A COMMUNICATION-AS-PROCEDURE PERSPECTIVE:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC AND SENSE-MAKING STUDY
OF A WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUP

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School
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By

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* * * * *

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To the Women's Spirituality Group
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INTRODUCTION

How I Came to the Focus of this Research

When the time came to select a topic to study for this dissertation, I had become very interested in ideas and issues addressed by feminist theology and women's spirituality. Issues related to these bodies of knowledge and personal experience had driven my intellectual exploration throughout my graduate studies and in my personal life I was tracking issues related to my religion and faith journey in the company of other women. What excited me most about this latter exploring was that I felt freed and supported to speak, to know, to acknowledge, to discover by my participation in groups with other women. My experience seemed to be opening up vast, fallow areas of my life to new energy and insight. I thought that something remarkable was happening, and that if I could figure out what it was, it would be a great thing to share with other people who sought such freedom and support. I decided to try to study, identify, assess, and articulate what was going on and how it was happening.

To this end I began to widely read in the literatures of feminist theology and women's spirituality, searching for something that would articulate and intellectually focus what I had discovered experientially. I encountered many anecdotal accounts of the importance of their women's groups to feminist writers, but one statement that truly chimed with my intuition was a quote in the first chapter of Carol Christ's 1986 work,
Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest. Second Edition. It reads, "...without articulation, the self perishes" (p. 6). This seemed to sum up the person I was when I first came to the women's group at my church of which I was then a member: silenced, suffocating, and numbed. With a sense of "aha!", I went on to read on the next page,

The consciousness-raising group, from which the current women's movement was born, can be seen as a ritualized setting in which women gather together to share their stories. In consciousness raising, women 'hear each other into speech,' as Nelle Morton says. Her phrase captures the dynamic in which the presence of other women who have had similar experiences makes it possible for women to say things they have never said before, to think thoughts they would have suppressed. As Morton says, there is a hearing that occurs before speech and 'evokes new speech.' In consciousness raising new stories are born, and women who hear and tell their stories are inspired to create new life possibilities for all women (Christ, 1986, p. 7).

This was it! This paragraph captured my sense of what had happened for me in my women's group.

Next, I tracked down the Morton quote in The Journey is Home, and found in her writing a theological concept that seemed particularly relevant to communication, "hearing into speech." In the following extensive passage, she describes a significant moment in a women's group which led her to this insight. I include this in its entirety because it makes visible the dynamic which is at work, especially the communicative behavior which seems to make possible the liberating moment,

It was in a small group of women who had come together to tell our own stories that I first received a totally new understanding of hearing and speaking. I remember well how one woman started, hesitating and awkward, trying to put the pieces of her life together. Finally she said: "I hurt...I hurt all over." She touched herself in various places as if feeling for the hurt before she added, "but...I don't know where to begin to cry." She talked on and on, Her story took on almost fantastic coherence. When she reached a point of almost excruciating pain no one moved. No one interrupted. Finally she finished. After a silence, she looked from
one woman to another. "You heard me. You heard me all the way." Her eyes narrowed. She looked directly at each woman in turn and then said slowly: "I have a strange feeling you heard me before I started. You heard me to my own story." I filed this away as something unique. But it happened again and again in other such small groups of women. It happened to me. Then, I knew I had been experiencing something I had never experienced before. A complete reversal of the going logic in which someone speaks precisely so that more accurate hearing may take place. This woman was saying, and I had experienced, a depth hearing that takes place before the speaking -- a hearing that is far more than acute listening. A hearing engaged in by the whole body that evokes speech -- a new speech -- a new creation. The woman had been heard to her own speech (Morton, 1985, p. 127-8).

This seemed to me to identify an emancipatory praxis based on the way women do things, but possibly something all humans could learn how to do. Supporting my conviction that such experiences in groups of women might be something new which could open up new and more liberating ways to be for all persons, Morton goes on to make the following statement,

While I experienced this kind of hearing through women, I am convinced it is one of those essential dimensions of the full human experience long programmed out of our culture and our religious tradition. In time I came to understand the wider implication of this reversal as revolutionary and profoundly theological. Hearing of this sort is equivalent to empowerment. We empower one another by hearing the other to speech. We empower the disinherit, the outsider, as we are able to hear them name in their own way their own oppression and suffering. In turn, we are empowered as we put ourselves in a position to be heard by the disinherit (in this case other women) to speaking our own feeling of being caught and trapped. Hearing in this sense can break through political and social structures and image a new system. A great ear at the heart of the universe -- at the heart of our common life -- hearing human beings to speech (Morton, 1985, p. 128).

In spite of Morton's comment, "since this kind of hearing first came to me, I have tried to analyze the process, but it resists analysis and explanation. It traffics in another and different logic" (p. 128), I felt confident that an examination would be possible given the communication
methodology I intended to use. With this articulation, I decided to choose as my research focus the communication process within a women's group, and, given my interests and affinity, a women's group convened to explore issues of spirituality, theology, and religion.
CHAPTER 1
THE FEMINIST GROUP IN THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine an emancipatory praxis based on the way women do things. In particular, its goal is to examine the praxis generated through the communication process of a women's small group which follows the form of the feminist consciousness raising group.

The phrase "consciousness raising group" has become widely used in contemporary American culture, usually, but not always, to refer to groups of women who organized at a grass roots level in a particular historical time and place to become conscious of ways they had been socialized into behaving that were oppressive to themselves and supportive of an oppressive social system, and to take action to change this situation.

In the Introduction which begins this dissertation, a passage from theologian Nell Morton's *The Journey is Home* describes what happened to one woman in a consciousness raising group. In this instance, what had happened was that the group of women she was with had sat silently hearing her story until she was finished. The woman's response was this: "I have a strange feeling that you heard me before I started. You
heard me to my own story." Morton goes on to develop the insight she found in this,

I knew I had been experiencing something I had never experienced before. A complete reversal of the going logic in which someone speaks precisely so that more accurate hearing may take place. This woman was saying, and I had experienced, a depth hearing that takes place before the speaking -- a hearing that is far more than acute listening. A hearing engaged in by the whole body that evokes speech -- a new creation. The woman had been heard to her own speech. (Morton, 1985, p. 128)

Also in the Introduction, Carol Christ, from her perspective as a feminist scholar in Religious Studies, provides a statement from her book Diving Deep and Surfacing which indicates the impetus to "be heard into speech." A woman silenced through oppression seeks to be heard into speech because "without articulation, the self perishes" (p. 6). Christ says of Morton's insight,

Her phrase captures the dynamic in which the presence of other women who have had similar experiences makes it possible for women to say things they have never said before, to think thoughts they would have suppressed. As Morton says, there is a hearing that occurs before speech and 'evokes new speech.' In consciousness raising new stories are born, and women who hear and tell their stories are inspired to create new life possibilities for all women. (Christ, 1986, p. 7)

These insights inspired the choice of focus for this research, and will guide the review of the literature on the women's consciousness raising group since it was in such groups that the phenomenon of "being heard into speech" occurred (which is not to say other kinds of groups have not engendered the phenomenon through their processes). In the review of the literature which follows, attention will be focused on how feminists are structuring their group process in order to create the possibility of raised consciousness in group members.
The extended passage from the **NOW Guidelines for Feminist Consciousness Raising** (1983) which follows encapsulates the group process described in various ways throughout the literature about the feminist group. Its presence here is intended as a summary of how feminist activists understand the consciousness raising group process before the literature is examined more deeply. Terms in capitals are present in the original in bold type. The parts underlined are included here to emphasize aspects which seem similar to the phenomenon "hearing into speech" indicated by Morton.

In...Introductory CR, the participant experiences four major phases: entry, inquiry, assimilation and activism.

While it may seem that the ENTRY POINT occurs when a person decides to join NOW Consciousness-Raising, it usually happens at some point during the CR session. The decision to participate is usually based on a desire for answers, growth, understanding and solutions. Joining the group is accompanied by anticipation, the expectation that something is going to happen. The actual entry point may not take place until the second or third topic. That is the time when the participant feels comfortable enough to remove any facade and discover who she/he is and why.

In a group of fifteen, a minimum of two and a maximum of five, will pull back, unable to cope with anything that would force them from their perception of reality as good/bad, right/wrong. They will choose to hang onto the old belief systems rather than take the risk. Some may retreat, either by departing the group physically or mentally.

INQUIRY refers to the time spent talking and listening. During this phase, people frequently recognize that some of the old explanations no longer work. Moments of mental or emotional impasse may be responded to by either laughter or tears. Either response, at the point of impasse, represents the release of old concepts or beliefs. The inquiry stage demonstrates that feminists do not rely on tradition, media, or "experts" but are capable of arriving at their own conclusions.

ASSIMILATION is assumed to take place after each CR discussion session and after a CR series has been completed. We see our world from a feminist perspective. **Based on the shared experiences and**
the acquired vocabulary, we have new ideas to use as thinking
tools when interpreting the world and our place in it.

INITIAL ACTIVISM is the moment when the shift from personal to
political becomes a reality. Once we enter into the CR process and
participate in the inquiry, we have the information and,
hopefully, the desire to take action.

The decision to take responsibility for our personal and political
lives and to work for change may have effects that are small and
momentary or may result in a sustained effort to eliminate sexism
on a much larger scale. (pp. 4-5)

The assumptions in the passages from Morton and Christ cited in
the forward combined with descriptions of the process of a consciousness
raising group in the review of the literature are that doing these
activities will hopefully result in occurrences of "being heard into
speech", of articulating the self so that it will not perish, and the actions
of that self once liberated to make emancipatory changes in the
oppressive circumstances.

The task of this research is to discover if and how a process
happens that could be identified as "hearing into speech" and
"articulating the self." The accomplishment of this task should comprise
an answer to one research question: How does a feminist group, informed
by a feminist consciousness of process, create and maintain a group in
keeping with its vision?

Feminist theologian Nelle Morton points toward the "consciousness
raising group" as a cluster of intentional practices which provides the
process she calls "hearing into speech" (1985, p. 127). In this research a
broader term, "feminist group," will be used to identify the group process
under study, and "consciousness raising group" will be used to refer to a
way women organized at a particular historical time and place. "Hearing
into speech” and “articulation of self” will remain metaphors for possible consequences of the process known as consciousness raising.

The impetus of this exploration will be Morton’s notion of “hearing into speech,” her thought that this is something all humans could do, “one of those essential dimensions of the full human experience long programmed out of our culture and our religious tradition” (1985, p. 128) and that “hearing in this sense can break through political and social structures and image a new system” (p. 128).

Thus, for the purposes of this research, the goal will be to reveal the communicative activity in the dynamic process of a particular group form as one way humans have creatively responded to the need for a new invention inherent in a historical, chronically oppressive social situation. The focus will be on how women communicatively create, maintain, and transform a feminist women’s group.

A broad search through the feminist literature on women’s groups, feminist literature generally, the communication literature on small groups, particularly women’s groups, and the literature on emancipatory practices in which communicative behavior plays a central role, found some research directly focusing on the practices used to structure emancipatory groups, some focusing explicitly on communicative practices, and a great deal of anecdotal evidence throughout the literatures which suggests that varieties of the feminist group exist ubiquitously.

However, very little scholarly work has been done recently which explicitly studies the communicative practices used to create, maintain, and remake the feminist women’s group. The study of the communicative
practices in the process of the feminist group will be the primary focus of this dissertation.

Briefly, the study is needed because:

A. the group form was created intentionally to realize a vision and to accomplish emancipatory goals;

B. the group form is popular, ubiquitous, comes in many variations, and has been used in response to many needs;

C. anecdotal evidence suggests consistent difficulty in realizing some parts of the feminist vision for this group form while other consequences have been nurtured, yet,

D. the processes which constitute the group form are studied surprisingly little communicatively, although group structuring has rested on assumptions about communication, and,

E. it has been been assumed to be communicatively egalitarian and pluralistic.

The remainder of this chapter will consist of two primary sections. The first section presents a brief review of literature which addresses the dynamic process of small group communication. This literature is primarily found in the small group communication literature, but also includes occasional forays into feminist literature. The intent of this section is to provide a context for understanding the communicatively dynamic feminist group form through a review of basic group dynamics and attention to process.

The second section will review the history of the feminist group. This review will include a discussion of the vision of feminists for what the consciousness raising group could and would do for the place of women in society and the use of the group as an organizing tool of the women's liberation movement. The intent of this section is to provide
general background material in which to situate the feminist group, to focus on the vision, structuring, and consequences of the feminist group, and to discuss the assumptions which underlie the envisioned group process, particularly egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic ideals which rely on communicative practices.

These broad reviews are meant to provide a description of the phenomenon of the feminist group form, background information and a context with which to understand Chapter II. In that chapter, the extensive descriptions of how to do a feminist group provided by the literature of the past twenty five years will be analyzed in some depth using a theoretic which emphasizes a communicative practice orientation to examine the dynamic processes of the feminist group form.

Process in Small Group Communication

This section will review literature on basic characteristics of small groups in order to establish what the feminist group form can be assumed to share with any small groups, and will review additional literature which focuses on the communication processes of small groups as important to understanding their consequences. It is important to bear in mind that while the consciousness raising group was an invention in response to a certain time and place, the feminists who were intent on reinventing the form were aware of the dynamics of small group process, and intentionally created practices to constrain some aspects they had found oppressive (Morgan, 1970; Dreyfus, 1973).

For this recreation of the small group feminists both drew upon their own experience and upon the practices of other "revolutionary"
groups with which they were familiar, such as the "speak bitterness" meetings in Mao's China, and the "testifying" used in the civil rights movement (Dreifus, 1973; Steinem, 1992). A more thorough review of this historical awareness will follow later in this chapter.

These feminists of the late 1960s and early 1970s also show an awareness of the universal dynamics of small group process as they intentionally attempt to constrain and redirect aspects through specific practices. This will be more thoroughly addressed both later in this chapter, and in portions of chapter two which examine communicative practices of the feminist group from a theoretic perspective.

The exploration of universal dynamics in small group process for the purposes of this research is to provide a foundational understanding of small group process as the examination of the feminist group begins. The communication of small groups has been a widely studied phenomenon in communication literature, the study of small group communication less so.

As this discussion of small group communication process begins, a definition for a group is almost axiomatic. Drawing on the work of Beales (1950) and Fisher (1974), Haslett, Geis and Carter (1992) summarize such a definition thusly,

---

1 Some early authors argue that the women's consciousness raising group of the late 1960s was created in parallel to other emancipatory groups, rather than drawing ideas and inspiration from them. However, since many of the American feminists' experience in the Civil Rights movement and participation in the "cells" of other radical groups of the time, it is reasonable to assume that the women who were inventing the CR group were influenced by these earlier grassroots forms, albeit unknowingly.
A group is ... a collection of people with interconnected, repetitive communicative behaviors. Within small groups individuals perceive one another as individuals as opposed to larger groups where individuals may be identified only as "a member" of this or that category or faction.

Small groups, therefore, have (1) norms -- shared expectations and patterns of behavior; (2) roles -- specific functions, carried out by specific behaviors and obligations; (3) goals -- specific purposes to be accomplished; and (4) interdependence -- goals and behaviors of group members that are interconnected and depend upon one another. (Bales, 1950; Fisher, 1974) (Haslett, Geis & Carter, 1992, p. 103)

Most groups pass through consistent patterns or phases in working on their problems. Which phase a group is in is an important characteristic of the group because it controls group activities. Several alternative models of group development have been proposed. Both stage models and multiphase models provide useful insights into group processes. These models help identify where groups are in their work and can enable the members to facilitate group progress. Four stage models include: orientation, conflict over alternatives, emergence of a proposed solution and, finally, decision, a reinforcement or commitment to the solution (Fisher, 1974). (Haslett, Geis & Carter, 1992, p. 104)

Additional basic work on groups, especially task groups (Folb, 1979, suggests that because it attempts to get women to effect change on a personal and political level, the consciousness raising group is task-oriented, (p. 185)), identify generally accepted models of group development, such as that by Tuckman below. Again, understanding these basic elements of a group's activity may be held to be pertinent in all groups, including a feminist women's group, no matter what other attention is paid to structuring the group in new and innovative ways. Poole (1983) recounts the widely used models which categorize group development into concurrent task activities and socioemotional processes. Here is one typical model suggested by Tuckman (1965).
Phase I appropriate
Socioemotional dimension -- sets standards for behavior.
Task dimension -- defines the task and operating procedures.

Phase II group
Socioemotional dimension -- conflicts within the emerge.
Task dimension -- conflict develops around individuals, and between different individual perspectives on the task.

Phase III cohesiveness
Socioemotional dimension -- creates group and a structure for social interaction.
Task dimension -- exchange of opinions concerning alternative solutions.

Phase IV
Socioemotional dimension -- use of social structure to resolve interpersonal problems.
Task dimension -- an agreed-upon solution emerges and the group expresses commitment to it.

As is typical of much of the small group communication literature, in Tuckman's model, process has to do with "socioemotional" aspects of the group, but is not explicitly understood as being central to "task activities." Elsewhere, Haslett, Geis and Carter (1992) provide a concise description of the notion "dynamic process" as it is used widely in the small group communication literature.

Dynamic refers to processes of change over time. Group activity changes over time, both in longer term intervals called developmental stages, and also in the shorter term intervals of ongoing communication within a single group meeting. (Haslett, Geis & Carter, 1992, p. 104)

Tacitly, the literature on small group communication assumes that any group will share these characteristics whether it is primarily a social group or a task oriented group. Since these characteristics of a group are considered to be immutable, for the purpose of this research, they can be taken to pertain to the feminist group form as well.

Gouran's 1992 overview of small group communication literature indicates that group process is, surprisingly, seldom the topic of study.
He characterizes most small group communication research as focusing on outcomes groups achieve and the kinds of relationships and affective states members develop or on how communication functions in groups, what he terms "processes of influence" such as individuation and deindividuation, socialization, conformity, cooperation and competition, group development, and leadership.\(^2\)

Gouran singles out Marshall Scott Poole's application of Anthony Giddens' structuration theory to small group communication processes of influence as one scholar whose work in the area of "the evolution and development of both communication in groups and the groups themselves sufficiently important and interesting in their own right to warrant inattention to outcomes" (1992, p. 120).

Whether the process of influence captured by the set of categories above have been examined out of interest in group outcomes or not, the study of them has possibly been the most revealing of the complex nature of communication in groups and has provided better bases for describing the dynamics of group processes.... (Gouran, 1992, p. 120)

A review of Poole's 1992 work using structuration to reexamine group processes reveals attention of interest to this research in its consideration of the process by which groups produce and reproduce social systems on the basis of rules and resources. Poole's work, thus, suggests a useful placing in the small group literature for an

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2 Although the terminology has not always been consistent, scholarship on groups historically has been concerned with processes of influence that are often referred to as individuation and deindividuation (Friedman, 1988), socialization (Shimanoff, 1980), conformity (Andrews, 1988), choice-shift (Meyers and Seibold, 1990), cooperation and competition (Deutsch, 1973), group development (Tuckman, 1965), structuration (Poole, 1981), and leadership (Bass, 1990; Fisher, 1985) (Gouran, 1992, p. 119).
examination of the communicative activity in the dynamic process of the feminist group form.

Eleanor Novek (1991) also uses the theoretic work of Anthony Giddens as a basis for examining women's communicating. She writes,

Anthony Giddens (1984) asserts that the exercise of agency is a natural state of affairs for human beings. People possess 'causal powers' which give them the ability to 'make a difference' in their own lives via the capacity to 'intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs (p. 14).'

However, as people experience the complex interdependent web of political, economic, social and natural forces in society, some come to see themselves as constrained, involuntarily held in or fenced out by factors they cannot influence. (Novek, 1991, p. 1)

Poole argues that one way to examine group processes is through structuration theory (Giddens, 1976) which recognizes that 'people in groups actively control their behavior. It would also have to recognize that behavior is shaped and constrained by forces not totally under the control of the members. The influence of these forces is channeled by members' choices about how to react to them' (Poole, 1992, p. 148). This is one of the few approaches to small group process which addresses process in a way similar to the interests of this study.

The process in which members structure groups is ongoing and continuous. It happens throughout the life of the group and is never finished. According to this theory, members are always structuring their groups. They do so with every act. If the structure of the group changes, it is because members have done something that has changed it. If the structure of the group stays the same, it is because members are acting in such a way that the same structure is created and maintained with every act. According to this theory, nothing is ever completely accomplished. The group is never finished or static. Instead, groups are always in the process of creation and re-creation. Nothing ever stops. Even if the group looks very stable and conservative, it is because members are acting in such a way to create the same group structure over and over, creating an appearance of sameness and stability. However, underlying this is a constant process of change. (Poole, 1992, p. 148)
This discussion of structuration theory as it applies to small group communication is not presented here with the intent of advancing this theoretic approach to be used in the present research. It is presented as one of the very few approaches to small group communication which directly implicates process in all aspects of the group and which suggests that the continuing choices and reiterations of group behavior are what comprise a given group. Its presence in the literature opens a door in the direction which the research in this study will pursue.

This very brief review of small group communication with regard to small group process has been provided as a way to understand those aspects of a feminist group which it shares in common with all small groups. However, Jenkins and Kramer (1978) in their touchstone overview of communication research about the consciousness raising (CR) group, assert the unique nature of the feminist group process,

It could be argued that the dynamics of the CR groups is a result of the cathartic nature of the groups rather than a reflection of distinctive female patterns of communication. However, the materials we have gathered led us to reject this interpretation. We feel that the CR groups deserve particular attention for the following reasons: The CR group does not fit into any of the traditional classifications of groups. It is not primarily an affinity group (rewards of friendship the only goal), an interest group, a therapy group, or a task group. The CR group is a group in which members believe that the group process decided upon has itself important implications for a social movement and for an entire culture. The members of the CR group -- all of whom have had experiences in other groups -- believe that this interaction is unique. (Jenkins and Kramer, 1978, pp. 81-82)

More recently, feminist scholars in communication have addressed the possibilities for transformative process in keeping with aspirations for feminist group process as well as one direction in keeping with "structuring" a feminist group.
Although you cannot force transformation on your audience, what you can do is create, through the communicative options you select, an environment in which others may change if they are inclined to do so. (Foss and Foss, 1994, p. 5)

At this point, with the notion of structuring in mind, passages of the often cited feminist scholar Starhawk (1982) which present metaphors such as webs and circles which resonate with the structuring processes described above provide a transition into a review of the literature about the feminist group.

All groups have structures -- open and hidden. Just as individuals have bones and flesh, and also a subtle energy-body in a treelike pattern formed by currents of power, so too a group has an outer form and an inner form.

We can change consciousness, we can transform our inner landscape, tell new stories, dream visions in new thought-forms. But to change culture we need to bond in new ways, to change the structures of our organizations and communities. 'Function follows form,' we could say (reversing the Bauhaus dictum). For as we have seen, structure determines how energy will flow. (Starhawk, 1982, p. 114)

The Feminist Women's Group

This section will review the history of the consciousness raising group as used in the Women's Liberation Movement. Again, in this discussion, the phrase "consciousness raising group" will be used to refer to discussion of actual historical groups (since this is what a variety of such groups are called in the literature) while the more abstract and global "feminist group" will be used more abstractly to refer to the particular group process under study here. Additional discussion will focus on the visions of the feminist group, ways to structure such a group, and the intended (and unintended) consequences of the feminist group process. assumptions which underlie the group form. Also, the
fundamentally communicative assumptions which underlie the intentional feminist group process will be addressed, particularly egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic assumptions.

A word about the literature

For all that most readers will have heard of consciousness raising groups, or women's groups as part of the Women's Liberation Movement and will have some sense of what is distinct about such groups, no focused and extensive body of literature exists on this readily identifiable and presumably ubiquitous form of small group.

A typical search through the literature would begin with the most recent literature on a topic and progress backwards in time to a few classic works, and out into related current literatures via interesting or frequently mentioned cites. This literature search began with writing by Nelle Morton and Carol Christ and, almost immediately, the most cited, most relevant works were found to be from ten to fifteen years earlier, and also in a wide variety of literature bases. This continued to be the case up to the most recent work. If presence of articles in the communication literature were a measure, the feminist small group could arguably be seen as a fad, an artifact of the birth of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s which had all but disappeared by the end of the next decade.

However, a wider focus shows that women's groups are examined for one reason or another throughout all the literatures included in this review, although recent articles have rarely addressed the process which is generated through the praxis of a feminist women's group.
In reading through the feminist literature on women's groups and following my discoveries in feminist work on spirituality and theology, a proliferation of women's groups were mentioned in passing, not as the focus of the work, usually, but as a significant location of generativity for the feminist writer. This body of anecdotal evidence, then, is an important source documenting the continuation of the feminist group form.

For the purposes of this study, then, the works cited here range over the past 25 years and include a variety of literatures, such as those focusing on feminist groups, feminist theology and spirituality, feminist critiques of religion and proposed alternatives, small group communication, feminist critiques of epistemology, and wide-ranging anecdotal accounts which document the continued presence and ubiquity of the feminist women's group.

Review of the history of the feminist group form

A review of the history of the literature about the feminist group form begins at the time of the Women's Liberation Movement, primarily in the United States, in the late 1960s. For this reason, most of the literature focusing on the group form was written in the early to mid 1970s, which corresponds with the beginnings of what is often called the "second wave of women's liberation".

In the beginning, the consciousness raising group was conceived as the primary organizing tool for a grassroots liberatory revolution for women. It was intentionally different than other groups of which many American women were a member and the praxis was intended to break
through social conditioning to reveal oppressive conditions. Jenkins and Kramer in their excellent 1978 review article, "Small group process: Learning from women" emphasize this unique process.

It could be argued that the dynamic of the CR groups is a result of the cathartic nature of the groups rather than a reflection of distinctive female patterns of communication. However, the materials we have gathered led us to reject this interpretation. We feel that the CR groups deserve particular attention for the following reasons: The CR group does not fit into any of the traditional classifications of groups. It is not primarily an affinity group (rewards of friendship the only goal), an interest group, a therapy group, or a task group. The CR group is a group in which members believe that the group process decided upon has itself important implications for a social movement and for an entire culture. The members of the CR group -- all of whom have had experiences in other groups -- believe that this interaction is unique. (p. 81)

Most of the literature which explicitly centers on this form is from the early to mid 1970s, describing how to organize a group with explicit instructions and presenting exemplars of actual groups. Claudia Dreifus, a feminist scholar and activist during this period, argues passionately for this emergent, emancipatory group form.

Consciousness raising is one of the most political acts in which women can engage. In CR, women learn what economics, politics, and sociology mean on the most direct level: as they affect their lives.... Once the questions are raised, actions begin to provide answers.

Further, CR is creative; it is a process in which women invent their own tactics for social change. Doing things differently from menfolk means developing new nonhierarchical, antiauthoritarian political forms.

CR is also a unique opportunity for women to meet on territory that is strictly their own.... Weekly consciousness-raising meetings become free space for a female culture to develop, a place where women do not have to be ashamed of their femininity or female ways. Within CR, females learn the liberating joys of woman pride. Embarrassment about shyness, inarticulateness, physical imperfection, and emotionality are banished. Instinct counts. Feeling counts. While men measure the world by
property, power, and status, women in CR can judge reality by what they have seen or felt.

Consciousness raising is many things, but one thing it is not is psychotherapy, or any other kind of therapy. Therapeutic processes have been employed mostly to encourage participants to adjust to the social order. CR seeks to invite rebellion. Psychotherapy frequently forces the individual to think of her problems as private and personal. CR, through group discussions and analysis, shows women that most female problems stems from a patriarchal societal structure. (Dreifus, 1973, p. 6-8)

During the late 1970s and 1980s, feminist activism began taking place in larger organizations, such as the National Organization for Women, with a concomittant drop off in the literature about organizing feminist small groups. From that time to the present most accounts of feminist groups are anecdotal, mentioned as generative places for various creative, activist, collaborative, supportive endeavors by women.

CR groups are self-initiated, long term, closely bonded groups which originated in response to societal conditions. CR groups have evolved into a variety of feminist groups which are continually changing in form and substance. (Jenkins and Kramer, 1978, p. 81)

One of the few (and often cited) authors writing about women's groups in the early 1980s whose work touches on the evolving group is the feminist academician and witch, Starhawk. Although the group model she promotes is not exclusive to women, it is widely invoked by feminists interested in developing a communal spiritual practice. Thus, she is an appropriate locus of attention because she is widely cited by feminists concerned with the way women do groups. She bases her suggestions on feminist praxis with groups, tested through a wealth of experience, and with an underpinning in spiritual practice and theory.
To empower individuals, groups must be small enough so that within them we can each have time to speak, to be heard, to know each other personally. The time we give to a person and the depth of attention we pay to her/his words and feelings are measure of the worth we accord her/him. We enact the theology of immanence, the belief that we are each inherently valuable, by creating groups in which each person is given time and attention -- given respect. (Starhawk, 1982 p. 99)

The concept of a group-mind (and even that of a group bond) is a delicate subject to put forth in an age of cults. But the bond we are talking about is never one that requires people to stop thinking independently, to lose their individuality. On the contrary, a small group that functions by means of the principle of immanence -- one that accords each person respect for her/his views, ideas, and feelings -- strengthens the individual's sense of self. (Starhawk, 1982, p. 100)

In a 1992 article in Ms. Magazine, Gloria Steinem suggests the feminist group form continues for some women, but that many active feminists have never been in what she calls "revolutionary circles," and hunger for what could happen if they were. As this is one of the few recent articles which focuses upon the feminist small group as a form, and because Steinem speaks authoritatively on the subject as a leader in the second wave of the feminist movement she is quoted extensively. She says,

For the past year, I've been traveling around this country talking to women...learning that there's a great impatience out there to put the internal and external together into one revolutionary whole.... And as if the feminist movement that pioneered the connection between the personal and the political had been under such political pressure for so long that the personal part of the equation had been neglected -- and had left a deep longing. (p. 26).

When I began in the late 1970s to ask women at movement meetings if they had ever experienced a small-group, consciousness-raising process, only about a tenth said they had. When I asked how many still had any similar group as a part of their lives, even fewer said yes. By the end of the 1980s, there were almost no yeses to the first question, and a grab bag of answers to the second ... but little that consciously linked personal affect to political cause or vice versa (p. 26)
She goes on to assess how things got this way,

As a movement, we got into this impersonal place in an understandable way. When this second wave was beginning, small-group feminism was more natural because that’s what we usually were: a few “crazy” women in each town who met in living rooms, coffee shops, and church basements. As ... pioneers of consciousness-raising demonstrated in the late 1960s, this method... allowed the truth of feelings and experiences to lead to theory and to action.... But as the tasks got bigger and a feminist analysis grew more widespread, there was also a need for bigger groups that could handle larger numbers and more sustained projects.... Larger organizations were a sign of energy and success, yet in the process of forming them, the free-form small group of the place was largely displaced. (Steinem, 1992, p. 26)

Thus, most of the literature which explicitly looks at women’s emancipatory groups in terms of how to do what will liberate, also anchors that activity in its historical, political situation.

The next portions of this section will focus more directly on four aspects of the feminist group and its role in the women’s liberation movement: the vision for what it could be and what it could do for women’s place in society; ways it is structured; intended and unintended consequences; and, the assumptions on which it was based.

Feminist vision for the liberation of women through groups

The creation of consciousness raising groups, of course, grew out of a vision for what could liberate women from their oppressed circumstances. Fueling the activism which is the focus of this literature are passages which eloquently elucidate the vision feminists have had for women, and give a picture of the anticipated (and often realized) liberation for women through the consciousness raising groups.
The first two quotations speak to the hopes and motivations of feminists for what liberated women could be and could mean.

I wish to see women neither heroines or brutes, but reasonable creatures.... For me, to be a feminist is to answer the question, 'Are women human?' with a yes.... It is not about whether women are better than, worse than, or identical with men.... It's about justice, fairness and access to the broad range of human experience. (Pollitt, 1994)

The moment we...hesitate to tell the truth that is in us and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, life flows no longer into our souls. Every truth we see is ours to give the world, not to keep for ourselves alone, for in so doing we cheat humanity...and check our own development. (Stanton, quoted, 1972, p. 156)

With this vision of what the liberation of women could mean, in the following three quotations, the nuts and bolts of creating a grassroots process which could produce such liberation across a society is addressed by feminists writing in the early 1970s.

The only hope of a new feminist movement is some kind of only now barely emerging politics of revolutionary feminism.... That politics comes from what has been called 'rap sessions,' 'bitch sessions,' or 'consciousness raising' which the small groups of radical women began to form around 1966-67. The technique attracted a lot of ridicule from men; it seems that when the Chinese used such a technique, 'Speak Pains to Recall Pains,' it was right-on revolutionary, but when women used it, it was 'group therapy' or a 'hen party'.... Some groups in the Women's Liberation Movement used consciousness-raising techniques only for a few months before moving into direct actions; others remained primarily talk groups and/or study groups; still others developed along both lines, probably the most healthy combination of theory correcting practice, practice correcting theory. (Morgan, 1970, pp. xxiii-xxiv)

Since the late 60s, the Consciousness Raising group (CR group) has been the mainstay of the Women's Movement in this country. It is a unique and potent small group experience -- one that allows women to share, look at and learn from those life situations common to all of us who have 'come of age' in a patriarchal society.

What began among New York feminists as an informal rap group in which women began to look at social and political oppression in
light of their own personal experiences, soon grew beyond the
bounds of New York and the Radical Feminist community. By the
deal of the decade, the CR group was a well established and vital
force in the Women's Movement and beyond. Women from all
parts of the country -- from small towns and suburbs -- and from
all walks of life were seeking information about CR groups and
forming their own.

The great grassroots appeal of the CR group is two-fold -- it is
accessible and it is personal.... What the CR experience brings
home to each woman involved is that 'the personal is political'.
That is, the politics, sociology and economics of women's
containment and oppression can be most graphically experienced
in their daily lives. (Folb, 1979, 182-3)

These authors reflect images of the passionate hopes feminists
have had for the consciousness raising groups as well as the powerful
and painful experience of organizing a grassroots revolution.

The way the group is done

In much of the literature, the roots of the feminist group are
described as located in the practices of other groups of people in many
different situations from for many different purposes. The common
threads are to have all members able to speak, be heard, and have power
in the activities of the communities or groups of which they were
members. This portion describes the way a feminist group is created and
maintained, focusing first on the practices of its historical and cross
cultural roots, and second on the distinctive practices of the
consciousness raising groups.

Roots. What is called the consciousness raising group by feminists
beginning in the late 1960s was based on some knowledge of similar
techniques of many other oppressed groups or different cultures. The
communicative process is called such things as: testifying, speaking bitterness, dialogue, rounds, even working together. Many authors note a variety of sources for the ideas of how to structure consciousness raising groups or revolutionary circles. Gloria Steinem is typical in mentioning the sources in passing, as when she states,

As Ann Forer, Carol Hanisch, Kathie Sarachild, the small group then known as Redstockings, and other pioneers of consciousness raising demonstrated in the late 1960s, this method that paralleled the 'testifying' meeting of the civil right movement and the 'speaking bitterness' meetings of the Chinese Cultural Revolution allowed the truth of feelings and experiences to lead to theory and to action. (Steinem, 1992, p. 26)

The following more detailed quotations give a sense of the way feminist authors trace the consciousness raising group or the feminist group form back to the innovations of earlier peoples (although few of these authors cite anything but word of mouth attributions for these).

**Chinese "Speak bitterness meetings"**

In the rural villages of North China during the late 1940s, woman's terrible complaint found a political outlet. Speak bitterness to recall bitterness, commanded the political cadres of Mao Tse-tung's Revolutionary Army. Speak pain to recall pain.

Speak bitterness meetings were the first consciousness-raising groups, the first known attempt to convert womankind's private laments into political acts.

It happened in the town squares. As Mao's...army purged villages of ... control, revolutionary political workers called townswomen to village centers asking them to recite the crimes their men committed against them. Slowly, the females told of [crimes]. For many of the participants, long sequestered and isolated in their husbands' homes, Speaking Bitterness was their first opportunity for equalitarian (sic) contact with other human beings. The process of venting anger became personally liberating... Together the women found the strength to confront the men who previously had oppressed them, forcing these men to change their ways.

Here was a truly revolutionary act. Before, women had been so convinced of their inferiority, they didn't feel capable of acting
on their own behalf. Speaking Bitterness gave them strength. (Dreifus, 1973, p. 2)

Native American rounds
The Native Americans do rounds in the sweat lodge, passing a rattle from one person to another. Whoever holds the rattle may speak, chant, call the elements, pray, or sing, as she/he feels inspired. The group-thinking and group-feeling processes that encourage shared power and circular structure are based on rounds.

When we do rounds, the quality of our listening is as important as the quality of our talking. If we maintain that everybody's concerns and views have inherent value, we are obligated to listen to what each person is saying.

At the same time, when we speak we must become aware of whether or not people are actually listening. Instead of repeating ourselves over and over because we sense that we are not being heard, we can learn to comment on the level of attention, to ask if people are bored, to shut up if necessary. Inflicting boredom on others is a form of violence. (Starhawk, 1982, p. 101)

Quaker dialogue
A similar process is called Quaker Dialogue. Each member of the circle speaks about a common problem, and about how she or he resolved it. We do not comment on each other's statements or discuss them -- but we learn from each other's solutions. (Starhawk, 1982, p. 103)

Religious women's groups
...the 'prodigious influence' of autonomous Christian women's groups was commented on the [sic] 1842. This long history is something that Christian women have to offer the secular Women's Movement as much as the other way around....Virginia Baron...developed this idea even further: I've been involved in the secular and the Christian women's movement. From the earliest days with the secular movement I'd come home from meetings with a splitting headache, because women were literally screaming at each other -- everything tore us apart. In the churches we have this very ancient heritage, going back before the emancipation movement, to the missionary societies of which our great grandmothers were a part. Then our mothers came along in the church women's organizations -- service organizations mostly -- but they learned how to work together, how to organize together. Women in the church have provided a great deal which hasn't perhaps been recognized, but the women who come out of those backgrounds know so much better how to keep things together. We know that it isn't easy; but it's in your blood, in your growing up that of course women can work together with other women. (Virginia Baron, personal interview, quoted in Maitland, 1983, p. 27-28)
Communicative practices of the CR/feminist women's group

The following quotations are characteristic examples of the way the literature talks about the intentional practices which go into creating and maintaining the the feminist group process. Through them, ubiquitous communicative practices employed can be seen.³

The first several quotes come from the small, often-cited core of feminists writing about consciousness raising groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They speak with the intensity and drama of pioneer activists fighting against overwhelming odds and fomenting for the Women's Liberation Movement.

Convinced she had hit upon something extraordinary, Sarachild wrote an outline, organizing a guide and manifesto to CR, and brought it to the first Women's Liberation Conference, held in Chicago in November 1968. Reprinted here in excerpted form, this was a seminal paper that created the consciousness-raising movement.

I. The "bitch session" cell group
   A. Ongoing consciousness expansion
      1. Personal recognition and testimony
      2. Personal testimony -- methods of group practice
         a. Going around the room with key questions on key topics
         b. Speaking out experience at random
         c. Cross-examination
      3. Relating and generalizing individual testimony" (Sarachild, cited by Dcri fus, 1973, pp. 13-14; also cited in Morgan, 1970)

Its basic unit is the small group of from five to thirty women held together by an often tenuous network of personal contacts and feminist publications. These groups have variety of functions but a very consistent style. Their common characteristics are a conscious lack of formal structure, an emphasis on participation

³ A more thorough and theoretically directed review of the part of the literature which deals with "how to do consciousness raising" is provided in Chapter II of this study. The intent here is to give a brief introduction to some of the practices generally held to be characteristic of the feminist group throughout the literature.
by everyone, sharing of tasks, and the exclusion of men. The thousands of sister chapters around the country are virtually independent of one another, linked only by numerous publications, personal correspondence, and cross-country travelers. They form and dissolve at such a rate that no one can keep track of them. (Freeman, 1975, pp. 103-4)

Method of Discussion: Begin each session by having everyone speak for five to ten minutes. Follow that with questions and answers, debate, then analysis. In most cases, hostile questions are to be avoided. CR is a place to practice sisterhood, not emotional genocide. Draw conclusions from what you discuss. Try to find a pattern to your experiences. Relate what you have learned to supplemental readings from feminist anthologies and books. Avoid straying from the announced topic unless something urgent has come up in a members' life.

Can one speak out of turn? Some CR groups are strict about forbidding members to speak out of turn. If someone feels she has something timely to relate, let her do so. However, if a woman persists in monopolizing all discussions, she should be politely admonished by her sisters.

Remember above everything else: the primary goal of consciousness raising is political. Always frame one's personal experiences within a political context....

Finally, always speak the truth. There is no other way you can hope your sisters will also speak the truth -- and that your observations come from real experience, not fantasy. If you suspect a sister of lying -- which certainly does happen -- gently nudge her toward a more truthful direction. Unless it is an extreme lie, don't accuse her of anything more than distortion. Hostility is best avoided. Leave barroom brawling to the boys. (Dreifus, 1973, pp. 26-27)

Later feminist authors revisit the practices of the consciousness raising group. They are writing at least ten years after the earlier activists, and both the tone of their writing and the tenor of the group they describe has moved toward the conventional, from "younger" feminists who have come of age in a world already impacted by the Women's Liberation Movement. Yet the sense of driving necessity in a hostile or at best alien world still permeates the words. Starhawk is one of the most cited and is typical.
[Consciousness-Raising Rounds] The group picks a subject, such as success, our mothers, or sex. We go around the circle. Each person is given time to speak. Time may be allotted for questions, clarifications, or responses. We speak from personal experience. When the circle has been completed, we have an open discussion about the common threads and the differences among us. From that discussion, we may develop an analysis.

This is the basic process from which much feminist analysis developed. We empower ourselves by seeking the truth in our experience, by making our own truths, not those of the Great Man, the basis for our theories. (Starhawk, 1982, p. 103)

Finally, in the 1992 issue of *Ms.* magazine mentioned earlier, Gloria Steinem compiles a list of guidelines for forming groups for yet another generation of feminists who feel unsupported and alienated, for whom organizing has lost its grounding in personal experience. In the following long quotation, it becomes clear that some aspect of communicating is central to almost every guideline mentioned.

I asked women to name the most important characteristics of groups that they have found personally nourishing and politically effective.... These are not rules. They are organic practices that help produce desired results by being desirable in themselves. The ends are the means.

Speaking from the "I." The point is to tell our own stories. We may offer first-person experiences in response to the similar experiences of others, but judgments, criticism, the advice of experts or others not in the room, and sentences beginning, "You should..." are not the honest, all-five-senses experiences on which such groups are founded.

Equality. There is no leader. Part of the purpose is to challenge habits of passivity, dominance, hierarchy, and need for outside instruction. Each woman deserves to become her own leader, and that means she is listened to carefully, with no interruptions other than questions for clarity, and with the right of as much time as any other member. If one or more women are monopolizing or holding back, it's up to each member to name what's going on, and restore a balance. If tasks have to be done, rotations or lot is a good idea so that no one dictates by skill or resource, or ends up feeling put upon.
Confidentiality. Stories and experiences told in the group are to be kept within it unless otherwise indicated by the speaker. Trust is a requisite of honesty.

"Going around the room." At least once early in a meeting, each woman addresses herself to the question at hand, says what she hopes will come out of this meeting, what has happened since the last go-round -- whatever. The fact of breaking the silence and hearing each other's voices is almost as important for bonding as what is said.

Making connections. After everyone has spoken personally for at least one round and responded to one another, patterns and connections of experience often emerge. Their identification is an important time of naming and political analyzing.

Action. Each person might commit herself to an individual action before the next meeting, or perhaps take on a group action or decide to do something with a larger organization. The important thing is that energy and understanding has some active and positive place to go.

A time of shared silence. One of the differences from early groups is the number of women who have discovered meditation and visualization. A few minutes of shared silence a the beginning of each meeting deepens whatever experience that is to come. (Steinem, 1992, p. 27)

Thus, the egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic assumptions which underlie these are that each woman's voice is given an equal opportunity to be heard, each woman's unique voice is equally valued, and the power to make decisions that affect all women is given to all women.

So far, the attention has been given to how the intentional practices were creating and maintaining the feminist group process. However, throughout the literature, brief accounts can be found of ways in which the intentional practices are not sufficient to address all contingencies for all women. In particular, it is important to look for systematic ways in which the communicative practices of the feminist
group are insufficient to accommodate axiomatic dynamics of small groups or to realize their egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic assumptions.

