

Positioned Within "The Outside World"  
The Cultural Construction Of Gender In An  
Egalitarian Intentional Community

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Ashley Spalding, University of South Carolina  
[ASpal84583@aol.com](mailto:ASpal84583@aol.com)

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

On my first morning at Twin Oaks, eight other visitors to the community and I were given a tour by Nate, a community member for over twenty years. It was late May, and at around 9:00 or 10:00 in the morning in Virginia the weather was already quite hot. As we walked down a main path of the community, past a field of asparagus and an outdoor volleyball court, I fully took in the community's beautiful landscape that, when I first arrived the evening before, had been secondary to getting settled into the visitor cottage and finding the dining hall for my first visitor orientation. Listening to Nate's commentary and looking around at the community's lush fields, trees, and rustic buildings, I paid very little attention to Ren, a male visitor, taking his shirt off in order to adjust to the heat. Nate had been telling us the history of each building we passed and pointing out landmarks and property lines, but

when he noticed that Ren was no longer wearing a shirt, he stopped our group abruptly in the middle of the path. Nate firmly suggested that Ren put his shirt back on as this was an area where women are not allowed to take off their shirts, and they would not appreciate Ren taking off his. Ren complied, and while I am sure everyone in our group noted the incident, I was especially intrigued. This was my first indication that gender roles really were constructed differently at Twin Oaks. In all of the United States social contexts I had ever been in, women always kept their breasts covered, and, conversely, it was acceptable for men to go shirtless in many contexts.

I had long been interested in issues of social inequality in the US, and I thought it would be especially significant to look at gender in an intentional community in which there is a deliberate attempt to create an egalitarian society, in terms of gender as well as other social arenas. I was interested in how a community intentionally organized around egalitarian values—as Twin Oaks is—could create and maintain constructions of gender alternative to the dominant culture of the United States. I saw Twin Oaks' transformation of gendered nudity norms as an example of one such attempt. But I continued to ask questions about the ways that the community's alternative social norms were superficial changes in terms of gender and the ways that the community actually creates alternative constructions of gender.

Through my research at Twin Oaks, I wanted to find out how the community's gender constructions are alternative to those of dominant US society and in what ways they remain embedded in the dominant culture. I was also interested in how Twin Oaks' gender constructions had changed over time. In this chapter, I will introduce the community itself—historically, ideologically, and spatially, and discuss my own introduction to Twin Oaks, and the theories that inform my research question, methodology, and the writing of this thesis.

## **Introduction to the Community**

### History

Twin Oaks is located in rural Virginia on approximately 450 acres of farm and forestland. Founded by eight original members in 1967, at one point the community grew to eighty-five adult community members—although during my stay there were only around seventy. Twin Oaks supports itself by primarily by producing hammocks, which are bought and then sold by Pier 1 Imports; running a small organic tofu business; and indexing books, mostly for academic presses. While the community struggled financially for many years, it is now unofficially known in the Communities Movement as one of the most financially successful intentional communities in North America. Partly due to its financial success, while most of the other communities founded in the late 1960's and early 1970's failed after a few years, Twin Oaks has managed to survive for over thirty.

Twin Oaks considers itself a "diverse community." The community's members hold in common no religious, spiritual, or political beliefs, but in terms of "race," class, and even sexuality, Twin Oaks' membership is nearly homogeneous. During my stay, one full-time member and another part-time member who spends half the year at another community—both African American women—were the only "non-white" adults at Twin Oaks. Additionally, I learned that very few members are from working-class backgrounds; while several are from very privileged backgrounds, most members are middle-class. In terms of

sexual orientation, although one man identified as gay, another as bisexual, and several women had been in lesbian relationships, most members were heterosexual.

Twin Oaks was originally founded as an incarnation of the utopian society described in behavioral scientist B. F. Skinner's science fiction novel *Walden II* (1948). Skinner believed that behavior could be controlled by positive reinforcement, and society

should, therefore, stop using punitive mechanisms of control. This belief was developed in his novel and guided much of Twin Oaks' beginnings. An article in an issue of *Communities: Journal of Cooperative Living* devoted to Walden Two communities reports: "They [the founders of Twin Oaks] had very little background in the science of behavior but plenty of faith in *Walden Two*. After the first excitement of being on a farm had worn off, they sat down and literally extracted from the novel everything they could use" (Kuhlmann 1999:37). Twin Oaks' original members all came from non-farm backgrounds.

Twin Oaks specifically adopted several of *Walden Two's* structural innovations and modified them over time. The community experimented with Skinner's "labor credit system," a system of internal currency that awards labor credits for hours of labor done, toward a quota of credits required of each member each week. Skinner's novel described a labor system where different types of work were rewarded differently so that all jobs would be equally desirable; a community member working in the sewers would receive more labor credits than a member planting flowers, for instance. After Twin Oaks had experimented with what they termed the "variable credit" system for five years, the community finally standardized labor credits; one hour of any type of work receives one labor credit (Kinkade 1994:30-32). Similarly, the Planner-Manager system of government was adopted from Skinner's novel and then modified. Planners are a board of three members appointed by the community to serve eighteen-month staggered terms. While serving as planners, members make long-range policy, control and dispense resources, and generally take care of the overall well-being of the community. Managers

are the individuals in charge of various specific areas of work or authority. A member becomes a manager by signing up when there is a vacancy, and then a group of related managers interviews candidates and chooses one (Kinkade 1994:17-18). In her article, "Walden Two Communities: What Were They All About?," Hilke Kuhlmann reports that as some community members resented the authority of the planners, Twin Oaks modified the planner-manager system from that described in *Walden Two*: "By the early seventies, the role envisioned for the planners had shifted from omnipotent decision-makers to facilitators" (1999:37).

In terms of gender, Skinner's novel focused primarily on transforming work and family in order to create a community alternative to that of the dominant US society, many aspects of which Twin Oaks adopted. Skinner described the formal recognition of domestic jobs as work. In one scene in *Walden II*, Frazier, the founder of Walden II—the fictional utopian community described in the novel—is giving a tour of the community to a group of visitors. In the kitchen, where two community members are washing dishes using an efficient industrialized dishwashing machine, one of the visitors remarks: "All your dishwashing seems to be done by two people." Frazier says in response, "And with four or five shifts a day you can say eight or ten people at most... Compare that with two hundred and fifty

housewives washing two hundred and fifty sets of miscellaneous dishes three times a day and you will see what we gain by industrializing housewifery" (1948:43). Skinner also suggested that women in dominant US society were trapped in their sole roles as mothers, and his novel transferred the responsibility of childcare to the entire community; in Skinner's novel, children are raised communally by professionally trained childcare workers, and women work at jobs other than being a housewife and/or mother. Additionally, although couples are legally married in *Walden II*, a husband and a wife have separate bedrooms in order to encourage their individuality. At one point in the novel, Skinner's protagonist Frazier remarks: "A man's room in his castle. And a woman's too" (1948:128). In keeping with their initial *Walden II* focus, Twin Oaks formally implemented the recognition of housework as labor, communal childcare, and the assignment of separate rooms for husbands and wives—and other types of partners. All of these arrangements continue to exist in the community, except Twin Oaks' communal childcare program.

Although some of the structures of *Walden II* remain, Twin Oaks no longer follows Skinnerian thought so closely. After Twin Oaks left behind its identification with behaviorism in the 1970's, the community ideologically aligned itself with egalitarianism and is a member community of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, a network of six communities that strive to be models of cooperative, nonviolent, egalitarian lifestyles. FEC communities, of which Twin Oaks remains a member today, share the following fundamental practices and values: land, labor and other resources are held in common; products of members' labor and all other goods are distributed equally or according to need; nonviolence; participatory government; nondiscrimination; environmental responsibility; and healthy interpersonal relationships (*Sharing the Dream* nd: no pagination). Twin Oaks also identified itself as a feminist community for a period in the 1980's, but currently this association is not collectively shared by the community.

## A Tour of the Community

There are a number of ways I could give a tour of Twin Oaks. I might describe each building and social space in detail or map out what a typical day is like. Instead, keeping with the focus of my research, I will describe how I learned about gender in different spaces in the community, referring to a rough map of the community that was

included in the visitor handbook ("Not Utopia Yet: Three Week Visitor Orientation Guide To the Twin Oaks Community" ND: no pagination). Those interested in an account of everyday life at Twin Oaks should read Kat Kinkade's book *Is It Utopia Yet: An Insider's View of Twin Oaks Community in its 26<sup>th</sup> Year* (1994), which includes many descriptions of everyday life at Twin Oaks over the years, in addition to descriptions of community structures and history.

As the scene I described at the beginning of this chapter reflects, gendered physical spaces were one of the first ways I learned about gender at Twin Oaks. In addition to areas of the community being specifically mapped out in terms of expectations of nudity for men and women (A), Twin Oaks maintains what they call "women's space," areas of the community that, during specified times, are off limits to men. All-male spaces, bathrooms, and work sites are other gendered spaces through which I initially began to learn about gender at Twin Oaks.

On my first tour of the community, Nate described Downstairs Oneida (B) as the "women's residence." He told us that only women live there, and no men are allowed after 6 pm. My second week at Twin Oaks, I encountered another women's social space, "women's tea." This was an optional part of my orientation as a visitor, but I felt it might be very important to my understanding of gender, especially gendered spaces, at Twin Oaks. I was the only "visitor woman" who attended. Two member women and a woman who was formerly a member at Twin Oaks (and currently a member of another intentional community), and I sat in chairs under a shady tree near the women's residence and ate pieces of carrot cake and drank iced herbal tea. One of the women told me that the women's tea had been happening since the 1980's and had been organized as an opportunity for female members to interact with female visitors, as there is not much interaction between the two groups otherwise. We talked about what my research interests were and several women answered questions I had about the community's history, so it did serve the purpose of a visitor woman getting to know community women better.

I had begun to get the idea that gender separatist activities were important at Twin Oaks, and I looked for other examples in the community. I observed that once a week a note went up in the dining hall advertising "Men's Movie Night," and during my first weeks at Twin Oaks, I learned a bit about the weekly event. Each week a group of men—varying in number from week to week—got together to watch a movie in Degania (C), a space in what used to be the children's building that is now used by members to watch videos other than those that are collectively selected by the community and shown in a public area—the Bijou—on weekends. Supposedly, the movies shown at men's movie night tended to be more violent and/or "sexy" than those shown in the Bijou. I learned that men, as well as women, construct gender separatist spaces at Twin Oaks.

Other spaces in the community provided an even greater contrast to my experience in dominant US society. Unlike most public restrooms in the US, which are segregated by sex, at Twin Oaks all bathrooms are unisex. Additionally, in most residences—all of which house both men and women, except Downstairs Oneida—one person might be taking a shower, another person brushing his/her teeth, and another person using the toilet, all in the same bathroom at the same time, in order to be more efficient. As a visitor living in Aurora, we maintained a norm of one person in the bathroom at a time, unless you knocked first and were given approval to enter. One night while I was still a visitor in the community, I was socializing with some members in Tupelo (D), and I went to use a bathroom in the residence. The door to the bathroom was open, so I was startled when I entered and a woman was brushing her teeth, wearing only a T-shirt and underwear. I felt even more awkward when she told me I could come on in and use the toilet; I asked her where another bathroom was, and she laughed and directed me to a half bathroom on another floor of the residence.

Work was another site that contrasted considerably with my experiences outside of Twin Oaks, especially in terms of gender. My first week at Twin Oaks, I received a work assignment to box hammocks in the Emerald City Warehouse (E) with several other visitors and members: another female visitor, me, two male visitors, one female member, and three male members, one of whom directed the project. The goal was to take hammocks that had already been rolled up and placed in plastic bags, price them using a price gun, put together boxes and staple them all on one end with an electric staple gun, place the priced hammocks in the boxes, and staple the boxes closed. I had never used an electric staple gun and did not

think of myself as being very physically strong, so I began pricing hammocks at first and then began helping carry the priced hammocks to a pile from which they could be more easily picked up and put into boxes. At one point, the male member who was in charge said that as I was interested in gender, I should observe how all of the men had gravitated toward the staple guns. All of the male visitors and male members were working at hoisting the hammocks into boxes and stapling them closed—and most of them were working with their shirts off; the female member was also boxing and stapling, and the other female visitor and I were pricing the hammocks. After a while, the female member said it was ridiculous only men were stapling, and she taught me how to use the electric staple gun; after a while I got the hang of it. Making sure women have opportunities to learn new skills and engage in work traditionally done by men is frequently not a concern of work places in dominant US society.

## My Introduction to the Community

I first became interested in intentional communities my senior year in college. I was a "white," middle-class woman attending a very conservative "white," middle-class university, and I was looking for an alternative to the lifestyles I had lived and seen others around me living. I began searching the Internet and stumbled upon the Federation of Intentional Communities web site—[www.ic.org](http://www.ic.org)—where I was surprised to read that there were currently hundreds of alternative communities in the United States alone. Immediately I ordered the most current issue of the *Communities Directory: A Guide to Cooperative Living* (1996), which lists hundreds of entries describing communities—mostly in the US but international communities as well—and how to visit or join them.

Upon entering the Master's program in anthropology at the University of South Carolina in 1998, I decided to combine my personal interest in intentional communities with an academic one; I would write my Master's thesis in cultural anthropology about intentional communities. I specifically became interested in Twin Oaks Community when I attended a discussion at USC held by two Twin Oakers who had been invited to the university to talk about their community. I was intrigued by Twin Oaks' espoused egalitarian values and established "student residency program" that enables scholars to live and conduct research in the community in exchange for work, and I began seriously planning a research project specific to Twin Oaks. As background research, I read about the community in two books about Twin Oaks by Kat Kinkade one of the community's founding members, the *Communities Directory* (1996), and a sensationalistic *Washington Post* article (Jones 1998). I then began communicating with Twin Oaks about becoming a student resident, developing a research question, and planning a possible research project.

From reading about Twin Oaks I knew the community identified as egalitarian and had at some point in the past considered itself a feminist community. I had read that members actively used the word "co" as a gender-neutral pronoun, that there had been a form of gender-based affirmative action in certain Twin Oaks work sites in the 1980's,

and that some members practiced polyamory, or open relationships. But I also knew that the community was predominantly "white" and middle-class. I was interested in learning how gender at Twin Oaks had been reconfigured from the dominant culture of the United States—what members refer to as "the outside world"—specifically from the "white" middle-class gender norms of the members' backgrounds, in the contexts of social relations, work, family,

and sexual relationships.

In order to be considered by the community for student residency, I first became a "visitor." A letter of introduction detailing my personal and work backgrounds, as well as my research intentions, gained me a space in an early summer visitor program as well as driving directions to the rural Virginian community, intentionally not posted on their web site or detailed in their literature. The visitor program lasts three weeks and includes structured orientations on living and working at Twin Oaks as well as full-time work assignments—43 hours per week—typical of life at Twin Oaks. During the three weeks, visitors who wish to be considered for membership or residency (a status separate from membership in that it is officially temporary and therein has different legal requirements than membership) each undergo a membership interview. At the end of the visitor period, membership and residency applicants each write a letter to the community detailing their experiences over the three weeks and stating their requests to be considered for membership or residency. In the ten days following the visit—during

which time the applicant must absent her/himself from the community—members are then polled concerning these visitors. At the end of the tenth day decisions are made; each applicant is assigned one of the following statuses: a "reject," a "visit again in a year," a "visit again in six months," or an "accept."

Being accepted by the community was a major concern for me. How could I propose this project to my department without a guarantee that I would be allowed to conduct research in the community? On what grounds might I be rejected for student residency? In the months before my visit, I communicated through e-mail with the community's student resident coordinator, Tim, about my concerns. Although he maintained that there was no way to be accepted for student residency before I completed the visitor program, Tim provided me with a "self test" and predicted that if I could answer the following questions affirmatively, my chances of living at Twin Oaks were in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile:

1. Can you do 43 hours of assigned and self-assigned work for each of the three weeks of your visitor period?
2. Can you generally be helpful and friendly, even with people who you don't know, some of whom are a bit odd?
3. Do you find the idea of egalitarianism intellectually attractive?
4. Can you share?

I mentally answered "yes" to the four questions and continued planning my research.

I began my visitor program on May 28, 1999. As a "visitor," I stayed in Aurora, the visitor cottage (F on the map), with the eight other visitors. Although officially visitors are allowed access to most areas of the community, in many ways they are subtly isolated from the rest of the community, geographically and socially. I remember it seemed to me like all of the "real" Twin Oakers (members) disappeared after dinner; members would retire to their residences, which were technically public spaces although to a visitor they felt, and often were, very private. Visitors have a somewhat marginal status in the community; although they are valued for their labor and membership potential, many members understandably resent their private lives being invaded by visitor groups year-round. Toward the end of the three weeks,

I had developed casual friendships with members and was often invited to spend time in members' residences, but I still felt my status as "visitor" to be precarious and temporary.

Ten days after I left Twin Oaks as a visitor, I received the good news that I had been accepted for student residency; eleven people had voted "yes" and zero had voted "no." When I returned to the community for six more weeks, I was a "student resident," and I felt myself embraced by the community in a way that as a visitor I could not have imagined. Several members who never even acknowledged me as a visitor, sought me out and welcomed me "home." I remember being introduced to the new visitor group as the "newest member," and throughout the summer the difference between member and resident was often blurred in this way. I was also paid the same monthly allowance of \$60 that members receive. Additionally, I moved into a residence with community members and began conducting my everyday activities in much closer proximity to members; I finally found out what the Twin Oakers did when they "disappeared" after dinner. My participation in the community intensified as I became a full participant in my residence and a regular worker at specific work sites. As a visitor, my labor was spread among many different work areas, but as a resident I worked primarily at weaving hammocks, shipping hammocks, and "moving milk"—transporting milk from the dairy to the community's kitchens several times a week.

Although as a resident I gained closer relationships with community members, my position as a temporary resident, a woman, and the youngest adult in the community, among other personal characteristics, enabled me greater access to some areas and individuals and less to others. I may have isolated myself somewhat from other, older social contexts, although I certainly interacted on an individual level with many members outside of my residence. Twin Oaks fathers are another "group" of members underrepresented in my set of interviews.

Many social groupings seemed difficult to join, especially in a six-week period. Additionally, members had the option of avoiding interacting with me in order to not participate in my project, and I was told that several Twin Oakers are extremely private in this way. Without going to the extreme of only talking to members who specifically approached me, I tried to respect members' privacy by not seeking out individuals with whom I never found myself interacting through work or a social situation.

For instance, I did not ever feel comfortable approaching a small group of middle-aged women whom I frequently spotted sitting together at meals. In the dining area, a couple of tables are designated as "fun tables" which means that anyone can sit there without asking those already sitting at the table if it is all right. For all other tables, it is expected that you ask the group if it is OK if you sit there. Additionally, there are certain tables where it is known that members sit when they want to be alone or have a private lunch or dinner with others; generally, anyone sitting at these tables would not be approached by other members. The women I observed who ate meals together usually sat at a table where I would have needed to ask to join them, and as my stay in the community was brief and I had given members the option of avoiding me so as not to be included in my project, I felt very awkward about approaching the more private tables. Instead, I usually ate at the "fun tables" where I was sure I was welcome.

My choice of residence also positioned me very specifically in the community. I chose to live in Tupelo because it was a male/female residence, child-friendly, and known to frequently

organize its own social events; I wanted to make sure I could observe men and women and families interacting socially. But the residence, D on the map, is geographically located a fair distance from other residences and the community's central buildings; is rather known for housing a majority of the younger Twin Oakers—ages 5 through 42; and, perhaps more than other residences, has its own social scene. When I returned as a student resident and began setting up my room in Tupelo, several members commented on my choice of residence. A couple of members suggested that I be careful not to isolate myself from the perspectives of those who did not live at Tupelo, as those who lived in the residence often seemed to socialize exclusively with others in the residence. Perhaps in response to these members' concerns, I made a real effort to seek out a wide range of perspectives; I ended up interviewing members from almost every residence in the community.

I have been discussing how my situation in the community influenced what I learned about gender at Twin Oaks. In the next section, I will address the theories that informed my research on gender constructions in the community.

## **Feminist Theory and Method**

In exploring gender at Twin Oaks, I draw from feminist theory that treats gender as a cultural construction, rather than a biological identity (cf. West and Zimmerman 1987; di Leonardo 1991:29-31; Bing and Bergvall 1996). In the field of anthropology specifically, the examination of gender as a cultural construction can be traced back to Margaret Mead's writings in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Kamala Visweswaran, in her article, "Histories of Feminist Ethnography" states that Mead "was possibly not the first social scientist to develop a distinction between biological sex and sociologically distinct gender roles, but she was certainly the first to use ethnography to do so" (1997:601). In the 1970's, Gayle Rubin, as Visweswaran mentions, further articulated how gender is separate from biology by importantly defining the "sex/gender system," (Rubin 1975:28) although she and her contemporaries were later critiqued for universalizing, and therefore essentializing, the category of gender. Since the 1980's, feminist ethnographers have begun to challenge essentialist ideas about gender, and in her article's conclusion, Visweswaran suggests specific directions for feminist ethnography:

If we learn to understand gender as not the endpoint of analysis rather as an entry point into complex systems of meaning and power, then surely there are other equally valid entry points for feminist work. Gender is perhaps best understood as a heuristic device and cannot be understood a priori, apart from particular systems of representation. To mistake the category for the reality is to create gender as a sociologism, reducing it to a male/female dichotomy mistakenly constituted in advance of its operation in any system of social representation (1997:616).

I have positioned my research at Twin Oaks in relation to Visweswaran's challenge by using gender as an entry point rather than an endpoint.

Further influenced by feminist theorists who elucidate the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Collins:1990; Collins:1998; West and Fenstermaker:1995; Weber 2000), I discuss gender in relation to these other identities. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge,*

*Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins states that Black feminist thought rejects "additive approaches to oppression": "Instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class, and religion, Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination" (1990:222). The "matrix of domination" Collins describes is the intersection of oppression by race, class, and gender, experienced simultaneously by African American women. Lynn Weber adds sexuality to race, class, and gender in her review of scholarship on these interlocking identities and axes of oppression (Weber 1998). In addition, she discusses oppression and privilege as relational (Weber 2000:101). In this thesis I discuss how Twin Oakers privileged situation in these systems—most members are "white," middle-class, and heterosexual—influences their alternative constructions of gender.

Feminist theory also informs my research methodology. In order to address the

power relations involved in producing ethnography, my research at Twin Oaks was in many ways what Visweswaran has termed "homework" (Visweswaran:1994). Visweswaran sees homework as an important part of decolonizing anthropology, viewing "fieldwork" (involving departure and return which, according to Visweswaran is the "product of institutional mechanisms of power" (1994:105) and closely tied to colonialism) instead as "homework," which involves speaking from one's own location. I consider my work at Twin Oaks homework. Although when I began my research at Twin Oaks I was an outsider to the community, I was conducting "insider research" (Aguilar 1981) from my social location as "white," middle-class, and heterosexual. I was simultaneously away from home, participating in a culture very new to me and an anthropologist "at home" (Messerschmidt 1981) in the United States. Most significantly, I am very much speaking from my "home" location along the axes of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the United States, which is very much like the positionings of most Twin Oakers.

Feminist researchers are concerned with the power relations that exist between the researcher and her subjects (Malson, O'Barr, Westphal-Wihl, Wyer 1989; DI Leonardo 1991). In order to address these issues, I deliberately considered power within every aspect of my research. I encouraged members to offer their advice on my research questions as well as my research methods. I was completely explicit with the community about my research questions and methodology, and members had the power to reject me after a trial "visitor period," deny me access to any data they wished, and withdraw data

from my project until August 17, 1999, a week after I left the community. And there was reciprocity between Twin Oakers' participation in my research project and my working in their community.

One of my primary methods was extensive semi-structured interviewing. As soon as I returned to the community as a resident, having been formally accepted by the community to conduct my research, I began my first formal interviews. I primarily interviewed members, although I also had the opportunity to interview a couple of former members who visited the community as guests during my residency. I used a snowball sampling method that provided me with a strongly diverse series of interviews. Additionally, several members specifically requested to be interviewed. In each interview, I posed a number of general questions related

to gender at Twin Oaks and

changes in constructions of gender in the community so that issues important to members would surface, rather than imposing my own ideas about what was important "data." I also asked broadly about what members' backgrounds were before they came to Twin Oaks and what brought them to live at Twin Oaks. Altogether, I conducted twenty interviews.

During my stay in the community, I attempted to involve members in my research project in various ways. One member encouraged me to hold a community discussion on the topic of gender at Twin Oaks and offered to facilitate. I organized this event and over twenty people attended; with the group's permission, I tape-recorded the meeting using an external microphone. A couple of weeks later, at the request of several members, I held a second discussion to which more than ten people came; I also tape-recorded this discussion. In order to further broaden my understanding of the community, at the end of my stay, I posted a sign-up sheet in order to solicit interviews from any other members who wished to be a part of my project; quite a few members responded, and my data was immensely enriched.

With the community's permission, I reviewed and gathered current documents constantly generated by the community for its own purposes. A major means of communication among community members is the O & I—Opinions and Ideas—Board. Located in the dining hall, this board is hung with rows of clipboards where members post a variety of "papers." These include analyses of political situations within the community, notes from community meetings, and letters from visitors and ex-members; a stack of blank paper is included underneath each O & I paper to hold comments from community members, enabling a continuous written dialogue. Keeping up with these papers and their comments remains central to understanding current issues and political situations within the community. The community's written bylaws and 6 ½ inch thick policy notebook are additional written sources that I used as sources in my research. Other significant documents include the community's quarterly newsletter "The Leaves of Twin Oaks," the three-week visitor orientation guide "Not Utopia Yet," the new member handbook titled "Living the Reality: The New Member Survival Handbook," and community memos and surveys.

