Neil and Julie, Sam then began screaming that he was "sick of people not paying their dues!"

While others comforted Sam as he slowly wound down, Julie quietly cried as another woman held her hand. Rather than ask Julie about her tears or help Sam

work it out with Julie and Neil, Chris moved on to the next exercise. At the end of the retreat in the "appreciation circle" others congratulated Sam for getting "so deep," and no one mentioned how it might have affected Neil and Julie.

Sam used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy in a way that allowed him to attack Neil and Julie while deterring others from holding him accountable. Sam's public screaming and crying signified being "out of control," which a discourse of liberation psychotherapy defines as especially authentic (Gordon 1989; Hoagland 1988) and thus inviolable. When Sam referred to always having to be nice, he used the discourse's assumption that adhering to social proprieties was pathological. If one had challenged Sam's attack for being "not nice," it would have appeared to have insensitively undermined his psychological growth. In addition, others did not hold Sam accountable because he linked his anger at Neil and Julie with a painful childhood experience, which a discourse of liberation psychotherapy defines as the most important goal of processing (Thoits 1996). Furthermore, within this discourse, challenging Sam's attack would have betrayed his trust and threatened the community's "safe environment" for authentic expression. As Wuthnow (1994:305) points out, talking about feelings in a group affords the person talking special deference because others interpret it as revealing "something hidden to the privileged few." Sam's use of the discourse therefore made it difficult for the attacked to defend themselves, in effect limiting their freedom of expression.

Except for Neil and Julie (whose reactions we discuss later), even newcomers who did not like harsh displays of anger interpreted Sam's attack through the lens of liberation psychotherapy. For example, Stacy said, "I was really happy that Sam got some of his work done," and Robert said it was "very powerful" to be there for Sam's "release" and see "how the group supported him to get through that." Peter discussed Sam's attack as follows:

I'm grateful for that experience and that he was bold enough to put it out. It was very daring. Some of it was deeply healing. . . . Even though I wouldn't choose that style for myself. I would rather have it come out a different way. What's real is at that point and that moment, he dealt with it.

A founder's attack could seem so authentic that even Robert and Peter, who had expressed reservations about founders' processing methods in interviews, were convinced that it was courageous, therapeutic, and a testimony to the support and safety of the community. Newcomers' dislike of intense processing usually did not translate to a criticism of *individuals* who successfully processed. Sam and the community got points for his display from everyone except Neil and Julie, who were attacked.

The second instance of a founder attacking a newcomer also occurred at a retreat. Rose attacked Stacy after Stacy expressed doubt about her need to participate in psychotherapeutic processing. At a meeting to prepare for the next day's retreat, Stacy said, "I've done so much processing in my life that I've had enough. . . . I really like the individuals here but I'm not sure about the retreats and the processing." Although what she said was not a direct criticism, it still expressed a therapeutic heterodoxy: not everyone needed or wanted to process.

At the retreat the next morning Rose said to Stacy, "If it's alright with you, I'd like to address something about us." Stacy nodded. Rose, visibly angry, responded,

I don't know what has been going on with us but I feel hurt and betrayed by you. . . .  
I listened to you last night saying, 'I don't like processing anymore' as if you were just sick of it. . . . I don't know where the hell you are. . . . We used to talk several times a week and now we can't even look at each other.

Rose then screamed, "What did I do that was so terrible to you?! You have treated me abominably!" Sam and Marny urged Rose and Stacy to let Chris help them. They readily agreed.

Chris asked each person in turn to (1) "Take a few minutes to complain," (2) ask "What is it about your past or programming that makes this situation inevitable?," and (3) then ask "What have you learned from this situation that you wouldn't have been able to learn otherwise?" Chris's assumption that one's current problems are "inevitable," given one's childhood, is consistent with liberation psychotherapy (Rice 1996). Rose and Stacy each followed Chris's script, after which Stacy and Rose hugged each other, and Rose said, "I'm so glad we worked through this." Although they may have worked through some childhood issues, they did not work through their interpersonal problems, about which Rose was still angry later.

