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PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC EXPERIENTIAL INTERVENTIONS FOR ACTIVISTS:
EXAMINING THE "DESPAIR AND EMPOWERMENT" PARADIGM

by

Barbara Jull

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Arts
Graduate Department of Education
University of Toronto

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PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC EXPERIENTIAL INTERVENTIONS FOR ACTIVISTS:
EXPLORING THE “DESPAIR AND EMPOWERMENT” PARADIGM
by Barbara Jull
University of Toronto - Graduate Department of Education
Master of Arts
1996

Abstract
Burn out literature substantiates activists’ stress. Political critiques of
psychology examine tensions between personal and political needs. From four semi-
structured qualitative interviews with facilitators of the “Despair and
Empowerment” paradigm, I examine how the personal and political can be
integrated into experiential workshops. These facilitators generate discourses about
psychotherapeutic interventions sustaining activism. Central questions were:
- how workshops integrate the personal and political
- how facilitators see emotional exploration affecting activism
- how some activists experience stress
- how notions of activism and political praxis are constituted by facilitators,
  the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm and political activists
My research expectation is not to provide definitive representations of the
intervention, facilitators, or activists. Rather, layers of discussion about pedagogy,
healing and practices of social change are offered to further develop praxis in myself,
the research and workshop participants, and others committed to personal and
social healing and transformation.
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CHAPTER 1 - DEFINING THE RESEARCH INTEREST

1. Introduction

This research originates out of an interest in sustainable activism, the emotional experiences and needs of activists, and how interventions with psychotherapeutic intentions¹ can stimulate and support active engagement in social transformation. My intention for this research is to examine a separation or tension I have noted through my own experience in engaging in activist communities. On the one hand there are activist's needs for emotional processing. Yet the same time, some activists feel an ambivalence about meeting their needs through any formal psychotherapeutic intervention. There is concern that psychological practices can undermine or depoliticize an individual's engagement in taking action. Although there are examples of activist organizations and ideologies that effectively integrate personal and political needs, this is not always the case. Some organizations and individuals may intellectually understand the need for integration, but there is a struggle in actually embodying activism that sustains the person, the organization and actions. Also, personal healing and political commitment is viewed by some within a mutually exclusive framework. In this case, the stresses of organizing can become intolerable for some, resulting in activists having to leave their political communities and commitments all together. This impasse between the psychological, personal and political is potentially detrimental to the individual, the community and the urgency of radical social change.

In my research, I wanted to look at how collective psychotherapeutic interventions might assist activists with feeling more sustained in their praxis.

¹The parameters of what I mean by "psychotherapeutic" will be defined shortly and are important to note because as my research progressed, this term became increasingly contentious. Thus, it is important to understand from the beginning how this word is used.
There were a number of different angles from which I could examine this interest. I chose to ground my discussion in the ways that one paradigm does and does not serve as a psychotherapeutic intervention that assists activists in collectively examining the emotional needs and experiences. Insight into the complexity of discourses about psychotherapeutic interventions for activists is developed through examining the gaps and contributions of this one paradigm. Moreover, as this research is in the area of community development as opposed to applied psychology, I examine primarily the ideological and political implications of psychotherapeutic interventions. Examining psychotherapeutic techniques are less of a focus in this research than the outcomes and political impact that this process of emotional support can have.

The Complexity of this Research Focus

At the outset, it is important to emphasize that this research has complexity on a variety of levels. First, this work encapsulates only a few moments in the evolution of my own perspectives and that of the facilitators and the circumstances we were describing. Representing and reflecting upon any situation is a selective and subjective process. Whenever we speak and consider our perceptions, both our "selves" and the field which we are considering are changed. So, the investments, analysis, bias, vision and partiality of these comments are pieced together with the intention of offering insight, more questions and a range of answers to consider, rather than a static representation of "fact" or universal generalization.

Another complexity is that the interplay of factors that define a context is never static and originates out of a unique configuration of elements. For example, in the configuration of "the individual" there is a paradox. On the one hand, people constantly change through the ability to consciously choose behaviors. Yet, at the same time most people have habitual behaviors which define their character and
are predictable and frequently unalterable unless considerable focus is given to changing their perspectives and behavior.

Equally true is the complexity of the external factors such as the constantly changing texture of relationships within organizations, and within the configuration of economics, politics, culture and power, that come to define each moment. As with individuals, so too can organizations, movements, political and economic climates exhibit comparable fluxes of both consistency and change. Finally, it is artificial in many senses to separate the individual and the environment; just as culture creates a person, a person constructs their own perceptions of identity and context.

My inquiry was also challenging in that there is little research on activists' experiences of the intersection of the personal and political. In one sense this absence was encouraging in that it indicated there was a need for this research. However, it also raised questions for me about authority within research. How would I examine attitudes and experiences that are diffuse and undocumented for the most part? What information or people can be viewed as reliable representatives activists' needs, attitudes and interventions? What does it take for stress to be acknowledged and effectively addressed in some activist cultures? Who can speak for a movement, an intervention or a particular culture of activism?

There are subjective accounts by high profile activists such as bell hook's *Sisters of the Yam*, Gloria Steinem's *Revolution from Within* or interviews with Ram Dass in *A Change of Heart* which offer some testimony. Can Steinem's work, for example, be seen as representative, given her influence in forming aspects of women's movement and contributing to a paradigm of organizing for feminists? How and why are figures like Steinem, hooks or Dass positioned as valid representatives/observers/creators of discourses of activism?
For instance, my research interest originated out of observations, experiences and casual conversations that I have had. I could offer similar testimony to a comment of Dass' that "many people who are activists - whose hearts hurt because of the pain of injustice or the destruction of the environment - say to me that being mindful of the anger will dissipate the energy of the anger that they use for social action" (Dass, 1996). Could my comments or observations be viewed as a valid representation of a phenomenon, or could Dass'? Given that there is little systematic research on these subjects, when does observation shift from hearsay into an accurate representation of perceptions within a field of discourse? Who has to speak that observation in order for it to carry authority and why does this regulation of observation/representation exist?

My own interests and history with the topics of my thesis also added complexity and my personal experience prior to and during this thesis is a key factor that needs some elaboration. Because I feel particularly intimate with this subject matter, some context is useful for the reader to sense the biases that inevitably seeps through into situations I perceive and represent from my young, Anglo-Saxon, able-bodied, educated, youngest of four children in a childhood-divorced family, generation X-ish, middle-class vantage. Most of the following paragraphs about my own experiences were written during my literature review process, and prior to choosing a particular workshop paradigm and conducting interviews. Parallels in themes and experience that emerge with my perceptions and that of the facilitators I interviewed are obvious. Throughout this paper, and particularly in my methodology section, I elaborate on the tensions in doing research where my relationship to the topic is personal.

A childhood interest in the mass beaching behavior of porpoises returns to my mind as an apt metaphor that in some ways captures the essence of this current research interest of mine. For years as a kid I was perplexed and mystified by this
fatal behavior of dolphins, whales and other animals of such discernible intelligence. Stories of failed attempts by humans to save these animals by pulling some of them back out into the waters particularly baffled me. What primal alliance or defiance caused many of the porpoises to persistently return to their suffocating comrades? My ten year old mind was transfixed by this perplexing mixture of intelligence, urgency, sacrifice, and liberation. There was mystery and tragedy in this inexplicable loyalty or pact that over-rode the laws of sustaining the individual and life that I thought all sensible beings would live by.

I have observed and personally reproduced behavior in the worlds of social activism very comparable to the suicidal group behavior of these dolphins and whales who beach en mass. I have spoken to other activists who have felt in conflict with their engagement in activism and tending to their needs for emotional integration. I spontaneously chose the word "engagement" in activism, but its quite apt to describe my experience, given the double meaning of "involvement", as well as "being on the threshold of some life long commitment that is an intention but not yet a formalized promise or fully lived relationship". In my heart I've been committed to actively engage in social transformation but in my actions, balancing doing socially urgent and transformative work while honoring my own health and well-being has been a challenge.

How to negotiate the struggle between personal needs and expectations with community needs and expectations? For the most part, I was unaware of the stress that my commitments and undigested feelings generated in my body and my being. I partially account for this by reflecting back on the various cultures of activism that I gravitated towards and the relentless focus on oppression and trauma that I was drawn to in work, relationships and studies. There was little replenishment, joy or relief in the way I and those around me pursued our commitments. So, in part, I attribute my struggles to the fact that I rarely found time, support, or resources to
gain insight into this struggle that was slowly tearing me apart. I sensed hierarchies of contribution and membership that I struggled to live up to. Moreover, my initial exposure to the imperative for social justice and transformation was primarily through books and undergraduate professors who no longer embodied and lived out the level of commitment to action that they spoke of in the good old days of the sixties. Having no access to living breathing mentors or support but a lot of pressure to act was a poor foundation to base my activism on. I felt I accumulated a lot of frustration and guilt before my feet ever really hit the floor. Although I had some intellectual avenues to examine the circumstances around me, with little space to emotionally digest these experiences, and I quickly burned out.

After a year and a half of recovery through yoga, art and living in an intentional healing community, with some ambivalence, I returned to academia and the looming thesis. I felt attempting to integrate my worlds of healing, activism and personal growth facilitation would offer me some clarity about where I'd been, where I am and where I might go. It was not until I started working on my thesis that I realized the extent of my burn out and felt in my body the extent of my caring about social justice, healing and transformation. Much grief and relief was triggered through the reading and interviewing process.

I was left with many questions. What personal and systemic or cultural mechanisms supported my burning out? What are other people's experiences? What judgment did I have and did others have about my emotional stresses and struggles? Why did I not find an activist environment that could offer me the mentoring, nurturing and agency that I sought? Was this all my own projection and baggage or how did external reality influence my taking on too much and being insufficiently aided?

At times I felt very vulnerable doing this research. On one level I knew my difficulties were a reflection of my personality and fears, and yet I had met many
others who have struggled with burn out and the difficult decision to leave organizing for a while. I felt in taking on questions of cultures of activism and the political impact of psychotherapeutic interventions, I was stepping into taboo territory - naming something that people are aware of but resistant to confronting.

There was also tension in returning to academia and choosing to look at this topic which has an inevitable element of mystery to it. I didn't want to theorize or systematize the magic out of what these facilitators do and why and how people act to support personal or planetary healing. So, fear, tension and courage were very present in this topic because of how it exposes the challenges and opportunity that I and other activists have struggled with. My investments and familiarity with the research focus was useful in how it served to inform my inquiry. Being conscious of my own interests also helped me to try and maintain a distinction between my beliefs and feelings and those of the people I would be interviewing. However, within the responsibility of accurately representing interviewees words and the essence of the paradigm, as researcher I chose the angle from which to use this paradigm as a discussion for broader issues of interest to me. I definitely experienced the tightrope that post-positivist researcher Patti Lather speaks of in "[doing] openly ideological [and] advocacy based research...[which] faces the danger of rampant subjectivity, where one finds only what one is pre-disposed to look for" (Lather, 1991, p. 52). As best as possible, I try to account for my investments and analysis.

Given this complexity on many levels, the methodology and intention of this research is grounded in an underlying recognition of this fluidity of subjectivity and context over time. Thus, my intention and expectation as researcher is not to provide any definitive representation of the work these facilitators do or of the needs and experiences of activists. Rather, through examining one paradigm, broader discourses of healing and activism can be considered. I celebrate how these workshops and doing this research offered a chance for expression, integration and
change for me, the facilitators, as well as so many others who benefit from our investigations and experiences. This work offers layers of discussion which interviewees, readers and at a later time even myself may not agree with. Rather than "proving" some "facts" about the effectiveness of an intervention or the complexity of praxis, my intention is to map out the parameters of discourses relating to these questions, thereby stimulating reaction and contemplation and promoting the development of further envisioning personal and global healing. A more detailed discussion of methodology and challenges in my approach to this research occurs in Chapter 2.

2. The Structure of This Paper

This research unfolds somewhat like a stone skipping on water. Because there is little research on experiences of activism specifically, there were some leaps to be made before finally sinking into the depths of this specific case study.

In this first chapter, I define my research interest generally. The literature review serves several purposes. Without having research to "prove" that activists experience stress, I chose to use readings on burn out to offer background on personal and environmental stresses that activists could potentially face. I use parallels in context particularly between the human services and activism because the former\(^1\) has had more research conducted on stress, burn out and emotional experiences in relation to the work that they do. Having this body of literature as a frame of reference assisted in giving a context to the workshops and research. It magnifies potential outcomes of cumulative stresses. Thus, I used the literature on burn out to substantiate the belief that contexts of activism can be stressful for some people, and there are some potential emotional outcomes to these stressors.

\(^{1}\)One reason why prison workers or nurses have been the subjects of more research could be that there is more social investment in sustaining people who operate within socially sanctioned roles rather outside of them.
Following the discussion of factors and experiences of burn out and stress is the canvass of literature on ambivalence within some activist circles about psychotherapeutic healing interventions. Regardless of whether resistance, critique and attitudes about psychological paradigms is dominant or not within an activist culture, this perspective exists in relationship to the work that these facilitators do. Thus, critique and reaction to psychotherapeutic interventions is pertinent to this research. This literature review forms the backdrop to my research.

The second chapter on methodology offers the framework of this research. First, overarching theoretical approaches that can govern research methodology are briefly examined. As there were innumerable ways of approaching my interests in sustainable activism and psychotherapeutic interventions, I outline my general course of decision making about the research parameters and methodology I chose to operate within. Then, a more descriptive representation of the specific research topic and methodology is provided, including, research procedure, data collection and analysis, the research write up and challenges encountered during my research process.

Then, in Chapter 3, my research findings begin to be presented. First I examine the “Despair and Empowerment” workshops as a paradigm that integrates the personal and political for self-identified activists and non-activists. The philosophical/psychological underpinnings of the paradigm are presented through synthesizing the written data from the book Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age and data collected from my interviews. Distinctions between therapy and the workshops are examined.

In the next two chapters, I consider the “Despair and Empowerment" paradigm’s relationships to political praxis. In Chapter 4, I look at how the work facilitators do is political in terms of supporting activists emotionally. Data about facilitators observations of feelings that activists have addressed in workshops are
presented. In Chapter 5, I examine the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm's relationships to political praxis and activists. I explore how the workshops implicitly and explicitly reproduces or transforms some dominant societal, activist, and psychotherapeutic practices and beliefs. I integrate critiques of psychology and therapeutic modalities presented in the literature review in Chapter 1 with data from my research and Macy's analysis.

In my concluding discussion section, I summarize key areas of inquiry that were addressed through my research and analysis and suggest avenues of further inquiry. Appendices are attached to illuminate various sections of research content and process.

3. Central Research Terms

There are some terms central to this discussion that warrant defining, although the fuller sense of their meaning in this specific context will unfold as the nuances develop through this research and discussion. A conventional dictionary definition offered by Webster's serves as a starting point:

**Psychotherapy**: "Any alteration in an individual's interpersonal environment, relationships or life situation brought about especially by a qualified therapist and intended to have the effect of alleviating symptoms of mental or emotional disturbance".

As my research progressed, there was considerable controversy about what constitutes a "psychotherapeutic intervention", and if the "Despair and Empowerment" workshop paradigm that I examine "counts". After some reflection on the above definition and feedback from research participants, I realized an important distinction can be made between "psychotherapeutic" methodology and "psychotherapeutic" outcomes. Although methodology and outcomes can be two
sides of the same coin, my primary interest was nonetheless in looking at workshops that had the intention of having psychotherapeutic outcomes, meaning "any alteration...intended to have the effect of alleviating symptoms of mental or emotional disturbance". The ways that the paradigm chosen specifically relates to this definition is discussed in detail in upcoming chapters.

**Experiential:** "derived from, based on or relating to experience". For this research, the term also implies participatory, whereby the lives of the participants provide the primary source of content.

**Workshop:** "a course or seminar emphasizing free discussion of ideas, demonstrations of methods and practical application of skills and principles given mainly for adults already employed in the field". It is important to add influential factors such as anonymity and whether the workshop occurs outside of the context of a person's regular life.

**Facilitator/facilitate:** "to make easier or less difficult; free from difficulty or impediment; assist; aid".

**Activist/activism:** These contentious terms are more carefully considered in later chapters on the findings of this research. A review of definitions in research by Rutter examines the broadest parameters of "activism". She found: "there are many types of activists participating in different acts, having different motives and different consequences" (p. 6). Her examination of political participation included a full range of activity - from voting and being a Rotary Club member to protest politics and civil disobedience.
A shortcoming in this breadth of definition in my mind is the failure to distinguish volunteerism or being active, from "activism". Factors that can distinguish levels of political action are the levels of initiative, skills, courage, resources and time required, and if the intention is to influence one's personal interests or a collective outcome. Degrees of psychological investment in participation can also distinguish levels of social engagement. Rutter mentions the willingness and intention to experience conflict and change with existing structures as defining experiences. Commitment also influences activism, whether it be voluntary, semi-voluntary or full employment by a community based organization.

Tova Green, who is affiliated with "Despair and Empowerment" work, defines activism in a way that is reflective of the paradigm that the facilitators interviewed in this research operate within:

Our activism may be expressed in many ways: through writing, music, dance or other art forms; through paid or volunteer work in peace, justice, or environmental organizations; through teaching, social work, health promotion, or law; through investing our money ethically; or through political work...Activism is action that contributes to "tikkum olam", a Hebrew phrase meaning the healing of our world. This includes creating our vision of the world we want to live in not only fixing things that we see are wrong (Green, 1994, p. 10).

Because my own experience is primarily out of "progressive leftist" critiques of social and systemic structures, these were the activists I was most aware of as the subjects of this discussion. However, I recognize that activism on the political Right may also engage in similar discussions. Also, because I am interested in activist's stress, I focus more on self-identified people who have at one time been involved in activism on a full time basis as opposed to concerned citizens who may volunteer but who are not immersed in activism as central to their career, lifestyle, time commitments and identity.
4. Literature Review

4.1 Burn Out and Stress Literature

The seeds of burn out are sown in how we enter into the helping act and in what we bring with us (needs, expectations). Burn out can be our motivations come home to roost.

Ram Dass in Shields, p. 121

There is little research about the interior or psychological experiences of activists. Other academic work addressing activists as a specific population seem to have found a similar paucity of information in their literature reviews (Hayes, 1994; Rutter, 1988; Shields, 1994; Simpson, 1989). This validates the need for research specifically about activists. Studies of individuals in the human services, such as social work, nursing, or prison workers are more widely available and offer some parallels in context that are useful to consider in this research. For example, social service workers and activists potentially operate in comparable internal and external environments, thereby potentially experiencing similar circumstances such as excessive case loads or demands, cut backs in resources, relationship to the welfare state, and personal motivations to serve people and instigate institutional and personal change. Thus, much of the following literature review examines stress, burn out and psychotherapeutic interventions draws from research in the human service sector. Integrating this information with my research findings will hopefully provide further insight in the distinctive needs and experiences of social activists.

There are numerous definitions of burn out. Presenting the ways that these definitions of burn out overlap offers a sense the literature's breadth. In Katrina Shields' work specifically about activists, she notes the various colloquial uses of the term burnout. This illuminates the broad range of experience that the term "burn out" can encompass. Shields notes that the phrase "burned out" can be used as an exaggerated expression of simply feeling tired in the moment. "Burn out" can also
describe a sense of temporary malaise which the individual can still recuperate from quite easily. The severest form of burnout is a "stress related disease providing a major life crisis from which the individual may never fully recover" (Shields, p. 119). She emphasizes that it is "the depth of anguish in this full blown experience which [differentiates it] from an acute stress reaction [that] a crisis or short burst of overwork [may cause]" (p. 119). Shields summarizes burn out simply as "taking on too much, too intensely for too long" (Shields, p. 121).