As a visitor, I had begun archival research in the community archives housed in a room in one of the residences, and as a resident I continued this research and photocopied numerous documents. One document I uncovered was a Master's thesis on the topic of gender at Twin Oaks, *Female Cultural Dominance at Twin Oaks Community* (1988), written by Zena Goldenberg, an anthropology graduate student at the University of Illinois who had visited the community twelve summers before I arrived. Many of the community's O&I papers are saved in the archives, and I reviewed and documented many pertaining to my research. I also looked over some of the community's older archival materials that are housed in the University of Virginia's special collections library. Additional documentary resources I draw from in this thesis include two books written by one of the community's founder's, Kat Kinkade: *A Walden Two Experiment: The First Five Years of Twin Oaks Community* (Kinkade 1972) and *Is It Utopia Yet?: An Insider's View of Twin Oaks Community In Its 26<sup>th</sup> Year* (Kinkade 1994). I also bought, in the Twin Oaks gift shop, a collection of the community's newsletters, "The Leaves of Twin Oaks," edited by Kinkade in 1987; that collection covered the years 1972-1974.

I consistently informed the community at every step of my research process. Even in my very initial contacts with Twin Oaks, I stated my research intentions, and I further indicated them in my letter of introduction. When I arrived at Twin Oaks for my visitor period, within the first few days I posted a research statement to the community on their O & I board. I wrote that I was applying for student residency as I wanted to conduct research at Twin Oaks and would be taking notes on my informal experiences during my visitor period, so that anyone who did not want to participate could avoid me. I also proposed that I would be interested in talking to members about topics related to my interests—which I stated—but that I would not mind at all if anyone did not wish to participate. At the end of my visitor period, in the letter stating my application for student residency, I reiterated my research proposal. I also verbally informed members of my research interests when I was asked on an individual basis about my intentions to live at Twin Oaks, in case they had not read my letters. When I actually began conducting formal interviews, I used consent forms. I have consistently used pseudonyms in my thesis in order to protect the identities of individuals, although I have not changed the name "Twin Oaks" as it seems unnecessary; there are a large number of publications—a few academic articles and also articles in newspapers and magazines—that refer to Twin Oaks by name, and many members feel this sort of publicity is positive.

Giving back to the community was very important to me. In order to reimburse Twin Oaks for allowing me to live in the community and conduct my research, I provided them with my labor. This form of reciprocity is actually built into the community's student residency program. Twin Oaks expects a student resident to work in the community approximately thirty-five hours a week in exchange for the opportunity to live in the community and conduct research; this is eight hours under members' forty-three hour weekly labor quota, so a student resident accounts for the remaining eight hours as research. During my stay at Twin Oaks, the community was at low population—and many members also take vacations during the summer—and therefore badly in need of additional workers, even if they were temporary, as I was. Workers were especially needed for weaving hammocks, and luckily I managed to learn this skill adequately. Additionally, it worked out that several members were able to work while being interviewed, instead of having to take time away from work to talk to me. Usually this happened while members were weaving hammocks, although one man chose a basement where he was shoveling gravel as his interview site.

## **Feminist Writing**

Feminist theory also informs the way I have written this thesis. In addition to addressing power relations in their methodologies, feminist researchers are also concerned with the representation of subjects in the final write-up (cf. Visweswaran 1994). I address power relations in my reflexive approach to ethnography as well as by incorporating members' own representations of themselves and Twin Oaks with my own representation of the community. Writing my thesis "at home," I have attempted to reflexively provide readers with information about my learning process during my stay, my situation within the community, and how my own race, class, gender, and sexuality positioning influences my analysis.

In this thesis I include many excerpts of transcripts I typed up from tapes of the gender discussions and portions of quite a few interviews. Regarding these transcripts, I agree with Alessandro Duranti's discussion of transcription as theory in *From Grammar to Politics: Linguistic Anthropology in a Western Samoan Village*: "[W]e become aware of the fact that

what we decide—consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly—to first hear and then transcribe is the product of systems of choices due to a mixture of conventional orthographic systems and theoretical assumptions about what constitutes relevant data" (1994:40). Many of the choices I have made in the transcripts I include in this text have to do with representation. None of us is as eloquent in conversations as we might be in practiced speech or written communication, so in transforming members' conversations into texts, I have omitted utterances such as "um," "uh," and some repeated words. I have also omitted many of my own affirmative responses in transcribed portions of interviews. Other choices I have made relate to my research focus. As I was primarily interested in members' narratives and dialogues with other members, I have not included pauses or latching, which someone interested in a more linguistic analysis might include. Like Duranti I also believe that "[t]ranscripts, like translations, are never final" (1994:43). See the Appendix for the transcription conventions I use throughout my thesis.

Full transcripts of the gender discussions have been given to the Twin Oaks community and should be available in the archives there. I also left copies of the tapes in the community's hammock-shop tape collection.

## **The Organization of this Thesis**

I have organized this thesis around significant issues that arose in both the gender discussions I held and my interviews with members. In Chapters 2-5 I relate the ways Twin Oaks described how community constructions of gender are alternative to those of the dominant United States society. Chapter 2 draws primarily on the two gender discussions I held and analyzes how the community negotiates gendered social and spatial boundaries in opposition to dominant US gender constructions. In this chapter, I expand my discussion of some of the gendered spaces I have mentioned in the Introduction. In Chapter 3, I examine work as a site of gendered change in the community, and in Chapter 4 I discuss the family as such a site. In Chapter 5, I consider gender roles and sexuality as fluid identities, in contrast to dominant US constructions. Finally, in Chapter 6, I deal with the embeddedness of Twin Oaks' alternative constructions of gender in what members call "the outside world"—the dominant culture of the United States—by discussing ways that members articulated the dominant society's influence on Twin Oaks' gender constructions, as well as community silences around race and class in these constructions.

## **Chapter II: Gendered Social and Spatial Boundaries**

Although gendered social and spatial boundaries are obvious in so many Twin Oaks locations and contexts, I have chosen to focus on two community discussions held for the purposes of my research in which the negotiation of these boundaries in relation to "the outside world" was especially salient. Within these two discussions, community members actively worked to define what it means to have a gender-balanced population and women's space; what constitutes sexist behavior and feminist and/or profeminist behavior; whether or not Twin Oaks is a feminist/profeminist community; what relationships are appropriate between members and visitors, especially male members and female visitors; and the changing meanings of these social and spatial boundaries over time.

## The Meetings

Throughout my stay in the community, several members suggested events and topics I might want to focus on in my research, members I should interview, and possible methods I could use. During my visitor period, one long-term member, Catherine, advised that I hold a "fishbowl" discussion on gender at Twin Oaks and offered to facilitate. I later learned she also facilitates many of the community business meetings. Soon after I returned to the community as a student resident, we began making arrangements. I was entirely unfamiliar with the fishbowl format and the community's

ways of doing things, so I followed Catherine's lead to a large extent. She explained to me that a fishbowl discussion meant that within the gathered group of people, several volunteers would sit separately from the rest of the group and talk about a specific topic, and then when individuals in this "fishbowl" grew tired of talking or had finished making particular points, they could switch out with others who wished to talk, perhaps on another topic. While early on in my research plan I had considered conducting small group interviews, I now found myself organizing a community discussion for around twenty people in which another community member would act as the "facilitator" instead of me. My role was to make homemade ice cream and beverages, customary for community meetings, and to be prepared with a list of topics to introduce if the conversation lulled. Catherine undertook the responsibility of advertising the meeting, hanging up a colorful flyer encouraging members to come and share their "piece" concerning "gender roles," and of guiding the discussion, a role I did not end up envying.

Catherine's facilitation of the discussion actually worked well for a number of reasons. First of all, I learned that "facilitation" is not the same as conducting a very large group interview; in addition to leading the discussion, it also involves handling conflicts—and there were a few. I believe that if I had tried to facilitate the meeting, I would have become accidentally intertwined in community politics in ways Catherine probably foresaw. Thinking back, I realize that she even suggested she hang up the flyer instead of me, because, she said, someone in the community is always going to have a problem with the way you do things. Another positive aspect of Catherine's facilitating the meeting was that the discussion seemed to serve a real purpose for the members who attended. After the first discussion, quite a few members told me they were glad that I had created such a forum for discussion on the topic of gender; the meeting enabled me to let issues important to community members emerge from the discussions instead of imposing my own questions on those attending. I held a follow-up discussion about a week later and utilized the same format; we used the fishbowl format to get things started and then abandoned it after the first half an hour in both discussions. I asked another long-term member, Sunny, to facilitate and around ten people came to the second discussion. Both conversations were tape-recorded for audio.

Many members who attended these discussions found themselves actively and reflexively engaged in coming to terms with the meanings of various gendered aspects of Twin Oaks community culture. Some members came to the meetings out of curiosity, and others for the ice-cream; many people brought their "piece" to share (as Catherine suggested in her flyer), and a few found themselves unexpectedly challenged by the conversations. I hope to represent how, within these discussions, members confronted the often nebulous definitions and meanings of a gender-balanced population, women's space, sexism, feminism and

profeminism, and "wolfing," in the history of their community. It was fascinating for me to observe how members negotiated boundaries for appropriate behaviors, the meanings of certain community structures, and the community's history. As a newcomer to the community I had assumed that, to a large extent, these definitions were fixed and obvious.

### **Gender-Balanced Population**

In the first discussion, I encouraged members to talk about how gender at Twin Oaks is both similar to and different from gender in dominant United States society, perhaps by drawing on their own experiences in both contexts. After we had discussed work, relationships, and sexuality—all of which I will return to in subsequent chapters—Catherine brought up that Twin Oaks has a 60:40 gender ratio policy; she had told me ahead of time that she hoped members would discuss this issue. The policy requires that the population be no more than sixty percent male or female at any time; if the community gets close to becoming more than sixty percent male or female, then no more new members of that gender will be accepted until it becomes more balanced. Catherine asked the group, "Why do we have it? What does it mean that we try to keep it balanced? Because I mean every time we get close to it and talk about it, we come up with well what does it mean? How do we count gays and lesbians?" The discussion that followed, which I will recount here, reveals how a fixed community structure can be interpreted in many ways, and members can be seen to negotiate among the multiple meanings, including historical ones. The history that the members constructed around the gender ratio was that in the 1980s, Twin Oaks, having seen the community's high population of men, set its gender limit. The meanings constructed concerning the gender ratio were primarily about the availability of partners and balancing male and female "energy." This ratio, although it technically limits both the number of men as well as the number of women, seems to have more to do with restricting the "macho" element that exists in so many "outside world" contexts, to use a term from the discussion.

The following dialogue is from the first discussion I taped. The following contextual information situates the participants whose words are included here: Tatiana has been a member of Twin Oaks for over a year; Jesse, a male, and Lilith are long-term members; Wes has been a member of Twin Oaks for just over a year but lived in another community, East Wind, for over ten years; Forrest is a long-term male member. Nate is a long-term member of over twenty years and therefore provides a unique historical perspective; and Sunny is a woman who has lived at Twin Oaks for over five years. I pick up the conversation where Catherine has posed her question concerning the gender ratio.

*Catherine: What's the idea of having this ratio?*

*Tatiana: Oh I see, like is it about available partners?*

*Catherine: Yeah.?: Right.*

*Tatiana: I see.*

*Jesse: That's what I've heard.*

*Lilith: [Really?]*

*Tatiana: [How] interesting. [[I never thought of it that way.]]*

*Lilith: [[/?/ more just about like vibe]]?: Yeah.?: Uh-huh.*

*Lilith: /Like/ not having an overabundance of female energy or an overabundance of male energy.*

*Catherine: I mean I feel I have more male energy than most men here.*

*: (laughing)*

*Lilith: Well that's true.*

*Wes: I could relate my experiences at East Wind which was like pretty much always twice as many men if not more than women. And of course it's a much more isolated place so you don't meet many people from the outside world but it really made a difference like it really feels a lot more balanced here and it doesn't seem like to me it doesn't matter if, you know, a certain amount of men, the men are gay or a certain amount of the women are lesbian or whatever. It's not even about that really although it of course affects like your likelihood of finding a partner or whatever but just the, you know, it seems relatively balanced the female and male energy in a general way.*

Catherine tries to get the group to define what "energy" is, and Wes begins explaining how it felt to have so many men living at East Wind. I pick the conversation up where Lilith further articulates how that plays out.

*Lilith: I think East Wind is more sort of harsh and crass, this is very stereotypical, you know, whatever male characteristics but, you know, they don't have quite so much of that moderating energy of, you know, like, for example, facilitation is virtually unheard of.*

*Wes: Yeah. Yeah.*

*Lilith: You know, they laugh at the thought of having a mental health team and it's all about like, " Oh God damnit I can say what I want to and you can't stop me," and, you know, "We're rugged individualists here," and some of that I think is regional and I think a lot of it is gender related. It creates a climate that it's not as emotionally safe.*

*Forrest: I see a lot of women there /into/ being /into/ that way too so it's the culture of the place rather than*

*Wes: Well it kinda selects for, like because there isn't much of a women's strong women's group there it makes it harder to get more women to come there. And I think the kind of women that, you know, just- this is very much of a generalization but that do stay there for any period of time are, I don't know, just kind of /?/ energy or*

*something or I don't know. It seemed pretty unhealthy to me, just in general, you know, /?/ just a real lack of balance.*

*Nate: Certainly the example of East Wind being as far out of gender balance as it as it was was major factor when Twin Oaks set a limit of 60:40. We had gotten to just about 60:40, sixty percent men, and we started noticing how it affected the whole feel of the place uh and we looked at it and said, "You know," and there was a lot of argument about it because, you know, we were being discriminating. We were saying, "No. Men can't join until there's another woman," you know, we weren't saying /you/ can't join /?/*

*Catherine: So that was in the eighties then /right/?*

*Nate: and the place started beginning, you know, it started getting the feel of, you know, too much male energy and women started not liking that and started wanting to go off by themselves and we said, "OK this is going to spiral down. We don't like this (laughing)," you know. We wanted it to be more feel more balanced. And after considerable debate about, you know, how can you discriminate against men and blah blah blah we finally said*

*Lilith: /?/*

*Nate: we're going to do this because it's going to help everybody including those who are going to be delayed getting in.*

*Lilith: Well it's not even necessarily discriminating against men like there could be 60:40 the other way.*

Lilith and Sunny begin discussing the current gender ratio, but Nate continues to reflect on its history: "In either case it was discriminating against some gender and there were people who said 'Well but we're supposed to be nonsexist.'" Catherine, Sunny,

Tatiana, and Frank decide that currently there are more men than women at Twin Oaks."

Yeah I think there are more men," Frank concludes; Catherine agrees.

The group agrees that a balance of gender and gendered energy is important. East Wind is determined worse off than Twin Oaks by not requiring more of a gender balance. Although members allude to an overabundance of "male energy" as more negative than an overabundance of "female energy," the topic is never directly addressed.

## **Women's Space**

"Women's space" exists at Twin Oaks in the form of an all women's residence, a women's tea that is organized once every visitor group, occasional women's dinners, and an annual women's gathering held at Twin Oaks and organized by Twin Oaks women for women outside the community; the summer of 1999 was the 16<sup>th</sup> Twin Oaks women's gathering. During the summer, the women's teas were held near the women's residence, which is

located in a cluster of other residences, and the women's dinners were held at a private table in the public dining area. The women's gathering is held at the community's conference site about a mile away from the central areas of the community. "Women's space" then is often temporary and more socially constructed than physically.

When I first came to Twin Oaks, I knew nothing about women's space there. I remember being asked in my membership interview a couple of weeks after I arrived how I felt about these spaces; from that particular framing of the issue, I made a general assumption that women's separatist activities were encouraged by the community and answered that I approved of these spaces. As I stated in the introduction, I attended the women's tea as a visitor that, I was told, is held so Twin Oaks women can get to know visitor women. An informal women's dinner held during my visitor period served a similar purpose. Neither was particularly well attended by either visitor or member women. I accepted the existence of these women's spaces as positive and highly valued by the community, without probing further into the significance of these spaces for members. When I held that first gender discussion, I had been back at Twin Oaks as a resident only a week and a half. The perceived purposes of women's space and its history in the community were not at all obvious to me, but the meaning of women's space seemed to be implicitly understood by community members. At that point I hadn't asked many questions. I was fascinated, within the first discussion, by the way members brought together multiple perspectives (where I had thought there was only one, which I hoped to uncover) and collaboratively constructed the meaning of past and present women's space.

After the discussion of the 60:40 gender ratio, Jesse, a man who has lived at Twin Oaks for around eleven years, brought up Twin Oaks' maintenance of a women's Small Living Group. Downstairs Oneida, the women's SLG, has several bedrooms, a comfortable living room, and a women's library. The public spaces are accessible to anyone during the day but only to women after 6:00 PM, although the spaces are not limited to women who live there. In the discussion, several members collaboratively constructed the history and contexts of the creation of the women's SLG. In this excerpt, Kara is a brand new member.

*Jesse: My understanding of it, it happened before I got here, is that that was a community issue and a community decision. It wasn't just that a group of women said, "OK we're going to start a living room /of our own/," was it? Does anyone know?*

*Nate: It happened as part of the creation of small living groups.*

*Kara: Oh really?*

*?: Yeah.*

*?: Mmhm.*

*Jesse: So right from the beginning !?!*

*Nate: Well yeah at the time there were women who wanted that*

*Jesse: There was very definitely a community process?*

*Nate: Mhm.*

*Kara: And this was during a moment of very strong feminist sentiment in the community also? Well I read that /?/*

*Nate: Yeah there was there was that. There was [/?/]*

*Catherine: [EC] Wood had all the women up there. I think there was a women's auto collective.*

*Nate: There was, there was a lot of strong, there was a number, several women anyway, had a very strong sense that way and, you know, enough feeling that that was what we should support.*

*Catherine: The beginning of the women's gathering.*

*Nate: Mhm. Yeah.*

*Krista: Mmm.*

I then asked about changes in these spaces: what the purpose of women's space was originally and how it functions now. In the excerpt of the discussion that follows, Becca has been a member of Twin Oaks for several months; Eric has been a member for over a year.

*Ashley: Does women's space, which I don't know that much about that but it was in my membership interview about whether or not I was comfortable with women's space. Is that different now than it was? Or does it function differently? Or*

*Nate: The rules aren't really different [/?/]*

*Ashley: [Does it] serve a purpose now than it didn't or did it serve a different purpose then or*

*Nate: The rules aren't any different but [[as to how it]]*

*Ashley: [[It's just a /rule/?]]*

*Nate: functions you're asking a person of the wrong gender.*

*Jesse: I think that relates to what Kara, just sort of quoting from the history of it all. And certainly that's the way I've always heard about it that at the beginning the people living in the women's SLG, it was tremendously important to them. They wanted it to be a group of women and some of them were hyper feminists and lesbians /?/ and what have you. It was very important to them. Whereas now I don't think it has that /?/. Is anyone here from the women's SLG?*

*Mark: Susan was here.*

*?: Becca's here.*

*Tatiana: Becca.*

*Jesse: Becca. How does it /?/?*

*Becca: I really like it, that it's all women.*

*Nate: Yeah.*

*Tatiana: Mmhm.*

*Becca: (laughing) I don't know what else to say. I mean it just feels really safe and I don't, I don't necessarily feel like unsafe when I'm living with men. But for some reason it just feels REALLY safe. But I don't feel like literally threatened by men here, most men here. But there's just, I don't know, there's just something about knowing that it's just women's space and women's bodies and /yeah/.*

*?: [/?/]*

*Tatiana: [I really like] that we have a women's SLG and I don't live there and I [[don't want to live there]]*

*Kara: [[Yeah me too]].*

*Tatiana: But I'm very happy that we have one and I don't spend a lot of time there and in that way I feel like it's not serving that much of a role like for the rest of the community but when I did, like I think some weeks ago I spent an evening there in the living room and it was great. It was really, yeah, women's space. It was a different feeling and I was really grateful for that.*

*Catherine: Women's teas are another women's space thing that we do, not routinely all the time but, and of course the women's gathering which is pretty essential for some of us here.*

*Ashley: What is the idea? What's the importance of having women's [space]?*

*Catherine: [It's] a all-women's very supportive community working together to organize what they want to do for a weekend.*

*Jesse: I'm sorry what was your? Was your question about the gathering or the [[/?/]]*

*Ashley: [[In]] general kind of the, why is there women's space or how does it? How is it meaningful to women?*

*Jesse: Well I can tell you what I've heard and accepted, speaking as a man. That*

*there is a need for a women's space and women's time and what have you exactly because coming in from the outside world women have a lot more to recover from than men do. That's what I've been told and as I say I accept that. So I put it out to hear, you know, did [other people have]*

*Ashley: [That's interesting].*

*Jesse: that same perception or information?*

*Catherine: I don't think that there's a lot of in-depth therapy going on about it but healing in a celebratory safe space, kind of healing certainly does takes place. But not having the inhibitions of, and having to worry about taking care of men and their egos and shit /is/ major major relief.*

*Tatiana: Mm all right.*

*Eric: Well thanks for commenting on that one.*

*Catherine: Yes you're welcome.*

*Lilith: I can't think of a concrete example but I've heard of studies that have shown that women communicate differently when men are around.*

*Tatiana: Uh-huh.*

*Lilith: And I think, you know, we need to just feel as much comfortable in ourselves and each other as possible so it seems like it probably serves that goal. Yeah.*

*Tatiana: I felt a huge difference last year at the women's gathering. Like I'd been here for maybe half a year or something when the women's gathering happened, and it was just three days, and at the end of it I just didn't want to come back to the community.*

*?: Hmm.*

*Kara: Really?*

*Tatiana: Really. 'Cause it was such a difference, you know. I totally didn't have to worry about who I was or how I was or just. I could just be. And it was really painful too, /you know/, /thinking of how big a difference it made/.*

*?: Huh.*

*Tatiana: But it also made me really grateful that, you know, that we do that and we support that as a community /?/ together.*

*Forest: Do you feel like there's a difference between people- /?/ being with people*

*you know fairly well and /?/ being with people you barely know at all or?*

*Tatiana: I don't think so. There was a time in my life before when I mostly spent my time with women and it more was, you know, it more was that way. Yeah and I think part of it is about what Catherine said of like, you know, taking care of men or what Lilith said about how we interact really differently if it's just women or if it's mixed. And*

*?: Yeah how- [how /do you/]*

*Tatiana: [part of it was body stuff] too.*

*Catherine: Mmhm.*

*Tatiana: You know like I didn't have to think about what I looked like. I just didn't have to think about it. It totally didn't matter. It was, you know, absolutely irrelevant. And that was very nice. And I don't feel that way being here.*

From these members' negotiations of the meanings of "women's space," it seems that what was once a structure very much connected to women's "recovery" from the oppression of the "outside world" has waned in importance, although it still exists at Twin Oaks. Zena Goldenberg's MA thesis documents the occurrence of twelve separate women's groups, activities, and spaces during her stay at Twin Oaks in the summer of 1987, including a feminist theory group, a weekly women's tea, and a women's dinner. From her observations, between six and twenty women attended the women's tea each week, and around thirty attended the one women's dinner that was held during her stay. During my stay at Twin Oaks, I observed fewer women's only events, and those that were held were not very well attended.

Although it was somewhat difficult for them to articulate, several women in the meeting constructed meanings of women's space. Currently, according to this discussion of its significance by several women, women's space seems to function as a relief from behavior performed by women for men: paying attention to what they look like, "taking care of men," and communicating differently when men are around. Women's space works to counterbalance these behaviors by providing a "celebratory safe space, kind of healing" and feeling "as much comfortable in ourselves and each other as possible." One woman brought up the issue of safety. Although she maintained that she did not feel "literally threatened" by the most men living in the community, she felt "REALLY safe" living in the women's SLG.

It is interesting to note that the first members to attempt to define women's space were men, Nate and Jesse. They seemed to focus on the rules and exact functions of the spaces, while the women suggested that they were more generally positive spaces specifically for women than actually formed for the purpose of addressing oppression or any other particular goal. In my experience attending the women's gathering, for which I returned to the community in August, women's space did not seem to have a specific purpose other than to create positive spaces for women. The women's gathering offered workshops on subjects ranging from drumming to herbal tincture-making to drama. It really seemed to follow Catherine's description of generally having a group of women organize what they want to do for a

weekend.

In an interview, Lilith told me that women's space is about having a respite from the patriarchy and healing from the wounds of oppression with people who understand. But currently women seem to be saying that at Twin Oaks, being in a group of all-women is more of a "pleasurable choice" or a "nice thing" as it is not necessary to heal wounds at this point. In the 1980's, the feminist theory group that met addressed issues of oppression, but currently no such forum exists. It seems that Twin Oaks women are still addressing oppression, but instead of focusing on patriarchal societal arrangements, they are creating positive spaces to balance out spaces that are often hard on them as women.

## **Sexism**

The issue of sexism came up in this first discussion and dominated a great deal of discussion time, primarily in terms of "men's movie night," an evening once a week when a group of men had been getting together to watch videos for about a year. While there are several all-male support groups in the community, and Twin Oaks is supportive of similar all-male activities, quite a few members felt uneasy about a group of men

getting together to watch movies whose content was often sexual and/or violent. Several women and a couple of men in the group gathered for discussion expressed concerns over whether or not the men used men's movie night as an opportunity to make derogatory comments about women, as sexism goes against the community's bylaws. Jeremy in this excerpt is a guest of one of the members.