Stacy was glad this confrontation happened in the context of the retreat. She said in an interview later that she did not "feel safe" talking to Rose alone, "so it was wonderful having the whole group there and all those therapists." In this case, Chris's reframing helped her get the result she wanted: distance from Rose without the tension and conflict. The fact that Rose and Stacy had embraced at the end as if the issue were resolved freed Stacy from processing with Rose anymore. The retreat and the therapeutic script framed any hostility Rose had toward Stacy as her own personal problem.

However, although Stacy used this reframing to her advantage vis-à-vis Rose, the resolution of the conflict also displayed to all that psychotherapeutic processing, including someone "authentically" attacking a newcomer, worked. Although Stacy could claim that she did not need to process anymore, the seeming effectiveness of Rose's attack and Chris's script belied this claim. Participants at the retreat believed that it was necessary for Stacy to process in order to work it out with Rose. For example, Marny said later, "Stacy hates to process . . . so it was wonderful for Stacy to just get real vulnerable and say, 'Yeah, I'll do this. This needs to happen and I'll do this.'" Others, even newcomers, said similar things. Nancy said, "At least it got yanked out and dealt with to some degree." Julie also thought that Rose's attack was necessary in order to resolve the issue. She said of Rose at that retreat, "I really liked how she said a lot of her stuff, even though it was not politically correct."

Because Stacy did process with Rose, she vindicated the founders' emphasis on therapy and left intact their control over retreats, despite newcomers' desire to have less emotional intensity directed toward them. The retreat also showed other newcomers that if they said they did not want to process anymore, founders might

attack them. Founders' attacks thus squelched dissent in the present moment while likely deterring future dissent.

When founders used therapeutic discourse, they could attack dissenters in a way that elevated their own place as brave enough to be "out of control" while protecting their authority over community functioning. Those who were attacked could not defend themselves without betraying the attackers' trust in them, which limited their self-expression. When founders attacked while processing and had a seemingly important breakthrough or resolved relationship problems, they also dramatized to all the value of liberation psychotherapy: processing is necessary for individual health and community functioning.

## DROPPING OUT

Seven of the nine newcomers dropped out of the community after four to eight months, except for Peter, who stayed for three years. As we show, five of them left because founders refused to address their concerns. Current members told the first author that "others" dropped out before she started fieldwork because of the founders' displays of anger. Instead of seriously addressing why most newcomers left, we show how founders often invoked a discourse of liberation psychotherapy and discredited them. Founders' discrediting of dropouts, we argue, legitimated and thus helped founders maintain control over community practices.

After leaving the community, Stacy told the first author, "I needed some ownership. I wanted to implement some of my own ideas and satisfy some of my own needs." Alluding to how the founders discredited her at an aforementioned meeting, she added, "People were expecting me to ask my parents for money and they aren't thinking that anymore. I feel the pressure's off." About a week after the retreat in which Sam attacked Neil and Julie and a few days before they dropped out, Julie said, "I felt personally assaulted" and that she was "mentally and physically sick for days" after the retreat. After he and Julie left the community, Neil said, "It seemed that it was going to be a community where people had an equal say." He said he learned, however, that although Marny said she was "willing to give people equality," when "it came down to really being able to do it, she was incapable."

Because Libby and Paul moved to California right after they left the community, the first author was unable to interview them. Peter, who never processed or publicly critiqued community practices, dropped out for unknown reasons three months after fieldwork was completed. Nancy, who was a nominal participant and also did not challenge founders, gradually stopped coming to community events for unknown reasons.

Before dropping out, newcomers told the first author that others had dropped out previous to her research because they thought community finances were too shaky and they did not like community processing. For example, Julie said that previous newcomers said they left because "it's too violent" and that it was "an unwise financial investment." Stacy similarly said that she met people who had left after attending

meetings full of “ranting and raving and people attacking each other.” In an interview, a therapist and ex-member of the Friday Night Group said that he dropped out of the group because Marny was “in my face screaming ‘I’m not your goddamned Mother,’” which left him “emotionally traumatized.”