Unintended consequences need not be negative, however, and in the following section both inadequate practices and unexpected repercussions are discussed.

**Unintended consequences**

Throughout this literature, in keeping with the emancipatory goals of Women's Liberation Movement, the emphasis is upon intentional practices creating a distinctly feminist group process. However, as with most intentional practices, unexpected consequences arise. From the small group communication literature, Poole speaks to this condition.

Another limitation on members' control over structuration processes is the actions of other members. Interaction, by definition, is beyond the control of any single actor. Members' actions often blend together so that interaction unfolds in unexpected directions. For example, in a conflict one member might make an attempt at reconciliation. If another member attacks the response, it may make the first counterattack, resulting in an escalating conflict no one wanted in the first place. External forces and uncontrollable interaction dynamics can result in *unanticipated consequences* of structuration. (Poole, 1992, p. 151)

While most of the early literature on the women's consciousness raising group is focused on putting into practice egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic communicative practices, the accounts document two other important experiences for women in feminist groups. In each case, differences between women not leveled by the intentional practices create situations which diverge from the articulated goals of the original women's consciousness raising groups.
Women valued unequally. The first experience of difference is that it has always been difficult to include all women, to value all women's voices and experiences equally, to move together in the same direction.

Although the literature espousing the consciousness raising group understandably spends relatively little time talking about its failures, spotty anecdotal evidence is scattered throughout. All the early writings include instances where a woman has had to be asked to leave a group, a woman has left the group because of disagreements, women have disagreed about the degree of commitment and change necessary in their lives and in their work to change the sexism in society, women have been unable to come to agreement on a common vision or how to realize a vision (Morgan, 1970; Cassell, 1977; Starhawk, 1982; Maitland, 1983; NOW, 1983).

Difference at many levels has always been problematic in spite of systematic attempts to create a place where every voice is heard, every perspective valued, leadership is shared, and decisions are made by consensus. If the task of this research is to discover if and how a process happens that could be identified as "hearing into speech" and "articulating the self," failing to accomplish this task indicates the need to phrase a second research question: How does a feminist group, informed by a feminist consciousness of process, fail to create and maintain a group in keeping with its vision?

Failing to move on to take political action. The other inadvertent consequence of feminist groups is that women found such safety, support, freedom, and creative stimulation in them that they wanted to
remain in the group, in effect, rather than using it as a platform from which to transform society. This is a failure in the sense that it implies the consciousness raising did not move to it intended consequence of political transformation.

Anecdotal evidence in the early literature provides documentation of the liberating, stimulating experience of being removed from the constraints of oppressive circumstances, and freed and encouraged to discover what it is like to be a human being.

Sonia Johnson (1989) argues that it only saps women's energies to the oppressive and powerful patriarchal system to fight it; that a better strategy is to expend energies in creating communities for women apart from the oppressive society. Even early feminists recount such aspirations.

Many women wanted the group to become a large family where needs could be met that were not being met in their private lives (homes -- communes) and jobs. This meant that the group was being asked to to offer women meaning for their lives, companionship and trust, and guidance to function creatively. (Allen, 1970, p. 11)

A constant thread of the goodness of the way unfettered women do things runs in a vast ribbon through the feminist literature. At times this theme results in radical separatism from all sexist relations, an oppositional stance, and at others it is seen as an alternative way to accomplish societal structuring. Some authors, however, argue that either of these is still positioning in relation to a male dominated world, still defining a woman negatively by what she is not rather than examining what she is. While either of the first two can certainly be seen in accounts of women's groups, in this research, how women use
groups for their own reasons and in their own ways will comprise the second of the experiences to receive attention here. Some possibilities of this notion are articulated by Belenky, et al. (1986), Johnson (1989), and Gearheart (1976).

In this second experience of feminist groups, it is the tension maintained between differences held in check by the egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic practices which provide the stimulation, freedom, and inspiration for women to explore, create, and learn.

Purpose of this study

Thus, based on the review of the literature and discussion of it, and in light of the guiding impetus to understand how the process of a feminist group provides insight into the abstract notions of "hearing into speech" and "articulating the self," the purpose of this study is to address the following research questions:

1. How does a feminist group, informed by a feminist consciousness of process, create and maintain a group in keeping with its vision; particularly, how is the group process:
   
   • egalitarian -
     all voices are equally heard despite difference;
   
   • pluralistic -
     all voices are equally valued despite difference;
   
   • democratic -
     power is invested in each voice and shared by all?

2. How are the communicative practices of feminist group process unable to maintain feminists vision for it?
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous chapter described the consciousness raising group of the feminist movement and drew the vision for the emancipation of women through its dynamic processes in broad strokes. The chapter concluded by setting forth not only the research focus for this study, but also the assertion that the feminist group form is based on egalitarian (all voices are equally heard despite difference), pluralistic (all voices are equally valued despite difference), and democratic (power to make decisions about and as a group is shared) assumptions that are explicitly enacted through communicative procedures. The purpose of the research, thus, is to study how a collectivity of women, informed by a feminist consciousness of process, goes about creating, maintaining, and reinventing itself into a feminist group in keeping with their vision through communicative procedures, and also how the communicative procedures of a feminist group fail to realize this vision.

Because of the focus on communication process within the feminist group form, a theoretic which provides a means to address this dynamic is essential. Such a theoretic would attend to the communicative activity within such a group which is creating, maintaining,
transforming, and possibly destroying the group. The review of the literature about consciousness raising women's groups reveals the intention to explicitly do something different than the individuals have done before to achieve a consequence of liberation for women. Because of this intentional attention to practice and the attempt to introduce new communicative procedures to act as a corrective to previous practices, a theoretic is needed which can made procedures apparent, both intentional procedures and those which may be unintentional but consequential nonetheless.

Conceptual work which has suggested a possible way to address these issues can be found in the work of Dervin (1993) and Dervin and Clark (1989, 1993). These works reconceptualize communication in ways that may usefully provide a means to capture the dynamic processes of a group through the communication-as-procedure theoretic (Dervin and Clark, 1989, 1993), through the attempt to shift the study of communicative action from a static to a dynamic mode by "verbing" communication (Dervin, 1993), and through the conceptually grounded sense-making methodology (Dervin, 1992).

All of this work attempts to deal with communication as a process rather than an end product, and rests heavily on the theoretical work of Richard Carter. He states that collective behavior proceeds by and in step taking and calls for inventive approaches to step-taking behavior in seeking the well-being of humanity, and suggests that the focuses of control are the specific place to intervene in a behavioral step in order to affect it (Carter, 1980, in Dervin and Clark, 1993, p. 106).
In the section which follows, Dervin and Clark's work will be cited extensively as a means of presentation of the communication-as-procedure theoretic to be used in this study. Throughout, examples will be used from the literature about the feminist group to illuminate the theoretic.

The fundamental suitability of the match between theoretic and communicative phenomenon lies at the root of the discussion which follows. Within the body of work on communication-as-procedure is the mandate for reinvention. The notion is that humans have invented and implemented through repeated communicative behavior virtually all we know of social structuring. What we have argued is that much of what has been considered as uncontested reality is actually a communicative procedure invented for a particular time and space which has become unconscious and rigidified through habitual activity. The new and hopeful position we argue is that what has been invented is not immovable reality, that we, with conscious reflection, can reinvent a communicating procedure that is responsive to the current time-space situation.

In effect, that is what feminists with their insight into the ways women have been systematically oppressed have done through their invention of the consciousness raising group process; breaking through the ideologically bound rigidities of the societal perception and role of women through the intentional communicative processes of a group can emancipate individual women who will then attempt to make political changes for all women.
Thus, an exemplar of intentionally reinventing communicative procedures can be seen in the form of the feminist group while a communication-as-procedure theoretic may facilitate insight into the dynamic group process engendered.

**Communication-as-procedure**

The mandate to view communication as procedure comes in response to calls for ways to understand the human predicament of historical ways of communicating and coordinating action together that no longer seem effective. Just as the Women's Liberation Movement occurred at a time and place in response to a situation which had become unbearably rigidified and oppressive, so too this approach to the study of communicating is an attempt to come at these dynamic processes in such a way that more of their unfolding or rigidifying is available to understanding.

Most of the work on democratic communication has limited itself to understandings of the way things are, not the ways they might be. Yet clearly, humans now face communication demands for which the species is unprepared and for which humans have had little experience. Further, the traditional procedures of communicating established to handle problems of human heterogeneity in the past are less and less useful. These procedures were invented for particular time, space, and situation demands. They no longer function well because the time, space, and situation have changed. A primary change is the move from more homogeneous, more stable social contexts in which authoritarian procedures seemed to work reasonably well to more heterogeneous, less stable social contexts that demand procedures that the human species has not yet invented. One of the difficulties in understanding this point is that when authoritarian procedures are the operating communication procedures in a situation, it actually looks as if there are no communication procedures operating. In essence, the hows of those in authority are translated into whats, as if they are the nature of reality and not the behavings via which reality was constructed. With the demand for democratic communication that allows a plurality of voices to speak and to be heard, the species must in essence make what has been hidden and assumed--
that is the hows of communicating -- obvious and flexible. (Dervin and Clark, 1993, p. 119)

Communication-as-procedure is the shorthand reference to an approach to the study of communicative behaving that focuses on the hows of structuring human activities through communicating. In the following passage, this perspective is delinmed,

It is the iterative use of routinized communicatings which stabilizes both message and structural forms long enough in time-space for identifiable patterns to be observable. The important point here is that it is iterative communication action which energizes messages and structural forms.

The term iterative is important for it suggests communicatings that recur in patterns. Each of these patterns may be thought of as a communication procedure -- a routine that guides communicating. These routines include modes of observing, categorizing, defining, labelling, writing, hearing, talking, joining, gesturing, and all other forms of communicating behaviors. Since few human actions are innate, communication procedures are conceptualized as inventions created at moments in time and space to deal with the need to reduce uncertainty in that time-space to controllable levels.

Examining communication in this way allows one to look at any communication procedure, any means by which something is communicated -- via whatever means from whatever source with whatever content as invention -- which requires continued reinvention if it is to be repeated. It forces our thinking beyond the whos and the whats to the hows. It mandates us to think of the ways in which iterative, repeated behaviors play a role in holding messages and structures rigid. It forces us to remember as well that these behaviors are not immutable. They were once invented and repetitively learned, albeit out of consciousness. As such, they are subject to change. (Dervin and Clark, 1989, p. 5)

Thus, both inventing and reinventing responses to situations is possible with the awareness of how the communicating procedure is shaping the current situation by which an individual or collectivity is confronted.

A focus on communication procedure is not proposed as either ahistoric or acultural. Procedures are seen as themselves ideologically bound. They have social histories and purposes.
They were invented (constructed) by human beings to serve needs at particular times and places. (Dervin and Clark, 1993, p. 111)

We suggest that the structure (culture, institution, system) is actualized in behavior as well. A social structure that is not reenergized regularly with acts of communicating dies; it simply does not exist. Structures are maintained, reified, rigidified, and changed through acts of communicating. (Dervin and Clark, 1993, p. 111)

The entire rationale of this article implies a self-reflexivity -- an awareness of and an ability to bring to conscious articulation the often unconscious construction and reconstruction of patterns for dealing with all aspects of life. (Dervin and Clark, 1989, p. 7)

In the case of women suffering under the oppressive circumstances of a sexist society, the feminist position might be reframed into the language of this theoretic to say that the bundle of procedures which had been used to invent the role "woman" in our society had become rigidified and lost to consciousness, but that the individual humans who were identified and constrained by the procedures of "woman" no longer experienced these rigidified procedures as functional or acceptable, and sought to reinvent the bundle "woman" through a new set of procedures which included those of the feminist group.

The communication-as-procedure perspective mandates that we focus on behavior at specific moments in time-space, but at the same time extract fundamental dimensions of these behaviors that are applicable across time-space. (Dervin and Clark, 1993, p. 113)

The last passage is focused on the communicating between entities indicating that this theoretic includes the entire range of behaving of an individual or collective. Communicating procedures, as observed by feminists, also involve the internal set of procedures referenced by the term "consciousness" in consciousness raising. In the last chapter, consciousness raising was conceptualized as bringing a woman to awareness of how the society's view of her was inculcated into her
thoughts and feelings and understandings, and to helping her to become aware of how this created an oppressive situation for her, and to prompt her to change within herself, as well as to act politically to change the world outside herself.

The communication procedure perspective assumes that the individual giving meaning is actualized in behaviors -- all manner of communicating behaviors. These behaviors include internal acts (observings, categorizings, definings, encodings, decodings, etc.) and external acts (talkings, gesturings, etc.) Each of these acts can be seen as a formal or informal routin -- a step or series of steps. Some of these steps repeat the past while others break with the past. These behaviors apply to relating to self (remembering, forgetting, making up one's mind, changing one's mind, etc.), and to others (loving, hating, deciding, disagreeing, etc.). They apply to relating to individuals when seen independently as well as when constrained or limited by or enjoined by a collectivity. All of these behaviors are driven by individual human consciousness (which may be operating consciously or unconsciously), the only site that directly drives individual behavior. (Dervin and Clark, 1993, p. 110)

Thus, this theoretic can be seen to match up with the feminist group on a variety of dimensions and levels of abstraction. However, Dervin and Clark (1993) propose more specific and micro focus of attention. In that article, the beginnings of a possible communication-as-procedure framework utilizes two procedural dimensions, the situation defining strategies, such as, individual relating to self, collectivity relating to individual, etc. and the dimension of communication tactics.

The particular set of situation-defining stragegies we have developed here focuses on how the communicating entity (individual or collectivity) sees itself at a specific moment relating to other communicating entities: What relationship to the world is the entity working on at that specific moment in time and space? In a world where sense is not given, every relationship involves daily acts of constructing via communicating. The individual need to relate to self, to other individuals, to collectivities; collectivities also need to relate to self, and to individuals as well as other collectivities. (Dervin and Clark, 1993, p. 114)
With the focus in this study on process of the feminist group, the primary situation defining strategies conceptually would be those of individual relating to collectivity (the individual women following their various paths to and through the group and/or how individual women relate to the group as an entity), the collectivity relating to self (the group members and their activities in the group), and the collectivity relating to the individual (the group working with each individual woman’s uniqueness).

However, it is important to note that the individual relating to self and the collectivity relating to other collectivities are also available even in this group form. For example, it is the individual who is using the group process to take new steps in relation to herself (consciousness raising) and the collectivity of a feminist group has as part of its vision political activities to intervene into the activities of other collectivities such as oppressive institutions.

The other dimension mentioned above is that of communication tactics. "In order to construct and deal with their worlds, humans must necessarily perform different communicative tasks" (Dervin and Clark, 1993, p. 116). Some of these could include expressing (communicating activity directed toward giving symbolic expression to individually or collectively created ideas), finding connectedness (communicating activity directed at getting connected to others -- allies, comrades, interest groups, sympathizers, sources of ideas), and confronting (communicating activity where one entity is contesting against another) (p. 117).
At this point it is important to mention one other theoretic choice suggested by Dervin (1993) and Dervin and Clark (1993) as a means of protecting the dynamic processes while examining them. That is the use of the gerund "-ing" form for nouns, referred to as "verbing." An artifact language generates is that by the very act of examining something we turn it into a noun. Yet that simple systematic act tends to let our thinking slide away from the dynamic processes we seek to understand into the very static forms, the "whats," that we are seeking to avoid. So, in this theoretic, and in the analytic which follows, the gerund form will be used systematically, particularly when communicative strategies and tactics are spoken of. This procedure can be seen in the previous paragraphs.

When the two dimensions, situation-defining strategies and communicating tactics, are interlaced, cells are created which provide a way to look at communicating procedures performed at specific moments in time-space.

The situatedness of this formulation is important and can be understood in two ways. One way involves understanding that life-facing involves daily constructings, even when some (or perhaps many or even all) of those constructings are repetitions of habitualized constructings used in the past. Since no moment in time-space has theoretically occurred before, each act of communicating is situated. The second meaning of situatedness refers to the idea that communicating behavior is situation-responsive. An inherent assumption of the framework...is that communicating tactics are potentially responsive to situation defining strategies. How an individual creates ideas when relating to self potentially differs from how that individual may do so when relating to others or collectivities.... Each of these means of creating ideas is seen as a communicating "how." Each is assumed to be an invention of past and/or present. Each is assumed to have the potential to become very rigidified so that the communicating entity never varies across its tactic in a given kind of situation or, at an extreme, across all situations. At the same time each is assumed to have the potential for responsiveness; for being used
or not used depending on the how the communicating entity defines the demands of a current situation. (Dervin and Clark, 1993, p. 118)

Thus far, the focus of this chapter has been on developing a theoretic frame for this study, that referred to as "communication-as-procedure." An analytic which complements this theoretic perspective can be found in the sense-making methodological approach (Dervin, 1992, 1990, 1989, 1983), "a set of methods which have been developed to study the making of sense that people do in their everyday experiences" (Dervin, 1992, p. 62). To flesh out the communication-as-procedure theoretic, then, the sense-making analytic is a fitting next step toward examining a feminist group.

The assumptions and propositions of sense-making taken together provide methodological guidance -- for framing research questions, for collecting data, and for charting analyses. Derived from these are a set of methods, particularly methods for interviewing humans about their experiences, a coherent set of theoretically-derived methods for studying human sense-making.... In essence, then, the term sense-making refers to a coherent set of theoretically-driven methods for studying human sense-making. (Dervin, 1992, p. 62)

In the next section, the metaphor which underlies the sense-making analytic will be described, followed by an introduction to the general approach which guides the methods themselves. The sense-making method selected and tailored for the purposes of data collection for this study will be found in Chapter III.
Sense-making methodology

In some of the passages above, individual step-takings were mentioned. As this chapter progresses, the lens of communication-as-procedure is being used to focus more and more specifically on the notion that it is in individual step-taking situated in time and space where communicating procedures are invented, maintained, rigidified, altered, and possibly reinvented. This dynamic has been encapsulated in the sense-making metaphor and made available to guide method in the sense-making triangle (Dervin, 1992, 1989). Inherent in the notion of step-taking is that there is a space or gap to step over in order to continue down a path.

In essence, the individual defines and attempts to bridge discontinuities or gaps. It is this focus on gap-defining and gap-bridging which is seen as offering a way of introducing order to conceptualizations of individual behavior. It is not the individual entity that is seen as ordered but rather the gap-defining and gap-bridging that is ordered.

...the communicating moment is best addressed by focusing on how the actor in the moment defined that moment and attempted to bridge that moment when conceptualized in gap terms....

At a specific moment in time space, therefore, an individual who defines self as facing a gap of a particular kind may use communicating tactics of a particular kind. In a different moment facing a different gap he/she may be of the kind which says "given this gap, then this tactic." Or he/she may be very flexible or perhaps entirely capricious. The point, though, is that by focusing on the gap defining and bridging we allow to emerge for examination human flexibilities and rigidities and allow the possibility that both -- flexibilities and rigidities -- are amenable to systematic analysis. (Dervin, 1992, pp. 67-68)

The sense-making metaphor, then, is of a person walking along a path when they are confronted by a discontinuity for which she needs to construct a bridge in order to continue on her way. So, there is the actor, the step-taking of moving through moment to moment, the defining of
the gap, and then the bridging of the gap, and then continued step-taking. Figure 1 is a representation of the sense-making metaphor.

```
-----> situation ----> bridge ----> helps ---->
      \                     /       \
       \                   /        \      
        \                 /         \ gap
```

Figure 1. The Sense-Making Metaphor

The sense-making triangle (see Figure 2) is a way of getting at the experience by encircling it, potentially entering the individual sense-making through the situation, the gap (block faced, barrier faced), or the helps/uses/consequences (questions answered, ideas formed, resources obtained, strategies used).

```
situation
  /  \  
 /    \ 
\      \ gap  \ helps
```

Figure 2. The Sense-Making Triangle

Again, this sense-making triangulation will be explained in more detail in the next chapter as the methods for this study are described and developed. It is presented here along with the methodological definitions of sense-making and the description of the underlying sense-making
metaphor in order to give a complete overview at an abstract level of how the communication-as-procedure theoretic and the sense-making analytic fit together.

The sense-making metaphor modified for this study

Later in this chapter, the literature on the women's consciousness raising group will be revisited using the communication-as-procedure theoretic and the sense-making metaphor to further excavate the intentional process by which feminist ideology is put into practice through the intentional communicative procedures creating and maintaining the feminist group structuring.

However, first an additional note is in order. The sense-making metaphor is most often used in an attempt to describe individual step taking, and can be applied at different levels of interacting (interpersonal, small group, organizational, etc.) and in various contexts (health, politics, scientific, instructional, etc.) (Dervin, 1992). In this study, however, it is used at several levels of abstraction.

For example, this triangulation is used to describe the step feminists took when they reinvented the group form in response to the discontinuity represented by an oppressive situation. The feminist group form can be seen as a bridge of this gap. This is a very large and abstract gap-bridging attempt. Later chapters will focus on the particular step taking, the particular iterative communicating procedures, that specific women will use in creating and maintaining their group and in each of their internal step-taking.
For the purposes of this study, the language used for this triangulation will be adapted. Situation will remain "situation" and gap will remain gap, but bridge will be "behavior," and helps will be "consequences." This can be presented in the triangulation form as follows in Figure 3.

-------> situation -------> behavior ------> consequence ----->
          (bridge)            (helps)
                     /         /
                    /         /
                   /         /
                  gap

Figure 3. Adapted Sense-Making Metaphor

Because of the specific focus on communicating procedures in this study, the largest bridging behavior is the group itself. Thus, the metaphor can be translated into the language of the feminist literature in order to hold the feminist group structuring in mind as a particular step taken by a collectivity of people in response to a particular historical and political circumstance.

-------> women in society -------> feminist group -------> emancipation of women ----->
          (situation)            (bridge)            (consequence)
                     /         /
                    /         /
                   /         /
             oppression of women
                   (gap)

Figure 4. Sense-making metaphor adapted to fit feminist group.
Figure 4 shows a possible adaptation of the sense-making metaphor. For this study, the focus on the feminist group will mean that particular attention will be paid to the communicating procedures that are creating, maintaining, and, perhaps, failing it. In terms of the communication-as-procedure theoretic, the feminist group structuring can be seen as a kind of meta-bridge, comprised of numerous smaller gap-bridgings by the group collectively and as individuals. Some of the more intentional and common of these numerous small gap-bridgings will be addressed in the following section by applying this communication-as-procedure analytic to descriptions in the literature which focus on how to do a women's consciousness raising group.

*Insights, meta-procedures, and procedures.* This study frames the feminist group process as a procedure at the most abstract level, a bridging of the gap which is the oppression of women in our society. Within that one immense gap-bridging procedure can be distinguished three other proceduring locii of which it is important to be aware. Following the tripartite feminist emancipatory praxis of (1) critiquing sexist society through personal confrontation with its socialization, and then (2) inventing feminist responses to that oppression, and, finally, (3) enacting the liberation, the bridge of creating and maintaining a feminist group is composed of three parts.

One locus will be called the *insights* that feminists have had as they observe and critique the position of women in our society. Following Dervin and Carter, these feminist insights are cognitive procedurings which point.
A second locus will be called the **meta-procedures**, the larger strategies reflecting particular intentions held by feminists. The egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic ideals upon which the consciousness raising group is based can be thought of as such meta-procedures.

The third locus will be called merely **procedures**, as the smallest part given attention in this analytic. These basic procedures are the actual communicating behaviors which can be observed and through which, step by step, the group is being created and maintained.\(^4\)

So, the sense-making metaphor which reflects an awareness of these various abstract levels of gap-bridging in the form of intentions and procedures could be pictured as follows (remembering that this study is looking at the metaphor through the lens of the bridge). The feminist group process seen as the bridge in the sense-making triangulation is expressed in Figure 5 as communicative procedure.

```
->women in society->(feminist insights)->emancipation-->
  \                     /       \\
  \                   /       \\
  \                 /       \\
  \               /       \\
  \             /       \\
  \           /       \\
  oppression of women
```

Figure 5. Bridge: Feminist group process as communicative procedure.

\(^4\) The use of the terms insights, meta-procedures, and procedures is an adaptation of the language used in Dervin and Clark (1993).
"verbing" was introduced as a way to stay with the dynamic nature of process. A way to identify the insights, meta-procedures, and procedures of the feminist group is by locating the various activities which correlate with these elements of the bridge. In effect, these three elements of the bridge which is the feminist can be distinguished at a very abstract level by three parallel verbs: observing (in this case, the observations and critique of sexist society by feminists), reinventing (here this means choosing and/or creating new meta-procedures based on egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic ideals), and enacting (the series of behaviors or procedures through which the bridging is made manifest).  

This way of looking at the bridge is based on an adaptation of the communication tactics mentioned in an earlier session. Once again, it is important to keep in mind that this use of the sense-making metaphor is a very abstract way to situate the feminist group form conceptually. The breakdown of the bridge into these verbings is intended as helpful theoretical groundwork for later analysis of the feminis: group using data collected using sense-making methods. These three basic verbings anticipate clusters of other verbings which are the individual gap-bridgings of the collectivity of the group and the individuals in it. The feminist group process viewed as the bridge in the sense-making

5 This three step way of understanding the bridge is based heavily on the conceptual work of Richard Carter who breaks human behaving into basic components which include observing, cognizing, and acting (see Carter, 1989, 1982, 1980).
triangulation can be expressed in the form of verbing as shown in Figure 6.

```
  -> women in society -> (observing - reinventing - enacting) -> emancipation ->
  \
  \
  \
  \
  oppression of women
```

Figure 6. Bridge: Feminist group process expressed as verbing.

In the section which follows, these interconnected ways of looking at the feminist group process are applied systematically to the literature about the use of the consciousness raising group by feminists both to illustrate the use of this analytic and to glean a more thorough understanding of the intentional use of communicative procedure by feminists to create and maintain the process of the feminist group.

**Exemplar using communication-as-procedure analytic**

Several of the works cited in Chapter One also include extensive coverage of what might be called exemplars drawn from field experience about how to create and maintain a consciousness raising (CR) group (Allen, 1970; Cassell, 1977; Dreifus, 1973; Folb, 1979; Freeman, 1975; National Organization for Women, 1983; Steinem, 1992). For the most part, the authors have been a part of one or more consciousness raising groups and because of academic and/or activist interests have gathered their materials together into the systematic reviews present in the
literature. These exemplars give us a picture of field tested, intentional procedures, largely communicative, which may prove helpful in creating and maintaining feminist group process.

The number of insights, meta-procedures, and procedures enumerated are too plentiful to assess fully here given the limitations imposed by the purposes of this study. The point of using the template here is not to perform an analysis of the material; that is beyond the scope of this study. The point is to demonstrate how a possible communication-as-procedure analytic might be developed which can point to underlying processes, and to set up analytic possibilities for later chapters.

However, to demonstrate the communication-as-procedure analytic presented in this chapter, parts of one of these exemplars will be assessed in the final section which follows. The article which follows was chosen in part because it is one of the very few presented by a communication scholar. The particular elements she focuses upon are grouped here according to the egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic ideals upon which the feminist group process rests. To review their fundamentally communicative nature, feminists forming these groups believe in principle that all voices should be heard, all voices should be valued, and all in the group should share equally in power.

Edith Folb's (1979) chapter from a reader in small group communication divides her discussion of the alternative nature of a feminist small group into three focii: the contract women in a consciousness raising group make with each other based on beliefs about conduct derived from the vision of the feminist consciousness raising
group, the structuring of a consciousness raising group, and the consciousness raising group process.

Three questions have been asked of each of the points Folb makes under each of these focii. First, what is the feminist understanding which underlies this point? Second, how would feminists reinvent what they observe? Third, how is this reinventing enacted in the group?

The answer to the first question can be thought of as the observing. The answer to the second question can be thought of as how the women want to go about reinventing the group based on that observing. The answer to the third question can be thought of as the enacting which makes the reinventing manifest.

Another way to think of the second and third elements is in terms of the procedures that flow from the underlying ideals which the women wish to make manifest through the feminist consciousness raising group process. This connection is continuous, intentional and dynamic. It situates and can be seen in communicative behavior.

Since the reinventing is based on observing which in turn undergirds the enacting behavior, it can be identified as a meta-procedure. The embodying behavior becomes the procedure. To access the dynamic aspect of procedures, the gerund form - ing, the verbal noun, has been used. Moving toward the terms of the communication-as-procedure analytic, then, the distinct clustering of observings in this case can be characterized as feminist insights. To capture the distinction between reinventing and enacting, reinventing verbs will be called meta-procedures and enacting verbs will be called procedures.
In the three sets of illustrative instances below, Folb’s own words have been used as closely as possible with only slight changes in punctuation to fit into the template. In keeping with the methodological choice of "verbing", where Folb has used nouns, the gerund form will be used in the meta-procedures/reinventing and procedures/enacting parts of the template. For the feminist insight/observing portion, her original wording has been preserved as closely as possible.

In the following section, each instance was identified in Folb’s text by looking for the reinventing verb, the one which connects the observing of the feminists' insight with the enacting behavior. It is the meta-procedure which organizes the procedure(s). The reinventing verb manifests the insight as well as situating the behavior in the larger patterning. In each instance, as the reinventing verb was located, as one might expect of feminist praxis, it was nested with "theory," what is being called "feminist insight/observing" here, and "action," what is called procedures/enacting" here.

Egalitarianism: Each voice is heard equally.

In Table 1, the emphasis is upon understanding how procedures create and maintain something which manifests the ideal of egalitarianism which underlies the feminist intention that each voice be heard equally.
Table 1

Egalitarianism: Each voice is heard equally

**feminist insight/observing**: personal growth and political action come from awareness of how and why women are oppressed in a male dominated society.\(^6\)

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: woman honestly confronting self and seeing how self is mirrored in lives of other women

**procedures/enacting**: sharing honestly from personal experience as a woman

**feminist insight/observing**: need sustained exposure to 'basics' of women's shared experience if the consciousness raising experience is to have a lasting impact on the participants

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: meeting

**procedures/enacting**: having minimum of 10 sessions

**feminist insight/observing**: need time frame which allows topic to be generally covered without emotionally and physically exhausting the members

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: meeting

**procedures/enacting**: Weekly; for two hours

**feminist insight/observing**: need group size which allows a range and diversity of responses and reactions and does not limit the extent and quality of the participation

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: meeting

**procedures/enacting**: having seven to ten women

**feminist ideal/observing**: each woman is assured equal space and time to be heard

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: going around the circle

**procedures/enacting**: going around the circle, each woman responding to the topic, possibly within a time constraint

**feminist insight/observing**: everyone is allowed her time to be silent. If a woman chooses not to respond to a particular question, she 'passes'

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: taking option to pass

**procedures/enacting**: saying "pass"

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\(^6\) The language used in these instances is Folb's.
Table 1 (continued)

feminist insight/observing: since each woman's participation is crucial in order to build a collective life story of the group, the silent member begins to be seen as a detached, even hostile outsider, rather than an active participant -- and can come to be resented as such.

meta-procedures/reinventing: allowing silence within limits

procedures/enacting: (1) asking woman to share reasons for silence; (2) sharing reasons for silence

feminist insight/observing: Each woman takes group seriously, it is a significant experience in her life.

meta-procedures/reinventing: committing

procedures/enacting: regular attending, being on time, staying for the duration of session

feminist insight/observing: close friends should not be in the same consciousness raising group because friends sometimes find it difficult or painful to share some aspects of life in presence of a close friend

meta-procedures/reinventing: having freedom of expression

procedures/enacting: having no close friends in group

feminist insight/observing: alcohol, drugs, food, cigarettes detract from a woman's concentration on the topic and her ability to involve herself deeply and fully in the process she is undergoing

meta-procedures/reinventing: restricting substances

procedures/enacting: having no alcohol, drugs, food, cigarettes

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Pluralism: Each voice is valued equally.

In set of instances in Table 2, the emphasis is upon understanding how procedures create and maintain something which manifests the ideal of pluralism which underlies the feminist intention that each voice be valued equally.
Table 2

Pluralism: Each voice is valued equally

**feminist insight/observing**: each woman's experience is valid, a statement of what it is like to be a woman for her; consciousness raising group is a place where women can share personal beliefs without fear of being diminished, dishonored, disallowed

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: safety -- avoiding confrontation

**procedures/enacting**: no intra-group challenging, no need to 'establish her consciousness raising edentials' or explaining, arguing for, or justifying herself

**feminist insight/observing**: close friends should not be in the same consciousness raising group because friends may feel they have permission to talk about group and members outside the group; this potential breach restricts others' openness and honesty of expression

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: keeping confidence

**procedures/enacting**: having no close friends in group

**feminist insight/observing**: endorse heterogeneous groups to discover and explore the common 'chains that bind' however differently they may restrain us

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: being heterogenous

**procedures/enacting**: members differing in terms of life-style, sexuality, class, race, feminist experiences, etc.

**feminist insight/observing**: develop questions related to topic so as to move discussion from a personal level of exploration and understanding to a recognition of the political implications of the topic in women's lives -- and an awareness of what can or must be done to change the personal, political and social conditions that confine us (Folb, 1979)

**meta-procedures/reinventing**: developing the topic in group

**procedures/enacting**: (1) lead-off questioning; (2) follow-up questioning; (3) bringing to conscious awareness the specific political implications

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7 The language used in these instances is Folb's.
Table 2 (continued)

feminist insight/observing: the consciousness raising experience is structured, and part of that structure provides for a designated leader to avoid the tyranny of structurelessness and also since leaders always emerge (Folb, 1979)
meta-procedures/reinventing: leading discussion
procedures/enacting: (1) learning 'on the job;' rotating leadership; (2) leading for topic closely related to own life

feminist insight/observing: break down social conditioning which encourages women to stroke, nurture, support (and live through) others rather than to focus attention and praise themselves. Shift the focus of attention and importance from other to self
meta-procedures/reinventing: stroking
procedures/enacting: a self-congratulatory patting on the back for something done, said, not done or changed in one's life during the previous week

Democracy: Power is shared equally by all.

In set of instances in Table 3, the emphasis is upon understanding how procedures create and maintain something which manifests the ideal of democracy which underlies the feminist intention that power be shared equally by all.

Table 3

Democracy: Power is shared equally by all

feminist insight/observing: though the CR group is task-oriented in that it attempts to get women to effect change on a personal and political level, it is preeminently a person-centered experience. For this reason, certain 'ground rules' are usually observed and maintained throughout the group's life. In a very real sense, each woman contracts with every other woman in the group to live up to the conditions of the contract -- to observe the rules meta-procedures/reinventing: contracting with others8 procedures/enacting: observing ground rules throughout the life of the group

8 The language used in these instances is Folb's.
feminist insight/observing: what insights and or experiences in relation to herself each woman chooses to share with others is her choice
meta-procedures/reinventing: safety -- keeping confidence procedures/enacting: no woman is given license to be speaking for or about another

feminist insight/observing: historically, women have been conditioned and rewarded for giving over their space to men, to relinquish their space; practical necessity to provide space so women can discuss oppression, can share fully their experiences as women meta-procedures/reinventing: creating space procedures/enacting: having women only

feminist insight/observing: close friends should not be in the same consciousness raising group because friends sometimes band together inside group and exclude others; group needs to function as cohesive support system as well as potential social action group meta-procedures/reinventing: group bonding procedures/enacting: having no close friends in group

feminist insight/observing: a topic must not only be specific enough to focus attention on the political ramifications in women's everyday lives, but it must provoke a real personal questioning of the degree and manner in which women have absorbed and integrated their oppression. Topics considered basic to any consciousness raising group include: do women like other women? masculine/feminine; women and the aging process; women and anger; mothers and daughters; fathers and daughters; rape; lesbianism; sexual oppression; life styles...also could include women and work/money/power; women's relationship to their bodies; do women oppress other women? meta-procedures/reinventing: choosing discussion topic procedures/enacting: group chooses topic at the end of one group meeting for the next

feminist insight/observing: the consciousness raising experience is structured, and part of that structure provides for a designated leader to avoid the tyranny of structurelessness since leaders always emerge meta-procedures/reinventing: leading discussion in new group procedures/enacting: having trained/experienced woman lead the group
feminist insight/observing: build group cohesion and solidarity as women demonstrate their commitment to the group by respecting each other's time; honor the schedules of participants who have made special arrangements to attend
meta-procedures/reinventing: meeting
procedures/enacting: beginning and ending on time

feminist insight/observing: need a place to meet regularly
meta-procedures/reinventing: meeting
procedures/enacting: rotating location among members; meeting regularly in one place

feminist insight/observing: develop questions related to topic so as to move discussion from a personal level of exploration and understanding to a recognition of the political implications of the topic in women's lives -- and an awareness of what can or must be done to change the personal, political and social conditions that confine us
meta-procedures/reinventing: leader developing questions
procedures/enacting: (1) setting down specific purpose of the upcoming session; (2) researching the topic -- examining own and others experience; (3) researching the topic -- reading; (4) choosing and ordering questions to take group deeply into examination of topic

By examining this material in this way, a very tentative beginning is made to demonstrate how the communication-as-procedure analytic may be used to indicate and assess rich and complex data in such a way that the intentional procedures remain nested in the situating understandings of those who are interested in creating and maintaining feminist group process.
In the following chapter, sense-making methods (as well as others) for data collection are presented which can now be understood as conceptually situated in a communication-as-procedure theoretic. Those chapters which follow will use an adaptation of the communication-as-procedure analytic sketched out in this chapter.
CHAPTER III
METHODS

Introduction

Since the phenomenon being studied is the communicative process of a feminist group, the decision was made to study a collectivity which matched the features of a feminist group over a period of several meetings. The rationale for doing this was to give the researcher many opportunities to document a group's process in a variety of ways, as well as enough time to permit the possibility that something which could be identified as "consciousness raising" might occur. In order to accomplish the unfolding of such a group's communicative process and to document the individual women's experience of what is identified in this research as feminist group process, this study has used multiple methods of data collection.

First, a group of women convening regularly was examined over a period of time to allow the communicative process of the group and the individual women's experience of that process to emerge. This first stage of observing the group over time involved recording the communicative process of group interaction in order to document the patterns observably emerging. After some time, when patterns were discerned, an initial analysis provided the basis for preparation of an instrument to test for the validity of researcher observations. This
instrument was used in individual interviews with the women involved. Its questions asked about the path each woman had taken in her life which brought her to this group, the important things that happened in the group from her point of view, focusing on one particular group meeting by all members to allow a deeper unfolding of the sense-making, and how each woman was using her experiences from the group process in her life outside the group.

The data collection methods mentioned will permit the unfolding of the communicative process of the group from the
* group members' points of view
* researcher's point of view

This chapter is comprised of the following sections:
* overview of the methodological parameters mandated by the research foci
* presentation and discussion of the data collection method of participant observation
* presentation and discussion of the data collection method of sense-making
* description of locating and gaining entree to a living group
* discussion and illustration of ongoing methodological decision-making over time drawn from the field notes
* description of how the sense-making interview instrument is adapted for use in this research
* introduction to an adapted communication-as-procedure analytic

The intention of this chapter is to present the methods of data collection. In so doing, substantial amounts of material are drawn from
field notes taken during or after the group's meetings. This material is included here when it involves methodological decisions and choices of researcher behavior in relation to the group. However, a detailed description of the group itself is saved for a following chapter.

Overview of methodological parameters

In light of the desire to examine the communicative procedures of feminist group process, methods were needed which would access (1) naturally occurring group interaction over time, as well as (2) the sense-making of individual women. The methods must produce data indicative of how each woman had made sense of and constructed her life in the past (particularly in regard to religion, spirituality, and feminist issues) and how each woman was making sense of, constructing, and possibly reinventing her life in the present. The methods must also produce data which will help understanding of how women are using feminist group process in the present group.

Although this research focuses on women's experience in a feminist group, this is not to say that this is the only place in their lives where they are in the process of constructing or the only means they are using to do the constructing. However, their participation in a feminist group is a portion of their lives which is accessible and amenable to qualitative social scientific examination and would be productive of tangible events useful for the goals of this research.

The primary methods of data collection used in this study are a combination of field notes from the ethnographic method of participant
observation (Bogdewic, 1992) and the results of in-depth sense-making interviews (Dervin, 1989, 1983) conducted with group members individually after several meetings. This is a variation on qualitative techniques for data collection, a combination of unstructured participant observation and a semi-structured individual long interview (Miller and Crabtree, 1992, p. 15).

The section which immediately follows will describe the participant observation method, the rationale for its use in this research, and extensive excerpts from field notes which unfold the entree of the researcher into the living group, and methodological choices throughout several months worth of meetings. The next section following that will provide further description and rationale for the use of a sense-making interview instrument, as well as presenting the actual instrument used in this study. The final section of this chapter will present the steps of a communication-as-procedure analytic to be used in the analysis chapters which follow.

Participant Observation

The use of the unstructured participant observation method of data collection is based on the mandate for this research to study the communicative process of a group over time. Bogdan (1972) offers a characteristic definition of unstructured participant observation. It is

...research characterized by a prolonged period of intense social interaction between the researcher and the subjects, in the milieu of the latter, during which time data, in the form of field notes, are unobtrusively and systematically collected. (p. 3)
Bogdewic (1992) suggests that the use of participant observation is indicated if the focus of interest is how the activities and interactions of a setting give meaning to certain behaviors or beliefs. The inhabitants of any organization or group are influenced by assumptions that they take for granted. These assumptions reflect the unique culture of a given organization. Rather than relying on the perceptions of inhabitants, participant observation affords the researcher direct access to these assumptions. (p. 47)

Thus, for this research with its interest in understanding the communicative process of a feminist group, the use of some variation of participant observation seems useful.

Because its mandate is not to impose a priori understandings on the focus of research, the method involves a researcher spending substantial amounts of time at a site so that behavioral patterns can reveal themselves. When the researcher has found a pattern and theorizes an explanation to account for it, the next step is to interview the people at the site to confirm or reject the explanation. Thus, participant observation over time provides a baseline to guide later questioning of individual participants.

Participant observation is an ethnographic method that allows a researcher to enter into a site or culture as a participant as well as an observer. It is based on the assumption that the researcher's task is to penetrate the definitions and taken-for-granted assumptions of a group or culture. The researcher is not detached since he or she does interact with the people being studied. However, the researcher observes what is happening on the site or in the culture more systematically than
would the non-researchers, seeking patterns, suggesting and testing hypotheses to try and account for what is happening.

To a large extent this approach is respondent driven rather than research driven. The goal of this method is to allow a site or a culture to present itself to the researcher. It allows a situation to be dynamic and permits the researcher/observer to dialogue with the researched. Participant observation uses interaction to formulate ideas about what accounts for the interaction being produced (Murphy & Pilotta, 1983; Shaffir, Stebbins & Turowetz, 1980; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Patton, 1980; Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

**Gaining entrée.** To begin the study of a group, it is necessary to locate one and "gain entrée." In many ways this is the beginning of the research process. How to "get in" to the collectivity of people one wishes to study.

A problem shared by all field researchers is getting in: securing permission to do the study, gaining access to people you wish to observe and talk to. This first phase of the research process accompanies another research requirement: developing rapport and thereby gaining initial acceptances from informants and respondents. (Shaffir, Stebbins, and Turowetz, 1980, p. 23)

The following are excerpts from my field notes for the first meeting of the "women's spirituality group" including how I had located them and their initial responses to my explaining I wanted to study the communicative process of their group. This first meeting really only opened the possibility of my being able to study this group as a participant observer. In the following passages taken from field notes about continuing methodological choices over the span of several
months of meetings, it can be seen that entrée continued throughout that time, as rapport was established.

29 August 1988

My observations of the first meeting of the women's spirituality group at the Community\(^9\) Church that I want to study for my dissertation.

I connected with this group because I had talked to my friend Jake\(^10\) who is a priest. I was telling him about the topic I wanted to study for my dissertation, how women use alternative religious discourses in order to construct new identities for themselves. I mentioned to him that I was looking for a group to study, a group of women who were meeting to talk about spiritual things and to work on their spiritual lives. He said that in his new church, the Community Church, there were some women who had been talking about getting together to do just that. He gave me the name of Ruby\(^11\) and her phone number and said that she would be a good person to contact to find out about the group.