Daley (1979) suggests that burn out is "a reaction to job related stress that varies in nature with the intensity and duration of the stress itself" (p. 375). When the inherent stresses of engaging in an activity are allowed to cumulate, burn out often occurs. In the foundational work of burnout research in the human services, Maslach (1978) defines it as emotional exhaustion resulting from cumulative stress.

Burn out is defined by Shannon and Saleeby (1980) as "a physiological and behavioral response to cumulative stress" manifested in behavioral, affective cognitive and physical symptoms such as apathy, negativity, hostility toward client and agency, emotional distancing from client problems and job context, lack of attentiveness, cynicism, and a decrease in energy and motivation.

Some other symptoms that Shannon and Saleeby mention of an individual experiencing excessive stress are a decrease in concern for people, a decrease in positive feelings about any aspect of their lives, and a diminished sense of respect and sympathy. They note how deterioration in the quality of life occurs physically and socially. Behaviorally, indicators or outcomes of burn out can be rigid, stubborn, inflexible attitudes which block progress and constructive change. The inability to adapt to change and verbalizing negative attitudes are also commonly mentioned symptoms. Chronic fatigue, weight change, sexual despondency or addiction, sleep disorder, substance abuse, depression, chronic anxiety, a sense of being overwhelmed, besieged by demands, entrapment are also identified as outcomes.
Shields, Freudenberg and Maslach offer similar shopping lists of burn out symptoms. They note that burn out can result in physical exhaustion, illness, psychosomatic symptoms, addiction, marital/relationship conflict, suicide, neurotic or psychotic symptoms and disorganization. People can also become more rigid, emotionally distancing at an unconscious level, with decreases in energy, motivation, and creative thought.

Studies have found that in order to cope with diminished energy, often people resort to formulas or dogmas for behavior rather than having the energy to be receptive and responsive to the changes and specificity of each moment. Increases in the use of blame or derogatory attitudes in relationships are also mentioned as common indicators of burnout. People can also adapt to excessive stress by becoming more emotionally distant from their work.

Burn out is also described by some literature as a spiritual crisis. "Burn out is a psychological metaphor - whatever has been damaged in the flames is the soul. Our souls and our bodies interact so closely that when one is damaged the other is usually in trouble too" (Vigderman, 1985). There is a sense of futility where the individual can be devoid of joy and isolated from what they used to find important and attractive (Shields, p. 120). There can also be a sense of ambivalence prior to full recognition of burn out. where the individual is faced with "the desire to go on with an obsession and wanting to escape. Being unable to scrape up the energy to create change until they hit rock bottom...[they] may struggle on ineffectually or even obstruct others in achieving joint goals" (Shields p. 120, 121).

Consistently the literature I reviewed in this area emphasizes that the inability of individuals to perceive other options is common in people who are burning out. Moreover, Shields emphasizes that burn out as an experience of personality change more so than a static formula of behavior or symptoms. She mentions withdrawal, rigid thinking, cynicism and negativity in a formerly positive
person are relevant indicators of burn out. Previously well balanced individuals can show evidence of distorted reality perceptions, paranoia, thinking others are against them (Shields, 1994). The literature mentions how burn out can be internalized to the point where the person feels they've become a deficient or bad person, cold, callous, or a sell out.

It is important to distinguish between stress and burnout. It is only when stress increases beyond a critical level or persists over a period of time that it can cause serious psychological damage. Daley and Shield's writing both emphasize the functionality of stress. They note that stress can provoke a sense of challenge to workers, thereby potentially increasing their motivation and productivity (Daley, 1979). The experience of adrenaline, energy and euphoria from stress is not a concern until it becomes sought after, or unnecessarily generated out of habit, at which point there is the potential for damage (Shields, p. 122).

Organizational Factors That Influence Stress

In the literature there is discrepancy about the extent to which environmental factors contribute to burnout. Shields distinguishes that at times burn out can be primarily a shift in perception "where we are surrounded by nourishment but are unable to tap into it and...[the individual] loses a sense of wonder at what is still unspoiled in this world and the daily miracles before our eyes" (p. 120).

External environments can greatly increase stress and undermine support. Organizational factors mentioned as having been found to contribute to burn out are: complex confusing rules and regulations, inexplicable and sudden changes in regulations governing the operation of the organization, excessive case loads or demands, a lack of variety in the jobs workers do, insufficient breaks away from stressful jobs, inadequate support systems and few safe outlets for emotional release catharsis within the place that generates the feelings. Stress is aggravated by the
perception of little control over the environment, relative lack of organizational support, inflexibility of work roles, and uncertainty of organizational norms and values (Shannon and Saleeby, 1980). Expectations that people will burn out can also support burn out in actually happening (Shields, 1994; Brachfeld, 1984; Unconscious at Work, 1994).

When individuals burn out, this can force an organization to compensate in a variety of ways. When people become over-stressed and ineffective in their work, this impacts the person, the organization as well as the clients or cause which they have been serving. This creates more work for the other members of the community by either having energy being taken up in supporting the burnt out colleague emotionally, through taking on the work that the individual is incapable of continuing to do, or by being faced with replacement staff who are new and place demands on the resources of the workers and the organization. High turnover can also create a climate where the "survivors" cling to one another. The need to have colleagues around who can affirm the history and culture of an organization is important. A destabilized environment can generate psychic defenses that create constriction and resistance to integrating the new ideas and energy of incoming members. Organizations prone to burning out workers tend to have low morale, impaired performance, and high rates of absenteeism and job turn over.

There is little in the way of research that delineates stresses specific to activist individuals and communities. Still, the potential for personal neglect, burn out and organizational failure is high. There can be inherent stress that comes with the knowledge that social change is necessary (Macy, 1983; Shields, 1994). Trauma has been described as "generally involving threats to life or bodily integrity" (Herman, 1992, p. 33). With escalating violence and environmental degradation occurring globally and locally, threats to bodily integrity can become an inherent part of living on this planet. As activist Sandra Butler summarized, "how can you be conscious
and not be outraged and in pain at the state of the world?" (Butler, 1992). Katrina Shields notes from her experience as a therapist for activists that "even if we are not obsessively seeking out bad news, as people concerned about social issues, we are exposed to distressing realities" (p. 122).

Activism can be stressful in that it potentially touches every level of our being (Shields, p. 125). In working for social change, there can be chronic emotional stress which requires continuous attention. For some activists there can be little separating their work and personal lives. Maintaining a "healthy distance" can be challenging for activists have been, or continue to be directly affected by the issue they are mobilizing to change. On the one hand, having an ongoing and personal relationship to an issue can offer the activist many insights and resources to cope within the situation they are trying to change. But this intimacy with issues can also create stress in that the stakes can feel higher than in other work settings.

Shields notes that due to the grass roots nature of some organizations, people may never have an environment outside of the activism as "home is office, is meeting place, is action headquarters, is a place for celebrations where more shop talk and to do's can be generated" (Shields, p. 125). Whether this can nurture an activist in terms of having a humane work environment or damage them depends on the individual.

Shields literature goes on to examine some of the specific "occupational hazards" for the individual activist which can result in burn out are, those being: fears of reprisals and criticism from family, the media, their organizations and from their own perceived standards or aspirations. Shields mentions that a person's "internal critic" can potentially be the most corrosive form of attack that an activist faces. When doubt, criticism or pressure to perform are continuously present, the sense that you are never doing enough can be chronic, and "who we are becomes what we get done" (p. 127). External influences such as the media and social norms
within and outside of activist communities can be a significant influence that supports burn out.

Considerable demands are placed upon those in the political arena who are committed to transforming power relationships of submission and domination generated through social constructs such as race, class, gender, age, and physicality (size, abilities). With increasing expectations of political consciousness, some activists can feel fear of penalties or shame for the discovery of a "faulty chink within my feminist armour" (Valverde, p. 63). This requirement of responsiveness to the complexity of each context, whether that be a person, organization or political climate, is a challenge that can generate stress.

With activism, there is pressure, uncertainty and few external rewards (Shields, p. 122). This can create stress in terms of insufficient physical or psychological support to sustain the individual. Activists' relationships to standing outside of social norms and expectations around earning money and pursuing recognized careers, families, and relationships can also create stress (Shields, p. 125). Being in constant rebellion can also be stressful or alienating for radical activists to maintain. Fluctuating feelings of political efficacy is also mentioned as increasing activists vulnerability to burn out. People engaged in controversial issues can also face physical harm and harassment either personally or through threats to loved ones.

Resistance to examining the toll that activism can take is another factor potentially contributing to burnout. Shield's work emphasizes that it is imperative that activists "include themselves as a valid environmental concern [within their commitments to change" (Shields, p. 124). Some political groups can be dependent on operating out of the adrenaline that stress offers. This can create powerful actions, however, while some individuals may thrive in the stress, others may deteriorate.
To conclude, failure to replenish and diffuse stress is a major factor contributing to burn out according to the literature that I reviewed. In order to recover, an individual may need to separate from their community and identity as “an activist”. This can create a sense of isolation and loss of purpose which may further alienate the individual.

**Brief Critique of the Burn Out and Stress Literature**

Some questions were raised for me about ways that burn out seems to be presented in the literature that I reviewed. In what ways does creating a definition of experience, "symptoms" or behavior support or undermine the project of social change? I believe a significant question to consider is who is using these categories and for what purpose? When behaviors such as “expressing negative attitudes” or “inflexibility in behavior” are categorically considered a reflection of disturbance or mental deterioration, the very foundation of protest can become suspect. For many activists, critique and vision can be two sides of the same coin. When are persistent feelings of “negative attitudes” and “cynicism” corrosive and when are they “healthy”, honest and legitimate reactions to political realities. Again, "inflexibility" is named as another symptom of burn out or an attitude that can create harm.

However, holding out on certain values or strategies can enable an individual or to not settle for less. Adapting,, becoming well adjusted, and playing by the rules can create less “stress” initially but can potentially undermine visions of justice and change. This raises many questions about the range of confrontation and stress inherent in various political strategies, from non-adversarial approaches to “non-cooperation”.

I believe that there is value in describing experiences that can be common to many people involved in social change movements, and I feel it is very important that burn out be understood and taken seriously in activist communities. However,
it is crucial to consider who is using these categories and with what intention. There is potential for abuse if these descriptors are used to assault or invalidate someone else's subjectivity. And yet, how as a community can activists challenge, care about and support each others behaviors so that personal care and sustainable activism can be strengthened? It is important to remember that the systemization of "burn out" as an experience has the potential to both heal and harm.

I am also personally interested in issues of maturation, stress and sustainability - something that is not addressed in the literature I reviewed. My own experience with student activism made me aware of the hazards of not having more seasoned activists to draw from. Particularly with the wealth of information now available in print form, having that level of information with few resources to guide people on how to sustainably act with that information can make young activists vulnerable if they do not have living support systems that are inter-generational. Being skillfully mentored in effectively embodying an activist lifestyle is different than observing or reading about this way of living.

While healing and integration are more thoroughly examined in the discussion section of this thesis, a brief mention is warranted at this point. As with many forms of trauma, psychological and physical wounding endures depending on the degree to which avenues are available for the individual to process the experience during and after its occurrence.

None of the literature I reviewed included an examination of the detrimental effects that systemic oppression and inaction can have. None of the primary research on burn out names racism, homophobia, classism, able-ism, sexism, or authoritarian power structures as factors that potentially contribute to burn out. There is some research on the emotional and physical toll of stress generated from racism. What is significant is the failure for burn out literature to bridge this gap. This raises the question of how the phenomenon of burn out is bound by racism,
class or socio-economic status. Are similar environmental factors and symptoms generated from the stresses of poverty considered the same as burn out or is there a different category or label? With burn out, there is the suggestion that the individual has some power or choice to alter the environment and recover. This may be less the case when people experience chronic stress from poverty or other systemic sources of oppression.

Although there are many stresses inherent in the activist's awareness of the need for change and the commitment to act on that knowledge, the stress of inaction or ignorance can also have a significant toll. States of cognitive dissonance, denial and feelings of political powerlessness are also factors that can burn out individuals.

**Critique of Psychology/"Healing" Modalities**

I briefly reviewed some literature that examines healing modalities through various lenses of systemic oppression. This was done for a number of different reasons. First, some historical sense of political critiques of Western, patriarchal, capitalist frameworks of psychology and healing is important to understand. Even if there has been radical transformations in contemporary notions of healing, our interpretations of the past and present are inextricably linked. Also, if this research is to be effectively received by activist communities, concerns about psychological ideology and interventions need to be taken seriously and addressed. It is impossible to generalize the extent to which dismissive attitudes about therapy and healing work are held in activist or political communities. Still, whether it is a snide comment or a lengthy diatribe, critique exists in the field of activism and needs to be considered within the backdrop of this research. It is my belief that it is impossible to come to a definitive statement about whether healing work is depoliticizing or not. Each context, intervention, practitioner and client creates an experience. However,
by briefly examining critiques, a rudimentary sketch of some activists resistance to psycotherapeutic practices is generated. This in turn gives a sense of the field of attitudes in which these workshop facilitators operate.

Central to the critique of most psychotherapeutic interventions is the view that internal voices of dissent become privatized, individualized, commodified or even pathologized (Bell, 1984; Fulani, 1988; Armstrong, 1990; Kitzinger, 1993; Kaminer, 1993). From the literature I reviewed and discussions I have formally and informally participated in, it seems the parameters defining politically "acceptable" or "unacceptable" forms of psychotherapeutic work constantly shift. I have seen verbal therapies, body centered therapy and massage therapy, expressive therapies, sweat lodges and vision quests, yoga, emotional self-disclosure, personal growth workshops, and twelve step programs all, at one time or another, be placed into the derisive category of navel gazing, or "New Age indulgence". To some, these practices are seen as a threat to political integrity.

Some of this suspicion of "healing" work could be derived from mainstream psychology’s illusion that there is a fixed, average human experience which can be defined as "normal". The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or DSM III, is an enduring expression of this legacy. This text systematizes "problems" and "psychosis" and is the primary text used by mental health practitioners today in diagnosing "patients". This system codifies a norm of the perfect, healthy, whole person. The complexity and diversity of human experience and cultural norms cannot be accommodated within this androcentric, culturally biased construction, particularly when the intricacies of race, class, and gender are fully considered.

This systemization of normalcy has a history of being employed to pathologize diversity and voices of dissent. For instance, forced operations to "cure" homosexuality or medication for "hysterical" expressions of protest particularly by women, are examples of this legacy. Even less invasive modalities often focus on
helping the client become more "well adjusted". A shift is finally emerging in some forms of therapy - from getting an individual to be marginally functional in an inequitable and unjust society, to supporting them in developing the resources to create more personally and collectively workable human societal structures of relationship.

Some critics of therapy also feel it is politically unacceptable for healing modalities to cost money and to be privatized (Kitzinger, 1993). An industry has been created that commodifies and benefits from people's distress and responses to their circumstances. Profit rather than change is generated from inequity and injustice. Moreover, many healing modalities depend on anonymity, whether it be in the private confidential office of a therapist or through retreat or anonymous programs. Some feel this increases secrecy by removing problems from the source, and this prevents communities from developing resources to collectively address shared human experience and need (Kitzinger, 1993). When people use strangers to develop support rather than working within a context where they are known more fully, there are a variety of potential outcomes. Anonymity can offer "safety" and risk taking, but this needs to be examined. How does this further support modern industrial fragmentation of identity, and the illusion that if we don't like who we are or how we are being perceived, we can just start fresh by finding strangers who will support us without there being fuller relationships of complexity, responsibility and familiarity. This use of strangers results in people employing fewer collective and cultural avenues to integrate these feelings about themselves or their world into the broader community.

When people do seek group settings, there is still the tendency in Western psychology to focus on viewing "problems" as a product of an individual's context or behavior rather than including systemic and cultural origins of struggle or alienation that people experience. I have heard and read of many examples where
people voicing their concerns about social structures are confronted with the question of "what are they denying personally?", "you can't blame the system!", or "all these problems you see are just your own projection ".

"New Age" healing trends offer an intriguing counterbalance to the DSM III's constricted notions of normalcy. Personal growth programs and workshops have mushroomed into a large and profitable industry in North America. Some activists feel the historical or material reality of oppression and victimization is being erased in this process of marketing needs and victim-hood. "Lying behind the instrumental appearance of self-help is a discursive regime, constructing a world view and hence a subjectivity that defends certain power interests...[and is] aimed toward a market of victims that exist outside of a historical and social context" (Hickcox, 1994). Given the level of repression and violence that can regulate dominant North American society through practices of child rearing\(^1\), industrial urban labor relations and the media, each person can have significant feelings of needing support to address feelings of powerlessness. There is inevitable pain in the process of living through the losses and change that are presented in every human's life. However, it is problematic when systems of imperialism and oppression become completely obscured by leveling experiences of history and power. The book My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Patriarchy nicely plays on the twelve step format and integrates this concern of how systemic harm needs to be remembered within healing modalities that hope to be transformative.

In some circles, suffering can be seen as having become a commodity indiscriminately available to anyone with enough resources to manufacture or construct their respective sense of victim-hood through buying membership into

various self-selected workshop populations where people then bond over their respective injuries. Aliments and interventions can become increasingly exotic.

Moreover, health can become equated with perfection. There is potentially always one more wound to heal. This can serve to constantly generate new markets of personal growth consumers by supporting people in feeling they are never quite together enough to act beyond their own immediate interests and needs. There is also a colonial or imperialistic mentality in this, where there is always a new spiritual or personal frontier to conquer.

Even if systemic oppression is acknowledged, healing can still be framed in such a way that the 'victim' valiantly resists as an individual rather than intervening collectively. Again, this de-politicizes people's perceptions of societal malaise by individualizing and decontextualizing socially generated problems. Personal empowerment in this case then serves to reinforce rather than transform capitalist patriarchal individualism.

With some paradigms, "health" is indicated by the degree to which the person feels harmonious relationship with all things and relationships. This leaves little space for voices of dissent and visions of change when everything should be positive and is "perfect" just as it is, or is simply a lesson the "gods" or powers that be planned especially for YOU. This mentality of personal growth and learning runs the danger of further supporting cultural hedonism. The prevalence of confessional frameworks of healing allow little space for confronting systemic privilege and oppression and institutional transformation by offering appeasement rather than accountability and change.

With these concerns, some activists are judgmental or hostile about any psychotherapeutic framework. These attitudes are diffuse but influence activist's relationships to various healing modalities. Reactions to books such as Gloria Steinem's *Revolution from Within* are indicative of the antagonism to naming
stress and refusing to accept the toll that political activism can take on a person. An example of this scorn is "when I first heard that Gloria Steinem didn't have self-esteem, my reaction was: "Who cares? Look at what she's done with her life! It's the life that matters in the end" (Sternhill in Kitzinger, 1993). Another belief expressed in reaction to healing work is that "we're deluding ourselves that there is some way to feel good in the world when there isn't" (Kitzinger, 1993).

Some activists feel participating in healing work is self indulgent "navel gazing", that there are people who have suffered more and collective social change is more urgent than personal, individual change. With this hierarchy of suffering, there is the sense that "I should suffer a little, because everyone else does". Thus exposure to stressful, disturbing and traumatizing experiences in engaging in activism may be underplayed. Healing paradigms have been written off as bourgeois white middle class indulgence. Because of psychology's legacy within capitalist patriarchy, engagement in that paradigm sabotages political integrity.