Founders were aware of at least one reason for the high drop-out rate. Although they did not mention a lack of equality or financial accountability, Marny, Rose, and Sam told the first author early on in her fieldwork that dropouts were not comfortable with the expression of anger. For example, when talking about dropouts in an interview, Sam said, “I’ve heard any number of people say it was too intense,” and “I think that people were scared of Rose and Marny’s anger, and maybe me.” Following a discourse of liberation psychotherapy, however, many founders believed that regulating anger was dysfunctional. And because most founders earned enough money as therapists to make the monthly land payments, newcomers dropping out did not jeopardize community survival. But founders wanted to think of themselves as compassionate emotional healers, not abusers.

Founders used liberation psychotherapy to cast themselves as therapeutically enlightened and dropouts as repressed. For example, Sam said he could handle the intensity of the community “only because I did primal therapy.” He explained that primal therapy enabled him to realize that his fear of others’ anger was a manifestation of fearing “my own rage against my Mom [for] sexual abuse and physical abuse when I was a baby.” For Sam, it was understandable that others were intimidated by founders’ expressions of their “deepest feelings toward one another” because, unlike him, they were not in touch with their own feelings.

Marny gave a similar account of dropouts. She told the first author that although some people “gave up” because of the “bitter confrontation,”

I pretty much liked it because I’ve done so much therapy and I’ve had so much shit in my life. [Confrontations] have 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 than having it all looking good but not feeling good.

Marny’s account of dropouts cast them as “in denial” about their own emotional realities and thus unable to live in what Peck (1987) called a “true community.” In contrast, she portrayed herself as therapeutically enlightened.

Neither Marny nor Sam questioned their own actions as hurtful or inappropriate because the assumptions of liberation psychotherapy are inviolable: those who object are in denial or not courageous enough. Similarly, Peck (1993:280) wrote that “the few” who dropped out of his community-building workshops “have only one thing in common: something they feel they must hide—from themselves if not from the group.” Peck thus shielded himself from critique by casting dropouts as cowards.

Founders not only discredited those who dropped out, but also particular individuals. For example, founders told one newcomer that Libby and Paul dropped out because “they were kind of needy . . . and [their] attitude was like, ‘What can

the community do for us?” When talking about Neil dropping out, Marny said, “A lot of what’s happening to [Neil] is that he’s blaming the community for things that are really within himself.” Echoing Marny’s comments, Rose, Sam, Robert, Gwen, and Michael gave similar accounts about Neil’s dropping out: he was not ready to deal with unresolved childhood pain. Founders thus used Neil’s self-disclosures against him even after he left the community.

Founders pushed some newcomers out by psychologizing their dissent and then used their dropping out as vindication for psychologizing them in the first place. The founders thus protected their identities as therapeutic visionaries despite the mounting evidence that their practices were driving newcomers away. We can see here another way that founders used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy in a way that maintained their authority: it shielded them from reflecting on how their own actions undermined their goal of egalitarianism.

### CHANGES IN THE COMMUNITY

During the last few months of fieldwork, there was evidence that community dynamics were changing. Marny, Rose, Sam, and Chris did not discredit or attack the two most recent newcomers, Dan and Jessica. Furthermore, a recent newsletter shows that some of newcomers’ concerns about community practices have been addressed and codified. These changes suggest that while people *can* use a discourse of liberation psychotherapy to reproduce power inequities, the discourse itself does not inevitably lead to such consequences.