This interaction happened sometime in early July, but it was late August before I called Ruby. It took a few calls to get her, but I finally did, and I explained to her that I had talked to Jake. She asked a few questions about what I was interested in studying and said they were just about to have the first meeting, that I was welcome to come, that she had no problems with me studying the group though she said that she would feel most comfortable with me as a participant and not just an observer. This was fine with me and fitted in with the way I wanted to study the group....

Two women (Ruby and Crystal) sitting in the middle of the semi-circle turned to each other saying, "well, where shall we start?" from which I got the impression they were the moving forces behind the group starting up. So, we went around the group and each person said their name. There were six women at this point, and another woman came in later. No one seemed to be the particular leader, but finally one of the two women in the middle said, "we talked about having this group, but we all have different backgrounds, so why don't we go around the circle and each woman can say something about her history with

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9 "Community Church" is a pseudonym.

10 "Jake" is a pseudonym chosen by myself to disguise the identity of the women in the group.

11 "Ruby" and other names are pseudonyms chosen by the women to protect their anonymity in this study.
spirituality or whatever is relevant and what brought her here today and about what she expects from the group." The women began to talk....

At this point, I was next in the circle, so I introduced myself and I told them that I was there interested in studying them for my dissertation. I told them that I was interested in studying women who were using an alternative kind of religious discourse in order to find their identities. I told them that I thought women used such groups to help create new identities for themselves, that I wanted to do a participant observation study over time and then at some point interview them in depth individually, and also interview them about their viewpoints on a particular meeting. I told them that I wanted to be a participant in the group as well as an observer, but because I thought they would be talking about important things to them, I needed to have their willingness and agreement to have me there or it would not work at all.

I went on to tell them I would be willing to participate. I told them about my background, how I hadn't ever thought the institutional church was perfect, but that I had always thought of it as a place that I could transform and that I had always known God. I talked to them about being in several groups at my own church. I told them I was interested in this kind of a group for its own merits quite apart from wanting to study it because I like the kind of energy that happens in groups like this one.

They listened very carefully and a couple of the women had questions. One asked why I wasn't using one of the groups I was already a member of and I told them that in this group as well as being a participant, there would always be a part of my mind that would be observing and taking notes. That as I listened to them, I couldn't just listen, I was also looking at their patterns of communication and issues they brought up, how they dealt with them, and what kinds of answers they found. So in this group I could not just be a participant. They seriously asked if they would be getting any money for this, and jokingly wondered if they would get residuals if it were made into a movie when I told them I would not pay them. They listened and then moved on to the next person. No one said yes or no at that point, but they were obviously thinking about my request....

Many of the women referred to their children, and were in their 30s and 40s. Lydia mentioned that some other women were interested in this group, but had not been able to come to this meeting. As the group was breaking up, someone said, "I think we had better give Kate an answer. We need to tell her if we are willing to have her here or not." Each of them said it was fine by them as long as I was a participant as well.
I asked Ruby for a ride home. She asked a couple of times on the way if I was certain I wanted to study a group that was just beginning, rather than one that was already established. I, feeling quite ecstatic, said that, no, I would have taken either, but that it was exciting to be in on the beginning of a group because so many things happen, you can trace the development of patterns in the group and trace how people change over time.

These excerpts show the locating and initial contact of the living group, and the nature of my involvement with it as participant observer. Once the living group which is the source of data for this study was identified, the particular variety of participant observation was negotiated with the group members. Because the group was expected to have no more than twelve members, the women in the group expressed their discomfort with the idea that a researcher would sit and silently observe and take notes on meetings.

**Negotiating the participant observer agreement.** The women in this group agreed to be the subjects of this research only if the I was to join in group discussion as a member. They asked that I take notes rather than video or audio record them, until the final group meeting when they agreed to be audio taped.\(^{12}\) Thus, in this group I was primarily seen as a participant who also had an additional task of observing for her own purposes, i.e. this research. A variety of other

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\(^{12}\) Observation during group meetings was recorded in note-books attempting to capture the verbal and nonverbal aspects of group meetings in some detail. Notes were taken during the meeting, followed by additional tape-recorded thoughts immediately afterward of any other observations that did not get into the notes. A transcript of these combined notes was completed for each meeting. For the closer examination of one particular meeting, an arbitrarily decided upon meeting was audio tape recorded in its entirety. A transcription of this meeting was used later during the sense-making interview process.
methodological choices about how I would conduct myself in this group are discussed more fully later in this chapter.

These agreements are in keeping with the views of scholars such as Jorgensen (1989) and Bernard (1988) (cited by Bogdan, 1992) who suggest that participant observation is a likely choice when it would be considered an intrusion to have a complete stranger present to witness and record the situation of interest; the situation of interest is obscured or completely hidden from the public; and the inhabitants appear to have significantly different views than outsiders.

This group initially was set up to meet biweekly, which members attempted to do from the first meeting in August until the following March when the participant observation element of the data collection was completed. Although it did not succeed in meeting biweekly this was generally because of intervening holidays or severely conflicting schedules, not lack of interest. In addition to group meetings, I also attended all but one of the worship services at the church which the women helped conduct.

The following section goes into more depth about methodological choices that I continued to make as the need arose throughout the participant observation portion of data collection.

Methodological decisions during the collection of data in the field

A fundamental aspect of the method of participant observation is that the researcher is making methodological choices throughout the length of data collection. Thus, in the six months of data collection, I made several decisions about how I would conduct myself as a
participant observer. The following excerpts from my field notes detail
some of the more significant. These included issues having to do with
recording the data, limiting the data collection to group meetings,
becoming a participant in the group process, and group members
committing to the research project.

Recording the data. At first, many of the initial methodological
notes have to do with the dual role of writing notes and being a
conversational participant. Although I asked at one of the first
meetings if the women in the group would mind being audiotaped, one
woman demurred so I resolved to take written notes (it was she,
watching me scribbling frantically through several meetings, who
finally suggested that I audiotape the final meeting; this indicated
another level of trust reached as well). For the most part, no one made
any comment about my relative silence, but occasionally, someone
would ask what I thought or say that it was my turn to say or do
something.

29 August 1988
By their agreeing to let me participate/observe, making the time
change, and agreeing to help me get home safely, I felt that I had
gained entrée to this group. Throughout this meeting I felt
strange because I did not know these women, but they felt so
familiar. I had to keep myself from leaping in and being overly
talkative or offering too many comments before I had really been
accepted. I need to sit back for awhile and until they got to know
me. Many of them knew each other, but did not know me. I also
held back my natural inclination to direct the group. I waited to
see if anyone would offer the idea that I had. This is the
distinction between Kate the individual entering the group in the
way I would naturally do so, and Kate the researcher entering the
site she is studying. I have decided to let others in the group
introduce the topics, bring up questions, and hold back my
contribution to a conversation topic until others have spoken.
The other aspect is that I have decided not to facilitate the group
unless others have tried and failed and I have an additional
suggestion. This makes me more reticent than I would naturally be in a group.

14 September 1988
My notes are reflective of what went on in the meeting, but every now and then when I would pop up with my ideas, that would not get into the notes. I consciously held back from interjecting any opinions or comments until the conversation was well underway. I try to say comments and opinions that would naturally say in a group meeting like this if I were not the researcher. To some extent, of course, I am there and influencing them, but I try to intervene in the group process as little as possible. Everyone talks animatedly, listens intently to each other, challenges each other, gains insight from each other, so my comments and opinions are not overwhelming contributions.

Tonight I thought I would try to hold a sense-making question in my head to look for situations, gaps, or helps, for example. However, I think that for awhile I will continue to take notes of what just happens. It takes all my time, energy and concentration to try and get down accurately and completely most of what people are saying. What people are saying and what is going on and record my impression of things that I think are important, not try and direct my observing for now.

20 November 1988
I took no notes at this meeting because there were only three of us. It seemed inappropriate for me to be taking notes of the other two conversing with me only intermittently commenting on something.

25 January 1989
After Crystal left I stopped taking notes because it seemed particularly awkward when there were only two people there besides myself. It already felt awkward when there were four of us because we were all nestled around a table and the others' eyes kept drifting to the notes I was scribbling. In a larger room when we are all spread out my notetaking isn't so obvious. I jotted down the odd idea to prompt my memory for talking into the tape recorder later.

Lydia, who had objected to my using a tape recorder last fall, suggested that I start recording the meetings. I was thrilled! Both Lydia and Ruby both said that they were very glad that I was a part of this group which made me feel wonderful and answered my anxieties about acceptance.
Another aspect was that in writing notes I was missing out on nonverbal cues, both in writing down those I saw and also not seeing many because I was writing! A related concern was how difficult it was to capture nonverbal communicating in hurried writing, and also understanding what it might mean. The following are illustrative.

28 September 1988
One thing I am not catching enough of is all the laughter so that all that comes across is the content. Next time I am going to have a column on one side of my page of notes -- so as well as the content I can capture the laughter and some of the other metacommunication.

12 October 1988
I still feel I am not getting all the nonverbal cues I could. And I get lots of the conversation in as close to the words as I can get, but I miss some, too. For the most part everyone does talk and attend to each other. Not too many dialogues going on between individual members outside the group discussion. That the women stayed after the closing time talking animatedly in pairs seemed to mean that they are getting lots of support from this group.

12 October 1988
Lydia is hard for me to read. She seems genuinely warm, accepting and friendly of me. When the meeting has been at her house, she has made a point of introducing me to the others and respectful of the research I am doing. Other times I sense resentment. Maybe she is just tired. Others have also seemed to misread her nonverbal communication. The very first meeting, when Skip was telling her history, at one point she interrupted herself to say to Lydia, "I can tell that hurt you. Your face changed." Lydia seemed startled and said "no, that's not what I felt." I may be reading more into this than is there.

Limiting the data collection to the group meetings. Other dilemmas presented themselves that I had not anticipated. My thought had been to study only the meetings of the group with the thought in mind of the communicative process of the group. However, I became increasingly aware that since the members of the group interacted with each other outside the group, and they were regarding me as a group
participant, that they would extend the same external opportunities to me as well. The question then arose as to whether or not I would include the content of such meetings as part of the data, and if so, how I would collect it. While the participant observation technique calls for the notion of a "key informant," a member of the group who helps interpret the group to the observer, the intentional design of this research is to include all members as co-observers, as interpreters, through the focused structure of the sense-making interview.

The entry below presents my thoughts and resolution of this dilemma.

12 October 1988
I was initially perplexed about what to do with a group member who was interested in pursuing a relationship with me beyond the group meeting. If I were to go ahead and become friends with someone, would that material become part of the material for the research? Would I need to record every interaction with a group member outside the actual meeting?

I decided to go ahead with any relationship outside of the meetings as it would be more unnatural to hold myself apart. I also did not want to offend any member. I decided not to try and take notes during any interaction but to meeting itself, but to note when, where, with whom, and the general nature of the interaction as I have here. Since the main focus of the study is the discourse that happens in the group meetings themselves, that will be the material I will record. Any other interaction will provide material to enrich the group discourse, but not be the focus of research.

Becoming a participant in the group process. In the following entry, I have gone beyond being merely a recorder of conversation and am beginning to interject myself as a participant. I did this at this point because I thought I had information that would help the group resolve an issue, because they had asked me to participate, and because I had been silent for the most part. In hindsight, I think this intervention
served my desire to participate more than my wise decision to be involved as little as possible in issues of communicative process in the group.

12 October 1988

I am still feeling that because the women know each other outside this meeting, particularly because they all go to church events, they are getting to know each other well while I am still an outsider. Also, because I am writing everything down rather than being relaxed and participating, this seems to set me apart as the alien observer, rather than a member. I feel that Maria accepts me as a member and is comfortable with what I am doing. Others, simply because I am doing so much writing, don't know me as well. I don't contribute as much as most others. In other words, they are getting to know each other faster than they are getting to know me.

Sometimes when I do offer stories or ideas I almost have to force myself into the conversation to be heard. Tonight, when they were talking about having this service of women led by women with the Goddess focus and less of a traditional Christian liturgy, somebody suggested using a guided visualization in the service. Lydia was uncomfortable about that because she has a friend who describes as having been "enlightened" for the past 20 years and he said that when you are in the light trance state of guided visualization your spirit actually leaves your body and you may be left vulnerable. Her understanding of his thinking is that unless you are a "master" you should not lead a visualization because you will be messing with something that might get out of control. She felt that for one of us to lead a visualization would not be appropriate. Crystal on the other hand had already done group visualizations, Jake (the male pastor) had led them in group meditations, and she felt she could confidently lead one.

At that point, I said that I had led group imagery sessions with people who had not done them before and had had no problems. I was offering this as reassurance to Lydia's concern. She did not seem convinced, and everybody else listened politely. I was the first time I had spoken in half an hour (I'd timed it), and those, like Skip and Wilma, who have not yet fully accepted me as a member of the group, seemed startled. Crystal was writing as I spoke, but was nodding as if she were agreeing. Offering this contribution made me see that although I am a participant, most of the women may see me as researcher rather than friend or group member as they see each other.
Group members committing to the research project. On the evening that was supposed to be the next to the last meeting during which I would collect data, no one showed up. Since it was my turn to host the meeting, I was the person women called to say they could not come and why. When Ruby called we ended up having a long conversation on the phone during which she divulged to me the information that she wanted to stick with the group until I got my data, but had found a Wicca group she was interested in joining instead. I told her I appreciated her commitment to my research. She said she was doing it for herself because she thought this kind of research was important. The following indicates both my acceptance as an active group participant and the gradual dissolution of the group, at least in its form as a biweekly discussion group.

15 February 1989
Although I want to stay out of the running of this group -- the process-- both Crystal and Ruby asked me to take an active role. Thus, I did not volunteer to get the next meeting together, but when I asked Crystal, "what next?" she said she wasn't sure. Since I was the host this time, I volunteered to bring up the subject of scheduling to whomever showed up. When Ruby called, she wondered what should happen next. I asked when she wanted the next meeting to be. She suggested she and I do the organizing, so we divided up names and numbers and agreed to call each other back in the next couple of weeks.

Question: What impact on the research if the group stays together only until I get the data? Will it invalidate the study of the group process?

In the chapters which follow, more attention will be paid to the content of the group meetings, and to the dynamic communicative process of the group meetings which is only implied in these entries.
In-depth individual interviews with group members

After several months of participant observation, as mandated by the participant observation method the time came to conduct interviews with group members in order to validate and challenge the spontaneous patterns identified by the researcher as well as to enrich the researcher's observation with the observations of the women in the group. Participant observation requires interviews with "informants" (in this case all members of the group under study) to confirm theorizing based on the observation over time. Since in this study the women of the group are also seen as participant observers, the interview portions access their sense-making and give them the opportunity to contribute their perceptions.

Rationale for an additional data collection method

For this research, the immersion within a site and the over time nature of study are appropriate. However, the underlying assumption of participant observation (that the researcher needs to account for what is producing (and maintaining) the interaction of the site) is only partially useful for this study. It is useful to look at what the nature of structuring or constructing is in use in order to account for the existence of a feminist group and the kind of individuals and interaction it produces. To access how women are using the communicative process of such a group implies the need for a conscious focus on an individual process quite apart from the communicative process observable by a participant in the group. It is not that these two elements are opposed,
but that participant observation is focused on a unit of study larger than the individual.

Ethnography is concerned with understanding cultures or larger social interactions and capturing the web of interactions and motives that comprise them. Because of this, the ethnographic method of participant observation is an effective way of gaining access to the production of the cultural web, but is less effective for gaining access into the constructing of individual sense-making. It becomes necessary to look for a second methodology which is focused on how the individual is constructing bridges on an everyday basis between her or his personal experiences and between the collectivity(ies) with which she or he is interacting. For this reason, a sense-making method which accesses the situated individual sense-making across time and space is appropriate to use in conjunction with the methods of ethnography.

So, informed by the literature, guided by the focus of this research, using the quantity of data collected in the form of meeting notes, and assuming the emergence of identifiable patterns in the discourse, an interview with each woman was conducted using another method of data collection. The previous chapter presented the theoretic assumptions and methodological foundations of an approach called sense-making. The section which follows discusses how a modified in-depth sense-making interview instrument strengthens the methods of participant observation for the purposes of this research.
Sense-making interview strengthens participant observation

In order to circle the communicative process of the group, participant observation and a sense-making interview instrument can be used to unfold the group structuring and the individual women's sense-making from a slightly different angle. Since each circling cuts into the group interacting or the women's experience at a slightly different point, some overlap was produced. The same territory is traversed using different instruments. This triangulating between data collection methods provides a check on the observation and conclusions of the researcher as well as the perceptions of each woman in the group.

These procedures also accord the women the opportunity to contribute their observations, interpretations and explanations of the group discourse as well as to document the path that brought them to, through, and out of the group. The posture of this study is that the other women participating in the group are co-observers with the researcher. Thus, each woman's individual journey and the communicative process of the group can be studied for spontaneously emerging patterns over time, for individual sense-making of several meetings and for the use of the group structuring for individual sense-making outside the group meetings.

Using a sense-making method strengthened the participant observation by providing a focused, structured, open-ended interview instrument that allowed women to unfold their stories. Because much of the talk in the group involved recounting of past and present stories about how the women did or did not fit well with religious settings or
other spiritual situations, focus questions asked the women to think
about times in their lives when they faced dysjunctures in regard to
religion or spirituality.

As hoped, many of the stories the women told were the same ones
they had told in group meetings which confirmed both the accuracy of
data recording as well as my perception of significant patterns.
However, beyond the aspect of confirmation of researcher observings,
sense-making triangulation permitted a far more thorough and
systematic examination of the communicative processes of the group
through the understandings of it expressed by the group members.

Prompting self-reflexivity. In addition, the sense-making
triangulation prompted self-reflection, self-analysis, and a more
detailed examination and consideration of their experience by the
women themselves. Thus, in effect, the women in the process of doing
the interviews were confronted with their own earlier sense-making
which they could affirm, clarify, and elaborate upon during the
interview, and, in some cases, could continue to reflect on and develop
their own understandings about what had happened and what this
meant to them.

This prompting of self-reflexivity is in-line with other sense-
making research which emphasizes the conscientizing derived from
the use of this method. While several of the interview questions focus
on sense-making about events over time in many of the group
meetings, the ability of the women to move into an observing and
critiquing mode along with the researcher for the particular meeting
for which an audio recording was made allows for further richness of
understanding of the sense-making of the event and serves as a check on the researcher's biases.

This aspect emphasizes the interpretive nature of sense-making, the interaction between researcher and respondent as an construction in process. It is also important to realize that the gap-bridging of sense-making about an event continues beyond the event as a person responds and makes sense of what has happened cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, behaviorally.

The section which follows reviews sense-making as a methodological approach and describes the adaptation of data collection methods for the purposes of this study, as well as presenting the sense-making instruments used in this study.

**Sense-Making**

Sense-making, with its methods which allow for open-ended, focused questioning, suggests itself as a natural complement to participant observation. At the point in the participant observation when the researcher tests theorizing against the understanding of members of the culture or social interaction, the need arises for interviewing members of the culture, informants, to confirm, disconfirm, and clarify observer hypothesizing.

After six months of participant observation, the time came to conduct interviews with the women who attended the group. Because of the dual need to confirm and illuminate the communicative group process of the meetings and to access personal constructing along
spiritual journeys over the life-time of the women, the sense-making method of a modified, in-depth interview was chosen (Dervin, 1989, 1983). In the next sections, sense-making methodology is presented, along with the adaptation of the sense-making instrument used for interviewing the women in the group.

**Sense-making methodology**

The sense-making approach (Dervin, 1989, 1983) is "a set of assumptions, a theoretic perspective, a methodological approach, and a set of methods developed to assess how [people] make sense of their intersections with institutions, media, messages and situations" (Dervin, 1995, p. 1). The approach allows respondents to define and anchor themselves in their own realities and is compatible with qualitative research needs because it may be built primarily on open-ended interviewing and may report findings primarily in qualitative terms.

Sense-making is a conceptually driven methodology. The methodology presents a conceptual framework which directs attention toward particular aspects of situations and suggests ways to attend to these aspects. These aspects include those which deal with how people make sense of their movement through situations. Thus, sense-making attempts to provide a systematic approach to listening to respondents describe how they see their situations -- past, present, and future -- and how they move to construct sense and make meaning of these situations.

So, in the use of a sense-making method, the researcher listens to the respondent tell of how he or she moved through time-space. In particular, for each step of the journey, the researcher attends to what
is called the sense-making triangle: how the respondent sees the situation, what gaps the respondent sees self as facing and/or bridging, and what ways the respondent saw self as helped by the bridge he or she built.

The theoretic foundation for all sense-making methods is the micro-moment time-line interview. This is the basic method from which all others are adapted according to the specific needs of a particular study. In the prototypical timeline interview, the researcher asks the respondent to recollect what happened in a situation in steps -- what happened first, second, and so on.

It is important to note that the "time" assumed here is not necessarily linear nor is the "movement" necessarily purposive or goal-oriented. The respondent may recollect things in whatever order is relevant to him or her at the point when he or she is telling his or her story in whatever terms he or she chooses as pertinent. The time-frame may be extended to include historical moments and anticipated future moments as well.

For each step in the time-line, the researcher explores with the respondent how the respondent saw and defined that situation, its gaps, its gap-bridging, and its helps.

**Sense-making methods used in the present research**

Based on the observations of the previous six months, a questionnaire instrument was developed which focused on the communicative group process recorded in field notes through accounts of individual experience in the living group. A woman was asked to
focus and talk about several instances in her life. For each of these instances a series of questions was asked in order to complete the sense-making triangle. Thus, by the end of her interview, a woman would have been asked about many different situations, the experience of which had be circled by entering through the questions involved in the sense-making triangulation.\textsuperscript{13}

**Sense-making triangulation.** In order to circle the experience identified in each of several focus questions, each woman was asked a series of sense-making triangulation questions. These questions allowed the women, in effect, to unfold their sense-making in that moment. Thus, the questions asked about the situation, the gap, and the help. Although these questions specifically prompted the women to talk about the situation, gap, and help, responses to any question could include talking about any or all of the triangulation points. The clear conceptual distinctions come from the researcher's assessment rather than from the respondent's. Table 4 is an example of a sense-making interview question drawn from the data in this study.

\textsuperscript{13} For a more complete discussion of the sense-making metaphor and the sense-making triangle, see the relevant sections in Chapter Two, Methodology.
Table 4

Example of sense-making triangulation in an interview question

What has been the most significant event that happened for you during the meetings of the women's spirituality group?

What happened?

What is significant about what happened at that time?

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?

Did it help? How did it help?

Did it hurt? How did it hurt?

The complete sense-making interview instrument used to collect data from the women in the group can be found in Appendix A.

Adapted sense-making interview instrument. In this study, the sense-making interview instrument was adapted so that the group members were asked first to talk about several times before they came to the group when they felt they had found or lost a spiritual situation that fit them well or did not fit them well. This provides a roughly chronological series of meta-steps to document each woman's history in trying to find a collectivity of which to be a part. An outline of the focal questions used in these in-depth sense-making interviews is presented in Table 5.
Focal questions for in-depth sense-making interviews

PRE-GROUP LIFE HISTORY:
• What was the first time in your life that you can remember being given a
definition or concept of yourself either in a religious setting or some other
spiritual situation that did not fit you? What happened?
• Were there other important times in your life that you can remember being given
a definition or concept of yourself either in a religious setting or some other
spiritual situation that did not fit you? What were they?
• What was a time just before you began coming to the women’s spirituality group
that you were given a definition or concept of yourself either in a religious
setting or some other spiritual situation that did not fit you?
• What was the first time in your life that you can remember trying to find a
spiritual or religious concept of yourself that fit you well? What was it?
• What were other times in your life when you tried to find a concept of definition
of yourself in a spiritual or religious setting that fit you well? What happened?
• What was a time just before you began coming to the women’s spirituality group
when you tried to find a concept or definition of yourself in a spiritual or
religious setting that fit you well? What happened?
• What was happening in your life that made you decide to come to the women’s
spirituality group?
• How did you hope the women’s spirituality group would help you?

DURING THE GROUP:
• What has been the most significant event that happened for you during the
meetings of the women’s spirituality group? What happened?
• What event most impacted your definition or concept of yourself? What
happened?
• Think of the one time when your definition of concept of yourself was most
challenged. What happened?
• Was there a time when you did not agree with something that happened in or with
the group? What happened?

PARTICULAR MEETING:
• What was the most significant event that happened during that meeting? What
happened?
• What event most impacted your concept or definition of yourself during that
meeting? What happened?
• What event happened that most shook or challenged your definition of yourself
during that meeting? What happened?

OUTSIDE THE GROUP:
• What was the most recent time when your experience in the women’s spirituality
group made a difference in your life? What happened?
• What was a recent time when a definition or concept of yourself which has been
changed in the process of attending the women’s spirituality group made a
difference in your life? What happened?
The first set of questions were directed to document the path a woman took that brought her to the group as well as her impressions and use of the discourse in and out of the group.

Secondly, each woman was asked to talk about her interactions with the group in no particular order. The focus questions in this second part were asked so that each woman would generate several different experiences with the group. It was less important for the purposes of this research to have a step by step chronology of each sense-making instance, and more important to circle what the women consider important through sense-making triangulation.

Thirdly, the women were asked to talk about how their experience in the group made a difference in the rest of their lives. This was to give the women an explicitly directed opportunity to talk what they got out of the group, and, if they had not done so in any other set of questions, to possibly discuss something roughly analogous to the "consequence" or "emancipation" of the use of the sense-making metaphor in Chapter II. An example of a complete sense-making interview with one of the women in this study using all of the focus questions listed above can be found in Appendix B.

Group members as co-observers of group process

As mentioned earlier, a full transcription of the audio recording of the particular meeting was given to each woman with all verbal exchanges transcribed and verbal cues of nonverbal behavior suggested. The verbal exchanges directed the woman's attention to the content of the meeting. The nonverbal behaviors conveyed additional
understanding of how the verbal message are intended and also prompted the woman to reflect on the unspoken relational aspects the participants might reveal. The transcription incorporated as little editing as possible in order to capture the chaotic, rich, dynamic characteristics of informal group interaction.

This transcript was given to each woman before the interview situation for her to review. The woman was asked to read over the transcript to see if she agreed with it. She was instructed to indicate pertinent sections regarding significant events that occurred during the meeting, events which impacted her self-definition, and events which challenged her self-definition. At the time of the interview itself, anything which needed to be made clear or corrected to match her memory of the meeting was noted. During the interview she was asked to answer the focal questions listed for the "particular meeting" found in Table 5.

Only group interview data used for analysis in this study

One final and important note before leaving this methods section of this chapter. While focus questions are asked during the sense-making interview about each woman's life prior to coming to the group, this part of the data will be used only as a source of description for each woman and to help provide a context for the formation of the "women's spirituality group." Because this study is focused on the communicative procedures creating, maintaining, and (perhaps) failing the feminist group, only the responses to questions which have directly to do with
the women's experiences of the group will be analyzed in upcoming chapters.

The following chapters will present analysis of the data collected by both methods and will use both conventional qualitative analysis and the communication-as-procedure analytic presented in Chapter II. These chapters will focus on testing the propositions based on the literature as well as those derived inductively from the patterns observed in the literature.

Adapting the Communication-as-Procedure Analytic

The final section of this chapter on method is an overview of the kinds of analytic tools to be used in the following chapters. In Chapter II, a communication-as-procedure analytic was built based on the sense-making metaphor. In that chapter, communicative practices common to the feminist group as detailed in the literature were briefly assessed to demonstrate how such an analytic might function. In order to tailor a communication-as-procedure analytic to the shape of the living group, the data collected could be organized using the following template. The sense-making interview generates data which provides responses to each of the parts of the template.

Adapting the communication-as-procedure analytic template

While the communication-as-procedure template in Chapter II focused on the bridge of the sense-making triangulation, and further distinguished proceduring elements which matched with feminist
praxis in order to assess the descriptions of "how to do a feminist group" in the literature, the template referred to here is different.

The living group is also considered abstractly as a gap-bridging procedure. However, the adapted communication-as-procedure template follows the pattern of sense-making triangulation and enters each response to one of the focal questions through the "enacting verb." This enacting verb is conceptually akin to that described in Chapter Two, but since the living group is not concerned with intentional feminist praxis the "situation" and "consequence" are rendered in their prototypical sense-making form. This is to allow the data to be shaped more inductively by the sense-making and procedures of the women in the "women's spirituality group."

Each full sense-making answer to one of the focus questions will be considered an instance for the purposes here. The interview responses were entered through one enacting verb, the most central action taking place in the sense-making triangulation of each instance. In keeping with the "verbing" methodological choice, the woman's choice of verb will be phrased in the gerund form. The statement of the situation is indicated by the enacting verb, and the most direct statement of the situation in the woman's words is coded. The statement of the consequence(s) is in the form of helps and hurts, once again staying close to each woman's words.

Using a list of general helps and hurts widely used in the sense-making research (Dervin, 1983), and adding to this list helps and hurts which are unique to this data, the consequences are further coded in a
more abstract form which permits patterns to emerge (see Appendix C). All instances are coded using the template presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Coding Template for instances in sense-making interview

SITUATION:
ENACTING VERB:
CONSEQUENCE (helps/hurts):
    HELPS CODE:
    HURTS CODE:

To give an example of how a sense-making question is coded using the template in Table 6, one instance from a group member's (Crystal) complete response to a sense-making question is presented. The example in Table 7 is from the sample interview in Appendix B.
Table 7

Example of sense-making interview response

What has been the most significant event that happened for you during the meetings of the women's spirituality group? What happened?
I really liked the one at Lydia's house when we were talking about The Starseed Transmissions. I thought that was a good one. I don't remember specifically what happened. It's just talking about all those concepts I find to be fascinating and invigorating and all that.

What is significant about what happened at that time?
Just talking about those ideas with those people, and finding that other people had similar kinds of experiences or beliefs that I did about it. That was significant.

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Just because of the opportunity to discuss it. And also the way that it brought us all together. None of us knew all of the other people real well, and yet here we were talking about some pretty heavy concepts. Some people agreed and some people didn't agree with what was going on, what was being said.

Did it help? How did it help?
It helped me clarify what I had read and what I thought about it and looking at other people's offerings about it to help me form my own... helped me solidify my own thoughts.

Did it hurt? No.

Crystal's response is coded as follows:

Table 8

Example coded using template

SITUATION: talking about concepts in a book the group read
ENACTING VERB: talking with others
CONSEQUENCE (helps/hurts): (1) able to talk with these people about these concepts; (2) it brought us together; (3) finding others had similar experiences and beliefs to mine; (4) talking about these topics I find fascinating and invigorating; (5) able to agree and disagree helped clarify, solidify, and form my own thoughts
(hurts): none

HELPS CODE: (1) got connected to others, (2) made collectivity (3) got support, reassurance, confirmation (4) got pleasure (5) helped me think
In this way, the enacting verbs of the living group were derived in a more inductive style from all instances of sense-making interviews with all members of the living group (with the exception of myself as researcher). Thus, these are the enacting verbs identified by the women of the living group as important in their experience of the group.

In Table 9 below the enacting verbs can be seen to range from more introspective procedures such as thinking about what is going on in the group to more interactive procedures such as talking with others in the group through to procedures which are the group acting together. The list includes all enacting verbs used in the study of the women's spirituality group.

Table 9

Enacting verbs

- thinking
- thinking about/observing self
- voicing/asserting me
- connecting with other(s)
- hearing other(s)
- observing/comparing self with other(s)
- talking with other(s)
- speaking to the group
- group supporting/agreeing with self
- self questioning/disagreeing with other(s), group
- observing another/group/ourselves
- doing something together

While no one seems to be heard into speech with silent hearing in this group (!), it is interesting to see that "hearing others" was the most often referenced enacting verb followed by "questioning/disagreeing with others," "thinking about/observing self," and "connecting with others." These enacting verbs will be more fully discussed in the analysis chapters which follow.
A chart was compiled which lists all consequences (helps and hurts) by all enacting verbs. The cells created by this design were used to code each instance of a help or hurt by one enacting verb. In the analysis which follows, illustrative instances will be located using this mapping. This chart can be found in Appendix D.

In order to see how this chart maps the instances, using the example of Crystal above, locate the enacting verb "talking with others" in the left hand column. Then move across the cells under each "help" and "hurt" looking for the shorthand "cdgs" (short for "Crystal/during the group meetings/focal question about most significant meeting").

Summary

In this chapter, the particular combination of methods to be used in this research has been presented, complete with rationale and detailed descriptions. To fill in the further methodological choices made in the process of conducting the research once a living group had been located and agreed to be the subject of study, excerpts from the field notes are included. In the chapters which follow, one will describe the women and the particular situation in which this group was convened. Two other chapters will use both conventional inductively derived qualitative analysis and the more focused communication-as-procedure analytic which is both deductively and inductively derived.
CHAPTER IV
SITUATING THE GROUP AND IDENTIFYING THE GAP

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter IV is to situate the collection of women coming together to form a group and to articulate the gap they confront for which the communicative group process is intended to be a bridge. This is necessary before beginning analysis in order to understand the group's communicative process. Situating the group and articulating the gap will require an analysis of different elements coming into play as the women coalesce from their diverse paths into the forming of the communicative group process.

The choice of a phenomenon for study in this dissertation arose out of my personal experiencing of a group process. In the Introduction to this dissertation I wrote,

I was tracking issues related to my religion and faith journey in the company of other women. What excited me most about this latter exploring was that I felt freed and supported to speak, to know, to acknowledge, to discover by my participation in groups with other women. My experience seemed to be opening up vast, fallow areas of my life to new energy and insight. I thought that something remarkable was happening, and that if I could figure out what it was, it would be a great thing to share with other people who sought such freedom and support.
The notions "hearing into speech" and "articulating the self"\textsuperscript{14} derived from others' experience of a particular configuration of group process have been serving as intuitive and metaphoric indications that a discernable communicative process exists which can be studied in a systematic fashion. My motivating hope for this study has been that such systematic study of a particular group would enable me to articulate a group process which could be replicated by other interested persons.

Previous chapters have (1) assessed the phenomenon of a feminist group process as presented in the literature, (2) introduced a methodology for observing and organizing the communicative procedures constituting such a group process, and (3) described the data collection methods to access material from such a group process.

In terms of the description of the feminist group process presented in Chapters I and II, this group can be seen to demonstrate many of the beliefs, meta-procedures and procedures of the feminist group (for example, a group composed solely of women, meeting regularly to deal with a particular topic of relevance to their lives as women). Referring back to the analysis of the literature on the consciousness raising group presented in Chapter II, the reason this group was formed is akin to one of the variations of the feminist group described by Foib (1979).

\textsuperscript{14} The notion "hearing into speech" is attributable to Nelle Morton (1985). The notion "articulating the self" is attributed to Carol Chrisl (1986).
On some occasions, women of 'like mind' may need or want to conduct a series of CR sessions specifically related to issues in their particular lives. For example, a group may form around such issues as single parenthood, aging and discrimination, black women's oppression, lesbianism and the like. (p. 187)

My intention in analysing the women's spirituality group is not to view it dogmatically through a lens identified as "the feminist group process" as derived through my reading of the literature nor to see if it corresponds to some notion of what a feminist group process should be. My intention is to keep the transformational concerns and communicative practices identified as comprising the feminist group process in the forefront of my mind as I begin to assess the data.

Situating the women's spirituality group

The task of this chapter is to situate the forming of a particular group process identified as "the women's spirituality group." This will be done by paying attention in three ways.

First, beginning with pertinent similarities and differences between myself and the members of the women's spirituality group, I hope to give an overview of the material in this chapter and to position myself as participant as well as researcher in relation to the women.

Second, by the introduction of the individual women through substantial excerpts from field notes and interviews focusing on biographic and demographic elements, my intention is to make apparent the paths which led them to the group and their understanding of the situation in which the group was formed.

And third, situating this group in its larger context, in terms of how the coalescing paths of individual women into the group are related
to the larger collectivity of which it is a part, will help to ensure that the group process is not rendered ahistoric or decontextualized. Situating the group in this third way means paying attention to historical and political events within the collectivity involving the women, and their experiencing and sense-making of these events.

Methodological checks. It is important to note that all of the material and my assessment of it is held in a methodological tension between two poles. One pole is my person. In many biographic and demographic ways, I am similar to the women and their experience of the phenomenon being studied. This means a richness and depth of understanding from an insider's perspective, as well as accessibility to such a group because of my similarities. However, my weaknesses include the bias, blindness, and unquestioned assumptions that come with such similarity.

A second pole has been the reasoned and articulated methodological choices I made as reported in my field notes, the use of the sense-making interview, and the application of the communication-as-procedure analytic as an organizing tool. These tools for guiding observation and collecting data help correct some of the weaknesses by bringing to light the communicative practices of the group, and providing sense-making triangulation to fully circle and reveal individual step-taking. To this point in the study, I have depended upon these methodological choices to guide my observing and collecting of data rather than any particular theory. This was an intuitive choice: I reasoned that in order to enter the experiential world of a group process I needed to listen and allow the women to be theorists, co-participant
observers with me, long before I began to theorize about their group's communicative process.

**Mandate to articulate theorizing.** With the need to interpret comes the need for theorizing. In addition to interpreting of the group process through my biographic and demographic lenses, I am also observing through theoretical lenses. Beginning in this chapter, I will articulate theoretic influences which inform my observing and interpreting. These are drawn from the body of work which grounds the communication-as-procedure analytic methodology and sense-making methods theoretically.

This chapter is organized into four main sections:

* positioning myself as researcher and participant
* introducing the women
* identifying dynamic tensions among demographic and biographic elements
* situating the group historically in the collectivity in which it is forming.

**Positioning Myself as Researcher and Participant**

Some notes at this point about myself may be helpful to situate me in relation to the group process which is the subject of this study. I will be interpreting the group process through (1) a theoretic lens, and (2) biographic and demographic lenses. Ostensibly, these two sets of lenses are roughly analogous to observing (theorizing) and participating (biographical and demographical identity). However, of course, both lenses shape my observing/theorizing, and both influence my participating/identifying. The organization of this section will be
broken into discussions of ways my formal academic training informs my observant participating, and ways my biographic and demographic elements inform my participant observing.

My theoretic influences suggested focusing on communicative process, informed my methodological choices for collecting and organizing data, and are shaping how I interpret the data. My biographic and demographic influences inspired the choice of this phenomenon to study, helped me gain access to the group process, shaped my participation in it, and is informing the concerns I will privilege in analysis.

Theoretic lens

While engaging with the thought of other theorists (particularly feminist theologians, other feminist scholars, and those theorists who influence them) has shaped my approach to this study, by far the strongest influences which inform my theorizing here are Brenda Dervin and Richard J. Carter. In a moment I will review some of the ways in which I am using their work, but first I want to mention some other theorizing which is influencing my thought.

Theorizing the "what" of this group. While the purpose of this dissertation is to examine process, first attention must be paid to identifying and defining the phenomenon. Although the focus is on the "how" of this group process, first the "what" needs elucidation. The following theorists can help to more deeply grasp the dynamics of the group.
Nelle Morton, Carol P. Christ, Sonia Johnson, Michel Foucault, and Luce Irigaray have all provided theoretical insights which merit mention here. My intention here is not to provide a thorough discussion of the ways their thought could be brought to bear on this data (although more a more in-depth discussion will follow in the final chapter of this study). My intention is to summarize very briefly what in their thought has influenced and is influencing my thinking at this point; to state how I am using their thought.

Although this is not necessarily the order in which I learned of their thought, the following paragraphs reflect how I have intermingled their thinking as I go to work interpreting this data.

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978), Michel Foucault proposes some provocative notions: discourses which silence some voices, thoughts, and experiences (p. 84); a multiplicity of points of resistance which are everywhere within a network of power relationships (p. 95); and, the "reverse" discourses which a dominant discourse forms (p. 101). This compression of his complex argument is admittedly extremely terse, yet it suggests a way to view the coalescing of women into the communicative procedaring of group process which is distinctively feminist.

The American feminists of the late 1960s and 1970s who were creating consciousness raising groups as a reaction to patriarchal oppression might have recognized the usefulness of Foucault's insights about having been silenced in a patriarchal discourse, finding ways to resist the patriarchal conditioning personally and politically, and speaking out in the public discourse. With my concern to situate the
women's spirituality group as an emancipatory response to patriarchal oppression, these notions of silencing, resisting, and reversing discourses have been provocative.

Luce Irigaray (1977, 1985) posits the existence of a female economy which is unexpressed and unexplored because language is that of a male economy in which women are never more than objects. She calls for women, "the sex which is not one," to begin struggling to hear, speak, know each other, make visible, and articulate this invisible female economy.

This notion joins with those of other feminists listed here to suggest that part of what is happening in a feminist group of women may be that something akin to Irigaray's "female economy" is being provided a space in which to exist, and that it is through communicating that this happens. This possibility may have been part of what the women's group at my church did when it seemed to open up the vast and fallow in myself.

Sonia Johnson (1989) argues that feminists only feed energy to the ever-dominant structures of patriarchy through oppositional activism, and calls instead for women to begin intentionally inventing and structuring a femininst vision of community in small collectivities apart from the dominant society.

Both the small group in my church, and the women's spirituality group connected with the Community Church were located in larger collectivities, and thus were more accurately a part of another community. However, both, especially the women's spirituality group, seemed to be coming together not in opposition to something dominant
but to be creating a "free space" to be reinventing and exploring. This
notion of a feminist group which is not oppositional would probably have
seemed foreign and possibly dangerous to the feminists of the early 1970s
who were intent on grassroots revolution. However, this provocative
idea caught my imagination and led me to look for visioning, creating,
and maintaining by feminists that went beyond or was not obscured by
an overdetermining concern with the relations of power.

Nelle Morton (1985) posits an explanation that the kind of
liberation which happens consistently in groups of women coming to
consciousness is because women can hear things from one another that
most men find it difficult to hear; her thought is that something has been
programmed out of the male of the species (p. 17).

Morton's anecdotal descriptions about the process in consciousness
raising groups were part of what led me to study this phenomenon. Her
metaphor for the process was that women were hearing other women
into speech. Her feminist theorizing here has less to do with oppositional
actions than with recovering a suppressed aspect of the species. This
notion that patriarchal society has systematically distorted both men and
women seems important, and that women may be touching the pulse of
something human which could be manifesting in a different kind of
society is very exciting. It squares with my experience, and seemingly
the experience of myriad women in groups, so to understand in some
replicable way what is happening seems a worthy goal.

Finally, drawing upon mystical experiences in Eastern and
Western religious traditions, Carol Christ (1986) argues that powerful
experiences of finitude or limitation in which social structures and
structures of consciousness which have provided meaning in a person's life are called into question and recognized as less than absolute could give women the power to challenge patriarchal social structures and structures of consciousness which have defined them and kept them in subordinate positions (p. xiii-xiv).

For the most part, I have stayed away from theorizing about spirituality in order to focus on communicative group process. My thought has been to let the members of the women's spirituality group identify and illuminate what spirituality means to them through their group discussions and interviews. However, both Morton and Christ are theologians, concerned with exploring what it is that women do through something they are calling spirituality, observing it through the lens of reinvented traditional religious thought. Christ's notion here that "mystical" experience which is outside of social structuring can serve as a source of power for women to challenge and change social structuring is of great interest to me.

Without wanting to name it myself or to have a predetermined notion of what that power might be, I have approached the group both as participant and observer with the thought in mind that the women of this group might be attempting through their group's process to be experiencing and bringing into being something of this other power.

What was suggestive to me was not that the women would be looking for something transcendent of usual human experience. I wondered if they might be looking for somewhere in their social structuring to be experiencing a certain part of being human, but had not been able to find anywhere to be doing this together with others. If
there was an "outside," it was not outside human experiencing, but
instead outside current social structuring. I thought the group might be
an attempt to reinvent current social structuring to make room for more
of human experiencing.

These theorists sparked my imagination and helped shape my
sense of the phenomenon I was looking to find and to study. Once I had
located and begun collecting data in the women's spirituality group, what
I observed and experienced there further fueled my desire to grasp what
this process might be doing.