For those who need to distance themselves from activist culture in order to regain balance, there can be considerable emotional fall out from internalizing the negative judgment that exists around psychological need. What does this tell us about the perceptions of or actual messages from activist culture which leads people to feel: A) they have become imbalanced and B) they need to seek support outside of their own communities to address these needs? Whether this dichotomy between healing/personal needs and commitments to organizing for change is self-generated or symptomatic of actual cultures of activism, this experience warrants further examination.

5. Summary

From the literature review, there is reason to believe that stress and burn-out can arise as a part of activism, whether experienced by individuals either personally
or witnessed in the deterioration of other colleagues, or at an organizational and movement level. There is also resistance within some activist circles to psychotherapeutic interventions. Thus my research looks at how can activists be helped with stress in a way that can support rather than undermine their commitment to personal and social healing.
CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I outline my choice of research methodology and present the process of generating and analyzing data. I also present difficulties encountered in my research process.

1. Selecting Post-Positivist Research Approaches

There are some overarching theoretical approaches that can govern research methodology. Delineated by Lincon and Guba (1985, p. 37) are the following:

- the extent to which the research is seen as being free of values or embedded in values.
- the extent to which the research is governed by a priori theory or theory governed by the data as it is accumulated and analyzed
- the extent to which there is a preconceived design or a design responsive to context/emergent
- degrees of participation and relationship between researcher and participants and between participants and the data/reporting
- the extent to which the research benefits all parties involved
- the extent to which the research is seen as generalizable, repeatable, scientific or partial, contextualized, subjective
- the extent to which theory is seen as fact or a situated representation
- how data and analysis validity is determined
- how representation and voice are understood - is the belief that the subjects are speaking for themselves, the researcher is objectively speaking about others or for others, or is the researcher representing their own ideas

I chose to use primarily post-positivist qualitative research theory to inform my methodology. However, before describing how these theoretical factors played out in my specific research, some of these general theoretical foundations for methodology require brief elaboration.
As already mentioned in my introduction, my perception of this research is that it encapsulates only a few moments in the evolution of my own perspectives and that of the facilitators. Our perceptions and my representations of them are a selective and subjective process. Whenever we speak and consider our perceptions, both our "selves" and the field that we are considering are changed. I come to this research with previous experience and perceptions\(^1\) which impact the questions I ask and the data I emphasize. My research methodology arises out of the belief that all knowledge as value laden and situated.

There were some assumptions that directed the formulation of my research from the beginning. For instance, I assume that it is preferable to support activist in maintaining their commitments over an long period of time, rather than individuals contributing short, intense period of productivity that are then potentially followed by burn out.

My methodology was influenced by a process known as "Strategic Questioning" (Peavy, 1994) which recognizes that rather than seeing people or opinions as static, ideas and relationships are acknowledged as constantly changing.

We approach problems within a constantly changing body of information...[and] asking the same question today elicits a different answer than yesterday. Whether we have learned new information or have simply created a solution from our own synthesis and analysis, both the question and answer have changed (p. 90-91).

With "Strategic Questioning" there is also the recognition that both researcher and participant are changed through the process of questioning. Therefore, underlying my responsibility and efforts as researcher to as best as possible represent the words and paradigm that I examine is the fact that this is inevitably a subjective representation of "data". There are innumerable facets to the questions I am

\(^1\)A representation of my subjective relationship to this research is provided in Chapter 1.
considering. Therefore, I recognize that the lens through which I examine data and questions is my own.

With regards to accumulating data, my methodology was influenced by the work of Patti Lather (1991) who notes:

Data must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of a priori theoretical frameworks, but which keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which the data must be poured. The search is for theory which grows out of context-embedded data, not in a way that automatically rejects a priori theory, but in a way that keeps preconceptions from distorting the logic of evidence.... While there is no such thing as value-free or objective research, ...there is a need to keep as open a frame of reference as possible to allow the data to generate the propositions (p. 62).

Apart from my decision to use a core set of questions for interviews, my relationships to theory, analysis and participants evolved dialectically. This was true particularly as my analysis/assumptions shifted with new input, reflection and feedback.

The intention or outcome of the research is also pertinent to methodology as it influences what questions are asked and how the data is organized and attended to. In accordance with "Strategic Questioning", I believe:

Questioning is a basic tool of rebellion. It breaks open the stagnant hardened shells of the present, opening up options to be explored. Questioning reveals the profound uncertainty that is embedded deep in all reality beyond the facades of confidence and sureness. It takes this uncertainty towards growth and new possibilities. Asking questions and listening for the strategies and ideas embedded in people's own answers can be the greatest service a social change worker can give to a particular issue (Peavy, p. 91).

This was the greatest area of learning for me in my research - how both challenge and respect the ideas of those I interview, how to honor peoples perceptions and feel entitled to make my own comment.
Thus, my intention and expectation as researcher is not to provide any definitive representation of psychotherapeutic interventions, sustainable activism or the needs of activists. Rather, this research was an opportunity for myself, the research participants and the readers of this paper to reflect on layers of discussion that can further stimulate reaction and contemplation. The analysis is pieced together with the intention of offering insight, more questions and a range of answers to consider, rather than a static representation of "fact" or universal generalization. My interest was in gathering data which could be used to analyze existing theory and generate new theory, rather than trying to represent or generalize about situations or individuals. Thus my intention in conducting this research was also to offer an opportunity for reflection that would impact the political work that these facilitators, other activists and I do as educators and healers, whether or not people agree with my analysis or findings.

2. Selecting the Research Focus

There were innumerable ways of approaching my interests in sustainable activism, emotional experiences and needs of activists, and psychotherapeutic interventions that stimulate and support active engagement in social transformation. This section first outlines my general course of decision making in defining the parameters of my research. Then, a more descriptive representation of the specific research topic and methodology is provided.

My first choice was how to frame my curiosity about sustainable activism. I chose to focus on activist's stress exclusively, rather than also highlighting activist's satisfactions and personal or organizational strategies for sustaining activism. There were a number of reasons for this decision. First, there is already some documentation of activist's strategies for sustaining activism or testimonies of satisfaction (Hayes, 1994; Simpson, 1989). Second, personal difficulties can reflect
larger systemic or cultural practices that need to be examined. Also, I was interested in gaining a better sense of activist's emotional experiences of distress in relationship to their political commitments and how these difficulties can illuminate some forms of unsustainable activist praxis.

However, in the spirit of doing transformative or emancipatory research, rather than describing one more thing that is wrong, I decided to look at psychotherapeutic experiential interventions to get a sense of the problem of activist stress by virtue of a solution that is being offered. Thus I decided to examine some discourses surrounding my working definition of psychotherapy as "any alteration in an individual's interpersonal environment, relationships or life situation brought about especially by a qualified therapist and intended to have the effect of alleviating symptoms of mental or emotional disturbance". The workshop paradigm that I ended up focusing on has been in operation since the late seventies. I inferred that the longevity and attendance at the workshops attests to the fact that some activists experience emotional distress and seek out interventions where the personal, emotional and political are integrated. However, because my research is in the area of community development as opposed to applied psychology, I examine primarily the ideological and political implications of psychotherapeutic interventions. Thus the psychotherapeutic outcomes and intricacies are less of a focus in this research than the political impact that this process of emotional support can have. I take up the psychotherapeutic elements of this work primarily in terms of it being a paradigm that both reproduces and transforms problematic psychological or political practices.

Choosing the Intervention

In approaching my interest in activists emotional needs, there was the choice of looking at the impact of group interventions or individual therapy. My research
focus on a group process was influenced by political critiques of dominant psychotherapeutic interventions as explored in my literature review in Chapter 1. Of greatest interest to me was looking at psychotherapeutic interventions that offer an alternative to Western industrial values of individualism, and psycho-social tendencies to privatize and keep secret physical expressions of emotions, particularly distress. In my literature reviews, I did find some research on individual activist experiences of sustaining their activism (Davis, 1996; Hayes, 1994; Simpson, 1989). I was interested in exploring the possibility and problems of collective healing modalities.

There was also the choice of contrasting a number of different interventions or focusing on one paradigm\(^1\). I chose to focus on one paradigm for two main reasons. First, I had limitations such as time, and costs of creating relationship by phone or through travel. Were this a Doctoral dissertation rather than a Masters thesis, I might have considered more expansive collection and discussion of data. However, my own intellectual interests also drew me towards choosing to have some common frame of reference between interviewees whereby subtler differences in perception become more interesting and possible for me to examine.

There was then the choice of which paradigm to focus on amidst the list I generated in Appendix 1. Many of the other interventions for activists listed were “one person shows”. As a researcher attempting to examine a paradigm, having a number of different people available to represent the work offered more theoretical fullness as well as data validity\(^2\). I was also interested in addressing the tension presented in my literature review about psychology being potentially depoliticizing. Other interventions such as meditation retreats can have significant psychotherapeutic outcomes. However, linking the subtleties of meditation as both an

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\(^1\)See Appendix 1 for other resources I found in my research that address in varying ways the emotional needs of activists.

\(^2\)See the later section in this chapter about how data was generated and perceived.
individual and collective intervention to Western psychology paradigms was a less
direct form of comparison. I wanted to study a method that would more overtly
reproduce and challenge conventional Western psychological notions.

From the list of resources for activists I generated in Appendix 1, I chose to
focus on "Despair and Empowerment" workshop to examine my research interest
in discourses/interventions that intersect around the personal, political and
psychotherapeutic. The appropriateness of choosing the "Despair and
Empowerment" paradigm as the intervention to focus my research was determined
through a number of different avenues. First I gathered information and a sense of
the workshops through talking with a friend who is a member of the organization
that coordinates "Despair and Empowerment" workshops. Next, I gained a sense of
"Despair and Empowerment" work through examining two texts: the book Despair
and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age (1983) by Joanna Macy and In the Tigers
Mouth: A Guide for Empowering Social Change (1994) by Katrina Shields which is
inspired by Macy's original "Despair Work". To me, Shields' work seems like an
updated revision of Macy's earlier paradigm. My assumption was that Macy's work
provides the structure and flow of the intervention but Shield's exercises and
analysis would be used in workshops to meet more current needs and contexts of
today's political activism. I made an assumption that these two books were being
integrated into current "Despair and Empowerment" workshops. This assumption
proved to be untrue.

Finally, "Despair and Empowerment" workshops were selected as the focus of
my research because my introductory letter to the organization clearly stated that I
was examining psychotherapeutic interventions for activists. I assumed their
positive response and willingness to connect me with facilitators meant that in their
minds this work counted as "psychotherapeutic". As much as there were ways that

1The ways that I adapted to this inaccurate assumption as delineated in the "texts as data" section.
during my research this paradigm became contested as a "psychotherapeutic intervention" by both myself and by facilitators interviewed, the data gathered through interviewing "Despair and Empowerment" facilitators about activists and their work still offered ample material from which to consider discourses about interventions for activist's stress.

There were also a number of potential subjects within the study of the "Despair and Empowerment" workshop format, namely facilitators and an array of participants. Initially I was not aware of the paradigm's expansive definition of activism, and therefore workshop participants. Participants in "Despair and Empowerment" workshops are often both concerned citizens who may not identify themselves as activist, as well as to self-identified activist individuals and groups. Thus, my interest in self-identified "activists" as outlined in my introduction/definitions in Chapter 1, further narrowed the scope that "Despair and Empowerment" work usually embraces. In this paper I often use the term self-identified activists to indicate the difference between volunteerism and activism as an identity/lifestyle.

I chose to focus exclusively on the facilitators of "Despair and Empowerment" workshops. This was done for a number of reasons. First, their workshops occur sporadically so timing constraints eliminated the possibility of extending this examination directly to the participant's experience of the workshop as an intervention to address stress from being an activist. When I began this research, my understanding was that I had just missed a facilitator training and there were no upcoming "Despair and Empowerment" workshops planned. Thus I designed my research around interviews with facilitators only.

Ironically, during one of my final interviews, I was told a workshop had just been arranged for the end of the summer because a notable facilitator was visiting from overseas. I ended up going to that workshop but because my research had
already been formulated, it felt too late in my time line to integrate this shift in information. Attending the workshop as a participant/observer offered invaluable insight into the process I was studying. Moreover, maintaining my focus and not attempting to expand interviews from this weekend into my research was a good decision. It seemed the workshop I attended had a split purpose: one was to offer a "Despair and Empowerment" experience but also many participants were there primarily to spend time with this visitor (as opposed to seeking the intervention). According to one of the facilitators of that weekend (who was not a research participant) as well as one of my research participants who was in attendance at that workshop, the intervention experience was not typical. For instance, there was an ongoing tension within the team facilitating the weekend as to why people were there and what experience they were expected to deliver as leaders. Also, the talk that set the tone for the weekend did not emphasize setting a context for emotional processing and creating group safety. Thus, the ways that data from participants of this weekend would have effected my research focus is questionable.

Interviewing facilitators was an important research focus for me. Because they lead and direct many workshops, facilitators are influential generators of discourses about healing and activism. Approaching the facilitators offered an opportunity to gain a sense of how they frame and understand the work that they do. They are also observers of a span of time and experience, and this offered a greater longitudinal and theoretical perspective than a shorter term, isolated account of activist participant's experiences from one workshop. Also, given the diversity of activists and issues that these facilitators worked with, their cumulative experience offers a partial sketch of praxis as perceived by facilitators and by activists inside and outside of the workshops. Central to the interviews were these questions:

1. How do facilitators see the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm integrating the personal and political for individuals or communities?
2. How do facilitators see emotional exploration effecting activism?
3. What have these facilitators heard about activist stress? How does this reflect on political praxis?
4. How can facilitator’s and activist’s notions of praxis, activism and politics be changed by the intricacies this paradigm and research reveals about integrating the personal and political?

Some of these themes were clear in my mind at the start of the research, and others crystallized more through the process of gathering and analyzing my data.

There were also a number of different facilitator relationships that I could have examined such as the facilitator’s relationships to workshop participants, to each other as colleagues, and their individual relationships to the text, Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age, upon which the workshops are based. Since observing the facilitators at work was impossible, I focused primarily on their perceptions of the work they do. Through talking with facilitators about activists, other relationships to political and psychotherapeutic praxis were more implicitly and sometimes explicitly addressed in the interviews. Culled from these facilitators’ perceptions of their work and the content and structure of the “Despair and Empowerment” workshops they offer, there is some indication of how activism and healing are being transformed.

3. Data Collection

The purpose of this research was not to prove or disprove a hypothesis but rather to describe and examine facilitators perceptions of their work with activists and how this related to broader questions of political praxis and activist’s stress. From an array of qualitative research instruments, such as participant observation, focus groups, and surveys, I chose to use textual analysis of documents and semi-structured interviews as my central research tools.

One-on-one in-depth interviews were the most appropriate choice given logistical limitations of geographical distances and the infrequency of workshops
occurring. I would have liked to have done a focus-group of all of the facilitators together after individual interviews. This would have created a clearer format for differences in perception to emerge and for synergistic agreement about their practices and perceptions to be generated. However, they were all very busy people and geographic distances, time constraints, and financial limitations eliminated my inclusion of this data collection approach. Questions for the interviews were developed through my literature review and personal reflection about central issues and interests to me.

Data was also gathered from written sources. I asked facilitators to provide me with any documentation of their work that they had, such as program evaluations from participants (which could have given me demographic information and testimonies about the workshop experience directly from participants), advertisements for workshops, articles about or relating to the paradigm, and texts or outlines from workshops that facilitators I interviewed had lead. Four showed me written materials such as posters advertising workshops or program outlines during the interview. Two facilitators also gave me articles which were either written by others and were of importance to the facilitator but were not specifically about the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm, or in one case, articles the facilitator had personally written about the workshops. No facilitators shared evaluations of their workshops with me. In some cases, they explained that they no longer kept the evaluations or they would be too hard to dig up. It also happened that when I received feedback from one facilitator, I was told that evaluations were kept. So workshop evaluations as a source of data was either withheld or unavailable. While not central to my analytic interests, the different forms of documentation were used for me to gain a sense of the work facilitators do.

The more fruitful sources for textual data were two books. Much of the theory for the “Despair and Empowerment” facilitator’s work is delineated in the book
Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age published in 1983 by Joanna Macy. There is another text entitled In the Tigers Mouth: A Guide for Empowering Social Change by Katrina Shields which is inspired by Macy’s original "Despair Work". However, Macy’s book became the central source of data in my research about the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm for a number of reasons. First, Macy’s book is the “text” that is used in training all “Despair and Empowerment” facilitators. Based on my interviews, Macy’s work was also mentioned many times by each interviewees. The theory and exercises of the “Despair and Empowerment” process as laid out by Macy are all used by facilitators directly in running of their workshops.

Shield’s work was never spontaneously referred to by interviewees, and only one interviewee spoke of In the Tiger’s Mouth after I brought it up. The peripheral position of Shield’s In the Tigers Mouth could be accounted for by the following factors. First, she is from a branch of the organization in Australia and thus is less known as a peer or “personality” within the social and professional circle that I interviewed in the Eastern US. Macy was a primary originator of the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm, which was developed in America. Also, Macy published Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age in 1983 as a guide to enable others to use the paradigm. Published in 1994, Shield’s text is more recent publication and thus less widely known and used. So, I would speculate that habitual relationships to a person and exposure to Macy’s text could account for the drastic discrepancy in the facilitators’ references to the two texts. Finally, although Shields’ work focuses more on political activists as a distinct and central audience, In the Tiger’s Mouth offers general experiential exercises and “tips”. The "Despair and Empowerment" model of a sequential and intentional ideology/psychotherapeutic group intervention is less clearly employed. Thus, Shields work became more peripheral to my data about "Despair and Empowerment" workshops but offered relevant
content or exercise suggestions which contributed greatly to my literature review and my concluding discussions about activist praxis and stress.

4. Research Procedure, Participants and Interviews

After establishing my research interests and approaches, a description of the research was submitted for ethical review according to procedure monitored by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. After ethical approval, I wrote to the umbrella organization that many "Despair and Empowerment" facilitators operate under. The Council Chair contacted me by phone and gave me the names and numbers of five facilitators. It would have been helpful to inquire as to why these names were chosen to given to me, as I had very little influence in terms of determining the content and rationale for the sample. Formalized facilitator trainings for "Despair and Empowerment" work began to be offered in 1982. As a result, theoretically there would be many facilitators to choose from. However, my guess is that the Chair's suggestions were based on two factors. First, the people I interviewed seemed very active historically or currently in offering "Despair and Empowerment" type workshops and were all geographically accessible to me. Second, each facilitator seemed to have contributed to the broader organization beyond the role of simply being trained and active as a "Despair and Empowerment" facilitator. Each of the people who were referred to me had served administratively or had coordinated or run trainings of other facilitators.

I phoned each facilitator and gave them a brief sense of the research. All immediately agreed to participate. Three accepted my offer to be mailed further information, which was the letter of introduction and consent (Appendix 2) and an abbreviated list of questions (Appendix 3- part 2). Two felt that receiving information prior to our meeting was not necessary.
Issues of confidentiality impacted my research. Because the circle of facilitators in this organization is small, the confidentiality of participants expected by the University’s code of Ethics was a challenge to maintain. Facilitators were often curious about who else I talked to, and a few easily guessed who else I had approached. Thus it seemed of greatest importance to me to ensure the anonymity of participants in this written document and to ensure all comments and texts that were generated from the transcribed interviews remained confidential. As a result, details that could give away identity are eliminated or altered as much as possible. In the following section, details about participants are intertwined rather than grouped into profiles. When interviews are quoted, alphabetical labels such as "(A -345)" are given so that a sense of distinct voices can emerge while gender and identity remain obscured, to secure anonymity as much as possible. None of the participants were known to me at the start of the research, either socially or through reputation.

