Phenomenological Research Method, Design and Procedure:
A Phenomenological Investigation of the Phenomenon of Being-in-Community as Experienced by Two Individuals Who Have Participated in a Community Building Workshop

by **Carl Holroyd**

Abstract

This project was conceived to determine the feasibility of using a phenomenological method of enquiry, based on Giorgi's existential psychological method, for explicating the experience of being-in-community as experienced within a Community Building Workshop. This project served to inform a larger Master of Social Science research project concerned with building community within business.

In approaching this project it was decided to interview two people who had participated in separate CBWs, but not within a business context. The reason for this was purely pragmatic as I had access to two co-researchers (participants) who were available for interviews within given time constraints. Therefore the focus of this project is on being-in-community as experienced in a CBW™.

Background to the project

There is much debate in phenomenological circles as to the 'method' of research one should use in a phenomenological enquiry. What is quite clear, however, is that there is no single method that will suffice for all and every enquiry. Phenomenological researchers in professional areas ranging from pedagogy and nursing to existential psychology agree on some basic guidelines and indicate that the approach to a phenomenological method design should be flexible and adapted to suit the phenomena under investigation (Crotty, 1996; Crotty, 1998; Giorgi, 1994; Giorgi, 1997; Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1997; Valle, 1998; Valle & King, 1978; Van Manen, 1990). This project will concentrate on Giorgi's existential psychological method of phenomenological enquiry as adapted by Schweitzer (1998) and its suitability to explicate the phenomenon under investigation.

This project was conceived to determine the feasibility of using a phenomenological method of enquiry, based on Giorgi's existential psychological method, for explicating the experience of being-in-community as experienced within a Community Building Workshop (henceforth referred to as CBW™). This minor project will inform a larger Master of Social Science research project which is concerned with building community within business.

In approaching this project I decided to interview two people who had participated in separate CBWs, but not within a business context. The reason for this was purely pragmatic as I had access to two co-researchers (participants) who were available for interviews within given time constraints. Therefore the focus of this project is on being-in-community as experienced in a CBW.™

Development and structure of a CBW

Peck's model of Community-Building has four stages. Jason (1997) describes these as:

> *pseudo-community*, in which people avoid disagreements and just pretend to be a community. During the next stage (*chaos*), healers attempt to heal and convert others; this is a time of considerable fighting and struggle. Then, during the third stage (*emptiness*), people begin to remove barriers to communication, such as expectations, prejudice, and ideologies. During the final stage - aptly called *community* - a peaceful, soft sense of quietude descends. People feel safe to share their vulnerabilities, their sadness, and their joy (brackets in original, italics added, pp. 73-74).

These stages can be present at any time during the course of a workshop/process. However, Peck and others point out that although pseudo-community and chaos are not necessary stages in reaching community, in their observation you cannot reach community before experiencing and going through the third stage of emptying (Gozdz, 1995; Peck, 1990).

It was, what Peck saw as, the necessity for 'authentic communication' in relationships which led him to develop this process of community building, called the Community Building Workshops (CBW). These workshops are a synthesis of ideas and methodologies and experiences that Peck was exposed to or used during his training and professional practise as a Psychiatrist. In his internship as a psychiatrist Peck was required to become a member of a 'tech-group' or 't-group' formed to investigate and participate in various forms of psychological exercises. He noticed that the 'T-group" was a place where he had 'no trouble being authentically… [himself] (Peck, 1990, p. 47), i.e., being able to share exactly what his emotions, feelings and thoughts were without self-censoring. Abraham Maslow (1965) in his chapter on unstructured groups felt that in his observation T-groups gave people a place where they could be exposed to or experience a "new kind of conceptualization." Included in this were "a sharp recognition of individual differences, that people really *are* different" (pp. 154-187, italics in the original), the breaking down and restructuring of concepts to include "both the real world of things and objects and the psychic world of sensitivities, fears, wishes, and hopes." Peck's community building workshops offer a way of experiencing a "new kind of conceptualization" resulting from the experience of being-in-community.