Bridging between "what" and "how." Where these theorists were
pointing toward and talking about a process, their work only implied the
parameters of how this process might work. In terms of how to study the
process, I turned to the work of Carter and Dervin mentioned in earlier
chapters. In constructing the study of a group, I wanted to make a large
space in order to let what was happening in the group be revealed. For
this reason, I chose a more inductive research route, rather than being
theoretically driven from the outset. This is not to say it is not systematic:
the methodological lens developed in Chapter II was intended to help me
look systematically for communicative process. However, the relatively
atheoretical beginnings were intended to allow my observing without
explaining all I saw as fitting any particular theoretical perspective.

I hoped by this combination of methodological decisions to
uncover the dynamics of a group process myself, but also to allow a
coherent explication of that process to be informed by the
communicating itself. Now, as I enter into interpreting the women's
structuring of their group process, Carter and Dervin's theoretical work also informs my theorizing.

Theorizing the "how" of group process. An introduction to the thought of Carter and Dervin was presented in the discussion of methodology in Chapter II. Additionally, previous scholarship I have done with Dervin helped lay the foundations for recognizing the group process called "consciousness raising" as a instance of procedural reinvention (Dervin and Clark, 1993). Among many pointed suggestions for attending to my underlying assumptions and making visible methodological reasoning, Carter's emphasis on the need to understand general behavioral principles (1991), for example, led me to be looking for processual relating within the data which would be producing specific consequences. Dervin's recent work (1994) articulates a "communitarian" perspective for the study of communicating which is "truly multi-perspectival, which mandates a circling of the reality being made, maintained, destroyed, and remade by humans as they struggle individually and collectively through their lives" (p. 382). These two scholars provide a wealth of theorizing useful for understanding a communicative group process which is intended to be transformative, to "raise consciousness."

Carter's theorizing. Carter's theoretical work sets a stage for the exploration of human behaving, especially for human communicating. The following quotations are from a 1991 article in the journal Communication Theory and serve to provide an encapsulation of the kind of theorizing that I have found particularly useful in thinking about the great flexibility of human communicating behavior and the human
capacity to be inventive in the face of varying conditions. His
conception of the human as capable, inventive, and self-reflexive guides
my thought that the communicating of a feminist group process might
reveal something about a different way of working with our human
condition.

However, for the world's people to construct the future they need,
we must have an understanding of how the universe operates.
Then we can see how any future culture, world or otherwise,
might operate. There are, after all, some principles at work or we
could make no differences at all. There is some "underlying order"
-- but in the sense that it underlies our efforts to make differences,
rather than in the overblown sense of deterministic covering laws
that would make our steps gratuitous. (Carter, 1991, p. 153)

His description of the human condition includes a hopeful sense of
the possibility that humans are capable of changing, of making a
difference. This is in accord with my thought that in the consciousness
raising group might be seen a new and useful way of ordering ourselves.

There is partial order, not complete order. The universe has its
similarities and differences, too. Similarities and differences are
not the sole province of particular cultures and of comparative
analysis. The world of our future, like the world of our past and
present is the world of possibility. (Carter, 1991, p. 154)

Carter conceptualizes a generality he calls "the everything
condition" in order to speak about the necessity to understand the
relationship of relationships which he distinguishes from the
"relationships of objects (or of conditions seen as objects)." This notion
emphasizes the importance of understanding the relating that constitutes
process. It undergirds his understanding of communicating as
behavioral and sets up some principles for some of the basic phenomena
of relating which any group process would need to negotiate through
communicating. He calls these conditions collisions, separations and partial order.

This behavioral kind of relationship is relating. It is a processual relationship that can produce other relationships ("products"). It is the relating we need so much to understand if we are to construct our future. The relating principles are what we need, before the fact, if we are to face the future competently. The crucial relationships of which I speak have been neglected in previous notions of everything. But the ubiquitous relational phenomenon of collisions might call them to mind. The other relationships are separation (without which the notion of everything is pointless) and partial order (so that our ordering is possible and consequential). From these three relationships follow a unique kind of principle for relating (Carter, 1990): requisites and imperatives. (Carter, 1991, p. 155)

Carter sees communicating as part of a repertoire of human behaving by which colliding, separating, and partial ordering are negotiated.

Communication is fundamentally behavioral. Behavior is constitutive of communicating as communicating is constitutive of social behavior. "Communicating" is something we do. "Communication" is what we produce .... If we view communication only as a social phenomenon, we may be carried far away from the sense in which communicating is fundamentally behavioral. (Carter, 1991, p. 156)

The importance for my theorizing is the distinction he makes between communication being behavioral rather than social. It supports the contention of several of the other theorists that in the consciousness raising group, women are seeking and finding opportunities for the kind of human experience that is beyond the current social structuring. This conceptual distinction makes it possible to understand communicating as providing the basis for inventing new kinds of social structuring.

Dervin's theorizing. The underlying metaphor for sense-making has helped elucidate how I am conceptualizing the group process as bridging a gap. The sense-making approach, Dervin (1994) writes, "calls
for a methodological refocusing of attention in attempts to understand the nature of information/communication processes from entities and states to processes and dynamics; from nouns to verbs; from nounings to verbings" (p. 379).

Dervin's recent work developing a notion of "communitarianism" focuses "on the idea that it is in communication that humans make and unmake order, self, community, and society" (Dervin, 1994, p. 378). This opens up ontological and epistemological possibilities which allow me to conceptualize the paths of individual women coalescing into a group process through communicative procedurings.

In essence, this communitarian position formally incorporates both order and chaos as ontological and epistemological assumptions. It assumes both construction and deconstruction as aspects of knowing. It assumes that the standard for judgment of knowing focuses on recursivities, consequences, contiguities, and intersubjectivities rather than external immutable standards. It assumes that knowing is made and remade, reified and maintained, challenged and destroyed in communication: in dialogue, contest, negotiation. In contrast to other positions, it focuses on hows, rather than whos and whats. (Dervin, 1994, p. 379)

This theorizing seems intuitively useful for looking at a group process which is comprised of persons with past experiences to draw upon or reject, with desires to do something different and to capture something new. The presumption must be that with the best will in the world, this process will be dynamic, both predictable in ways it is like any other group (both from the point of view of the small group literature and the experiences of the women themselves) and unpredictable in the ways the women are being inventive and responding to unique circumstances and desires.
As the rest of this chapter unfolds, this epistemological and ontological openness proves remarkably useful for examining the tensions the women articulate about the situation in which they begin forming their group's process. In the next chapter with its more explicit focus on the communicative group process itself, this perspective's openness will once again provide a theoretical frame to see the dynamics between order and chaos within the process.

Finally, the notion of "verbing" communication in order to preserve the sense of a dynamic activity was presented in Chapter Two as I discussed various ways to think about forming a group process. I have already begun using the gerund "-ing" form for several key words in this chapter quite intentionally: situating, theorizing. Dervin (1993) writes about the need for a shift in theorizing about communication so that scholars focus on the "hows" of communicating, not the "whats."

The move [to verbing] will allow us to begin to transcend the false dichotomies which prevent us from theorizing communication as practice, as the verbings which humans, collectively and individually, use to construct bridges across gaps -- self and other, self and community, structure and individual, self at time 1 and self at time 2, one aspect of self at time 1 to another aspect of self at time 2, chaos to order, order to chaos, homogeneity to difference, difference to homogeneity. (Dervin, 1993, p. 51-2)

In particular, this theoretical stance seemed to fit the needs of this study to gain access to group process and reflect it in a verbal form. With my interest in seeing how a process occurs, the mental shift accomplished by turning nouns into their verb form keeps my thinking open to dynamism. The following variety of possible verbed communicating activities is suggestive of what one might expect to find in a group's communicative process.
Homogenizing and differencing are reconceptualized as communicatings. Among other possible communicatings are: idea makings and idea repeatings; thinkings and emotings; listenings and arguings; positionings and vascillatings; cooperatings and contestings; polarizings and nuancings; categorizings and hierarchings; nounings and verbings; and host of other ways in which we humans individually and collectively make and break order. (Dervin, 1993, p. 51)

Additionally, the assertion that humans are making and breaking order seemed particularly suited to looking at members of a group creating, maintaining, reinventing, and perhaps failing at, a group process.

These are some of the most obvious ways in which Carter and Dervin's work has influenced my theorizing about the phenomenon under study, theorizing about how the women do it, do a group process through communicating.

Nouning myself as participant. In the next part of this section, I will move into an explication of the biographic and demographic lenses which I bring to viewing this group process. I am aware as I do so that while my theorizing, observing, and data collecting have been influenced by the theorists presented above, in many ways I shift into more conventional ways of viewing myself and my similarities to the group. At some future time, I may be more integrated as a theorist and a participant, and thus might talk about myself in terms of some of the notions just mentioned. But a more accurate reflection of my thought encountering the group several years ago, and the self that is writing about these biographic and demographic elements at this time, is to write in more conventional terms. Here I write in terms of nouns, not verbs,
and not necessarily aware of all the implications to order or chaos that I am bearing with me.

**Biographic and demographic lenses.**

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I described having happened into a group of women at my own Presbyterian church. In this group I had the experience of feeling opened up, liberated, and enlivened. Some of the women in the women's spirituality group asked me why I did not study the group in my church, instead of studying them. My answer was that I needed my church group for my own personal support whereas in the women's spirituality group I would always be observing, as well as participating. Thus, one important difference to my experience in the women's spirituality group was that going into it, I was always a researcher before (or alongside) being a participant. To that extent, my presence as a participant was always somewhat artificial.

Another difference was that I am a member of a mainline Protestant denomination and a professing Christian. In fact, through my mother, my family have been middle class, white Presbyterians for generations. Thus, my experience in my church group was firmly rooted in that context and that history. Although in that church group we were all women and although I was taking the risk to explore with other church members some of the seemingly marginal areas of Christianity in which I was keenly interested but trepidatious, it was with the intent of being informed by biblical teachings and attempting to live out Christian ideals. My position in relation to my church and denomination was that it interpreted the Christian message in too narrow, exclusive, and
patriarchal a way; it needed to be radically transformed from within by and for such women as myself.

However, for the most part the women and the setting of the women's spirituality group was different than this. While all had been raised in families which practiced some form of Christian religion (as did mine), some of the women were adamantly disinterested in being informed by biblical teachings or attempting to live out Christian ideals. Many of the women wanted to explore other forms of spirituality instead of the religion presented by the Christian church. That two of the women were more like me in their desire to transform the Christian religion rather than rejecting it altogether became a significant factor in the life of the group.

While I was in my own life still content to attempt to transform my religion, I was fascinated by this particular group of women because they seemed to have moved beyond where I had dared to venture. They were actively exploring a women's spirituality akin to that which I had been reading of in literature on feminist spirituality and theology.

In the discovery of this group, I felt I had found sisters who had gone further and explored more and were willing to be more radical than I was yet able to be. I felt great excitement that I would gain a glimpse into a new terrain where I might be going. In terms of this research project, I thought the group process of these women would provide an even clearer and more complete picture of the communicative practices of such an alternative to conventional religion than my own church group could.
So, while I knew I would be attentive as a researcher to the communicative practices in a way none of the others would be, I perceived myself at the beginning as being personally less developed in a radical woman's spirituality than most of these women because they had known yet rejected their religious backgrounds where I had not, and because they had explored (and would explore) spirituality in many contexts outside of conventional religion as I had not. However, as I spent time with the group, I came to believe that I was more like them in many fundamental ways than I had at first imagined, and that my experiences had not been so different. This was my perception as I entered the group, and parts of this view remained throughout the time of data collection.

In the following section, each woman will be introduced and characteristics which the women share or do not will be discussed in terms of their significance for the purposes of this study.

Introducing the Women

At the first meeting of the women's spirituality group, one of those who had instigated the group said, "we talked about having this group, but we all have different backgrounds, so why don't we go around the circle and each woman can say something about her history with spirituality or whatever is relevant and what brought her here today and about what she expects from the group."

This section of the chapter is devoted to presenting the women in terms of biographic and demographic characteristics which seem relevant to the particular dynamics of this group's process as they
developed it over time. Some of these characteristics were of importance to the women as they introduced themselves to each other and began creating their group. Some were revealed over time in the ongoing conversation of the group and can be seen in retrospect as significant given what occurred in the group process. Presentation of all of the characteristics is intended to help the reader situate these women and this group within an understanding of history and societal tensions.

In terms of nowning and verbing, or the tension between order and chaos, these introductions could be seen as the poles where the women are most ordered, most nounced by current social structuring.

All the members of the women's spirituality group (including myself) shared the experience of having spent substantial amounts of time as children and young women being educated in and experiencing formal religion at the behest of their families. All but one of the women had been raised in religious white working or middle class American Christian households, both Protestant and Catholic. The exception was a woman from Egypt whose family had immigrated to the United States when she was a young girl. However, she shared with the rest a Christian religious background in a family which was now American and middle class.

In addition to these similar characteristics of religious background, the women can be described in other demographic terms. Below, a brief biographical statement will be made about each woman, followed by discussion of what additional pertinence these demographic characteristics have for this study. The women chose their own pseudonyms for the purposes of anonymity.
The women.

The oldest woman was in her sixties, had an undergraduate degree, and had primarily been a homemaker. Ramona was a recent widow who was now living the life of an active retiree with grown children. Her basic religious affiliation had been Methodist for most of her life. She describes her reasons for coming to the group. "I went partly as a social thing because my husband had died within the year before that and I was looking for things in my life to take up interests and time and so forth. There were people that belonged to the group that I liked a lot. It was just to spend time with those people."

The youngest woman, Maria, was single and had recently been a graduate student working part-time as a teaching assistant but was now employed full-time in a white collar industry. It was she whose family had emigrated from Egypt and were now small business owners, and whose religious affiliation was Egyptian Orthodox. She came to the group because "I had accomplished a lot of things in the material world, I think. I was at a point when I wanted to start doing something internal, some internal work, so to speak. When I joined that church, that was the purpose of joining the church. That led to the women's group because the church wasn't doing what I wanted it to do for me."

Crystal, Lydia, and Ruby shared some characteristics. All were in their middle thirties at the time the group was being initiated. All were mothers of two or more children. Crystal was married, while Lydia and Ruby were single. All had had some undergraduate education; Ruby had a bachelor's degree. All described themselves as "old hippies."
worked full-time. Crystal was a professional artist. Lydia ran a small business. Ruby worked for a government agency.

Crystal's father was an Episcopalian priest and she attended an Episcopalian boarding school during high school. Crystal's mother died when she was a young girl and Lydia's when she was a small child. Lydia's stepmother had been extensively involved in a protestant church when Lydia was a young woman. Ruby's family had been Catholic, and she had also attended Catholic schools up through her undergraduate degree at a Catholic university. After teen years of increasing disillusionment with their families' religious traditions, each had rejected these religious affiliations by their late teens or early twenties.

Crystal says of the group, "I enjoy talking about spirituality and became more interested in a woman's point of view of my woman-ness. The goddess culture. I was one of the instigators of it. I thought it would be fun to do."

Lydia had desires for the group. "As much as anything, a lot of the women in the group are friends of mine and we had touched base on different occasions about different thoughts and feelings we had. I thought it would be a really good place maybe to share information and to explore and to learn some new things. To be able to verbalize, to start to learn how to verbalize."

Ruby joined the group in part because of what was happening in the Community Church. She says, "A lot of it had to do with disappointment in [the Community Church] and the fact that I was even seeking something. I was seeking more knowledge and a different path to try to get more in touch with my own spirituality. I am very woman
focused and so I really wanted to learn it from other women and to share the journey with other women."

Francis was also in her mid-thirties, currently single after recently leaving a long-term relationship and had no children. She worked full-time and was taking night courses toward a master's degree. Her family was working class and she describes having made a decision as an adult to go to night school while she worked in factories in order to be able to leave that life. She had been raised in an actively Catholic family, but like some of the others had begun rejecting Catholicism as a young girl, finally abandoning it by her late teens.

Francis says she came to the group because, "I was feeling close to a community of women and I enjoyed them and felt very free to talk about anything around them. I felt that a number of them would have many many many contributions to make that I could learn from. I was interested in knowing where they were coming from and what they were thinking, what some of their experiences were."

Wilma was also in her mid-thirties, had been raised in a Lutheran household, and had graduated from a Lutheran seminary. However, a significant recent event in her life makes her history similar to some others. While she had attended seminary with the intention of becoming Lutheran clergy, she had painfully realized she could not make the final required vows because she could not accept their patriarchal bias. This decision meant the while she completed a related master's degree, she could not complete the requirements which would have made her a pastor. By this decision she was prevented from pursuing her intended
career path. Thus, she was new in town and looking for a fresh start and a job, as well as a community.

Of her interest in a group, Wilma says, "I had been out of seminary for a year and I wanted to keep my feminist stuff going because that had been a real point of growth for me in seminary. That was the key that unlocked the door to life in general. I was hoping to find a group of women that I could keep working on that kind of stuff with."

As has been noted, Skip was the part-time female Methodist co-pastor of the Community Church. Her parent's were farmers and the family attended a protestant church regularly. Unlike any of the others except Wilma, as a young person church for Skip was a positive experience, indeed a haven from the stresses of her family. Her faith had been a source of support and guidance during extensive times of crisis in her twenties, especially relating to her family, illness, and the death of her first husband. She was now in her forties having attended and completed seminary in her thirties. She announced her engagement (a second marriage) in the course of the first meeting of the group, and had no children.

Skip says, "As the woman pastor of the church I felt a responsibility to meet with the women and at least begin to know them better, begin to understand who and what they were a little better."

To complete this set of biographies, at the time when this data was collected in 1988-1989, I was a graduate student, working part-time as a teaching and research associate. I had been raised in a middle class family, attending Presbyterian churches (although because of my father's profession, I had lived in other countries with dominant non-
Christian religions which as a young person gave me wider exposure to a variety of religious perspectives), and still sought and was active in Presbyterian churches as an adult.

As has already been noted, I considered myself a Christian who was working to rid her denomination of patriarchal biases, trying to transform my religious affiliation. Unlike any of the other women, I had no knowledge of the other women nor much knowledge of the Community Church before I contacted Ruby at our mutual friend Jake’s suggestion. Although I became a participant, my identity was primarily that of researcher and observer.

The following account describes my initial encounter with the women’s spirituality group. This group was selected for this study because of the members' intention to explore the experience of spirituality as women, their willingness to accept a researcher as a participant observer, and its availability at the time I was ready to do the study. The following passage is drawn from my field notes of the first meeting of the women’s spirituality group in August 1988. Introductions for two women who joined the group within a couple of weeks of this first meeting are drawn from their in-depth sense-making interviews.

While some of this material repeats the introductions of the women presented above, it more concretely situates the women in the communicative procedures of this group as they negotiate the initial stages of beginning to create a group process. In addition to some of the biographic and demographic material used above, most of the women also use anecdotes to give each other a taste of the kind of spiritual and/or religious experience which has been hurtful or meaningful to them. In
this way, they provide a more immediate picture of their own sense-making than demographic and biographic material is able.

Initial group meeting: 29 August 1988

Two women (Ruby and Crystal) sitting in the middle of the semi-circle turned to each other saying, "well, where shall we start?" and I got the impression they were the moving forces behind the group starting up. So, we went around the group and each person said their name. There were six women at this point, and another woman came in later. No one seemed to be the particular leader, but finally one of the two women in the middle said, "we talked about having this group, but we all have different backgrounds, so why don't we go around the circle and each woman can say something about her history with spirituality or whatever is relevant and what brought her here today and about what she expects from the group." The women began to talk.

The first woman who talked was Francis. She described growing up in a Catholic background that had been fairly restrictive. She said that she had felt restricted by the church and not found God in the church. Had gone through the movements, but had found her God in nature. She was coming to this meeting to talk about spiritual things. That she had come to this church feeling like it was place where she thought important things would be talked about.

The next woman to talk was Crystal. She described described herself as growing up in an Episcopalian household, her father was a priest. Her mother had died when she was quite young and she went to boarding school. She described a situation that happened when she was a
young adult in which her father had gotten castigated by his church for some reason. At that point in her life, when she was being rebellious anyway, had seemed to be the last straw to break her trust in the institutional church. She said she had spent the next several years doing all sorts of spiritualist, hippyish, alternative things, always searching and seeking but outside the institutional church. She also said she found her God in nature.

Crystal mentioned that part of why she was at the group was that she would like to study alternative kinds of spirituality. She mentioned the words "goddess" and "coven." This made me think that she was interested in bringing alternative feminist spiritualities notions to this group. She also said she had finally found a church which was a place where she could bear to be. A church that didn't have the bad parts of the institution that she recalled.

The next woman to go was Ruby who described growing up in a Catholic home, going to Catholic church, Catholic school, Catholic high school, and Catholic university. She described two incidents connected with the church that summed up the problem of what the institutional church was like to her as an authority of God's word. ....After one incident, she never again accepted that a priest or the institutional church was an authority of God's word. Another incident she described was when as a teenager she had been sitting talking to a priest, and he said, "you would really make a good priest, it's too bad you can't because you are a girl." At the time she thought, "this is stupid. They're telling me what I would be good at, what I should be, and telling me in the same breath it's what I can't be. What kind of a place is this?"
Ruby had not been in church for several years after college, but had still been seeking her own relationship with God and a place where she could worship. She had met Jake somewhere and figured that this church might be such a place. She, too, was seeking a place where she could be religious and spiritual in a community without the negative aspects of the institutional church that she had found in her upbringing.

The next person to talk was Lydia. She said, "well, all of you have just told my story." She also described growing up in a religious family, going to church, finding the church repressive. She came to this church having sought and wanting community. She was at this meeting because she wanted to be in a woman's group and wanted to discuss spiritual issues.

At this point, I was next in the circle, so I introduced myself and I told them that I was there interested in studying them for my dissertation.\(^{15}\) I went on to tell them I would be willing to participate. I told them about my background, how I hadn't ever thought the institutional church was perfect, but that I had always thought of it as a place that I could transform and that I had always known God. I talked to them about being in several groups at my own church and said I was interested in this kind of a group for its own merits quite apart from wanting to study it because I like the kind of energy that happens in groups like this one.

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\(^{15}\) My presentation of myself and my request to study the group and the discussion with them about my participation are found in Chapter III, under *Gaining Entrée*, p. 64.
The next person was Wilma. She came in a little bit late. She said that she had grown up in a Lutheran church and that church was fine, but really what she adored was going to the church camps in the summer. Growing up she had gone to them, in high school she was an assistant counselor, in college a counselor. At some point she decided that she wanted to become a minister, went through seminary, worked in Chicago suburbs during this time doing various kinds of Christian social work outreach activities. She went through a Lutheran seminary, but at the end could not bring herself to take the vows to be ordained because she could not get up in front of a congregation and repeat the paternalistic creeds, prayers, etc. required by that denomination. At that point she left off trying to be a minister and an active worker in that church. She was now working in Columbus, and had come to try this church out.

The final woman was Skip who is the other minister besides Jake. She told us a synopsis of her history. After a traumatic time in her life, she felt God calling her, holding her still to listen and to do something, but when she got better she didn't. A second time she was similarly disabled with a series of illnesses, and again, felt God calling her to become a minister. At that time this seemed the farthest thing from her mind. However, she finally did go to seminary and became a pastor fairly recently. She has worked at various social work kinds of jobs and now is finally able to work professionally as clergy. She hoped this group would be a place where she could just come and not have to be "on" as a pastor; a support group.
Many of the women appeared to have children, and were in their 
30s and 40s. Lydia mentioned that some other women were interested in 
this group, but had not been able to come to this meeting.

Two other women came to the next group meetings. Maria and 
Ramona attended the group during the data collection time frame. 
Excerpts from their sense-making interviews serve as their introduction. 
First, Maria speaks:

I really wasn't given too many definitions of myself other than the 
very few times that I was in [Egyptian Orthodox] church and those 
were the times when I was in with other people in the family 
because my parents didn't really give me any definitions of 
myself. Any time when I came in contact with other people in my 
family who were religious other than my parents. The two 
feelings I got, one from my parents and two from the other people, 
were very conflicting because in my family I grew up to believe 
that the world was mine, I could do anything, there was no limits 
for me, and then whenever I came in contact with religion it was 
the outside that put limits, that introduced me to any kind of 
limits.... (Maria)

And now Ramona:

I think that it probably started very early. As I think it must with 
everyone, from the time that you first are introduced to church 
and religion you would like to find a definition that suited you. I 
don't know that I can say any exact incident, but I can remember I 
grew up as a Baptist and my father was very much into this and 
nothing pleased him better than having the whole family sit in a 
church pew together on Sunday morning. I don't question his 
motives exactly, but I just wonder ... this picture of this family 
sitting there; he liked it. I would like to have fitted into it and did, 
seemingly. We all did. I think that you want to fit in, you want to 
find a spiritual definition of yourself.

We went because he wanted us to. I remember it as being his 
impetus that got us all there. He insisted on it and so we went and 
we sat as a family. I think there was some rebellion up and down 
the pew, but we went and we sat.

When we first moved to Columbus, which was about 22 years ago, I 
joined this Sunday school class at the Methodist church. It was a 
real good experience. I loved it because we talked about 
everything. I always seemed to be taking an opposite point of view 
as if I was there to be the person who said, "hey, wait a minute,
maybe that is not true" to the extent that the people in this class
got so they would say if I weren't there they would tell what I
would say if I had been there! I was predictable. I think it was
very influential on me. I really liked it. I liked this getting in
there and fighting it out, speaking up for what you thought, who
you thought you were. I perceive it as a kind of rebellion again. I
know that word keeps coming up in my life, but I do think that all
my life I have been a rebel. (Ramona)

The rather extensive passages above have served to introduce the
eight women (nine, including myself) who were the members of the
women's spirituality group during the approximately six months during
which data was collected.

Demographic and Biographic Dynamics

Some particular elements of the sets of demographic and
biographic descriptions bear further discussion at this point because
they may inform about some of the dynamic tensions at work within the
process of the women's spirituality group. Different groupings of the
women based on (1) their age and generation, (2) their past experiences
with religion, including a sense of identity in relation to religion, and (3)
their current desires set up strong currents as they coalesce into the
group process.

Generations.

Those in the group in their middle thirties and early forties
(Crystal, Francis, Lydia, Ruby, Skip, Wilma, myself) all were in their late
teens and early twenties in the late 1960s and early 1970s and thus are
members of the Baby Boom generation. Their activities and interests
reveal characteristics of the societal trends of the time: Rebelling against
the values of their families by rejecting the authority of religion, exploring other religions and spiritual movements, experimenting with sexual relations and psychedelic drugs, a strong interest in working for social justice through grassroots activism, and not least, participation in the Women's Liberation Movement. The instigators of the group (Crystal, Francis, Lydia, and Ruby) particularly reveal a shaping of interests, values, and activities through their participation in the events of this generation.

Skip and Wilma share a feminist critique of religious authority with these women, but their histories do not reveal the full participation in the rebellions of the others (nor does mine).

Maria and Ramona, because of their ages, have life experiences which fall somewhat outside these generational influences. In the conversations during group meetings, Ramona occasionally makes comments or asks questions about how it is that the rest of the group seems to know something or takes something for granted that she identifies as being shocking or outside the way her generation would have thought or understood things. Maria seems to some group members to be wise and think in an interestingly different way not only because of her different cultural background, but because of understandings attributable to a different era or generation.

But the thrust and vision for the group of those who instigate it is in keeping with their being "old hippies": Defying institutional authority, exploring alternative ways of doing things, inventing new ways of doing things. They expect each group member to be tolerant of a
wide range of spiritual or religious expressions and also assume that each
other shares a similar defiance of the authority of religious institutions.

Yet in ways significant for the dynamic tensions within the group, not all members share these expectations and assumptions. This brings us to one of the main areas where the shared experience of a generation is less influential than the personal experiences with religion institutions and explorations of individual spirituality.

Past religious experience versus religious identity

For all of the women but Skip and Wilma, past experience with formal religion had been at best ambivalent. Most of the women talk about religion as being something which they as individuals have experienced. Skip and Wilma have taken on something that could be called religious identity which definitively shapes and directs the way they proceed in the group process. Skip is present in the group as the female pastor of the church with the stated intention of getting to know these women better because of events in the church. Wilma as recent seminarian, and despite the recent decision which derailed her from a career path, is in the group to continue discussion about how feminist Christians can transform a patriarchal church institution.

Table 5 in Chapter III presents the focal questions used in the long sense-making interview about the women's lives before coming to the women's spirituality group. These questions were phrased in a way reflective of themes in many discussions during group meetings. In these discussions, the women frequently talked about ways they had or
had not fit into the religions of their families as well as other experiences and explorations which they felt were spiritual.

Thus, where Skip and Wilma can be seen as having religious identities because of their having positions within a religious institution, the other women might identify themselves as explorers and seekers. They encounter both religious institutions and many other things as places for exploration and experience which they identify as spiritual. So, a tension exists between those who identify strongly with the Christian church (even if they are working to change it) and those who encounter it as only one among many possible opportunities to experience and explore spirituality (albeit a flawed and domineering opportunity). This tension suggests a third dynamic which is that between the range of current desires for a particular experience in the group expressed by the women.

Current desires

While the women share similar backgrounds in many ways and differ in their religious or spiritual identifications in some important ways, yet another set of tensions can be seen in the answers women in their sense-making interviews to the question: What was happening in your life that made you decide to come to the women's spirituality group? Again, looking at this dimension, the women vary from wanting to explore spirituality with these other women, thinking they could learn from and practice new skills with them to another pole where a woman wants to get to know the others because of her identity as pastor of the church or a woman wants to find a group of women to work on feminist
issues. The fundamental difference between the other women and these last two is that all of the others knew and liked each other and were wanting to do whatever they wanted to do with each other as specific and known women. Skip and Wilma did not know these women personally and had motivations which did not require liking or wanting to do something with these specific women.

In a sense, although none of the women knew each other well before the group, there was a sense of insiders and outsiders based on liking or being indifferent to what one knew of the others. This may be a subtle distinction, but in combination with the previous two tensions it becomes magnified to add to a difficult set of dynamics.

While in the discussion above about different generations, Maria and Ramona stood out somewhat from the others simply because of their ages, in both the tension between identities and the tensions between desires for the group, both of these women have identities and desires for their experience in the group that are harmonious with what the instigators wanted to be doing. However, in the case of Skip and Wilma, although they are closer to the instigators in age, their religious identities and their desires for the group which are not based on liking and interest in exploring with the specific other women serve from the beginning of the group to set the two of them apart.

All of these dynamics of demographics and biography will be explored more thoroughly in the analyses of the group process in the following chapter, but these initial sketches of the women as they coalesce into the group serve to present them in light of the concerns of
process. Having attended to an overview of the diverse women coming together to form the group, the next section will focus in more depth on the more immediate situation in which the group was formed.

Situating the Group Historically in the Greater Collectivity

A group of people, including most of the women introduced above, had been creating and organizing the Community Church for about a year when some of them took it upon themselves to instigate the women's spirituality group. This was done in a specific historical context where some of the hopes of the women had not been realized as they participated in the newly formed church.

Apart from Skip and Wilma, the rest of the women had rejected or simply dropped out of their respective religious backgrounds in their teens or early twenties when they left the immediate sphere of their families' influence. Having fallen away from and/or adamantly rejected their religious backgrounds, several years (or even decades) later they were seeking a community in which to be spiritual and work for justice in the company of others.

Introducing the church

The church with which this group is affiliated is somewhat unusual. Although it is administered and funded as a joint mission project of the Methodist and Episcopal denominations, it is a new church intended to reflect the needs and desires of the community in the immediate vicinity of an existing but unused church building. Because of this, the newly reclaimed church building was host to many different
programs created in response to the needs and desires of its neighborhood. For the most part, these were invented and staffed by members of the community, however, there was leadership by some professional staff and programs funded by the two denominations.

In addition to the community outreach, another aspect remained more typical of a church, and that was the holding of regularly scheduled worship services. While the core of its worship at the time of this study was the Christian sacrament of communion, a greater latitude than usual was permitted in the form of worship surrounding the ritual of communion. During the time that data was collected, a variety of different groups took turns leading the small worship services.

Most of the women in the group had been associated with the creating of the church, both in helping survey the neighborhood and in planning meetings deciding how the church would be structured in response to the information gained from the survey. Some tension existed from the beginning between those who were Christian and those who were not interested in the Christian religion so much as in exploring and creating alternative ways to be in spiritual community. Several of the instigators of the women's spirituality group mention wanting to explore alternatives with other like-minded people. Before the group was created, many of the women had intended to be members of the Community Church hoping it would be the spiritual community of like-minded others which they sought.

Recalling the introductions of these women, it is important to bear in mind that all of them had backgrounds of growing up attending churches with their families, but all had rejected or moved away from
these churches as adults. The interest in Community Church was that it promised to be the positive things that they believed in and/or remembered without the negative aspects.

This introduction provides an overview of the recent activities of the women as participants in the larger collectivity of the Community Church. The following section presents several perspectives of the church experiment through the experiences and sense-making of the women who would create the women's spirituality group.

The Community Church from the perspective of the women of the group 16

The women's experiences and sense-making of recent events in the Community Church range from enthusiasm and deep satisfaction to bitter disappointment and resignation. Those women who chose to talk about their recent experiences with the group in their sense-making interviews extend from Wilma's excited discovery of a church which is "the kind of church or place that I wanted to be a part of and if I couldn't

16 The data being used in this chapter is drawn from field notes, meeting transcripts, and transcripts of in-depth individual interviews. An important note is that the long sense-making interviews, from which many of the direct quotations are drawn, were conducted a year after the initial meetings of the group. In the interview, the women were asked what was happening in their lives that they wanted to become a member of this group and how they hoped the group would help them. Thus, they were being asked to recall their thoughts of a year previously, yet events of the intervening year (as will become clear in subsequent chapters) may directly bear on the beginnings of the group and how it is later perceived by the women. This is specifically in evidence in the sense of disappointment with the church that some of the women express, and the presence of the female pastor of the church at the initial meetings.
find one I would have to start one" to Lydia's painful sense of betrayal that her "vision of what this place could be ... just wasn't going to happen."

All of the women chose to talk about their experience with the recent events of the church except Francis and Skip. In Francis' case, although a friend of some of the women (Crystal, Lydia, and Ruby), she had not been involved in the formation of the Community Church. She began her indirect connection with it by beginning to attend meetings of the women's spirituality group. Her recent spiritual experiences have to do with nature and will be recounted in a later section of this chapter.

Skip, although she was a pastor of the church, did not speak in her interview about her interactions with the women of the women's spirituality group prior to its creation during the time when she would have been working with them to some extent. In part, she had been hired late in the process of forming the church as the Methodist presence in its professional leadership. She joined the group in part because she was aware of friction of some of the women who had been disillusioned by the recent constraints of the denomination and wanted to make a bridge from the Christian clergy to the women. She wanted to get to know them and understand what had happened from their point of view. However, as with Francis, in her actual interview she spoke more about her personal spiritual practices. Her explication of one of these will be presented in the later section with Francis'.

In covering this continuum of perceptions about experiencing the Community Church formation, bear in mind the dynamic tensions derived from the demographic and biographic accounts of the earlier section.
The range of responses from enthusiasm with the Community Church to bitterness and disillusionment parallels the three elements of tension described in that section: (1) experiencing the influences of a generation which occupies a particular historical and political configuration; (2) identifying with or in defiance of religion; and, (3) differences in desiring and understanding what the women's spirituality group is to become.

Wilma exemplifies one end of this three strand polarity. She is a feminist Christian who took the drastic step of refusing to take the final vows of ordination which would have made her clergy. In the Community Church she has found a model of her vision of a transformed Christian institution.

Lydia exemplifies the other end of the polarity. She is a rebellious explorer yearning to belong to a community where her perspective and experiences will be accepted as is, without modification. In the Community Church she worked to realize her vision of a spiritual community but her efforts have been coopted by the sponsoring religious denominations. Because she is not a Christian, she is excluded from the church which she worked to form.

As each woman's perspective is presented, their combined sense-making will be used to develop a glossary in order to assess these tensions. This description of the limitations of the church as well as the desires of the women will provide a context with which to understand the communicative process of the women's spirituality group.
Making sense of events in the creating of the Community Church

One of Wilma's responses in the long sense-making interview provides a view of the church by someone who is very involved and very excited by what is happening. It will serve here to give a sense of the potential which initially excited most of the women who eventually formed the women's spirituality group. Later on, other excerpts from interviews will provide the reasons to which several of the women alluded behind the sense of disappointment in the church.

Extending a positive experience. Wilma speaks of the ways in which this church is different from other churches with its greater tolerance for diversity of beliefs, room for exploration, and acceptance of many kinds of differences. She also speaks of the part which is her particular interest, music in community.

I had started going to [Community Church]. It was only a few weeks. I had decided early on, even before I moved back, on the invitation of the person that became my landlord, who was involved with it, that that sounded like my kind of place, so I decided that's where I wanted to hang out.

For the most part it hasn't got too traditional yet, though it has gotten to be more familiar. It's hard to find places like that. It's significant because it's a bunch of folks that were intentional about being together for worship and also service kinds of event in a setting that didn't want to draw lines in the same places that traditional Christian churches tend to do. Those were justice kinds of issues in some ways, but also theological issues that left room for growth and exploration in ways that most of the traditional churches didn't. They've got it all figured out! They'll give you the questions and the answers! It's kind of boring. But [the Community Church] was significant because they didn't have questions or answers for the most part. At best we were trying to keep track of what was going on! It's mere fact of existence seems significant because it ran against all the norms of what a church is.

It's hard to find a place like that. I had decided before I ever heard about it that that is the kind of church or place that I wanted to be a part of and if I couldn't find one I would have to start one. I was
glad to find one that was already started because it saved a lot of energy on my part. I can just be a part of this one instead of having to get it started.

It's not like it is monolithic in its thought which is what it is about. One person has one idea of what it's supposed to be about and what life is about and another person has another idea and that is fine. Just toss them in there all together.

For myself, maybe...I feel affirmed there as a person though not necessarily for what I believe. It is the kind of place where you are accepted for who you are rather than for what you believe because there is not the criteria there for belief that churches normally have. People are not there because they are looking for an orthodox sort of belief system. It's not monolithic which is what orthodox is. Straight. Ortho means straight. That what orthodontist's do to your teeth, they straighten them out.

It's more like a bush that has shoots going off in all directions and some of them bear fruit and some of them are sort of fancy and interesting and they just kind of tucker out. I'm convinced the roots there are in the right place, and you can't really see the roots. They're underground and really beyond description in a lot of ways because you can't see them, but you can see they're there when the bush starts to move. There is an anchor there. The bush hasn't blown away, dried up and become a tumbleweed. But it is a kind of interesting bush, what we've got there. It's the kind of bush that a lot of little critters can find a home in and they don't necessarily have to become an organic part of the bush. They can hang out there for awhile if they need shelter or if they need food, shade, or whatever this bush can give them. They may decide to stay there and become a part of the bush or they may move on wherever their journey is.

I wouldn't say that it feels like a spiritual home, sometimes more like a spiritual menagerie. I guess I like zoos, and it's a kind of a zoo, somewhere between a zoo and a circus depending on if it's a busy day. How did it help? I felt like I could be me there and that was okay. And whatever I decided that God was calling me to do people would say "that's great! Go for it!" even if (a) they didn't understand it, (b) they didn't agree, or (c) they thought they didn't want to have anything to do with it and thought it was really awful, but they'd say "go for it anyway because that's what you're hearing."

Sometimes it's been a good place to sing and I hope it will keep on getting better. It's been hard to figure out what to sing that will make everybody feel included. Everything from there's too many words and people who can't read can't handle the songs that you have to read the words to sing, the tune is too funky or too
traditional. It's hard to find a song that keeps everybody happy. (Wilma)

So, in Wilma's experience, the church is a wonderful place to be. As excerpted in her brief biography, Wilma wants to continue working on her "feminist stuff" which was why she sought out the group of women. She wanted to extend her happy experience of the church by participating in a group she thought was part of it.

Accepting and adapting. Where Wilma was engaged and involved in the Community Church in a way that satisfied her deeply, other women were ambivalent. Crystal gives a perspective of someone who had truly missed some parts of the religion she had rejected more than a decade earlier. For the most part, she remains quite enthused about what is happening at the church, although one brief reference gives a glimpse into an emergent sense-making of some others. The two sponsoring denominations required that the ritual of Christian Communion be celebrated during the worship services. The non-negotiable presence of this ritual was seen by some of the women as the recurring symbol of an oppressive system.

I guess a significant event is that I started at [the Community Church]. The year before I'd gone to an Episcopal church in my neighborhood. I thought I'd give it a try to see if the old magic was there. It wasn't. It was totally boring, way too conservative. So when [a friend] started talking to me about this new church and I decided I'd check it out, it was the first time since I was a teenager that I felt that a church situation could be nurturing. It was a unique opportunity to make it be what I wanted it to be. That was significant. Up until then it had been years and years since I had been affiliated with the church.

I met a whole bunch of people who were also searchers coming from different backgrounds, but all kind of believing in the universal goodness of us all and how we're all tied together. Even though it is still a Christian church in that we still celebrate communion (which still doesn't have any real gut level meaning
for me) I can look at it like a meal that I'm sharing with these other people that I care about. It felt real good to be in a situation where you could talk about God and talk about religion and not feel queer about it. A lot of times before that it had been my experience (and probably a lot of people's experience) that you start talking about God and people just look at you like you are pretty weird. So that was nice because for the past several years I have been looking, searching, reading, trying to find how I fit in with the things.

It was a church that I was going to, on my own, voluntarily, without having somebody tell me I had to do it! That was pretty significant to me! Given the way that I had felt about the church for the past twenty years, it was significant that I was willing to give church another try.

Yeah, for the most part I did [find a concept that fit]. Just the things I already said, that we're all one, that the earth and all the creatures and the universe is all part of the same energy, that we're all connected and interdependent, and that we're all part of God. (Crystal)

Crystal mentions the acceptable, but personally meaningless, requirement that the community "celebrate communion." She describes finding a way to make it meaningful for herself, translating it into "a meal that I share with these other people that I care about." While she is accommodating this element imposed by the sponsoring denominations, she demonstrates an awareness that it is an element which comes from outside the desires of some of the organizers of the Community Church.

Accepting imperfection. Ramona focuses more specifically on this aspect in the following excerpt where she describes her excitement about what the church might be, her recognition that in some significant ways it is still limited as most churches in her experience have been, her acceptance that it is not perfect, and her appreciation for what it does do better than other churches she has attended.
Just right before that, and maybe having to do with the same thing, was the establishment of [the Community Church]. As soon as I heard about that, I thought to myself, "hey, maybe you have found it! This long sought after whatever. This is going to be what you think a church should be."

Fairly soon on, a person began to see that it wasn't going to be that different. To this day it is different enough that I feel that it suits because they are trying. They are trying to be different and to get away from some of the old stereotypes. I think if you find somebody that is at least trying, that is about as good as you can get. There is no perfection in this world. But I really thought it was going to be different. You know how you go into things, "wow!" but it hasn't been like that.

What was significant to me was that I felt like I could belong to it. That I could join it with a whole heart and not have all of this. This is the first church that I have ever belonged to that I wasn't perceived as a rebel. Thinking about it, that is the truth. In a way, that is significant to me. I feel like I can fit in. I feel like almost anybody could. "Y'all come!"

I guess all this church tramping around and all this seeking for something, for some kind of perfection or whatever. To think, even to think, that you might be going to find it or that it might be going to be what you had always thought you were looking for. You don't always know what you are looking for, do you?

I think that I might have come closer. I perceive that church to be out for the underdog which all my life was what I thought I was. Therefore, if I found a group of people that were like that, yes, that would be concept of myself that I could relate to.

I like being a part of it. I like it being somewhat off the beaten track. I like it not being this suburban beautiful church like the kinds of churches I have gone to all my life. In all my church tramping around, all the churches were very traditional. This church is not traditional. It does a lot of things. I know there are people in the women's spirituality group that think it is too traditional for them, but it is far enough off the beaten path that I like it. It suits me.

No, I wouldn't say it [hurt]. If it did, it was only in the fact that it didn't live up to my exact specifications, but I understand that that is not possible. That is silly to even think. I would say that is fairly insignificant, that it didn't really hurt. I think it is something to have found anything that close. As close as it is, that is not bad. (Ramona)
Ramona alludes to the limitations which even the Community Church shares with other churches, even though she feels she as a "rebel" can fit in because it is "out for the underdog" and "far enough off the beaten path." However, she doesn't specify in this instance what it is about churches in general which has fallen short of what she seeks. For more detailed sense of what that might be, we can turn to the sense-making of some of the other women.