Four women and one man were interviewed. One participant later withdrew from this study, therefore nothing from that interview is directly quoted in my reporting of the data or in my analysis. Only general information about that participant is included in this segment in order to accurately represent the scope of my research procedure. Moreover, I found that even with the elimination of data from that one interview, the information generated through my research remained coherent.

I traveled to each participant’s home, three of which were in the same state and one who lived ten hours from my home in Western Massachusetts. Two lived in a big city, one on the edge of a smaller city, and two in the country. Two interviews were done outdoors and three in people’s living rooms.

All facilitators participating in this research are in the 35 to 55 age range, are Caucasian, and originally from either the Southern, North Eastern or West Coast of the United States. As much as differences in facilitators geographic and cultural
origins likely influenced their perceptions, these subtleties were not a part of my analysis because I was interested in the paradigm's theory more than facilitators' identities and understandings as individuals.

At least two participants had training in psychotherapy, and one had a private practice with individuals and groups as her main occupation. Three participants are involved on a full time basis with non-profit, activist organizations. Each of the participants was or continued to be engaged in a number of political movements such as feminist community organizing, environmental activism, AIDS activism, government reforms, and Latin American solidarity work.

With regards to leading "Despair and Empowerment" workshops, their range of experience varied. The years they were first trained ranged over a decade: 1990, 1987, 1981, 1986, and 1986. Each estimated the number of workshops they had lead, which were: 15 to 20 workshops, 150 workshops, 50 workshops, 12 to 15 workshops, and 30 workshops. Numbers of participants in a workshop generally ranged from 10 to 300. The two and a half day weekend format with mixed self-identified activist and non-activist participants seemed the most common experience of facilitators interviewed. The paradigm could be applied to an experience that was from an hour to a week long. Few of the facilitators had any direct experience of using the "Despair and Empowerment" workshop paradigm in other countries and discussion about how this paradigm is employed cross-culturally was limited.

It is notable that some facilitators interviewed had been involved in training other facilitators. Approximately 27 training's for facilitators had been done between them, ranging from one day to four days in length. This situates them in a particularly influential position in terms of contributing to this discourse of action.

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1It is important to note that each interviewee had considerable training and experience as educators or therapists. Thus "Despair and Empowerment" facilitator training was often a way of reorienting the skills they had already developed in other areas. Thus, a correlation between duration of experience in the paradigm and overall facilitation skill level cannot be assumed.
and personal and political interventions. Many of the participants had professional and social relationships with one another - such as working together either organizing or participating in other events, or co-facilitating "Despair and Empowerment" workshops together.

It is important to clarify that beyond this point, the participants in this research will be exclusively referred to as "facilitators" or "interviewees" to avoid confusion about whether "participant" refers to a workshop participant or to the facilitators participating in this research.

The interviews were semi-structured according to the questions listed in Appendix 3. Interviews ranged from one hour to two and a half hours long. The interview style was very fluid. Questions and topics were woven together depending on how the conversation was organically unfolding. Although all questions may not have been directly posed by me, all topics were covered in each interview. I offered to send facilitators copies of their interviews and my initial analysis. Only one participant expressed interest in seeing my analysis and write-up draft, and another wanted a copy of the interview. Thus, due to time constraints on the part of myself and the participants, I did not pursue more expansive, participatory approaches to soliciting feedback about data and analysis. At the end of all interviews, I asked facilitators if they wanted to add anything and most were asked if they were to come up with other questions about the topics we covered, what would they be. I also requested any documentation of the workshops they offered, such as advertisements or plans. Some shared documentation with me during the interviews.

In the interviews, I also refrained from contributing my own perceptions about the topics until the interaction was almost over. My role was primarily one of asking questions of clarification to those listed in Appendix 3. I did not choose a
more fluid interaction of self-disclosure and reciprocity that post-positivist researchers such as Lather endorse, except as the interview and/or contact was drawing to a close.

5. Data Coding and Analysis

Because the sample size was small, rather than seeing results as generalizable, I wanted to use the data gathered to further analyze existing theory and generate new arenas of discussion. Each interview was transcribed by myself within a week of first gathering the data. This generated approximately 150 pages of condensed text to examine. Interviews were first analyzed as a whole, as opposed to question by question. I watched for patterns, recurrent themes within each text and across interviews. Data was also examined for convergence or divergence with issues identified through my literature review. “Bites” of data were coded under topic headings listed in Appendix 4. In time, the categories that I was grouping the data into for my coding shifted dramatically and were reformulated into more workable themes of analysis which is also illustrated in Appendix 4.

The section of coding “emotions that facilitators have heard activists expressing” was challenging to do methodologically. It was difficult trying to code or organize this section because each sentiment can have layers of feelings within it. For example, there are commonality and differences in experiences of sadness and sorrow, or overwhelm, numbness and burnout. It was artificial to interpret subjective nuances of feeling into categories. So when categories overlapped, each feeling would be counted in each relevant category. Again, methodologically, I did not want or consider these numbers to be statistically valid. Rather, the frequency of times a word is mentioned was examined at three levels: first, as a representation of what facilitators have heard activists expressing; second, as an expression of the framework that these facilitators most spontaneously recall or draw forth when they
think of activists as a distinct population; finally, they also reflected how speech and feeling is regulated by context, and served to suggest where the paradigm or facilitators may place greatest emotional emphasis.

Not all of the themes identified in the coding were taken up. In this report, I chose to focus on the ones most related to activists, psychotherapy and political praxis. In the interviews, facilitators spoke of how structurally, the “Despair and Empowerment” process remained the same for any audience and only the content varied. I was surprised that the nuances of working in a group of people who know each other vs. a group of random participants was not seen as particularly influential. This could also be because of the facilitators I interviewed; only one or two seemed to have had extensive experience doing "Despair and Empowerment" workshops with activist organizations. Others had worked with activist groups but more through large conferences, where there is commonalty and perhaps familiarity but not long term relationships to contend with. Thus, comments about how anonymity vs. already established and enduring work relationships can mediate process and outcome was dropped as a significant coding category.

Four facilitators proved to be an adequate sample of the discourses at play, as the content began to overlap and reach saturation by the time the last interview was conducted. With coding and data, attention was paid to subjects that appeared to “be out of bounds” or were addressed implicitly rather than directly. These often indicated the richest arenas for further theoretical investigation. Three participants offered feedback from my analysis.

6. Research Write Up

Interview data reflected my own experience of finding innumerable tangents to explore within the questions I asked about sustainable activism, emotional experiences and needs of activists, and psychotherapeutic interventions that
stimulate and support active engagement in social transformation. Thus various decisions had to be made about what topics from my data I chose to develop.

My main interest was to tie my data into the theoretical tensions I examined in my literature review around stress and political critiques of psychotherapeutic interventions. How does the "Despair and Empowerment" intervention reproduce or transform problematic ideologies of practices in healing or political praxis?

Also as my research progressed I realized that the workshops were not initially intended to serve activists as an exclusive or even central audience. A long time facilitator that I interviewed in this research did note that there were always activists in attendance and interested in even the earliest workshops that they offered. Because self-identified activists were rarely an exclusive population served by the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm, coupled with the reality that most of the facilitators I interviewed had done work primarily in mixed audiences, I focused very little on the added complexities of doing work with groups of activists who already know or work with one another.

In my research write up, analytical points are usually supported or illustrated by coded evidence from the interviews. Data I gathered was also contrasted with a the textural analysis of Despair and Empowerment in the Nuclear Age.

Throughout this paper, footnotes are used as an opportunity to develop some ideas that seemed tangential to the issues at hand but had some relevance to the project of transforming perceptions about healing, pedagogy and political activism.

7. Impact of the Research

I acknowledge that even before my "analysis" of the data, facilitators were actively engaged in these inquiries I raise in my research. I wish that time, geographical and financial limitations had not prohibited us from creating a more collaborative exploration about activism, praxis and personal and social healing.
During an interview, a facilitator commented that participating in this research "got all sorts of ideas [going] for me and I got all excited [when she first saw the questions I mailed her]" (C- 29-30). Moreover, she pressed me about my intentions in getting the results of this research out, asking me "if I could see the possibilities" in creating interventions that would more effectively address activist's emotional needs. She told me a funder had recently turned down a proposal from a separate organization she was involved with because he didn't believe that burn out was an issue for activists. Another facilitator commented that:

Talking about this, it makes me want to do more workshops geared towards activists cause I think these are such good questions that you've got me going, and ...we really haven't addressed these issues in a workshop and I would really like to actually, when you are finished, go back and use some of the reading and think more about doing more because I am sort of putting it together now (A- 468).

This feedback shows how interventions for activists are developing in the minds of the research participants and in the broader spectrum of these discourses of personal and political healing and radical transformation.

Moreover, this research is well timed in that at the most recent annual gathering of the organization that coordinates "Despair and Empowerment" work, discussion occurred about the question of the organization's culture - what they do and why and how they do it. I was not aware that they were re-examining these questions of identity when I embarked on this research. I was pleased that it seemed timely to interview facilitators and document my own and others perceptions regarding "Despair and Empowerment" work.

There were also some less positive outcomes to this research. Considerable misunderstandings about my methodology, analysis and research intention occurred from sending only part of my thesis to a participant who requested to see my write up. Although some mutual understanding was reached and feedback was considered, this research also had some painful impact for myself and for some of
facilitators. Thus my desire to work as allies with these facilitators in envisioning political and therapeutic paradigm shifts in activist’s praxis was not fully realized.

8. Limitations and Surprises in the Research Process

In retrospect there were many ways that this research process could have been enhanced. If there had not been logistical barriers around time and geography, it would have been preferable to complement data of facilitators perceptions with participant observation of interviewees actually facilitating a workshop, as well as doing a focus-group discussion.

I had very little influence in terms of determining the content and rationale for the sample as all of the interviewees were referred to me by the Chair of the organization.

With one interviewee, we interacted socially prior to the interview. I had planned to interview her prior to our plans of having dinner, seeing a great comedian and staying over at her house before the long drive home the next day. I had to come later so we did not interview until the morning and both of us noticed how jumping into a more formal or artificial relationship of “interviewing” with the tape recorder on changed our “roles” and ways of speaking and interacting. This was a graphic reminder of how the production of knowledge is influenced by identity, context, technology and structure.

In one interview, we were interrupted by the facilitator needing to go and pick up her dog from the vet before it closed. I stayed at her home and took a dip in a nearby waterfall. These shifts in context likely affected the final discussion. For instance, the break gave us both time to reflect on the conversation. Also, upon return, her pooch was still sedated so our attention was shared between the conversation and attending compassionately to the wobbly hound. Beyond
distraction, the relationship between her and I also became more casual and connected through the shared concern about poochy.

With regards to questions, the format I used was casual interaction. Although each question was covered by all the interviewees, the diversity of whether a question was posed directly or emerged through an organic process of discussion likely affected how data was articulated and generated. In a few cases, I did ask directly a question that had already been covered more diffusely in conversation. Sometimes this generated a nice summary. Yet, other times this return to a covered topic seemed to break the flow of the conversation and relationship by its redundancy.

After doing coding and analysis, I also realized that there I would have changed some of my questions. For example, it would have been very helpful to ask facilitators about how they define “political” as well as how they define “activism”. Also, it would have been interesting and helpful to have a more direct discussion of healing work as political or how the idea that “the personal is political” is played out in the facilitators perceptions about activism and this paradigm.

I also learned that it was important at the outset of the interviews to clarify that I was interested in focusing on workshop participants who were self-identified as activists rather than the broader populations of concerned citizen participants. In my first interview, I did not establish who was the focus of my research at the outset and found during that interview I had to frequently ask for clarification about the population that we were discussing. This slippage in defining activist participants was also from my assumptions about the paradigm's sense of “activism”. However, the expansive and shifting boundaries of “activists” and “praxis” resulted in a complexity and richness to my research topic and analysis. This complexity was also apparent in determining what constitutes a therapeutic intervention.
I also wish I had created more time and focused discussion with interviewees who had trained facilitators of the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm. This focus on training would have been helpful in magnifying central ideological frameworks. However, Macy’s book is the central resource used to educate anyone on how to run these workshops. Thus the ideology and application of the intervention presented in her text provided me with a strong sense of what a training emphasizes. However, looking at what trainers include beyond Macy’s frame would have helped to further develop my sense of how praxis in facilitation and in activism are understood.

In my coding, it was very challenging to organize the data, particularly when trying to organize and tabulate emotions. Emotions and feelings overlap and given that there were many layers and subtleties to the topics that facilitators were speaking of, coding was difficult. I also found collating the data of facilitators observations of common feelings expressed by activists listed in Appendix 6 to be a particular downer for me emotionally. I noticed how consistently I avoided and struggled with this section in my writing. As much as I tried to be a thorough and rigorous researcher, I must be honest in saying I would be astonished if my analysis were not affected by this subtle experience of aversion.

A final area of learning was in terms of representing peoples perceptions and making my own analysis of the data and direction of the research. One participant withdrew from the study feeling that she and the paradigm were misrepresented. Reading the entire context of my thesis as opposed to just the sections we agreed upon would perhaps have altered this situation and I did respond to her concerns as best as possible. However, I believe that differences in our understandings of my project, the methodology and expectations of roles were other reasons for this breakdown. It was very unfortunate and painful that this conflict happened yet this was also the source of some of my most significant learning. This reaffirmed the
importance of emphasizing that in my representations and analysis, I do not assume that my observations are complete or that my suggestions have not already been considered by or are in agreement with that of the interviewees. The people interviewed in this research have considerable levels of expertise and the time they have spent reflecting and developing support for activists could never be fully communicated during the limited time in which I interviewed each of them. I recognize that this research only begins to map out and integrate the parameters of a much larger discussion.
Chapter 3 - INTERVIEW FINDINGS ABOUT THE "DESPAIR AND EMPOWERMENT" WORKSHOPS

The three following chapters present findings from my data and analysis. Based on my research, it seems that the "Despair and Empowerment" model is a process that could be applied to any audience rather than an intervention developed particularly with the needs of self-identified activists in mind. So, in this chapter I examine the "Despair and Empowerment" process as an intervention for integrating the personal and political generally.

1. Philosophical Underpinnings of the "Despair and Empowerment" Paradigm

With regards to the philosophical underpinnings of the paradigm, my research found that there was congruency between facilitator's descriptions of the process and Macy's text Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age. Much of the "Despair and Empowerment" work emerged out of a group of people engaged in their own political work, academic commitments, re-evaluation co-counseling and socially engaged spiritual practices such as Buddhism. Through leading groups and examining their own processes and experiences of the intersection of the personal and political, they collectively developed this workshop paradigm. "Despair and Empowerment" workshops integrate educational, political and psychotherapeutic interests.

The workshop's intention is to support people with "the psychological and spiritual work of dealing with our knowledge and feelings about the present planetary crisis in ways that release energy and vision for creative response" (Macy, p. xiii). Macy repeatedly emphasizes the importance of acknowledging our pain for

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1 A more detailed examination of healing, pedagogy and political praxis occurs in Chapters 4 and 5.
2 From the outset, this description emphasizes the plurality of approaches in the "Despair and Empowerment" workshop methodology, as indicated by the word "ways". A more detailed discussion of this paradigm's methodology follows.
the world, of validating our pain for the world, of experiencing the pain, moving through the pain to its source, and to experience the power of "interconnectedness" that results from this process of opening emotionally (Macy, p. 37). As represented in the text, the fundamental principles of this work that guide the facilitator's crafting of the experience are:

1. Feelings of pain for our world are natural and healthy.
2. This pain is morbid only if denied/repressed. Pain is dynamic and once experienced it flows through us.
3. Information alone is not enough; We already know that we are in danger - the essential question is can we free ourselves to respond?
4. Unblocking repressed feelings releases energy, clears the mind.
5. Unblocking our pain for the world reconnects us with the larger web of life. (Macy, p. 22-23)

A facilitator interviewed articulated the central intention in a similar way:

When we can connect back with our deepest feelings, especially our feelings of sorrow and despair about how the world is, then we are feeling more connected with ourselves...and with our feelings, and... with other people, and when we feel more connected we are reminded that we feel this deep despair and this deep connection because we really care. And once that gets tapped back into, or for some people for the first time, then I think it really opens up a lot of blocks that keep people from moving ahead (A-25-30).

The same facilitator also emphasized the need these workshops were filling in terms of "people [not] taking the time to collectively sit and take the opportunity to feel and express their deepest feelings about these issues and what they are doing" (A-335) and "when people don't [make time to process emotionally] it blocks them personally and collectively. Conversely, when they do that, it opens up and makes [for the]...ability to go on, and go on longer and more effectively" (A-390).
Denial and mechanisms of repression are examined in detail by Macy. Both Macy and some of the facilitators emphasized that numbing occurs generally when dominant cultural norms do not value or support the physical expression and processing of emotions. Macy goes on to outline how numbing is often more dramatic when people are faced with the possibility of complete annihilation through environmental collapse or the immanence of nuclear war which was particularly acute in the late 1970's when she first developed this paradigm. Macy outlines fear, anger, guilt sorrow and despair as the central experiences of pain provoked by the magnitude of political horrors occurring in the late twentieth century. Macy believes that people's reaction to planetary peril, or repression in general, can be:

- apathy
- sense of powerlessness
- avoidance
- disbelief
- displacement behaviors
- denial/leading a double life where people conceal their concern
- fragmentation and alienation

Macy outlines the following central mechanisms of repression and denial which lead to emotional and political numbing:

- fear of pain
- fear of losing our capacity to cope
- fear of losing control
- fear of losing our minds
- fear of causing distress
- fear of appearing unpatriotic
- fear of appearing too emotional
- fear of others capacity to react helpfully
- fear that we will be expected to have solutions
- fear that if we feel feelings we will be mired in them permanently
- fear of "negative" thoughts creating negative realities

(Macy, p. 9-12)

1Macy maintains this analysis on a personal level and does not elaborate upon how social or state mechanisms can employ these general fears to further create repression or fear in people. Advertising strategies are a clear example of how these fears can be enlisted for the service of profit.
2. Political Issues Addressed by the "Despair and Empowerment" Paradigm

The origins of this paradigm are embedded in the political and economic climate of the late seventies. As reflected in the title Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age, the threat of nuclear annihilation was an overarching presence defining the need for action. An interviewee who is an early colleague of Macy's noted:

We were trying to bring a different approach to engaging people around...larger environmental issues...[That] we were living on a planet that was in a periled state and the nuclear weapons issue served to really just highlight that...Nuclear weapons and the war issue really crystallized it for the public in a way that nothing else had (B- 60-63, 65)

It is notable that since the de-escalation of the concern about nuclear war, the facilitators I interviewed felt that the public was less responsive to other concerns, although facilitators felt that the outcome of environmental degradation certainly warrants as much concern. I speculate whether this difference in social response could be attributed to the fact that it is easier to deny the slow deterioration of our life support systems than it was to deny the very visceral threat and consequences of nuclear attack. Moreover, public concern is impacted by changes in the general configuration of political and economic activity in North America since the late seventies. I was surprised to find in the workshop that I participated in that Macy's exercises which emphasize concerns about nuclear annihilation were still being used. For me, nuclear destruction is a not a prominent politically or emotional concern. Perhaps this is a reflection of my own denial. However, I was curious about how other people experienced this focus on nuclear destruction in relationship to their own immediate political concerns.