Being-in-community as experienced in the last stages of a Community Building Workshop has both a personal meaning and a group meaning which, because of it's very nature, cannot be definitively explained (Peck, 1990). The following is an attempt at explicating the essence of being-in-community, which tests Peck's idealised stages of community using a method of phenomenological enquiry adapted by Schweitzer from Giorgi's step-wise method.

Outline of Schweitzer's adaptation of Giorgi's phenomenological method

Phenomenological methodology attempts to explicate the meaning structures developed through the experience of the person being questioned. The model below has been adapted by Schweitzer (1998) from Giorgi (1997) and summarizes one methodological approach to explicating experience.

Stage 1. Intuitive/Holistic Understanding of the Raw Data

This stage requires reading data, repeatedly if necessary, in order to achieve a holistic and intuitive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. It is necessary that all preconceptions and judgments be bracketed.

Stage 2. Forming a Constituent Profile

This stage summarizes the raw data from each participant.

2.1 Natural Meaning Units (NMUs):

NMUs are self-definable, discrete segments of expression of individual aspects of the participant's experience.

2.2 Central Themes:

Central Themes reduce the NMUs to recognizable sentences conveying a discrete expression of experience.

2.3 Constituent Profile:

The reconstitution of Central Themes that provides a non-repetitive list of descriptive meaning-statements for each participant, is termed the Constituent Profile.

Stage 3. Forming a Thematic Index

Constituent Profiles from each participant are used as a basis to construct a Thematic Index, which highlights major themes that have emerged.

3.1 Delineating Constituent Profiles:

As with Central Themes, Constituent Profiles are reconstituted to remove any repeated or non-relevant statements.

3.2 Extracting Referents:

Referents are defined as specific words that highlight the meaning of the experience being researched. Constituent Profiles are searched for Referents, which are extracted and listed separately.

3.3 Thematic Index:

The Thematic Index establishes a non-repetitive, sequenced list of meaning statements and Referents used to search for interpretive themes. The Thematic Index contains the Constituent Profiles, statements attributed to singular meanings of experience. From this point on the data is examined collectively.

Stage 4. Searching the Thematic Index

This enables the comparison of Referents, Central Themes and Constituent Profiles to form a set of Interpretive Themes. It is important to note that the focus is on the explication of data that reports the meaning of experience.

Stage 5. Arriving at an Extended Description

Interpretive Themes are used to rigorously explicate meaning attributed to the phenomena under investigation.

Stage 6. Synthesis of Extended Descriptions

This is a summary of the Interpretive Themes to produce an in-depth picture of participants' experience of the phenomena under investigation (Sherwood & Silver, 1999, pp. 10-13).

Application of a phenomenological method to two interview transcripts

Participant Profile

The participants in this project are both Australian Anglo-Saxon females, aged between 35 and 45. Both participants run their own business, one as an organizational consultant, the other as a psychologist who, along with private clientele, also consults to organizations. Both women travelled from Australia to America in 1999 to participate in two separate CBWs. They were interviewed individually in August 2000.

Data Collection

I interviewed and recorded via audiotape the participants regarding their experience of 'being-in-community' during their participation a CBW. The interviews, conducted separately, were unstructured and proceeded with the question: *What was your experience of being-in-community?* This facilitated a free dialogic flow between co-researchers, which allowed other open-ended questions to be asked during the interview based on the emergent data. The interviews were transcribed and subjected to the procedures outlined below. However, the procedure

for the one of the transcripts was subject to modifications I made to Schweitzer's method. These modifications are indicated in the proceeding sections.

Before reading the transcripts, the first stage of the phenomenological procedure used, I assumed the 'phenomenological attitude'. This is a two-fold procedure consisting of the epoché or bracketing and the eidetic reduction. Both steps are essential to phenomenological methodology. Bracketing consists of suspending ones 'natural attitude', or our taken-for-granted approach to everyday living informed by culture and education, including our "past knowledge of the phenomenon encountered" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 240). Bracketing requires a rigorous reflection on one's bias, opinions, and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. McKenna (1997, p. 177) succinctly captures this in saying: "…epoché then is a way of making the transition from our more normal way of considering consciousness and the world to the properly phenomenological way of considering them."