At this point in the continuum of experience and understanding, cracks are beginning to be identified in the experiencing of the Community Church. Earlier Wilma attempted to extend her helpful experience in the church by joining the women's spirituality group. In Crystal and Ramona's accounts, much of this enthusiasm for the church is maintained, but they also see that the church is not all they had wished. Some of the women are beginning to think of the women's spirituality group as something they would be doing instead of the church because to one degree or another they were disappointed by the church.

**Relinquishing hopes.** The disappointment ranged from thinking the church did not go quite as far as some wanted to go (as in the cases of Crystal and Ramona) to feeling bitterly hurt that this church was revealing itself to be as flawed as many other groups and churches had been. Maria briefly notes her sense-making of the church's flaw in the terse statement, "I was led to the women's group because the church wasn't doing what I wanted it to do for me."

The following interview response from Ruby is a good example of the sense-making about the situation with the church shared by those
women who had hoped to find something different from their past experiences. She provides a thorough critique of the Community Church based on her experience, noting the contradiction between what those who sought her participation in the forming of the church promised and the recent actions of the church. After it was formed, in part through her efforts, she was excluded from a leadership role in the Community Church because the sponsoring denominations would only allow professing Christians to vote on issues relating to the church.

In a way coming to [the Community Church] was a way of trying to find a different definition for myself within what turned out to be a more rigid Christian construct than I had expected. But I was willing to try an organized religion that was set up by Christians because I was told that the only requirements were to believe in love and service to the community which are guiding principles in my life. So, I thought, "gee, if there is really going to be a church where those are the guiding principles, then that fits me.

As it turned out, it was more than that. Those may be the guiding principles and I still feel good about most of the people that I know from that church, I just don't feel good about the structure. I was still seeking a comfortable definition for myself. I didn't find it in that setting which I already described. The Wiccan thing that I've been looking at happened at an overlapping time period when I began hanging out at [the Community Church] and Wicca did work more.

I believe that the people who started [the Community Church] really do have love and service to the community as their guiding principles so in that way it is a good thing. I think that it is significant once again though, and I've said this before, is that what happened was that I found out that wasn't really how it was. It was that whole thing about feeling like I was deceived once again by organized religion. I was told one thing and it turned out to be different from that.

It didn't feel like a good fit. I wrote a letter to the editor in the church newsletter basically saying how I didn't feel good about that. Because after awhile, even though the service bothered me, the communion service in the middle of whatever we were doing, I was able to block that out and just deal with the good vibrations that were going on.
But when the bishops came around and wanted us to sign up and we had to make a statement that we were Christians and that we were either Methodists or Episcopalians or that we would recognize the authority of both, I said forget it. So, in that way I did not find a definition. The definition that was offered to me as the only way to be a "real" first-class member of the community of the church was to take the definition that they wanted to impose. That way, no, I didn't find a definition.

In terms of the community service, I do feel good about that and the love that is there, but I feel like I have been relegated to a second class position because I won't join, I won't sign and I don't believe the same things that they believe. I think that that is hard for some of the people there. It is like, "what are you doing here? If you are a witch, what is the story?"

Again, the only way that it helped was to point me in another direction. It helped me move along towards where I think is a more comfortable path for me. It helped me in that it gave me the opportunity to hang out with some people and do service to the community in a nice context, because I still like to do that. I do feel welcome and equal in those kinds of situations. If we are serving a dinner for people with AIDS, nobody cares if I believe in Christianity or not. It is like, what am I here for? To offer love and service. That is what we are all doing. It doesn't matter what our religion is. So, in that way it has been nice to give me the opportunity to do that kind of stuff in a kind of community setting. The deception [hurt]. Dashed hopes, I guess, I really thought that it might be different and it wasn't. In terms of the system it wasn't different. (Ruby)

Ruby explicitly states the contradictions of the system while acknowledging the good intentions of all but the sponsoring denominations. Lydia goes beyond to reveal her disappointment and sense of betrayal in what was happening in the Community Church. Hers is probably the bitterest response and deeply underscores the cost of maintaining a sense of personal integrity while yearning to belong, to be included in some group or community.

I had been told by a really good friend of mine that it was going to be an alternative spirituality group and that it wasn't going to be part of the mainstream Christianity group and that it was going to be based on love and service and that we could be free there to be whoever we were and to think whatever we wanted to think and
that it would be okay. And it wasn't that way at all. It turned out to be a very Christian sort of environment.

Just basically who I am. I am not a Christian and I felt really betrayed by this person who brought me into this group. I was one of the founders of that place and brought a lot of my friends in, too. The whole thing just wasn't a part of who I am.

Probably my feelings of betrayal by this person. My vision of what this place could be and it just wasn't going to happen. I felt that maybe I had found a place where I could go and feel comfortable and share thoughts and feelings with other like-minded folk. It just didn't happen.

Probably my need to attach myself to a group. I had been feeling pretty isolated for a long time on a spiritual level and needing reinforcement from other people. I had really hoped that that would be a place where I would find that.

It helped me realize that I can only find what I am seeking within myself and that it wasn't going to be from an outside source.

Yeah, [it hurt] deeply. I felt like I was looking on the outside, that there was this pane of glass or something and I was on the outside looking in and really wanting to be a part of that community but knowing that I couldn't be a part of it because I couldn't buy into what they were selling. I couldn't. It felt really fake. It felt just very artificial. I couldn't do it. It hurt me deeply that I couldn't be a part of that group. (Lydia)

With Lydia's articulation of her experience as being on the losing end of a struggle over whose vision would be realized in the forming of the Community Church, the other pole of the continuum from Wilma's enthusiastic satisfaction is established. The contest between visions for the Community Church and the responses of the women reveal various sense-making conclusions. These conclusions range from acceptance to accommodation to resignation to rejection of one competing vision instead of another.

This continuum provides a good picture of the dynamics experienced by the women in the Community Church who would go on to create the women's spirituality group. However, before leaving this
discussion, one particular aspect which is developed further in the next chapter needs attention. Lydia, in particular provides a deeper understanding of a characteristic of oppression which is often referenced in group discussion by the terms "imposed" and "dogma." Her sense-making about previous group experiences related to religion unfolds encounters with this negative group dynamic.

"Imposed dogma." In their conversations, some of the women often used words like "dogma" and "imposed" and statements meaning that at a certain point groups and organizations all tend to require one to accept their point of view and authority in order to be included.

For instance, in the following excerpt from her sense-making interview, Lydia recounted the following account of her experiences with groups. She reveals a pattern of unacceptable interactions with group dynamics which she associates with being like an early bad experience with a Christian group when she was a teen. Even in her mid-thirties, this negative experience serves to inform and mitigate her willingness to be in groups.

The time that I decided to try to be Christian was probably the last time I ever tried to attach myself to a group. I went through this little thing for awhile a couple of years ago where I was going to and listening to some channeling things but the minute it started to feel like a group kind of thing I backed away from it immediately.

I don't think I was searching for anything really at that time. I was just curious about the channeling and the group felt really open at first to everybody's points of view and everybody's kind of way of thinking, but after being in it for a few weeks, it really started to feel more like dogma and I really felt that that was not a place... that I had gotten out of it everything I could get out of it. I did just quit going.

[At the beginning], I was very curious. I had never experienced anyone channeling information and I wanted to go and see what it
was like and what it was about. I went and I really enjoyed it and I
got a lot out of it and it started to feel very Christian-like. Not like
a Christian group, not like Christianity as a religion, but with the
same sort of perimeters that I perceive Christianity as having. The
group ended up having a lot of the same sort of limitations that I
felt Christianity had also and so I just kind of quit going. (Lydia)

So with Lydia's account we can glean that her the limitations of
churches and groups tend to be a shift from initial acceptance and
support for many points of view to feeling "more like dogma." She refers
in this passage to an earlier interview response where she talks about
being a young teen trying to belong to a Christian group.

I was probably a pre-teen trying to get into the Christian mode of
thinking. I was probably trying to belong to a group and to attach
myself to a certain way of thinking. It lasted for a while. It was
real significant when it was happening, but it didn't last very long
at all. I kept thinking, "it just does not feel right, it feels wrong.
Not wrong, just feels really alien." It was like I was trying to force
myself to think a certain way, to feel a certain way, to be a certain
way. I thought, "this is totally bullshit. I can't do it!" I knew I
couldn't do it and I tried really really hard. I tried really hard and
I just couldn't do it.

What was significant about what happened was how hard I tried. I
couldn't do it. I tried really hard to be a good Christian girl. Or my
mother's perception of a good Christian girl. It was "fuck this! I'm
over it!" I just could not.

I felt like an outsider once again! I did not feel like I belonged.
That was kind of weird. I wanted to belong. I really really wanted
to belong and didn't. That feeling of wanting to belong and not.
(Lydia)

Thus, being in a group situation which begins to feel "like dogma" seems
to mean that a group does not remain a place of acceptance and tolerance
for one's own point of view and experience of the world where one can
explore and learn with others. Somewhere in the dynamic between
wanting to belong, to be on the inside, and having a distinct point of view
and set of experiences, it seems that a person faces the danger of
becoming alienated from herself. She begins to try and "attach" to a
"certain mode of thinking," begins to think she has to "force" herself to be, feel, and think differently than she actually does in order to belong.

In this broad picture of the situation in which the women's spirituality group was formed, already it is understood to be emerging out of contesting visions and a wide range of experiencing. When the communication procedures of this women's spirituality group's process are studied, they must be seen as arising out of these historic, biographic, and demographic tensions.

Before moving on to the next chapter, one more set of perspectives and experiences needs attention. Two of the women did not speak at length or at all about this contest going on within the church. Thus, when their paths coalesce with the others they are bringing different recent experiences and sense-making, and are not necessarily processing the recent historical events of the Community Church.

While Skip is the female co-pastor and thus would seem to be in the midst of the contests about which vision of the Community Church will be realized, she did not choose to focus in her interview or in introducing herself as recorded in the field notes on the struggles in the church. She mentions them in passing, but in effect brackets them out of her sense-making accounts. Possibly she chooses to remain silent because she knows her perspectives will become known to the other women through this research. She focuses on her on-going attempts to cope with the stresses she feels in trying to fulfill her role as pastor. Thus, in the following excerpt, she is expressing her attempts to cope with tension.
through meditation. This is, of course, also an indirect commentary on her experience of the dynamics discussed above.

I think that for me, that is almost a daily process. As a minister I have to serve not just a thing called a church, but I have to serve individuals. Each individual that I meet a different part of me has to minister to, and if I don't have somewhere inside of me a sense of exactly who I am, in the process of ministering here where we have a white congregation and at [another church] where I have a black congregation I would become so schizophrenic that I would find pieces of me lying between here and [another church]. So for me, that is a necessary part of my morning meditation to make sure I know who and what I am and where I am. Sometimes it is called up to question because of a situation that I am dealing with, because of a situation I find myself in in regards to the church or a particular person in a counseling situation. For the most part, for me it is a need that I have to ensure every morning that I know who Skip is and what she is about. I don't think that I can do the job that I have been called by God to do otherwise.

My morning meditation is a time of reading, of praying, of listening, of writing. If I do not do that in the morning, my whole day is shot to heck. Doing that ensures that I start my day right. It ensures for me that I start my day centered, I start my day in calmness and quiet, I start my day in the presence of God that has kept me through the night, I start my day knowing that unless I do this I don't have the strength and the ability that I need to deal with the day. So, it is significant in that if I don't do it, my days are lousy.

My relationship to God and the need that I have to be in constant contact with him and the need that I have for God to speak to me and in speaking to me to give me the guidance and the understanding that I need to face the day, to deal with the day, to do what needs to be done in the day.

Yeah, my definition and concept of myself is that through God I can do whatever I need to do as one called to be a minister. In myself I do not have the strength, I do not have the knowledge, I do not have the words, I do not have the abilities, I do not have the patience. But with a God that walks with me daily, that keeps me daily and that guides me daily, I can do what I have to do.

Oh, yes! It helps every day. It keeps me from making a total fool of myself. I still do it sometimes, but not as often as I would if I didn't make sure that God was part and parcel of what I do. It stops sometimes when I would go and do something really rash that I know would not be in the best interests of the God that I serve. It prods sometimes when I forget to do something that I should have done. So, yeah, it helps.
Yes, because not everybody accepts the God that I serve nor wants to. They can't understand why I do. It still puts me on the outside sometimes, wanting hiding in my little room where it was nice and warm and fuzzy. (Skip)

Where Skip is expressing the sense of overwhelming tension with which she is trying to cope in her role as pastor and longs to hide in her "little room where it was nice and warm and fuzzy," Francis recounts various idyllic encounters with nature through which she receives a sense of herself. She contrasts this with what seems to have been her more typical approach to sense-making. "Sometimes my concept or definition of self wasn't being arrived at through agonizing appraisal but just in being."

Probably it was in nature, could have been any number of places which come to mind. Could be on a camping trip on a little island up on Lake Michigan and there were a zillion evergreens around, just tall, straight and strong shooting straight for the sky and the sky is just busting out with stars. It just felt good being there. It made sense. Standing on the coastline in New England and feeling the power of the energy that was and how all life seemed to come together there somehow, it all seemed to make sense there somehow.

Walking the shore in northern Seattle and watching people bring in all this sea life from tide pools and setting them up at this little children's aquarium at the end of this big pier and having all these little Head Start kids come in and seeing them play with all this sea life and watching their eyes and their faces light up and all their questions and their amazement and their amusement and being part of them and being a part of that energy and being a part of that wonder in that natural setting.

Just a nice feeling. It was nice to feel as though something came together. It just felt right without having to think about it. You just felt it. I guess that it was a time where I at least realized where sometimes my concept or definition of self wasn't being arrived at through agonizing appraisal but just in being.

It was maybe like a great body massage or having been in therapy. It was coming to a sense of resolve even if only for a few moments provided you a time, a period of peace. An opportunity to rejuvenate. (Francis)
While both of these women give us an insight into how they experience or practice spirituality, a comparison of these two examples also reveals an important distinction. Where Francis is struck by the beauty and wonder of the natural world and is deeply touched by her own and the children's experience of it, Skip is describing how her meditative practice anchors her before she encounters the challenges of her world which she otherwise would find insupportably overwhelming.

In this chapter, a greater exposure to some of the women's sense-making provides an understanding of their histories, and particularly how several were seeking something in the Community Church and were somewhat disappointed or wanted even more of a way to be spiritual with other people that was not as constricted as the way they had felt in the past. Across the board there is an interest in pushing past conventional boundaries and of figuring out ways to be structuring spiritual opportunities differently.

If this chapter could be said to have presented the situation (the coming together of the individual women's paths to begin the group, and particularly the positioning of the inception of the group within the larger collectivity of the Community Church) and the gap (seen in their interest in exploring and experiencing spirituality differently that that provided by their previous religious experiences including that in the Community Church), then the next chapter will focus on the bridging of the gap, conceptualized as the many smaller step-takings and communicative procedures which together comprise the group process.
CHAPTER V
BRIDGING THE GAP:
STRUCTURING GROUP PROCESS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE PROCEDURING

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the women's spirituality group's process. Using the sense-making metaphor, the group process is identified as being a gap-bridging step. Using the communication-as-procedure analytic tool, the group process is conceptualized as structuring this gap-bridging step through communicative proceduring. The sections of this chapter address the communicative proceduring of this gap-bridging by theorizing, presenting a historical chronology of the meetings of the women's group, and attending to the meta-proceduring of the group as visioning, creating, maintaining, and dysjuncturing. The following outline of section headings is intended to help the reader to begin with a sense of the way the concerns of this chapter will be addressed.

• theorizing
• chronological overview of meetings of the women's spirituality group
• visioning the women's spirituality group
• creating the women's spirituality group
• maintaining the group process
• dysjuncturing in the women's spirituality group process
To begin, the following presentation of the various influences and approaches to theorizing used in this dissertation provide a framework for the analysis of this chapter.

**Theorizing**

Several different theorizations have been articulated throughout this dissertation. All of them will be brought to bear on the data in order to examine the communicative process of the women's spirituality group.

**Summary.** The Introduction evoked process in consciousness raising groups through the theological observations "hearing into speech" and "articulating the self." Chapter I revealed the egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic assumptions underlying the structuring of consciousness raising groups which point to necessary communicative proceduring: all voices valued, all voices heard, power shared equally. Chapter I also discussed axiomatic dynamics of small group formation to which any communicative proceduring must attend. Chapter II presented the methodological repertoire of the sense-making theoretic and communication-as-procedure analytic tools which provide guidance for the observing of communicative group process. Chapter III articulated methods of data collection which rest on collaborative theorizing by researcher and researched. Chapter IV introduced various influences which inform my theorizing. Ranging from the abstract to the concrete, a summary recalls these theorizings to mind after a discussion the construct "spirituality."
Spirituality. In Chapter IV, Christ implied that women might find a source of power in mystical experiences which are outside social structures. This combined with Morton's sense that the consciousness raising group was reclaiming a suppressed aspect of human experience, suggests that the women in this study may be seeking both a source of power outside of institutional religion and a place to experience something together that they have sought in institutional religion or heard spoken of in institutional religion but experienced elsewhere.

Some women, such as Francis, found in nature what was not found in church. Others found something in exploration of non-Christian religions. Many of the women in this group seem to combine the experience of being women and something they call spirituality. Later Crystal links talking about spirituality and wanting a woman's point of view of her womanness in one breath. Maria says she wants a power to be given to her which could come from women.

So here, spirituality as a substantive category will be purposely left open because it is contested and because the women refer to it as a leaping off point for discussions of things they have felt silenced. In terms of group process, it may be understood as a dimension of experience like being a woman. Both have been defined in certain ways by the dominant social structuring which constrains, ignores, or denies the existence of something these individuals are nonetheless experiencing. Both provide a source of power or opportunity for different structuring beyond what is dominant.

A deductive theoretical frame. As analysis of the group's communicative process begins, all theorizing needs to be synthesized
into a succinct theoretic and analytic frame. In Chapter Four I identified a variety of theorists who led me to identify and define a phenomenon of a feminist group's communicative process. Based on my intermingling of their insight and observations about the "what" and the "how," I developed the following picture of what I would be looking for as I encountered the women's spirituality group.\textsuperscript{17}

I theorized that I would see women who felt oppressed by patriarchal social structuring because it did not make a space for them to be participating fully as human beings. The oppressive social structuring would be accomplished through communicative proceduring. Communicative proceduring would have positioned and constrained them oppressively by privileging some ways of thinking and speaking about women and their experience while silencing others. Each woman would have realized that she could be doing something more because she had had experiences of herself feeling, experiencing, and making sense which were beyond what the oppressive social structuring permitted. As the women's paths coalesced, each would be envisioning how she would and could explore beyond the oppressive social structuring. The envisioning would include forming a feminist group process.

In forming a group together, women would be creating and maintaining a different social structuring through reinvented communicative proceduring. This social structuring or group process would permit and support exploring and experiencing being more fully

\textsuperscript{17} Chapter IV provides a fuller explication of the background for this discussion in the section entitled Positioning Myself as Researcher and Participant.
human. The forming of the group would be resisting the oppressive social structuring which had silenced this part of experience. To the extent the group was resisting the oppressive social structuring, it might begin articulating the reverse of whatever the oppression would have constrained or silenced.

Since the women would not have previously experienced their new social structuring, they would be struggling to learn to think, talk and do communicating in ways the dominant structuring had not allowed. Within the grouping itself might be found struggles between the constraints of the oppressive structuring and the freedom of the newly invented structuring; contests among various visions of what the new structuring would be; falls back into oppressing habits; or confrontations with intrusions from the oppressive structuring.

The metaphors underlying various theories may be getting jumbled here. One metaphor has us thinking about making a place in a web of social structuring by another way of structuring, and using communicative procedures to do so. The sense-making metaphor has us thinking about an individual taking steps along a path, bridging gaps as encountered, using communicative procedures to do so. Perhaps we can think of numerous individuals taking steps singly and together, creating strands of communicative procedures which are forming the web of social structuring.

This has been a fairly abstract explication of deductive theorizing, a picture of process at a meta-level, a metaphor. However, more concrete deductive theorizing may be derived from various readings of the
literature. What communicative procedures are recognizable as structuring inventively?

**Communicative procedures derived deductively.** Some possibilities include those communicative procedures which ensure that all voices are being heard equally, all voices are being valued equally, and power is being shared equally in the group process. The assessment of the consciousness raising group in Chapter II suggests that these ideals may be enacted by communicative procedures such as each person being expected to speak to the topic, taking turns leading discussion, no criticism of the person but challenges to the ideas, etc.

These are some of the communicative procedures which feminists were using to intentionally reinvent the structuring of consciousness raising groups. This kind of proceduring might be a systematic way of keeping the women from falling back into habitually oppressive communicating. It might also be a way to create new structuring which would allow women to be more fully experiencing being human.

**Communicative procedures derived inductively.** A more concrete understanding of what communicative procedures are needed to accomplish structuring the women's spirituality group is provided by the women's accounts of what they had sought in the Community Church. Because of their unrealized desires, the women's accounts suggest some desired parameters for the communicative structuring of the women's spirituality group. Using the women's words to create verbings, this structuring would include:
requiring only love and service to the community as guiding principles believing in the goodness of all understanding that all are connected and interdependent encouraging tolerance for a diversity of beliefs accepting each person for who she is and not what she believes supporting what each wants to do even if not all agree providing room for growth and exploration feeling free to talk about God, religion, spirituality including different points of view and ways of thinking nurturing seekers from different backgrounds reinforcing thoughts and feelings creating a place go to, join whole-heartedly, belong, fit in, feel comfortable

Based on the women's accounts of the kind of experience they had been looking for and NOT found in the Community Church, one would expect to see communicative procedures which would avoid the problems some women encountered.

Extrapolating from what the women said they did not desire, the structuring would not include:

presuming the current structuring had all the answers forcing one to think and feel a certain way in order to be included, to belong accepting one for awhile and then making one submit to authority and accept authority's beliefs in order to stay included betraying deceiving
These verbings give a sense of what successful bridging of the gap might include; how the structuring of a group process might help liberate women from patriarchal oppression. They give a sense of what the collectivity of women are looking to experience in their lives, as well as how this experiencing could be accomplished. The verbings suggest both what to expect of the group process and a standard by which to evaluate it.

Yet, for the most part, these verbings focus on how the women might experience a different structuring or on desired elements of the structuring or on what they are resisting in the oppressive structuring. These verbings do not focus on how they might accomplish this reinvented structuring through communicative behavior. This leads to questions such as:

• How can experience, desired elements, or resisting be observed?
• How do communicative procedures constitute the structuring?

Enacting verbs revisited. A communication-as-procedure template was presented in Chapter Three as a way to enter and assess the women’s sense-making of their experience of the women’s spirituality group’s meetings. Using this abstract template, the whole group process is considered one big gap-bridging procedure. However, this larger bridging procedure is conceptualized to be comprised of numerous smaller steps (also procedures). For the purposes of this chapter, each of these smaller steps is conceptualized as a communicative procedure which can be observed as behavior.
Each communicative procedure can be understood through the sense-making triangulation from the interviews. The adapted communication-as-procedure template follows the pattern of sense-making triangulation and organizes each response to one of the interview focal questions around the "enacting verb." The enacting verb identifies the behavioral element of the step. A list of these enacting verbs was provided in Chapter Three, and is presented again in Table 10.

Table 10

Enacting verbs

- thinking
- thinking about/observing self
- voicing/asserting me
- connecting with other(s)
- hearing other(s)
- observing/comparing self with other(s)
- talking with other(s)
- speaking to the group
- group supporting/agreeing with self
- self questioning/disagreeing with other(s), group
- observing another/group/ourselves
- doing something together

To review, the enacting verbs were derived all the women's responses to focal questions about the group and compiled into this list. Each sense-making triangulation focused on events which happened during (or related to) the meetings of the women's spirituality group. Thus, looking at the group process through the sense-making triangulations of all the women as seen in these behaviors provides a behavioral referent for the structuring of the group. Clearly, all these enacting verbs are communicative in nature, whether the communicating is intrapersonal, interpersonal or collective.
A question to ask at this point is:

• How might the desiring verbs be realized by the structuring of the women's spirituality group process through these communicative enacting verbs?

**Structuring group process through communicative procedures.**

Dervin (1993) speaks of making and breaking order through communicatings. Carter (1991) suggests that behavior constitutes communicating and communicating constitutes social behavior. He also calls for an understanding of the behavioral relationship of relating. This relating is required to negotiate collisions, separation, and partial order.

Women's spirituality group members are intending to create and maintain a variety of relating -- structuring a group process. Their desiring verbs can be understood as their recognition of the need to negotiate collisions, separations, and partial order through communicating. Their communicative enacting verbs can be seen as a means of negotiating through behavioral structuring.

With this understanding, structuring the group process to negotiate these fundamental aspects of relating in light of their desires is the way this collection of women propose to bridge their gaps. Aspects of this gap-bridging enacted through communicative procedures would necessarily include visioning, creating, maintaining, and possibly dysjuncturing to realize the desired consequences of this group's process. These four meta-procedurings warrant examination of the data collected from and about the women's spirituality group in the depth and
specificity possible. Patterns revealed in the data mandate more thorough analysis of these aspects.

The sections which follow will attend to data from the sense-making interviews and the participant observation field notes in terms of how it elucidates visioning, creating, maintaining, and dysjuncturing in this group's desired process. Patterns observed in the field notes and application of the communication-as-procedure analytic have been used to organize the particular material chosen for each of these sections. But first, a chronology of the group meetings will help to situate events and emerging patterns in the group meetings.

Chronological Overview of Group Meetings

This is an overview of what happened during the time when the data was collected during group meetings in the fall of 1988 and winter of 1989. This chronological account includes decisions about the structuring of the women's spirituality group and reactions to these decisions, patterns of attendance and participation, and contests between competing demands for the time, attention, and energy of the group. This chronology will serve to locate various events historically which are analysed in more depth later in this chapter.

In terms of the concern to understand the communicative structuring of group process by visioning, creating, maintaining, and dysjuncturing it, this chronology is a useful place to locate pertinent information. Although other sections will attend to the other meta-procedures, details of the dysjuncturing which happened during the group's meetings are particularly clear in this mapping of the group's
process. Thus, illustrations from the data are added to the descriptions of some meetings to flesh out the otherwise terse historical accounting.

**August 29.** The women coming together to form the spirituality group introduced themselves to one another. They decided to try and meet biweekly at each other's homes to read and discuss books and articles which interested them. Some of the women brought xeroxed copies of articles which intrigued them, and gave copies to the rest of the group to read for the next meeting. Skip¹⁸ (female co-pastor of the church), Wilma (new in town and to the church), and Crystal, Francis, Lydia, and Ruby (who already knew each other) attended this first meeting. After this first organizing meeting which was held at the church all others were held at member's homes.

**September 14.** Two weeks later Francis used an idea from one of the articles she had handed out to begin discussion. She wanted each woman to articulate her "core beliefs" so that the group could understand them, and then, gently, challenge each other to reflect on these beliefs. Agreeing with this, the women took a few minutes to write down beliefs, and then spent the rest of the meeting time discussing them. During this discussion, Lydia suggested that the group start working through a book she had read, *The Starseed Transmissions*, and others agreed to get and read it for the next meeting. Skip and Wilma were absent at this meeting.

¹⁸ All names of persons and the name of the church are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the women. When Methodist and Episcopal denominations are mentioned, they are indeed those denominations.
A new woman, Maria, came who knew Crystal, Francis, Lydia, and Ruby from the church.

September 28. The discussion begun at the previous meeting continued two weeks later. My field notes say, "last time we talked so much about karma, and what Crystal had written down as her beliefs had been so stimulating, that we started with that. Lydia reread the prose poem she had written stating her beliefs to bring Ramona (new) and Wilma (absent the previous meeting) up to speed." Francis and Skip were absent.

Although Wilma participated in this discussion, and attended some of the future group meetings where worship services were planned, the group's decision to read this book meant to her that the group was not going to be what she had hoped, and she eventually stopped coming to the group meetings.

In her sense-making interview Wilma said what difference this choice made,

There were women in the group but we didn't really focus on women's experience by looking at the channeling book. The reason I finally just stopped coming was that the channeling wasn't making connections for me in my life and it wasn't women's spirituality for me. The information that was in the book wasn't helpful for me in whatever I was trying to do. It was irrelevant for the most part. It was interesting, but basically irrelevant. Attending the group became a lower priority for me in my life schedule so I didn't often come. (Wilma)

October 12. At the fourth meeting, Lydia opened by saying there was something the group should know. Some members of the group had been part of a church worship committee meeting (including Skip) and
complained because they (Ruby, Crystal, Lydia) felt the liturgy at the church was too Christian "for some of us." The field notes capture some of the ensuing discussion.

Lydia: I need more foreplay before communion and the Christian [liturgy] does nothing for me. I really need that preparation.

Crystal: I want less Bible on a regular basis. It's one of many sources of "the Word." I want to introduce other things into the service, like visualization and other mind enriching and expanding things.

Lydia: Without asking any of the rest of you, we volunteered the women's group to plan two services over the next two months. We want to do this instead of the book for now if this is okay with you.

Ramona and Maria agreed, Skip watched, I scribbled.

Skip: I have heard your pain and your need for a different liturgy.

Skip went on to detail some ideas and resources that she had, as did others. Most of the rest of the meeting was about planning the services. At this meeting I asked if I could tape record meetings. Although others were agreeable, because Lydia did not want me to tape record I took hand written notes for all but the final meeting. Ruby and Francis were absent.

October 19. A week later some of the women (Crystal, Ramona, Skip, and Wilma) met again to plan the worship service. Near the end of leading some brainstorming, Crystal said, "well, that's all. I guess now we'll have to turn around and do the next one. Then we can get on with the book." Ramona responded, "Lydia will be glad when we're back to the book. She doesn't feel that this is meeting time well spent." Crystal said,
"Ycah, well I agree, but I think this is very important because [other groups in the church] will see that we did this and they might be encouraged to do something too."

Going on to plan a second worship service, Crystal suggested a psychic singer who speaks in tongues he asked to participate. She asked, "what do you think? Lydia thought it might not be okay, but Jake (male co-pastor, friend of Crystal, Lydia, and Ruby) said great." Wilma, laughing, said, "Jake would agree to anything!"

But Skip, the female pastor, took this opportunity to say, "No, even Jake has his limits. I have heard you mention witchery. I have a problem with this. I counseled a girl whose mother was a witch." Crystal asked, "I take it she was, it was, bad?" Skip responded, "It was bad. I as a person, not a cleric, won't be able to stay if you do witch things. And if you choose to do witchery, Jake and I as clerics will take a stand against it."

Although the meeting went on, and Skip participated in the other worship services, this was the last time that she attended a meeting of the women's spirituality group.

I chose to absent myself from the group. I think it helped the ladies because I am not sure they felt very comfortable with having me there anyway. That is my opinion. They were much more free to talk about what they wanted to without my presence. I know that. I think it helped because I didn't cause any more frustration and if I had stayed in the group, once they had started that discussion, I'd have caused major frustration. (Skip)

October 23. The women's spirituality group led the worship service. All members of the group except Francis attended, each doing part of the service. In the middle, Skip as pastor performed a
conventional Christian communion, and then the worship went back to
the variations chosen by the group.

October 26. Only four people attended the next meeting at Lydia's
house. Instead of discussion, Lydia decided we would play the board game
Pictionary. We did.

November/December. Members of the group led a second service
in November which I had to miss. It was not discussed in any subsequent
meetings of the group nor was another meeting scheduled for December
14 at Francis' house. At the next meeting on January 11, I received the
impression that the group had not met again since I had last been
present.

January 11. Only Crystal, Wilma, Lydia and myself attended this
meeting. Crystal began by noting the date of the next worship service
the women's spirituality group was scheduled to lead. The discussion
ranged from possible elements for the service to talking about recent
painful and stressful events in group members lives.

January 23. Crystal had arranged for a female liturgical dancer to
lead the worship service. Afterwards, I went with Lydia and Ruby to
Ruby's house to eat. Lydia and Ruby talked about how frustrated they
were that the church had started to follow more and more conventional
institutional Christian values and codes. They were concerned that the
Methodist and Episcopalian churches had said that only Christians could
be voting members of the church. This meant that Ruby and Lydia could not be members since they are not Christian.

Ruby and Lydia were incensed because they had been among the first to sign on as founding members of the church. They said that originally they had been told that diversity and conflict were welcomed, but now they felt closed out and were angry that there seemed to be an "in" group. Ruby showed me the original documents from organizing the church that she had felt indicated openness and commitment to including non-Christian viewpoints.

**January 25.** Two days later, Crystal, Lydia, Ruby and I met for a discussion based on The Starseed Transmissions book. The last assignment had been to find a paragraph that was meaningful to us. We took turns reading passages, using them as a beginning point for discussion. At the end, deciding about upcoming meetings, Crystal suggested the next be at my house. To my pleased surprise, Lydia suggested that I tape record the next meeting so that I could be free to join in the discussion.

While each of the other absent members was mentioned, no one had mentioned Skip in recent meetings so I asked if anyone knew where she was. Ruby said, "I haven't seen Skip. Skip doesn't belong in this group. She'd like to convince us of her way. She's not a seeker. She is satisfied with what she's got."

This contrasted with regretful mention of Francis being so busy with work that she would not be able to continue meeting with the group.
January/February. The women led the next worship service as planned, but I did not attend. At the time I assumed that this was going to be an on-going part of some women's interaction with the church, but that since it did not involve all the women and was not a group meeting that I would not systematically attend all worship services led by the women at the church. I continued to attend all other meetings of the group, including those when the worship services were being planned.

February 15. The meeting which was to be held at my house was canceled due to a variety of reasons. Based on field notes about who called to tell me they could not come, the group (besides myself) at this point seemed to be composed of Crystal, Lydia, Maria, Ramona, and Ruby. When Ruby called to see what was happening, we talked for about half an hour.

Ruby had written a letter for the church newsletter challenging them to hold to their commitment to support diversity. She mentioned how little Christianity meant to her because of her Catholic upbringing and the damage it had done to her and her family. She said she wanted to stick with the group until I got all my data, but that she had found a Wicca group she was interested in joining instead.

The two of us discussed and organized the next meeting, dividing up the names of members to phone, trying to get the group together for March 1. This was important to me as researcher since I wanted to use an audio cassette player to record the group's discussion at least once before I concluded my data collection in the field.
March 1. The final meeting during which I collected data was held two weeks later at my house. All the women who seemed to consider themselves group members attended: Crystal, Lydia, Maria, Ramona, Ruby, and myself. Once assembled, knowing they were being recorded, the discussion was under way.

Crystal began by saying a series of statements and questions that indicate both her perception and the state of the group: "I need help with church on Sunday, ladies." "I need some readers," "well, yeah, actually women doing church comes down to Crystal organizing it and soliciting people to help read," and "so, does anyone want to volunteer to find something to read on Sunday?"

No one disagreed with this assessment of lack interest and willingness to lead the worship services as a group. Throughout the rest of the discussion, Crystal kept prompting the women to think about the service, but primarily the other women use these prompts as a leaping off point for discussions about the chosen topic for the night, sexuality and spirituality.

Although the chronology ends here, reflecting the time frame of data collection, I conducted the long sense-making interviews in the fall. The following epilogue provides a brief sketch of how the women continued to meet, interact, move on together and apart in various ways.
Epilogue

The women met a few more times over the spring and summer. Maria moved to California. After the summer, the women stopped meeting as a discussion group.

Maintaining connections among group members. Fall 1988 through summer 1989 is the span of time of the women's spirituality group's meeting which is used as data for this study. However, most of the women continued meeting in one manner or another for several years, right up to the present. Now, six years later, I recently received an invitation for an upcoming gathering which mentions those who are invited: Crystal, Francis, Lydia, Maria, Ruby, Ramona, myself, and Rico (who became a part of the group about a year after the end of data collection).

Crystal, Francis, Lydia, Ruby, Ramona, and myself continued getting together every few months for a gathering that was more like a retreat, often taking place at Lydia's house which had a large yard or going away overnight or for a weekend to some location in the country.\textsuperscript{19} These gatherings continued for a few years, often at times when Maria returned for a visit.

At various times over the years, Crystal, Lydia, Ruby, and myself have visited Maria in California. After the first year or so Ramona gradually stopped coming, although she was usually invited to a

\textsuperscript{19} Since this is not part of the data for this study, these gatherings are not analysed here.
gathering if Maria was in town. Several other women have visited the group, but only Rico appears to have become a completely accepted member.

Crystal and Ruby tried to convince the others to begin meeting more regularly again for discussion, support, and spiritual exploration but this has never lasted for more than two or three meetings due to lack of attendance.

**Relating to the Community Church.** Skip continued as pastor of the church through the spring of 1990, but left the Community Church to be a pastor in another city in July. Wilma did not return to the group, but became very involved at the Community Church where she is now a paid staff member, able to do pastoral work. Crystal remains involved both in the worship and the community activities of the Community Church. Both Wilma and Crystal have participated in other discussion groups about women, spirituality and religion.

Lydia and Ruby participate occasionally in community activities at the church, but not in worship. Francis does not participate in the Community Church, but retains warm if sporadic ties to group members. I attend many group gatherings, and have developed friendships with Ruby, Crystal, Lydia, and Maria outside the group.

In the next sections, the sense-making and communicative proceduring of various aspects of the group meetings will be analyzed in more detail. This chronology can be used to help the reader locate events historically and participate in observing the patterns that arose from the field notes.
The analysis which follows begins in each instance by looking at what patterns suggest themselves from looking at the field notes and the interview transcripts. The next level of analysis is using the communication-as-procedure analytic as a guide to observing at a meta-level which will turn up other patterns and probe more deeply into some of those patterns already identified.

At that point, all of the patterns need theoretical guidance to help assess their wider meaning for the discourse on the communicative process of a feminist group. Additional theoretical material from relevant literatures will be brought in to help understand what this group was doing. Yet this women's spirituality group, like many of the feminist groups in the literature, did succeed in doing something many of the women experienced as remarkable, so the attempt will always be to see what new insight this material will bring, and to resist the temptation to fit all of this material into predetermined theoretical understandings derived from the literature.

Visioning the Women's Spirituality Group

In this section, the link is made between the most recent attempt on the part of the women to find a situation where they could fit, and the creating and maintaining of the women's spirituality group process. The material in this section is drawn from the women's responses to two questions in the in-depth sense-making interview: (1) what was happening in your life that made you decide to come to the women's spirituality group? and (2) how did you hope the women's spirituality group would help you?
The responses to these questions help sketch out a vision of these particular women want for the group process they are structuring. To some extent this has been done in the extrapolation of desired verbs in the earlier section on theorizing. However, here the women are more specifically speaking with the women's spirituality group in mind. This sketch will be useful for various reasons. One is a measure of how successful these women will be in creating and maintaining their vision(s) for the group. Another is to see how the disparate visions and reasons for participating will come to play an essential role in the contests and consequences of the group process.

Finally, the responses to these questions can be translated into the sense-making metaphor. Having done this reveals a picture of each woman's path up to and into the structuring of this group's process. If, at an abstract metaphoric level, creating and maintaining this group is this collectivity of women's attempt to bridge a gap, then the women's individual responses to these questions provide their own identification of gaps and their visioning for how this group would all them to bridge the gaps and experience the desired consequences.

Perceiving the current situation

In the rest of this section, material from the in-depth individual interviews is used to systematically reveal the situation and identify gaps as perceived by the women. As they provide answers to the questions, "what was happening in your life that led you to become a member of this group?" and "how did you hope this group would help you?" the women give clues to their situation and the consequences they hope to
derive from the structuring of the group's process. They show us their beliefs, vision, and the actions they are taking to realize these.

In the women's articulations of how they perceive the situation, and what they want from it can be discerned their perceived gap and the way they intend or hope to bridge it. Each woman, of course, has her own understanding, perspective and hope for the group, however, even at this early stage, that some of these fall more harmoniously into alignment with each other than others. The following section is organized around articulations of the perceptions of the current situation, visions for the bridge, and hoped for consequences.

Drawing from the in-depth interviews, the women articulate their visions for what the group would be. The visions coalesce around common themes: wanting to explore a woman's experience of spirituality, wanting to be with particular other women, wanting to learn something new or to explore the self in a new way, and recent disappointment in their encounters with the Community Church. The quotations below are drawn from the complete answers to the questions with particular themes underlined to emphasize them. Parts of some of the more complex quotations are used under more than one theme.

**Being with particular women:** Some of the women spoke specifically about their desire to be in a group with particular other women, mostly because they were enjoying each other and wanting to explore something together in a more specific way. One instance reveals a sense of responsibility to know these particular women.

**Francis:** I was feeling close to a community of women and I enjoyed them and felt very free to talk about anything around them.
Lydia: As much as anything, a lot of the women in the group are friends of mine and we had touched base on different occasions about different thoughts and feelings we had.

Ramona: There were people that belonged to the group that I knew from the church that I liked a lot. It was just to spend time with those people.

Skip: As the woman pastor of the church I felt a responsibility to meet with the women and at least begin to know them better, begin to understand who and what they were a little bit better.

Disappointment with church: Although this was not discussed during the first group meeting, the following women remembered feeling a sense of disappointment with what was happening at the church, that they had had hopes for what it would bring them which had been disappointed. Thus, part of why they came to this group was because they were still searching for something.

Maria: When I joined that church, that was the purpose of joining the church. That led to the women's group because the church wasn't doing what I wanted it to do for me.

Ruby: A lot of it had to do with disappointment in [the church] and the fact that I was even seeking something. I was seeking more knowledge and a different path to try to get more in touch with my own spirituality.

Visioning the bridge

In their responses the women mentioned different ways they thought that the group might provide a bridge for them, such as other women's perspectives on spirituality and in working on themselves individually in some way.

Women's perspective on spirituality: Some of the women mentioned specifically that they were interested in hearing about
spirituality from other women, and in exploring spirituality oneself as a woman.

Crystal: I enjoy talking about spirituality and became more interested in a woman's point of view of my woman-ness.

Ruby: I really wanted to learn it from other women and to share the journey with other women.

Wilma: I was hoping to find a group of women that I could keep working on that kind of stuff with.

Learning new things, working on self in new way: Several of the women stated their personal goals, not so much for the results that they hoped for, but for the process they hoped to undergo in the company of other women.

Francis: I was interested in knowing where they were coming from and what they were thinking, what some of their experiences were.

Lydia: I thought it would be really good place maybe to share information and to explore and to learn some new things. To be able to verbalize, to start to learn how to verbalize ... I looked at it as maybe a tool.

Maria: I was at a point when I wanted to start doing something internal, some internal work, so to speak.

Hoping for consequences

Most of the articulations in this section come from responses to the question, how did you hope the women's spirituality group would help you? Most of the consequences anticipated by the women have to do with their own development. It is here that the goal of consciousness raising to have a woman bring her understandings to consciousness is paralleled by members of this group. Here also we begin to see some
correspondence with the notion of silenced women trying to begin to articulate with other women. For some it is to articulate or verbalize thoughts to others, for others it is to learn from other women, and for yet others it is to discuss ideas and information that are not generally available.

**Crystal:** Just to clarify things, come up with ideas, have my ideas corroborated.

**Francis:** It would help me to have to verbalize some things that I haven't ever really verbalized and wasn't sure how I felt about those things. Being forced to have to come up with opinions about some things perhaps that I wasn't sure if I had or not. To bring me closer to them. To open up my perspective further as to other ways in which people define or experience spiritualness.

**Maria:** Self-affirmation. Or I wanted a certain power to be given to me and I thought it could only come from women.

**Ramona:** I thought it would put me with people who were like me. Who I enjoyed the fellowship of. I enjoy the give and take of it. There isn't a person in the group that I don't think is interesting. I think that that is a bunch of interesting, neat people. Just getting together and being social and talking. Significant talk, not talking about the kids. I don't like to talk about them. I like to talk about things of the mind, and that is what they do.

**Ruby:** That is a good question. I hoped that I would learn more from the spiritual journeys that other women were on or have been on. I thought that we would read some books and discuss things new concepts, like one of the first books we picked out, *Starseed Transmissions*, which is channeled information about outer space beings. Things that you don't read in school, you don't get at a regular Christian church, you don't get in the newspaper. It is not mainstream media kind of information. It is something that you really have to seek out. I guess I was hoping that and that I might find ways that other women had become comfortable with spirituality in a patriarchal society.