Beyond the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm's focus on nuclear destruction is much broader considerations of planetary crisis. Macy mentions "the growing threat of nuclear war, the progressive destruction of our life support
system, the unprecedented spread of human misery and the fact that these developments render questionable, for the first time in history, the survival of our species” (Macy, p. xiii). As one facilitator described, the parameters of political issues addressed by the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm are “anything to do with change...threats to life or violence or social change needs of any kind” (B- 195). A more complex investigation of “politics” and “praxis” is developed in a later chapter.

3. Audience

Because no evaluations or figures about participants were available to me, these sketches merely informed the way I thought about the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm as a discourse, rather than being seen as conclusive evidence about specific individuals or audiences. Both Macy’s text and the interviews that I conducted affirmed how “Despair and Empowerment” workshops were not initially intended to serve activists as an exclusive or even central audience. “Despair and Empowerment” workshops tended to be either with a pre-existing group or organization, or was composed of a group of individuals who did not have any pre-established formal relationship to one another, such as a random group at a conference or a mixed group of activists and concerned citizens who have come together through general advertisements for a workshop. The "Despair and Empowerment" process can be done in groups of 5-300, and the duration of the experience can be one hour to one week. The predominant experience of facilitators I interviewed was a weekend workshop format with a mixed audience of self-identified activists and concerned members of the public or random groups of activists at conferences.

With regards to audience composition, facilitators interviewed noted that apart from a sprinkling of African American or Latino participants, the primary
participants in the North American workshops are Caucasian, middle-class, educated people, and to a lesser extent working class and poor white people. The “Despair and Empowerment” process originated in North America but has been brought to politicized regions of the world such as Valdez Alaska after the Exxon oil spill or in Germany after the Berlin wall came down. “Despair and Empowerment” work has also been done in the former Soviet Union, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, India, Southern Africa, and Central and South America. None of the facilitators I interviewed had extensive “Despair and Empowerment” experience cross culturally. Thus, although I take up culture in a later chapter, the examination is limited by a lack of direct experience.

In workshops there was usually a spread in the age of participants. One facilitator noted that in her experience, the majority of participants that she had worked with were the aging "sixties activist" population. There was a full range of organizations in North America that facilitators mentioned using the “Despair and Empowerment” process with, such as Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Fellowship for Reconciliation, numerous environmental groups and coalitions, the Quaker American Friends Service Committee, various AIDS coalitions, unions, and various student and women’s groups. Other groups of participants mentioned by facilitators were ministers, church groups, therapists, psychologists, educators, people working with the homeless, domestic violence, sexual abuse, Love Canal residents, scientists, government officials, socially concerned corporate bureaucrats, and nurses. This mixture of political leanings within facilitators definitions of “activist” audiences indicates the expansiveness/ambiguity of “who is an activist/what is activism”. The majority of work with pre-established groups was at

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1 Speculation and implications about how this paradigm is embedded in cultural values systems will be taken up in Chapter 6.
a local or regional level, however one facilitator spoke of working with national and international levels of organizations.

Word of mouth as well as organizations experiencing conflict or crisis were the main ways that facilitators came to work with already established groups. Facilitators I interviewed found they had little success in attempts to be paid to do work with political organizations, particularly when approaching the activist group "cold" or without prior relationship. Some facilitators attributed this gap in reaching activist groups to the fact that often political organizations or individuals lack money or time to do workshops. However, my interviews and the sentiment of some facilitators illuminate an ambivalence about the ways that "activism" and "politics" are often constituted implicitly and explicitly within the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm. Ambivalence within the intervention around mission, legitimacy and identity in relationship to activists may affect why some activists might still choose to put time elsewhere, even if the "Despair and Empowerment" process were offered for free. Moreover, looking at this paradigm as an example may illuminate broader struggles of bringing stress-relief interventions to activists. Relations with "activists" and "praxis" are examined more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

4. Workshop Methodology

The "Despair and Empowerment" structure and methodology is a three-part group process or "Arc" of: "Despair Work", "The Turning" and "Empowerment".

A facilitator interviewed suggested that the name "Despair and Empowerment" was a misnomer to a certain extent. The intention more broadly was "to listen to what people are concerned about, support them in feeling their reaction, and helping them realize they are not alone and can be supported in their concerns and then from this place of caring and connection, take action" (A-50).
Thus, although the workshops focus the global and political, if what was most prominent in a person’s experience of despair is personal concerns, such as a recent divorce, this was appropriate to examine within exercises. Also, both Macy’s text and the facilitators acknowledge how people vary in their needs/processes for expression and change. However, in order to create a coherent, shared group experience, the originators of this process found through observing individual and group experiences of confronting feelings that the "arc" sequence of "despair", "the turning" and "empowerment" arose most organically. This "arc" is laid out in Macy’s text, and all of the facilitators followed this sequence in designing their workshops. This format could be used as a skeleton for workshops that lasted anywhere from one hour to one week in duration. The intentions of each element are as follows:

4.1 Despair

Central to the "Despair" element of the process are the following components: acknowledging pain verbally and silently, validating them as a wholesome\(^1\) response to the condition of our planet and the threats of annihilation, letting ourselves experience the feelings, being able to express them to others, recognize how widely these feelings are shared by others and that the source of these feelings lies in our caring and interconnectedness (Macy, p. 89). Repressed or "negative" emotions such as rage, frustration, or grief all tend to be expressed under the umbrella term of "despair". Again, the emphasis is supporting people in examining the emotions most readily accessible to them. Participants determine the level to which they want to address disturbing or "negative" feelings.

\(^1\)Terms like “wholesome” have significant implications on the concepts of health that facilitators operated with, and will be examined in more detail later.
Exercises used in this phase of the work are often done in a variation of paired and small group exercises, to create a sense of intimacy with a few people rather than a large group of strangers. Facilitators emphasized how making eye contact and having verbal and non-verbal interactions support the process of accessing and expressing feelings. A sample of the specific wording for an exercise that many facilitators mentioned appears in Appendix 5, to give a sense of tone and wording.

4.2 The Turning

After the “Despair” section, there is a “Turning Point” which comes on the tail of relief that is often experienced from being supported in collectively expressing repressed or seemingly overwhelming feelings. One facilitator described the "turning" as "something that reaffirms the beauty, the wonder, the awe, the connection...and the beauty is the bridge from all this dark shadow stuff to a place of action or a place of transformation" (C-442-445). The intention is to offer time for integration of feelings and to shift the energy of the group. Some examples of developing relationships with one another, with the group and with nature were through songs, physical contact such as being cradled by people, dispersing the group for individual journaling time, or creating opportunity to be alone in nature.

4.3 Empowerment

The “Empowerment” element usually includes sharing stories of courage and successful action with the large group. Time is often used to examine the question "what are you going to do to respond to your concerns and what support do you need?". This exploration occurs through guided meditations where affirmations are generated and shared with one another. All facilitators also mentioned the importance of action plans where time is created to reflect on personal and material
resources needed to support people in the next steps of action they have identified. For example, three facilitators mentioned an exercise where people identify actions they want to take in 24 hours, two weeks and two months. The "Empowerment" section is also intended to assist with integration back into the participant’s daily life, which is important since most frequently workshops occur in a retreat environment.

4.4 Safety

Though not formally articulated as a section within the “arc”, both Macy’s text and the facilitators interviewed talked about creating context or safety as a key element in the workshop format. Four of the five facilitators were emphatic about the importance of setting a “context” at the beginning in order to create "safety". Macy lays out initial steps which help create context: to help participants to relax, to focus on the present and themselves, offer clarification of the purpose of the workshop (that being to explore our inner response to the condition of our world), affirm the presence and power of feelings (which includes that people have diverse emotional styles), and let people introduce themselves. Facilitators interviewed for this research echoed the importance of these steps to varying degrees. They would accomplish these goals through songs, guided relaxation, ice breaker exercises, or a name game.

Some other components that facilitators emphasized as essential to establish at the start were phrased as: confidentiality, no matter what you say and how you express it is alright, there is no right or wrong way to do this, whether you show emotion or not doesn’t mean that you aren’t feeling anything, you can choose to participate, you can ask for emotional or logistical help and support from leaders. Facilitators emphasized the need to build trust and friendliness while setting a tone that “really honored the seriousness of our situation [in the workshop and globally]”
Three facilitators emphasized the importance of each individual "taking care" of themselves or being attentive to their own needs emotionally and physically (A- 74-78). One facilitator spoke of an experience of not outlining these guidelines at the beginning, which reaffirmed for her how absolutely essential setting context is if people are going to trust the support offered to help them take emotional risks and feel deeply.

5. Structures and Modalities Used in Workshops

There were innumerable variations on the specific exercises that facilitators use within this structure. Modalities mentioned by facilitators included using series of structured experiential exercises, body work, dance, movement, art, music, poetry, breathwork, toning, brainstorming, guided mediations and imagery, rituals and discussion. Facilitators emphasized that this diversity was important in that people access and express emotions in different ways and it was important to use modalities that offered the greatest creativity and inclusively. However, exercises tended to be "doing things by experiencing rather than more cognitive, analytical [processes] (A- 38). Using modes that people were less accustomed to or comfortable with could also support growth, although the process never intentionally set out to create discomfort or provoke individuals.

Shorter check-ins in groups of four or five were often instigated at the start of each day or after meals. This was an opportunity for individuals to address immediate preoccupation's, such as leaving an ill child at home. They also used various "witnessing" processes where the speaker is not interrupted or given

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1Of course people use their analytical faculties within and after experiential exercises, but little formal discussion or problem solving time is intentionally created in the workshop format. The pedagogical/therapeutic emphasis in the "Despair and Empowerment" workshops is on learning styles that adults use less frequently in dominant North American culture, such as play, intuition and feelings, rather than analysis and intellectual problem solving.
feedback but just listened to, whether through "active listening" in pairs or large group sharing.

Another method two facilitators noted as extremely powerful in verbal exercises such as creating action plans, is to give one person the opportunity to speak out loud and have their thoughts recorded and read back to them at the end by an attentive listener/scribe. This opportunity to be heard and supported in exploration seemed important to the pedagogy or methodology of this paradigm.

In the interviews, it was striking that two facilitators emphasized the power of nature and music to open people emotionally. One referred to an exercise where people go out into nature, whether it be a public park in a city or the woods, to find aspects of themselves reflected in the setting they see and then to come back and share that with the group. She noted that:

Closeness to nature...can be very revealing...It gives people very quick access to their feelings because they are not protected.
I mean somehow if you are associating yourself with something you love in nature, you are not as distanced from your feelings... and its a wonderful way to get people to be unselfconscious in a group, because they are busy relating to nature (D-304-314).

Music was noted as powerful in that it can draw people together. One person liked to use big drums because "sound wise, it creates a space that is so much bigger than yourself that you feel like you can be held in this huge world of sound" (D-393-395).

Each facilitator emphasized the importance of using diverse modalities.

6. Roles of the Facilitator

Facilitation is often done by at least two people. The importance of co-facilitation in this work was emphasized by three facilitators I interviewed. Co-

1"Protected" is a provocative term. In terms of its relationship to the experience of being alone in the woods, it offers a double meaning of people letting down their social guards but also being less protected in environments they likely find "wilder" than the surroundings they normally live in; that "Nature" can simultaneously produce a sense of liberation and vulnerability.
facilitation is valued in part due to the volatile nature and the stresses that facilitating such a process could place on one person. Two facilitators enables the group to continue if one facilitator needs to offer extra support to individuals in processing emotions that arise. Co-facilitation also offers an opportunity to experience and model shared leadership. Facilitators usually charged money to run these workshops and either keep that as a salary for their services or donate the fees to other organizations or projects.

When asked how they would describe their roles in this work, they unanimously identified with the word "facilitator", and did not view other suggestions such as therapist, or community development worker, as fitting descriptions. One succinct description was "I think of a facilitator as someone who tries to create situations where change can happen, rather than trying to direct the change" (C- 660). She also described her work as that of a "storyteller".

We are really trying to tell a new story because the story that we have been running the world under doesn’t work anymore... Sort of like once upon a time ago we "knew" the world was flat and it took a while to figure out it wasn’t. I see myself as just that. As trying to introduce a new way of looking at the world...We’re all storytellers\(^1\) (C- 657-660)

Two facilitators used the image of planting seeds to describe their work. Two also spoke of how their work doing “Despair and Empowerment” workshops fulfilled callings for spiritual ministry, and saw themselves at times serving a social role comparable to that of a "shaman". They also all mentioned that an important aspect of their work was role modeling - whether that was taking emotional risks and being vulnerable, or taking care of their needs personally, or showing how to work in a supportive way with their colleagues. Facilitators also emphasized how they are participants as well as leaders in experiences, meaning that they join in the

\(^1\)For fans of the view that we construct reality (whether that be from a post-modern theoretical perspective or a new age Neuro linguistic programming perspective), this is a provocative notion.
exercises and participate to a level that enables them to both be a member in and a midwife to the group gestalt.

In summary, both those interviewed and the description in Macy's text emphasize that "the greatest gift that the guide can offer the participants is the opportunity for them to listen to themselves and each other and...therein lies the power to connect, inform and invigorate" (Macy, p. 81). Therefore the facilitator is participant as is the participant a co-facilitator in the creation of the experiential process. With the workshop that I was in, leadership was offered to participants in many ways, ranging from leading a song to modifying the group exercise.

7. Diversity in Workshop Content and Structure

From my interviews, diversity appeared to occur in content but not in the actual structure or process of the "arc". Both Macy and the facilitators I interviewed noted that with regards to employing the "Despair and Empowerment" model, "these projects and programs are manifold, as varied as the lives and work settings of the participants in this work" (Macy, p. xiv). A facilitator described it as: "it is not so much facilitating any particular workshop, it is really getting people to come together and then holding them in ways that allow their needs to come out" (C-623). At the same time:

[The workshops are] highly structured for very good reasons. Primarily because of the volatile nature of the content and the emotions we were inviting people to get into. So I think the structure made it safe. And the structure meant that while you could follow different directions that might emerge during the workshops, there was still structure and that people knew what the structure was ahead of time (B- 548-553).

Facilitators mentioned how structure helped ground and create confidence and safety for both themselves and the participants.
When asked if the "Despair and Empowerment" format changed depending on a group's affiliation with a specific organization or political movement, all facilitators said there was little distinction in how they ran the process, apart from gearing songs or poems to an appropriate theme, such as nature if they are working with environmentalists. It seemed only content varied primarily according to the composition of the participants.

Chapter 3: Section 2: Boundaries and Overlap Between Therapy and the "Despair and Empowerment" Paradigm

The data about "Despair and Empowerment" workshop philosophy and praxis raised many questions around "healing" and pedagogy. First, the "Despair and Empowerment" model presents a certain ideology about how people learn and change and creates relationships between education, healing, and personal and social change. The impact and outcomes of the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm on participants in the workshops would require further research with people who have experienced the process before conclusions could be drawn about if, how, and why this intervention is effective. Thus, this discussion is clearly an exploration of philosophical and potential outcomes. If I or a facilitator thinks or hopes that an outcome can or is happening, that outcome still needs investigation and documentation that is beyond the scope of this research. Moreover, as this research is in the field of community development as opposed to applied psychology, my primary interest is in the political and ideological outcomes more so than the applied or individually therapeutic outcomes.

When the question "What is the difference between the workshops and therapy?" was posed, often the discussion immediately focused on a comparison of individual therapy and the workshop. I was not specific on defining the parameters of what I meant by "therapy". Their assumptions reflect common cultural
associations with therapy as an individual and private intervention. Often later in the interview, parallels between support groups or group therapy and workshops were brought in as a more structurally relevant comparison. The following examination of some distinctions between the workshops and therapy are used to clarify how facilitators see the outcomes and intentions of their work.

As discussions in my research interviews evolved, it seemed there were simultaneously clear distinctions and considerable overlap between therapy and the workshops. The texture of the following quote is indicative of the complexity that most facilitators found in exploring the boundaries of their work.

The goal [of the workshops] isn't to be happy, or to get well, or overcome your neurosis or reconcile your shit you are carrying from your childhood or your parents. It's not to have some individual attainment, or even enlightenment or peace or happiness\(^1\). They may come but...the goal is really to participate in facing the reality of the world and to participate in the healing of what is damaged and in pain. And that is something that is a collective process, it's a global process...that combines the political, the personal, the psychological, the spiritual, the creative. And it can embrace many of the elements that one might find in therapy. But it is not a therapeutic, primarily therapeutic. Well, it is a therapeutic process, but it is community therapy in the largest sense. It's not personal or individual therapy, and it's not group therapy. It's a collective, kind of global therapy for the community...acknowledging that the personal pain that we are carrying around is related to our being able to be effective in the world (B-806-823) (my italics).

The methodologies, intentions and the actual outcomes can all be used to consider the therapeutic nature of an intervention. I do not feel it is useful to try and create hard lines between therapy and the workshops. Rather in this section I examine the nuances of the intervention and facilitators perceptions of the work that they do.

\(^{1}\)It is notable to consider the similarities in these comments and the ones presented in the political critiques to psychology found in the literature review in Chapter 1.
For instance, intentions or issues addressed by participants taking a workshop or seeking therapy can be quite similar. Summarized from my data coding and analysis, the following list illustrates commonality and difference in issues addressed through either intervention. When facilitators were asked why they thought activists took the workshops and what facilitators felt they were offering to people, the following accounts were given. Motivations more particular to activist organization or individuals appear towards the end of this list.

- An avenue for people to express or access their feelings
- Opening blocks that keep people from moving ahead or starting to do something
- To find or regenerate a sense of community
- Insight
- Being able to move beyond wherever they are now
- Permission to try new behaviors
- A safe enough environment to actually open up, and heal, and release feelings, and be able to move on, and take some sort of action
- To relax
- To figure out how to impact the powers that be
- Wanting a growth experience
- To feel stronger and more empowered
- Wanting to be with like minded people
- A retreat
- A nurturing connection with each other and the earth
- A jump start or regeneration for activists who are maybe burned out or feeling overwhelmed
- Wanting a safe space for exploring the whole [picture of self and political situation] in a way that is not demanding that you define your arguments or come up with an action plan.
- Tools that they can take back to support their personal and political lives
- Activists wanting to be recognized and understood for who they are
- Being able to stop for a while and rest with their feelings and really being able to look at how they were working as a group
- Group bonding

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1Facilitators mentioned how activists may not know overtly what their expectations of the workshop are and their motivations for participating.
2The facilitators gathered perceptions about activists primarily by listening to what activists say during workshops.
3Some of these themes are repeated but they are quotes from the facilitators. Thus, there is value in considering the subtleties of languaging.
- Go deeper into their feelings individually and together and share that to
  make a decision
- A safe environment where people can come and speak without being
cut down for whether or not they are politically correct. They
can be relaxed and nourished
- Wanting to address psychosomatic/physical concerns/symptoms - ranging
  from losing hair due to excessive stress to serious illness

A primary intention of the “Despair and Empowerment” workshops as described by
a facilitator that I interviewed is to support people in “living a life according to your
conscience, and trying to increase the amount of awareness and justice and
environmentally sound behaviors and creation of beauty and love and community”
(D- 660-662). Another facilitator described it as “it's kind of a jump start or
regeneration for activists who are maybe burned out or feeling overwhelmed and
an initial start up for people who feel just too overwhelmed to do something and
have never really gotten going” (A- 31-33).

In is beyond the parameters of this research to determine the extent to which
these outcomes and intentions that facilitators spoke of are achieved because
participants from “Despair and Empowerment” workshops were not interviewed
and evaluations were not available. One facilitator also noted how there are great
challenges in evaluating the effectiveness of workshops in general, because:

It can be days or weeks or even months before it takes hold and
is processed through...How do you evaluate emotionally deep work?
Someone could have an awful experience superficially and it was
like the most important thing for them. Who is to judge? I think it
takes a different kind of evaluation than [just asking] "what did you get
out of this?" (C- 719-743).