Following epoch comes the eidetic reduction which "involves the movement from objects as facts to objects as exemplars (essences). In this process, particular features of a phenomenon are reduced or set aside so that note can be taken of that which shows itself as universal" (Ehrich, 1999, p. 25). The following steps form the process of eidetic reduction and are carried out within an attitude of bracketing:

a) The transcripts were read a number of times in order to achieve a holistic and intuitive understanding of the phenomenon.
b) The transcripts were then divided into discrete segments of expressions of the participant's experience; these are called Natural Meaning Units (NMUs).
c) The NMUs were then simplified, that is redundant or repeated words were removed, taking care that the essential experiential description was not altered, and each NMU was given a number. This was a sub-step included by me in Schweitzer's procedure to facilitate the searching of transcripts.
d) The simplified and numbered NMUs were then organized into Central Themes which are sentences conveying a 'discrete expression of experience.' Note: As an experiment I applied the following variation to the transcripts. I sorted Central Themes into key groups under particular headings e.g. 'family', 'community', etc. I then reconstituted the Central Themes into succinct statements relating to the key words. These were then sorted as outlined

below. An initial Referent search (see step g) was conducted and the results listed.

e) Central Themes were then searched for repetitive statements, which were removed, leaving a non-repetitive list of descriptive meaning statements for each participant, termed a Constituent Profile.

f) The Constituent Profile was reconstituted to form a Thematic Index, which highlights major themes that have emerged.

g) The Thematic Index was then searched for words or referents which conveyed meaning relevant to the phenomenon under investigation; for example the word 'reflect' and its derivatives, reflection and reflected were mentioned a number of times by one of the participants, Brenda.

h) Using these Referents I then removed any repeated or non-relevant statements to produce a combined Thematic Index of the essential aspects of the phenomenon of being-in-community.1

The above steps are carried out for each individual participant and the Thematic Index is an ideographic or personal list of relevant themes. The next step was to combine the individual Thematic Index's into one document. From this point on, the data is examined collectively. With this step the phenomenological investigator moves from an ideographic explication of an individual's experience to a more generalized nomothetic description.

The combined Thematic Index was read thoroughly a number of times and I became immersed in the data. Through meditating and reflecting on the data the following seven Interpretive Themes emerged which reported the meaning of experience. Interpretive Theme four was further divided into three sub-themes relating various aspects of the experience of speaking. It is important that the relationship between Interpretive Themes and the context in which they arose in the Central Themes and Constituent Profiles is kept in mind.

Interpretive Themes
The following Interpretive Themes were explicated from the data:

1. Self-boundaries/feeling overwhelmed

2. The reflected self
3. Experience of god/spirit/wisdom
4. Speaking as a:
   threshold experience
   clearing/emptying process
   transformational event
5. Community as connective and healing
6. Encountering the other
7. Community as a transcultural, transgeographical and transgender space

The Interpretive Themes were again checked against the original transcripts for verification and accuracy using a process of 'imaginative free variation' where the context is imaginatively altered in order to test the invariant structure of the experience of being-in-community as captured in the Interpretive Themes. That is, if the themes remain the same through this process they are taken to be universal and invariant aspects of the essence of the phenomena under investigation. As Haney (1994, p. 8) says: "the 'unbuilding' of the first phase of phenomenological method [the eidetic reduction], must be complemented by the rebuilding of the world as intentional constitution [interpretive themes and the extended description]." The 'rebuilding' phase commences by using the interpretive themes to explicate meaning attributed to the phenomena under investigation.

Explication of the phenomenon via Interpretive Themes
The following Interpretive Themes are not exhaustive and are restricted by a number of factors. First, as only one interview per participant was conducted, the data is not as deep and representative of the phenomenon as it could be. Second, only two participants were interviewed which again means that the data is not exhaustive or representative of a 'universal essence' of the phenomenon. Third, as phenomenology is interested in the inter-relationship between aspects of a phenomenon, the data is lacking in terms of quantity and variety of description. Given this, however, I believe the Interpretive Themes to be representative of some aspects of the phenomenon of being-in-community.