Although Dan and Jessica often suggested changing community practices, founders—even those who disagreed—listened to and debated their concerns. For example, at a business meeting Dan and Jessica expressed concern about many members’ nonparticipation in workdays, suggested sanctions for shirkers, and called for a retreat to discuss their concerns. Dan and Jessica started the retreat by describing their “vision for the community” as working together on common projects, and then they asked others to describe their own visions. Sam began to reframe the issue by saying, “Efforts to regulate” were “symptomatic that something else is going on.” Echoing Peck (1987:93), who wrote that “organization and community are incompatible,” Sam and other founders viewed regulation as escaping more fundamental psychological issues. Dan and Jessica, however, reasserted their belief that a healthy community was one in which people worked together. Rather than insist on processing, founders then talked with Dan and Jessica about the pros and cons of having sanctions.

While Dan and Jessica did not get what they wanted—community sanctions for nonparticipation—they did successfully engage the founders in a discussion. Unlike previous retreats, Dan and Jessica led the retreat, giving them more control over the proceedings. Founders also refrained from using “therapeutic tools” to guide members to process “issues about commitment.” Although Sam tried to reframe the issue, Dan and Jessica resisted rather than deferred. Furthermore, founders did not

collectively insist on reframing the issue. Founders also chose not to discredit or attack Dan and Jessica after they resisted. The combination of the newcomers' resolve and, perhaps most important, founders' deference thus enabled Dan and Jessica to have their concern addressed more democratically than did other newcomers.

A recent community newsletter reveals that members have written bylaws that more clearly define members' financial obligations and procedures for reimbursing dropouts. They have also created a policy banning name-calling, insults, screaming at others, manipulation, and coercion. Violators of the ban could be sanctioned or expelled. These new rules likely played a role in the other major change in the community: two new families recently built houses on the land and are currently living there (during fieldwork, no newcomers were committed enough to build). Banning attacking has likely made it easier for community members to express dissent and initiate debate.

Final interviews show that newcomers were becoming more determined to change things and that founders were becoming more concerned that attacking drove away newcomers. Dan and Jessica said that they believed they could convince founders that yelling at each other was "dysfunctional." Michael, Gwen, and Robert—all of whom had *not* participated in primal therapy, unlike the other founders—indicated they were becoming increasingly critical about the other founders' attacking. For example, Michael, a therapist who was highly respected by other founders and newcomers alike, said:

It has seemed like there is kind of an apology for unbridled anger, 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 . . . and it makes people reluctant to speak their mind.

As others have pointed out (Hollander 2002; Thorne 1993:81), changes in group dynamics are more likely when powerful group members support resistant ideas. It seems likely that frustrated founders and newcomers joined forces to press the other founders, who themselves expressed concerns about the high dropout rate, to make changes.

## CONCLUSION

In our everyday lives we want to use language that reflects our best values. For many, a language of liberation psychotherapy promises to challenge the dominant values of authority and rationality (Rice 1996). Following Peck (1987:70), community founders believed that if everyone were equally vulnerable, it would be "personally disarming" and create the conditions for egalitarianism. Our study showed that rather than disarm the founders, a discourse of liberation psychotherapy armed them against newcomers' dissent. Although members of social movement and utopian communities often adopt a discourse emphasizing authenticity, in part because they believe it will foster egalitarianism (Kanter 1972; Klein 2002; Lichterman 1996; Rice 1996; Taylor 1995), our analysis suggests that other results are possible.

The logic of liberation psychotherapy as well as its cultural ubiquity bolstered founders' ability to successfully use it in ways that managed dissent. Because the discourse is a closed system whereby one is either an uncritical participant or in denial about the need to participate (Gergen 1991), it enabled founders to discredit newcomers. Liberation psychotherapy is also a "power evasive" discourse (Frankenberg 1993), which orients community members to look for solutions to problems in individual change rather than collective action. Not only is the discourse power evasive, it is defined as liberatory (Rice 1996) or a subversion of power. Because the discourse equates authenticity with liberation, participants often failed to see how some presentations of authenticity were also coercive. And finally, because the discourse is culturally ubiquitous and widely accepted (Bellah et al. 1985), the newcomers lacked a mainstream discourse with which to be critical. Discourses that are more open, not defined as necessarily liberatory, and are culturally contested may be more useful in subverting power discrepancies.