Again, in-depth research directly with participant would be helpful to substantiate
whether or not these intentions are fulfilled.

There can also be considerable overlap between issues addressed in therapy
and in the workshops. For example, a facilitator noted “when women started to
explore their pain about the world in a workshop, what always came up? Gender
issues! What it felt like to be a woman in a sexist world. Most of what was happening in the world in terms of the nuclear threat or environmental threats, were seen as just symptoms of the patriarchy anyhow, so it wasn't like we were dealing with two different issues” (B-524-629). This raises questions about false dichotomies between the personal and political that exist in more conventional psychological paradigms.

It seemed the background of the leader and the group of individual participants also affected the intentions behind how, why and which topics were examined. Two of the facilitators commented directly on how the outcome, structure and content of a workshop very much depends on the individual facilitator and how personal investments and perceptions are at that specific time.

So much depends on...the group that comes together and what their real needs are, and then also the facilitator. I'm an educator. I'm not a psychologist and so my approach may be very different than a psychologist...who may be very focused on the need to nurture or bring out or allow space for a lot of personal feeling stuff to be processed...I may have a feeling of wanting them to feel connected to something greater [such as nature/spirit] because that is where I come from...we all bring our own stories...and that's one of the reasons why I encourage people to take more workshops than just [ours] (C-981-994).

From the workshop that I attended, I feel I experienced first hand what this facilitator was speaking of in terms of the chemistry of the group and leader creating a distinct experience within a standardized “Despair and Empowerment” sequence of exercises. My coding of the interviews also reinforced the situational nature of the work, because facilitators who were psychotherapists on a full time basis tended in interviews to talk more about feelings and catharsis in their workshops and the interview. Likewise, it often seemed those with more of an educator or activist bent became most animated or placed the most emphasis on how this work fits into systems of social regulation and transformation. The extent to which they viewed
their process of facilitating as an opportunity to educate about spirituality, healing, facilitation, or politics was diverse.

Some structural and situational differences between the workshops and therapy were also mentioned. The intricacies of group dynamics where people know one another is not focused on in this paper. This is primarily because the predominant experience of facilitators interviewed was working with random groups. Although it is likely that people in political circles may run into a colleague or acquaintance at a workshop emphasizing activism, the complexities of pre-formed groups was not sufficiently developed in my data.

For random groups, the most notable structural difference between workshops and therapy are that therapy implies an on-going relationship within a certain structure. Even if workshop participants encounter one another outside of the workshop, structured "roles" and ways of interacting are less likely to persist. When there is anonymity in a workshop, some facilitators noted that emotional risk taking can at times be easier because the participant is not bound by others preconceptions and will not face any long term consequences to their behaviors. Equally true for others is how anonymity and short term interventions are hard if there are no guarantees of ongoing support and they are amongst "strangers". The level of freedom and safety that is experienced in different group surroundings is very much influenced by individual preferences.

Facilitators also spoke of distinctions between the role of the facilitator in contrast to therapist. Some of the points raised were that some therapists can intervene or challenge clients more whereas the facilitator is present to the group primarily as a listener. Facilitators usually don't counsel people individually in the workshops. Therapy is also a method that "uses relationship for healing and [workshops] uses your common community in terms of relationship" (D- 537).

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¹See methodology section for the complete rationale.
Mutual sharing is often limited in therapy between client and therapist, whereas in the workshops attempt to be egalitarian.

For me, as much as the facilitator attempts to create an atmosphere of egalitarian relationship, in my analysis I feel that the workshop facilitator stands in a potentially comparable position of influence to that of a therapist. The difference between a therapist and facilitator is that the intentions, expectations and exertion of power that both the participant and facilitator mutually generate in workshops is more egalitarian.

Of greatest interest to me was differences in the perceived impact of change from therapy or workshops. Two facilitators spoke of how their own experiences of first doing the workshop as a participant had a far reaching impact on their lives personally, and that many people can have dramatic shifts occur in their personal lives or world views as a result of the workshop. However, there was also recognition of the limitations of workshops. For example, one facilitator felt that a weekend “Despair and Empowerment” workshop is limited in terms of addressing ongoing emotional issues. Often facilitators encourage participants in the workshops to try and create longer term support groups with others who have shared the “Despair and Empowerment” experience. Again, for addressing more chronic emotional and behavioral needs, like full blown burn out, longer term therapy or support would be advised, as recovery is frequently a process of radically altering life-style and behaviors.

A facilitator also noted ways that individual psychotherapy can have limitations in terms of creating or supporting enduring changes in character or behavior. "Getting people into a different state of being...you have to go into some spiritual discipline or spiritual physical discipline like tai chi or yoga or something that teaches you with regularity...how to integrate yourself " (D- 852). Two facilitators commented on how they felt a more explicit integration of holistic
health practices such as yoga or meditation into the workshop would be beneficial to the format they use, in terms of support as well as improving cross-cultural appeal\(^1\).

One facilitator commented that usually the emotional work done in workshops is more "contained" than therapy. For instance, in exercises that require reflection on a painful experience of their past, facilitators often qualify that participants should only go back a few years, so that deeper experiences, such as childhood trauma, are not brought into a forum that is not intended to offer that level and kind of support. Facilitators acknowledged that the "Despair and Empowerment" process could be used to work with severe wounding. Yet the intention of the workshops is to address social rather than personal impact and response to systemic abuses.

Facilitators also valued how exposing people to the structures and experiences of the workshops enabled participants to apply these tools and insights to all aspects of their lives. "Many write that the most telling effect of the work is in their personal lives - in new dimensions of appreciation for themselves and their friends and families" (Macy, p. xvi). Facilitators each emphasized how the "arc" is an organic process of release which can be a beneficial framework for individuals to continue to use in addressing emotions throughout their lifetime. The "Despair and Empowerment" model is a continuous process rather than a finite accomplishment that someone completes after doing a weekend workshop.

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\(^1\)Issues about race/class/culture are addressed in Chapter 6.
Chapter 4 - RESEARCH "TESTIMONIES": ABOUT SOME EMOTIONS THAT ACTIVISTS HAVE ADDRESSED IN "DESPAIR AND EMPOWERMENT" WORKSHOPS

Shifting patterns of avoidance, psychic numbing, and isolation in order to create support for action is a primary emphasis in the "Despair and Empowerment" workshop paradigm.

Despair and Empowerment work helps us to increase our awareness of [global] developments without feeling overwhelmed by the dread, grief, anger, and sense of powerlessness that they arouse in us. The work overcomes patterns of avoidance and psychic numbing; it builds compassion, community, and commitment to act (Macy, p. xiii).

However, the "Despair and Empowerment" workshops structure and process is intended as a support for any audience. Choosing to highlight self-identified activists as an audience sub-group within "Despair and Empowerment" workshops resulted in my research shifting the ways that the paradigm is usually considered. Upon reading parts of my research, some facilitators disputed the suggestion that the paradigm is a psychotherapeutic intervention. Yet, the following data suggests that regardless of whether or not a primary or explicit intention of the paradigm is to support activists personally, some activists still seem to come to the workshops in order to address stress in their personal lives.

I realize that my research emphasizes a focus that might not otherwise appear as prominently in an examination of the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm. However, rather than discrediting the real or potential psychotherapeutic impact of the work for self-identified activists, the following research can be seen as a beginning to what I see as valuable examination of stress and the support that is being sought after by self-identified activists as a distinct population. This data also

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1 "Testimonies" appears in brackets as a reminder of how this data is influenced by factors outlined on this page.

2 The ways that the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm can implicitly take up questions of community, action, and praxis are examined in Chapter 5.
begins to illuminate ways that the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm could grow or is already succeeding in meeting activists' needs. More research or observation directly with activists would also be required in order to further substantiate/disprove and understand activist's experiences and needs.

One facilitator interviewed used the term "secondary numbing" to describe the quality of stress response that has been observed with self-identified activists in "Despair and Empowerment" workshops. Secondary numbing is generated from experiences of engaging in change and the stresses that can be created from that, rather than primary numbing which is a form of denial that initially obstructs a person's capacity to feel and act. What seems most prominent for activists in workshops is the deterioration rather than an absence of their capacity to feel and respond. The testimonies represented in this research affirm this phenomenon.

With the data of "testimonies" about to be presented in order to elaborate upon activist feelings, it is important to keep in mind a number of things. First, these are facilitators representations of other peoples feelings. Also, both dominant cultures, such as Puritan New England, as well as sub-cultures, such as "activists" as a community, have norms that regulate feelings, such as how they can and cannot be expressed, who can express them, when and in what contexts. These factors all impact how the upcoming testimonies can be understood.

The limitations of context may also affect what feelings appear in my data. For instance, facilitators commented on how their own comfort level with various feelings affected the depth to which they could facilitate others in those emotions. Another influence a facilitator found was if the facilitators co-leading are connected with one another, the group will be connected and that often there is a parallel process between facilitators and the group. For example, if the leaders are tense, often the group will be tense. Thus the power of facilitators to influence group and

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1For instance, race, age, sex, class, public or private context, accent etc. can all affect these factors.
individual experience is important to consider as an influence upon what is spoken and how. The "Despair and Empowerment" process is also a directed group experience on many levels. Each exercise, as well as the process in its entirety emphasizes certain feelings. This occurs through wording and through the prominent experience generated by a theme. Although there is support for people to feel their own feelings, certain emotions will inevitably be more peripheral to the experience and thus, in the data as well. What other participants are willing to hear or are most concerned about will also effect which emotions are expressed in pair and group work. This regulation can happen both consciously and subliminally and again affects the testimonies data.

Time and intention also influences what is spoken in a workshop. Given that workshops are often weekend experiences, emotions are "more contained" and people may be hesitant to go into soul shattering depths of feelings. Again, the emphasis of the workshops is to release emotion and energy so that people will be able to satisfy their desire to take action politically and facilitators seemed clear about these boundaries of psychotherapeutic support. Thus as much as the process also aims to be "co-creative", leadership and collective forces both influence each workshop experience.

Finally, my own interests and interpretations in the interviews, coding and analysis influence what is represented\(^1\). Thus, the following data about emotions expressed by activists is not considered "statistical fact" but rather as a partial sketch about facilitator’s perceptions of some activist’s feelings of distress. Moreover, an expanded list from my interviews of facilitator’s observations of feelings expressed by activists in workshops are presented in Appendix 6. By providing more examples, the appendix elaborates on how these upcoming categories were constituted.

\(^1\)The first two chapters on defining the research and methodology account for some of these intentional choices and unintentional biases.
When asked “why activists took the workshop” or “what feelings do activists come to process in the workshops”, the emotions or concerns that were most prominent in facilitator’s minds about activists were grouped the following way:

- Overwhelmed/burnout- 35
- Depletedblocked/numb- 35
- Fear - 28
- Frustration - 26
- Despair/ sadness/ sorrow - 25
- Anger - 20
- Pain - 17
- Lack of resources - 14

Facilitators also noted how in the workshops they heard gratitude and appreciation from activists about how social change work is meaningful and how activists feel enriched by their community and occupation.

The most notable correlation between Macy’s general categories and the ones that appeared in the data generated through interviews specifically about self-identified activists were in the following areas:

Macy’s general category
- fear of losing our capacity to cope
- fear of feelings of powerlessness
- fear of others capacity to react helpfully
- fear of losing control

Data about activists specifically
- Overwhelm
- Responsibility
  - nobody is as capable or as committed as me
- Fear
  - if I feel, I may fall apart and let down others
- Pain from values dissonance
  - I’m tired of being the outsider
  - Tired of having people say “there she goes again…”
- Fear in confronting their sense of the physical/emotional danger in taking socially radical stands

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1See Chapter 2 about my research methodology and Appendix 6 for more details around choices and problems in coding this data.
Macy’s themes of fear of losing our minds, fear of causing distress, fear of appearing unpatriotic, fear of sowing panic, fear of appearing too emotional, fear of religious doubt or testing faith, fear that we will be expected to have solutions, fear that if we feel feelings we will be mired in them permanently, fear of “negative” thoughts creating negative realities, fear of pain and fear of appearing morbid were less prominent in my data findings about activists. However, these absences could be attributed to the factors regulating feelings, particularly how participant’s experiences are contained and directed by exercises/facilitators given the workshop’s final objective of generating hope and action, and limitations of time and support inherent in the format.

I was particularly curious about how guilt was not very visible in interview data with facilitators, yet can be a prominent feeling either consciously or unconsciously for some activist individuals and groups. The workshop I attended had an exercise which created a focused context in which to examine or confront feelings of guilt. How the workshops could structurally and philosophically expand emotional exploration into more emotionally “unspeakable” categories such as shame, would be interesting to consider.

After some reflection, it seemed each facilitator came to a concluding statement about the underlying feelings of self-identified activists that they have observed over their years of facilitating “Despair and Empowerment” workshops. Two facilitators emphasized that “the frustration of your own powerlessness is the bottom line of what people are really dealing with more than anything else” (D-191). “The high level of frustration...tends to be either focused on the larger society that they don’t fit into and which they are fighting to change, or not feeling they are making much progress” (C-46-471)..."and underlying there is a cry of "How can I change the world?", "How can I keep going?" (C-390-392). These statements are

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1This feels to me like a reflection of the American context that Macy and the paradigm are situated in.
consistent with the data frequencies of observed activist feelings, which further support the suggestion that overwhelm and frustration are prominent concerns for activists.

Three facilitators noted how gender specifically mediated the expression and content of feelings.

It's not 100% true but there was a basic gender phenomenon that other people have written and talked about and it isn't anything that we discovered. It's just that we were able to experience it first-hand. Women tended to bring a lot of depression, and powerlessness which was sitting on top of their anger. Right beneath the surface was a lot of grief and sadness and under that would be all their anger, like the core of the earth. For men it tended to be sadness and fear that were the core and anger was the one that rides out in front and that does all the stuff that men do. But for activists there was a layer over that, so now you've got this guy who looks like he's really calm and together and it's like a volcano. [laughs] And again it's like the corporate exec. "You just gotta harness those emotions and cover them up so you can get your work done"1 (B- 483-497).

More research into how race, gender, age, and class all influence the issues and emotions expressed by participants would be interesting to examine.

It seems that some activists come to “Despair and Empowerment” workshops to address their sense of immediate personal peril as well as broader concerns about planetary peril. I would be curious to examine how the mandate to increase either emotional awareness and response to our planetary crisis is experienced by activist’s who come for support in addressing very acute personal needs. More than providing answers, this research begins to develop significant questions about why the “Despair and Empowerment” intervention is sought out by activists and how it is effective in meeting their needs. In particular, I would be curious to study more directly why and how personal concerns that can be so prominent for some activists are brought to forums that emphasize the outcome of political action. This may

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1 Parallels in how activist praxis can reproduce problematic labor practices is examined in Chapter 5.
reflect on a gap within the ways that more conventional psychotherapeutic interventions fail to satisfy some activist needs. Maslach (1978) states:

Burnout is best understood and modified in terms of the social and situational sources of job-related stresses. Although personality variables are certainly relevant in the overall analysis, the prevalence of the phenomenon and the range of seemingly disparate staff people who are affected by it suggest that the search for causes is better directed away from identifying the bad people and toward uncovering the characteristic of the bad situations where many good people function (p. 114).

Other research has found that burnout rates are lower for those professionals who actively expressed, analyzed and shared their personal feelings with their colleagues (Maslach, 1976). Opportunities to "get things off their chests", receive constructive feedback from other people, and develop new perspectives on their situation (Brachfeld, p. 8, 1984) are offered to activists through the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm. This research could account for activists seeking collective arenas to address political distress at an emotional level.

Particularly for activists, Shields notes the importance of "needing support to provide perspective and affirm the courage of your stand" (Shields, p. 127) and the importance of having the "opportunity to reflect - to review personal objectives, realize what is working, celebrate what's going well, acknowledge difficulties, look for resolutions" (Shields, p. 124). This could account for some of the reasons why activists find value in the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm.

Facilitators in my research emphasized that many activists coming to the workshops may not know overtly what their expectations of the workshop are and their motivations for participating. One facilitator felt that the main motivation for participation from activists was:

[Activists] had lost whatever original motivation that had gotten them into being an activist. [That] was long gone in terms of them being in touch with it. It might still in some weird way be fueling but... it was like the after effects of something that is just rolling down hill
and there was no real juice...and no ability any longer to have an emotional response to the terrible things they were working on (B- 430-432).

From the data generated in this research, it seems of central importance to activists is "not so much what to do out there but how to function better individually and as a group to then figure out what to do" (A- 130-143). The therapeutic tone of activist's motivations for participating exists in contrast to the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm's emphasis on the general public usually attending workshops to get support in how to act. Another summary from my interviews about self-identified activists' impetuses to do the workshop is:

A lot of [activists] came to the workshops to process...[the realization] that there was all this emotional turmoil inside them that was actually coming out in some pretty weird ways. That they were taking their anger out on themselves, their co-workers, their families. Whoever happened to be in their path. [This was an issue ] particularly for men" (B- 478-482).

This comment again reflects the phenomenon of secondary numbing as being prominent for activists. Other motivations mentioned by facilitators for self-identified activists attending the workshops were:

- Wanting to be with like minded people
- A retreat
- A nurturing connection with each other and the earth
- A jump start or regeneration for activists who are maybe burned out or feeling overwhelmed
- Wanting a safe space for exploring the whole [picture of self and political situation] in a way that is not demanding that you define your arguments or come up with an action plan
- Seeking tools to take back to support their personal and political lives
- Activists wanting to be recognized and understood for who they are
- Being able to stop for a while and rest with their feelings and really being able to look at how they were working as a group
- Go deeper into their feelings individually and together and share that to make a decision
- A safe environment where people can come and speak without being cut down for whether or not they are politically correct. They can be relaxed and nourished
- Physical concerns/symptoms - from losing hair due to stress to facing chronic pain or serious illness
Each facilitator identified burn out as a significant concern among the feelings that activists were expressing in the workshops. Often burn out may not be named overtly, but the symptoms or outcome of burn out can be present in workshop participants. "[There is] frustration that can’t be contained anymore - so [activists] either blow out, withdraw, or go into super-denial" (C- 702-705). Moreover, risk of burn out can be inferred by the fact that facilitators mentioned how many activists leave the workshops with a sense that self-care needs greater priority in their lives.

There were some specific reasons why facilitators felt that focusing on burn out in exercises or workshops was potentially problematic. First, facilitators felt that some activists might resist focusing on burn out as a risk in their lives. Considerable amounts of work can get done when people operate at a frenetic level and "I think sometimes there is a fear that “if I really get off that pace, I won’t be able to function and I won’t get done everything that needs to get done”!" (A- 358-362).

Another facilitator noted that a draw back to focusing overtly on burn out is that "from a publicity stand point, if you are an activist and you are in denial about taking care of yourself, then you are going to resist going to a workshops that advertises itself as “come and take care of yourself”!" (C- 244-246). This facilitator also pointed out that people who are burnt out from activism are also "less in the loop" of information about services developed specifically to emotionally support activists so the individual may not find out about or choose to go to workshops that emphasize the integration of the personal and political.

One facilitator also noted that burn out is a long term behavioral change, and wondered if the most popular format of a weekend workshop would be insufficient to address the depth of need experienced by people suffering severe burn out. Another facilitator felt that the spaciousness of the "Despair and Empowerment" format would enable a participant to begin to address burn out, even without having specific exercises or discussions about this topic.
The methods for dealing with burn out were not all that different from what we had been doing all along anyway. It kind of came through a different window but you are going to the same place...Why do people burn out? Because they lose touch with their own inner needs and feelings and self. And so if they can get back in touch with that, they can heal from the effects of burn out and find ways to do their work that won't burn them out so much. Won't burn them out at all actually1 (B- 402-406).