An existential psychological investigation would always interpret these themes from a psychological perspective, changing the language to that which is properly psychological (Valle & King, 1978). For this project I have chosen to depart from this procedure and give a participant-descriptive explication of the interpretive themes. In doing this, it must also be noted that as this project stands, the explications are more in line with what Crotty (1996) calls the 'new phenomenology', arising out of the North American developments in humanistic psychology exemplified

---

1 After I had reached this stage in V's analysis I decided not do complete a referent search for G's transcript as I found that themes emerging from the Constituent Profile stage could be reduced readily to a succinct Thematic Index. To test my theory I subjected G's Constituent Profile to a Referent search and the resultant Themes were identical to the ones I had already listed.

by Carl Rogers. Further explication of the themes uncovered in this paper would see a critical rendering of the phenomenon more closely aligned with classical or Husserlian phenomenology. I would also expect the Interpretive Themes, along with the Extended Description, to progressively deepen with second interviews and/or the inclusion of more participants.

The following descriptions need to be understood from a physical space perspective. In a CBW, participants are seated in a circle for the entire process. They may change seats regularly, but the circle is rarely broken.

1. Self boundaries/Feeling overwhelmed
Both participants reported that at some stage in the CBW they experienced reaching the limits of their bodily boundaries. This was explained in both cases as a sense that they would 'explode' if they proceeded with the moment; Brenda *"I wasn't going to be able kinda to continue it ... because it felt very explosive"* and Sarah *"I would explode, if I kept going, I would explode"*. Sarah also describes feeling existentially threatened by this feeling *"it would almost be like ... I didn't exist."* Both participants sought to resolve this internal intensity by placing limits on it or trying to 'stop' the experience continuing; Brenda *"[there was] an incredible immediacy, an urgency, ... to put the emotional intensity at rest ..."* and Sarah *"I chose to cap it and it was like I will stop there."* Along with experiencing bodily boundaries was the sense of being overwhelmed. Brenda also reported feeling overwhelmed by both other's expression of emotional pain and her own inner emotional intensity. She reported her *"capacity to tolerate too much [of others pain] all at once, overwhelmed me"* and that this experience felt like *"internal shaking"*.

The above indicates a heightened awareness of the internal self of being pushed to the extreme; somewhat like a balloon that has been filled up to the point where, with one more breath, it will burst. This experience shows itself as fundamental to the CBW experience, and is reported by both participants as being prior to transformational shifts and/or the experience of being-in-community. It is inextricably bound up in the experience of others (see interpretive theme 6).

2. The reflected self
Although only one participant reported experiencing 'being reflected', it is included here as it was fundamental to her ongoing experience of being-in community. It is my view that further interviews with other CBW participants would reveal similar experiences.

Brenda reported that the circular space became *"like a pond"* in which she experienced *"looking and being reflected"* which was for her *"<u>the</u> most powerful experience [in community]."* The other participants became like mirrors for Brenda. To *"look in somebody else's eyes"* and feel *"truly understood"* was a major transformational shift for her. The power of the other to mirror self and reflect her in a different light, to be deeply understood in the core of her being was not only self-revelatory, but also transformed Brenda's experience of her self and others dramatically. Up to that point Brenda had reported that she was *"pissing people off"* and being a *"pain in the arse"* feeling isolated and disconnected from the group and then all of a sudden she experienced for the first time in her life *"being reflected in an incredibly profound way."* Paradoxically the intensity of this experience became too much and Brenda had to *"kind of shut down from there."* These descriptions point to a fundamental experience of feeling truly seen at the same time as feeling completely exposed and overwhelmed (see interpretive theme 1).