*Sunny: I've talked to some people about what I heard Eric and Rain referring to like specifically in the last year in terms of their being kind of more of a like a boy's club sort of scene happening in the community and I think on the one hand that serves this purpose of like guys bonding more, you know, being like, you know, more emotional intimacy but I think, you know, it's also simultaneously created a culture that has, you know, at times encouraged more of the, you know, the macho male bonding thing*

*Jeremy: Mhmm.*

*Sunny: and the just maybe sometimes talking derogatorily about women and that kind of thing. And I've heard like lots of people in the community talking about how that's a concern to them. Maybe we could talk about that.*

*Kara: Yeah.*

*Jeremy?: Sure.*

*?: Sure.*

*?: /Interesting/*

*Jesse: Well if anything you're probably talking about men's movie night, boy's*

*night as we call it.*

*Sunny: /?/ focal point of the /?/*

*Frank: Is it? Why would that be the central focus of men's movie night?*

*Sunny: I don't think it's the focus but I think it's /?/*

*Lilith: Well I remember too like when Todd was doing a lot of like men's trips to the mountains and stuff and I was still together with Sam he went a few times and would talk about like, you know, "Yeah, you know, it was kinda fun," but then there was this element of sort of trashing women that he, God I hope he doesn't mind me talking about this when he's not here.*

*?: He's broken the /?/.*

*: (laughter)*

*Lilith: Ooh. But so he would kind of go [along with it]*

*Frank: [That's mean].*

*Lilith: but he'd be uncomfortable too, you know, like it wasn't entirely OK with him but he didn't want to /?/ speaking up and saying, "Hey, you know, this is really sexist and this is really offensive and let's stop." He didn't want to interrupt it. So and I wasn't there, you know, I don't know. Guys don't talk that way around me for the most part.*

*: (a little laughing)*

*Seth: Would it be all right if I turned off the air-conditioning?*

*?: I think so let's try it.*

*Wes: I've never experienced anything like that here.*

*Frank: We're talking about gender issues.*

*Nexus: /?/ paying attention.*

*: (laughter)*

*Krista: Thanks Frank. Keeping us on track /man/.*

*?: /?/*

? : /?/

Wes: Oh-

: (laughing still)

Ashley: (laughing) Wes we're talking about gender.

: (laughter)

Wes: OK yeah.

Eric: So.

Lilith: /Do you have any more to that?/

Eric: Any more?

Wes: Just that, I mean I just, I've never experienced anything like that here, I mean /just you know/. I mean I'm kind of surprised to hear like what you were saying, that this is like a major concern for people that there's, that the guys are hanging out or something. I mean, I've kind of caught that attitude sometimes that it's like "men's movie night," you know, and it's like well we have a women's gathering and a women's SLG and blah blah blah but so why is, you know, why is that automatically seen as weird, that men want to hang out.

There is then some confusion about who should talk next between Eric and Becca; then Becca begins speaking. Seth, in the following excerpt, is a long-term member of Twin Oaks. Shawna is a visitor.

Becca: When men get together when there's men's movie night or whatever

do you guys, do you males /?/ when you get together find that you speak

derogatorily about women? Because we have (laughing) reports.

: (Laughing)

Wes: I haven't [gone to men's movie nights]

Kara?: [/They have reports/]

Wes: all the time. [[I've only gone to like maybe two or three but, you know, I've never experienced that at all]]

Becca: [[/?/ /saying in general /?/ we have reports/]]. Do you see it that way? I

mean that doesn't mean that we're going to take your word for it because maybe you

*[talk in a certain way and you don't consider]*

*Wes: ['Cause men are all /?/]*

*Becca: it derogatory or whatever, but just what do you think? Speak up.*

*Seth: I see it that way.*

*Wes: What way?*

*?: What way?*

*Seth: That the sort of amorphous group of men that among other things gets together at that men's movie night uses those opportunities to make derogatory comments about women.*

*Wes?: Really?*

*Tatiana: Were you there?*

*Mark: Can I /?/*

*Seth: I've attended at least ten of the movies.*

*Tatiana: Uh-huh.*

*Mark: I think a lot matters what you consider a derogatory comment about women. Guys here get together and talk about a lot of different stuff and yes some of what we sometimes talk about would be considered by some people objectifying women. I mean, it's not really much different than what I've heard many women getting together and talking about men and I guess if you consider it a bad thing to look at a TV screen and comment on a woman's nice pair of breasts then I guess we fall into that bad category, some of us.*

*Frank: Some of us.*

*?: (someone laughs)*

*Mark: But*

*Becca: Not you though?*

*Mark: Me though. And I personally don't consider that a bad thing, and yeah. But I know I don't fit into the, you know, some people consider politically correct or feminist or whatever. And I personally I think that testosterone is a nice chemical.*

*: (LOTS of laughing)*

*Catherine: God gave it to /us/.*

*Mark: And I think, you know, it can be threatening to some people, men and women, you know. But I think it's possible to create an atmosphere of testosterone without it being um a really negative thing. And yeah, I enjoy getting together with a group of guys and not feeling like, I mean it's just a different feel. I just feel freer in a certain kind of way and it's hard to describe exactly how but. And that's why I like, I mean it's not just with the guy's movie night but that's like an example. But a lot of guys who don't really care /?/ women would come and some guys will, you know, they'd like it to be just guys movie night and I felt that way just because like those few nights when women did come it just totally changed the entire feeling of the whole thing and there is a feeling created when there's a group of guys together, you know. I mean, I don't think guys here get together and like totally slander women. I mean it might be individual occasions of women that they're angry at, you know, and I would think that it would go in the other direction as well. Yeah it all matters what you consider, you know, wrong I guess. Boy I /was talking/ for a long time.*

*? : Yeah /?/.*

*Mark: 'Cause I thought a lot about this subject.*

*? : /?/*

*Catherine: I want to just jump in here just, facilitator hat. It sounds like we're getting sort of sensitive and challenging and judging and we all have our opinions and we all have our judgments. Hold the judgments. Share the opinions respectfully please. You did very well /talking/ even though we were razzing you /going on/.*

*Mark: /?/*

*Eric: Were we razzing Mark?*

*? : What?*

*Mark: No I didn't feel /razzed/.*

*: (mumblings)*

*Shawna: I want to know how like, I mean, do we get to hear examples or general [/?/ stories?]*

*Mark: [We saw a movie the other day.] We saw "Barbed Wire" with Pamela Anderson Lee and the entire first sequence was her doing a strip dance. There you go. There's an [[example]].*

*Jesse: [[Thought]] though just to be clear she never does strip in any way. It's just a very provocative dance.*

: *(lots of laughter)*

*Catherine: It seemed like a strip dance to some people.*

To many of the men who attended these movies, this was the first they had heard about concerns from community members. It seems the group as a whole was trying to define whether or not the movie group would be considered "sexist," a slippery task as Twin Oaks' bylaws allow for a great deal of personal interpretation. The community's bylaws, Article I, "[Community] Definitions and Purpose," paragraph two, "Purpose" states: "together our aim is to perpetuate and expand a society based on cooperation, sharing and equality"; item "D" continues: "which in the behavior of individuals and of the Community strives to eliminate the attitudes and results of sexism, racism, ageism, and competitiveness." Paragraph Three, "Implementation," item "H" requires "an insistence on the non-involvement by all members in acts which are defined by the Community as conflicting with the purposes and policies set forth in this Article." No specific community boundaries are described in this document, or any other official community document, regarding what is considered "sexist" behavior.

The conversation continued to explore what constituted "men's movie night" and in what ways this group of men participated in "sexist" behavior. Several female members also challenged the men with having engaged in conversations—outside of men's movie night—that reflected sexist attitudes. While several members, both male and female, seemed very concerned about the attitudes and behaviors of these men, other members contested their being challenged to account for themselves and reminded the group gathered for discussion that the men's movie night group did not act or think in one specific way but rather as individuals. In the following excerpt, several members discuss the issue of some community women's opposition to activities like men's movie night:

*Kara: Well I think about Nate's comment earlier about the 60:40 ratio and what happened when the ratio began to creep above sixty that people began to get the general impression that the balance was wrong or that there was a pervasive attitude or a pervasive like psychological climate that was not acceptable to the membership and they wanted to somehow bring that into check as a community. And I wonder if the women are having the same feeling now about like something that's being cultivated as a result of the men's night. That some sort of attitude or viewpoint is being propagated there and /it'll/ grow and take over and we'll be infiltrated by machoness or *(laughing)* I don't know. *[That's what I feel like]*.*

*Lilith: [Yeah that's what I fear].*

*Sunny: /?/*

*Lilith: For sure. It feels like, you know, all the gains that we've made to have /us/ be in more balance or even more women /in/ the society are being undermined *[[or potentially]]*.*

*Kara: *[[/?/]]* So that seems like the question *[[[to me]]]*.*

*Jesse: [[[You-you]]] personally feel that way /do you/?*

*Lilith: I, you know, it's funny because I didn't really start thinking about that or noticing it until somebody else brought it up and then it became more in my consciousness.*

*Jesse: Mmhm.*

*?: Mmhm.*

*?: Mmhm.*

*Jesse: And you Sunny, you spoke about concerns that [/you'd heard expressed/].*

*Sunny: [Yeah that's probably] true for me too that a couple people came to me saying "Wow, you know, it seems like this thing, while it may have this one side effect of being like a really positive thing for men and their bonding and being more emotionally close, there's this element that seems like it could potentially be working against what we've all said communally are really strong ideals that we have: nonviolence, nonsexism, and to some extent within nonsexism is like not like emphasizing like physically objectifying one another as sexual beings and all that.*

*Tatiana: Mmhm.*

*Sunny: And yeah like what Becca said is true. We all come in with our stuff from the outside and we all have some of that going on but are we trying to like kind of work together to like work through that shit and de-emphasize or are we like, is potentially some element of the guy's group and some of the movies that were selected a situation where they're coming together to promote it?*

*?: Mmhm.*

*Mark: I think different individuals have different ideas about what they think is sexist and what they think is right and wrong and what they want to change about themselves. And everybody's going to come...to their own truths in their own time and I think there's a certain amount of value to making sure that people don't go too far in one extreme and go too far from what is basically considered the norm of this culture or what we're trying to be here. But there are going to be within a basic guideline different ideas about what we want to be as individuals and what we want this culture to be. And people are going to act in the ways that they see fitting and it's not always going to be what everybody else sees fitting. And unless it's something WAY out of line to what the norm is of the community then there really seems in a sense that you've got to give room for individual expression.*

As the discussion progressed further on this topic, violence in the films also emerged as an issue. Tatiana talked about feeling threatened if indeed the group's weekly meeting consisted of, she said, a bunch of guys watching violent movies; she also mentioned that this behavior could be understood to go against the community's self-definition as a nonviolent

community.

Although the conversation about men's movie night grew extremely intense at times, the gender discussion ended on primarily a positive note. Several members stayed for a few minutes afterwards and reflected on the discussion. A couple of members thanked me for having held the discussion. One woman said: "I think it was good to have this." I will also add here that several male members later told me that the discussion was very uncomfortable and/or frustrating for them, especially around the issue of men's movie night, for various reasons.

### **Feminism and Profeminism**

Community definitions of profeminist behavior, as well as definitions of Twin Oaks as a feminist and/or profeminist community, arose in the second meeting I helped organize on the topic of gender, which I held at the request of quite a few members who had attended the first discussion. I publicized it as "Another Gender Discussion," to follow up the first, and members' comments at the end of the meeting were similar to those at the first discussion. While most members appreciated the opportunity to talk about the issues that came up, a few left frustrated.

In this meeting, Jesse brought up his struggle with trying to practice "profeminist" behavior at Twin Oaks, and the group discussed what community expectations of profeminism exist. According to this discussion, there were stricter expectations of feminist/profeminist behavior in the past. Nudity solidarity—men leaving their shirts on where women are not allowed to go shirtless—and equality in language were defined as profeminist behavior in this discussion, and as behavior that is unusual in the context of the outside world. To introduce the speakers in the excerpt that follows, Tim has been a member of Twin Oaks for over a year, and Callie and Tamara are long-term members.

*Jesse: But I must admit, no one's ever, no- LITERALLY no one has EVER told me how to be profeminist. No one has ever said, "OK Jesse, this is what you do." [/?/]*

*Sunny: [Didn't you go] out with Lilith?s*

*: (laughing)*

*Tim: She didn't tell you?*

*Sunny: She didn't give you the handbook?*

*Jesse: I understand what you're saying but I think it was more personalized in that case*

*: (laughing)*

*Jesse: and also I've talked to some men about being profeminist here at Twin Oaks. And I've been a little bit surprised, a little bit disappointed /?/ to have men say, "Oh*

*well /nah/ there's really no need to do that or be that way."*

*Callie: Was that recently or in the past?*

*Jesse: One was recently, yeah.*

*Sunny: And what was their rationale behind that position. /?/ that was taking things to an extreme or like reverse sexism or like what were their perceptions? /?/*

*Jesse: I don't know if reverse sexism would [quite be]*

*Sunny: [Oh we'll let Mark field that question (laughing—Mark had just walked in)]*

*Mark: Huh?*

*Sunny: I'm just kidding. I said we'll let you field that question. (softly) Never mind.*

*Mark: All right.*

*: (Laughing)*

*Jesse: We've got a question here about profeminism. Let me READ out of my thoughts. Was it a matter of reverse sexism or was it something other than that?*

*Mark: I'm a sexist, you know that.*

*: (Laughing)*

*Jesse: I think it was along the lines of men who would say that what the women are asking of us is too much and /?/ along those lines what the debate consisted of was, that was said on the one hand, and on the other hand, the question being put, "So what's the big deal? What's so difficult about doing what the women are asking us to do?"*

*Tim: I'm curious as to what kinds of things you're talking about specifically that the women are asking us to do.*

*Jesse: Mhm.*

*Tim: Like leaving our shirts on?*

*Tamara: Yeah, that sort of thing. That's a*

*Jesse: There's one very [good example]*

*Tamara: [good example]*

*Jesse: very good example. I mean that used to be a live issue when I was first at Twin*

*Oaks.*

*Sunny: Well it still is somewhat.*

*Jesse: Well in my experience of it it's gotten to the point where nobody ever says anything anymore.*

*Sunny: About men who*

*Jesse: When a man has his shirt off nobody says anything.*

*Tamara: I do. I do.*

*Sunny: Well, but now there's a movement towards like EVERYBODY breaking the norm (laughing) you know I feel like. In the courtyard or whatever at ZK just, if it's really hot, to just have your shirt off if you're a woman or you're a man.*

*Jesse: That breaks another norm (sort of laughs).*

*Sunny: Hell yeah!*

*Tamara: Yeah I don't think everybody feels that that would be a good idea.*

*Sunny: Well certainly not, it's certainly going against the norm.*

*Tamara: I mean I'd be very uncomfortable if everybody started doing that.*

*Sunny: Mhm.*

*Tamara: Because if somebody comes in from Louisa and thinks we're a nudist camp*

*Jesse: Mhm.*

*Tamara: and then they shut us down.*

*Catherine: /I mean/ one of the things that I try to catch people on, myself included, is to have equality in language. Like if you're going to talk about girls, then men are boys, both girls and boys and men and women and, you know, sort of equal language. Not MEN and girls. I've been doing that for years and most people here are pretty good.*

*Jesse: But you have found it happening here?*

*Catherine: Not much. Not much.*

The existence of multiple definitions of feminism and profeminist behavior then emerged in the discussion:

*Kara: It's difficult to rest upon the assumption that we as a community are operating under some common definitions or some common understandings of feminism and feminist behavior. I'm curious Jesse about your own perceptions and I'm almost certain that it's different from mine, the question of what is feminist or what is a feminist man or what are the prevailing, you know, desirable behaviors of Twin Oaks. I think those are interesting questions because it seems that, in part, that was the crux of the conflict at the last meeting.*

*Sunny: That was the CRUX of the conflict?*

*Kara: I think that we're operating under very different definitions as a community in trying to function together, that we have expectations of each other moreover.*

*Jesse: You know it would make me very uncomfortable if the fact that we do not manage to have identical definitions of any of the definitions you just mentioned, if that became an obstacle. I don't want that to be an obstacle. I don't feel I need to have EXACTLY the same definition as you nor vice versa. I hope that we have some shared elements and definitions, some overlap between all of our personal views and definitions of it, and I hope that the overlap is sufficient that we really are different from the outside world.*

After this discussion of variance in members' definitions of feminism, Tim brought up the community's definition of itself in terms of feminism and profeminism, which has never been formalized, and how that comes up for him as a member of the recruitment team (recruiting members involves placing advertisements, giving public talks, etc.). The history of community identification in these ways was then negotiated. While the community once explicitly defined itself as a feminist/profeminist community, such definitions seem to gradually have been abandoned, in some ways making the boundaries between Twin Oaks and the "outside" less obvious.

*Tim: It's interesting, you know, Callie and I wrestle with this when we write, and George as well, when we write advertisements and other recruiting stuff and most often we avoid using the word "feminist" because that's not something the community is agreed upon as a self-definition.*

*Callie: Well what's interesting is like eight years ago, ten years ago we regularly used the word "feminism."*

*: (lots of agreement)*

*Sunny: I think.*

*Callie: And I think it's really changed. I think the community's feeling about it has changed. And now we kind of use it as a filter. It's like if we're advertising in a place where we think we're going to get a lot of he-men we put in the word "feminism" because that weeds out those guys.*

: (laughter)

*Jesse: But what happened? Did anything really happen that was Twin Oaks changing in that regard? I mean, like you say, eight years ago I clearly agree that we characterized ourselves as feminist slash profeminist. I don't remember the community ever deciding that that was no longer the case.*

*Callie: I mean, from my perspective, I think that something happened. Like we got all these groovy women and men here and we became this groovy profeminist slash feminist community. And then we kind of, like because we were there it wasn't an issue and we didn't have to keep talking about it so we kind of fell into an assumption place and now I think, like you were just saying, all those different questions, Jesse would have different answers than you. We don't really talk about, we don't really know what our definitions are 'cause it doesn't really come up as a subject. And I think it's partly because to some extent we think, "Oh we're there so we can just put this to rest," and I, yeah, I don't think that. I think we're in a great place and I think*

*Tim: We're not there.*

*Callie: Yeah.*

Although Twin Oaks is currently negotiating its identification with feminism, members continue to address issues of empowerment in many community practices. The utilization of feminist facilitation techniques for community discussions, the equalization of standards of nudity for men and women, and the practice of gender equality in language by many members, all work to equalize power. But as members articulated in the previous excerpt of dialogue, although they feel they are "in a great place" in terms of addressing these issues, they are still "not there." For instance, maintaining a norm against wolfing is constantly a struggle in the community. Members are specifically concerned with male members becoming romantically involved with female visitors, due to a gendered imbalance in power that may already exist; wolfing by females is less common and is not perceived by most community members as an abuse of power in the same way.

## **Wolfing**

The issue of "wolfing," members becoming romantically involved with visitors (usually male members with female visitors), is a sensitive topic and while the discussion had come close to the issue several times, it wasn't until Tim brought it up directly that the group gathered for discussion examined the practice in-depth. The following excerpt of discussion illustrates individuals' expectations, as well as expectations of the community as a whole, concerning the relationships between members and visitors, and a consideration of whether or not these expectations have changed over time. Members suggest that wolfing has perhaps become more acceptable to the community in recent years. In the conversation that follows, Sandy is a female guest who is thinking about becoming a member; \*Randall is a male member of several years; and Constance is a brand new member.

*Tim: I'll throw something out and we'll see whether or not [[people]]*

*Sunny: [[Go ahead.]]*

*Tim: bite. I think as an indicator that we are not as far as we might be, I think in the areas of wolfing, members starting relationships with visitors, there's far more male wolfing of women than women wolfing of men.*

*Tim: And I wondered if that's other people's experience as to whether that's true and whether or not that's any indication of what's going on here. Or is that just all because we all come out of this, you know, screwed up social background and that's the fundamental nature of people who are raised in the gender relationships in the industrialized west and so we're going to carry that with us no matter how long we're here.*

*?: Hmm.*

*Sandy: Is that true? I mean, do you find that the women pursue and are attracted to and curious and interested in the men*

*Sunny: Not really.*

*Sandy: that come in the same way.*

*Jesse: The [visitor men?]*

*Kara?: [I haven't seen /that/]*

*?: Much less.*

*Callie: Not to the same extent /?/.*

*Sunny: I mean it'll happen occasionally but [[generally I have to stop and stretch my imagination to think of a couple of examples]].*

*Tamara: [[Yeah it's much more /?/ yeah /when/ it's happened you]] could count on probably one hand over many, many years.*

*Tim: So is that an indication that we're not as far as we want to be or is this not a relevant issue?*

*Randall: Let me put this out [[[/?]]]*

*Sunny: [[[It's relevant. Why don't you let]]] other people talk a little bit.*

*Randall: OK.*

*Sunny: Thanks. If anybody else has anything to say. [/?/]*

*: (Laughter)*

*Tim: [Well Tamara you started] to say something.*

*Sunny: Yeah, go ahead Tam.*

*Tamara: I did. I said I think it's quite relevant and I think that it's gotten a bit worse of late and that we're sort of ignoring it, sort of like the no shirt thing or whatever it is, the whole idea that we're just laying back on laurels that are starting to not exist anymore and people have decided they're going to do it anyway. And you know recently there was a young man who was wolfing a young woman in our last group and I, you know, I said to some of the- "Does that guy realize he's going to get sort of a lot of flack about this and that women will be warned against him ultimately and that it's really kinda yucky and it's so worth waiting until the person actually comes back," and blah, blah. And, you know, we talked about it for a little while but it's just not being taken as a very serious thing. But for all we know that young woman may come back because of the relationship she had. And it may not, /they may be/ totally not interested in her or him. So I still think it's an important thing. Somebody was saying, "Why do you bother with this? Nobody cares," and I was just really hoping that wasn't true.*

*Constance: They're wrong I think.*

*Jesse: Well I don't want to change the subject but talking about the same topic, I believe we need to put more effort into teaching our new members what the community expects about these things. For instance, do you remember when we had the feedback for Greg. I was horrified by something you were saying.*

*Tim: By something I said?*

*Jesse: Yeah.*

*Tim: Which was which particular thing?*

*Jesse: I remember you said something to the effect that if it was a norm at Twin Oaks for men not to wolf women visitors, that that was not something that we tried to hold people to, that was just a sociological norm that mostly didn't happen. And I was arguing that well when I came to Twin Oaks that was a norm in the sense that you were told not to do it. And I would like to go back to that.*

*Tim: I mean, at that particular feedback I think there was a very charged discussion about whether or not it was OK. And it's clear, and it's not just new members, I mean, it's clear that there are some older members here who've been here a number of years who feel like it is OK, that, you know, that they do it in the right way or that it works for them or whatever it is. So I don't think that there is a, sort of a, well it's certainly*

*not unanimous, statement from the community that it's not OK.*

*Callie: I think the unspoken statement is it happens, I mean, it does. It happens a lot. I think that's the norm. [/?/ conscious].*

*Sunny: [Right but it happens more]. It happens more now than it did five years ago I think.*

*Sandy: So it happens more now and is the norm because it's accepted or? [Or it always happened?]*

*Randall: [It's a norm because it's being done].*

*Sunny: Right it's just sort of been this progressive shift but it's not been a conscious decision to change the norm on the part of the community.*

*Tamara: Not at all.*

*Jesse: Yeah but I think that what has happened, and I regret it enormously, is*

*that, back to what I said at the beginning, we no longer make as much effort as we used to to teach our new members that the community prefers them not to wolf visitors. When I joined the community I was taught DO NOT WOLF VISITORS.*

*?: (someone laughs)*

*Jesse: That is a bad thing to do. The community does not want you to do that. I was definitely taught that, and I was willing to accept that. I didn't have any big problem with that, for heaven's sakes. It was OK to accept that, OK that's a rule at Twin Oaks and /that's fine/.*

Goldenberg's documentation of attitudes and strategies toward wolfing in the summer of 1987 provides another way to understand the changes perceived by the discussion group that met in the summer of 1999. Goldenberg wrote in 1988 that "some Twin Oakers find wolfing a problem which requires policy attention while others either don't see it as a problem or don't want the community legislating on the sexual behavior of mature adults" (43-33). But there is some evidence that community members possibly took the issue more seriously twelve years ago.

What exact behavior constitutes "wolfing" was also discussed. Callie said that she felt it was condescending to call the relationship she began during her visitor group eight years ago wolfing: "Some people would say I was wolfed when I was a visitor. I don't like to think of it that way 'cause it feels pretty condescending to me, like I was this totally passive person being acted upon, and that bugs me." Whether or not members getting involved with new members is wolfing was also discussed, because a power imbalance between full members and new members still exists. Tim brought up that "one of the things you can do is you can

influence people's behavior without doing what's classically wolfing. And you can certainly create the-the foundation of a romance that's totally inside the guidelines of what's acceptable at Twin Oaks."