I guess I liked the idea of hanging out with women in a different context. I work on women's issues full time and that gets really overburdening to me sometimes. I don't want to think about women's issues, but at the same time that is how my whole life is focused so this was a good opportunity to be with other women in a different kind of context where I didn't have to be the leader. I didn't have to provide anything other than my own true feelings and thoughts about things. I didn't have to organize it. I didn't
have to do any follow-up. I didn't have to do any of that stuff. That was kind of attractive to me, too. I still get the benefits of doing some important discussions with women.

**Skip**: Give me an opportunity to interact with them.

**Wilma**: That it would be a community of women that could hear each other's concerns and in that hearing of one another to find the words to describe their own life experiences.

**Coalescing to begin group process**

Throughout Chapter Four and Chapter Five are references to the distinctive paths each woman took which brought her to the point where she wanted to participate in structuring the women's spirituality group. Various aspects of background and experience have provided pictures of each woman. However, the data also provides another possible view of these women coalescing to begin the group process and that is a two pronged mapping of each path. The two prongs are seeing the meta-level sense-making step which brought them to the first group meeting, and then rephrasing it in terms of verbing.

The women's individual visions become a key to deriving a collective vision for the group and a standard provided by themselves to measure the success of their gap-bridging. In Table 11 below, each woman's responses have been organized by sense-making triangulation, and by verbing the substance of her sense-making. These eight portraits create a map of the coalescing paths.
<table>
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<th>Seeking (gap)</th>
<th>Finding (bridge)</th>
<th>Losing (gap)</th>
<th>Having (situation)</th>
<th>Seeking (gap)</th>
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The patterns of the step that brought them to the first meeting of the women's spirituality group and their expressions of what they are hoping to discover and experience provide a broad visioning for this group's communicative process. Although these steps are presented in a linear manner across the page for ease of reading, they must be understood to represent a circling of one experience from various entry points.

In this mapping of each woman's path into the group, similarities and differences in sense-making can be more readily seen. While each woman has her unique desires and perspectives, several share (or do not) a pattern. For instance, with the use of this analytic organizing tool we add information to the situating of these women in the Community Church as they turn their minds to the envisioning of the women's spirituality group.

What the mapping reveals. Chapter IV provided a picture of Crystal's excitement with the Community Church in contrast with Ruby's disappointment. Francis, Lydia, and Ramona join her here in wanting to spend time with a group of women whom they already know and enjoy, women they think might be like them. Crystal is creating the group for enjoyment, for fun, as an addition to her experience in the Community Church while Ruby frames her interest in the group as trying to find what she is seeking after having been disappointed that the Community Church did not provide it. While Lydia and Ramona both had expressed disappointment in their experience of the Community Church in Chapter Four, unlike Ruby they seem interested in this group for its own merits, not as a replacement for what they were seeking in the church.
This mapping shows that Crystal, Francis, Maria, Ruby, and Wilma share an explicit interest in learning from other women about women's experience, corresponding to the theorizing of the feminist authors cited earlier. Ruby and Wilma state an interest in feminist concerns. Although Wilma ended up leaving the group, this map suggests that she might have found what she was seeking in it because she held these concerns and interests in common with many of the rest of the women. While an assessment of her leaving the group is addressed elsewhere, we might conclude that something powerful must have happened to convince her she had not found what she was seeking.

This map shows Skip as clearly different from all the others. The only dimension she seems to share is her interest in interacting with these specific women. However, it is not from liking or seeking enjoyment or wanting to learn from them. She is clearly motivated in her role as pastor to take this opportunity because she is a woman and therefore can gain access to this group. She seeks to interact with these women to know them better and understand "who and what they were." This last statement accentuates her focusing on them in terms of how they fit into the Community Church, how they fit with her job description.

Thus from the beginning Skip understands herself as a member of the leadership of the larger collectivity forming a bridge to the group. The group process is not a bridge for her itself as it is for all the other women. As Ruby said of her earlier, she is not a seeker in the way the others are. She is trying to bridge a different enough gap that the tension between her vision and the rest of the group's gap-bridging
steps eventually creates too great a strain for the communicative procedures to overcome and she leaves the group.

**Analysis via the deductive frame.** Assessing this mapping in terms of the deductive frame presented at the beginning of this chapter, some correspondence between these women's desires and the visions for group structuring of the feminist theorists is evident. Potential contests for the vision of this group in terms of the women's desires are also already visible.

A "pure" (or maybe just more tidy) form of my theorizing would have had these women more unified in their visioning of the reason for the group, and more explicitly stating that they were creating a space because there was no room for them in the Community Church. I theorized contests between old oppressive habits and the newly transforming and liberating self. Obviously many of the women see themselves as already free to create a space in which to explore. While some have anger, disappointment, and failure at their attempts to create a non-patriarchal structure in the Community Church, they do not totalize it as completely oppressive.

My theorizing did not include the person of Skip who in her identity and her motivation as clergy is a presence of the larger collectivity within the group. Her bodily presence already raises questions about the integrity of the group's structuring as a space distinct from the larger web of structuring.
With this mapping, this section provides a window into the visioning of the women as their paths coalesce into structuring the group process. So far their step-taking has not been necessarily communicative. However, the need for communicating is implied in what they seek and hope for, not only in that they want to be with others (which necessitates communicative procedures), but in what they want from others and want to be able to do themselves.

In the next section, creating the group process is examined in greater depth. Conceptually, we are moving from primarily cognitive and individual step-taking to a phase of beginning to create the structuring of the group through communicative proceduring together.

Creating the Group Process

In this section, the focus will be on ways the women went about creating the structuring of a group process through communicative procedures. The selection of data for analysis will be guided by the convergence of three focuses: (1) desiring verbs extrapolated from women's sense-making about their experiences in the Community Church (drawn from Theorizing), (2) mapping of the women's sense-making as their individual paths coalesced into forming the women's spirituality group (drawn from Visioning the Women's Spirituality Group), and (3) enacting verbs identified in the sense-making interview as being the behavioral component of group structuring (drawn from Theorizing). The material generated will be assessed in terms of my deductive analytical frame (see Theorizing).
One reason the desiring verbs are useful is that they provide elaboration and clarification of requirements for the structuring of the group process not necessarily mentioned in the women's sense-making as they considered forming the women's spirituality group. They also provide a check on the consistency of the women's responses in the mapping as they spoke about what they wanted from the women's spirituality group a year (with all its history) after it had been formed. The enacting verbs become the behavioral component of communicative procedures with the impetus and shaping of the women's desiring, hoping, and seeking.

In Chapter II the intentional communicative procedures of the feminist group process (abstracted from the consciousness raising group) were assessed as sharing a distinct pattern which moved between feminist ideals/observing, meta-procedures/reinventing and procedures/enacting. For example,

- **feminist ideal/observing:** each woman is assured equal space and time to be heard
- **meta-procedures/reinventing:** going around the circle
- **procedures/enacting:** each woman in a circle responding to a topic, possibly within a time constraint

The current analysis will be constructed somewhat differently. The list of desiring verbs provides a composite picture of parameters for any communicative structuring. Dominant themes in the mapping suggest the main thrusts of the women's seeking and hoping for a specific structuring, the women's spirituality group. Enacting verbs here provide a repertoire of behavioral communicative proceduring to
manifest the desired parameters of the group and to realize the hoping and seeking of the women.

This section will focus on structuring group process through some of the more explicitly positive convergences of desiring, seeking, hoping, and enacting. Communication procedure is composed of all three and creates this group's process through developing friendships, exploring with others, and learning from others.

Some of the enacting verbs seem to fit a conventional social understanding of group process, such as connecting with others, talking with others, speaking to the group, and doing something together. Others seem to have less to do with social aspects of group structuring and more to do with individual experience, such as thinking about or observing myself, hearing others, observing and/or comparing myself with others, questioning and disagreeing with others, and observing another. However, this blend of self-reflexivity as well as interaction with others is precisely the kind of group process in keeping with the theorizing about feminist group process as well as what the women of this group were seeking.

**Developing bonds with other women**

The communicative procedure of developing friendships and forming bonds is one of the most self-evident. In the responses below women talk about enjoying being in the group. This is reminiscent of the desiring verb, creating, having a place go where one can join whole-heartedly, belong, fit in, and feel comfortable. It is in keeping with their enjoyment of each other expressed in the mapping as they
coalesced into the women's spirituality group. And a logical enacting verb for this is "connecting with others."

To begin with, the behavior identified as connecting with others provided helps for several women such as getting pleasure, getting connected to others, getting motivated, and getting started and motivated. Those who used this enacting verb in their responses include Crystal, Francis, Lydia, and Ruby. In a later section these women are identified as being the core grouping through various assessments. It seems reasonable that they are the ones taking the initiative to create this group in line with their desiring, hoping, and seeking. Also reasonable is their sense of satisfaction from connecting with others. Francis, Lydia, and Ruby have already explicitly articulated a sense of isolation and unwanted solitude in their spiritual journeys. Thus, in this communicative procedure they have found what they desired, hoped for and sought.

Lydia talks about the fun she has in this group, the growing sense of camaraderie and closeness as she and the others get to know each other better. Especially with her bitterness from being excluded from the Community Church, it is significant that Lydia is realizing her deep longing to be included even as she speaks rather casually of her participation in this group.

I don't know that I can say it made a difference in my life. It was just a part of my life, kind of like anything is a part of my life. It was fun. Its been like going to a bridge club is kind of how it has felt only a little different of a twist. Rather than bridge it is spirituality. It's like a little club or something. Its been very nice as far as the relationships that I have developed with these women. I feel a lot closer to them than I did before and that is real significant. We have a real sort of camaraderie that I didn't feel with them before. That the relationships are nicer, more
close. There is nothing in my life that would account for that being particularly significant. It is just, in my opinion, a part of developing relationships. As time goes by you get to know people better, you feel closer to them, build relationships. (Lydia)

Francis speaks of feeling "very very close" to one of the other women in the group (without identifying who it is) to which she attributes her experience of attending even a few group meetings. Here she is realizing her hope that she would get closer to people. Her sense of "bonding" with this person additionally triggers a different perception of self in her uneasy reflection about this person seeing her with a new boyfriend. This evokes the desiring verb "supporting what each wants to do even if not all agree."

Maybe last Friday, seeing one of the people in that group and feeling very very close to her. I have no way of knowing if the fact that for the brief time I was involved in the group that that didn't add to the bonding that I felt with her. It is significant that it felt so good. Because it doesn't happen that often that you feel so connected with someone. I haven't had enough of those kinds of connections to make this one feel anything but significant. I felt more invigorated. It made me feel happy.

Through a side door, something about it hurt. It hurt because this person knows me in the context of a relationship that I have been in for five years that I had just very very very hesistantly broke out of and I was with someone else and I knew that she would recognize that. She was someone who knew me and my former boyfriend together. She would probably question. I wasn't sure what to say. It would stir up a lot. I was getting anxious about the fact that the scene was different. I knew it was different and knew that she knew it was different and just knowing that had it hanging in the air. (Francis)

In the next two responses Crystai and Ruby speak about becoming friends and developing bonds through their participation in this group. Desiring verbs are evoked such as accepting each other, feeling free to talk, and creating a place to belong. Crystal may be said to have found
"a woman's point of view of her womanness" and Ruby have realized her hope to learn from and with other women outside of work.

Probably the bonds that I've made with the women in the group continues. Particularly, Ruby and I have gotten very close and I think it is the group that has brought us together. We are able to talk to each other about things that are important and significant to us that we might not be talking to other people about. It is significant to us because we have bonded this new friendship with each other, and I think we got to know each other through the spirituality group. We had known each other before that, but we weren't really friends. Now we are. My best friend lives in Chicago, my confidante, and I didn't have anybody here that I felt that way about. Now I do. [It helped] just being able to talk to her about things that are happening in my life that I don't get to talk with anybody else about. (Crystal)

One thing that I am thinking of is that Crystal and I have become much closer friends. I know that has nothing to do with spirituality necessarily, but I think a lot of that has to do with the opportunities that we have had to interact with each other in different ways than we ever have had before. That is real nice. It is fun to find a person who can be important in your life. That is new. Even if I have known her for a long time, it provided us with a new, more regular opportunity for us to hang out and talk about things that are important and give you the opportunity to build some trust and that sort of thing. It is nice to have a new friend. I guess I needed her. The rule of the universe. Whatever I need comes to me. Maybe we needed each other. It has just been nice to be friends with her and get to know her better. That is sort of generic. It is nice to find a person who thinks a lot like you which I think we do. We think a lot alike in a lot of ways. (Ruby)

Other women talked about the way they tolerated others' differences in spite of questioning or disagreeing with them. In particular, Maria and Ruby were uncomfortable or frustrated that the conversation did not stay on the topic of spirituality, but both decided that free flowing conversing amongst the women was important. They concluded that this communicative procedure helped form bonds between the women because it allowed trust to develop. This helps to manifest the desire to create a place to belong and feel comfortable
through nurturing seekers from different background, and not forcing others to think and feel a certain way in order to be accepted and belong.

Maria is not comfortable with Crystal's unquestioning acceptance of ideas, but lets herself relax into a "general mellowing out" because "something more important [is] coming out of the meeting" than people believing the same thing or talking about spiritual things.

I just enjoyed being there so much. A lot of the stuff that Crystal would say kind of bothered me by it being so accepting of a lot of givens from different sources. That I wasn't in agreement with because I felt very uncomfortable taking things quite so literally. Crystal believes in a lot of different spiritual movements about reincarnation and karma and stuff like that in a very strict sense, and even stuff like environmental issues. I guess it is not that I don't agree with it, because a lot of things I don't agree with, but I felt uncomfortable with that kind of whole-hearted accepting of things.

It didn't really matter in the group even though some members had these concrete beliefs and most of us didn't, it all seemed to be okay. A realization. A kind of general mellowing out, realizing that it doesn't really matter if people don't believe exactly the same thing. There is something more important coming out of that meeting even when we didn't talk about anything spiritual. Realizing that was a different kind of development for me. (Maria)

Ruby appreciates "the social interaction" because it is "more relaxed and informal" and she sees that as helping the group develop trust. She seems to feel that it is necessary to develop the trust in order for group members to feel safe talking about spirituality. This suggests the communicating proceduring helps women to feel free and nurtured in the group process.

I can't remember a time when the whole group ever agreed on anything! Which is part of the interest of the group, part of the joy of talking to everyone. I can't really say that there was a time when I didn't agree with something that was happening in the group. Sometimes I felt that maybe we would get more out of it
from a more spiritual, seeking, conceptual kind of basis if we were more focused.

In the transcript I noticed that we talked about a whole bunch of other things from selling jewelry to [an event she was involved in] to different other books and movies that we saw that really didn't pertain to our children to our clothes. We talked about a lot of things. Sometimes I would think, "gee, if this was really a study group we would be doing more studying." On the other hand I don't feel that that was a big deal because the more I read that transcript, the more I thought perhaps the social interaction between us was as important to us as the content. I guess I had mixed feelings about that.

Sometimes I would think that maybe we should have more focus and stay more on the topic and have more specific questions to talk about or whatever. Nothing really big significant, other than when I thought about that, I realized that the social interaction was important also to all of us. Certainly to me. It was okay that we talked about other things even though sometimes it was frustrating if I was real interested in a particular direction that we were going on a particular topic and somebody would get off on some other tangent, that was okay even though I may have thought initially, "gee, I wish we would pay more attention to the topic at hand."

I think ... that I wanted the social interaction as much as anybody. I think that we have all mentioned this to each other at various times, "gee, wouldn't it be better if we focused more?" but then we all sort of let that drop and talk about people's kids and their houses and their clothes and their everything else because we care about that too with each other. Yeah, it probably did because it gave us more of an opportunity to be more social on other levels. If you come in and you see a bunch of your friends and you are bursting with some news and you can't talk about it because we have agreed to be totally focused on Chapter Three of the StarSeed Transmissions and that is all we can talk about for the next hour and a half, then that would be a real bummer.

I think the more relaxed and informal we were during the first year, probably the better it was for developing our trust level with each other. We were all free to say whatever we wanted as opposed to being totally structured by a set of questions or an agreement to focus on a particular topic. I think that is really good when you are talking about something as important and personal as your spiritual definitions of yourself and the universe. You have to have that trust. I think that was good.

Occasionally [it hurt], just by frustration and I think many of us felt that because we talked about it amongst ourselves. It was sometimes frustrating because sometimes you could be interested
in a certain topic and pretty soon everybody would be off on another tangent. I noticed that in our transcript, too, that we did a lot of talking over each other and it was almost as if we all had so much to say and so many ideas and thoughts that we would all be saying them out loud at the same time. Several times there were a couple of different conversations going on at the same time. (Ruby)

Lydia focuses on the effort the women made to attend group meetings, the limitations of attempts to verbalize what each person knows, and the importance of having many meetings together enjoying each other to develop trust.

I started thinking about this group as a whole and how we interacted with each other based on personal relationships, based on the topic we were to be discussing, the wine consumed, a whole different set of variables that came into the entire evening. There were so many different things we could have talked about. Just based on the transcript alone we could have expounded for hours and hours, but how limited we are in being able to verbalize that which we know.

Knowing these women as well as I know each of them and how I perceive them to be so exceptional each in their own way and knowing, through experiences with them, observations of them, their sense of understanding who they are and what they are about far surpasses anything that any of us could say and I think it is real evident in this transcript. We hit on a lot of different subjects, a lot of different topics, laughed over things, some things were taken more seriously than others. I would say it has more to do with how we are and react with each other. I keep coming to the fact that we put enough energy into trying to even just be together based on how busy everybody is. I think that is real significant. That we all choose to share is real significant. Based on the previous statement, it took a lot of energy to be there that evening. I'm incredibly busy, 24 hours a day kind of busy. It took a lot of energy for me to even be there, let alone try to function as an intelligent, rational, spiritual human being. That was pretty significant to me, just being able to be there was a feat in itself.

It always helps to get together with this group of women. It's real nice. They're a lot of fun and I think that we are working toward a level of trust. I think that this whole first year has basically been built on trust and building that trust so that we can start to share. (Lydia)
One last person's attempts to develop bonds with the other women came in the form of silencing herself because she felt her disagreement with the other members of the group was so profound that neither she nor they could hope to accommodate or reconcile each others' perspective. In her unwillingness to speak, Skip reveals an outer boundary for the desiring verbs. She perceives in herself an unwillingness to encourage tolerance for a diversity of beliefs.

My definition of spirituality comes from a real deep understanding of who and what God is in the universe and to me. I have never felt put off by God or put down by God and have never felt that I in any way was subservient to anyone else as a child of God. Because of that, I didn't need to stretch me spirituality by looking at all of the different aspects of gods -- little "g" -- so it cause frustration [to me to keep quiet] and not let it be seen too often. Knowing full well that their understanding of the God that I know is not mine.

[I disagreed with] their feeling that in order to widen themselves they needed to look at all different forms of gods. I chose not to fight them but to let them do what they chose to do. I chose to begin to pull myself back. The fact that I am a minister and I don't have to agree with what everybody says but I have to love them. It helped me keep from getting them real angry and real pissed. (Skip)

So through enacting verbs such as connecting with others, disagreeing with and questioning others, distinct desiring, seeking and hoping converged into the communicative proceduiring developing friendships. In the next section, the focus moves on to another dominant theme seen in the mapping of the women's step-taking into the group. Through the communicative proceduiring of exploring with others, women are learning new things, sharing information, articulating thoughts and feelings, opening themselves to the influences of the others.
Exploring with others

The communicative procedure "exploring with others" includes such desiring verbs as reinforcing thoughts and feelings, providing room for growth and exploration, and including different points of view and ways of knowing. Again one enacting verb is connecting with others, but another, questioning and disagreeing with others, is often indicated as well. Such hopes as clarifying ideas, opening oneself to other perspectives, and learning new things are realized. The responses emphasize the potency of the group for helping one examine, change and strengthen aspects of self.

Wilma is excited because as she listens to the women introducing themselves at the first meeting, they were describing their own paths instead of trying to fit into paths others might require of them. This corroborates my theorizing about the necessity for women to create a place in social structuring where they can be experiencing something else as women. This enacting verb is reinforcing thoughts and feelings.

Probably it was the very first meeting where people went around and told where they were coming from and what they wanted in the group. People told their life story and it related to that concern. To hear the stories was important for me. It doesn’t often happen. It’s a rare event that women tell their life stories and what is important to them about spirituality. Because it had been a real growing and changing point for me over the previous five to seven years and it was exciting because it was describing your own path instead of saying how well you fit into what traditional religion thought your path should be.

It helped me understand where some women were coming from definitely and it explained their responses later on to other things in the church. By me knowing what some of their life experiences had been, some of the pain that was there, some of the pain that was unresolved, some of the good things that had happened that were exciting and growth producing. [It didn’t
hurt), other than that you feel for people as they share what they had been through in their lives. Sadness at what seems to be needless pain that we all experience in our lives that seems random or needless or useless or whatever. (Wilma)

Crystal emphasizes the connection with others and the way they have supported each other's viewpoints, ideas, and understandings. She speaks of the personal power she feels by having her ideas corroborated, thus realizing one of her hopes for the women's spirituality group.

I would say that the things that have come out of the women's spirituality group, and particularly the bonds that I've made with the other women, and the way that we have supported each other in our viewpoints and ideas about where we are and where we fit in and all that has given me more personal power in dealing with things that are going on in my life. [It made a difference] in the way I react or act in situations. I have more confidence in myself and my ideas. It enabled me to act in a way that I felt was more responsible and had more integrity with the way I really felt. I think through the reinforcement of my own personal power that I get from the women's group and from the women in the group enabled me to do that. [It helps] by reinforcing my power and concepts about who I am. (Crystal)

Francis has goals for herself and sees them realized in the other members of the group. She likes the group because it helps her to view her life critically. The group helps by providing room for growth and exploration. By opening herself to different points of view and ways of thinking she realizes her desire to learn from other women.

I suppose my need to be a more spiritual, thoughtful, playful, energized person. That is how I feel about so many of the women in that group. It is the kind of setting that I like and want to be in. Who wouldn't? It is maybe one element in making me take a good hard look at, for example, the relationship I am in and how a big part of that need in me for spiritual growth and awareness and exploration is not at all shared by my partner and how much I miss that and wish I could to some degree with him share that. Perhaps that is just another one of those elements then that in sum total with others has caused me to remove myself from him right now. It was at a time in my life when I was going through some things that were extremely important in relationships with
other people and in the long term, what my life was going to look like. The way I dealt with it was certainly significant.

I think it is a part of what has helped me take steps to get out of the relationship. It is the first major movement in the relationship in five years. I can't pin it to any one event. It is real in that it is real, it hurts, I took action after having sat on the post for a long time about it. The degree to which any other awakenings in myself came about because of involvement in the women's group is impossible to measure, but I wouldn't doubt that that has some impact on what I feel I need out of life. The kind of person I want to be and the kind of person I am in this relationship. [It hurts] because I am not sure I'm doing the right thing, I'm not sure that I'm not making a big mistake, I'm not sure I won't regret it. It hurts that I don't have answers that I wish I did. (Francis)

While possibly unexpected as a helpful aspect of being in a group, other women also focused on how the enacting verb
"questioning and disagreeing with others" was helpful to them. In this case, there was no particular clustering around one or two particular helps. Instead, helps included getting control, getting out of a bad situation, avoiding a bad situation, getting pleasure, getting support, reassurance, and confidence, getting connected others, making collectivity, helping me think, appreciating difference, getting to express my own viewpoint, getting new a understanding of myself. The responses selected below are drawn from this range of helpfulness from disagreeing and questioning each other to reflect a diversity of perspectives. Not surprisingly, most of these responses are to the focus question, "during the meetings of the women's spirituality group, was there a time when you did not agree with something that happened in the group?"

In terms of desiring verbs these responses point to communicative proceduring which is encouraging tolerance for a
diversity of beliefs, accepting each person for who she is and not what
she believes, supporting what each wants to do even if not all agree,
providing room for growth and exploration, and including different
points of view and ways of thinking.

In the first two responses, Crystal and Lydia refer to the same
conversation, the same disagreement and each other. Interestingly,
however, Lydia makes sense of the way she violated communicative
proceduring. She concludes her communicative behavior did the
opposite of ensuring Crystal felt free to speak, felt her different point of
view and way of thinking was accepted, or felt supported even when
Lydia disagreed. Crystal, on the other hand, interpreted this same
disagreement completely differently, experiencing it as lively,
refreshing, broadening, and good.

One time at Lydia's we were talking about reincarnation and
people choosing to come in at a certain time and place and there
was some disagreement about that. I was talking about the
concept that I had learned and that Cayce talked about from my
psychic development class, and Lydia and some other people had
a problem with that, particularly relative to starving people in
India and why people would choose to come into that and she
didn't agree with that. That was a pretty lively discussion about
that, as I recall.

I was agreeing with the idea that people choose to come in at
certain time and place to experience or grow in ways that they
think they need to grow or the other side of that is that some
people have a misconception that the earth is for suffering and
so you come in to suffer in order to gain redemption. So, I was
saying that is why people put themselves in that place, to learn
something or to suffer, and Lydia didn't agree with that. I don't
really remember what anybody else thought. It was pretty much
a discussion between she and I, I think.

I found it very refreshing to discuss it with somebody who had a
different view. I hadn't had that much opportunity to talk about
that with anyone other than the people in the class that I was in
and they didn't disagree with it. It was good to look at another
viewpoint of it. Yeah, it broadened the way I looked at it. It gave me another viewpoint of looking at it, so that was good. (Crystal)

I don't feel that the group was there to agree or disagree with anything. I felt we were mostly there to share. I guess the one time I can remember in particular is the karma conversation. Crystal said something. I can't remember what she said, but I felt incredibly challenged by it and I said to her, "that is a really dangerous statement," and I could see this look come across her face. I could see that I had made this horrible mistake by saying what I said to her. It really limited her freedom from that point on because of how my statement impacted her. I felt really bad about it.

I felt really bad because I limited her in what she was feeling and saying rather than allowing her to just be who she was. I don't even remember. It was so insignificant in comparison to the look on her face. In comparison to how I felt that I made her feel by the statement that I made, it was real insignificant. I will never forget the look on her face. That I limited her. That I cut her off from being allowed to say what she really was feeling by attacking her because something that she said triggered something in me and I don't even remember what it was, but it was really limiting to her. My response to her limited her.

It helped me a lot. It helped me try to be more conscious about how I react. That coupled with probably a thousand other experiences made me try to get control over my knee-jerk reactions to things. Trying not to react so quickly to what other people are saying and maybe trying to explore more of where they're coming from and why they are saying what they are saying and what. There has got to be some value to it. It was very significant to me. (Lydia)

These two set of responses allow the women to give their understanding of the group process by reflecting on what was important to them about connecting with others in the form of the group, and on what was helpful to them about questioning and disagreeing with each other. The next two sets of responses will focus on the more self-reflecting enacting verbs "hearing others," and "thinking about and observing the self."
Learning from others

A dominant theme in the mapping of women's hoping and seeking was to learn from the experience of other women, both women in general and these women in particular. Where the communicative proceduring of "exploring with others" focused more on the interacting with others, this communicative proceduring emphasizes the introspection of women as they process the information, experience and persons of the others, and reflect on how it shapes the way they understand and experience themselves. The predominant enacting verbs in this convergence are "hearing others," and "thinking about and observing the self." Desiring verbs might include providing room for growth and exploration and reinforcing thoughts and feelings. However, another possible desiring verb suggested by the following responses might be something more along the lines with providing grist for the mill as each woman digests herself, or merely self-reflecting.

The enacting verb "hearing others" led to far more helps in the responses than any of the others. This is consonant with the women's desires to learn about their own spirituality through listening to the experiences of others.

Francis speaks of how challenging it is to her understanding of herself to hear Maria talk about her father's stories. Including different points of view and ways of thinking through hearing other's stories helps Francis realize some of her own hopes to be learning, discovering her own opinions, and opening herself to other perspectives.
When Maria was talking about some experiences. She was translating some stories from her father that had a lot to do with eastern philosophy. She seemed to be so well-versed in certain aspects of eastern philosophy and so in touch and in tune with this certain experience that she was telling us about that I remember feeling how much stuff there is out there to know about that could affect, definitely, who I am that I don't know. My definition of self in terms of how much I am aware of what is out there or in here just felt very limited.

I was challenged to think a lot bigger. I was challenged to explore a lot of things a lot deeper. I felt challenged to know more than I know. I felt challenged to read a lot more. It is significant that I had that response and that I'm sure when I have the time, make the time, I know how much I want to explore it. I will make more time to do it.

Due to the fact that I had come through my life to a point now where I was feeling more comfortable with myself I felt better equipped now to go and dig and explore a lot of possibilities. Also, to give myself the permission, instead of berating myself over the fact that "shh, I don't know anything about this, damn, I am so blind to all these different things," to stop and tell myself, "hey, it's okay that you don't know this, you've been doing other things in your life and you haven't had the time, it's okay, but if this is important to you, then maybe you can make plans to find the time."

It was significant for myself giving myself permission for being who I am, what I am, when I am. It helped remind me of how many sides there are to this subject of spirituality, how deep it is, how big it is, yet perhaps how simple it is. I think it helped excite me, impassion me a little bit more to find time to get out and explore. (Francis)

Crystal also considers information Maria has shared. Hearing about Maria's exploration of bisexuality allows Crystal to consider something new about herself.

Well, I must say that nothing that we talked about really shook me. I didn't shake me up. I marked this part where we were talking about bisexuality. Bisexuality is intriguing to me. It didn't really shake my concept of myself. _The one thing that I marked was when Maria says, "it kind of changed my whole attitude toward sexuality. I feel differently about men. I think I appreciate them more sexually. When I started having sex with women, sex with men became different. I almost own myself more when I have sex and when you go back to men you have
another view of yourself. You have more power." I thought that was real interesting. The concept [was] whether or not I am bisexual. It was interesting to hear Maria talk about that as someone who has practiced that and I have not, but have always been rather fascinated and intrigued by the idea. This thing that I just read that she said I found to be very interesting. It is something that I have thought about. It gave me another viewpoint to look at it. (Crystal)

Reflecting on the transcript of the audio taped meeting, Maria proceeds to mull on portions of the conversation. She has found a place where she can do "internal work," which is providing room for growth and exploration.

"To me that epitomizes one of the problems that we have here is that everybody feels they have the truth." I remember that. Here's where Crystal says, "it's pretty self-centered to think that we're the only intelligent creatures." "Oh, totally!" says Ruby. I always assumed that if everyone understands each other well enough they will come to the same conclusion. That makes me start thinking that maybe they won't. That seems like a kind of a breakthrough thought because I felt "yeah, everybody does think they have the truth!" It makes you question "why?" Later on you ask "does it matter?" and I don't have that question answered. It helped to pose the question. I've posed the question before and then, I'm sure, since. It was just another posing of that same question. (Maria)

Ramona is confronted by a new idea and as she processes it she comes to a new understanding of herself. She is being nurtured as and by seekers from different backgrounds. She is able to enjoy the give and take of the group as she hoped.

Ruby was talking about the earth-centered and Goddess-centered religions, saying the significance of the earth as our mother. She went on to talk a lot about being raised in the Catholic church and about how they didn't have any significance or they didn't stress anything that had to do with saving the earth. It was a new concept to me. I hadn't really thought about this kind of mother earth kind of thing and as it being this big religious kind of thing which it obviously was and is to these people. It was significant because it gave me a new perspective. I must have always felt about the ecology and so forth and I was having somebody say it should to be a part of your church experience. I think it should be. I think a lot of these things should be a part of
the church experience that aren't. It gave me a new perspective to look at and to think about. I like the idea that it is being pushed in our church by these same people in this group. They have their earth days. (Ramona)

Thus, this series of different enacting verbs sketch a picture of how the women are creating the women's spirituality group through communicative proceduring.

**Analysis via the deductive theoretical frame.** This section has focused on providing a picture of women creating a group process through communicative procedure. Earlier, in the Theorizing section, I speculated women forming a group in response to an oppressive situation would be creating reinvented communicative proceduring which would permit and support exploring and more fully human experiencing. The material assessed in this section generally supports my sense of how women might be expected to go about creating a group process through communicative procedurings.

To identify communicative procedurings, I used convergences of (1) desiring verbs which suggest requirements of any social structuring (based on extrapolations from recent experiences with the Community Church), (2) notions of what the women were seeking and hoping to experience in the women's spirituality group as they coalesced into it (based on a mapping of their reasons for coming to it and hopes for what they would get out of it), and (3) enacting verbs which provide a behavioral referent to the women's sense-making of their participation in the group (based on responses to focal questions in the sense-making interviews).
Through these convergences three dominant communicative procedures were identified: (1) developing bonds with other women, (2) exploring with other women, and (3) learning from other women.

The verbs most often used to enact these procedures behaviorally include: (1) connecting with others, (2) questioning or disagreeing with others, (3) bearing others, and (4) thinking about and observing oneself.

In the next section, the focus will be on maintaining the communicative procedures that are used by the women for structuring the group process.

Maintaining the Group Process

This section focuses on the ways its communicative procedures serve to maintain the group process. The attention here is on the ongoing reiterating of communicating procedures. An axiom of the study of small group communication is to observe what happens when a rule is broken. Often this is the only time when the tacit rules structuring a group are explicitly addressed and debated by group members. This examination can be done at times when a disagreement or confusion arises such that group members begin metacommunicating about their assumptions for how the communicating will be procedured.
In this study, examination of such incidents in the group communicating reveal the underlying structuring in terms of the group communicative procedures. This permits analysis of how well the group procedures are doing in terms of realizing the egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic ideals suggested as essential to the feminist group process in Chapters I and II.

In Chapter I, two communicative assumptions upon which the literature on the feminist group seemed to be based were identified: that each woman's perspective would be valued and each woman's perspective would be heard. These egalitarian and pluralistic ideals are summed up in the phrases, all voices heard and all voices valued. The third important assumption is that the group process would invest power in each person and that power would be shared, that it would be democratic.

How can these elements be seen and evaluated in the data collected from the living group? The field notes document only occasional comments which reveal intentions by the women in this group for the way they will conduct themselves in terms of communicative practice. As might be expected with a group of women, most of whom know, enjoy, and are comfortable with each other, the field notes reveal more typically "everyone talking at once," that is, the evidence suggests that most of the women are assertive in voicing their perspectives and seem comfortable with the level of response they receive from the others.

However, the field notes and interview data do provide instances where the assumptions about what the communicating is expected to be like can be seen because some infraction of tacit agreement occurs.
Metacommunicating about problematic communicating

In the example from the field notes which follows, some of the women interrupt their discussion about substantive issues to address a problematic situation regarding a communicative practice. From the perspective of the researcher, this is one of the few times during all the group meetings when such an event occurred. Serendipitously, it occurred during the meeting that was taped recorded and for which transcripts were prepared for the women who attended it. Thus, both the sense-making of the women at the time of the infraction, as well as further sense-making during the interviews provide a window into the communicative processes of this living group.

Table 12 is an excerpt of interaction taken from the transcript of the recorded meetings. Crystal has been speaking about the way she believes the universe works when Ramona interrupts her to voice resentment at the way Crystal is communicating her perspective.

Table 12

Metacommunicating about problematic communicating

Crystal: There's no way!
Ruby: Um hmm.
Crystal: There's no way.
Ramona: We're sitting here with two different ....
Lydia: Oh, exactly.
Ramona: You know.....
Ruby to Lydia: Okay, what? Speak you two!
Lydia: Okay, well, Ramona... as vehemently as she made that statement, Ramona's sitting here and said, "ooh, what if I...what if I challenge that?" and I said "to me that epitomizes one of the problems that we have here is that everybody feels they have the truth."
Maria: The truth. Uh huh...
Lydia: Because I...
Crystal: But that is the truth!
Lydia: But you don't! You don't! You don't!
Crystal: But it's the truth for me! It's my truth!
Lydia: Yeah, well, what we're trying to do...
Crystal: So for me that's true.
Lydia: Exactly! But, it's like...
Ramona: But there may be no universal truth.
Lydia: ...it was so...the way you...thank you.
Crystal: That there's only a truth.
Lydia: Exactly. It's individual.
Crystal: It's all individual.
Ramona: But, you know, uh, you can't live with that, if you think about it, if you think that what... because you said that in that tone of voice, and for you that's the truth and if I feel differently and if these people who are sending their money into Jim Bakker, they think they've got a hold of the truth and everybody else's truth isn't the truth... It can't be. There are too damn many of them.
Crystal: I think there are some universal truths.
Ramona: Well, yeah, I think there are, too.
Crystal: But for the most part your truth is your reality and my truth is my..., you know, that statement I made is true for me. For me that is totally a true...I believe that it's true.
Ramona: But it's safe to say "I believe it is true." Don't say it that "this is true"...
Crystal: Well, that's it for me...
Ramona: Because you don't know.
Crystal: Well, that's true, I don't know. Except in my heart I know, but...
Ruby: Well, it's like faith, you know, it's faith.
Crystal: Yeah, I have faith it's true, yeah.
Ramona: Well, that's okay.
Crystal: I my heart I'll say it's true. I believe that that's... that I believe..
Ruby: That's okay, don't say it is ...
Ramona: The only thing wrong with your statement is you really put down everybody that didn't agree with you.
Crystal: I did!?
Ramona: Yeah.
Crystal: Oh. I didn't mean to.
Ramona: You said .... well, don't you think she did the way she said...
Ruby: No. I don't. No, I just believed that was what she believed.
Ramona: Well, yeah, I do too. I know she believes that.
Ruby: No, but I didn't think that if someone disagrees with that that they're...
Crystal: No, I wasn't...no, no...
Ramona: You said... you said "that's bullcrap" or something.
Kate: That it's symptomatic of areas of thinking where they're...
Crystal: OH! Oh, wait wait a minute...I know...
Table 12 (continued)

Ruby: OH! ...[loud unintelligible]!
Lydia: Wait, wait I say that we talk about sex!
Crystal: ...that we're the only intelligent life in the universe?
Lydia: Let's go back to sex!
...burst of laughter...
Lydia: I say, let's go back to sex!

Later, during their interviews, Crystal and Ruby reflect on this event (Ramona did not mention it during her interview). Crystal is struck by the mirror to her own behavior which is present in this interaction, and speculates about ways she might change in the future. In her reflection on her communicating she evaluates her behavior, saying the following: it "gave me pause that she would think that I was putting her down." This evaluation on her part reveals that she holds an egalitarian ideal for herself that she should not "put down" others through her communicative practice no matter how strongly she feels about a topic.

We were having this exchange and talking about..... I stated my belief as what I believe, and for me that was what was true, although I didn't necessarily say it that way. Ramona kind of took offense and felt that I was saying was that everybody else was wrong and I was right. Reading back over that (I had forgotten about that) and remembering that, I felt that I really do come off that way. I can see that I would because I am real convinced of what I am saying and it certainly was true for me. But it kind of gave me pause that she would think that I was putting her down when I wasn't. (Crystal)

Ruby, who viewed the interaction during the meeting, also used it as a means to reflect on her own behavior which might be similarly limiting. Even though she had not been called to account as Crystal had, and even though she did not feel "silenced" as Ramona did, she recognizes that speaking her mind strongly is characteristic of her
communicative practice. She ponders if "people would perceive me as saying things in a way that was so strong that I didn't allow for any disagreement from them." In her interview statement, she reveals that she holds a pluralistic ideal that others should be able to disagree with or question her,

There was a point in time where a couple of people were questioning Lydia and Ramona seemed to feel that something Crystal was saying that she was stating very strongly. Somehow the way she in which she said what she was saying didn't allow for any disagreement.

I didn't pick up on that. I didn't think that at all. I just think that Crystal made a strong statement. It seemed like, at least at the beginning of that meeting, that Crystal and I agreed on everything. She and I were responding back and forth to each other on a lot of those topics. When I read that transcript and saw that other people in the group picked up a different kind of thing from that, and even though it was Crystal they were talking to, I didn't agree with their interpretation of it. I didn't feel that she didn't leave any room for disagreement. If I had disagreed with her, I would have disagreed with her.

But then I wondered if I came across that way, too, to people sometimes. That people would perceive me as saying things in a way that was so strong that I didn't allow for any disagreement from them. That was kind of a challenge to my concept because I think of myself as an open-minded person who is always willing to listen to new ideas or challenges to my thoughts or my opinions. Yet, if other people perceive that there is no room for questioning or disagreement, then that shakes my concept of myself. (Ruby)

Another instance where a member can be seen addressing issues related to egalitarian ideals, is in the following example where Lydia and Crystal have been in a discussion, and Lydia is distressed by Crystal's nonverbal reaction to the way that she, Lydia, is speaking.

I guess the one time I can remember in particular is the karma conversation. Crystal said something. I can't remember what she said, but I felt incredibly challenged by it and I said to her, "that is a really dangerous statement," and I could see this look come across her face. I could see that I had made this horrible mistake by saying what I said to her. It really limited her freedom from that point on because of how my statement impacted her. I felt really
bad about it. I felt really bad because I limited her in what she was feeling and saying rather than allowing her to just be who she was. (Lydia)

In this sense-making instance, Lydia's concern is that she "silenced" Crystal by her own forceful statement, and to her it is intolerable that her way of speaking had this consequence. In this can be seen ideals that Crystal's voice should be heard and valued rather than "limiting" her in what she was feeling and saying and rather than "allowing her to just be who she was."

However, Crystal, referring to this same meeting in her interview, said "I really liked the one at Lydia's house." She found it "fascinating and invigorating!" her statement referring to both agreement and disagreement. For Crystal, it fulfilled part of her hoping for what the group process would be. She says,

None of us knew all of the other people real well, and yet here we were talking about some pretty heavy concepts. Some people agreed and some people didn't agree with what was going on, what was being said. It helped me clarify what I had read and what I thought about it and looking at other people's offerings about it to help me form my own; helped me solidify my own thoughts. (Crystal)

These examples show the women's sense of what kind of communicating they expect to be happening in their group. They expect that each woman (including themselves) will feel free to speak what she pleases, but with care that her way of communicating does not infringe on the freedom of others.

In order to get at the dimension of pluralism, that each voice is equally valued, the data provides instances where women talk about other women who they admire. For instance, in the examples which follow, Lydia speaks glowingly of Maria's way of communicating. Maria
and Ramona express their admiration for the examples of powerful
women provided by the lives of Lydia and Ruby.

I've always had this image of Maria being this calm and centered
kind of person and it became even more clear to me who she was as
a human being and as a spiritual entity. Maria was consistently
interrupted through the entire transcript or a good portion of it
and she would very quietly step aside. At first, its almost as if she
is too timid to speak up but then as I think of my concept of Maria
and how I perceive her its as much as anything that she steps
aside very gracefully and allows everyone else to continue. She
allows it to happen. As you continue on into the transcript what
she has to say is worth listening to. When she speaks she has
something to say and that is a characteristic that I truly admire in
anyone. She doesn't have to be in the forefront. She doesn't have
to do anything other than be who and what she is. I perceive her
as being very comfortable with that. That is really special to me.
To observe that and to see that. I admire these qualities very much.
(Lydia)

Seeing Lydia and Ruby being these incredibly powerful mothers,
that had a big impact on me. I had a better sense of value for that
kind of strength and that kind of job in the world. It showed me a
different way of survival. It's a very interdependent kind of
system where the women depended on each other, not only on
each other, but on other people that were part of a support group.
That to me was very different, to understand that way of living. I
knew it was there, but I never had a really good grasp on it or
understanding of it until I met them. (Maria)

Ruby came in and she told about taking that young girl into her
home. I was terribly impressed with that because I thought to
myself of all this talking that I have done in my life and here was
a person who was doing something. She wasn't just talking. What
she was doing seemed to me big; to take somebody into your home.
I think it would be really hard, to have somebody come to live with
you, be a part of your family. Then, Lydia had taken that young
AIDS victim into her home for awhile. These kind of people,
they're really out there. Lydia throwing herself into the AIDS
work. Suddenly, I had these people and it made me feel more that I
had talked a good story, but not in any way acted. (Ramona)

It is more difficult to find such forthright verbal communicating
about the women whose voices are not valued so highly. However, some
evidence exists which suggest what it is about some of the women that
their voices (and thus themselves) are less valued. This aspect is
important because the dissonance between the group and two of the women eventually led to these women leaving the group.