From the above experience, a CBW could be seen to provide a unique and powerful opportunity to observe oneself with new eyes. The reflection of new or different facets of one's being is received by this same being. It is like standing in a hall of mirrors where one can see aspects of oneself usually hidden from oneself. Every way you turn there you are, confronted by self, exposed to the bright light of new self-perception. It is the intensity of this reflected self that Brenda withdrew from. Reflection seems to function as a reminder of our other facets, that there is more to us than meets our eyes. This experience has an essential quality of otherness, i.e., without others Brenda's ability to perceive hidden aspects of herself is reduced; the other also becomes a pivotal reference for *"feeling understood."*

3. Experience of god/spirit/wisdom
Both participants described the experience of being-in-community as a moment when they became aware that something greater or other than them-selves was present. After experiencing moments of agitation, struggle with self and others, of overcoming fear, of confronting self behaviour, after 'emptying' inner content through speaking their stories, when they were left with nothing else to say and nothing left to do, spirit entered the CBW. As Brenda reported *"it felt ... like in the presence of spirit ... it felt very much like something intangible became present."* This was echoed by Sarah in saying, *"you are left with the emptiness, then you are left with something else ... the real moment when universal spirit comes through."* Spirit was described as a connective, unifying force; Sarah *"I saw the movement of spirit between all of us, the movement of wisdom ... it just flowed, it bubbled,*

it ... kept popping up." Brenda reported that "*[spirit] connected us, for that period and ... that's what I experienced as community.*"

Both reported that their insights and inner knowing was provided by something they experienced as outside of themselves. Sarah said *"that moment of seeing what I saw [insight into her behaviour], I knew that that came from somewhere beyond me,"* whilst Brenda observed *"the ether or something provided me all my knowing, provided me with the answers."*

In contrast to this feeling of spirit being external to the individual, both participants reported feeling at some stage almost omnipotent. According to Brenda *"I became the Messiah*2 *and it completely transformed me."* Sarah said *"It was almost like being God."* Both of these feelings were in relation to their experiences of speaking. As Sarah says *"when I was speaking [to others], I was speaking to that essence within them."* Sarah found the experience of being like God *"a bit scary actually"* (see interpretive theme 6). This points to an extremely heightened awareness of one's own being as a powerful and profound presence emanating from one's core and capable of self-transcending actions.

The CBW became a space where the participants felt something larger, something beyond their normal experience of themselves. This experience became tangible to their senses and, again, was an integral 'self-in-relation-to-others' experience. However, it was reported as transcending self and being other than self.

4. Speaking: a) as a threshold experience, b) as a clearing/emptying process c) as a transformational event

a) As a threshold experience
The experience of 'speaking' in the presence of others, was for both women the pivotal point around which community revolved. Both participants reported being 'moved to speak'[3] about themselves

and their lives. Brenda *"I knew I had to speak, it was a very different body feeling ... I was going to be physically ill if I didn't speak ... I was so moved to speak from some place that I'd never spoken from before in my life ... [and] I told my story in a way in which I've never told anyone my story before in my life."* Sarah *"I just started to talk about how I really felt about some things that were going on in my life."*

However, both reported the build up to speaking as emotionally intense and scary; Sarah "*The build up to the expression of that [talking about her life] was ... quite tense and quite emotional*" and Brenda "*[taking the step to speak] was scary absolutely like life and death.*" Historically, both women reported coming from a family environment which did not encourage their self-expression. As Brenda says "*sadness and anger were things that I wasn't allowed to actually express*" and Sarah also relates a similar family dynamic "*My whole family rules are that you don't speak.*" Given this, the build up to self expression manifested as a 'threshold' experience which Brenda expressed as a move to "*speak from thin space*" and Sarah as going "*over the threshold.*" Brenda also said she was so scared "*I couldn't open my eyes; I spoke with my eyes closed.*"

The urgency or wish to speak created a situation in which the past had to be confronted by taking a risk. In both cases, choices were made to cross an invisible interior line, which was experienced as a threshold of self.

b) As a clearing/emptying process
Both participants reported feeling clear after speaking. Brenda "*when you speak from the heart space the communication is clear, there's no static, no crap, it feels very clear*" and Sarah "*once it was done ... I felt clean, clean, clear, fresh, new, new.*" However, there was a difference in how they felt post-speaking. Brenda reported feeling "*...very small, like a child ... I didn't have much energy for anyone else at that point, I was exhausted*" whilst Sarah reported feeling "*... alive, incredibly alive, very energized ... [like] the physical boundaries of my body didn't exist.*" So, speaking in this context has both an expansive, extroverted, transcendent bodily aspect and a contracting, introverted, withdrawn aspect. As Sarah said "*I wanted to withdraw [after speaking], take away the focus from me.*" Speaking was seen as an 'emptying' process where Brenda says "*everything just gets kind of moved away.*" This clear space seems then to be a place where new aspects of self can emerge, where transformative processes occur.