While it is important to look at the logic and cultural meaning of a discourse of liberation psychotherapy, our analysis uncovers the importance of interaction for scholars who take a discursive perspective on power. These scholars suggest that people's use of a discourse of liberation psychotherapy can create hierarchies (Gergen 1991:119), define subjectivity (Rice 1996; Schrock and Reid 2006), and control how people define others and the source of their problems (Bellah et al. 1985; Kaminer 1993; Rice 1992) in ways that frequently reproduce inequality. For example, Rice (1992:159) theorizes that "the logic of liberation psychotherapy as symbolic system" leads to an individualist rather than collectivist vision of social life. However, he does not show how people use the discourse in everyday life in ways that lead to individualism. As Katovich (2003:61) points out, the promise of symbolic interactionism is an analysis of what people actually do together "rather than what theorists assume humans do." We show that grounding an analysis of discourse in interaction reveals *how* people collectively use discourse in ways that constitute power relations.

Our analysis builds on Prus's (1999) interactionist perspective on power by pointing to the importance of discourse. More specifically, we show how people use discourse as a resource for successfully influencing others. While Prus argues that searching for and exploiting target vulnerabilities is a generic process of power, we show how founders used a discourse in ways that both secured disclosures of and then exploited newcomers' emotional vulnerabilities. While Prus points out that disqualifying opposing ideas and discrediting their believers are also generic power tactics, we show how founders' use of a discourse reframed dissenting views and discredited dissenters (see also Fujimoto 2001; Loseke 1987). And while Prus rightly states that effective tactics depend on the target's cooperation, our analysis suggests that newcomers often cooperated with founders' management of dissent because they, like the founders, were committed to a discourse of liberation psychotherapy. We thus build on Prus's conceptualization of power by showing how interactants use discourse as a resource in their tactical maneuvers and in securing compliance.

Prus (1999) also emphasizes that analysts should only “see” power in interaction when it reflects study participants’ definition of the situation, which underlies his view of power as *intentional* tactics to influence others. In contrast, our study suggests people can use a discourse to define the situation without reference to power, even if their joint actions result in power inequities. We show how Aurora Commons’s founders and even some newcomers often used a discourse of liberation psychotherapy to define founders’ management of dissent as indicating that they were compassionate guides and brave explorers of their true selves. In turn, founders often interpreted newcomers’ complaints and dropping out as signifying that dissenters were in denial or cowardly. We thus show that even when actors *intend* to be egalitarian, they can be so committed to discursive definitions of the situation that they do not critically examine the contradictions between what they profess and the consequences of their actions.

Although we have emphasized how elites’ use of a discourse of liberation psychology can reproduce power inequities, we do not believe they exclusively or inevitably do so. At Aurora Commons, members also used liberation psychotherapy in ways that gave them insight into their lives and allowed them to listen to, nurture, and respect each other (Holden 2001). Other research similarly shows that people use liberation psychotherapy to meet existential needs for community, identity, and self-worth (Irvine 1999; Kleinman 1996; Lichterman 1996; Schwalbe 1996). Comparing our study with other research also shows how groups that similarly use core assumptions of a discourse of liberation psychotherapy may nonetheless differentially adapt or alter the discourse. Irvine (1999) shows how codependency group members defined anger as signifying immaturity rather than authenticity. In addition, the recent regulation of attacking in the community suggests that members successfully challenged the assumption that unbridled anger was healthy and authentic, showing that a group can alter the meaning of a discourse. Understanding that a group’s use of a discourse can have contradictory consequences, that different groups can adopt and use the same basic discourse in contradictory ways, and that group members can alter the assumptions of a discourse over time all point to the importance of examining how people use discourse.

In an age where people turn to television, spectator sports, and shopping malls 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. However, their use of a discourse of liberation psychotherapy was often counterproductive to democratic decision making. Our analysis suggests that communities committed to equality need to create and use a discourse that encourages a critical examination of the social basis of emotion and the emotional basis of social life.

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