The conversation continued around exactly what power dynamic can exist between members and visitors:

*Sandy: I think the wolfing thing is complicated though, what Callie was saying leaving the room with this whole impression that women are somehow victimized. And I think I would want to be responsible, as a responsible woman, or taking responsibility for my part. And I come to a community, I'm lonely. I'm going to do as much to attract it as the men are to give it so then are we going to put the burden completely on the men, that they're supposed to then resist? So somehow or another I'm in a convenient position of the men being [blamed /for/]*

*Constance: [It's the power imbalance].*

*Sandy: And you say it's the power imbalance but who really has the power, like I'm coming in I'm the [[fresh new girl /?/]]*

*Catherine: [[Voting, voting. There are people voting on you]]. That's a pretty big leverage.*

*(Lots of response—audio confusion)*

*Tim: Well it's actually a*

*Sandy: But who's got the leverage? [/?/]*

*Catherine: [Input, input].*

*Tim: But that leverage is actually much bigger in the minds of the visitor than it is in the reality. [[If I, if I]]*

*?: [[In the reality right]].*

*Tim: want to wolf you and you're not cooperating, my objection to you has virtually no chance of influencing whether or not you're accepted.*

*?: Sure.*

*?: [/?/]*

*Catherine: [Are you Crazy?!]*

?: *You don't know that as a person being rejected.*

Tim: *You don't, that's right. You don't know that as a person being [[rejected, that's right]].*

Catherine: *[[/You're crazy/]]. Well yeah. You think you have no influence on anybody else?*

Tim: *A single person rejecting you? I think a single person attempting to derail a visitor's time here*

Tamara: *[Oh /?/]*

?: *[/?/]*

Catherine: *Not by themselves but by influence.*

Jesse: */?/ [[yeah /?/]]*

Tim: *[[Yeah/?/ if they]] I mean if they can create a story.*

?: */?/ [yeah (laughing)]*

Constance, Kara, Catherine, and Tamara begin discussing how damaging wolfing can be to the community as a whole, dealing with these broken relationships and hurt emotions. Jesse then brings up another way that the power imbalance works:

Jesse: *I think the other thing as well as the power over is the member has the information. The member knows what the social context is [The member knows how many enraged ex-lovers have been hassling that member]*

Sunny: *[/Right/ it's like the home turf, you know, oh God].*

: *[other words of affirmation]*

Jesse: *that, you know. As Ginai put it once in this room a year or two ago, in our relationship life here at Twin Oaks we just eat new visitors alive, [[we just eat them alive]].*

Tim: *[[You mean visitors or new members?]]*

Jesse: *New members, sorry, new members. We just eat them alive and*

Catherine?: */?/ between the visitors.*

: *(whispering and laughing)*

*Jesse: I think that that is a very big thing because /?/ has been alluded to, not /in this proceeding/. I don't know if it's most of us but a hell of a lot of us living here also have ex-lovers living here.*

: *(agreement)*

*Sunny: Right.*

*Jesse: And, you know, possessiveness and jealousy don't just disappear the moment you break up, so on and so on.*

: *(more agreement)*

Community norms against wolfing, enforced informally in numerous ways, attempt to right a gendered power imbalance often present in "outside world" contexts. The discussion of wolfing in the second gender discussion reflects the community's ambivalence around issues concerning the individual's freedom to act and make decisions on his/her own behalf and the community's attempts to legislate individuals' behavior. While several members talked about wanting to be able to make decisions about whether or not to become involved with visitors and determine whether or not the involvement constitutes "wolfing" on their own, other members worked to enforce a community norm of no romantic involvement between visitors and members. Several male members similarly expressed to me concerns that some community members might try to prevent them from holding men's movie night, as these members feel the movie night encourages sexism and violence which are against the community's bylaws. There is also ambivalence around gender inequality. While quite a few members maintain a feminist agenda and want the community to define itself as feminist, others think gender inequality should not be an issue in the community and do not feel they should be expected to participate in what some members have defined as feminist/profeminist behavior. These negotiations between individuals' definitions and community definitions, and the individual member's right to act and the community's attempts to legislate behavior according to ambiguous definitions of "sexism" and "wolfing," are similar to outside world dilemmas and ambivalences.

### **Chapter III: Gender and Work**

"Twin Oaks's religion is work," Callie said in the second gender discussion. Indeed, work is central to all aspects of life at Twin Oaks. Sickness, pregnancy, caring for children, cooking, and cleaning are considered work, in addition to weaving hammocks, making tofu, indexing books, and other jobs. Additionally, visitors are chosen for membership, to a large extent, on their willingness to work hard during the visitor period. As another member suggested in an interview, "Work is the major thing in this community, period."

The community has historically emphasized gender equality in work sites and most of the Twin Oakers I spoke with, both informally and formally in interviews, easily located gender equality at Twin Oaks, in contrast to the outside world, in work. Yet some contested the notion that all jobs are equally valued in the community. In this chapter, I will examine ways

Twin Oaks has implemented gender equality in work, both formally and informally, and members' perspectives on gender and work, in terms of equal valorization of work and equal access to jobs.

### **Community Efforts to Promote Equality in Work**

Gender equality in work is frequently a community issue. Looking back through past O & I papers, those filed by the community archivist as gender-related primarily have to do with work. Twin Oaks' labor system implements gender equality through the revalorization of what has been called "women's work" and "men's work" in the outside world and providing opportunities for both women and men to engage in work not traditional for their genders. Many members also view men's choosing to do work traditionally taken on by women—like childcare, cooking and cleaning—and women's doing work traditionally reserved for men—namely physical and mechanical jobs—as evidence of gender equality in work. Historically, the community has made special efforts to create and maintain gender equality in work in these ways.

Unlike in dominant US society where jobs are highly stratified in terms of value (jobs primarily done by men pay higher than jobs primarily done by women, and house work and childcare for one's own family tend to be unpaid and devalued), at Twin Oaks all types of work are officially valued equally through the community's labor system. Kat Kinkade's book *Is It Utopia Yet?* (1994:29), sums up the labor credit system nicely: "Basically labor credits are Twin Oaks's internal economic currency. One credit equals one hour of work. Other than the obvious exceptions for the sick and the aging, every member is required to work an equal number of hours for the Community each week. We call this 'doing quota.'" At Twin Oaks, a member can receive labor credits in many areas not defined as "work" in the outside world. What has traditionally been considered "women's work" on the outside and not actually valued as work at all (at least through pay), at Twin Oaks is visibly and officially valued as work. Cooking, cleaning, taking care of someone who is sick—bringing them dinner or running an errand for them—and parenting, are all labor creditable. Currently, parents receive a certain number of labor credits per child every year (depending on the child's age and whether or not he/she is being home schooled) to use as they wish; for example, parents can give other members labor credits to take care of their child/children. Additionally, a pregnant woman can receive a certain number of labor credits every week so that she does not have to do as many other jobs. As I understand it, one member also received labor credits for "pregnancy" when she was trying to adopt children as it took a great deal of time and effort.

In addition, the selection of workers for particular jobs and positions is not gender biased; for the most part, members can choose to do any kind of work they wish. The community is willing to train members who choose to work at jobs at which they are not already skilled. Special efforts have often been made to train women to do technical and physical jobs with which many more men than women arriving at Twin Oaks are familiar.

Over the years, the community has consistently emphasized members' participation in work not traditional for their genders as important to Twin Oaks' goal of gender equality in work. Goldenberg's thesis documents the importance of nontraditional work to Twin Oaks women

in the summer of 1987:

Both male and female Oakers spoke at length and with fervor about the traditional male work they engage in. Women exhibited a number of attitudes. They were proud of overcoming their ignorance and fears of failure. Learning new skills and passing them on to other women gave some women pleasure. Some continued to fear the negative judgment of the community and felt they need to work harder than men to prove themselves. And almost all the women felt excitement and power from gaining competence in areas previously considered off-limits to them as women (1988:14).

Later in her thesis she adds, "Power derived from going against stereotypes and doing male work was a constant thread in women's descriptions of the importance of this work. Such empowerment included learning skills formerly forbidden to them, women sharing these skills with other women, and outsiders seeing this occur" (Goldenberg 1988:21).

All of these themes were also present during my stay in the community: women finding "men's work" empowering, learning new skills and passing them on, feeling they had to work harder to prove themselves—several women mentioned this to me informally—and emphasizing the significance of the visibility of women doing this work. I will discuss members' attitudes toward nontraditional work later in this chapter, but here I will continue with the history of this community emphasis.

At some point in the 1980's there was a form of gender-based "affirmative action" for nontraditional work sites in the community. According to a very long-term community member I had the opportunity to interview, as she remembers it, there were no formal policies created to implement the placement of women in positions traditionally held by men. She recalls that after leaving the community for nine years, when she returned in 1982, there were no men allowed in the auto shop; "this went on for years." In 1985 or 1986, Twin Oaks hired a female construction worker, Mindy, who was also a former member of the community, to renovate one of the buildings; only women worked on the crew with her and learned the skills as they worked. It was intentional to have the crew be all women as, according to this woman who did not work on the crew, they felt working with men might make them feel inadequate; the women were concerned that the men would dominate the work site as they already knew how to do construction work, while the women were just beginning to learn and wanted to be able to fully practice their new skills. Most members believe that these efforts were effective at counterbalancing the imbalances of the dominant US society and are no longer necessary. Of course, new members are always coming in from the outside world.

Another way the community maintains equality is through gender balances in work areas and managerships. While there are no official policies concerning numerical gender balances in work, maintaining such balances does seem to be a social norm at Twin Oaks. One male member told me in an interview:

*We recently lost a couple of managers for ECW and whenever I heard people, most of the people I heard talking about filling these positions at ECW, I always heard people saying, talking about, "OK, you know, who can we find for this who is interested?" Well I mean basically we are looking for people to fill the position, people who are*

*interested, people who are competent at it. But I always notice that in the conversations that we have, we have a tendency to say um, "OK so and so is a really good woodworker and they'd be perfect for it. But so and so is interested but less competent, should we be also talking to that person? What women are interested in doing this? Can we find a woman and a man to take on the managership of this position?" I hear conversations like that come up a lot. Whenever we're trying to fill a position I feel like we take into consideration our gender balance in the department. Are we looking over someone because of their gender? Are we immediately assuming that Jerry a male member is going to be good at construction and Maria a female member is not going to be good at construction?*

I noticed that in my visitor group, the assignment of visitors to certain jobs was usually balanced in terms of gender. For example, one week a male visitor might help with the "dump run"—the weekly task of loading heavy metal barrels of trash into the back of a pickup truck and then emptying them at the local dump—and the next week a female visitor would be assigned to this job. Similarly, a group of several visitors assigned to clean the community's industrial kitchen would be fairly balanced in terms of gender.

My observations as a resident were similar; most work sites seemed to be balanced in terms of gender. In addition, special attempts are made to have a gender balance in decision-making bodies, which is considered another work site, and there is an actual policy dictating such a balance for the community's Membership Team.

### **Working at Twin Oaks**

The evening that I arrived at Twin Oaks for my visitor period, I met the other visitors and two members for a visitor orientation dinner. One of the first things we did was to go over what a "labor sheet" was. Tim and Tatiana passed out sheets of paper to each visitor penciled with his/her name and the days and times of labor assignments for the week ahead; orientation meetings are considered "work" for visitors, and they were penciled in too. The number of hours of work assigned on the labor sheet was marked on the sheet, and the remaining number of hours needed to make quota for the week was listed under the heading "Do During the Week" next to the letters "hx." Tim and Tatiana told us this meant that it was suggested that we spend that number of hours working on hammocks, as there was currently a large demand for workers in this area. If we did not want to spend those hours in the hammock shop, there were other jobs that did not have to be done at specific times, like peeling garlic, that we could do to make quota for the week. We were told that some members at Twin Oaks have almost all of their labor assigned as they work at jobs that must be done at certain times—like cooking dinner, making tofu, gardening, working in the hammock shop office during business hours. Other members have almost no labor assigned as they work at jobs that can be done at almost any time, like making hammocks.

Labor assigning is usually done by two people every week. Members fill out labor sheets with work assignments they have scheduled for themselves and days requested off, and then the labor assigners, with input from managers of different work sites, assign other labor, including one "K" shift—cleaning up and washing dishes after lunch and dinner—for every member each week. These sheets are due by Tuesday morning of every week in a box mounted on a wall in the dining hall's lounge, and the labor assigners return them to the box

on Wednesday evening. Members then have a chance to request revisions in their labor schedules until Thursday afternoon, and labor assignments are finalized by Thursday evening. The work week at Twin Oaks begins on Friday and ends on Thursday. During the week, as members work, they account for the number of hours they work at different jobs by pencilling them in on their labor sheets in one tenth of an hour increments; for instance, if I wove hammocks for 54 minutes, I would write down "0.9" on my labor sheet. Many members carry their labor sheets in their pockets as they go from job to job during the day. At the end of a work week, members total the number of hours they have worked at different jobs and return the completed labor sheet by Saturday at noon.

The first job I learned at Twin Oaks was weaving hammocks. Almost immediately after our community tour, the other visitors and I received an in-depth tour of the hammock shop. That first day several of us learned how to weave hammocks, and the other visitors learned one of several other steps involved in the making of a hammock: threading shuttles of rope onto a hammock jig; weaving braid into the sides of a hammock; using a soldering iron to cut rope into specific lengths. Working on hammocks is a job that can be done any time of day in many areas in the courtyard where hammock jigs are set up; jigs can also be moved but usually remain in the courtyard area. Weaving hammocks is a social job; the hammock jig itself was actually designed to enable two people to weave a hammock at the same time. I found this a good way to talk to members, and several of my interviews were conducted while weaving hammocks.

As visitors, much of our labor was assigned. Most of us worked in the tofu hut, a small building where both tofu production and packaging occur, several times during the three weeks. Many of us participated in at least one tofu "kettle clean," which involves carefully cleaning the machine that processes the soybeans. Wearing knee high rubber boots, a rubber apron, and a beard and/or hair net, a worker sprays with a hose, and also scrubs by hand, the different metal parts of the machine, dumps buckets of water and soybean byproducts down drains, and sprays the concrete floor clean. As there is no air conditioning, this is a very hot job, especially in the summer, and it usually lasts several hours. Many of us also worked several garden shifts, from 8am to 12 PM, during the visitor period; mostly we helped pick fruits and vegetables.

As a new resident or new member to the community, more jobs become possible. Just as I became a resident, a male member in his twenties who had worked primarily as a hammock shipper and a milk mover was leaving the community. I took over his work in both of those areas. Every other morning, I carted milk from the dairy barn to the community's kitchens. I filled orders for Twin Oaks' retail hammocks business several afternoons a week—retrieving the hammocks, hammocks pillows, and hammocks stands needed to fill the order from the Emerald City Warehouse stock, boxing up the orders, filling out mailing labels, and strapping boxes together in time for the UPS person to pick them up at the end of the day. I was also assigned to work in the tofu hut occasionally, and I had other odd job assignments like extracting honey from the community's honeycombs. I worked primarily at weaving hammocks to fill the hours remaining unassigned.

If I had been staying longer in the community, I could have gotten involved in a number of other work sites. Work at Twin Oaks is basically divided into what is called "direct labor," jobs that bring in money, and "domestic labor," jobs done within the community like

cooking, cleaning, gardening, and dairy work. As a new resident I was given a list of jobs available at that time in both work categories. In terms of direct labor, there were openings in hammocks, book indexing, rope-making, tofu, making hammock chairs, and doing woodwork for the hammock chairs, among other areas. Domestic labor areas in need of workers included recycling, dairy, visitor program, cheese and milk processing, gardening, bicycles, safety, and battery carts. To work in one of these areas, I would need to talk to the current manager of the area.

### **Members' Perspectives On Nontraditional Work**

In interviews with members as well as in the first gender discussion, many community members specifically discussed gender equality in work at Twin Oaks in terms of women and men having opportunities to engage in nontraditional labor. The following exchange occurred in the second gender discussion when Tamara was talking about how her experiences as a woman at Twin Oaks contrast with her experiences in the outside world:

*Tamara: I can remember when I came as a visitor, saying, "What? You mean I could learn to drive a TRACTOR? Oh come on," you know.*

*: (Laughter and agreement)*

*Tamara: Then I see Callie driving the tractor, you know, and I get a thrill. I get SUCH an excitement over that. And then I see her with a chainsaw and boots and a hard hat.*

*: (Lots of laughter)*

*Tamara: You know, then I get REALLY excited. I mean really excited.*

*?: So exciting Callie!*

*Tim: Send you some pictures!*

*Tamara: Yeah you really COULD! But, uh, for MYSELF I do find that...I HAPPENED to have taken on a whole bunch of domestic type jobs. But I still feel that if I ever approached anyone and said, "I want to drive the tractor"*

*Tim: "Give me that chainsaw."*

*Tamara: "GIVE me that chainsaw. Put it in my hands." MAYBE they'd say, "Yes." Maybe they'd say- NO ONE would say, "We won't do this because you're a woman." They'd say, "We won't do this (laughing) because you are a jerk."*

*: (Lots of laughter)*

*Tamara: (laughing) You know. "You, you may not do this." (laughs). It wouldn't be because I'm a woman. They may not think I was capable. Or they may not want me*

*on the team or whatever, you know, other snarky thing might happen.*

*: (Agreement)*

*Tamara: It wouldn't be because I was a woman. And I truly believe that. So it's-I feel the change. It's VERY exciting and I've lived here nine years next month so I do feel the change.*

Tamara's comments show that she sees gender equality in work at Twin Oaks as the opportunity for women to do nontraditional work. She cites the community as transforming the relegation of women to "domestic type jobs," which occurs in the outside world, since Twin Oaks provides equal opportunities in work to both men and women. Unlike on the outside, Tamara claims, she would never be denied a job at Twin Oaks because she is a woman.

While Tamara spoke about her excitement at seeing other women do nontraditional work and knowing that it is available to her—although she herself does not participate—several women related to me their experiences engaging in a great deal of physical work when they became members of Twin Oaks. In an interview, Callie told me about being invited to work on the forestry team:

*So when I came to Twin Oaks I was however old I was, twenty-four or something. I was this skinny college girl, you know, and there was an opening on the forestry crew to do, you know, wood-chopping, chain-sawing, hauling stuff, tractor work and I just wanted to do that so I signed up and got, I mean, and I was invited to be on the crew and like I was, I mean I was amazed. Like one of the things people say, I mean that we say about Twin Oaks, is that the traditional, the barriers of age and gender that exist in the mainstream don't exist here and to me this is a perfect example of what that means. Like, I was young and I was a woman and like I said I was physically, you wouldn't think that I could do strong physical work. And that was irrelevant. All of those factors were not an issue in deciding whether to take me on or not. And I thought if- imagine me trying to get a job working in logging /in/ forestry on the outside. They would laugh at me. I mean I might get hired but it would not be as easy and I- it would be a joke to some people and just it would be a flat-out refusal in others and anyways so the point being that it was just like, "Yeah you want to do it? Come on."*

As a visitor and then as a new member, Jenn, a woman I interviewed who also came to Twin Oaks in her early twenties and has been a member for thirteen years, similarly found herself working at jobs she felt weren't available to her on the outside unless she "put up with a lot of crap." Right away she got involved in construction and other kinds of physical labor at Twin Oaks, with which she had very little previous experience.

Tamara, Callie and Jenn all emphasize the equal opportunity that exists for women at Twin Oaks to do what has traditionally been considered "men's work." Callie and Jenn specifically contrast women doing nontraditional work at Twin Oaks with women trying to do nontraditional work in the outside world, where they believe they would either be denied these jobs or hired but not taken seriously. In dominant US society, frequently when women

actually are hired in work sites traditionally dominated by men, they undergo a great deal of sexual harassment and have no way to move up in terms of wages and positions (cf. Tallichet 1998).

Some of the differences between Tamara's perspective on gender and work and those of Callie and Jenn probably have to do with age and generational differences. Tamara is middle-aged and Callie and Jenn were in their twenties when they arrived.

Jenn also ended up managing the rope shop early on in her membership:

*For seven years I managed the rope shop in the community and that's, you know, big heavy machines that require a lot of mechanical maintenance and to do major work on them. They required a lot of skills, most of which, machinist skills which I don't have. But over the years, working there I just, I went into the job. There was no manager. Jerry had taken over for six months while we moved it into a new shop and the rope was really needed at the time and we really needed to have a strong crew and a well-managed shop and Sharon trained me in making rope and I really enjoyed it. I just, I've always really liked mechanical things and so working in that shop was really exciting for me and fun.*

After a couple of years making rope, Jenn decided to manage the shop. Her position as manager reflects the equal opportunities women have in leadership positions in work at Twin Oaks, even in nontraditional work areas.

On an individual basis, both female and male members often encourage women to engage in nontraditional work. Jenn talked about her desire to teach other women the new skills she was learning. She said her favorite part of managing the rope shop was training people, especially women learning to do somewhat basic mechanical things to- when something went wrong in one of the machines there were various things that you could learn how to do to make the repairs. And it did feel like very empowering to be able to do those repairs yourself and I could see that, especially in the women that I taught how to do this job.

Additionally, several long-term female members praised Twin Oaks men who trained them at what is traditionally considered men's work in the outside world.

Men also participate in nontraditional work at Twin Oaks, although it seems there is less of a community emphasis on it. In interviews, several men talked about having been metas when there was organized group childcare. Many women I interviewed spoke about how Twin Oaks fathers play active roles in their children's everyday lives, something they saw as being still somewhat uncommon on the outside. Additionally, most of the community's cooks are men, and all members are equally assigned cleaning responsibilities. The community's emphasis specifically on women engaging in nontraditional work may actually work to reinforce the unofficial value of "men's work" at Twin Oaks.

### **Clashes Between Official and Unofficial Values of Work**

Previously in this chapter, I have discussed Twin Oaks' official valorization of what in the outside world has traditionally been considered "women's work" and, when a woman does it

in her own household, is not valued as wage work in dominant US society. In this section, I will discuss ways members contested this valorization, suggesting that what is officially valued as work in the outside world, at Twin Oaks is unofficially valued over unpaid childcare and domestic labor in the outside world.

Work was one of the first topics discussed in the first gender discussion I helped organize. In the following excerpt, members negotiated the informal valuation of work underlying the formal labor policies. Tatiana initiated that segment of conversation, and I pick the conversation up there:

*Tatiana: One of the important differences for me of gender stuff here and whatever mainstream is about the division of labor, you know, and generally you will find, in mainstream world you will find some distinction between work that's more supportive nurturing type work which is generally more done by women and work that's more production type work which is generally more done by men. And you will find that the nurturing work is generally less valued and often not even paid. And here at Twin Oaks there's, you know, nurturing work is valued at least more than the mainstream and also the division is less, you know, and not that in mainstream it's a hundred percent women do this and men do that, but here it's much more equally divided over the different sexes than in mainstream world. So that's another difference. And you see it as well, I mean, I think it really helps with raising children and getting other sort of nurturing work done, that it's more balanced and you find less that it's, you know, women doing those jobs. And I think it's really important to have those jobs be appreciated and be valued more equally /?/, you know, we have a labor system that gives labor credits for those kind of things too.*

*Lilith: I think there still is a subtle difference in status [though].*

*Tatiana: [Oh yes].*

*Lilith: Maybe not even subtle [[at times]].*

*Tatiana: [[Right]].*

*Lilith: Not only between sort of traditionally women's work and men's work but between, oh I think there's class issues as well. I think that what's valued as managerial energy and not consistent good quality worker energy. And as somebody who's happy to be a worker bee and not be a manager I feel a lot of pressure from people sometimes like, "Well you're just being irresponsible and you're not fully grown up if you're not managing an area." That's just a classist assumption, you know. Some people have it in them to organize and oversee and coordinate and do that kind of work and other people like me just like to, you know, (singsongy) doodle-oo and go along and do, do my thing. So that's probably less gender and more class.*

*Tatiana: Mhm.*

*Lilith: Yeah but I also think, you know, it's more high status to be building a residence*

*than to be watching children.*

*Tatiana: Yeah.*

*Lilith: Even though they're both labor creditable you're not quite valued as much if you're raising children, which sucks.*

*Tatiana: Right and it's creditable less anyway.*

*Lilith: Yeah. That's true too.*

*Catherine: /Can you/ say Lilith how you experienced that difference?*

*Lilith: Well I'm reaching back a little to the time when we had more organized group childcare and a structured formal meta program and I felt like there was a lot of resentment among people who didn't have children that they were supporting the children and the childcare workers. There was a lot of divisiveness over, you know, where the kids could be and how they were impacting people. In general, it felt sort of like a marginalized area, like people didn't express appreciation that we were raising a generation of healthy happy, you know, individuals who are then going to become the leaders of the country.*

*Catherine: So it was sort of on a level of prioritizing building and growing over raising healthy kids and*

*Lilith: Sure or, you know, or income work or*

*Catherine: Uh-huh.*

*Lilith: managerial work.*

Eric, who is in his early twenties and does not have children, and Lilith, who is ten years older and has a daughter, discuss why child-rearing might be valued less than other types of work; Eric contrasts raising children primarily with building buildings. I pick the conversation back up where Jesse offers his perspective:

*Jesse: Catherine?*

*Catherine: Mhm?*

*Jesse: Can we have some comments on what they've said so far or not?*

*Catherine: Are you comfortable (she's saying this to Eric, Lilith, and Tatiana)?*

*Eric: Sure.*

*Catherine: Sure.*

*Jesse: I just feel that we're getting away from the gender aspect here because*

*building buildings is done by both men and women and caring for children is done by both men and women. And it's true that in recent years a number of our buildings have been honchoed by men but that's not always the case. Catherine, Catherine you did some honchoing didn't you [on Nashoba?]*

*Catherine: [Mmhm, mmhm]*

*Jesse: And a member [[Rhonda Kratz]]*

*Catherine: [[/And Kaweah/]]*

*Jesse: when she lived here I think she was in charge of building Degania so that as far as, you know, connecting the gender question to these particular work areas I think again you'd find the specialness of Twin Oaks is that women can honcho a /building project/. They don't have to be men to do that and a man- I remember when I was first here, one of the new and interesting and wonderful experiences was to be a meta back when we still had the meta program. So I was actually doing childcare, which in the outside world it was still in those days /?/ quite unusual for men to do. It was pretty much women's work and very poorly paid, but here I was doing childcare and it was entirely valued and it felt like important work and a useful part of the community. So I just want to remind us ourselves of that.*

*\*\*\**

*Eric: So getting back to what Jesse said a while ago about women honchoing the building projects and men metaing. It seems like when like what maybe both of you just said it or it was just Lilith, that child-rearing was valued less than building a house, even though that's, you know, that's a job done by both men and women in, you know, in Twin Oaks. It sounds like the outside world reality of women rearing children and men building buildings is what gives those things their value here in this community, the influence of dominant US culture. So I didn't see it as off the topic to talk about how we value child-rearing versus home raising.*

*Jesse: I think the discussion of differential value, correct me if I'm wrong, but, well, simple facts. When I was a meta I got one labor credit for one hour of work, right? The value was /?/ as anything else was, correct me if I'm wrong, I think it's parenting that is less valued than child-rearing.*

*Tatiana: Mmhm. When I-*

*Jesse: If I was to work as a meta and if I were to look after, you know, do daycare for the women's conference or something like that, I don't think I'd be getting less than one labor credit per hour.*

*Tatiana: It depends.*

*Jesse: Uh-huh.*

*Tatiana: It depends on the age of the child and it depends on if you're with one kid or with more. Like when I'm with Amanda for four hours I get two hours credit.*