---

2 The Messiah here refers to a story, generally read out at the start of a CBW, called 'The Rabbi's Gift'. A monk tells the priest of a dying monastery that one of the monastery priests could be the Messiah. From that point on each priest starts treating the other priests with extraordinary respect. This respect gives of a special aura that attracts people back to the monastery, which begins to thrive once again.

3 One of the few guidelines for a CBW is that participants speak when 'moved'. This manifests in many ways such as sweaty palms, racing heart, a sense of urgency and other physical and emotional signals. Peck (1990) asserts that one of the barriers to reaching community is people speaking

when they are not moved or not speaking when they are moved.

---

c) As a transformational event

Speaking in the presence of others was a catalyst for personal transformation for both participants. The act of speaking their stories and having their stories heard and acknowledged by the other(s) created a shift in their personal consciousness and self-perception. Underlying this shift was the fear of persecution and being 'judged' by others. By overcoming the ingrained family messages, the two participants experienced a release of some kind that enabled these perceptual shifts to occur. Brenda reports "*when I looked at them [after speaking] the whole group changed, I didn't feel like I was dislocated or alienated from the group ... there was a point of transformation where I suddenly realized that I was actually part of the group.*" Again, the presence of others was fundamental to this transformational shift.

5. Community as connective and healing

When describing being-in-community, words such as "wholeness", "healing", "connectedness", "in-tune", "calm", "unity" and "back together" were used. Brenda felt a coming together of parts of self that she had previously experienced as disconnected or estranged from their sense of self. For instance, Brenda said "*It felt like bits of, you know, like parts of the tapestry or bits of the jigsaw had kind of fitted, I felt more whole.*" Sarah experienced community as an opening to others with a heightened sensitivity "*I was so in tune with where people were at ... it was so powerful.*"

They both described a making-way for community to manifest or enter the space. Brenda experienced this as being a group process; "*I absolutely and utterly experienced the group making way for community to become present. People gave up everything, it was a real stripping down, to make way, everybody had cast aside all ... [their] stuff for a full moment, for a moment.*" Sarah was aware of this at a personal level, and stated "*I just got out of the way.*" This allowed for an "*emergence of ... [the] experience of oneness*" of both herself and with others. Brenda reported this as "*a sense of being connected, incredibly deeply connected with people that we have no [prior] connection with.*"

The above descriptions tie in with Peck's following observation on community:

> A soft quietness descends. It is a kind of peace. The room is bathed in peace…and then something…happens. An extraordinary amount of healing and converting begins to occur - now that no one is trying to convert or heal. And *community* has been born (1990, pp. 103-104, Italics added).

Although this model of community building is not 'therapy', the process has the power to trigger a healing process in participants. Both participants reported healing in their lives as a result of being-in-community. Sarah says "*I was probably one of the most depressed people about [but after the CBW], my love of life and my openness to people is growing each day*" and Brenda "*it's healing, and feels like it's coming back together, whole and calm.*" Brenda also reported "*The essence of community has changed dramatically [for the better] my relationship with my children.*"

6. Encountering the other

Community cannot be separated from our interaction with or encounters with others. As Jason (1997, p. 108) says "social settings … provide a sense of community to all members and a sense of meaning to one's own individual needs." The encounter with the other emerges is one of opposing qualities. The tension between these qualities defines the participant's experience of the other. According to Goff (1992, p. 43) "Peck's community building model focuses upon otherness and the dilemma provided by such an encounter." The resultant tension provokes a series of responses in participants which enables their own barriers to community to become evident.