Facilitators seemed to feel that the “Despair and Empowerment” intervention had a role to play within a larger process of re-education and healing from burn out.

The research of Daley (1979), Shannon and Saleeby (1980), Maslach (1978), and Shields (1994) all mention that workshops can be helpful for workers in danger of burning out. Workshops allow for reflection, time away, and the development of skills which can reduce stress. Again, Brachfeld’s review finds that “the literature indicates that effective interventions to alleviate job burn out should occur on an agency level” (Maslach, 1976; Shannon and Saleeby, 1980; Wallach, 1984). Training workshops provide time out from stressful job situations and a feeling on the part of the worker that s/he is supported by both agency and co-workers. This relief appears to be a major factor in preventing or reducing the perception of and effects of job burn out (Brachfeld, 1984, p. 44).

On the other hand, it is relevant to note that “interventions that promote expression of feelings with the intention of increasing support can backfire and generate more negative and stressful feelings by promoting sarcasm, carping, complaining and mutually reinforced hostility” (Shannon and Saleeby, 1980). In my research, I did not ask facilitators about harmful outcomes of the workshops they have lead. This could have been an interesting discussion were my research focused more on the therapeutic structure and outcomes of the “Despair and Empowerment” process as opposed to the political implications.

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1 This qualification is interesting to note and can be tied back to studies that show how expectations of burn out influences whether a person does burn out or not.
Because secondary numbing occurs through the interplay of both personality and environment, practices of activism need to be considered at an individual and organizational level. As my analysis developed during my research, it became evident that facilitators of "Despair and Empowerment" workshops are offering more than just a structure to process feelings and inspire action. In the next chapter, I begin to examine how the workshops implicitly confront and create various notions of political praxis and what it means to "be an activist".
Chapter 5: "DESPAIR AND EMPOWERMENT" WORKSHOPS IN RELATIONSHIP TO POLITICAL PRAXIS

From my literature review of political critiques of healing modalities, many concerns about psychotherapeutic interventions were raised. The "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm both reproduces and transforms some problematic outcomes from psychological, social and activist practices. In this chapter I consider some of the ways that the "Despair and Empowerment" can be considered political. Whether overtly or implicitly, the workshops as a discourse confront and create various notions of political praxis and what is meant by "being an activist". Part of the methodology of "strategic questioning" is attempting to "ask the un-askable" (Peavy, p. 97) and to clarify the values underlying behavior and choices. When I asked a facilitator if "Despair and Empowerment" workshops addressed the stress and complexity of activist praxis, the response was "No, they don't. Which is really interesting. But they do implicitly. And maybe that is safer." I really hadn't thought about it" (C-239-240). This comment is very illuminating. Why is an implicit approach "safer"? For whom? And, how might the "safety" of this implicit approach support or undermine the workshop's goals of supporting personal and political change? In this section I will first consider some critique of the workshops that facilitators spoke of, and then consider the political implications of the paradigm.

Repressive Reaction from Activists to the "Despair and Empowerment" Workshops

Some facilitators said that they had heard little in the way of negative feedback from activists about the "Despair and Empowerment" process. Others had experienced more reaction. It seemed the longer the person had been doing the

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1 This also raises questions about the strengths and disadvantages that the implicit, experiential approach can have, in contrast to more directed forms of pedagogy/intervention.

2 This is an additional comment about the transformative potential of research, some of which were presented in Chapter 2.
work, and the more they were among activists as colleagues and friends, the more reaction they seemed to have heard. This could be accounted for by the fact that people newer to facilitating “Despair and Empowerment” workshops are operating in a cultural climate that is more broadly accepting of or familiar with various forms of therapeutic interventions than in the early 1980’s.

Facilitators found reaction to the workshops from activists were expressed in a number of different ways. During “Despair and Empowerment” workshops. Some facilitators mentioned they had personally experienced or heard of other facilitators experiencing constructive criticism, outbursts of indignant scorn or rage, people walking out of the workshops, and finally written or verbal evaluations given at the end of a workshop. Outside of the workshops, critique was given by colleagues who had either participated or heard about the work through casual conversation. Apparently a few "scathing" written critiques of the workshops also appeared in the early 1980’s. However, unfortunately I was unable to track down these articles as they had been published in small newsletters from the eighties and are not widely available.

One of the critiques that we received in the early days was that we were too touchy feely\(^1\), that we were either navel gazing..., coddling people or babying them or actually bringing them into kind of dangerous places where they would never get out of or become effective activists (which were their deep emotional places), and that people’s emotional feelings and their tears and their sadness and their grief and their rage - all these things really weren’t worth spending time on, and were in fact counter productive and the best thing to do was “just do it” and not take time to mess with that (B- 114-127).

Expressed later in the same interview was how "at other kinds of political gatherings people would express their kind of lack of...uh, they felt we just weren’t

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\(^1\) In discussions of cultures of activism, many facilitators noted how behaviors and climates of organizing could also be examined as gendered behaviors. The scorn for “softer” activism could be seen as a gendered sentiment that first prompted many feminists to generate less patriarchal paradigms of organizing.
credible or we weren't, we couldn't possibly help the cause" (B-288). Two other facilitators mentioned critique from activists and two had little to say about political critique or reaction. One facilitator recalled being at a workshop with Joanna Macy where Macy recounted many stories of her own experiences receiving critical or hostile reaction to "Despair and Empowerment" workshops.

In contrasting Macy's mechanisms of repression with these "politically motivated" critiques of the workshops, I was struck by the following parallels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macy's Mechanisms of Repression</th>
<th>Repressive Sentiment in Activist Critique</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- fear of losing our capacity to cope &amp; - fear of feeling powerless</td>
<td>- if activists do your workshop they will become useless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fear that we feel feelings we will be mired in them permanently</td>
<td>- workshops are counter-productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fear of appearing stupid/invalidation - fear of losing our minds</td>
<td>- workshops couldn't possibly help the cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fear of appearing stupid/invalidation - fear of losing our minds</td>
<td>- workshops bring people to dangerous places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fear of guilt - fear of appearing unpatriotic</td>
<td>- workshops are navel gazing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fear of religious doubt - fear of appearing too emotional</td>
<td>- workshops are unpatriotic to political dogmas and expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fear of religious doubt - fear of appearing too emotional</td>
<td>- being emotionally vital will undermine rather than support activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fear of religious doubt - fear of appearing too emotional</td>
<td>- workshops are counter productive</td>
</tr>
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I found these parallels in mechanisms of repression and invalidation intriguing. Not only do they reflect effort to invalidate the workshops but they reflect values about what counts as "Real" praxis.

At some level, echoes of these concerns about how emotional support impacts "real" activism emerged in my interviews with facilitators. It was interesting to note that in some interviews, facilitators expressed ambivalence about the "activism" in their work, yet later when they read a draft of my work, were quick

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1Connecting this description with feelings that activists expressed about not feeling good enough, like they weren't doing enough, I wonder how the sense of inadequacy that some activists feel is supported by the levels of critique and sniping that activists direct towards one another. I wonder what if critique in this form serves or hinders solidarity and creating viable social change movements. Finally, I am curious about how guilt motivates activism and these feelings of never doing enough.
to assert or defend the activist nature of their commitments. To me, rather than seeing these doubts or inconsistencies as an affront to the political legitimacy and power of the paradigm, I see this ambivalence as an ongoing tension that many people committed to social change experience. The following quotes illustrate key tensions/ separations I observed in interviews around identity and praxis. When asked if the work facilitators do is still relevant to activists, one facilitator replied, "when you are committed to work like this you don't necessarily ask questions [like the ones being posed in the interview] because you're a little bit afraid of what the answers might be. Or the questions come up but [we] never quite get around to getting [them] answered" (C- 787-790). To me, it is important to consider how these ambiguities about how "political" and "activism" can be constituted by broader activists, non-activists, political movements, and by social norms and forces such as the media.

The shifts in how activists/activism is referred to in the following quote illustrates this wider tension in trying to define who counts as an activist and what counts as activism.

The "Despair and Empowerment" workshops were designed as a way to create activists from concerned people, or people who were subliminally intensely concerned. To enable them to release the activist within, in a sense, since we didn't really think we were creating activists but that everyone would naturally be an activist if they could go through a certain process. In other words that everyone would at least be active. I don't know if they would be an activist but they would...do something about their concerns (B - 39-44).

Ambivalence about what counts as political is also reflected in the comment that "[we are] not really an activist organization...but it is more of a nurturing for activism...it provides nurturing and sustenance that then sends people back out" (A-306-309). With regards to how facilitator's roles in workshops are perceived, another interviewee explained: “sometimes I'll identify myself as an activist [but] I probably

1This raises questions about outcomes, pedagogy and the intentions of workshops and facilitators.
don’t qualify in many activists’ minds anymore because I am not issue oriented. I am not fighting against something so much as I am fighting for something” (C-667-669).

Each of the above comments reflects tensions between discourses about “political praxis”. Although there is never a static answer, the questions of who defines “activism” and “politics”, why and for what end are helpful to continually reconsider. Illuminating the ways that “Despair and Empowerment” workshops both implicitly and explicitly constitutes and contests notions of political praxis could increase the political effectiveness of this paradigm by supporting facilitators, non-activists and activists in having more conscious and sustainable relationships with political and personal commitments, desires, and interventions.

**The “Despair and Empowerment Workshops as Political Praxis**

There are a number of ways that I see the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm as political. Again, my analysis is intended to offer facilitators and readers an opportunity to clarify their own beliefs and roles whether or not they agree with my interpretations or suggestions. Examining these questions may also help to further realize the political and psychotherapeutic complexity and potential of any paradigm that attempts to integrate personal and social transformation.

At the most obvious level, the workshops are political in that they support individuals in taking action in response to political situations. Moreover, the workshop’s intention of helping self-identified activists become more vital, sustained and effective in their political commitments has direct political impact. Still, there are also many subtle ways that the workshops are socially transformative. In retrospect, directly asking facilitators how they see their work as being political would have greatly enhanced this discussion.
However, before presenting these observations, it is important to emphasize that in the upcoming discussion, there are generalizations about activists’ and facilitators’ perceptions and praxis. Throughout my research, facilitators were very conscious about what they said and that there were dangers and inaccuracy in stereotyping and generalizing. Each facilitator frequently qualified comments with the need to contextualize judgments and their awareness that there were exceptions to what they were saying.

For myself, I acknowledge that many of these comments have many exceptions. However, I believe that generalizations can offer insight to be tested in contextualized situations. Because there is little research on cultures of activism to substantiate some of these perceptions, these generalizations stand as offerings that simultaneously hold wisdom, gross inaccuracy, and exceptions. I feel generalizations can serve the important function in offering a partial reflection of some beliefs and experiences that a person may hold. This likely influences their perceptions of the needs of activists and activism. Thus generalizations offer a partial reflection of the interior and exterior environments that facilitators are operating within. Clearly neither I nor the facilitators believe situations are static, or that some individuals, organizations, and movements do not already embody sustainable and transformative praxis. My intention, and I believe the intention of the workshops are to collectively inquire, create and celebrate creativity and diversity in possibilities of vision and praxis. It is in this spirit of exploring and acknowledging diversity that these critiques and paradigm shifts in “activism” “political” and “praxis” are suggested. Examining these questions offers greater opportunity for workshops to accomplish their goals of supporting all individuals in sustaining action for social change. Thus, the “Despair and Empowerment” process can be considered as “political” or transformative in the following ways:
1. The "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm challenges societal and psychotherapeutic tendencies to privatize, individualize, pathologize and commodify expressions of emotional distress. Many of the ways that exercises are structured help reveal how "these kinds of feelings are not simply one person's little, idiosyncratic, neurosis but that actually they are speaking for many others" (B-535). Moreover, the workshops emphasize developing group process skills and ways of self-care and inter-relationship that are applicable beyond the workshop. This contributes to, rather than undermines, the development of collective community resources for confronting the need for personal and social healing.

2. With the high levels of burn out related concerns expressed in my data, the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm confronts societal and activist practices of self-care or mutual care. Although not articulated formally in the description of workshop intentions, the theme of "being taken care of" emerged frequently in discussion about activists. Facilitators noted how often activists are engaged in taking care of organizations, colleagues, global concerns and are less frequently in the position of being taken care of themselves. These workshops offered care to activists on a number of levels. Facilitators often got feedback from activists that the opportunity to simply be led as participant in a political and educational experience was valued. Participants seem to benefit from the opportunity to be in an environment where there was little pressure to do or organize anything. The only task of activist participants is to feel and to choose how to exist in relationship to the group and to what is being offered. For groups already functioning together, activists seem to appreciate how the workshop structure enables status, leadership, and roles within an organization to be shifted. Moreover, two facilitators commented on how during concluding exercises about "the next steps" to be taken by participants, self-care was often included as a new and valid priority for some activists. There are
ways that acceptable forms of organizing can burn people out and in the workshops, the relief experienced by activists from being taken care of was another mirror that reflects and transforms unsustainable societal and activist practices.

3. The “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm is political in its transformation of authority and leadership. Workshops are usually co-facilitated, thereby modeling relationships of shared leadership, responsibility, and mutual support and development of talents. Moreover, the paradigm demystifies authority roles by facilitators sharing with the group the "Despair and Empowerment" process mechanisms. Leaders are intentionally positioned as regular people with their own human experiences of pain, struggle, and uncertainty. Finally, authority is also transformed in that participants are supported in choosing whether or not to participate in activities. This supports individuation in the group and challenges group power relations which often implicitly include consent for a leader to completely regulate and create homogeneity within a group and individual experience.

4. This paradigm offers transformative approaches and forms of pedagogy. First, the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm uses diverse learning modalities such as being verbal, silent, musical, artistic, intellectual, intuitive, imaginative, and pragmatic. Facilitators spoke of how this expands societal emphasis on the verbal, written, and linear expression. Having greater resources for self-expression sustains both personal and political creativity and expression.

5. My research indicates that some facilitators see the “Despair and Empowerment” framework as a transformative generator of knowledge in both the workshop’s process and content. Particularly notable is how the paradigm
transforms notions of ways people learn and what people need to be supported in participating in social change. A belief of this paradigm is that due to societal fear of pain, and the ensuing repression mechanisms:

it is not sufficient to discuss present crises on the informational level alone, or to seek to arouse the public to action by delivering even more terrifying facts and figures. Information by itself can increase resistance, deepening the sense of apathy and powerlessness. We need to help each other process this information on an affective level if we are to digest it on the cognitive level” (Macy, p. xiii)

The paradigm’s emphasis is that to support action “we need to elicit people’s concerns rather than impose our own information” (Macy, p. 41). This experiential and therapeutic approach to learning is a stark contrast to dominant educational frameworks that tend to put information into people that is then intellectually processed.

The paradigm is a transformative pedagogical approach in that it draws knowledge out of people as individuals and exposes participants to the synergy of experiential group interaction. In emphasizing that the answers to personal and political challenges lie within the participants, it enables the group to generate a collective sense of empowerment. Facilitators were clear that nobody can empower somebody else. Through facilitating exercises that have been proven to be effective, the paradigm offers an opportunity for personal and social change.

This is also a contrast to some forms of protest politics which can attempt to educate through confrontation and assume that people are ignorant of the urgency of political change. One facilitator noted during the late seventies that “what we saw around us was a large number of people and organizations who were focusing on activating people by fear and terror” (B- 49). While there was legitimacy of responding to the threat of nuclear war with terror and fear, the originators of this paradigm felt:
It seemed like, number one a really violent way to approach people and ultimately ineffective...[because] few people could respond emotionally ...that kind of an assault on their psyche, and that it would either leave them numb or acting in a way that would be... kind of hurry scurried and it wouldn't last... Our feeling was that people really needed to be approached in a different way and helped to process the feelings that would naturally arise in the face of such catastrophic information. And that their motivations would more efficaciously come from a deeper place than just the surface fear. And that it would actually come from a caring about life, and about future generations and about the planet (B- 84-94).

The "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm creates transformative notions of how people are motivated. One facilitator noted how the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm "gave me a whole new slant on what is meant by hope, and why you worked. You didn’t work to try and change it - you worked because it was right" (C-206-208). My research suggests that the "Despair and Empowerment" workshop is political in its offering activists opportunities to reflect on how political movements motivate others to join in the project of radical social transformation, how activists motivate themselves and colleagues and how this impacts the effectiveness of their praxis.

One facilitator commented on how the workshops are radical in that they offer a context for socially transformative expressions of experience.

An essential part of the structure is [we] invite them to tell the truth... about what it is like to live in the world in these times. And to tell the truth from the inside out...And in telling the truth, what they find out is there is a tremendous amount of truth that they have not been telling and living. And that that truth is not weird or unusual...but is in fact shared by many people” (B 787-793).

The power within this opportunity to truthfully express the distress and desire for change that can be provoked by current global circumstances without the pressure to have a solution cannot be underestimated.
6. My research illuminated how some facilitators see this paradigm as transforming social and activist practices of labor. Two facilitators interviewed noted that in some activist cultures (and in the facilitator's own personal behavior) there can be striking parallels between conventional corporate work ethics and activist work practice.

[Activists come because] often their personal lives had gone to hell. Whether it was relationships, their families, they were so focused on just activism that they had lost touch with the fact that they had a spouse, or a partner, or children or friends. They had become workaholics basically. They might as well be working for IBM. Many activists worked like a corporate executive, around the clock, eighteen hours a day, and talked nothing else but. Didn't know anything else to talk about. That happened to me at a certain point. You go to a party and if you weren't talking about the work you were doing there was nothing that you could talk about or had any interest in talking about. So peoples lives had become constricted and narrow in many ways...they were aware they were becoming kind of dead and numb inside (B- 418-430)

How does this lead to burn out? And how does reproducing industrial urban fragmentation support and/or undermine the intention of radical social transformation? What forms of individual and group behavior enable effective, creative and sustained activism? How do labor practices and norms depend on individual and group norms? How might the scorn of healing work expressed in critical reactions by some activists generate burn out and undermine change?

In my interviews, some facilitators acknowledged that stress can serve both positive and negative functions. However, I think it is deeply problematic when activists accept burn out as an occupational hazard of their work environment. First, Maslach's research (1976) shows that expectation of burn out is a factor that supports burn out actually occurring. Secondly, experience and relationships are accumulated through years of doing activism. When an experienced person burns out from doing activism in an unsustainable way, there is a collective loss of history, resources and friendship that has personal and political outcomes.
Finally, the industrial, urban, consumer society views labor as dehumanized, disposable, and replaceable. The consequences of this mentality are closing in around us as human and environmental degradation escalates globally. The “Despair and Empowerment paradigm offers support in transforming personally, organizationally or socially unsustainable ways of working.

Another political shift in notions of labor found in my research was how “work” can be constituted. In reference to activists specifically, one facilitator felt:

There has to be some looking at the division of energy and not just tasks but energy...It is easy for one or two of us...to not only take on the activities but take on the energy of the action or the concern, and hold that energy and I think that can be really difficult and can be harmful for everyone in the group. How to look at a division of labor, labor meaning both the actual active work and labor meaning the emotional work"(A- 396-399)

Many conventional notions of “work” imply doing. Recognizing the value in "feeling" significantly expands notions of what counts as a contribution to political agency and change.