*Jesse: OK. OK.*

*Tatiana: So*

*Jesse: So it's not just the parents.*

*Eric: Well what's more important, I mean that's, that's huge, but also like what, you know, what people think of, you know, as far as child-rearing or home-building like what, you know, as opposed to what you get labor credit wise I mean, you know, if everybody walks around and in their hearts and minds is a certain mindset or value that reflects the dominant culture then I think that carries far more weight than our labor system.*

*Tatiana: I mean, it's interesting, you know, before I came to Twin Oaks I heard that when you're hanging out with the children, especially if it's one-on-one, then you get less credit. And I was told that it's mostly because this is a job that lots of people want to do and so if you give one-on-one for it then everybody would be, you know, hanging out with the kids all the time and none of the other work would get done. And that's why, you know, it's a popular job so you'd have less credit. But being here I have heard quite some of what you hinted at like, you know, some sort of subtle or not subtle grumblings in the background about parents taking all these labor credits for hanging out with their kids and like leaving the real work up to other folks and stuff like that. So my impression now is different and it's that it more has to do with not valuing that work as highly as other jobs.*

*Nate: I could add a little historical perspective /?/ when there was a meta system and the childcare was group care*

*Tatiana: Mmhm.*

*Nate: then it was valued hour per hour and then when that stopped being the way things were normally done and parents wanted to or anybody wanted to hang out just with one child or two children, the community put out this as a sort of a compromise. "OK well you can do that if you want but /in-/ but we won't give you full credit 'cause you're not hanging out with the whole group. You're, you're sort of selecting who you want to hang out with and so if you're hanging out with, you know, three children we'll give you full credit; if you're hanging out with two children we'll give you two thirds credit; if you're hanging out with one child we'll give you one third credit." And that's sort of where it came from. Now, you know, what it means and how it reflects values /?/ is another question but that's, that's the historical background on it.*

*Tatiana: Hmm.*

*Lilith: Yeah and I could see there being some sort of ideological, you know, kibbutz influence reasoning behind that like, "Well ideally we want all the children to be in groups all the time and so if we can't have that then, you know, we'll sort of parcel it off and that way."*

*Nate: No. I thought it was an efficiency thing and I was sort of on the sidelines 'cause I don't do childcare but I thought it was an efficiency thing.*

*Lilith: Yeah, I often remember feeling like we had to fight /through/ to get the budgets that we needed, pass the tradeoff game, or to get whatever schooling options we felt like were best for the kids to be funded and if it was, you know, like you're saying people's attitude of parents are getting a free ride for having fun which I don't know (laughs) like. Some kids are always really fun and most kids aren't always really fun. Some kids are rarely fun and it's*

*: (laughing)*

*Lilith: you know, it's work.*

*Kara: But Lilith did you feel that it was a women's struggle or a parent's struggle?*

*Lilith: I felt like more it was a parent's struggle actually.*

*Kara: You don't feel like typically in Twin Oaks culture then that childcare and childcare issues have typically been left up to the women parents?*

*Lilith: Well it's funny 'cause I was also going over in my mind, like I think like it's still considered women's work even if men are doing it and that's where the devaluing comes from. And I was thinking too like in terms of care-giving, the health team and the mental health team are all women.*

*Kara: Really?*

*Lilith: Yeah. And it's been that way for a while.*

*Kara: Huh.*

*Lilith: It's just almost unfathomable to think of an all male health team and mental health team and people choosing to be in that role of caring for people's health and well-being. And it hasn't always been exclusively female, and we don't want it to be that way, and we tried really hard to get a man on the mental health team, but we haven't had success.*

*Kara: Huh.*

*Sunny: And also like the single parenting scene is that, you know, folks who come through here, it's always women single parents and so in that way the division's, you*

*know, pretty /?/*

In this dialogue work is again emphasized as a major site of gendered change in the community, in terms of being an alternative to the outside world. But the official value of work, as measured in labor credits, and its unofficial value, as measured by attitudes of community members, are not always compatible. The official and unofficial valuing of "women's work" in the dominant US culture may influence its value in Twin Oaks culture. As Eric points out in the excerpt above, "It sounds like the outside world reality of women rearing children and men building buildings is what gives those things their value here in this community, the influence of dominant US culture." Lilith more specifically notes: "It's still considered women's work even if men are doing it and that's where the devaluing comes from." It also seems that in some ways, childcare is unofficially valued as "work" but parenting is not, very much like in the outside world. Lilith also importantly brought up the greater unofficial value given to positions that involve organizing and overseeing and coordinating than to "worker bee" jobs, which parallels the value these jobs have in dominant US society.

There is a constant tension in this excerpt of conversation between the official value of certain types of work and the unofficial value of this work. Although the community's official policies promote gender equality in work, unofficially, as Eric points out: "As far as child-rearing or home-building like what, you know, as opposed to what you get labor credit wise I mean, you know, if everybody walks around and in their hearts and minds is a certain mindset or value that reflects the dominant culture then I think that carries far more weight than our labor system." It is interesting that Jesse, and Nate too to some extent, keep coming back to the fact that *officially* all labor is valued equally, while several other members articulate the more nebulous ways that certain types of work are differentially valued, in terms of gender and leadership positions, unofficially and even officially. These values are constantly negotiated, much as in the outside world.

## **Chapter IV: Reenvisioning Family**

In my first week as a visitor at Twin Oaks, Emily, a member of ten years and a mother of two, held a children's program orientation for my visitor group. I had paid very little attention to the community's history in my reading before coming to Twin Oaks; I was much more interested in finding out about the community's current state, and what to expect when I arrived. One area of history I had especially neglected was the community's children's program. Having read that children currently live in residences with their parents, I was completely unaware, until I attended Emily's orientation, of the original communal childcare program which had been modeled after both *Walden Two* and the Israeli kibbutz; the original idea, a radical one, had been to eliminate the nuclear family. Over time, responsibility and decision-making power shifted to the parents, but the Twin Oaks families that exist today remain, in many ways, defined in opposition to nuclear families.

### **The Children's Program**

Parents were not encouraged to play primary roles in their children's lives in the beginnings of the Twin Oaks children's program. According to the *Walden Two* ideal, children would be

raised by professionally trained childcare workers rather than by their less qualified parents. Childcare workers, in the early Twin Oaks reality, underwent some form of instruction but were not necessarily professionally trained to a *Walden Two* standard. Very much like the *Walden Two* model, these workers were trusted to have the children's best interests in mind and to promote these interests deliberately, while parents had the option of being important adults in their children's lives. Group childcare was, for the most part, 24 hours a day; young children slept together in Degania, the children's building, with a childcare worker. The community even utilized a version of B.F. Skinner's air crib for a period of time.

Kat Kinkade's first book, *A Walden Two Experiment* (1972), reports that a few original members—often very temporary members—brought children to the community. But as there was no children's building at that time, nor a group of cohorts for a child, the community's attempts to implement communal childcare were unsuccessful. Twin Oaks' children's program officially began in 1972 when a community baby and the children's building were both on the way. A collection of the community's newsletters for 1972-74, compiled and edited by Kinkade in 1987, provides some interesting information concerning these beginnings. Several newsletter entries reveal the community's intentionality in going about raising children, although no entries specifically addressed gender. An entry entitled "Child Study Meetings" describes how members worked to clarify the community's implementation of "the behavioral directioning we feel is so necessary to rearing our children" (Kinkade 1987:11):

In the first meeting we reaffirmed our intention to structure the children's environment, both physical and social, so as to encourage our children to live the ideals we believe in. It is not necessarily true, of course, that all things a child learns must be purposely taught by an adult, but a child does learn, one way or another, to be competitive or cooperative, selfish or sharing, egotistical or egalitarian. Since in most cases we know generally how we want our children to be, we will try to design the environment to encourage the traits we want. In doing so, we will, as in *Walden Two*, make efforts to accomplish these things using positive means rather than punishments or threat of punishment. That is, rather than wait for an undesirable behavior to appear and then try to suppress it with punishment, we will encourage desirable behavior, and then reinforce and maintain it when it appears.

Among the discussed approaches were that the children would live in a building specifically designed for their needs and after the age of five would move into a second building. The newsletter further reports:

In addition to planning the building, meetings have concentrated on developing a program for the children. A good way to begin any behavioral program is to define what the desired behaviors are. So we began with a list of "character traits" (cooperative, honest, kind, nonaggressive, sharing, freethinking, sensitive, etc.). Then we began one by one to define what we meant by each. Honesty, for instance, meant not only non-fibbing but also the free sharing of feelings and both positive and negative feedback to others. Non-fibbing can be encouraged simply by not punishing the children for honesty, and openness will also benefit from nonpunishment. Imitation of the adults and older children around them will probably also be important

(1987:11).

Another child meeting, reported in the "Leaves" in an entry entitled "Child Meetings In Earnest," focused on what to name the childcare workers. The group decided against "mothers" as some members thought the term would be confusing—for a child to have a biological mother and childcare workers all called by the same name—and others felt the term should not have feminine connotations; they agreed instead on "meta," short for "metapelet," which is what a childcare provider is called in Israel (Kinkade 1987:26).

While in many ways the children's program became less and less directly modeled after *Walden Two*, socializing children in terms of the community's agreed-upon social ideals remained a strong emphasis. The metas met as a group at least once a week in order to, according to Lilith (a member of almost twelve years and a former meta), "clarify values or to talk about how to respond to a behavior that one of the kids was exhibiting." One agreed-upon approach to addressing undesirable behavior was to determine it "not okay" instead of "bad"; this way children would not hear that what they were doing was bad and internalize it to mean that they are bad.

Lee Ann Kinkade, Kat Kinkade's granddaughter, was one of the first babies born into the community in 1973. In an interview published in the *Walden Two* issue of *Communities* magazine (1999:45-48), Lee Ann Kinkade discussed the mixed feelings she has about her communal upbringing. Overall, she remembers her childhood as relatively happy and believes the childcare workers were very well-intentioned, but many of Skinner's ideals did not transfer well to everyday life. When Hilke Kuhlmann, the interviewer, asked Lee Ann Kinkade about the role of positive reinforcement in her daily life, she recalled, "Well, Twin Oaks was of course more rigidly behavioral in its early years. But attempts were definitely made to use positive reinforcement throughout our upbringing. I benefited from some of this. For example, being told over and over again that I was good at something did give me a good sense of self-esteem" (1999:46). There were other aspects of positive reinforcement that she "would gladly have missed" (1999:46):

When I was a baby, for example, I cried a lot and demonstrated a lower-than-average use of such behaviors as smiling, sitting up, etc. This was partly because I was a colicky baby, and partly because I had cerebral palsy. The way the metas decided to address the problem was by only reinforcing "alert and happy behavior" from Thrush (That's the name the community gave me. I have since changed it.) I cannot remember this, and I don't like to think about what this must have felt like for me as a baby.

Lee Ann Kinkade commented further on the difficulty of carrying out Skinner's ideas about reinforcing desirable behavior and ignoring undesirable behavior in real life, as opposed to in a laboratory. She gave the example of a boy in her group who discovered that she was extremely sensitive to high noises and that if he screamed, she would burst into tears and throw herself on the floor. The metas discussed this and concluded that, in line with Skinner's ideas about positive reinforcement, they would comfort her and tell him, 'Not okay!,' but otherwise ignore the behavior on his part. Lee Ann Kinkade remarked, "Of course the real problem was that the reinforcement he was getting from watching me freak out was infinitely more important than the minor-to-negligible effect of hearing "Not okay!"

(1999:47). Additionally, Skinner did not consider how difficult it is to maintain consistency in group care: "Metas are not automaton scientists, and they shouldn't be. The varying degrees of skill and experience among the metas, and simply the different personalities involved in childcare led to a lack of consistency. So I pretty much knew who to ask for what," for instance to get a cookie (1999:48). Lee Ann Kinkade also regretted that metas consistently left the community, and by the age of five, none of her original caretakers remained. To a child, when someone leaves the community, "it's like they died" (1999:47). She reflected that, "[o]f course in the *Walden II* vision, the society would be so ideal that no one would ever leave" (1999:47).

Many of Twin Oaks' efforts at socializing the children involved combating sexism and gender stereotypes. In an interview, Jenn, who worked as a meta before the program's collapse a couple of years ago, told me that in the group childcare children were given "heaps of 'CO'" to socialize them into non-sexist language. Additionally, several former metas recalled that the children's books at Degania were edited for equality in language, as well as for their proportional representation of male and female, and "white" and "nonwhite," characters. Jenn further related to me:

*We used to do this thing when there was a child program at Degania, the meta program for kids aged one to five we, and this has been pretty controversial too, among some people but we would edit some of the children's books which are probably ninety percent male characters and the ten percent that are female characters are usually like somebody's mother or, you know, whatever, not a model of the strong woman character. And unless they're some very new books, and a lot of the books we had at Degania were old books 'cause we didn't really have a lot of money to buy newer books for the kid's program for years. And so there was a couple people who would periodically go through and change the pronouns and sometimes do more than that in terms of substituting like instead of "mother," they would have "meta," or, you know, just kind of trying to broaden the way in which we define family and caretakers.*

The program also encouraged non-gender-stereotyped behavior. Lilith gave some examples:

*Like the girls didn't have to wear tight uncomfortable clothing. The boys could wear dresses. The boys could play with dolls, the girls could play with blocks. They were all very physically active so the girls were encouraged to be fearless and, you know, strong and active. The boys were encouraged to care about other people, you know, be empathetic, give a shit about the consequences of your actions.*

Over the years, parents began playing increasingly important roles in their children's lives. Childcare remained in groups supervised by metas, but while the young children still slept in Degania, another building was never built for older children; at the age of five, children would then begin sleeping in a room in the same residence as a parent. Additionally, many metas were also parents. Some parents moved away and took their children with them, reinforcing the traditional bond between parent and child.

Jenn offered her perspective on the changes in the children's program:

*Of all the things that have changed in the community over the years, probably the children's program /is/ the very, most radical thing to have evolved from initially communal childraising, true communal childraising where the parents were often less involved than other caretakers with even very young- like babies which is such a radical notion for us now. And I know it went from true communal childraising to more cooperative childraising which included, where in that way the parents were making the decisions about children's lives.*

She discussed what the program had originally been like, when childcare was communal and the children were still sleeping in Degania, and then related to me the changes she has seen since she came to Twin Oaks over thirteen years ago:

*There would be one adult, the night meta, who would be sleeping in the- there was a night meta room and then there was the big back room with lots of beds for the kids and they would all be back there and it's really hard to picture now (laughing) how it all worked. By the time I joined the community it was more, there was, it was still doing the night meta and some parents had decided they didn't want to have their children spending the nights there, they wanted their children with them. Like Ronnie and Deb were about the first parents to really promote the family bed idea, having their kids sleep with them. And they did that, they had their kids in Harmony. Their kids are now thirteen and fourteen I think\*\*\*So that was, that was about thirteen, fourteen years ago that, twelve years ago that kids stopped sort of being required to spend the night at Degania. And some still did for some years and then at some point the parents, like then it became, oh it was only two nights a week that there would be a night meta at Degania and then it was almost more maybe like a babysitting service or something in a way like parents would have a night off. And then the, the meta shifts themselves that used to run, it used to be 24-hour care and then it became, no it wasn't, it wasn't evening care like six to nine that was "primaries" where individual non-parents were encouraged to develop relationships with kids and actually more credit was offered to spend that, those three hours with a kid than you could get other times of the day, just to try to encourage that. And, so then it sort of evolved that kids were spending less time at Degania and more time with parents and so that there was only meta shifts I think from noon to six p.m. and then maybe a shift at different times of the year from like maybe nine in the morning /to/ three. It became basically like a, in the last maybe five or six years it became like a six-hour-a-day childcare program, daycare program and that was when I was a meta and we would do three hour shifts and if there were more than three kids there we would have two adults on.*

*And during that time Emily was quite the person to revolutionize things too because her childraising belief, one part of it, is that her kids should have the freedom to make the choice about whether they want to be with her or be with the group\*\*\*As far as the meta program, it got down to one three-hour shift a day, near the end\*\*\*at this point the childcare scene is totally parent-led with parents doing the lion's share of childcare.*

Sherry, a mother of two young boys and a member of Twin Oaks for over eight years, also offered her views on the changes in the children's program. When she arrived at Twin Oaks, before she had her first child, parents had already begun keeping their children with them

more. The changes that have occurred since then have involved, as she sees it, "putting the power back in the hands of the mothers" where she thinks it should be. Before these changes, Sherry suggested to me, parenting was seen as more of a hobby than a profession. Now parents are given labor credits for each of their children which they can use toward making quota each week and/or give labor credits to other members to take care of their children, which, as Sherry sees it, puts the power in the hands of the people who have responsibility over them.

Currently group childcare does occur, but it is more informal and spontaneous. Sunny described the situation now as, "Childcare just sort of shifts. Like somebody will be with the kids in the morning and while the other parents work and do other things. And then somebody will hang out with the kids in the later part of the day and, you know, just kind of shifts throughout the day so that, you know, nobody has the kids all day."

### **Twin Oaks Families Versus the Nuclear Family**

Although families are beginning to look more and more like nuclear families in many ways—with children now living in residences with at least one parent—families at Twin Oaks remain very different from the nuclear family model of dominant US society. Some ways that Twin Oaks families differ from the nuclear family model were not apparent to me initially because I am not a parent myself. I observed that parents could bring their children to certain work-sites and that single mothers were certainly more supported than on the outside, but many children still seemed to have both parents living in the community. I conducted formal interviews with six Twin Oaks mothers with children currently in the community (there were seven mothers during my stay), one mother who no longer lives at Twin Oaks, and one Twin Oaks father who did not discuss parenting in-depth (there were six fathers with children in the community during my stay), as well as informal conversations and interactions with other fathers at Twin Oaks and other community members. Through these interviews and conversations, the ways that Twin Oaks families differ from the dominant US nuclear family model became clearer to me. The following themes arose as important differences: less isolation, economics, flexibility in organizing "family," work, control over decisions concerning children, and socialization of children—many of which are interrelated.

#### **Less Isolation**

Nuclear families in "the outside world," the dominant culture of the United States, are typically physically, socially, and economically isolated. In her book *Belonging In America*, Constance Perin discusses privacy as a central priority for American families. She suggests that Americans' preoccupation with privacy can be seen in the way families draw lines between themselves and other families in a neighborhood. Although expensive and economically impossible for many, most families want to maintain their privacy by living in single-family-detached houses. Perin writes: "Owning a single-family-detached house provides the very most privacy, something like 80 percent of American families believe" (1988:30). According to Perin, the building of fences, drawing of property lines, and strict maintenance of lawns are also enacted in order to protect family privacy (1988:31-34). In contrast, at Twin Oaks families live in residences with other adults and families, interact with other adults in everyday encounters as well as organized social situations, and share

resources—not to mention lawns—with around seventy other people.

Less isolation was an important difference between having a family at Twin Oaks and having a family in the outside world for many of the mothers I interviewed. Sherry's perspective on families on the outside was that they seem to be "on these little rafts." She said that in raising a family she had wanted the closeness and intimacy of a nuclear family but not "out on a raft by ourselves." Sherry emphasized that she thinks the nuclear family model for raising kids does not work because parents are so isolated and have more financial burdens. Other women described the isolation of families on the outside more implicitly. Emily, a mother of two, appreciates that her children's emotional needs are met by a variety of people, instead of solely by their parents. Sunny and Cam, both single mothers, talked about the support they get from other parents at Twin Oaks. Instead of privacy—and resulting isolation—Twin Oaks families seem to prioritize emotional and financial support.

## Economics

Unlike nuclear families in dominant US society, at Twin Oaks families do not function as economic units. The community supports the members of a family individually and, therefore, family members are not financially dependent on one other. This issue came up in the first gender discussion I held, an excerpt of which follows; the discussion also touches on social isolation:

*Tatiana: There's another thing that I was surprised, that was surprisingly pointed out to me by Ronnie when he and I talked about relationships at Twin Oaks and so I kind of want to share that. We talked about the fact that often at Twin Oaks, often relationships last shorter than in the rest of the world or in mainstream society and he said that his thought was that that was mostly because of economic reasons because here people don't have to stick together to make it work economically. And I thought that was really interesting and like it hadn't occurred to me that that would be the truth. And that really made me feel much better about that reality. 'Cause before I was sort of like, "Why does this happen /?/? What is it about our [lifestyle?]"*

*?: [/?/]*

*Tatiana: Yeah like what, what's wrong with our lifestyle that our relationships don't last? You know, whereas now I think, "Well that's great. People are not forced to stay together." So that's, you know, and I see that as something sort of gender related*

*?: Mmhm [[/so now/]]*

*Tatiana: [[because]] I find that economic reasons are often, and again especially for women, often the reason why people stay in a relationship that they might want to get out of.*

*Lilith: Yea! And if it's [abusive].*

*Sunny: [So now] there's not a piece of you that thinks, "What's wrong with our*

*lifestyle that [/?/]"*

*Tatiana: [Right! Or]] at least it's much smaller.*

*Lilith: I would add to that that there's, I mean, couples tend to be each other's world in terms of emotional support and social connectedness. You know, they might have friends as a couple or even individually but primarily they're focusing on each other and here our worlds are a lot bigger than that so if you don't need each other and have that whole dependency thing going on it's a lot easier to split up.*

*Mark: Am I allowed to say something?*

*Catherine: Yeah. Sure.*

*Mark: Or /I mean/*

*Catherine: Yeah /kind of/ take this moment to appreciate our three initial get 'em going conversationalists up here.*

*: (Yea's and clapping)*

*Tatiana: So are we released from our*

*Catherine: You can stay here and*

*Tatiana: Right*

*Catherine: sort of /?/ help me keep it rolling.*

*Lilith: Oh no! We have [to stay!]*

*?: [/Anybody/] should jump in?*

*Catherine: Yeah. In an orderly, you know, [/?/ way]]*

*Mark: [[I just um]] I know I like I talked to Danny Smith a little bit before he left and this might be a little bit of flip-side of that coin or something I don't know. And he was saying that yeah it's true here that people, couples break up. It's easy for couples to break up. You can parent your child and still, you know, and have the other person still be here and there's not all the economic problems and everything like that. And they were, and he was saying that's part of the reason they were leaving because it is too easy to break up here and they didn't want to break up and so they went back into the outside world because it is much harder to break up in the outside world. And maybe sometimes that's a good thing. Sometimes it's a bad thing, and maybe sometimes it's a good thing. And so that's just, you know, a part of that whole scenario.*

*Lilith?: What do you think is good about it?*

*Mark: I think that maybe it's good that, or maybe it's a problem if it's too easy for people to leave each other and that, you know, I think there's often times when it can be a good thing, you know. I think that it might be a positive thing sometimes when in the outside world people are pushed to stay together and not see such easy alternatives like, "Oh well we can just, you know, drift apart and it's not a big deal," you know. And that was just kind of shown to me by, pretty much as like exactly what Danny said to me. He just was like, "Well yeah Gloria and I could just stay here and we probably /would just/ stay here and break up and it would be so easy to do that but like we don't want to break up so we're going to a culture where it's harder to break up."*

In an interview, Sunny also talked about financial pressures keeping families together on the outside; she similarly wondered if maybe this economic bond did not have some positive effects. She said, "It's super hard on families here. It's really hard." When I asked her to explain, Sunny responded:

*Relationships in general are hard. Relationships take like an extreme amount of work and time and energy and selflessness and those things are like in short supply. People don't really want to work that hard. And people don't want to be really, be that like selfless. And on the outside world you have this incentive /to/ at least do some of the work or at least be selfless some of the time in order to stay together because you have such a financial dependency. You've created your whole world around each other, buying property together, cars, you know, all of your rent and houses and just your whole life is so much structured around one another and kids. Whereas here, you know, you don't have any of those things really. You don't have, the financial security factor is gone. You can separate here and there's just no ramifications like that. And the social stuff, it's like well, you know, you can all still be part of the community, you can both still be part of the community and not have serious ramifications. I mean, that's not always the case.*

Other women contrasted their own situations positively with the outside world. Emily also brought up that unlike on the outside, Twin Oaks couples have the opportunity to break up and still raise their children together and, therefore, do not stay together because of money. Sherry talked about how so many of her female college friends started families with their husbands but have since divorced and are now struggling financially to raise children on their own.

## Flexibility in Organizing Family

Twin Oakers have the flexibility to organize and define "family" in any number of ways. Some parents choose to CO-parent and equally work at other jobs; others choose to have one parent do the majority of childcare; and single mothers, as well as other types of families, find greater flexibility than on the outside in their ability to organize their work around their children.

Many couples at Twin Oaks, for example, break up and continue to CO-parent their children

together in the community, something nearly impossible to do in the outside world. Although she was the primary caregiver of her children when they were very young, Sherry and her husband (the father of her second child), and her ex-husband (the father of her first child, who also lives at Twin Oaks), all share childcare responsibilities. Wes and his ex-wife have been broken up for almost all of their daughter's twelve years, but have both lived in intentional communities—first East Wind and now Twin Oaks—with her in order to share parenting responsibilities. There are many other examples of such flexible family arrangements at Twin Oaks.

Families with parents who are still together also experience flexibility in their organization. Jenn and her partner are "CO-parenting" their two-year old son; they both do childcare part-time and other types of labor part-time. Emily exercises the flexibility to define and organize her family as what she calls a more "traditional" family: she does the majority of childcare for her and her partner's two children.

Single mothers find themselves more supported at Twin Oaks than on the outside. Although Sunny's ideal remains the nuclear family, she admits Twin Oaks is the "place to be" for single parents. Cam also talked about not "feeling like" a single parent at Twin Oaks.

Another example that members articulated was that fathers at Twin Oaks play important roles in their children's lives. In an interview, Jenn told me that unlike her father who worked over fifty hours a week, and therefore did not spend much time with her, Jenn's partner spends more time with their child. I similarly observed many fathers taking active roles in their children's lives.