The following table is an illustration some of the opposing dynamics between aspects of the other, experienced as tension by Brenda and Sarah.

The encounter with the other enabled participants to gain insight into their own behaviour. As Brenda said "*it's not about tolerating other people, it's my own capacity for tolerance*" and Sarah "*It's not dependent on what the people around me are doing ... it's more dependent on how I am seeing it.*" Brenda reported how, when she was being difficult and manipulative in a group, a young 'innocent' girl spoke that gave Brenda a contrast of her self that "*tempered me slightly.*" Although Brenda felt even more isolated after this encounter with the other, it was, nontheless, instrumental in moving Brenda toward a different way of being. Husserl (1982, p. 128) brings a phenomenological sense of otherness to bear in writing "The only conceivable manner in which others can have the sense and status of existent others ... consists in their being constituted in me, as others."

The CBW brings otherness into sharp contrast against the screen of self, thus enabling a perspective, derived from reflection and differentiation, to be achieved by participants, which highlights their personal barriers to community. These barriers have to be 'let go' or

Quality	Description	Quality	Description
Difference & Isolation	I was a foreigner, feeling very different and very isolated	Nurturing & Caring	I haven't had that experience in my life where a group of strangers care so much…it was a human thing, very nurturing, supportive
Disconnected	I felt incredibly separate from the group, I felt very isolated extremely disconnected	Connected	[I] felt…connected, incredibly deeply connected with people
Confronted	there was a guy… who was dying of aides… and he just kind of dumped, his stuff and it just absolutely and utterly threw me, it was too premature	Empathic, Intuitive	My back was killing me and he [man next to her] just lent and he put [his] finger on the exact spot in my back that was excruciating me; that shocked me.
	We had a woman in our group she would constantly verbalise to the group what was going on in her head…at one point I just looked at her and I said 'We have a tape recorder and [listening to you]…it's just like a tape recorder going'…that's when she told me to go fuck myself.		I said [to him]"you felt everything I was feeling didn't you" yes he said yes!
			This guy that was next to me, he was extraordinary, I mean he was like, he was like my anchor to the ground, he just intuitively anchored me.

'emptied' before community can be achieved. Peck (1990, pp. 95-103) lists the most common barriers that people need to empty themselves of before they can enter genuine *community* as being: '*Expectations and Preconceptions; Prejudices; Ideology; Theology and Solutions; The Need to Heal; Convert; Fix or Solve; The Need to Control'*. Brenda demonstrates the need to fix and heal "*I wanted to run over and solve it [others emotional pain], or save it, or fix it, or stop it, because it was all too much*.

In his comments about emptying, Peck talks about how people or groups try to avoid the emptying stage by trying to organize themselves into community. Again, Brenda provides an example; *"[I] became very arrogant and very defensive and ... tried to orchestrate this group ... into ... seeing this shit wasn't necessary, and that we could actually get through to community and it didn't actually have to be ... all this great purging stuff."* The personal and group effort to 'let go' of the need to organize, fix convert, etc., enables group members to acknowledge the difficulty of the transitional process in a way that moves them on. Emptying allows for a space within which something new can emerge and this leads to the CBW space becoming transcendent in nature.

7. Community as a transcendent space
The data points to the CBW space as taking on differing dimensions and qualities. At times, it seems imbued with sacredness, with spirit, and at other times it is chaotic and disconnected. Participants described the space as thin, a heart space, as disorienting, as different from what they normally experience. The space also seems to change depending on what the group and/or the individual are experiencing. Both participants reported varying experiences of the CBW space with specific mention by Brenda of being-in-community as transcending difference; *"It took story and history and shit to get us there but [community] transcends their stories, their life ... their everything ... it transcends whatever shit has gone on in this room, transcends gender, race, story even history becomes irrelevant you know."* Thus the CBW space becomes representative and metaphorical. It exists as a finely balanced tension of opposites; of sacred and profane, safe and dangerous, connective and disconnective, absorbing and reflective, individual and group, self-hood and otherness, internal and external, inclusive and exclusive and so on. It is the screen for personal and group projection of internal and existential struggle. It also has a life of its own. As Sarah states *"It [CBW] creates space for spirit to be experienced."* This reference to the CBW doing the creating is testament to the CBW as being more than the sum of the total of its participants, of having a spirit of its own, and points to a CBW as having inherent qualities that transcend the group individuals comprising a CBW. The transcendent nature of the Community Building Workshop will, I believe, become evident with further investigation.