**Analysis via the deductive frame.** In the discussion above, the disagreements and confusions provide windows into the assumptions that the communicative procedures in the group rest upon, and also show the way the group's procedures are capable of addressing and adjusting in response to these disagreements and confusions. The way the communicative procedures respond to disagreement and confusion shows the maintaining of the group process.

I theorized that the women would face some struggles as they learned to think, talk, and do communicating in ways the dominant structuring had not allowed. Struggles might exist between old habits shaped by the constraints of the oppressive structuring and the freedom of the new. The desiring verbs emphasized in other sections indicated such values as encouraging tolerance for diversity, accepting each person for who she is and not what she believes, including different points of view and ways of thinking, nurturing seekers from different backgrounds. Women strongly rejected other possible structuring verbs such as presuming the structuring had all the answers, forcing one to think and feel a certain way in order to be included. The contests between the women revealed through their responses above suggest they experience a tension between their desired communicative behavior and their actual.

As can be seen, to a certain extent differences among and between the women can be helpful or can be managed through the
communicative procedures. However, some differences between the women were too great for the communicative procedures to handle, and at this point they falter, come apart, and could be said to fail. The indication of this failure is that members of the group drop out. While having members leave the group could be seen as helpful or "something that just happens," in terms of the analysis of a communicative process which intends to be able to include all, it may be instructive to consider this a failure of being egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic.

The following section, then, is an examination of how the group's communicative procedures fall apart; how the group is dysjuncturing. The verbing dysjuncturing will be used rather than other possibilities such as coming apart or disintegrating because it implies that the communicating process of the group came apart at a critical juncture, an explanation which fits the actions and sense-making of group members. The prefix "dys-" is used because it suggests something problematic in the coming apart, something unintended and possibly negative.

Dysjuncturing in the Women's Spirituality Group Process

A concern of the present study is to observe how communicative practices are able (or unable) to measure up to underlying egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic assumptions. In reading over the participant observation field notes and transcriptions of the in-depth sense-making interview, one dominant dysjuncture in conflict with realizing the composite visions of the group members is that two of the women chose to leave the group. In their actions in relation to the group, in their conversation during group meetings, and most fully articulated in their
interviews, these two provide a window into understanding the often hidden dynamics of group process.

The intent of this section is to examine the data to understand how the communicative procedures which comprise this group’s process fail, falter, come apart such that there is a dysjuncture in the group: two members stop attending.

A guide to understand how it was that the group ended up dysjuncturing is provided through the field notes and by metacommunicating found in the in-depth sense-making interview transcripts. To begin the analysis, patterns derived inductively from all the data sources will be discerned, followed by application of the communication-as-procedure analytic tool to come to an understanding of how the communicating procedures faltered and ended in dysjuncturing.

Inductive patterns

In the field notes, those individuals attending each meeting were noted, as was the main topic of discussion. Various groupings of women would occur because of individual patterns of absence and presence, but rather surprisingly, the topics under discussion vary depending on who was present at a given meeting.

These topics of discussion fall fairly clearly into two main categories which can be labeled "spirituality" and "planning a service." These terms are chosen specifically because several women referred to meetings using these distinguishing terms during the interviews. A third category could be used to group those meetings which were
primarily for socializing and entertainment, such as a meeting in which the group "took a night off" and played the board game, "Pictionary."

There is a tacit fourth category which will not apply here because none of the women referred to it, but that category could be called "leading a service" as a group within the larger collectivity of the Community church.

An unexpectedly clear pattern emerged when who was present at a meeting was compared to what the topic under discussion was. Meetings in which the topic under discussion was "spirituality" occurred only when three group members were present at the same time: Crystal, Lydia, and Ruby. For other meetings, both "planning a service" and "taking the night off", any variety of members would be present, but not all three of those women at the same time. Further evidence adds to the picture as this triangulation proceeds. It becomes clear that in a sense the presence of these three women at the same meeting permits the group to discuss "spirituality." What also is clear is that the meetings at which "spirituality" is the topic under discussion are generally the most valued by members of the group.

A sense of what (and thus who) is most valued becomes quite clear when the third element of this triangulation becomes present, that of the implicit metacommunicating provided by the interview methodology. During the sense-making interview, the women are allowed to choose the instances during group meetings about which they will be interviewed.
The questions asked include,

*what has been the most significant event that happened for you during the meetings of the women's spirituality group?

*during the meetings, what event most impacted your definition or concept of yourself?

*what was a time when your definition or concept of yourself was challenged?

*was there a time when you did not agree with something that happened in the group?

Most responses by most of the women refer to meetings in which "spirituality" was the topic under discussion. That combined with the direct verbal expressions of admiration consistently favor Crystal, Lydia, and Ruby as very highly valued members. In this tactic action, the ideal of plurality is thrown into question.

Of all the other group members, most distinctly different from those three women is Skip. Skip's responses to the sense-making questions of her interview are revealing when combined with her pattern of presence and absence at group meetings, and her choice of instances of importance to her during the interviews. Her responses and actions taken together reveal a person distinctly different from the other women in specific ways. It is through of this pattern of difference that her repudiation by the group can be understood.

**Experiencing the group differently**

In contrast to the others, Skip was present only at those group meetings where the topic for discussion was "planning a service." Consonant with this, the instances she chose to talk about in her interview were either some aspect of planning the service or the
services themselves. For example, in response to the question, "what has been the most significant event that happened for you during the meetings of the women's spirituality group?" Skip answered,

The sharing of the service of thanksgiving last year that was planned by the women's spirituality group. The sharing of ideas and attitudes and the way it came together was good. I think it was a good experience for all of the women as well as for the church itself on the Sunday that we did that. All of us shared in it. I enjoy good worship experiences. I think it helped the women to feel more a part of what is happening here. It doesn't always work that way but it did that one Sunday. (Skip)

Only one other person even mentioned either of these topics in their interviews. So in these regards, Skip is showing signs of being significantly different from most of the other group members.

To understand this more fully, other data sources provide the answers in Skip's own words. Earlier, a gloss of the vision of its members for this group was suggested in the statement, "I am getting together with these particular women to enjoy each other, to learn from each other, to explore together, to share." Skip's response is unlike any of the others, she says,

As the woman pastor of the church I felt a responsibility to meet with the women and at least begin to know them better, begin to understand who and what they were a little bit better. [I hoped the group would] give me an opportunity to interact with them. (Skip)

While it would not necessarily be the case that a female pastor of a church who was trying to be a bridge between the church and a somewhat disaffected group within the church would of necessity fall into this position of repudiation, in Skip's case, for a variety of reasons,
this is the case. In the end, all her differences from most of the rest of the group weave together so that she decided to leave the group.

**Disagreeing with the direction of the group**

At no point during the group meetings was there an overt discussion of the ramifications of her differences and how that made it difficult for her to continue on with the group. However, in the following passage from the field notes, a difference of opinion over the direction a worship service might take was the occasion for her to clearly state her boundaries. Although she obviously feels free to state her perspective, and others show their willingness to listen to her point of view even when they disagree with it, the shakiness of much further continuation together with the group can be seen.

Wilma: *...laughing...* Jake would agree to anything!

Skip: No, even Jake has limits...I have heard you mention witchery. I have a problem with this. I counseled a girl whose mother was a witch.

Crystal: I take it she was, it was bad?

Skip: It was bad. I, as a person, not a cleric, won't be able to stay if you do witch things. And if you choose to do witchery, Jake and I as clerics will take a stand against it.

Crystal mentioned Wicca and told what she thought Wiccans were about. I added that Wicca was a Goddess religion, that witches in it were interested in an immanent god rather than a transcendent one, with much concern with healing and wholeness rather than negative things. Crystal agreed and mentioned that Ruby was the one who was most into witchcraft and Skip said, "I know." I asked if Skip was familiar with
Starhawk, a feminist theologian who is a Wiccan. She said yes, but that she still felt uncomfortable, and that while this church has very few rules, both she and Jake will not tolerate "witchery" in the church.

Later, in the interview, Skip further articulated her experience and difference with the group on the point of "witchery." This statement was in response to the question, "during the meetings of the women's spirituality group, what event most impacted your definition or concept of yourself?"

The discussion of witchery. There was a discussion about getting a book and dealing with it and I could not because of my understanding of God and what God is and my understanding of who rules this world as opposed to the entire universe. I could not meddle in something that would pull me away from the God that I know and would be a greater temptation to me. I have dealt with voodoo. I have had voodoo used on me as a counselor. I know the evil of witchery in all of its forms and chose not to even think about taking part in that discussion or reading that book. I could not. It would have served no good purpose for me to have been there and could have caused a whole lot of problems because I would have not have been able to sit still and not get very angry about what I was reading. It let me know that I was still as much of a rebel as I've been.

The God that moves in my life. The fact that when I was a counselor and was dealing with someone who was trying to get out of a very unhappy relationship the person was a worshipping Haitian voodoo person and that person not only threatened my life, but used many forms to try and get me to quit doing what I was doing and I had to fight with all the strength that I had in me and all the strength that I could get from some friends and from God to fight off his presence and his need and desire to hurt me. I would not put myself in that position again where I would even have to look at the face of or read the story of one who dealt in witchery no matter what kind it was. So Skip had a conscious conversation with herself and God, and God and Skip decided that that would not serve any good purpose for me, and so I had to say, "I can't do it. I can't be part of it." (Skip)
Leaving the group

Of the nine women who composed the women's spirituality group, three ended up not attending many of the meetings. In the case of Skip and Wilma, it was because they no longer wanted to be a member of the group or go the direction it seemed to be heading. Francis only attended a few meetings, but it was because of pressures of work, not the direction of the group. So, for this discussion the focus will be on Skip and Wilma's sense-making and communicative proceduring about leaving the group.

I chose to absent myself from the group. I think it helped the ladies because I am not sure they felt very comfortable with having me there anyway. That is my opinion. They were much more free to talk about what they wanted to without my presence. I know that. I think it helped because I didn't cause any more frustration and if I had stayed in the group, once they had started that discussion, I'd have caused major frustration. (Skip)

Importantly, at no time did she verbally announce this decision to the group. From the point of view of other group members, she simply stopped coming. Tellingly, during the meetings after she stopped coming, her name was never one of those who was mentioned as having been contacted or having contacted someone to say she could not come to a meeting.

Wilma also ended up leaving the group because she felt the group was getting off track from what she had thought was its vision. In her response to questions about what was happening in her life that she decided to come to the group and how she hoped it would help her, she says,

I had been out of seminary for a year and I wanted to keep my feminist stuff going because that had been a real point of growth for me in seminary. That was the key that unlocked the door to life in general. I was hoping to find a group of women that I could keep working on that kind of stuff with, that it would be a
community of women that could hear each other’s concerns and in that hearing of one another to find the words to describe their own life experiences. (Wilma)

Later in the interview, Wilma responds at length about the event that most impacted her definition or concept of herself, and, like Skip, she assesses the group, describing the incident that helped her decide to stop coming to the group.

For me, by choosing the book that was on channeling. There were women in the group but we didn’t really focus on women’s experience by looking at the channeling book. The reason I finally just stopped coming was that the channeling wasn’t making connections for me in my life and it wasn’t women’s spirituality for me. The information that was in the book wasn’t helpful for me in whatever I was trying to do. It irrelevant for the most part. It was interesting, but basically irrelevant. Attending the group became a lower priority for me in my life schedule so I didn’t often come.

I’m not saying I don’t believe in channeling. Rationally, I believe it probably exists, but in terms of my self definition, at that time it didn’t seem to be helpful or challenging to me. It wasn’t dealing with questions that I was asking in my life or issues that I was dealing with.

To me it seemed like an escape from really dealing with down to earth life. I wasn’t interested in that kind of escape. I could do other things for escape. My experience of women’s groups had been very now centered and very relational and very political in some ways. It seemed to me focusing on wisdom coming from outer space shifted the focus of life for me from being in the here and now and historical to being ahistorical. I’m not used to functioning in an ahistorical framework. (Wilma)

Wilma’s decision to leave the group had far more to do with where she was interested in going instead of where she had determined the group was going. Like Skip, Wilma is very interested in realizing the vision of the church community with which this group was initially connected. However, perhaps because she is a relative newcomer, and does not have the history of struggle on opposing sides that Skip had with Crysial, Lydia, and Ruby. Wilma’s journey to and through the group does
not have the indications of a struggle to be heard, to be valued, and to have power to shape the life of the group that mark Skip's presence in the group.

While this assessment has revealed ways in which egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic ideals are both maintaining and failing in the group process through communicating, it does not fully explain how it is that this is happening. That it happens is established, but to understand how it is happening requires an analytic which can address the patterns of communicating at a meta-level. The communication-as-procedure analytic, thus, is applied to the data in the following section.

**Pointing to a different gap**

Two of the women have a different understanding of the identity of the gap for which the group is hoped to be a bridge. This analytic makes clear a fundamental difference in the sense-making of Skip and Wilma and provides a clearer understanding of how their sense-making was such that a dysjuncture between them and the rest of the group was in play from the beginning. A further examination of their distinctly different sense-making and its repercussions will follow with particular attention to how the identification of the gap each was trying to bridge was significant in their participation in the group, as well as their decision to leave. This is a systematic analysis of women who leave such groups which was not found in the literature, and thus is valuable for an understanding of the communicative dynamics of process in the feminist group.
The predominant sense of those who stayed as members of the group seems to be that it is important to get together with these women to enjoy, learn, explore, share, and do internal work. Crystal, Lydia, and Ruby; Francis; and Maria and Ramona had a vision of the group that either matched or was harmonious with this general feeling.

However, Wilma and Skip were trying to bridge different gaps from the rest of the group. Skip was intent on bridging the gap between the church and these women. Wilma wanted to bridge the gap which is how the institutional church is flawed by oppressive sexism. The rest of the group saw their gaps as ones which they could bridge by being with each other, with "these women."

Articulating the self?

Being guided by the notion of "hearing into speech" and "articulating the self", some enacting verbs and helps in particular seem illustrative. "Voicing, asserting me" and "speaking to group" seem closest to the phenomenon described in the literature above. Interestingly, the three women who referred to this as an important enacting verb were Francis, Skip, and Wilma.

One thing that Francis shared with these others who eventually left the group, was that because of a work conflict she did not attend most of the meetings. While the other women who stayed members of the group thought of Francis as one of those they had expected to be in the group with them, she shared something in common with the others who ended up leaving which was the use of these enacting verbs.
All three of these women referred to actions that could be abstracted into the enacting verb "voicing me." Francis was helped by this action because she got helps which were coded as support, reassurance, and confidence, and she got connected to others. This is the analysis of her response to the question, "what has been the most significant event that happened for you during the meetings of the women's spirituality group?

The significant event which immediately came to mind was the fact that in one setting, in one situation, I found how I was having a hard time not interjecting myself as the group leader per se. I was having a hard time not to put some kind of structure to it, wanting us to get somewhere but we weren't unless there was someone who pulled or prodded or set some kind of structure. I remember deliberating whether or not I should make that move because I felt I needed to, gave me time to reflect about why I was feeling the need to do that. I remember going ahead and doing it and ended up feeling pretty good about it.

Outside of the work setting and outside of my own personal life in a more social context, it was significant to me that I ended up feeling comfortable enough in putting myself out there to perhaps be criticized for doing it, but making myself obvious in that way. Setting myself up for reprimand or something. If that had happened, it would have been okay. I was working full time with school at night for fifteen years. I've not been around social groups much at all. I don't do that, I don't know how to do it. There is just no time for that stuff. So, it was one of the first times where I, instead sheepishly hiding and trying to be quiet and not be there, went ahead and made myself known.

The fact that up until then in my life I would usually feel very uncomfortable speaking out in most settings, particularly in a group of people that I really admired and respected for who they are what they themselves have to contribute. Comfortable enough with myself in that context anyway. I recall it now and because there wasn't anything painful about it and again, it was just another piece added to my growing sense of self. (Francis)

Skip and Wilma also referred to actions which were abstracted into the enacting verb "voicing me." Wilma got the help started, motivated while Skip's helps were coded as kept going, went on to other things, and
avoided a bad situation. In both of these cases, what they were talking about in their assertions involved their decision to move on out of the group because it had not provided what they were hoping for. Both of the instances below were in response to the question, “what was a recent time when a definition or concept of yourself which has been changed in the process of attending the women’s spirituality group made a difference in your life?”

I chose to stand up for what I’ve been living, what I believed, and what I understood as my role and chose to opt out as opposed to causing friction and unhappiness and frustration and chaos. I did it. I am who I am and every day that is reaffirmed by God Almighty before I start my job.

Probably have been busier and I was already extremely busy. As I said, one less meeting, knowing that if I stayed in the group my opinions would have to be spoken and my feelings which are very strong when it comes to that particular subject would have to be vocalized. I chose the option of being out of the group knowing that one less meeting wouldn't hurt.

[It hurt] a little bit. I would like to have stayed. I would liked to have shared, but did not believe that my experience would be accepted because their belief and their understanding of spirituality was so far removed from mine that we were like in different planets. I knew that if I stayed I really would become really vocal and probably really obnoxious. I don't think any of us want to intentionally hurt anybody. If I would have stayed, I don't believe any best interests would have been served. (Skip)

That would be a difficult thing for me to answer because in large part the women's spirituality group has been a non-experience. It was something that didn't really happen much for me. What that means is that what happened in the women's group for me didn't have a lot of meaning outside the fact that I liked the women who were a part of it. Maybe its a commitment to working or initiating meetings or events where issues that are important to me and do connect with my life can be addressed by anybody who is interested in doing that.

In the middle of the summer I decided that I needed to provide opportunity for whoever to do some looking at the Bible and the whole process of how did we get this book and what does it mean
and what can we use it for. Deciding that I needed to do that for myself and if anybody else was interested in that, well, great.

I guess I feel like it is a definite risk. It is the one topic that has been the most explosive for us, that we've had the knock-down, drag-out fights about at church. My sense is that those discussions could be improved by us having some common knowledge or at least some common discussions about some historical stuff. I know a lot of people have problems with scriptural things and some of the problems that people have with what's in the Bible are worse because they don't understand how they got there or they have been told erroneous things about where the Bible came from and don't understand translations and things like that. My goal would be to do some basic teaching about things like that so people would have a little more value-free information to work with their own selves to come to their own conclusions. It feels risky. I guess for myself deciding the best way for us to deal with all this is just to jump in the middle of it and go for what I see to be the crux of the problem. We don't seem to have any trouble for the most part working together and living it all out, but what do we do with our history? (Wilma)

Thus, remarkably, in terms of "articulating the self," even as they were not able to continue with the group or spend much time with the group, these three women were moved to make what they felt was an assertion of their identity in relation to the group. Francis with her closer association with the women who stayed in the group, focused on a time when she, in fact, did speak up and make her thoughts and suggestions known to the other group members. Something in her and possibly in the procedures of the group did "hear her into speech."

Analysis via the deductive frame. When theorizing about what I expected to happen in the women's group I anticipated struggles and contests but, perhaps naively, I did not think I would see women silencing themselves. It never occurred to me that an empowering moment for any of the women would be to leave the group.

Although the literature about consciousness raising groups and other feminist groupings mentions women who are not able to complete
the group process, I was looking for these women to be able to realize their own requirements for group structuring, including requiring only love and service to the community as guiding principles, believing in the goodness of all, understanding that all are connected and interdependent, as well as encouraging support and tolerance for diversity.

Strangely enough it was this requirement for openness which ended up limiting the two women who left. In the face of Skip's strongly divergent beliefs and understandings, the desire for tolerance and support of diverse perspectives became a demand. She recognized the pressure which this group of women was imposing upon her, silenced and then removed herself. This is how Skip the individual responded.

Paradoxically, of course, Skip saw herself and was seen by the others as holding the beliefs of the dominant structuring (religious institution) in her person (as clergy) and thus the demand for openness and tolerance was in the face of an embodiment of the oppressive structuring.

It was not simply her connection with the leadership of the Community Church which made the difference. Crystal, for instance, remained in the Community Church and can be seen organizing and creating worship services for the women to conduct throughout the chronological account in an early section. She is never seen as an "outsider."

But Skip was a cleric of one of the mainstream Christian denominations who were seen as both supported and imposing themselves in the forming of the Community Church. Her attempts to form a bridge between these women and the denominations' intentions
for the Community Church were too like accepting one for awhile and	hen making one submit to authority and accept authority's beliefs in
order to stay included. Her interest is adamantly not in exploring outside
of the Christian religion, but only in finding ways to keep the women
worked into the Community Church.

In Wilma's case, she may have been an inadvertent victim of the
contest between some of the others and Skip. Her reason for leaving was
the divergence of the group from a feminist critique of religious
oppression. Although in early meetings the discussion was wide-ranging
with most of the women talking about the varieties of "spirituality" that
interested them and which they had experienced, the March 1 meeting
for example focused explicitly on anger at the institutional church for
how it had dealt with sexuality. Given Wilma's interests in transforming
the institutional Christian church she might have found this to be the
kind of feminist work she was seeking to do.

But the struggles between the relation of the group and the
church (was the group going to be for planning services or for
exploring spirituality with other women) and between Skip and some of
the other women (Skip's antagonistic disinterest in exploring beyond
Christianity and most of the other women's explicit desire to explore
beyond Christianity) typified by the decision to study a "channeled" book
may have obscured the possibilities for harmonious correspondence
between what Wilma and the others were seeking.

Skip and Wilma asserted themselves paradoxically through verbal
silence and the physical action of no longer attending, although it is
clear from their statements that their decisions and actions were in
relation to the group. However, the group was left only with the
information of their absence, and not the complexity of their self-
reflection.

A sad thing about Wiima and Skips' assertion of self is that none of
the other women in the group were able to hear what is obviously
thoughtful sense-making on the part of these three who left or were
absent. Their responses make it clear that the communicative procedures
of the group did not successfully bring to articulation in the group the
reasons these women left, although reading their responses, it is obvious
that they were consciously aware as they stopped coming exactly why
they no longer were interested in participating.

To an extent they could be said to have silenced themselves.
Additionally, this silencing of self did not give the other women in the
group were an opportunity to address their difficulties and concerns, and
perhaps create new procedures which could have permitted them to
remain in dialogue. Possible avenues of creative resolution that might
have permitted all the women to stay as part of the group were not
opened because the communicative procedures blocked or did not attend
so this degree of difference.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter I stated that the purpose of this dissertation was to examine an emancipatory praxis based on the way women do things. Stating the purpose in this broad manner was an attempt to keep the possibilities for ways to study this research open. In part this was because I wanted to study something liberating I had personally experienced in a group of women. I was too close to the phenomenon to be anything but subjective.

Because I was not certain how such a phenomenon might be identified and circumscribed in a scholarly fashion, I read a variety of literatures looking for something outside myself which resonated with what I was experiencing. I found this in the work of feminist theologians Nelle Morton and Carol Christ with their notions of "hearing into speech" and "articulating the self." Because they pointed to consciousness raising groups as the locations of this experience, that was the place I began to study. Because consciousness raising groups had a very specific historical, political, and social location, I wanted to capture yet not be tied to their process. Thus, I abstracted some key aspects of
their vision and practices into what I have been calling feminist group process.

Overview of Steps Taken to Conduct this Research

The goal of this research became to examine the praxis generated through the communication process of a women’s small group which follows the form of the feminist consciousness raising group. After a review of the literature about the consciousness raising group as used in the Women’s Liberation Movement and informed by the small group communication literature about axiomatic elements of small group process, Chapter One concluded by proposing these research questions:

1. How does a feminist group, informed by a feminist consciousness of process, create and maintain a group in keeping with its vision. In particular, how is the group process
   * egalitarian - all voices are equally heard despite difference?
   * pluralistic - all voices are equally valued despite difference?
   * democratic - power is invested in each voice and shared by all?

2. How do the communicative practices of feminist group process fail [falter, fall apart, come apart, lose integrity] to maintain its vision?

Combining inductive and deductive elements

In order to address group process and to illuminate communicative practices in the creation and maintenance of a group, a methodological perspective was introduced in Chapter II. Rather than developing a theoretical perspective which would shape the rest of the research in a deductive fashion, the decision was made instead to develop a guide for
observing a group process systematically, but one which would leave theorizing for later so that it could incorporate and be shaped by insights from the data in a more inductive fashion.

To this end the theoretic tools of the sense-making metaphor and the communication-as-procedure analytic were presented to guide observing. Chapter III continues the application of this approach in its presentation of a data collection method, the long sense-making interview.

**Sense-making and communication-as-procedure**

To recap briefly, the assumption which underlies the sense-making theoretical approach is that individuals move through time/space by taking steps down a path. Inherent in taking each step is that there is a space or gap or barrier to step over or bridge in order to continue. Thus, the step-taking can also be seen as gap bridging. "In essence, the individual defines and attempts to bridge discontinuities or gaps. It is this focus on gap-defining and gap-bridging which is seen as offering a way of introducing order into conceptualizations of individual behavior" (Dervin, 1992, pp. 67-68).

The sense-making metaphor is of a person walking along a path when they are confronted by a discontinuity for which she needs to construct a bridge in order to continue on her way. So, there is the actor, the step-taking of moving through moment to moment, the defining of the gap, the bridging of the gap, and continued step-taking. Figure 7 is a representation of the sense-making metaphor.
The triangulation implicit in the sense-making metaphor is a way of getting at the experience by encircling it, potentially entering the individual sense-making through the situation, the gap (block faced, barrier faced), or the helps/uses/consequences (questions answered, ideas formed, resources obtained, strategies used). This dissertation is addressing sense-making from the point of view of the bridge, since the feminist group process is conceptualized as a bridge (see Figure 8 below).

The sense-making methodological approach is "a set of methods which have been developed to study the making of sense that people do in their everyday experiences" (Dervin, 1992, p. 62). All of its data collection methods are based on the sense-making metaphor and incorporate the sense-making triangle. The communication-as-procedure perspective is a study of communicative behaving which focuses on the "hows" of structuring human activities through communicating (Dervin and Clark, 1989).

An additional methodological choice growing out of Dervin's conceptual work was the shift to using verbs instead of nouns to try and stay with the dynamic nature of group process. This verbing is a sometimes awkward shift intended to push past some of the biases of
studying behavioral phenomena which tend to freeze process in time and space into a "what" or a noun, rather than capturing its continuing movement and change, the "how" or the verb (Dervin, 1993, Dervin and Clark, 1993).

**Shifting the view of the phenomenon.** Reflecting this perspectival decision, the purpose of the dissertation was subtly rephrased. The language and conceptualizing shifted from that of the feminist and small group literature to that of a perspective intent on paying attention to process and communicative practice. This reframing meant the purpose now read: to study how a collectivity of women, informed by a feminist consciousness of process, goes about creating, maintaining, and reinventing itself through communicative procedures into a feminist group process in keeping with its vision.

To suggest how the sense-making theoretic and communication-as-procedure analytic tools might work as guides for observing, descriptions in the literature about how to go about setting up a consciousness raising group (structuring a feminist group process) were briefly assessed in terms of communicative procedures. Figure 8 represents this perspective.
Figure 8
Bridge: Feminist group process expressed as communicative procedure.

Chapter III presents the data collection methods of participant observation and a long sense-making interview, as well as discussion of continuing methodological choices throughout the collection of data.

Thus, in setting up this research, a theoretically based guide for observing process systematically was developed, rather than more deductive theorizing. The intention was to observe a group process for some time, letting the data collection as well as preliminary analysis be influenced by a dialectical process between myself as researcher and the women of a group who would be studied.

I reasoned that since my own experience and the literature revealed a paucity of information about the group process, especially from a communicative standpoint, that it would be well to listen and observe for a long time before beginning to theorize about what was happening in an actual group's process. Thus, (skipping over Chapter IV for the time being), I used communication-as-procedure and verbing in Chapter V to organize the data from the sense-making interviews in a way that reflected the inductive patterns and observable behavior. I also
looked to see what other patterns emerged from engaging with my field notes and responses to the long sense-making interviews.

Only after I had pushed this observing and organizing as far as it could go did I begin to theorize as a means of further interpreting the data. This theorizing was presented in Chapter IV as I positioned myself in the research situation as researcher and participant of the women’s spirituality group. I then went back over the material in Chapter V (which had been organized through the lenses of verbing and communicative procedure) with my deductive analytic frame to analyze the communicative procedure used in structuring this group’s process.

This has been a recap of my somewhat atypical approach in conducting this study. Yet this overview demonstrates that all the elements of a deductive theoretically driven study have been included and hopefully enhanced by the more inductive approach taken.

Assessment of the communication-as-procedure perspective. This was the first time I had used the communication-as-procedure analytic to study individual sense-making or collective structuring of a group process. Since I used it to observe and organize the data after I had assessed the data already, it became clear that this analytic was a powerful tool for revealing systematically patterns and practices which I could grasp only intuitively or anecdotally without it. Additionally, both the sense-making interview instrument and the communication-as-procedure analytic tool used to evaluate and organize all the responses in the sense-making interviews usefully constrained my biased perceptions as a participant. Without using them, I would never have been so
scrupulous and nonjudgemental in listening to each women's perspective, nor would the fullness of their sense-making been revealed. The theoretic underpinnings allowed me to create my own deductive frame, helped me to address systematically what other theorists had only presented anecdotally. At this point in my use of the communication-as-procedure analytic I am experimenting with ways it can be used and what it can reveal. Because my use of it is so preliminary and what is revealed so exciting and useful, I find it difficult to be negatively evaluative of it.

Discussion of Conclusions

This rest of this chapter will address the conclusions of this dissertation by viewing the communicative procedures of this group process from several entry points. One discussion will be how the analysis of the data through communicative proceduring speaks to the theorizing of those (Foucault, Irigaray, Johnson, Morton, Christ) whose work helped me define and identify the phenomenon -- the "what" or nowning of this group process. Yet another will be to consider how it speaks to the theorizing of those (Carter and Dervin) whose work work helped me conceptualize and observe how the phenomenon works -- the "how" or verbing of the group process through communicating. Through discussion of the "hows" and the "whats," these conclusions will respond to the issues of small group communicating generally, and the feminist group process in particular. Throughout I will reflect on what this project means for my personal interest in an emancipatory group process.
What: Understanding the phenomenon of a women's spirituality group

In Chapter IV, I reviewed several theorists who helped me identify and define the "what" of this study, the phenomenon of a femininst group process. I hoped to intermingle their thought with my own intuitive sense of what I was observing and come to a greater understanding of how to theorize about it. My various understandings of their work and how it influenced me are recounted in Chapter IV. The conclusions of this study seem to speak pertinently to some aspects presented there, but not all. Discussion of these aspects will comprise the focus of this section.

First, Michel Foucault's notions of discourses which silence some voices, thoughts, and experiences; multiple points of resistance which are everywhere within a network of power relationships; and the "reverse" discourses which a dominant discourse forms. I fought the notion that everything that was happening in the women's spirituality group must be seen and interpreted through a lens of power. This was difficult because evidence exists to support such an interpretation.

For example, the continuing tension between Skip and the rest of the group members clearly can be seen as a power dynamic between a dominant religious discourse and the resistance of this group trying to push beyond it. The worship services also encompass a contest between the "reverse" discourse of the women and the imposed presence of the dominant institution's ritual of communion which can be seen as resistance. The women's stated and then realized intention to verbalize as
they have not before because of a lack of "space" in the dominant
discourse implies a silencing mechanism in place.

My resistance to this interpretation was in part quite visceral
because of my own experience in the women's spirituality as well as the
group in my church. Although my experience felt something like being
oppressed and then resisting long enough to create something new, the
sense of liberation and being enlivened felt like it moved beyond a
dialectic of oppression and resistance. Feeling liberation and new
energy seemed more like being in a time space no longer framed by or
concerned with the dominant discourse, even in opposition.

For this reason, Irigaray's notion of a female economy not yet
uncovered in discourse because it is obscured by the language of the
dominant male economy was attractive to me because it supported my
sense of something beyond the network of power relationships.
Combined with the other feminist theorists' notions about what happens
in groups of women following a feminist process, including Christ's idea
of power from outside social structuring, it feels like a better fit to say
that women succeed not only in resisting, but in creating a new space
free of the necessity to accept oppression or resist it.

I underline the word feels, however, because I am still left with
the question of whether my sense of moving beyond, liberation, or
newness is actually doing so. The question remains because so much of
the activity in this group (which is tacit in any consciousness raising
group, by definition) is so influenced by how the women have been in
the dominant social structuring. While channeled material like The
Starseed Transmissions seems to move completely outside of the dominant
discourse, the women are attracted to it because it supports ideas and experiences which the dominant discourse has left silent. Yet, many of the women who want to move beyond institutional Christian religion are still trapped in their anger about it. Not only recent disappointment in the Community Church, but their experiences with religion in their pasts. This anger suggests that they are creating more of a reverse discourse, are resisting, are unsilencing themselves about the dominant discourse rather than doing something new and beyond the discourse.

**Theorizing by women's spirituality group members**

For the next part of this section, I want to include theorizing about what was happening in the women's spirituality group as articulated by some of the women. Several women spoke about what they saw happening in the group during their interviews. Three in particular speak to this issue. In the first passage, Wilma ponders if the women got off their path when they chose the channeled book because it took their attention outside of their historical, material circumstance. Her understanding is that change could only happen if they were to stay working within the religion which had done violence to them.

Ruby, having read a transcript of the final meeting, reflects on her surprise at the amount of anger toward religion expressed in the course of an evening's meeting. She ends by wondering what they might be missing that is good about organized religion when it is rejected for what is bad.

Lydia, also having read this transcript, is struck by how stupid she and the other women sound when she remembered the conversation as
having been intelligent and important. While some of this can be discounted because of the shock of reading one's own unedited conversation in print, she also is speaking to the difficulty of capturing subjective experience of a group process.

_Wilma._ To me [choosing the channeled book] seemed like an escape from really dealing with down to earth life. I wasn't interested in that kind of escape. I could do other things for escape. My experience of women's groups had been very now centered and very relational and very political in some ways. It seemed to me focusing on wisdom coming from outer space shifted the focus of life for me from being in the here and now and historical to being ahistorical. I'm not used to functioning in an ahistorical framework.

My sense is that it didn't really help the group because as I recall from the first meeting women were interested in a response to ecclesiastical violence. This is a support group for people who have been beat up by the church in some way or other. There was a fair amount of that in there. There were very few people who didn't have a church background and very few who didn't share some major trauma that they'd had with all that. Some of those issues came up. My sense is that the book took us off the path of our real life issues. It was searching for another reality out there somewhere that certainly must be better than this one, rather than trying to make sense of what we've got and redeeming it in some sort of way for our own selves.

I wouldn't say that I was in a whole lot of pain over the whole thing, but I felt there was some sort of loss there because I don't think I
was the only one who had some expectations of what that group of folks might be for each other because there were some pretty sharp folks there. From my own experience, I just think we got side-tracked. That's what I was looking for. As I recall there were a few people that were really excited about the book and the rest of the people read it with some interest, but I don't remember a lot of enthusiasm about it from the group as a whole.

Ruby. I marked several sections [in the transcript] that showed that we... I wrote in the margin, "Christian bashing?" and I wrote in another margin, "Catholic jokes. We hate organized religion!" I was kind of surprised to read it in writing that there was a lot of that. A lot of negative, angry comments about organized religion being woman hating, being too rigid, not having the correct focus. That kind of stuff.

It came up a number of times and that struck me. The fact that the Christian religion was very violent. The words controlling and manipulative were used about it. We were talking about the fact that the Christian religion in Europe literally murdered thousands and thousands of people in the name of Jesus Christ. All that power need. All that control and stuff. There was a whole section where Maria was telling us about a play she had seen called Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All. At the end of it there was a person being held at gunpoint by the church. So there was a number of different ways in which that whole thing was brought up about how religion has been used as a control tool by the power structure which I describe often as the patriarchy.
It seemed significant to me that it kept coming up and that many of us seemed to have opinions and experiences that made us pissed off. Still. After all this time. The fact that we experienced it a lot, at a personal level, at least for me, but it seemed like a number of other people had the same opinions about it.

I think it helps to get that kind of stuff off your chest. I don't know if you can ever really do anything about it. Just talking about it doesn't help really. That it helps to hate organized religion? Probably! Five fewer people to join the whatever.

I think, reading it over, that it always hurts when you maintain a certain level of anger. It is not fun. When I realize that about myself, that I have a lot of buried or maybe not buried, out there, open sores of anger from things that have happened in my past, in this case my religious upbringing. Yeah, that hurts.

I like to think of myself as a free person, as a person who has grown and matured and forgiven the negative things of the past, and gotten past the guilt and all the brainwashing and when I look at something like this and realize that I still have anger and apparently so do a lot of other women, yeah, it is not very pleasant to see that.

I guess one way that it might hurt is that if we are still pissed off, then it closes that door or that path or that opportunity to learn from that particular system. If you have been so hurt by a particular system that you don't want to deal with it any more, then you also lose what good that system has to offer.
Lydia. The thing that struck me in this whole transcript is first of all, when I went through it, how stupid we all sounded. I was embarrassed because I thought "Good God! I thought there were some incidents in that whole thing that were a lot more profound!" I was beet red. If anybody gets ahold of [the transcript] I will die. Then I reread the whole thing again based on having these questions in my mind.

I started thinking about this group as a whole and how we interacted with each other based on personal relationships, based on the topic we were to be discussing, the wine consumed, a whole different set of variables that came into the entire evening. There were so many different things we could have talked about. Just based on the transcript alone we could have expounded for hours and hours, but how limited we are in being able to verbalize that which we know.

Knowing these women as well as I know each of them and how I perceive them to be so exceptional each in their own way and knowing, through experiences with them, observations of them, their sense of understanding who they are and what they are about far surpasses anything that any of us could say and I think it is real evident in this transcript. We hit on a lot of different subjects, a lot of different topics, laughed over things, some things were taken more seriously than others.

To the extent that the women in the women's spirituality group began bonding, exploring new ideas together, and learning from each other, I could argue that they were doing something beyond resisting. They might even be tapping into some power that comes from beyond the
current social structuring. I would like to believe that while power may be everywhere, it is not everything.

Finally, the question remains about whether something referenced by the notions of hearing into speech and articulating the self is happening. To the extent that the women are expressing their anger and sharing their experiences within the group, something formerly silenced is being expressed. The communicative procedures of the group process seem to be creating and maintaining its capacity to do that.

That these previously silenced thoughts and feelings are coming from the women suggests that they are articulating a self who may not have been empowered to take part in the discourse before. Of course, the unanticipated aspect of the women who specifically talk about asserting themselves as the action of leaving the group suggests that the communicative procedures are not operating as anticipated. This provides a segue into the next section of this chapter, an assessment of the communicative procedures.

**How: Verbing group process through communicative procedures**

This section will deal with two aspects of communicative procedure. One will be the use of communicative proceduring by the women’s spirituality group members in order to structure their group’s process. The second will be a discussion of the power of this analytic for studying group process.

**Communicative proceduring in the women's spirituality group.**

Chapter Five provides detailed analysis of the use of communicative
proceduring in the women's spirituality group. Yet it is in the contrast between the careful, tested communicative procedures of the consciousness raising groups spoken of in the literature and the less intentional, indeed almost unconscious, use of communicative procedures of the women's spirituality group where the power and importance of communicative proceduring can be observed.

As demonstrated in the assessment of the literature at the end of Chapter Two, the intentional structuring of the communicative procedures to create the consciousness raising group moved very consciously between theory and practice to create a replicable process for women to use in a grassroots movement. By the time that many of the authors were writing their didactic assessments, these procedures had been field tested often. The group in this study did not set out to be a consciousness raising group, yet enough residual procedures are used and values espoused that a comparison is useful.

The necessity of this attention to creating and maintaining structuring is underscored when the communicative proceduring of the women's spirituality group are assessed. Although many of the spoken ideas and tacit practices of the group support the notion that this is a feminist group process, many others appear to subvert it. The analysis, especially Chapter Five's sections on maintaining and dysjuncturing the group process, reveal some clear ways that the group dealt with differences amongst the women and intentional use of communicative procedures in ways which supported or subverted egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic assumptions.
The chronological account of the group's meetings shows several occasions when one or two women made decisions and committed the group to courses of action with which the others either fell into line or did not. The main example of the latter is that Skip and Wilma, each for their own reasons, felt the group was going in a different direction with which they did not agree and without discussing their problem or decision, they left the group.

A case in point of the former was Crystal and Lydia's commitment of the group to lead worship services at the Community Church without discussing it with the others. Although some of the others baulked or grumbled there was never an instance where someone took it upon themselves to organize a discussion around this point and to challenge Crystal and Lydia's right to do this. Yet the tension between the original visions for the group and the amount of time devoted to this activity arguably sapped the group's vitality and derailed it from ever fully realizing the hopes the women had for it.

In this sense, the use of communicative procedures by the women's spirituality group is both successful (as seen in Chapter V's sections on creating and maintaining the group process) and inadequate (see the discussion immediately above). This underscores the contention of Dervin and Clark (1989, 1993) that unless careful and explicit attention is paid to reinventing and reiterating communicative procedures to structure a certain formation, the likelihood is that the people involved will fall back into using old, habitual, and undesirable communicative procedures.
The feminist group process as articulated in the literature and the variation embodied in the women's spirituality group both endeavor to manifest the egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic assumptions which undergird them and to resist slipping back or being subverted by old, oppressive patriarchal notions.

Yet the mandate of the consciousness raising group that women demonstrate a capacity to be reaching certain understandings and demonstrating certain changed behaviors through certain kinds of political action is already privileging some sense-making and step-taking over others, perhaps necessarily. Perhaps it is axiomatic that a certain point in a group, such boundary defining procedures are necessary to differentiate what is happening in the group from what is outside it.

In the women's spirituality group, if the context in vision and direction were not played out, how would the group know its identity or be able to continue moving together? Thus, it becomes evident that it may be impossible to be completely egalitarian, pluralistic, or democratic in any small group process. In Carter's terms, only partial ordering may be possible or desirable.

A final discussion brings us to set of rather concrete and pragmatic conclusions about the communicative procedures of the feminist group process. Yet, as stated at the beginning of Chapter I, the purpose of this research is to examine an emancipatory praxis based on the way women do things, and its goal is to examine the praxis generated through the communication process of a women's small group which follows the form of the feminist consciousness raising group.
In Chapter II, the emancipatory praxis of the consciousness raising group is further defined. Feminist insight into the ways women have been systematically oppressed led them to invent the consciousness raising group process. It is hoped that by breaking through the ideologically bound rigidities of the societal perception and internalized role of women, the intentional communicative processes of a group can emancipate individual women who will then attempt to make political changes for all women.

The intervening chapters have been an exploration of the communicative procedures of this feminist group process through the words and actions of the members of a living group. For the conclusions which follow, accept that this women's spirituality group was a feminist group process. With that, how does this study speak to the conclusions of the literature about feminist group process?

**Feminist group process in the literature.** The intentional process of the feminist group creates a consequence of liberation evoked by the phrases "hearing into speech" and "articulating the self." The feminist group process involves egalitarian, pluralistic, and democratic ideals each of which rests on assumptions about communication. Nonetheless axiomatic elements of the process common to all small groups are not entirely constrained by the intentional communicative process of the feminist group. Some women in a feminist group will leave, in part because of these axiomatic small group forces, which means that the feminist group process incompletely realizes its ideals.

While feminists have identified the points at which women are likely to leave a group and even the dynamic that will result in some
women leaving the group, like all small groups, it is written off as 
unavoidable. The women who leave effectively disappear from the group 
process, but it is important to explore the cracks through which they 
have fallen. Yet the women who leave have valuable information about 
the nature of the group; feminists have tended to identify the "failure" as 
residing in the women who leave or in the inevitability of group process. 

What this study has to say. This study suggests that the women who 
leave can provide valuable information about the nature of the group 
which may be invisible to the women who stay or to the researcher 
intent on understanding the group process from the point of view of a 
group's succeeding and what those who stay do right in terms of group 
process.

This ignorance keeps deeper processes at work invisible. It 
obscures the importance of difference and indicates incompleteness in 
attention and invention to the intention feminist group process. This 
ends up limiting diversity and potentially useful struggle which is the 
ideal which undergirds the other ideals of equality, plurality, and 
democracy.