Non-parents can also be a part of families at Twin Oaks. During my stay I heard several non-parent members talk about wanting to live at Twin Oaks because they were looking for an "alternative to the nuclear family." The "primary time" that Jenn mentioned in her description of the former organized children's program was several hours every night when non-parent members were encouraged to spend time with community children. Although primary time no longer exists in a formal way, it has evolved to describe a relationship between an adult and a child that usually involves some degree of regular childcare. For example, a non-parent can "primary" a child once a week or several times a week. Some non-parent primaries also act as secondary caregivers to children.

There are also ways that families are restricted at Twin Oaks. Pregnancies and adoptions must be approved by the community through a process of application. The community also has a policy regarding the maximum ratio of children to adults that states that when there is a ratio of one child to every five adults living in the community, no more incoming families will be accepted until either a child/children leave or the adult population rises. During my stay at Twin Oaks, the community was not accepting any families as new members. Several members mentioned to me that this policy frequently keeps single women with children from becoming members.

## Balancing Work & Childcare

Many mothers emphasized the importance of being able to balance work and childcare at Twin Oaks, a very difficult arrangement in dominant US society. At Twin Oaks, parenting is

labor creditable, some work sites are child-friendly, and members support each other in terms of childcare in the community. I often observed Ned weaving hammocks on an outdoor hammock jig while his two-year old son Sasha played with toys close by. Cam told me that Tatiana, who schedules tofu processing and packaging shifts, frequently watches her daughter so that Cam can work in the tofu hut. Other members have similar arrangements.

Sherry told me a primary reason for her wanting to live in community was her concern over, "How can I make a living and have children and make it be good for my kids?" Her impression on the outside was that many children don't get enough attention when their parents work full-time. How to keep a job, have a home life, have a child, and not go crazy had been a "severe issue" for her, as it had been for her parents. Sherry

related to me that her mother had been forced to work when she really had not wanted to, due to her father's poor health, and it had put a lot of pressure on their home life. And even today, she said, mothers on the outside have to struggle to "make it work." Such a balance of work and childcare is possible at Twin Oaks. Additionally, unlike on the outside where one of her friends was fired after her employer found out she was pregnant, Sherry was a fully contributing member of Twin Oaks when she was pregnant with her sons. She also talked about not having to worry about nursing her child in public or on the job at Twin Oaks, whereas on the outside she might have had to take her child into a public restroom to nurse. Sherry said that Twin Oaks has given her the power to be with her kids and be the kind of mother that she wants to be; she is able to devote time both to childcare and work. Of course, both are considered work at Twin Oaks.

Jenn also spoke about balancing work and childcare in our interview:

*I think even more than knowing I can get some labor credits for taking care of my kid is knowing that the overall work scene at Twin Oaks is such that both my partner and I can be part-timers on the system outside of the childcare work we do and still get full benefits in the community because I- that seems to be that crux of the problem for most of the two-parent households of friends of mine out there is that, you know, that they both would like to spend, like they both would like to spend a medium amount of time with their kid. Neither of them wants to be full-time mom or dad and neither of them wants to be full-time working mom or dad who gets to see the kid at night and on weekends. And yet the way so much of our societal work scenes are set up is that unless you work full-time at a job you don't get like health benefits and things which are, you know, especially when you have a kid are just really important and so I just love that Ned can, Ned has Sasha every morning and I have him every afternoon. And various people, you know, pop in here and there for an hour or so to take care of him but I just really feel like if we were to break down hour by hour care for an average week for us, that you would come out pretty even, you know, how much time we each spend with him and obviously that's glorious. I mean that is like my ultimate dream of parenting, my true like CO-parenting, equality fantasy (laughing), you know.*

## Less Control

With the increased support and flexibility of being a family at Twin Oaks comes the necessity of parents relinquishing some control over their children. Perin describes the

existence of what she calls "this family law" in dominant US society—"each family constituting its very own customs and norms, unique meanings and codes for conduct through which fault is found, blame assessed, and punishment meted out"—which allows families informal control over themselves within larger communities (1988:34). According to Perin, "this family law" is so strong that the influence of national or local community cultures take second place to an individual family's culture. Additionally, "Americans respect every other family's law as they want their own to be" (Perin 1988:34). A parent does not discipline another family's child, for instance.

Gloria, whose family—a husband and three sons—was, she said, the "nuclear family" straight out of suburbia, provides a unique perspective on the contrast between dominant US nuclear families and Twin Oaks families in terms of control over one's own family:

*I think when we came to Twin Oaks it was very different because we were the nuclear family and Twin Oaks did not believe, I mean the Walden II did not believe in the nuclear family (laughing), you know. So us coming in, it was like we were the token nuclear family. There are a few here but we just came from the outside world, fresh from the suburbs (laughing), you know. It's like oh here we are bringing in the white bread (laughing) family or whatever. And it didn't work.*

They ended up leaving after a year at Twin Oaks, primarily because of this loss of control:

*Coming here our jobs were at different times and the kids were being pulled by other children in different areas or /in/ different activities that were going on so I couldn't keep the home-schooling schedule. And a lot of it was because I was busy doing work but a lot was also the pull of wanting, of the children wanting to be somewhere else in the community.*

Additionally, if she asked her sons not to do something, they might insist that someone else had said they could. Gloria exasperatedly related to me her reaction to one such situation: "But I'm your mother!" While they had wanted to keep the nuclear family within Twin Oaks, Gloria felt instead they were "scattered here as a family." After less than a year at Twin Oaks, Gloria and her family left the community in order to regain the closeness that they had felt as a family before coming to Twin Oaks.

Other mothers provided different perspectives on the loss of control necessary for maintaining family in community, often in terms of maintaining certain values. In an interview, Jenn offered her views:

*Another benefit of the group care, the meta program, was that parents and other caregivers would be dialoguing almost weekly about what's going on with the kids and, you know, what do we want to be. Teaching them and what are our rules and norms that we're trying to uphold. I think that just comes with parents having more control, is parents will also have more freedom to bring in whatever influences they feel comfortable with that other parents may not feel /comfortable with/.*

She specifically talked about how the community formerly had more agreed-upon standards for nonviolent toys. Emily, a mother of two, also discussed how her values are not always

shared by other parents, especially in terms of access to computer games and videos. Cam, whom I mentioned earlier in this chapter as a single mother, like Gloria, discussed sometimes feeling uncomfortable when other members intervene in her parenting. At Twin Oaks, unlike in dominant US society, "this family law" has much less influence than the culture of the larger community.

## Socialization

While Twin Oaks no longer tries to socialize children formally in terms of the community's egalitarian values, many parents said that raising children in the community does provide important socialization for their children by providing a variety of adult role models, unlike the nuclear family, which provides only two. Jenn, commenting here on her views concerning the editing of the children's books, gives her perspective on female role models for her son:

*I think for the most part that that was a good thing, and now myself having a two year old who's not going through that program but who, we still have those books and I still have a pile of them in my room for him to read. I mean, my partner and I just laugh at them sometimes but other times I just feel really glad that, you know, my son is being exposed to models that are not just all about strong little boys, you know, going out in the world and doing adventures and, you know. Like his favorite book is Deborah's Tricycle. And it used, and this was, it was some little boy /and/ I don't know what the name was but it was whited out and Deborah's name was put over whoever the boy's name was. And it's just really interesting because this little child, this girl, now, goes around with her tricycle and she just learned to ride her tricycle and she is like riding in the street alongside a big fire engine and it's, "Deborah likes to pretend she's driving a big fire engine." And then she's going along the beach and by these big ships, "Deborah likes to pretend she's sailing a big ship," and, you know, I see that even for myself with all the, the ways in which I've been exposed to feminism and aware of, you know, gender inequities that I still can carry that stuff of like, "Oh but women, maybe there'd be a woman firefighter but she wouldn't be the one driving the truck," like I have these messages in my head so it's really great for me to, to be challenging those and I see with my child that, you know, that he's not a girl so I thought I wouldn't feel so strongly like I need to give him role models of strong girls but I see how it's just as important for him as a boy to see that. And like one of his very favorite people, Callie, she works on the forestry crew and he watched her this winter a lot because she- the forestry station was right by our building and he'd wake up from his nap, he could hear the tractor, we'd look out the window as he was waking up and there would be Callie driving a tractor. So he now calls one of the two tractors "Callie's tractor." And it's just so great, I just love that, you know, and it's so different from my own upbringing and that of anyone in my generation.*

In interviews, Emily, Gloria and Cam offered similar perspectives on the importance of children having diverse role models. Lilith believes it is important for her daughter to see her in many roles, not just as her mother, and Jenn mentioned the significance of her son seeing her in "active" situations and, therefore, not being limited to models of mothers "baking cookies or whatever."

Many of the ways families at Twin Oaks differ from those in dominant US society have gendered implications. The fact that families do not usually function as economic units at Twin Oaks seems to specifically benefit women in many ways. In dominant US society, women are traditionally paid less and often find themselves solely responsible for their children, while at Twin Oaks, men and women have equal work opportunities and the community supports children.

Mostly what I can say here is about women as I did not really speak with fathers about parenting. I also did not interview any of the community's children, due to ethical considerations and time constraints. A study focused on the community's children would be interesting, and this is also an area that community members have identified as an important area for future research; during my stay at Twin Oaks, many members suggested that I interview children.

Twin Oaks families are certainly beginning to look more and more like nuclear families with the general move from communal to parent-led childcare in the community. Like families in the outside world, individual parents are making decisions regarding their children. There are also many traditional family arrangements at Twin Oaks, something members account for as a choice, although there are attempts to bend gender roles in certain ways. In addition, in the outside world as well as at Twin Oaks, there are a range of definitions of family and family arrangements.

## **Chapter V: Fluid Identities: Gender Roles and Sexuality**

At Twin Oaks, gender roles and sexual identities are less fixed than in the dominant culture of the United States. In previous chapters I have described women's experiences with gender roles at Twin Oaks in terms of their options for doing nontraditional work and sharing childcare responsibilities with their partners and/or other community members. I will further discuss women's gender roles in this chapter in terms of standards of physical appearance for women, although a great deal of the chapter will focus on men's experiences with gender roles, an issue I have not yet addressed in depth, as well as women's and men's sexual identities at Twin Oaks.

Specifically problematizing the category "Third-world woman" in the US, Trinh T. Minh-ha writes in her essay "Infinite Layers/Third World?":

Whether I accept it or not, the natures of I, i, you, s/he, We, we, they, and wom/man constantly overlap. They all display a necessary ambivalence, for the line dividing I and Not-I, us and them, or him and her is not (cannot) always (be) as clear as we would like it to be. Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak (1999:544).

In the dominant culture of the US, although the constant overlap and "necessary ambivalence" of such categories exist, the boundaries between "woman" and "man" and "homosexual" and "heterosexual" are distinctly maintained in what Trinh describes as "our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend" categories. Janet M. Bing and Victoria L. Bergvall specifically critique the maintenance of the binary categories "women" and "men" in dominant US society in their article "The Question of Questions: Beyond

Binary Thinking"; they suggest that gender should instead be understood as a "continuum with indistinct boundaries" (1996:1). In this chapter I will attempt to illustrate how definitions of gender and sexuality at Twin Oaks are, in many ways, more fluid than in dominant US society. Both men and women at Twin Oaks described to me informally, formally in interviews, and also at the gender discussions I held, the increased flexibility that exists for being "feminine" and "masculine" at Twin Oaks, as well as the community's acceptance of a range of sexual identities.

## **Gender Roles**

In addition to being free of the work and family gender roles traditional in "the outside world," many women also emphasized Twin Oaks' alternative standards of beauty for women; men too experienced altered standards of masculine physical appearance on entering Twin Oaks. Both men and women experiment with stereotypical markers of male and female appearance. Most women at Twin Oaks do not wear bras, and some do not wear shirts in certain areas of the community; additionally, Twin Oaks women rarely use make-up or shave. Gloria told me in an interview that unlike on the outside, at Twin Oaks there is less pressure to "look beautiful and feminine" and be judged on appearance. Similarly, Lilith contrasted standards of physical appearance for women at Twin Oaks with those on the outside in the first gender discussion. Lilith said that when she looks at herself in mirrors outside the community she feels less attractive as she notices her "faults and imperfections whereas when I look in a mirror here it's just, 'Oh there's me,' you know, and I feel so much more accepting, so I think that there's something weird about the mirrors out there." Parallel to this, men at Twin Oaks often wear skirts, dresses, and fingernail and toenail polish.

Members generally characterized masculinity at Twin Oaks as more flexible than on the outside. In an interview, when I asked Frank if he saw any differences between masculinity at Twin Oaks and in the outside world, he told me:

*What's allowed for males here is much more flexible than it is on the outside. In fact, now that you bring it up, that's really true. I would say that, that Twin Oaks allows more variation on the theme of what masculinity is than on the outside even in those pockets that are more liberal. You know, we have men wearing skirts and they decide. And I'm not attracted to that personally, but it just, it's certainly allowed here and so males in that way I think fare better than on the outside.*

Elaborating on this theme of flexibility, Sam, a member of over three years, provided an interesting perspective on masculinity and gender roles in general at Twin Oaks in an interview:

*Sam: I think we're more balanced people as a result of, you know, men can be more emotional or expressive and women can be more what would be considered butch or, you know, physical or whatever than in the outside world. And I think we end up being more balanced people.\*\*\* I had four younger sisters. I was raised in a household full of women. Most of my friends in high school were women, you know, and so I was constantly under this, you know, "He's a queer," sort of thing. It's like, "No man, give me a break." Just because of my behavior*

Ashley: Mmm.

Sam: just my mannerisms, my whatever and I came here and several of the people said, you know, /?/ thought I was gay. And I thought half the men here were gay but it's just because they did, they're just, they're just not

Ashley: What's the- What is it?

Sam: I don't know it's just they're not stereotypical men, you know, and

Ashley: What's that? Like what's a, what's the stereotype?

Sam: What's the stereotype? Oh I don't know just a little gentler in their actions. Maybe a little more expressive as opposed to just very stoic and strong /?/ and manly. A bit more open. And that was refreshing because most of my life, like I said, I've been in a working-class situation. Most of my adult life I've had a full beard (he does not now), partly because I just felt, it's like I wanted to look a little rougher. I mean some bars that I /would/ go in I just, I just wouldn't've thought of going. I would've felt uncomfortable going if I were clean-shaven. And even my ex-wife. My ex-wife once told me this. When I worked at this bakery I had a beard and I had to wear a beard net and I hated it so I shaved my face. And she told me, she said, "You look like a queer without your beard." And she said, "You have a prettier face than I do," you know is the way she- and then /?/ it's like, "Yeah well." But so yeah and I've, I've probably been clean-shaven for the longest period of time since my early twenties since I've been here. I mean I would, I would sporadically shave but I always let it grow back. /And/ part of that too is that my beard is getting gray.

Ashley: (laughs)

Sam: Yeah it's, it's better. And I've felt more comfortable /?/ here.

Ashley: Are there other ways like masculinity here is different?

Sam: /Yeah/ guys aren't, the men aren't as homophobic about, I like that we can tackle each other and, you know, there's a lot of just affectionate horseplay.

Ashley: Mmhm.

Sam: (laughing) Hugging, kissing, whatever. And it, and it's all right. Before in the outside world that's just very, very frowned upon especially, you know, where I came, very close-minded. I remember this one guy that I had been friends with was telling me about a man picking him up hitchhiking and putting his (the driver's) hand on his (the hitchhiker's) leg and that he actually stabbed him and he ended up, he actually stabbed his own leg to get this guy's hand\*\*\*that's how strongly HE felt about it, you know. And yeah. So, I mean there was a few gays in the area that, that I was on friendly terms with. But they weren't very out and open to most people. That just wasn't the norm.

\*\*\*

*Sam: And I think the women, I like seeing more women do physical, strong physical work.*

*Ashley: Mmhm.*

*Sam: I like seeing that. But then that's, I think that's probably more different for middle-class than it is for working-class people.*

*Ashley: Hmm. [That's interesting. Yeah.]*

*Sam: [/?/ I've seen, you know] a lot of working-class women have busted their butts, you know. It's like this is the way it has to be, you know. "I work on a, I'll fix the car because I'm a single working /?/ and I don't have the money to take it into a garage," you know, sort of thinking. As opposed to a middle, you know, /?/ a middle-class woman would like be, "Well I'll take it and let them fix it," sort of thing.*

Both Frank and Sam acknowledge the binaries that exist between the categories "female" and "male" and "homosexual" and "heterosexual" in dominant US society and describe how, in contrast, Twin Oakers construct these experiences on more of a fluid continuum like that described by Bing and Bergvall (1996). Frank implies the contained category of masculinity on the outside when he states that more variation on the theme of masculinity is "allowed" than on the outside. In contrast, Frank perceives that there is "more variation on what the theme of masculinity is" at Twin Oaks. Similarly, Sam's statements that men "can be" more emotional and expressive, and women "can be" more physical at Twin Oaks implies his understanding of the binary categories of gender constructions in dominant US culture. He suggests that at Twin Oaks the categories allow more overlap in terms of behavioral expectations than in the outside world; individuals can be more of a "balance" of what have traditionally been considered feminine and masculine characteristics in the US.

In the first gender discussion, Gabe, a member of about a year who lived in another community for several years before joining Twin Oaks, also talked about the greater flexibility of masculinity, specifically in terms of seeking out emotional support as a man and not having to perform masculinity. He moves from a discussion of gender roles to sexuality in the following excerpt, demonstrating the fluidity of the concepts in the community.

*Gabe: I generally don't make friends easily but I reached out to the community in a very public way. I wrote like lengthy papers that explained about what was going on with me emotionally and said I need help here. I need support. And I got that really well and started making some friendships as a result of that and have, you know, gone on to support some other people through some hard times. It has been a source of some frustration to me that, both at Acorn and here, that I have not made close male friends and that my close male friends, I only have a few, are like far away from me. And I've, you know, been involved with the men's group here and that's been a source of good support and the poly group and my SLG. You know, there've been, you know, like group settings that I've been a part of that have been support, a source of emotional support, but I had to seek out each one of them. They didn't, you know, they*

*didn't like, you know, jump into my lap and say, "Here you are," and so I guess that doing that is somewhat contradicting a male pattern of isolating ourselves, myself, emotionally. It was, I felt like it was something I needed to do but I don't know, I mean, I don't think. I don't, I don't know how it would be for a woman coming here in this similar situation, if they would have to organize as much support as or if it would kind of coalesce around them more organically or not. It's an interesting question but I felt like I, you know, it was really important to me to undergo the process that I did and so I did go about organizing my support in a very, I wouldn't say methodical way, but focused way. I did it as a guy (laughs).*

*Lilith: All right!*

*Gabe: While we're on gender issues I'm wearing a dress or a skirt here. And the other day Tabby asked me to go help her pick up a car from the truck stop (laughs)*

*: (laughter)*

*Gabe: And, you know, like the car was broken down and, you know, I knew I could get it going so I hopped in the car, ran out to the truck stop. We got there and I got out of the car and it was like, "I'm wearing a skirt!"*

*: (lots of laughter)*

*Lilith: All right! /You get/ any weird looks?*

*Gabe: "So let's get going quickly." And I'm remembering back to being a kid and that when I was growing up the worst insult that you that you could be called in my suburban, you know, hometown was a fag or a faggot. And*

*Lilith: /?/ not a girl?*

*Gabe: I didn't, I heard that word well long before I knew what it had any reference to. I just knew that was the worst thing that you could be called.*

*?: Mhm.*

*Gabe: And around here if somebody, if there was, you know, a male homosexual I mean they wouldn't be looked down at all here. I mean it would be like, "Oh well we don't have enough of you guys around, you know, like come make yourself at home," you know. You know, "Hopefully we can find you some more playmates or something," you know, and it's kinda like that. And I don't feel like because I'm wearing a skirt or if I be real involved in parenting or something like that then anybody's going to make any assumptions about anything having to do with my sexuality or machoness or anything. And it's just so, so different, you know, if I were to walk, you know, a hundred feet beyond the gates here (laughs).*

*Lilith: Mmm.*

*Gabe: So yeah I think that is something that's very powerful and, and right now as I am a parent to two young boys I'm trying to explain to them what it means to be male. And the messages that they get from me and to some degree from the community are very different than the messages that they get in public school or they get from toys, media, even second-hand media stuff and I feel like they're very affected. And that's why I wanted to bring Kelly, I really wanted to bring Kelly to this thing 'cause I want, you know, even if he's like only catching bits and words and pieces of this, is that I just feel like it's a real important part of him becoming a nonsexist human being, you know, to hear people discussing about gender roles and, but yeah.*

*Tatiana?: Yea.*

*Gabe: Yea. /?/*

Gabe's transition from discussing masculinity to the acceptance of homosexuality at Twin Oaks is significant as gender and sexuality are tremendously interconnected, especially in terms of performing gender and sexual identities in the outside world. In his essay "Gender Treachery: Homophobia, Masculinity, and Threatened Identities," Patrick D. Hopkins suggests that "[o]ne way to read homophobia and heterosexism in men is in terms of homosexuality's threat to masculinity, which in light of the connection between gender and personal identity translates into a threat to what constitutes a man's sense of self" (1996:97). As Gabe points out—and to some extent Sam does too—on the outside, masculinity is defined in opposition to being a male homosexual.

Both Sam and Gabe discuss not having to perform masculinity in the same way at Twin Oaks, as on the outside. In discussing the relationship between "performing masculinity" and affirming one's heterosexuality, Hopkins writes: "What arises in looking at heterosexism/homophobia is that being a man, or continuing to be a man, is the outcome of performing masculinity" (1996:108). According to Hopkins, "[m]asculinity assumes, essentializes, naturalizes, and privileges heterosexuality. A violation of heterosexuality can be seen as treachery against masculinity, which can register as an affront or threat to a man's core sense of self, a threat to his (male) identity" (1996). In this way, in order to appear more masculine in the outside world, Sam altered his appearance to look "rougher" and less "like a queer." Gabe similarly associates maintaining "machoness" on the outside with not bringing into question his heterosexuality; for instance, on the outside his masculinity—and sexuality—might be questioned if he wore a skirt or took care of children. In contrast, the category of masculinity at Twin Oaks is more fluid and does not require the constant maintenance of a heterosexual identity. Unlike in the outside world, Sam shaves his beard, and Gabe wears skirts and takes care of children at Twin Oaks.

Although in many ways the contrasts these members make between gender roles at Twin Oaks and gender roles in dominant US culture suggest that those at Twin Oaks are much more fluid and flexible than in the outside world, I want to point out here that they reinforce the gender binary in other ways. Both Sam and Gabe accept the dichotomization of the categories "femininity" and "masculinity." Sam suggests that there is something essentially "masculine" and "feminine" when he states that at Twin Oaks men can be more "feminine" and women more "masculine." Similarly, Gabe mentions not having his "machoness"

questioned when he wears skirts and takes care of children.

While these members described the flexibility of masculinity at Twin Oaks, the construction of masculinity appears to be legislated in many ways in the community. The community actually seems to dictate a single construction of masculinity—what Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Michael A. Messner call "the new man" (1994), a sensitive, emotionally expressive, nurturant version of masculinity—rather than allowing for the emergence of multiple constructions of masculinity. Frank, Sam, and Gabe discussed how as men at Twin Oaks, unlike in the outside world, they could wear skirts, be emotionally open, and take care of children, but the gender category is not so flexible at Twin Oaks that it allows for what members referred to as "macho" behavior, for instance. Gloria suggested to me in an interview that Twin Oaks is "more accepting of the feminine side of people." She said that her husband had felt that at Twin Oaks "you couldn't show your masculine side," for instance in aggressive physical behavior like competitive sports.

Members also reinscribe stereotypes of homosexuality. Sam and Gabe's comments reveal the maintenance of associations of homosexuality with appearance when they talk about appearing gay to others due to mannerisms and wearing skirts. Additionally, they continue to define themselves as "men" in opposition to homosexual men. Gabe states that when he participates in childcare and wears skirts at Twin Oaks, he knows that no one will question his "machoness" or sexuality, and Sam similarly defines the flexibility of masculinity at Twin Oaks as not being assumed to be homosexual at Twin Oaks.

## Sexuality

Immediately after Gabe finished talking about teaching his sons what it means to be a man, Catherine went back to discussing the issue of sexuality at Twin Oaks. I pick the conversation back up at this point:

*Catherine: I just want to pick up on, /taking/ my hat off again on one of the comments that you said about being homosexual. I got here in time to meet Lu and got into a five-year lesbian relationship and I was astounded at how, not only tolerated I was and we were but supported and nurtured and, you know, just really cradled in our whole relationship by just about everybody just about all the time. It was just incredible, so I mean and it was real clear that when we went out that it's not that way anywhere else so [[/it makes it /?/ other lesbians]]*

*Gabe: [[Almost, almost anywhere else]].*

*Catherine: other lesbians so it was a real /?/ experience. And I think it is, /you know/, we are very accommodating and supportive of gays and lesbians getting what they need, you know. We get special publications and blah blah blah blah. So it's, it's nice.*

*?: Yea.*

Along these lines, Callie said to me in an interview: "Sexual identity is irrelevant here." Being gay, lesbian, or bisexual at Twin Oaks, as suggested in the excerpts above, is completely acceptable and even embraced by the community as a whole. Additionally,

members need not adhere to the categories of "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," "heterosexual"; some members do not overtly identify as homosexual or heterosexual. Several women have been involved with both men and women during their memberships at Twin Oaks, sometimes identifying as "lesbian" or "heterosexual" and changing those identifications, and often simply identifying specific relationships as "lesbian" or "heterosexual." One woman who self-identified as a lesbian when she first came to Twin Oaks has been in relationships with men ever since, and another woman has been involved with both men and women during her stay in the community. Another woman, who was involved in heterosexual relationships during my stay in the community, was suggested to me by another member as a potential interviewee, someone with a unique perspective on gender and sexuality because she "sleeps with women sometimes." As I understand it, none of these women identified as "bisexual." The fluidity of sexual identities seemed to be less important, or perhaps more threatening, to men at Twin Oaks. During my stay, one man identified as "homosexual," another as "bisexual," and to my knowledge most other men identified as heterosexual. Many members spoke about how, unlike the current situation, there was a considerable lesbian population at Twin Oaks throughout the 1980's; a long-term member approximated that at one point, out of around forty female members, ten of them were lesbians. She also told me that Twin Oaks never seemed to have more than one or two self-identified gay male members living in the community at a time.