Summary of preliminary findings

Preliminary findings point to the CBW as being a powerful place where people can come together, no matter what their ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background or employment, and learn to strive together and transcend their differences on their way to building authentic community. In this case, both participants reported experiences that resembled Peck's stages of community building, with a particular emphasis on 'emptying' being pivotal to the experience of being-in-community. Their experience of being-in-community, as shown by the explicated data, is both a personal and shared-with-others experience. The manifestation of community is contingent upon there being a 'space' where it can be revealed. The CBW creates this space through dynamic tension created by encountering the other, what Turner (cited in Goff, 1992, p.44) calls the "rite of intensification".

The CBW is a meeting place for diversity and difference. It is a place where one can have an intense experience of oneself in relationship to the other. It is the interdependent relationship with the other which allows for the creation of a resilient community capable of embracing difference and diversity. In his book *The Web of Life*, Fritjof Capra shows that diversity in an ecological community is fundamental to its resilience. He draws a comparison with human community in saying:

> A diverse community is a resilient community, capable of adapting to changing situations…. If the community is aware of the interdependence of all its members, the diversity will enrich all relationships and thus also enrich the community as a whole, as well as each individual member (1997, p. 295).

In explicating some aspects of the phenomena of being-in-community, as experienced in a Community Building Workshop, it can be seen that the process enables a 'sensitive awareness' of one's self and the other as unique beings in an essential human relationship which is interdependent and connected. The CBW could well be a modern 'rite of passage', a path to reconnecting with a deep essence of community.

_____

About the Author

Carl Holroyd is a graduate student in the social sciences at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, Western Australia.

Refereneces

Capra, F. (1997). *The web of life: A new synthesis of mind and matter*. London: Flamingo.

Goff, D. (1992). *Communitas: An exploratory study of the existential and transpersonal dimension of a psychological sense of community as found in the Community Building Workshop.* Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, USA.

Crotty, M. (1996). *Phenomenology and nursing research*. Melbourne: Churchill Livingstone.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. St Leonards (NSW): Allen & Unwin.

Ehrich, L. C. (1999). Untangling the threads and coils of the web of phenomenology. *Education Research Perspectives*, *26*, 219-226.

Giorgi, A. (1994). A phenomenological perspective on certain qualitative research methods. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *25*, 190-220.

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *28*, 236-60.

Gozdz, K. (Ed.). (1995). *Community building: Renewing spirit and learning in business*. San Francisco: New Leaders Press, Stirling & Stone, Inc.

Haney, K. M. (1994). *Intersubjectivity revisited: Phenomenology and the other*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Husserl, E. (1982). *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to phenomenology*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Jason, L. A. (1997). *Community building: Values for a sustainable future*. Westport: Praeger.

McKenna, W. R. (1997). In L. Embree, E. Behnke, D. Carr, C. J. Evans, J. Huertas-Jourda, & J. Kockelmans. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (pp. 177-180). Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Peck, M. Scott. (1990). *The different drum: Community-making and peace*. London: Arrow Books.

Pollio, H. R., Henley, T. B., & Thompson, C. J. (1997). *The phenomenology of everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schweitzer, R. P. D. (1998). *Phenomenological research methodology: A guide*. Paper presented at Phenomenology Seminar for Edith Cowan University, Bunbury WA. Bunbury.

Sherwood, P., & Silver, A. (1999). *Client experience of counselling and psychotherapy*. Unpublished report, Edith Cowan University, Bunbury WA.

Valle, R., & Mohs, M. (1998). Honoring human experience. In W. Braud & R. Anderson (Eds.), *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Valle, R. S., & King, M. (Eds.). (1978). *Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. New York: SUNY Press.

_____