However, also axiomatic of small group process is that once past 
the stage where differences and conflict may have the consequence of 
some group members leaving, those who remain will cohere into a 
functioning group. Those who make it through to this point of the group 
process are probably those who will be heard into speech in the sense 
intended by Morton, Christ, and those feminists concerned with 
consciousness raising.
Interestingly, the data from the women's spirituality group suggests that even those who do not go through with the process may experience a consequence similar to that intended by feminists: the three women who expressly focusing on articulating themselves included the two who left. Of the two who left, it was their own understanding that by articulating their difference and their intention to leave, they most fully articulated their selves.

That the women's spirituality group accomplished hearing into speech and articulating the self is also evidenced by other patterns than in the moment of leaving.

Hearing into speech and articulating the self was done by (1) hearing about other's creative response to the problems of living and comparing one's self with this which resulted in profound challenges to understanding of the self and one's way of living which in turn resulted in action, (2) articulating experiences and understandings and subjecting them to the challenge of the groups' responses, and (3) trying out articulating to see what oneself experienced and understood by doing it.

A conclusion to draw from the analysis is that while in this group no one ever was silently heard into speech as in Morton's chapter, and those who apparently articulated lest the self would perish were those who were least involved in the heart of the group, and that there was no conscious attempt to systematically follow the guidelines of a consciousness raising group, still the process of this living group can be seen to result in those very outcomes attributed to the feminist group process.
APPENDIX A

SENSE-MAKING INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

I WANT TO BEGIN BY ASKING YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT EVENTS IN YOUR LIFE THAT TOOK PLACE BEFORE YOU BEGAN COMING TO THE WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUP. ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS WILL BE ABOUT EVENTS IN YOUR LIFE THAT HAVE SOME RELATION TO EITHER SPIRITUALITY OR RELIGION. SO HOLD SPIRITUALITY IN OR OUT OF FORMAL RELIGIOUS SETTINGS IN YOUR MIND AS I ASK THESE QUESTIONS.

FIRST, I'M GOING TO BEGIN BY DRAWING A LINE THAT REPRESENTS YOUR LIFE. LET'S ANCHOR SOME THINGS ON THIS LINE THAT HAPPENED TO YOU BEFORE YOU BEGAN COMING TO THE WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUP.

Pre-group life history:
What was the first time in your life you can remember being given a definition or concept of yourself either in a religious setting or some other spiritual situation that did NOT fit you?

What happened?
What was the definition or concept of yourself that didn't fit?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?
Before you began coming to the women's spirituality group, what were other important times in your life when you were given a definition or concept of yourself either in a religious setting or some other spiritual situation that did not fit?

What happened?
What was the definition or concept of yourself that didn't fit?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

Were there any other important times in your life when you were given a spiritual or religious definition of yourself that did NOT fit?

What happened?
What was the definition or concept of yourself that didn't fit?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

What was a time just before you began coming to the women's spirituality group when you were given a definition or concept of yourself either in a religious setting or some other spiritual situation that did NOT fit?

What happened?
What was the definition or concept of yourself that didn't fit?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?
This next set of questions is still concerned with events in your life that happened before you started attending the women's spirituality group. Again, hold spirituality in or out of formal religious settings in your mind as I ask these questions.

What was the first time in your life that you can remember trying to find a spiritual or religious concept or definition of yourself that fit you well?

What happened?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did you find a definition or concept that fit? What was it?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

What were other times in your life when you tried to find a concept or definition of yourself in a spiritual or religious setting that fit you well?

What happened?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did you find a definition or concept that fit? What was it?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

What was the last time before you started coming to the women's spirituality group that you tried to find a concept or definition of yourself in a spiritual or religious setting that fit you well?

What happened?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did you find a definition or concept that fit? What was it?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?
What was happening in your life that made you decide to come to the women's spirituality group?

How did you hope the women's spirituality group would help you?

HERE IS ANOTHER LINE, AND THESE SQUARES REPRESENT INDIVIDUAL GROUP MEETINGS. AS YOU ANSWER QUESTIONS WE WILL ANCHOR EVENTS THAT HAPPENED DURING THE GROUP MEETINGS.

During group:
What has been the most significant event that happened for you during the meetings of the women's spirituality group?

What happened?

What is significant about what happened at that time?

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?

Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?

Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

During the meetings of the women's spirituality group, what event most impacted your definition or concept of yourself?

What happened?

How did that event impact your definition or concept of yourself?

What is significant about what happened at that time?

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?

Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?

Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?
During the meetings of the women's spirituality group, think of one time when your definition or concept of yourself challenged?

What happened?
How was your definition or concept of yourself challenged?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

During the meetings of the women's spirituality group, was there a time when you did not agree with something that happened in the group?

What happened?
What did you not agree with?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

THAT IS ALL THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GROUP MEETINGS IN GENERAL. THE NEXT SET OF QUESTIONS IS ABOUT THE PARTICULAR GROUP MEETING THAT IS RECORDED IN THE TRANSCRIPT. HAVING READ THE TRANSCRIPT AND HAVING HIGHLIGHTED CERTAIN EVENTS, THE NEXT SET OF QUESTIONS IS BASED ON SOME OF THE EVENTS YOU HIGHLIGHTED.

Particular meeting:

TO BEGIN WITH, I WANT YOU TO CHOOSE FROM THE PARTS YOU MARKED IN _____, THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENT THAT HAPPENED FOR YOU DURING THIS MEETING TO FOCUS ON.
During this particular meeting, what was the most significant event that happened?

What happened?

What is significant about what happened at that time?

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?

Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?

Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

NEXT, I WANT YOU TO CHOOSE FROM THE PARTS YOU MARKED IN ______, THE EVENT THAT MOST IMPACTED YOUR CONCEPT OR DEFINITION OF YOURSELF.

During this particular meeting, what event happened that most impacted your concept or definition of yourself?

What happened?

What was the concept or definition of yourself that was impacted?

What is significant about what happened at that time?

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?

Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?

Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?
NEXT, I WANT YOU TO CHOOSE FROM THE PARTS YOU MARKED IN _______. THE EVENT THAT MOST SHOOK OR CHALLENGED YOUR CONCEPT OR DEFINITION OF YOURSELF.

During this particular meeting, what event happened that most shook or challenged your concept or definition of yourself?

What happened?
What concept or definition of yourself was shaken or challenged?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

THAT IS ALL THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PARTICULAR GROUP MEETING. THE NEXT SET OF QUESTIONS HAS TO DO WITH YOUR RECENT LIFE OUTSIDE THE WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUP.

Outside group:
What was the most recent time when your experience in the women's spirituality group made a difference in your life?

What happened?
What is significant about what happened at that time?
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?
Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?
What was a recent time when a definition or concept of yourself which has been changed in the process of attending the women's spirituality group made a difference in your life?

What happened?

How did the definition or concept of yourself make a difference?

What is significant about what happened at that time?

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?

Did it help? How did it help? Anything else?

Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?

THAT IS THE END OF MY QUESTIONS. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE SENSE-MAKING INTERVIEW: CRYSTAL.

I WANT TO BEGIN BY ASKING YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT EVENTS IN YOUR LIFE THAT TOOK PLACE BEFORE YOU BEGAN COMING TO THE WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUP. ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS WILL BE ABOUT EVENTS IN YOUR LIFE THAT HAVE SOME RELATION TO EITHER SPIRITUALITY OR RELIGION. SO HOLD SPIRITUALITY IN OR OUT OF FORMAL RELIGIOUS SETTINGS IN YOUR MIND AS I ASK THESE QUESTIONS.

FIRST, I'M GOING TO BEGIN BY DRAWING A LINE THAT REPRESENTS YOUR LIFE. LET'S ANCHOR SOME THINGS ON THIS LINE THAT HAPPENED TO YOU BEFORE YOU BEGAN COMING TO THE WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUP.

Pre-group life history:
1. What was the first time in your life you can remember being given a definition or concept of yourself either in a religious setting or some other spiritual situation that did NOT fit you?

   On a personal spiritual level, when my mother died when I was eleven, then something of my faith, which I've always had, kind of left.

What happened?
I remember going to Sunday school and feeling this really full feeling and at some point that went away. I lost that. I think that it was probably when my mother died. That God is good. God will take care of you. All this, then He takes my mother away. So I think that probably started to shake my beliefs or my trust. I started questioning why things happen and maybe started to question the validity or the truth of everything that I'd been told in church.

What was the definition or concept of yourself that didn't fit?
I don't know if it was so much a concept of myself as the world because I had always been secure and had a real secure happy family for the most part. My father was in seminary when my mother died.

There was one thing that happened that stands out. The morning she had been sick (she had an aneurysm, a cerebral hemorrhage). We lived in Swannee, Tennessee which is on top of a mountain and the closest hospital was two hours away on the top of
the next mountain so it's down that mountain and up to Chattanooga. There was no ambulance or hospital in Swannee and the doctor just lived up the street so he brought his station wagon and they put her in the station wagon to take her. She was throwing up blood. I remember waking up and looking out and seeing the commotion in the yard and then I went back to bed. The next morning I got up and my father came in and told us that my mother had died. I didn't believe him. Then, this priest that I didn't really know came to the door.

I remember I did this whole dramatic scene. It was an act. Crying. I felt grief for my mother, but this whole little scene was just this little act. I've thought about this so many times since then. It was like I was over here watching myself do this thinking, "now Crystal, what are you doing? You don't know this guy!" It was an act and I don't know where it came from or why I did that or thought that was the way I was supposed to react. That was the expected reaction or something. So, that was something that I remember from that time real clearly.

**What is significant about what happened at that time?**
I would say that that was the first time that I actually had been real cognizant that I was acting in a way that was not in keeping with what I was feeling, that I was not being authentic.

**What in your life accounted for this event being significant?**
Well, the circumstances surrounding that whole time. And I remember the whole sequence of events that happened then, but that stands out. I guess because I am not proud of doing that. Certainly there were other things that I could have done that would have been more productive for me and for my family. It was just a minor thing and I'm sure that God didn't remember it. I'm not proud of that, that I did that, although it was really no big deal.

**What in your life accounted for this event being significant?**
Well, because my mother had died. Otherwise I probably wouldn't remember it. It was just that I had never experienced anything in my life before that was even remotely that intense or important. I was totally unprepared for it. I had never known anybody to die. I guess it was just a way of processing that in some kind of way. I don't know.

**Did it help?**
At the time, probably.

**How did it help?**
Because I guess at the time I felt like I was doing what I was supposed to do, behaving in the expected manner or something like that.
Anything else?
Well, I also remember that here my mother had died and there were four kids and how really self-centered I was, that I was still concerned with personal kinds of things. I guess I don’t remember stepping in and helping out that much. Being the oldest it was an opportunity for me to act really mature and really try to help out with the other kids, but I don’t remember doing that. I don’t think I did that. It was kind of a missed opportunity there. And I never did do that. My sister, the one right after me that is sixteen months younger than me, was the one who stepped in to be the mom. Not me. I was more concerned with what I wanted to do.

Did it hurt?
Yeah, it did. But it has taken years to process that.

How did it hurt?
Well, just losing my best friend. The one person I could always... It still does hurt. For me the grief I think was not... I was still into the day to day dealing with my life. I remember crying and being sad, but it wasn’t real deep grief. My family tried to keep us occupied and I was staying with my favorite cousins in New Orleans and that was fun. They just tried to make it fun for us so that we wouldn’t be so unhappy.

It’s probably in years since then that I’ve realized what I missed. Particularly when I had my own children. I have a teenage daughter now and this is all uncharted waters for me because I never had a mother when I was that age so the decisions that I make with her are purely on instinct rather than what was done with me which in a way is probably good. And I’ve often wondered what my life would be like if she had lived and where would we be and what would we be doing, and then I think too that she would probably be proud of me and what I’m doing.

One thing that really hurt in retrospect is that my father was not strong enough to keep her image alive for us. He was so devastated by her death -- he’s basically a very weak person which I didn’t know then -- he was so devastated by her death that he could not talk about her. I mean, when she died that was it. I was just like, whoosh, gone. I really blame him for that. I have never talked to him about it, but I have been angry at him for doing that and wish that I had had the foresight or been strong enough or had just had the idea to do that, to remember her and talk about her, and keep her memory more alive.

I remember her very well, but my little brother and sister... my brother doesn’t remember her at all. He was five. My sister who lives here was seven and she was probably more devastated than any of us because I have always been independent and had my own life and been real involved with my own thing and my other sister was too, but the younger sister was pretty introverted and overweight, she did not relate to my father at all. My mother was her friend in the world. My mother and our other sister. In
the long run, my youngest sister was more affected than any of us by that.

Anything else?
I guess little things like being sorry that I didn't behave better. Just things like that. That's pretty normal. I don't think I have any guilt about it.

2. Before you began coming to the women's spirituality group, what were other important times in your life when you were given a definition or concept of yourself either in a religious setting or some other spiritual situation that did not fit?

In high school, I thought the whole organized religion thing was just... I liked the music but I didn't pay a lot of attention to the other things. I didn't feel a real connection with the service, the memorized church service. I was raised in the church, first the Presbyterian church and then pretty quickly, the Episcopal church. I went to Sunday school. I don't remember as a young child ever really questioning. It was just nice Bible stories and things like that. I don't remember specific incidents, it's just my recollection of when I got to high school I went to an Episcopal boarding school. A lot of church. We had a bishop who would come and hear confession. The whole idea which is not put forth so strongly in the Episcopal church as it is in the Catholic church that we're doing bad things. I guess I never really thought that I was doing bad things. The idea that we're basically bad. Original sin. I don't know if I'm putting what I believe now back on that time either, which is possible.

Going to church was part of what we did, it was part of our life and I never questioned that and then I went to this boarding school that I wanted to go to. We had evening prayer Monday through Thursday and Holy Communion on Sunday. A lot of church. And I was in the choir. I liked the choir a lot, but as far as the services go it was just something we had to do. We would get in trouble if we didn't go. It wasn't like I wanted to go and pray. It didn't mean anything. It was just something I had to do. It had no meaning for me for the most part although there were exceptions to that. The main exception that stands out is when Kennedy died.

What happened?
I was a freshman in high school and they started ringing the chapel bells at 10 o'clock in the morning. My heart stopped. We all went in the chapel and they told us. It was kind of comforting to be there then. Probably my whole high school experience... There were other services where we had the pomp and circumstance and the robes and the incense and I liked that. I liked the theatre of the church and I liked the music. I always have and I still do. That's probably the time when I felt the church was a place for sanctuary or a comforting place to be.
What was the definition or concept of yourself that didn't fit?
I don't have any recollection of a definition of me sent down from the church. Not necessarily a definition that didn't fit or that my own self-image didn't fit with something that was being told to me. It was more that my own concept of what church was changed. Although, as far as spirituality goes, it didn't change that. I've always had a lot of faith and I always did and still do. But it wasn't in church, it was in God or universal good. That didn't go away, but the whole organized religion thing was bullshit. It didn't mean anything to me.

What is significant about what happened at that time?
When I was younger, church was a special thing to me. I think I was more into it. It was important, it was something I put more faith in or gave more credibility to. When I got to high school, and just being that age when you question things, there was just so much of it! It was always the same and it got to where it was just meaningless.

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Everything else was a lot more fun and interesting than church. I guess I didn't feel like I needed it, except maybe when Kennedy died. The rest of the time I felt like I didn't need it to feel good about myself. Although there were times in there when I would need it, but for the most part I didn't. There was so much else going on that I would much rather do than go to church.

Did it help?
Yes, I think so.

How did it help?
Because I didn't have a dependency. I was being more dependent on myself than on some outside force, particularly some guy standing up there in a black suit telling me what to do with my life.

Anything else?
It made it easier down the road for me to evaluate it.

Did it hurt?
No.
3. Were there any other important times in your life when you were given a spiritual or religious definition of yourself that did NOT fit?

The first time that I remember rebelling against the church was when I was nineteen.

**What happened?**

When I was nineteen, after my freshman year in college, I started getting high, started smoking pot, and I was still going to church on Sundays. It was my dad's church. But then I had moved out of the house and so I wasn't going to church anymore. I would go occasionally just to make him happy. I went down to Mexico with a friend and tried to smuggle back some pot and got caught and got put on probation. It was a big mess. After that happened, my father, who was an Episcopal priest in Baton Rouge and who had remarried a woman that I didn't get along with, was having a pretty serious drinking problem, and so the bishop fired him.

That was the straw that broke the camel's back for me. I said, "forget it!" I saw so much hypocrisy and so much self-righteous bullshit in the church that I just said, "I don't want to have anything to do with it!" and for about fifteen years I didn't.

That's why I said earlier that my disenchantment with the church in high school made that whole realization less devastating. If I had still been dependent on the church and still had that strong belief in the church that I did when I was young, then this whole realization would have been devastating. But it was just one more thing. It's just a business. They don't practice what they preach. They preach all this love and compassion, but when it comes right down to it, that's just a crock of shit. And I still really believe that that's where it's at as far as church goes.

**What was the definition or concept that didn't fit?**

What I just said. That the church puts itself up as being this holy, sacred, God-like institution. The liaison between God and man. And it just turned out that it didn't have anything to do with God, didn't have anything to do with love, didn't have anything to do with compassion and caring. It had a lot to do with business and money. It think is a business. As much as anything else they are in business to make money and I know that that is a huge generalization, but I'd say it fits in 75% of the instances.

**What was the definition or concept of yourself that didn't fit?**

That I needed that. I didn't need that. I felt that my relationship with God or whatever was intact without church, that I didn't need that for my own spirituality.

**What is significant about what happened at that time?**

It gave me a real clear picture of things that I have been building up to all along. My thoughts that I didn't need all this rhetoric. So, that incident just clarified that for me.
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
It was a clean break. I said, "fuck the church" and I never went back.

Did it help?
It didn't matter. It was insignificant. After that, it just wasn't there, it wasn't part of my life. The only other times after that that I was in a church was when family members died or somebody got married. Those were the only times that I went to church until about five years ago. I guess in a way it may have been a bit of a monkey off my back although I don't remember being that concerned about it one way or another.

How did it help?
Well, I guess maybe after that I didn't have to feel guilty about not going to church anymore.

Anything else?
No

Did it hurt?
No.

4. What was a time just before you began coming to the women's spirituality group when you were given a definition or concept of yourself either in a religious setting or some other spiritual situation that did NOT fit?

I'm sure there must have been questioning times. For a big part of that time I was pretty heavily into drugs, too, and the whole thing of taking acid and finding God. I did all that, but I don't think it really shook my image of myself. From that time on I became a searcher and still am. I can't think of any instance that changed or challenged who I thought I was. I guess I don't really put myself in positions where people are going to tell me who I am or who I am supposed to be.

THIS NEXT SET OF QUESTIONS IS STILL CONCERNED WITH EVENTS IN YOUR LIFE THAT HAPPENED BEFORE YOU STARTED ATTENDING THE WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUP. AGAIN, HOLD SPIRITUALITY IN OR OUT OF FORMAL RELIGIOUS SETTINGS IN YOUR MIND AS I ASK THESE QUESTIONS.

5. What was the first time in your life that you can remember trying to find a spiritual or religious concept or definition of yourself that fit you well?

I don't remember early on thinking about that at all. I don't think I have been thinking about that at all until the last few years. It was probably in the last fifteen year. I don't remember different times or incidents. Just exploring the different eastern religions.
I guess it started in college really, reading things like The Book by Alan Watts and just exploring views of the world, other philosophies and concepts of the world and the universe and how I fit into all that.

_What happened?_
Well, I think that I started reading The Book... I don't remember now real clearly what it said... I guess it gave more of a concept about where we all come from and how we all connect to each other and to the universe which felt real good to me. I mean it felt true to me. So, from the church which I didn't really relate to that much and beginning to read other things that were not church teachings, at least not western Christianity kinds of things, that felt like I could relate to that and that felt more true to me. That started in college and has been going on ever since then.

_What is significant about what happened at that time?_
It started me searching and thinking and, I guess, maybe too, feeling like there are explanations that I can relate to. Finding truths that I could take as my own.

_What in your life accounted for this event being significant?_
I needed something to fill the hole that the church had left.

_Did you find a definition or concept that fit? What was it?_
Many. That all life is interconnected. That we all have the ability to communicate with God on our own without any help from anybody else. That we are all sacred spiritual beings. Those kinds of things.

_Did it help? How did it help?_
Yes. It just helped to put the puzzle pieces together. As time went a whole generation was questioning everything in their lives that they'd known up to that time and so we were all looking for answers and how we fit in because our parents' way was not working for us. All of the things that they had believed in and put their faith in, we found to be not true for us. Gradually finding answers, things that on a gut level we felt were true was comforting.

_Did it hurt?_
No.

6. What were other times in your life when you tried to find a concept or definition of yourself in a spiritual or religious setting that fit you well?

I started going to a psychic development class. I went to it once a week for about a year and a half.
What happened?
I started finding explanations for things in my life that I had not had explanations for before. Things like ESP and past life things. I've always been kind of fascinated with those concepts. Again, being in this group gave me another way to look at things and it ties in with the other philosophy about the real connectedness of everything, especially with the soul and past lives and other entities that interact with us on a daily basis that you can tune into. It was interesting that when I went back to church at [the church], that that didn't conflict. I didn't find conflict between the two, between what I had learned in the psychic development classes and what I was feeling about church. They didn't cancel each other out.

What is significant about what happened at that time?
It opened me up to a whole realm that I was aware of, but not in a real cognitive way. I was aware of it on more of a subconscious, fleeting, glimpsing level, but then I was able to focus in on it.

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
It was something that I had always been fascinated with and had been really afraid to get into it until I was ready to get into it. I mean I was afraid to have my fortune told or any of those things until I was ready to take the class and do it. I don't know why. Just, timing. It confirmed feelings that I'd had about extrasensory kinds of perceptions and awarenesses that I had experienced but I didn't have explanations for. So, basically, this helped me find the explanations for what was going on.

Did you find a definition or concept that fit? What was it?
The whole idea of reincarnation and the concept that we have souls or entities or spirits that interact with us in our lives, the idea that we make contracts before we are born with our spiritual guides, with our children, with people that we're going to have significant relationships with in our lives. That you can communicate with these other entities. That you can learn to communicate and listen to them, to what they're telling me in my life.

Did it help? How did it help?
It just gave some clarity to things that I was unclear about.

Did it hurt?
No

7. What were other times in your life when you tried to find a concept or definition of yourself in a spiritual or religious setting that fit you well?

It's kind of been going on since then. I guess a significant event is that I started at [the church]. The year before I'd gone to an
Episcopal church in my neighborhood. I thought I'd give it a try to see if the old magic was there. It wasn't. It was totally boring, way too conservative. So when [a friend] started talking to me about this new church and I decided I'd check it out, it was the first time since I was a teenager that I felt that a church situation could be nurturing. It was a unique opportunity to make it be what I wanted it to be. That was significant. Up until then it had been years and years since I had been affiliated with the church.

**What happened?**
I met a whole bunch of people who were also searchers coming from different backgrounds, but all kind of believing in the universal goodness of us all and how we're all tied together. Even though it is still a Christian church in that we still celebrate communion (which still doesn't have any real gut level meaning for me) I can look at it like a meal that I'm sharing with these other people that I care about. It felt real good to be a situation where you could talk about God and talk about religion and not feel queer about it. A lot of times before that it had been my experience (and probably a lot of people's experience) that you start talking about God and people just look at you like you are pretty weird. So that was nice because for the past several years I have been looking, searching, reading, trying to find how I fit in with the things.

**What is significant about what happened at that time?**
It was a church that I was going to, on my own, voluntarily, without having somebody tell me I had to do it! That was pretty significant to me!

**What in your life accounted for this event being significant?**
Given the way that I had felt about the church for the past twenty years, it was significant that I was willing to give church another try.

**Did you find a definition or concept that fit? What was it?**
Yeah, for the most part I did. Just the things I already said, that we're all one, that the earth and all the creatures and the universe is all part of the same energy, that we're all connected and interdependent, and that we're all part of God.

Did it help? -missed. How did it help? Anything else?

**Did it hurt?**
No.
7. What was the last time before you started coming to the women's spirituality group that you tried to find a concept or definition of yourself in a spiritual or religious setting that fit you well?

Well, you know, it is not clear cut. It just kind of builds. I don't remember anything specific.

8. What was happening in your life that made you decide to come to the women's spirituality group?

I enjoy talking about spirituality and became more interested in a woman's point of view of my woman-ness. The goddess culture. I was one of the instigators of it. I thought it would be fun to do.

9. How did you hope the women's spirituality group would help you?

Just to clarify things, come up with ideas, have my ideas corroborated.

HERE IS ANOTHER LINE. THESE SQUARES REPRESENT GROUP MEETINGS. AS YOU ANSWER QUESTIONS WE WILL ANCHOR EVENTS THAT HAPPENED DURING MEETINGS.

During group:
10. What has been the most significant event that happened for you during the meetings of the women's spirituality group?

I really like the one at Lydia's house when we were talking about The Starseed Transmissions. I thought that was a good one.

What happened?
I don't remember specifically what happened. It's just talking about all those concepts I find to be fascinating and invigorating and all that.

What is significant about what happened at that time?
Just talking about those ideas with those people, and finding that other people had similar kinds of experiences or beliefs that I did about it. That was significant.

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Just because of the opportunity to discuss it. And also the way that it brought us all together. None of us knew all of the other people real well, and yet here we were talking about some pretty heavy concepts. Some people agreed and some people didn't agree with what was going on, what was being said.

Did it help? How did it help?
It helped me clarify what I had read and what I thought about it and looking at other people's offerings about it to help me form my own... helped me solidify my own thoughts.
Did it hurt?
No.

11. During the meetings of the women's spirituality group, what event most impacted your definition or concept of yourself?

I would say that the way it impacted my definition of myself was just in reinforcing what I already thought, by having other people agree and have the same feelings and thoughts about things that I did. The last time we met talking about the goddess culture and those kinds of ideas.

What happened?
We just talked about concepts and history and feelings about that and the patriarchy, that I feel real strongly about. Some people brought up some interesting points that I didn't know.

How did that event impact your definition or concept of yourself? Gave me more definition.

What is significant about what happened at that time? I don't know!

What in your life accounted for this event being significant? I guess it was a time when it was important to me to have other people feeling the same way that I was about these things.

Did you find a definition or concept that fit? What was it? -missed-

Did it help? How did it help? It strengthened my views.

Did it hurt? No.

12. During the meetings of the women's spirituality group, think of one time when your definition or concept of yourself challenged?

That would be the last one. We were having this exchange and talking about.... I stated my belief as what I believe, and for me that was what was true, although I didn't necessarily say it that way.

What happened?
Ramona kind of took offense and felt that I was saying was that everybody else was wrong and I was right. Reading back over that (I had forgotten about that) and remembering that, I felt that I really do come off that way. I can see that I would because I am
real convinced of what I am saying and it certainly was true for me. But it kind of gave me pause that she would think that I was putting her down when I wasn't. That was the only time that I felt challenged or anything like that.

**How was your definition or concept of yourself challenged?**
I don't see myself or think of myself as being aggressive in that way.

**What is significant about what happened at that time?**
Well, it is probably something that I do on a regular basis.

**What in your life accounted for this event being significant?**
I never looked at it before. It had never been pointed out to me that I was doing that.

**Did it help? How did it help?**
Hopefully, I'll be more aware in the future. Being sure of couching what I say, like "for me this is true," rather than just universally saying "this is true and if you don't believe it you are full of shit!"

13. **During the meetings of the women's spirituality group, was there a time when you did not agree with something that happened in the group?**

One time at Lydia's we were talking about reincarnation and people choosing to come in at a certain time and place and there was some disagreement about that.

**What happened?**
I was talking about the concept that I had learned and that Cayce talked about from my psychic development class, and Lydia and some other people had a problem with that, particularly relative to starving people in India and why people would choose to come into that and she didn't agree with that. That was a pretty lively discussion about that, as I recall.

**What did you not agree with?**
I was agreeing with the idea that people choose to come in at certain time and place to experience or grow in ways that they think they need to grow or the other side of that is that some people have a misconception that the earth is for suffering and so you come in to suffer in order to gain redemption. So, I was saying that is why people put themselves in that place, to learn something or to suffer, and Lydia didn't agree with that. I don't really remember what anybody else thought. It was pretty much a discussion between she and I, I think.
What is significant about what happened at that time?
I found it very refreshing to discuss it with somebody who had a different view.

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
Because I hadn't had that much opportunity to talk about that with anyone other than the people in the class that I was in and they didn't disagree with it. It was good to look at another viewpoint of it.

Did it help? How did it help?
Yeah, it broadened the way I looked at it. It gave me another viewpoint of looking at it, so that was good.

Did it hurt? How did it hurt? Anything else?
No.

THAT IS ALL THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GROUP MEETINGS IN GENERAL. THE NEXT SET OF QUESTIONS IS ABOUT THE PARTICULAR GROUP MEETING THAT IS RECORDED IN THE TRANSCRIPT. HAVING READ THE TRANSCRIPT AND HAVING HIGHLIGHTED CERTAIN EVENTS, THE NEXT SET OF QUESTIONS IS BASED ON SOME OF THE EVENTS YOU HIGHLIGHTED.

Particular meeting:

TO BEGIN WITH, I WANT YOU TO CHOOSE FROM THE PARTS YOU MARKED IN _____, THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENT THAT HAPPENED FOR YOU DURING THIS MEETING TO FOCUS ON.

During this particular meeting, what was the most significant event that happened?

They all relate to the same thing that I marked. It started off when we were talking about The Clan of the Cave Bear and about the whole concept that a woman is ... this is a quote "It is the Mother who chooses the man's spirit to mix with the woman's spirit when she blesses the woman," in terms of having babies. Then, further down it says, "a man makes a woman with the Mother's gift of pleasure. He opens her so the spirits can enter, but the Mother's most sacred gift of life is given only to women. They receive the spirits and create life and become mothers like Her. If a man honors her, appreciates her gifts, and makes a commitment to take care of a woman and her children, then she can choose his spirit for the children of his hearth.'

"Basically, they believed that their Great Mother was the Goddess and the Creator and that women were the highest form of creature and then when men realized that they had something to do with pregnancy they wanted to control us. In The Mammoth Hunters it was man's role was to support and protect and take care of women and their children. They think the woman owns the kids. Basically, it was a gift from the Goddess. The absolute worst
crime anyone could commit was rape because women were so honored and sacred as the chosen person of the Goddess to create more life, that it was always her choice whether or not to have sex."

The other things that I wrote about... there was one other basic idea... the way they put it is "honoring the Goddess because she gave you the potential to share, to have pleasure. She made your bodies so that you could, and especially for women."

The other thing that I marked was about Original Blessing which also has to do with the Goddess culture. I guess what is significant for me about everything that we talked about that night that I probably feel more strongly about this whole concept. The idea of motherhood being a blessing and the woman being blessed by the Goddess. This whole concept of women before the patriarchy is important to me. I think women should think of themselves in this way, as being blessed. Of all that we talked about, this whole concept of the Goddess culture, and then, what I had marked further on was talking about the patriarchy.

We were talking about Matthew Fox and his idea of original blessing versus original sin which ties back to the Goddess culture. The whole patriarchal versus feminist, ascetic versus aesthetic, mortification of the body or discipline towards birthing control, passion versus ecstasy, eros and celebration of passion, God as Father, God as Mother, God as Child, suffering as wages for sin versus suffering as the birth pangs of the universe, death as wages for sin versus death as a natural event, a prelude to recycling and rebirth, holiness as a quest for perfection versus holiness as cosmic hospitality.

Of that whole discussion that we had I think that those were the things that were the most interesting and significant to me.

What happened?
That discussion of the Goddess culture versus the patriarchy and how the role of women in the Goddess culture, just the way we look at the whole universe, original blessing versus orginal sin, that pleasure is a gift from God as opposed to a sin and unclean, this whole thing of when you have your period it is called the curse but for the Goddess culture it was the blessing because that is what made your body ready to create new life. Of all the topics that we talked about, we kept coming back to this, especially in regards to the patriarchy.

What is significant about what happened at that time?
It just refocused and reinforced my commitment to that and the way I feel about that, my indignancy and anger at the patriarchy, and everything it stands for and everything that it is. It just kind of helped solidify that.

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
We're all victims of patriarchy.
Did it help? How did it help?
Oh, yeah. That we were all agreeing and for the most part being able to vent our anger about it with each other and seeing how angry we all are about it, too. I think that that is really good because a lot of the time I'm not aware of it. I try to not have anger be a part of my life and try to let those kinds of feelings flow over me or through me, but I think it's good to recognize that that anger is there and to realize how it impacts real life.

Did it hurt?
No.

NEXT, I WANT YOU TO CHOOSE FROM THE PARTS YOU MARKED IN _______. THE EVENT THAT MOST IMPACTED YOUR CONCEPT OR DEFINITION OF YOURSELF.

During this particular meeting, what event happened that most impacted your concept or definition of yourself?

That was that exchange with Ramona and me where I was talking about soul mates which has to do with reincarnation and past lives and all those kinds things.

What happened?
I had just stated my concept about it and then Ramona said "because you said that in that tone of voice and for you that is the truth and if I feel differently and if these people who are sending their money to Jim Bakker, they think they've got ahold of the truth and everybody else's truth isn't the truth. It can't be. There are too damn many of them." And I said, "I think there are some universal truths" and she said, "I do, too, but for the most part your truth is your reality and my truth is mine" and I said, "that statement I made is true for me; for me it is totally a true statement" and Ramona says that I should say I believe it is true, rather than just that it is true. In this whole exchange it pointed out that I speak my mind in a way that puts other people down which I had never thought that I did. It is not my intention. It is interesting for me to remember that and to be aware of that. Because I know I am very emphatic in stating the way that I feel.

What was the concept or definition of yourself that was impacted?
That I was expressing myself in a way that was challenging or negative to somebody else.

What is significant about what happened at that time?
Well, I had never thought about that before, never thought about myself in that way before.
What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
I don't want to act that way! I don't want to be a bitch. Maybe I don't need to feel that it is necessary to convert the world to the way I think. I tend to come off that way. I hadn't really thought about that before.

Did it help? How did it help?
Yes, just by calling attention to it. It made me aware that this is a possibility; that I might do this!

Did it hurt? How did it hurt?
No.

NEXT, I WANT YOU TO CHOOSE FROM THE PARTS YOU MARKED IN ______.
THE EVENT THAT MOST SHOOK OR CHALLENGED YOUR CONCEPT OR DEFINITION OF YOURSELF.

During this particular meeting, what event happened that most shook or challenged your concept or definition of yourself?

Well, I must say that nothing that we talked about really shook me. I didn't shake me up. I marked this part where we were talking about bisexuality. Bisexuality is intriguing to me. It didn't really shake my concept of myself.

What happened?
The one thing that I marked was when Maria says, "it kind of changed my whole attitude toward sexuality. I feel differently about men. I think I appreciate them more sexually. When I started having sex with women, sex with men became different. I almost own myself more when I have sex and when you go back to men you have another view of yourself. You have more power." I thought that was real interesting.

What concept or definition of yourself was shaken or challenged?
The concept of whether or not I am bisexual.

What is significant about what happened at that time?
It was interesting to hear Maria talk about that as someone who has practiced that and I have not, but have always been rather fascinated and intrigued by the idea. This thing that I just read that she said I found to be very interesting.

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
It is something that I have thought about.

Did it help? How did it help?
Oh, sure! It gave me another viewpoint to look at it.
Did it hurt?
No.

That is all the questions about the particular group meeting. The next set of questions has to do with your recent life outside the women's spirituality group.

Outside group:
What was the most recent time when your experience in the women’s spirituality group made a difference in your life?

Probably the bonds that I've made with the women in the group continues. Particularly, Ruby and I have gotten very close and I think it is the group that has brought us together

What happened?
We are able to talk to each other about things that are important and significant to us that we might not be talking to other people about.

What is significant about what happened at that time?
It is significant to us because we have bonded this new friendship with each other, and I think we got to know each other through the spirituality group. We had known each other before that, but we weren't really friends. Now we are.

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
My best friend lives in Chicago, my confidante, and I didn't have anybody here that I felt that way about. Now I do.

Did it help? How did it help?
Yes. Just being able to talk to her about things that are happening in my life that I don't get to talk with anybody else about.

Did it hurt?
No.

What was a recent time when a definition or concept of yourself which has been changed in the process of attending the women's spirituality group made a difference in your life?

What happened?
I would say that the things the things that have come out of the women's spirituality group, and particularly the bonds that I've made with the other women, and the way that we have supported each other in our viewpoints and ideas about where we are and where we fit in and all that has given me more personal power in dealing with things that are going on in my life.
How did the definition or concept of yourself make a difference?
In the way I react or act in situations. I have more confidence in myself and my ideas.

What is significant about what happened at that time?
It enabled me to act in a way that I felt was more responsible and had more integrity with the way I really felt. I think through the reinforcement of my own personal power that I get from the women's group and from the women in the group enabled me to do that.

What in your life accounted for this event being significant?
It was at a time in my life when I was going through some things that were extremely important in relationships with other people and in the long term, what my life was going to look like. The way I dealt with it was certainly significant.

Did it help? How did it help?
Yes. By reinforcing my power and concepts about who I am.

Did it hurt?
No.
APPENDIX C

CODESHEET OF TAILORED HELPS AND HURTS

This codesheet includes three sections of coding categories. The first is the basic sense-making helps drawn from Dervin's 1983 overview of sense-making research. The second section is called tailored helps. It extends, elaborates, and discriminates helps in light of the emphasis of this study on women using group communicating. The third section is a collection of hurts. These hurts reflect the emphasis of this study, as well as encompassing contrasts to the basic sense-making helps categories.

BASIC SENSE-MAKING HELPS

GOT PIX: People need ideas in order to move. This category includes getting new or revised pictures and understandings, sense, pictures.
ABLE TO PLAN: In order to move one must have direction. This category includes being about to decide, prepare, plan ahead.
GOT SKILLS: Moving frequently requires skills. This category includes being helped by or acquiring them.
GOT STARTED, MOTIVATED: Moving sometimes requires a push to get started. This category includes getting motivated to start or finding ways to start.
KEPT GOING: Moving sometimes is in danger of stopping from lack of self-motivation. This category includes getting motivated to keep going.
GOT CONTROL: This category includes gaining or regaining control.
THINGS GOT CALMER, EASIER: This category includes making the situation easier and/or calmer.
GOT OUT OF A BAD SITUATION: Includes getting out of a bad situation.
REACHED THE GOAL, ACCOMPLISHED THINGS: This category includes achieving goals and arriving places.
WENT ON TO OTHER THINGS: This category includes being able to to leave this situation behind and go on to other things.
AVOIED A BAD SITUATION: This category includes seeing a bad situation ahead and avoiding it.

*TOOK MIND OFF THINGS: This category includes being able to put the situation out of mind temporarily or permanently.
*RELAXED, RESTED: Includes getting rest, recuperation, relaxation.
GOT PLEASURE: This category includes obtaining pleasure, happiness, joy, satisfaction or other pleased emotional states.
GOT SUPPORT, REASSURANCE, CONFIRMATION: This category includes getting input in which the person feels his/her views are supported or confirmed or he/she is reassured in some way.

GOT CONNECTED TO OTHER(S): This category includes being and/or getting connected with others, not feeling lonely.

* these are basic sense-making helps not found in this study

TAILORED HELPS

MADE COLLECTIVITY: This category includes behavior on the part of the group that contributed to creating and/or maintaining the group. This is building in specific ways on the broader category of getting connected to others. Instances of helps include: talking brought us together, we are building trust so we can start to share, we put energy into being present, we choose to share, we are building relationships, I am made to feel a part of the group.

HELPED THINK: Input in the situation helped the individual think something through or arrive at a new understanding. Instances of helps include: getting distance from own thoughts and feelings; clarifying, solidifying, and forming my thoughts; eye-opening; enlightening; helped to understand and explain situation.

DIFFERENCE HELPED THINK: This is a variation on helping the person think which emphasizes that it is differences perceived/experienced between the self and others and/or disagreement which is helpful.

APPRECIATED DIFFERENCE: In this case the difference and/or disagreement is appreciated and/or enjoyed for how it uniquely helps creates/maintains the collectivity.

ACCEPTED DIFFERENCE: In this instance the perceived/experienced difference and/or disagreement is accepted as part of the situation and is not seen as something to try and change.

GOT TO EXPRESS OWN VIEWPOINT: Being able to express the viewpoint of the self/collectivity in a situation. This includes being able to describe one's own path in its own way, being able to talk freely about what is important to the self/collectivity, and making the self known to other(s).

CONFRONTED SELF: Sometimes a person becomes aware of, and must confront/face/see the self or some attribute of the self.

GOT NEW UNDERSTANDING OF SELF: Something happened in the situation which helped the person get a new understanding/idea/picture of the self.

GOT NEW UNDERSTANDING OF HOW SELF COULD BE: A variation of getting a new understanding/idea/picture of the self with an emphasis on new possibilities for how the person could be, what the person could become.

USING NEW UNDERSTANDING OF SELF: An extension of getting a new understanding of the self in which the person is using the understanding to behave in new/different ways.

ACCEPTED NEW UNDERSTANDING OF SELF: Sometimes the step the person takes is to accept the new understanding of the self. This variation implies the person is ready to move on along the path with the new understanding in place in the mind.
ACCEPTED SELF: Sometimes the step a person must take is to accept the self. The implication is that the person will no longer try to change the self or some attribute of the self.

GOT STRONGER: Something happened in the situation which made the person feel stronger.

RESTORED CONNECTION TO OTHERS: Variation on getting connected to others which emphasizes a restoration of connection which has been broken/not maintained.

HEARD ANOTHER'S/OTHERS' EXPERIENCE: Sometimes it is helpful to be able hear others talking about their experience and/or the experiences of others and what they value.

IMPRESSED BY/APPRECIATE ANOTHER/OTHERS: In this case the person is specifically being impressed by and/or appreciating another person or persons. This includes being in their presence and pleasingly experiencing how the other is feeling, thinking, behaving.

HURTS

WAS NOT ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL: Opposite of reaching the goal, accomplishing things.

DID NOT GET SUPPORTED, REASSURED, CONFIRMED: Opposite of getting support, reassurance, confirmation.

LOST CONTROL: Opposite of getting control.

DID NOT GET CONNECTED TO OTHER(S): Opposite of getting connected to other(s); here especially the implication is that this is a thwarted hope or goal of the individual.

LOST CONNECTION WITH OTHER(S): Variation on DID NOT GET CONNECTED TO OTHER(S); could be because self broke or did not maintain the connection and/or the connection was broken or not maintained by other(s).

FELT LOSS: felt loss of connection with other(s).

SELF FELT LIMITED, CONSTRAINED: The individual felt limited and/or constrained by a situation, other person(s), and/or own experiences/understandings/abilities.

SELF LIMITED OTHER(S): The individual did something in a situation with other person(s) that limited the other(s) ability to act freely.

DIFFERENCE HURT: Difference(s) between self and other(s) expressed/apparent in a situation hurt; here especially this is in contrast to situations of disagreement with other(s) where differences were perceived as helpful/pleasing/refreshing.

DID NOT GET CONFIRMED IN PICTURE OF SELF: This is a negative variation of the category in which the person feels his/her views are supported or confirmed or he/she is reassured in some way. In particular this refers to a situation in which a person does not receive confirmation of a longstanding idea/understanding/picture of the self.

DID NOT LIKE NEW UNDERSTANDING OF SELF: This category includes negative responses to the experience of getting a new understanding of the self.
GOT SAD

GOT EMBARRASSED

GOT AFRAID

GOT UNCOMFORTABLE

GOT FRUSTRATED

Variations on the opposite of GOT PLEASURE.

I kept these hurts separate because they are arguably distinct and fundamental human emotional states.

STAYED ANGRY: This category emphasizes the continuation of the emotional state of anger over time/space; the implication is that maintaining the anger does not help the self move on, that getting stuck in the anger hurts.
APPENDIX D

ENACTING VERBS X HELPS/HURTS
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ENACTING VERBS

talking with other(s) ldgs ldgs

speaking to group

observing/comparing self with other(s) wdgs

hearing other(s) rupmch

doing something together

agreeing w/ me

voicing/asserting me

thinking about/ rudgisd

observing self lpmids

q-ing/disagreeing w/ other/others, gp

observing another/lpm group/us rupms

thinking

connecting with ftd

another/others
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