In addition to the community supporting gays and lesbians and fluid sexual identities, Twin Oaks is also accepting of alternative relationship models. Quite a few members practice "polyamory," which is, most basically, open relationships. Several Twin Oaks members self-identify as "polyamorous," and many others experiment with this alternative relationship model without specifically identifying with the label.

According to a short booklet, titled "With Open Hands: A Handbook on Open Relationships," that a polyamorous community member put together and distributes both in and outside of Twin Oaks, an open relationship is :

[W]hen two lovers do not limit each other in having other lovers. There are many other words used to describe this (i.e. multiple relations, non-monogamy, polyfidelity, omnigamy). I chose "open relationship" here because it sounds nicer and you can have an open relationship with just two, providing you are open for more – so in a way it is a step before these other names. The other way of defining an open relationship is by what it is not. A closed relationship (a monogamous agreement) means at the very least, neither of the lovers will have other sex partners. Often in monogamy there are more restrictions on new intimacy. Having "affairs" or secret lovers is NOT open relationships (1995:3).

The booklet states that open relationships challenge one's socialization into the dominant practice of monogamy and provide an alternative way of thinking about relationships. Rather than viewing relationships as "a possessive contract which implies love is scarce," the fundamental "philosophy" behind open relationships is that, "[i]t is unlikely that any single person will fill all our needs/desires. If more than one intimate will be filling these needs and desires, it makes some sense to judge the rightness of sex for these relationships independently from other relationships" ("With Open Hands" 1995:35).

These non-monogamous relationships are accepted and recognized by the community as a whole. During my stay, a group of polyamorous members held a dinner on Thursday evenings for those practicing polyamory, involved with someone who is

polyamorous, or interested in polyamory in any way; the dinner group acts as a kind of support group for those who regularly attend. At the invitation of the group's members. I attended several of these dinners. Community members generally accounted for a resurgence of polyamory in the community in the past couple of years, but according to several long-term members I talked to, the practice of open relationships has been present at Twin Oaks pretty much since the community's beginnings, waxing and waning in popularity and practice at different times over the years.

In this chapter, I have described how members perceive gender roles and sexuality to be alternative to those of dominant US society, as well as how I see these constructions as both alternative to and embedded in dominant US gender constructions. Gendered standards of physical appearance and behavioral norms, as well as the acceptance and support for homosexual relationships, all arose as important differences between the construction of these identities at Twin Oaks and in the outside world. But several members' accounts of how masculinity is more flexible at Twin Oaks than in the outside world reflect how the gender binary, as well as stereotypes of homosexuality, are reinforced in the community. In the following chapter, I look at other ways that gender constructions at Twin Oaks remain embedded in the outside world.

## **Chapter VI: The Outside World**

All of Twin Oaks' members come to the community from an "outside world" context. Most members are from the United States—although several are from Canada and Europe—and almost all Twin Oakers are from "white", middle-class backgrounds. As I am considering gender as it intersects with race, class, and sexuality, in this chapter I will address how the outside world positioning of Twin Oaks' members influences the community's alternative constructions of gender. Some of the ways Twin Oaks' gender constructions remain embedded in the dominant US society were initially difficult for me to see as I too am from a "white", middle-class background. Articulating the unmarked, privileged positions of "whiteness," middle-class situation, and heterosexuality working in the context of Twin Oaks, as well as in the outside world, has been a challenging process for me. To contextualize the individual topical discussions of the last four chapters, in this chapter I analyze the ways the constructions of gender at Twin Oaks are ideologically influenced by, and socially embedded in, the dominant US culture.

### **Twin Oaks and The Outside World**

It was easiest for me to perceive the general ways that Twin Oaks has, over the years, become more and more integrated into what community members call "the outside world." Unlike during the community's modest beginnings in the late 1960s, Twin Oaks currently subscribes to numerous outside world magazines, has numerous community computers hooked up to the Internet, and appoints a "video manager" to rent movies for the community on weekends. Twin Oaks' survival as a community is in part due to its financial success in

the outside world capitalist economy where the hammocks members weave are bought and then sold by Pier 1 Imports. Additionally, since the community has enjoyed financial success, it has added a number of automobiles to its fleet and allots a higher monthly allowance to each member; this enables Twin Oakers to drive to Louisa or Charlottesville, Virginia, if they choose, for business, personal errands, ice-cream, movies, shopping, and other activities. This is much more contact with the outside world than early members had.

In the first gender discussion, Nate, concluding the conversation about "men's movie night," addressed the changing role of the community in negotiating relationships between Twin Oaks and the outside world and how this role has changed in some ways over the years (Nate has been a member for over twenty):

*It seems to me that it's an inherent aspect of being, as we say, a diverse community and we value that and at the same time it creates problems that we don't all agree on a fair number of things...completely. I mean if we insisted that everybody agreed completely on a lot of different approaches to life we'd be a much smaller community because /it'd/ be a very small number of people who could, who could actually agree on that and at the same time we do have some agreement on what we want and it's a matter of how we, how we manifest that. I could offer a perspective that when I came here there was no video. We said no television and at the time ...there wasn't video to speak of. And then video came in and people said, "Oh well we won't have television but we'll have video. Only one night a week. Just, just, you know, one night a week won't be a big deal." And, you know, it came in like that and it just expanded since then to a fair degree and people wanted it. And it's true that we're telling people what to do and it's true that we tell people what to do and what they can't do in lots of ways. And if we don't then we end up with mainstream culture 'cause that's where everybody comes from and that's where what they want comes from and if we're going to change that and maintain any kind of change of that I don't think we're going to be able to manage it without rules. If we give people the choice of whether to income share or not we wouldn't have income sharing. And if we give people the choice of whether they can watch television in their rooms we'll have television. And choose anything else that has to do that, you know, is a strong mainstream value and if we give the people the choice of whether to do that or not we won't have that because while in the short run an individual joins the community, in the long run we join the people who are joining the community because over a period of years that's who the community is. And I don't think, I don't agree that we should not limit people. I think that if we're going to maintain anything other than just a collection who randomly showed up we have to limit people.*

As this quote illustrates, individual members now have more choices concerning what outside world practices they bring into the community (for instance more outside world media is now allowed at Twin Oaks), but formal community policies maintain the boundaries between Twin Oaks and the outside world in certain ways.

While there is still, as when the community began, a policy against live television at Twin Oaks, video policies, as Nate brought up, have become more and more liberalized over the past couple of years. Several years ago Twin Oaks began showing taped television programs and films—all collectively approved by the community—in the Bijou, a public venue in the

community, once a week. While formerly there was a policy against members keeping televisions in their own rooms, a couple of years ago this policy also changed; whether or not an individual can have a private television is now a decision made individually by SLGs, and several currently allow private TVs and VCRs for watching videos. Additionally, the community set up a room in Degania as a private video-viewing area but limited its use, although it fairly quickly became available for video-watching twenty-four hours a day.

Twin Oakers also have more direct contact with the outside world than they did in the community's beginnings. For years Twin Oaks children attended Oakley School, a private cooperative school run by Twin Oaks and a few parents in Louisa; when it closed

in 1990, many community children began to be home schooled, but more and more are attending public school (Kinkade 1994:145). The number of people coming to Twin Oaks as visitors from the outside world has also increased. The community currently has a formal three-week visitor period every month, which means the community is without a visitor group only twelve weeks out of the year. Also, the community recently began accepting visitors who could come for only one of the three weeks, which means more visitors are able to break away from their outside world responsibilities (for only a week) and spend time at Twin Oaks.

In naming other changes at Twin Oaks over the years, many long-term members suggested that there was generally more nudity in the community in the past. A formal policy was actually created in the late 1980s to limit nudity in areas of the community most accessible to the outside world. In these areas—the dining hall, the garden, the courtyard, anywhere the UPS delivery person might see you, unlike many other areas of the community, women are expected to keep their shirts on according to the outside world norm. While the policy is not always adhered to, especially in the hottest summer months, it reveals a community compromise to outside world social norms. Additionally, while many Twin Oaks women and men expect men to also keep their shirts on in these areas, "in solidarity" with community women as I mentioned in Chapter Two, several members suggested to me that recently more and more men have been taking off their shirts in areas where women cannot.

### **Articulating Privilege**

More difficult, and more important for me to see were the ways in which race, class, and sexuality influence constructions of gender at Twin Oaks. Lynn Weber writes:

One's social location in the intersecting systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality produces varying social experiences: One can be privileged in all social systems—a White, heterosexual, middle class, professional male...One can be disadvantaged in all the social systems—lesbian women of color who have few job skills and little formal education (2000:101).

For the most part, Twin Oaks' members are privileged in these systems. While members talked about gender and, to some extent, sexuality, race and class were less salient as most Twin Oakers are situated in the unmarked, privileged positions of "whiteness," middle-class status, and, for the most part, heterosexuality. As these privileged positions in the matrix of domination are considered normative in dominant US society—and therefore more difficult

to see than positions that are not privileged, at Twin Oaks race, class, and sexuality become nearly invisible because "whiteness," middle-class status, and heterosexuality actually *are* normative in the community's population.

I found Ruth Frankenberg's book *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters* (1993) helpful in thinking through how the "whiteness" of Twin Oaks' membership prevents the community from fully challenging its privilege and confronting the inequalities of the outside world. As Frankenberg notes, "Whiteness, as a set of normative cultural practices, is visible most clearly to those it definitively excludes and those to whom it does violence. Those who are securely housed within its borders usually do not examine it" (1993:229). She gives the example of Beth, a "white" woman she interviewed, who was "much more sharply aware of racial oppression shaping Black experience than of race privilege in her own life" (1993:49). But oppression and privilege are relational. "Whiteness" is "coconstructed" with a range of other racial and cultural categories, and with race and gender, a "coconstruction" that is "fundamentally asymmetrical, for the term 'whiteness' signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (1993:237). In this way, Frankenberg insists that "analyzing the construction of whiteness is important as a means of reconceptualizing the grounds on which white activists participate in antiracist work" (1993:242). Analyzing "whiteness" is similarly important to the creation of constructions of gender truly alternative to those of the dominant culture of the United States.

Frankenberg marks racial discourses in the US from the 1920s through the very early 1990s in three movements: "essentialist racism," "color-blindness"—which is also "power-evasiveness"—and "race cognizance," which acknowledges difference in terms of the autonomy of culture, values, and aesthetic standards. Though these shifts have occurred chronologically, one never replaces the other; therefore elements of all three are present in contemporary US discourses on race. According to Frankenberg, "The overarching principles of race cognizance are...the ideas that race makes a difference in people's lives and that racism makes a difference in U.S. society" (1992:159). But while the current phase of US race discourse is race cognizance, Frankenberg asserts that colorblindness and power-evasiveness remain "dominant in US 'public' race discourses" (1993:142). Additionally, she importantly and critically maintains that "there are some salutary lessons to be learned about the new kinds of selectivity currently emerging in US society—selectivities that apparently embrace cultural and other parameters of diversity, but do so in ways that leave hierarchies intact and, in this sense, remain as power evasive as their 'color blind' antecedents" (1993:143). I will discuss how I see these ideas about race playing out in the context of Twin Oaks.

Kinkade addresses Twin Oaks' "whiteness" briefly in her second book about the community in a chapter titled, "Living in a Diverse Community":

We have begun to ask ourselves whether we are sufficiently diverse from a sociological point of view. In plain words, why do we have so few Black people, so few blue-collar men, so few gay men? We certainly do not deliberately discriminate along such lines. Minority group members usually meet friendliness and welcome when they visit. You could even say they are courted for membership. Yet they seldom join, and when they do, they frequently leave after a short time. Let me

introduce Ira, who has a lot of opinions on this subject. Ira is a Black woman about 43 years old who has been a member of three different communities, of which Twin Oaks is the most recent. Ira fits in easily with white society, and I would have forgotten her color years ago if she didn't keep talking about it. The reason she talks about it is that she thinks racial diversity is desirable, and she thinks Twin Oaks shoots itself in the foot as it tries to aim for it. One built in contradiction, says Ira, is that there are cultural norms at Twin Oaks that the Black people who might otherwise be interested in us cannot tolerate. She names them: nudity; stained and sloppy clothes; dirty houses; small families. If Ira is right about the kind of Blacks who show interest in community and about their typical biases and standards, then it is obvious that we are accidentally keeping them out. Occasional nudity and habitually sloppy clothing are thoroughly entrenched in Twin Oaks culture. We don't treasure bad housekeeping but we tolerate it. Certainly we try to keep a lid on the number of children we have, considering that we haven't yet proved very adept at raising them. Under these conditions Ira doesn't feel that she can realistically extend her Black friends an invitation to try for membership. Does that make our norms and our caution about children a class or race issue? Ira thinks it does. The Black candidates this Community is eager to accept are the ones who are just like the rest of us, only with darker faces—more people like Ira, in fact. If they like nice clothes, they can shop for them in thrift stores and rummage for them in Commie Clothes. We don't ask them to wear anything torn or stained. But we don't expect criticism from them if we wear what we please. As to nudity, there isn't enough of it at Twin Oaks to worry about, and some people theorize that anybody who can't tolerate that little bit is going to be too uptight to live here anyway. One thing is sure: We are unlikely to get agreement to change our ways in order to be acceptable to new people. They are expected to change their standards instead. (1994:193-94).

Analyzing this quote in terms of Frankenberg's consideration of race, I see Kinkade's discussion of the lack of racial diversity at Twin Oaks reflecting elements of color and power-evasiveness as well as race cognizance. Kinkade suggests the exclusion of Blacks from the community is not because of race but because there are *cultural* differences between Twin Oaks and Black culture. She discusses the specific concerns of one African American member about the ways that Twin Oaks culture excludes non-"white" members, and considers Twin Oaks' "whiteness" only in these terms. Instead of addressing the power relations involved in maintaining a predominantly "white" community, Kinkade names specific cultural differences between Twin Oaks culture and African Americans that she believes are unacceptable to African Americans. To emphasize that consideration for membership is color-blind and has only to do with *cultural* compatibility, she states: "The Black candidates this Community is eager to accept are the ones who are just like the rest of us, only with darker faces" (1994:194). According to Kinkade—responding to this African American member—the irreconcilable cultural differences include Twin Oaks' cultural norms of sloppy dress and housekeeping, nudity, and small families. She also seems to imply class differences here. To Kinkade these may seem like very small differences, and she—having avoided the power relations involved—almost seems justified in reasoning, "[w]e are unlikely to get agreement to change our ways in order to be acceptable to new people. They are expected to change their standards instead" (1994:194). Kinkade's statements certainly are not representative of the attitudes of all the community's members, but the general silence around issues of race and class at Twin Oaks clearly reveal color and power-

evasiveness in the community. As I analyze Kinkade's remarks, I am also commenting on the larger culture of Twin Oaks in many ways.

Like "whiteness," middle class situation is normative at Twin Oaks, and class, like race, continues to influence life at Twin Oaks. Several members mentioned the subtle maintenance of class differences at Twin Oaks to me as a way that the community is not so different from the outside world. The manifestations of class differences in work, communication styles, and values arose in various social contexts. In the first gender discussion, Lilith brought up how managerial work is valued over non-managerial, "worker-bee" jobs, reflecting class hierarchies in dominant US culture. A member suggested to me in an interview that community members' use of feminist and "self help" communication styles is classed, as well as the community's emphasis on written communication. Issues of "value" differences also came up in terms of class. In an interview, a member suggested to me that Twin Oaks' values are very "middle-class" in being generally more "egalitarian" and feminist than other classes. And another member suggested in a community meeting about recruiting new members that working class individuals do not share the same values as Twin Oaks' membership—specifically in terms of excessive drinking and physical aggressiveness.

Class plays out in other subtle ways that members did not articulate. Twin Oaks inadvertently selects for middle to upper-middle class members in many ways due to the financial requirements of living in a community. One way is that it is nearly impossible to pay off debts when you make only sixty dollars a month. Additionally, financially secure individuals can set aside money by lending it temporarily to the community or their families before joining Twin Oaks; if these individuals decide to leave the community at some point, they can then pick right back up in the outside world, almost where they left off. Class also plays out *within* the community in terms of finances. Although Twin Oaks has extensive policies regulating members' access to money earned outside of the community, many individuals receive plane tickets and gifts from their families to supplement their monthly allowances.

Kinkade also addresses Twin Oaks' middle-class status in the diversity chapter of her book:

There are other issues of class that not only Ira but many thoughtful people see as boundaries we Twin Oakers unconsciously draw around ourselves and keep certain other people outside of. These are matters of behavior. Twin Oaks is known in the community movement as a "middle-class" commune. In some ways this is a fair description. Obviously the epithet doesn't refer to our income or the way we dress. In spite of the minor pockets of posh among our buildings and equipment, we qualify as "poor" by national standards, and even in the relatively poor town of Louisa we are thought of as people who might want to use old clothing or furniture when it is no longer good enough for local residents. The people who call us "middle class" usually mean something else. They are talking about behavior. In spite of our diversity of opinion, we are surprisingly consistent in our way of talking to each other. We are considered "quiet." It is said of us that we don't shout, don't confront each other directly with hard words, and that if we have anything unpleasant to say to anyone else, we write a note. I can't deny any of this. I'll go further to say that even when we write notes to each other, most of us couch them in tactful language. Now introduce into this environment a person who has grown up in a family where everybody shouts—probably has to shout in order to get heard—or where calling other people names is

standard practice, and a daily exchange of half-humorous insults the norm. Call this lower-class or whatever you want to call it, it doesn't fit into Twin Oaks. We try to avoid belligerence, sarcasm, insults, aggressive stances, and any verbal behavior that might make another person feel afraid or abused. When anyone comes in from the Outside who does any of these things, we notice immediately, and if there is any question of applying for membership, warning flags go out all over the Community via the swift lines of gossip. Such a person's chances of being accepted by this Community border on zero. Is this classism? Ira says it is, and she isn't alone. A substantial and growing contingent within the Community these days is saying, "Give them a chance. They weren't raised the same way some of us were." Giving a verbally aggressive visitor a chance means telling that person what the behaviors are that bother people, explaining Community norms, and suggesting changes in the way he or she talks. Since we don't have any central mechanism for doing this, what usually happens is that about 5 different people will approach the person and give essentially the same message, none of them knowing that it has already been delivered. I imagine myself in this person's place, and I shudder. Would I be able to accept all that feedback and still want to join Twin Oaks? Only, perhaps, if I were desperate. Nevertheless, some people have in fact swallowed the criticism, figured out how to talk like a Twin Oaker, and been ultimately accepted for membership. Of such a person we say "He (or she) takes feedback well, and that's a good sign." All this is clearly a filter that selects against a whole lot of people who were brought up differently and don't see why they should change. Calling it classism doesn't help anything. Most of us like our norms of courtesy. We have no intention of accepting a more aggressive standard. We expect members to conform. This choice does not promote class diversity, and there are those who stoutly insist that Twin Oaks has no right to call itself a diverse community while expecting all applicants to conform to a standard that is easy only for those who were brought up that way. This fence we have built around ourselves is not unclimbable, but it is a fence, and those of us who are inside it tend to grow more and more alike in our speech.

As in her discussion of race at Twin Oaks, Kinkade is certainly power-evasive in her justification of the community's lack of class diversity. Instead of addressing power relations, she again suggests that the reasons lie in differences of culture or "behavior"—drawing on dominant US cultural stereotypes of class and also ethnicity—and not in the individuals themselves or even their class situations. Building on stereotypes of working-class people as loud and aggressive, Kinkade writes that in contrast to other groups of people who may grow up "in a family where everybody shouts," Twin Oakers tend to be "quiet" people (1994:195). In order to emphasize that Twin Oaks does not discriminate according to class, Kinkade maintains that if these "lower-class" or working-class people can conform to Twin Oaks' behavioral expectations, the community welcomes them. Needless to say, there are very few working-class members at Twin Oaks.

In her discussion of class, Kinkade attempts to entirely subvert class differences several times. In another passage in this section, she states that although Twin Oakers may come from middle-class backgrounds, they are certainly "poor" according to national standards (Kinkade 1994:194). Kinkade also suggests in another section in this chapter that she does not know what class she would personally fit into (1994:197). Additionally, in the excerpt I quoted above, while Kinkade admits that the community's standards of behavior select

against certain groups of people—specifically individuals who engage in "belligerence, sarcasm, insults, aggressive stances"—she denies it is class-based: "Call this lower-class or whatever you want to call it, it doesn't fit into Twin Oaks" (1994:194).

Kinkade then describes a time when the community took in a refugee family from El Salvador to whom domestic violence was, as reported by Kinkade, a cultural norm; Twin Oaks could not permit this behavior, she said, and since the family left the community has not taken in any more refugees. In a section of this same chapter titled "Maintaining a Standard," Kinkade further addresses these issues of exclusion, stating that she and a number of other members believe "the concept of diversity ought not be stretched to include bad manners, regardless of its class origin":

What they mean by desirable diversity is a colorful collage of different races and sexual orientations, different music and art, a variety of interests and talents and even opinions, all under the general umbrella of clearly understood and accepted norms of social behavior. They—I should say "we," because I'm in this camp—envision Twin Oaks teaching its standards to any who are willing to learn them, but never lowering that standard. I use the words "lowering the standard" deliberately, knowing that some eyebrows will go up and the word "ethnocentric" will be spoken chidingly (in a nice way, of course). There isn't much question that courtesy, sensitivity, and compassion, as cultural norms, are superior to angry outbursts, swaggering, and sarcasm. I don't think you have to be ethnocentric to acknowledge that being kissed on the cheek is more fun than being slugged on the jaw. I'm not claiming moral superiority for the class (whichever one it was) that first modeled such decencies, but I prefer pleasant interactions to hostile ones, and so does everybody else. Obviously, this means learning not only some self control but also the basic vocabularies of kindness. If some people come to us who haven't had a chance to learn them yet, it is up to us to be patient. It is not up to us to broaden our culture enough to be polluted by unpleasantness (1994:194).

The above excerpt from Kinkade's discussion is simultaneously power-evasive and explicitly drawing heavily on negative ethnic and class stereotypes. She indicates that Twin Oaks culture is superior to cultures that do not include "self-control" and "basic vocabularies of kindness," and at the same time superficially addresses ethnocentrism and denies that she knows "whichever one it [class] was" that she is deeming inferior.

In the discussion that follows, I am working to articulate the ways the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality that have shaped members' experiences before coming to Twin Oaks play out in the community's constructions of gender in terms of social and spatial boundaries, work, family, and gender roles and sexuality. As most members are privileged by these systems in the outside world—and therefore less cognizant of how they play out at Twin Oaks—my analysis examines the subtle ways privilege is embedded in these alternative constructions, as well as ways that members articulate the community's relationship to the outside world.

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## **Gendered Social and Spatial Boundaries**

In the second gender discussion, Tim suggested that the practice of "wolfing" might be an indicator that gender relations at Twin Oaks are embedded in the larger US society:

*I'll throw something out and we'll see whether or not people bite. I think there is a, as an indicator that we are not as far as we might be, I think in the areas of wolfing, members starting relationships with uh visitors, there's far more male wolfing of women than women wolfing of men. And I wondered if that's other people's experience as to whether that's true and whether or not that's any indication of what's going on here or is that just all because we all come out of this, you know, screwed up background, social background and that's the fundamental nature of people who are raised in the gender relationships in the industrialized West and so we're going to carry that with us no matter how long we're here.*

While Twin Oaks attempts to maintain gender equality, the practice of wolfing reveals that power imbalances occur in relationships in the community, especially in those between male members and female visitors. This mirrors gendered power imbalances in relationships in the outside world, of which members are aware.

The discussion of gendered "energy" in the first gender discussion also relates to members' outside world positionings, in ways of which members are perhaps not as aware. "White" feminist women often have difficulty seeing differences among women within the category "women." The idea of "female energy" implies that there is something essentially and biologically female that all women share and ignores the many differences among women, i.e., racialized and class differences. The category "women" has often been synonymous with "white women" in Western feminism. In her book *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, Elizabeth Spelman writes:

Western feminist theory has in effect ... implicitly demanded that Afro-American, Asian-American, or Latin American women separate their "women's voice" from their racial or ethnic voice without also requiring white women to distinguish being a "woman" from being white. This double standard implies that while on the one hand there is a seamless web of whiteness and womanness, on the other hand, Blackness and womanness, say, or Indianness and womanness, are discrete and separable elements of identity.

Twin Oakers used the term "women" in this way when they talked about the community's gender ratio having to do with a balance of gendered energy as well as when they discussed the purposes of women's space. Members assumed that *all* women share something biologically and essentially female that give them a common "energy" as well as a common need or appreciation of women's space. Similarly, members discussions of testosterone in terms of men's movie night were based on the idea that there is something essentially male.

Along these lines, members' conversations about feminism in the second gender discussion did not include analyses of race and class as they intersect with gender but rather discussed race, class, and gender as entirely separate identities. Spelman effectively critiques this way of thinking: "One's gender identity is not related to one's racial and class identity as the parts of pop-bead necklaces are related, separable and insertable in other 'strands' with different racial and class 'parts'" (1988:15). Unlike the tendency of many "white" feminists to

perceive gender in this way, as separable from race and class and therefore an experience all women have in common, Spelman insists that one's race, class, gender, and sexual identities are experienced simultaneously. The following exchange occurred in the second gender discussion some time after the group had discussed Twin Oaks as a feminist/profeminist community.

*Randall: Part of my concern about these conversations that go like this is the idea of feminism/nonfeminism, like it's any different as if we couldn't be having the same discussion talking about race or the same discussion talking about religion. And to me it's always been the answer as someone whose always dealt with, you know, had a lot of people who were different than the majority whether it be women, men. I mean women or African Americans or different religions that if we got to a place where we stopped seeing people as this or that but recognized people as people and we're all inherently all the same whether whatever our religion race or gender and build more toward the healing. It's not just a gender issue 'cause the same things that women experience as being women I think Black people experience being Black or minority religions experience being minority religions. And if you get to the point of not seeing each other as "isms" or seeing each other as being different or seeing each other as being unique then it would go a long way to overall healing. And my concern with feminism is that it localizes the real problem and it gets from their being a middle point and just these two different lines and just, you know, a pendulum swinging back and forth and not really addressing what the problem is of people really being threatened by difference.*

*Catherine: I don't know. That seems to ignore oppression.*

*Sandy: That's right.*

*Catherine: That's ignoring the whole dynamic that there is oppression.*

*Randall: Yeah and it's not just against women. It's against minorities in general. It's against anyone that's different.*

*Catherine: OK well whatever, wherever it is. I, you know, to mush it all together and say, "Well we're all in the same boat," that's not the answer to me.*

*Sandy: /?/ I mean ideally, the whole "people are just people" thing is a wonderful, I think, ideal but then you have the reality of the world that we live in at the present moment and /?/ what it's going to take to get there and I just think you can't ignore*

*Catherine?: Mhm*

*Sandy: sexism as one of the things that has to be directly looked at. As Callie was saying, we can't ignore the fact that, so maybe you arrived at some comfortable feminist place but I think that by not separating the issues out in a lot of ways it misses the point /?/.*

*Randall: I'm not saying ignore it. I'm saying not just be focused on this as a feminist*

*issue but saying feminism is a part of this overall issue. Link your hand with the rest of minorities. Link your hand with the person who's an Arab living in America while we're going to war with Saddam Hussein or the Gulf War, you know, even though we're allies with the Arabs. You know, link yourself with the Black man who's still, still, you know, still not earning as much as a White person overall or has a lower life expectancy, higher /?/ mortality rate. Link your hand with, you know, poor White people who are economically disadvantaged but can't see it because they still view themselves as part of the overall majority. Link your hand and see that each piece of this is part of the real evil, which is the overall oppression of the many by the few. I just say that because I'm a communist /?/.*

*: (laughter)*

*Jesse: I like that belief, ideal point of view definitely for sure. And I do see feminism as one piece of that pie but I do think it's relevant and significant to us that when I look around the room right now, is it half? It's more than half of the people in the room are of a different gender from me. I don't see people who are of a different race from me. And therefore I'm not sitting here talking about race issues but I am talking about gender issues. I think that's a big part of it for me.*

*Tim: My own personal definition of feminism isn't about striving for equal rights for women. I think that's central in a lot of people's definitions /?/. For me, the sort of feminist school that I came from out of Northern California, the anarchofeminist culture is about saying that the patriarchy has created a significant collection of problems and that feminism is the collection of tools for reconstructing society so that those problems go away. And so feminism is about working with consensus and avoiding hierarchy and changing power over relationships which are things that came out of the male-dominated society and they're, they're the right things to do, gender independent.*

In the above discussion, a power-evasive approach to difference, as well as the tendency to see race and class as separate from one's experience of gender, play out in members' discussions of feminism and oppression. While it seems like Randall is beginning to make connections among oppressions, he then suggests that we not see differences among people but instead see "people as people"; additionally, in a later discussion he suggests that he does not believe in power. Catherine and Sandy then problematize Randall's power-evasive "people are people" view. But Sandy's solution of "separating out the issues," looking at sexism separately from other types of oppression, ignores the intersections of sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism. Similarly, Jesse wants to separate out gender oppression from other types of oppression: "I don't see (in this room) people who are of a different 'race' from me. And therefore I'm not sitting here talking about 'race' issues but I am talking about gender issues." Tim does seem to make connections among different types of oppression although he does not fully articulate such an analysis.

The community's gradual dissociation with feminism—brought up as an issue in the second gender discussion—parallels this same trend in the outside world. At the 1999 American Anthropological Association meetings, I attended a workshop titled *Is Feminism for You? The "F-Word" and Young Scholars*, organized by Irma McClaurin and sponsored by the

Association for Feminist Anthropology. A female graduate student and a young woman with a Ph.D. began the discussion by asking why it is that feminism has recently taken on such negative connotations and why more young scholars do not identify as feminists; the group then attempted to talk through these questions. Coming to feminist scholarship only fairly recently myself, I was not aware that feminism had become an unpopular association, but I can now see that both in and outside of academia, such a trend does prevail. Interestingly, like Twin Oaks' membership, most of the women—and the one man—gathered for the AAA discussion of feminism were described by one woman at the discussion as "white" and middle-class.

The sort of "feminist backlash" occurring at Twin Oaks in the form of men's movie night and men ignoring the nudity solidarity norm can also be understood in this context. While the community formerly identified as feminist/profeminist and maintained strict behavioral expectations of members along these lines, currently Twin Oaks shies away from such an identification—feminism also seems to be less important to individuals—and tolerates mild forms of backlash. In an interview, a long-term male member provided his view on the backlash situation at Twin Oaks. He said that over the years Twin Oaks has gotten fewer and fewer incoming female members who are "militant feminists," and the feminists who do come to the community are more "post-liberation feminists" who "don't need to struggle and make and laugh at sexist jokes." Additionally, he suggested that the "old-guard feminists" who have lived in the community a long time have tired of "educating the world about women's rights or just always being on the edge." With this decrease in feminist activism in the community, he described the current situation at Twin Oaks as follows:

*I think one of the things these days we're seeing is a reaction against a rigid interpretation of equality, which may affect gender stuff. I think it is more backlash against, you have to speak a certain way, you have to, you know, men you have to wear shirts here. You can't do traditional relationships without being sneered at. You can't do traditional women can't do traditional work without being sneered at. Men shouldn't glory in doing construction work.*

This is very similar to what has occurred in the outside world as feminism has become an unpopular association.

## **Gender and Work**

Twin Oaks' emphasis on equality in work, specifically in providing opportunities for women to engage in nontraditional work, reveals a great deal about these women's class positionings in the outside world. As Sam pointed out,

*I like seeing more women (at Twin Oaks) do physical, strong physical work. I like seeing that. But then that's, I think that's probably more different for middle-class than it is for working-class people. I've seen, you know, a lot of working-class women have busted their butts, you know. It's like this is the way it has to be, you know. "I work on a, I'll fix the car because I'm a single working /?/ and I don't have the money to take it into a garage," you know, sort of thinking. As opposed to a middle, you know, /?/ a middle-class woman would like be, "Well I'll take it and let them fix*

*it," sort of thing.*

Female members' emphasis on women engaging in physical and technical "men's work" has a great deal to do with the fact that as middle-class women in the outside world they did not participate in such work. But other "women," working-class women, often engage in this type of work. In this way, a community composed of working-class feminists would most likely not place much emphasis on women engaging in "men's work" as it might also have been "women's work" to them.

The community's valuing certain types of work over others is another way the gender and class hierarchies of the outside world influence Twin Oaks. As Eric pointed out in the first gender discussion, "It sounds like the outside world reality of women rearing children and men building buildings is what gives those things their value here in this community, the influence of dominant US culture"; and Lilith further noted: "I think like it's still considered women's work even if men are doing it and that's where the devaluing comes from." Lilith also importantly brought up the greater social value given to positions that involve organizing and overseeing and coordinating—comparable to professional, middle-class jobs on the outside—than to "worker bee" jobs—comparable to working-class jobs on the outside.

Members' work experiences in the outside world, which are in many ways dictated by race, class, and gender positionings, often determine the types of work members end up doing at Twin Oaks. Frank suggested to me in an interview that the class backgrounds and genders of Twin Oaks' members contributes to what types of jobs they do at Twin Oaks: "I think that in my view that really gender here isn't all that different than it is on the outside especially in the middle classes. You know, most of the managerial jobs are on men. You look at the GMT and planners right now are most are all female right now actually. But you know tofu, managing tofu." Even though the community is willing to train unskilled or inexperienced workers, a very long-term member talked to me about how difficult it is to apprentice people for jobs as inevitably they will leave the community. According to this member, over the years, members generally have invested less and less energy in training members for positions. In this way, many members end up doing work at which they are already skilled.

The community's emphasis on (mainly middle-class) women engaging in nontraditional work—work traditionally done by men as well as working class women—reveals the community's embeddedness in their outside world middle-class positionings; the community assumes that this type of work excludes all "women" in the outside world. Additionally, the community's informal valuation of what has traditionally been called "women's work" and "men's work" reveals the influence of outside world values; raising children does not seem to be as valued as building buildings, for example. Members also suggested that at Twin Oaks individuals often end up working at jobs very similar to the work in which they were engaged in the outside world, often in line with their gender and class positionings. For example, many "white," middle-class men currently run the hammock and tofu businesses at Twin Oaks.

### **Reenvisioning Family**

Although Twin Oaks families differ from the nuclear families of the dominant US society in many ways, some experiences are similar to those of families living in neighborhoods in the

outside world. Ambivalence concerning children in public spaces open to all is present at Twin Oaks as in the dominant society. There is also an increase in individual arrangements between parents and their children, rather than groups and communities making decisions affecting children, both at Twin Oaks and in the outside world.

Perin describes the American attitude and practice of "locking out children"—out of housing, out of neighborhoods, out of public spaces, often maintaining strict boundaries between people who have children and those who do not. Families at Twin Oaks find themselves similarly isolated from certain areas and groups of people in the community. At one point in the late 1980's, there was a group of members who organized as "the less involved," consisting of members who were not childcare workers or parents and shared some concerns about how the community's children's program was impacting them. Kinkade reports that the group faded away after a short period of time (1994:150), but the existence of such a group at all is indicative of the presence of these attitudes. Although Lilith suggested to me that currently the community is more supportive of families than it has been in the past, her comments in an interview show that tensions between parents and nonparents still exist at Twin Oaks:

*It's not as factional /?/ somehow like when there was an organized group with the metas and the midis and there was kind of like the metas and the midis versus the rest of the community and I felt very much like people were begrudging us to get whatever funding or what we needed for the kids. And I never really quite understood that. It's like the community made a conscious decision to have children. HELLO, you know, (laughing) like welcome to your community that's made a conscious decision to raise children, in a good way which means supporting parents. So yeah there's a hell of a lot more support here for say single parents especially but even just parenting in general. And there's resentment from some people some of the time. I think, you know, they just feel like parents are getting this goody or something and, "Well I don't get that," you know, "I don't get my education paid for by the community," or I don't know. It's petty shit mostly.*

Lilith's quote reveals the complexity of these tensions. While formally Twin Oaks supports families, the division between those who have children and those who do not emerges in subtle ways.

Several members related to me examples of how the community's ambivalent attitudes toward children have played out. In an interview, Lilith talked about the impact of children being more and more integrated into the physical spaces of the community when group childcare ended:

*I mean, it used to be that people were HIGHLY, HIGHLY uptight if the little kids were eating anywhere besides the kid's dining room. "That's where you belong," you know. And it was a nightmare in there. It was SO chaotic and loud, you could not believe. It was really unpleasant. And then some parents just sort of started having their kids with them out in the main dining room and, you know, the expectation was, "OK, you know, the kids can be out here as long as they can be fairly reasonable in their behavior and noise-level and stuff." And-and that seemed to work. I think Emily was pretty instrumental in getting people used to having the kids out and about in the*

*community more because when she adopted Evan she brought him to work. She was a shipper at the time and she would have him, you know, playing quietly in the shipping area of the hammock shop and people were uptight, at first, you know, like they're used to kids being sort of in packs being (laughing) chaperoned by metas. You know, it's like oh there go the kids on their way to the river /or whatever/. So yeah that took some getting used to but people seem to accept that pretty well now and the kids just seem to be more welcome in a lot of places.*

During my stay, I noticed that certain public spaces were more conducive to children than others. I observed adults weaving hammocks and peeling cloves of garlic with young children nearby, but in most work areas (e.g., tofu production, cooking, working in the dairy, and shipping), it is difficult to integrate children. Other public spaces—for instance, the courtyard area and the dining hall—require children to be closely supervised by adults.

Another physical space that creates boundaries between parents and nonparents is housing, a major site where children are "locked out" on the outside as well as at Twin

Oaks. To illustrate her point in terms of housing, Perin quotes a manager of several apartment buildings in the Minneapolis suburbs as saying: "If people have pets or dogs—'scuse me, I mean pets or children—you take them last. And I don't mean if you're just running 1 or 2 percent vacant, but only if you're in a position where you're running 20 to 30 percent vacant, you have to take those types" (1988:161). Additionally, according to Perin, about 25 percent of rental housing and condominiums do not permit persons under the age of 18 to live in them (1988:161). And subdivisions for retired people often zone out children entirely and have elaborate rules governing children's visits (Perin 1988:162). Twin Oaks similarly relegates children to specifically designated "child-friendly" residences—Morningstar, Tupelo, Kaweah.

Another example of how the community's attitudes toward children play out is nonparents' concerns about the financial burden of children, an issue both in neighborhoods in dominant US society and at Twin Oaks. According to Perin:

Among the least favored of newcomers [in a neighborhood] are those with children who will pry open the public purse and keep asking old-timers to dig into their pockets for more: the current antipathy toward children also festers partly because they can cost their neighbors money. Schools may need to be built or reopened, teachers and administrators paid, public health doctors and nurses employed, buses and vans operated on children's schedules (1988:164).

This attitude is also present at Twin Oaks. Gloria suggested to me in an interview that during her membership she felt that some community members resented her family of five because they feared the family would consume a large amount of community resources.

Although many decisions concerning children are decided by the community as a whole or the Child Board rather than children's individual sets of parents, with the shift from communal to parent-led childcare at Twin Oaks there has been an increase of individual arrangements between children and their parents concerning what types of toys they play with, what kinds of food they can eat, and where the children go to school. This trend at Twin

Oaks parallels at least a perceived increase in home schooling as an alternative to public schooling in the outside world, giving private households more control than communities over decisions affecting children.

## **Gender Roles and Sexuality**

In the last chapter, I indicated that although gender roles and sexuality are more fluid at Twin Oaks than in dominant US society, masculinity at Twin Oaks—like in the outside world—seems to be dictated by the community in certain ways. Men at Twin Oaks actually do not have the flexibility to construct masculinity in many ways, including engaging in "macho" or physically aggressive behavior. Just as in the dominant US society, masculinity is prescribed. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the dominant construction of masculinity described at Twin Oaks is that of the emotionally open, sensitive, egalitarian man. The dominant construction of masculinity at Twin Oaks is in many ways, however, *also* the dominant construction of masculinity in the outside world. While members see this more "feminine" construction of masculinity as an alternative gender construction, it is actually the dominant construction of masculinity in the larger society, that of the White, middle-class, heterosexual "new man" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994).

Masculinity at Twin Oaks is constructed specifically in relation to other US masculinities. In their article, "Gender Displays and Men's Power: The 'New Man' and the Mexican Immigrant Man," Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1994) argue that the construction of masculinity that is currently called the "new man"—typically represented by "a white, college-educated professional who is a highly involved and nurturant father, 'in touch with' and expressive of his feelings and egalitarian in his dealings with women"—actually involve no real transformations in structural positions of power and privilege that white, middle-class, heterosexual men hold (1994:202). According to Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner, the construction of the "new man" acts as the "hegemonic" version of masculinity and continues to subordinate women and especially other men. They write:

Those aspects of traditional hegemonic masculinity that the New Man has rejected—overt physical and verbal displays of domination, stoicism and emotional inexpressivity, overt misogyny in the workplace and at home—are now increasingly projected onto less privileged groups of men: working-class men, gay body-builders, black athletes, Latinos, and immigrant men (1994:207).

In this way, Twin Oaks men specifically model themselves after the "new man" and define themselves in opposition to "macho" men—namely working-class masculinities.

Like "hegemonic masculinity" in dominant US society, masculinity at Twin Oaks is also constructed in relation to homosexual men in many ways. In Chapter Five, I discussed how members subtly reinscribed stereotypes of homosexuality—namely that sexual identities are embodied in behavior and dress—in their discussions of the "new masculinity" at Twin Oaks. Men at Twin Oaks wear skirts and fingernail polish, but they maintain heterosexual privilege in many ways.

Part Two of the Spring 2000 issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, "Men's Fashions of the Times," is a concrete example of the dominance of the construction of white, middle-class,

heterosexual masculinity as "feminine." Fashion advertisements showcase men wearing soft colors and capri pants. Many advertisements and fashion layouts in the issue pose men performing middle-class, heterosexual, mostly "white" identities, in passive positions with both women and men and dressed in clothing traditionally considered "feminine." While the magazine's articles discuss how these men are breaking gender role boundaries by wearing "feminine" clothes, make-up, and being "vain" and fashion-conscious, in my analysis, this magazine issue represents the "new man" as the hegemonic construction of masculinity.

Just as "white," middle-class, heterosexual constructions of masculinity in the dominant society remain defined in relation to working-class masculinities, as well as homosexuality, in many ways, so do constructions of masculinity at Twin Oaks. While many community members perceive themselves as participating in transformative gender constructions in terms of masculinity, their "alternative" construction of masculinity actually models the "new man" of the dominant culture, the hegemonic construction of masculinity that actually subordinates women and other men in various ways.

In conclusion, from the ways members spoke about constructions of gender in their community, it seemed that the outside world strongly shapes these constructions at Twin Oaks. The community's alternative constructions of gender actually reflect those of the dominant society in many ways, rather than transforming them.

## **Chapter VII: Conclusion**

It has not been my goal to *evaluate* Twin Oaks as a successful social experiment. Instead, using gender as a point of entry, I hope I have answered some questions and raised others about how an alternative society can exist within a dominant society and effectively create and maintain alternative cultural constructions. Twin Oaks' members have experimented with the valorization of work, forms of family alternative to the nuclear family, and gender roles and sexuality. But these gender constructions remain constrained by the larger society, in part because the models that influence their alternative constructions of gender are dominant US models. Twin Oaks' members have not experimented with moving beyond binary forms of gender and middle-class sensibilities, for example. In many ways members "play" with dominant US gender norms rather than creating alternative gender constructions. I will specifically discuss the community's socialization of children, models of feminism, relationships, and gender categories in these terms.

Transforming gender from the standards of the dominant culture has often been a focus of US utopian experiments. The Shakers and the Oneida (Cooper 1990) both attempted to create alternative constructions of gender by reconfiguring gender roles and sexuality from the dominant culture's constructions. The Shakers were founded in England as an offshoot of the Quakers and appeared in New York in the late 1770's. Although Shaker men and women were kept separate in their occupations as in most other areas of their lives, they were formally considered equal. In terms of alternative constructions of sexuality, one of the Shakers' central tenets was "virgin purity" (Cooper 1990:44-46). The Oneida Community was founded in the mid 1800's in central New York. Like the Shakers, men and women were officially equal among the Oneida, although men may have had more decision-making authority. Unlike the Shakers, the Oneida rejected the sexual division of labor (Cooper:50-53). The community also practiced group or "complex" marriage (Packer 2000:39) and raised

its children collectively (Cooper 1990:50).

Unlike the Shakers and the Oneida who, understood in their sociohistorical contexts, radically transformed constructions of gender from those in dominant US society, some of the ways Twin Oakers described gender constructions as alternative to those of the dominant culture are more like what anthropologists call cultural "play" than cultural transformation. Emily Schultz and Robert Lavenda define play in the following way: "A framing (or orienting context) that is (1) consciously adopted by the players, (2) somehow pleasurable, and (3) systematically related to what is nonplay by alluding to the nonplay world and by transforming the objects, roles, actions, and relations of ends and means characteristic of the nonplay world" (1998:131). In this way, men wearing skirts at Twin Oaks does not prove the transformation of the dominant construction of masculinity in US culture, but instead reflects community members playing with the dominant society's cultural norms.

This "play" with, rather than transformation of, cultural beliefs about gender is especially evident in the socialization of children. One man told me in an interview that he believes that there is something inherently biological about gender. He said that when he worked as a meta, and also as a father, he dressed young boys in skirts and dresses as well as shorts and pants, but these boys still wanted to play with guns, trucks, and to be physically aggressive. A mother told a similar story about how the socialization of children in terms of gender is ineffective, using the example of having dressed her son in bonnets and dresses (with no long-term effects in gender socialization). Dressing children in non-gender-stereotyped clothing is a very superficial level of socialization that does not necessarily lead to transformation in terms of gender roles, and the Twin Oaks members I talked with about gender socialization articulated that themselves in some ways.

The community also remains constrained by the larger US culture in ways even more difficult for members to see, in the very sources they use as models for their alternative gender constructions. Twin Oakers draw from feminism in order to create and maintain alternative constructions of gender through the practice of feminist facilitation techniques, various profeminist behavioral norms, the maintenance of women's space, and by emphasizing women engaging in nontraditional work. But the feminist models community members draw from—primarily liberal feminism and radical feminism—tend to be specifically US forms of feminism and therefore limited in terms of providing cultural alternatives to dominant US society. The models, like the community, are mostly based in specific class and ethnic backgrounds: middle and upper-class and "white."

Moreover, although the community recognizes relationships other than legal marriages—e.g., gay and lesbian relationships, heterosexual partnerships that are not legally recognized, and polyamorous relationships, this is not necessarily so different than in the outside world. Although the community supports alternative relationship models, Twin Oakers do not necessarily experiment with alternative relationship models more, or in different ways, than individuals in dominant US society. To use the Oneida as a point of contrast, Twin Oakers have not tried to reconfigure marriage, for instance. Although many of Twin Oaks' members do not practice marriage, the marriages that do exist draw primarily from the larger US society's models of marriage. Looking at marriage cross-culturally, there are many models of marriage practices alternative to dominant US forms. To give an example, the practice of polyandry—women marrying more than one husband at a time—is practiced in areas of

Tibet and Nepal, southern India and Sri Lanka, and northern Nigeria and northern Cameroon (Schultz and Lavenda 1998).

In terms of creating alternative gender roles, Twin Oakers continue to accept the dichotomy between "male" and "female." Looking at gender categories cross-culturally, some cultures actually do construct gender on more of a "continuum" (Bing and Bergvall 1996). Several societies are known to have more than two gender categories, or what Bing and Bergvall refer to as "supernumerary genders," categories that describe roles other than feminine and masculine (1996:10). One such category, the "berdache," refers to either a biological male who acts socially as a female or a biological female who acts socially as a male; berdaches have been accepted and respected members of their societies (Schultz and Lavenda 1998:238). According to Schultz and Lavenda, male berdaches have been described in almost 150 indigenous North American societies and female berdaches in around half that number (1998:238). The Pima Indians have four genders: males, females, males who act like females, and females who act like males (Bing and Bergvall 1996:10).

Twin Oakers' play with dominant culture gender norms can be seen as meaningful in many ways. Men wearing skirts and women driving tractors, and members' experimentation in terms of sexual relationships, for instance, provide a visible critique of prescribed gender roles—and to some extent class roles—that exist in dominant US society. But the community's members do not respond to their own critiques by constructing alternatives such as third or fourth gender categories and alternative forms of marriage. Members "play" with the norms of the dominant society, but remain constrained by the larger society's gender model.

## **Epilogue**

Just before I sat down to write the conclusion, I received the most recent version of the *Communities Directory* (2000), an update of the 1996 version I read in college when I first became interested in intentional communities. The directory contains articles on community living and lists descriptions of intentional communities, with their contact information. I continue to find it exciting that these communities, organized around ideals as diverse as spirituality and ecology to communication, exist as alternatives to the dominant culture of the United States. As so many of Twin Oaks' members articulated to me during my stay, it just makes so much sense to share food, cars, childcare, and money, and the gendered benefits of living this way are remarkable.

I was encouraged to see that quite a few communities are currently organized around gender-related issues. According to the 2000 Directory, the Federation of Egalitarian Communities currently has six member communities, all in the US. Member communities practice egalitarianism by holding land, labor, and income in common, assuming responsibility for the needs of its members, practicing non-violence, maintaining participatory forms of government, working to eliminate discrimination, conserving natural resources, and creating processes for group communication. Six additional communities are considered to be "in dialogue" with the Federation, which means they share most or all of the Federation's tenets and consider full membership as an option for the future (*Sharing the Dream*). Other communities were listed in the directory's index as valuing equality. Eleven were listed in the

index as "feminist," including Twin Oaks. Eight were listed as polyamorous.

I hope that intentional communities' members consider intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in relation to empowerment and disempowerment, and from looking over the 2000 *Communities Directory* it seems that a number of communities are. Several communities were listed in the index of the directory as "multicultural" and "multiracial," and quite a few communities are politically committed to issues of social inequality. In this issue of the directory, the definition of "intentional community" also seems to have been broadened since the last directory. Several communities of indigenous people were listed in this issue. Also in contrast to the 1996 *Communities Directory*, the new directory includes an annotated recommended reading list of texts that the editors thought might be of interest to *Directory* readers. Topics of books on this list include agriculture and gardening, community issues, social theory, spirituality and religion, among others; most books are closely related to the organization and ideals of existing intentional communities. I found it interesting that Angela Davis's *Women, Race, and Class* was listed under the heading "Women in Community" alongside several books on the history of feminism and women in intentional communities. If individuals interested in living in intentional communities are reading Davis's work, perhaps more communities will recognize the intersections among race, class, gender, and sexuality and begin addressing privilege and oppression along those lines.

Maybe the future of intentional communities will involve addressing social inequality in different ways. Many academic departments in universities, after beginning to teach about social inequality in the classroom, have begun addressing issues of social inequality in their admissions practices and course materials. Perhaps intentional communities will address these issues in their own admissions practices, job training, and cultural models.

|

\* Pseudonym "Randall" is a replacement for the original pseudonym, made by the webmaster of this site in December 2008.

## **Appendix**

The transcription key I use throughout the thesis is as follows:...

omitted words

\*\*\* several lines omitted

[ ] overlap

/?/ inaudible

// unclear

CAPS speaker's emphasis

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