7. A facilitator also addressed how sacrifice can be a problematic value incorporated into some activist cultures. This facilitator presented an alternative vision which comes through in the facilitation of workshops, where “I don’t see what I am doing as sacrifice...and less and less do I feel like I am giving something up - This is how I want to be, and when you are coming from that place you are not coming out of deprivation” (C- 053-055). Facilitators echoed this value or perspective by emphasizing in workshops the importance and the abundance of support and motivation from social and natural sources. It was significant that guilt was not very prominent in the “Testimonies” section of my data in Chapter 4 and Appendix 6, as there can often be relationships between martyrdom and guilt and political activism.
8. Analyzing the data from my interviews and the literature review I conducted suggest that the “Despair and Empowerment” understandings of "health" are also transformative in a number of different ways. First, the paradigm does not reproduce dominant cultural illusions of attaining perfection and unwavering happiness. Instead the paradigm emphasizes that despair is intricately connected to our sense of caring, vitality and hope. The ways that integrating feelings of despair into our perceptions of health were noted by each facilitator. A goal a facilitator set was "to finish a workshop feeling that people are feeling renewed, and supported and hopeful...and realistic too" (C- 618-620). Cultural tendencies of wanting emotions to be static and unendingly pleasurable are challenged by this emphasis on emotional flux and the value of less socially sanctioned feelings.

Moreover, the paradigm’s assumptions about why people seek support and how to give that support to them are also transformative. Facilitators spoke of how supporting people in expressing and acting to change distress about the world was a normal, healthy and organic processes.

It’s necessary to help people alter the normal patterns of behavior that they have grown up with and that they use to survive in [a repressive culture]. And so you create a safe environment in which people can begin to allow themselves to explore other ways of behaving. It isn’t really that hard to get them to do that. It's not like they have to start walking on their head or something that is foreign. It is simply that they have to stop putting up the barrier and to do that takes a little time. So they have to begin by doing simple things like breathing deeply, slowing down, looking into each others eyes, talking about what they care about most deeply (B 772-782).

The mixture of directive language and reference to trusting people’s abilities describes the nuances of facilitating change. Moreover, the gentleness in the "Despair and Empowerment" approach clearly indicates a respect for human vulnerability. Thus, the paradigm does not employ invasive medical approaches of “emotional surgery” nor does it subscribe to Christian beliefs in humanity’s nature
as “fallen” and drawn to sin or discord. Trusting that people can figure out what they need and that people want interconnection can be radical ideologies in a culture that can tend to underestimate and undermine the capacity of people to help and heal.

[Participants] come to experience themselves not just intellectually but viscerally as not separate. It's not that you try to convince people that they are not separate, you let them experience what it is like to not be separate and one of the ways...is by sharing the pain they have for the world with others who also share that pain”(B 796-799).

Thus, the paradigm is transformative to dominant practices, both in the workshop’s means and ends.

9. Some facilitators commented on how “Despair and Empowerment” work is an effective intervention to transform cultural tendencies to reward people for leaving aspects of their personality or life behind. This is implicitly challenged in the workshops. For instance, the "Despair and Empowerment" structure regularly includes opportunities for emotional integration through check-ins. The workshop process poses various alternatives to social norms that can be repressive, fragmenting and alienating. One facilitator noted that:

I think that is one of the other deep hurts and the very deepest things that we have to get past, that our society does to us, is that there are only certain parts of ourselves that are allowed and acceptable and it’s very functionally oriented. To be in a place where every part of you is absolutely completely fine is just really important!" (D- 424-427).

Data from the “testimonies” section of coding further illuminates the facilitator’s perceptions about the value of supporting the expression of diverse feelings. Two facilitators mentioned that in workshops activists have expressed how meaningful

1Again, this level of acceptance needs to be qualified with the earlier discussion of how facilitators regulate what aspects of a participant’s experience can be addressed accurately in the workshop setting, such as childhood abuse experiences.
the support and validation the "Despair and Empowerment" intervention was in terms of integrating an individual's political, personal, and emotional identities.

The data from my interviews, Macy's book and my literature review all supported a correlation between emotional repression and burn out. Macy's outline of general effects of emotional denial and repression are useful to consider as a backdrop. She emphasizes the following outcomes from repression:

- fragmentation/alienation
- political passivity
- psychological projection
- burn out
- diminished intellectual performance

Outcomes, such as fragmentation, displacement behaviors, psychological projection, resistance to painful/contradictory information, powerlessness, diminished intellectual performance and burn out are all mentioned in facilitator's discussion of social and political change. Although facilitators examined fragmentation as psychologically or socially problematic, only two of the facilitators emphasized how they have seen dissociation being reproduced and rewarded within activist praxis.

Activists involved in politics, real activists, often...are high on ideology and high on action plans and low on understanding or making room for assimilating what their feelings are or about other people's feelings...and it leads to not really understanding what the interpersonal dynamics are of what they are doing, and therefore alienating or losing people who would otherwise agree with them and work with them...you are not going to get popular support if people don't think that you care about what is happening to them...of course if that's all you spend time doing, is taking care of people's feelings you are never going to get anywhere either (D- 39-69).

Expressed another way in a different interview were very similar sentiments.

I don't want to stereotype but I feel as though the activist motivation from my perspective\(^1\) was often one that was, there was certainly an

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\(^1\)All of the hesitations and qualifications were intentionally left within this quote to give a sense of the speech and to reflect how I believe the speaker realized there was truth and untruth to the
element of caring to it, it is also often kind of had an anger, and a kind of anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional, anti-tradition aspect to it that was um, and had a kind of grim, serious side to it that didn’t want to deal with feelings, and people’s human side. That to some extent wanted to sublimate that, to push it under and repress it, simply to get the job done (B-114-127).

The workshop’s support of emotional vitality serves both personal and political ends, because “in talking to other people, [frantic/burnt out activists] weren’t bringing any kind of compassion or humanness or depth...just a kind of um, recruitment energy but nothing was really touching people” (B-436) or “there would be activists going into schools and scaring the hell out of little kids with pictures and movies of nuclear fire balls” (B-438). Being conscious of rage, despair, vulnerability and power can prepare activists to more skillfully and intentionally use these emotions when they are triggered through their work. My research data of “testimonies” mentioned the prominence of fear that activists can feel in their work. Examples given were fears of confrontation, or fears of emotional or physical harm to self or loved ones because of the stands and risks that they take politically.

A facilitator noted the importance of how “[participants] need to talk about their anger and they need to talk about having covered it up” (B-506). An area of expansion with regards what can and is expressed would be to consider examining ways that feelings can be regulated in participants’ lives, including in the workshop. Factors such as age, race, gender, class, context can all effect what is allowed to be said, by whom, where and when. These factors that influence speech and feelings were not emphasized by Macy or by interviewees.

generalization he was risking to name, which could be a reflection of ways that examining problems in political praxis can be taboo

1 Later in this quote, anger is mentioned as a crucial aspect of feeling/reaction for activists. I think the concern being expressed here is when anger is unconsciously, exclusively and indiscriminately acted out, as opposed using anger with awareness, and accompanied by other emotions that provide relief and give greater fullness to the person in their actions.
Facilitators were clear about some of the ways that they do regulate emotional expression. For instance, the structures and instruction used in the workshop can regulate the depths to which people could examine pain from personal psychological wounds. Two facilitators mentioned how childhood abuse and current global structures are not entirely separate. However, the workshop's are not offering individual therapy, thus facilitators' regulation of "unconditional" openness to participant's experiences were based on time and structural limitations rather than minimizing or invalidating the personal and political impact of early traumas.

Macy and Shields also mention the importance of activists being comfortable with feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness, resistance and trust. How to learn to be in those uncomfortable places and act from them is crucial for effective social organizing. This integration and support of diverse emotional vitality is personally and socially transformative. Giving experiential exposure to feelings of "interconnection" also implicitly confronts the emotional/interior and social/exterior "isolation" symptomatic of urban industrial individualism.

10. Developing solidarity amongst activists and also between activists and non-activists is a potentially powerful political outcome of the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm. For example:

In our very earliest workshops we would always at least have a sprinkling of folks that were already active, and [they] would bring into the workshop...their getting arrested, going over the wall in a protest, or their jail experience...and that would awaken other people to "Oh ya, oh my god! These are ordinary [people], actually human beings like me that are doing these protests, not some kind of weird other species", which is what the mainstream feeling kind of was: "Who are these people?!". And then realizing they are people just like me and I could consider doing something like that. Or maybe something else that would be equally effective but not quite in that form (B-315-322).
This is an illustration of how the media's or mainstream society's can pathologize activists or other voices of dissent thereby undermining political agency and collective solidarity. It could be enriching to also explore the development of experiential exercises such as the ones in Katrina Shields book *In the Tigers Mouth*, which examine how "activism" is generated as an identity and experience, by both activist "insiders" and non-activist "outsiders". Again, who creates the boundaries in legitimacy or identity that people sense, and for what ends? These subjects of exploration could help activists address larger sources of their emotional distress and could influence non-activists relationships to, understanding of, and support of more "Political" forms of praxis.

In *Despair and Empowerment in the Nuclear Age*, Macy briefly mentions "solidarity" (p. 4) as an outcome of these workshops. However, none of the facilitators used this word, and interviewees placed more emphasis on "interconnection". There is a difference in language and intention that is important to explore. "Solidarity" is commonly used in political circles, and suggests uniting forces to respond to, transform or resist various circumstances. "Solidarity" can, but does not necessarily imply adversarial relationships where there is an "us" and "them". Perhaps it is because of the antagonistic connotation that solidarity is not focal in the "Despair and Empowerment" goals and values, as represented by the facilitators I interviewed.

However, from my own activist experiences of developing solidarity between movements, it was always a complex process. The usual forums for developing solidarity were going to a meeting, rally, or less formally in social or party situations. With workshops that are intended to support activists emotionally, I see a powerful potential in intentionally offering activists an environment where intimacy and information can be shared without requiring action. Facilitators that I interviewed noted how activist's distress can be related to feelings of spreading themselves too
thinly. Being energetically taxed is also echoed repeatedly in the “testimonies” about activist’s feelings that are commonly expressed in “Despair and Empowerment” workshops. Further research would be interesting to see if activists find it is superficial or satisfying to come together at an emotional level in workshops with other activists, and develop a sense of support and community without the expectation that they act, analyze, or take on another cause.

The word “interconnectedness” was used more often by facilitators in my research. Generating discourses around “interconnection” does have some subtler political implications than the word “solidarity.” “Interconnection” re-frames dominant conceptions that are fundamental to Western capitalism, such as “the individual” or “Nature” as separate from and inferior to human beings. Interconnection is a form of relationship that is transformative. “For people who have made [a shift in perception to interconnection]...they may not be able to verbalize it...but its clear from everything about them that they are coming from a world view of interconnection, [although] they may...[explain that way of being in] psychological terms” (C- 325-330).

I believe if the political potential of this paradigm is to be fully realized, an integration of the discourses of “interconnection” and “solidarity” might be valuable to explore. At least, facilitators might want to clarify if there are reasons why political terms and perspectives are not being emphasized in the paradigm to the extent that they could be. Some facilitators spoke of their own yearnings to feel like they were having more political impact through offering “Despair and Empowerment” workshops. This desire might be easier to achieve if facilitators affirmed more clearly the political intentions and relationships in their work.
Chapter 6 - RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION SUMMARY

This research ran an orbit around questions of integrating the personal and political. By asking workshop facilitators of the "Despair and Empowerment" psychotherapeutic experiential workshop paradigm to spotlight activist’s as a distinct population of participants, numerous questions about interventions that want to support personal and social transformation arose for me. My research offered a comparison, integration and expansion of literature on individual and organizational stress, political critiques of dominant psychological paradigms, and the insights from "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm and facilitators in contrast to Macy’s text Despair and Empowerment in the Nuclear Age. Key observations generated through this research were:

1. The longevity and attendance at the workshops examined in this research, as well as my data findings further attest to the fact that some activists experience emotional distress related to their activism and seek out forums and interventions to address their needs. From facilitator’s “testimonies” of observed emotions that activists address in “Despair and Empowerment” workshops, my research suggests that some activists seek emotional support about distress generated from their political commitments. Central themes for activists were a sense of frustration, overwhelm and burn out. An interesting tension in the “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm is that it seems the general public comes with the desire to get support in developing their political awareness and action, while some activists seem to come to the workshops with needs of self-care and retreat from concerns about action. How does the political emphasis of the "Despair and

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1 This is not to suggest that a context devoid of the “political” would be advisable for activists. However, this research suggests that activist’s seek in workshops insights about how their relationships to praxis may need to be shifted. Thus there is considerable overlap in personal and political concerns. This will be discussed in more detail in later.
Empowerment" intervention impede and improve the emotional relief that self-identifies activists seek or need? In passing, facilitators spoke of the diversity of needs in a group. However my research findings and data offers greater illumination about activist needs as a distinct population. More research directly with activists would be advisable to substantiate, disprove or add further complexity to my findings. Further research into why and how activists find this forum of intervention supportive in contrast to other psychotherapeutic interventions would also be valuable.

2. Many questions about political praxis and cultures of activism were raised through this research. The fact that some activists express considerable distress in the workshops about their lives raised questions about how work/political commitments can be constituted both individually and collectively. The distress of activists, as well as the alternative approaches presented through the experiential format of the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm present an implicit alternative to some forms of political praxis. Moreover, emotionally repressive critiques from some activists about the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm further suggest how there can be a gap between the workshops and some activists in their respective values and understanding about what constitutes support for political change.

Workshops that explore how political praxis can generate burn out could be enriching for both activists and non-activists. Currently this is not a focus of "Despair and Empowerment" workshops. However, exploring political praxis could offer people who are new to activism a fuller perspectives about how to sustain their commitments. Moreover, "stress literature indicate[s] that developing an adequate understanding of a stressful situation may be the first step in coping with it" (Brachfeld, p. 11). Addressing praxis could also highlight and more effectively
address the phenomenon of secondary numbing that my findings suggest many activists seek help with through the “Despair and Empowerment” workshops.

Another question I am left with through doing this research is the strengths and limitations of using implicit pedagogical methods to support personal and political transformation. Any psychotherapeutic experiential workshop is faced with the question of the effect created through employing blends of didactic, implicit, and explicit content into the experience. I am not assuming that it would be advisable on a therapeutic, political or pedagogical level for workshops to overtly confront or critique cultures of activism and activist praxis. However, I am curious about potential outcomes in creating an explicit arena for activists and non-activists to explore notions of “activism”.

For instance, the ways that activism is constructed or perceived by sub-groups within a society likely mediates the workshop and its participants in subtle ways. This could be fruitful for facilitators and participants to examine more explicitly. In the case of “Despair and Empowerment” work, is there more blocking peoples desire initiate and sustain action than their feelings of fear, despair, numbness or overwhelm? What are there conscious and unconscious ways that non-activists perceive “activism” which then prevents these concerned individuals from more effectively contributing to the changes they feel they would like to see? Are there ways that praxis or "activists" can be framed by the media and by some activist circles that can alienate many people who would otherwise be inclined to contribute their energy to radical social transformation.

Examining activism as a lifestyle in any psychotherapeutic experiential workshop would need to be done carefully. For instance, there is the potential to

1In Katrina Shield book she offers some excellent suggestions of experiential exercises like this. No facilitators made mention of anything comparable to Shield's work. I would guess this is because most facilitators interviewed had little experience focusing on activist burn out specifically. In the final case, this topic was not examined more deeply in the interviews because there was a shortage of time to cover all the issues.
evoke fear in non-activists and pain or resentment for self-identified activists through exploring the experience some activists have that "[most of] the regular social and economic and [emotional] expression... [avenues] that society organizes around giving you opportunities to do, aren't really there for activists" (D- 20-25). Creating space to honestly examine the penalties and rewards of activism could be powerful pedagogically, politically and therapeutically.

Again, it could be politically and personally beneficial for emotionally supportive activist workshops to consider more overtly ways that feelings such as despair can be maintained and constructed through cultural avenues such as the media. A facilitator commented about how people can always use the "Despair and Empowerment" process because just watching the news for an hour provides plenty of despair. In the case of "Despair and Empowerment" work, I believe the choice to not examine the media's role in influencing societal despair and hopelessness could be explained through the paradigm's emphasis on using primarily implicit therapeutic approaches rather than didactic political analysis. Still, it would be interesting to try and create psychotherapeutic experiential exercises about how societal structures can generate a sense of futility and hopelessness in a way that would still accomplish the workshop's goal of creating emotional relief, and more freedom, hope, realism and courage.

3. Three facilitators spoke at some length about how the "Despair and Empowerment" workshops in North America tend to not have very culturally diverse audiences. Most facilitators recognized that the "Despair and Empowerment" workshops:

...have a lot to offer but reaches basically white middle-class people with a fair amount of education, who are to varying degrees into some sort of personal development by the very fact that they will take a workshop [that deals with feelings]. And there is a whole lot of other
people that are not being served because that is not within their racial, cultural economic orientation (C-002-005)

There was a range of discussion about the ways that this paradigm is bound by cultural needs and assumptions. Some facilitators felt that although they recognized the value in anti-racist education, it was more essential that the content of the workshops emerge from the participants than be imposed by the leaders. In terms of reaching more diverse audiences, one facilitator felt that they needed to do more active outreach rather than expecting people of color to naturally gravitate towards the workshops. They also felt that training and collaborating with racially diverse facilitators would be essential in order to modify the process and meet the distinct needs of different cultures within North America.

Facilitators speculated that part of the reason why white middle class people sought out an emotionally cathartic political arena is that there are few cultural avenues available for white people to collectively process feelings and create political change. Two facilitators mentioned that perhaps the workshops were serving a necessary human and social function comparable to the role that some Black churches can have in terms of integrating emotional, spiritual, social and political/community needs.

There was a range of feelings about the possibility and appropriateness of expanding North American workshops to more culturally diverse participants. The “Despair and Empowerment” paradigm has been done in many different countries with racially mixed audiences. So, I am not suggesting that is it impossible for this work to be valuable cross-culturally. However, because facilitators interviewed had little direct experience of crossing major cultural difference, it would be fascinating to develop more research to examine the outcomes of cross-cultural experiences.

For me an interesting question is not so much to judge whether or not it is a problem that a psychotherapeutic experiential workshop appeals to mostly white
middle class people. What is crucial to consider is why do they do it and to what end. Mostly white people getting together to do emotionally cathartic work becomes a problem in my mind only when the process is being used to support denial and systemic oppression by erasing histories of oppression or marginalization and the collective responsibility to act in solidarity with people across cultures and issues. It was evident that in the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm that I examined as a psychotherapeutic experiential intervention, there is effort to create respectful cultural inter-relationship. For instance, in Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age, Macy is conscious of attributing credit and cultural origin to practices she mentions. For example, with an exercise that many of the facilitators mentioned called the "Despair Ritual", Macy notes "this ritual draws elements from two different traditions: its form from the Native American circle1, and its content inspired by the practice of "speaking bitterness", which was used to alleviate the apathy and paralysis of the peasants in post-revolutionary China" (Macy, p. 110). Consciousness and attention to acknowledging the diversity of cultures that a paradigm draws from and serves is important for any workshop intervention to consider.

I also believe that some of the structures used in "Despair and Empowerment" workshops such as active listening help individuals develop tools to improve people's capacity to listen respectfully. Communication can be regulated by class, gender and race, and thus, learning more spacious forms of interaction could affect patterns of submission and domination that can at times happen in communication and interaction. This could potentially help but not necessarily ensure more respectful cross-cultural interaction.

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1Granted, the use of "Native American" as an blanket term for the diversity of nations and cultures that inhabit North America would not be viewed as a sufficient acknowledgment by some.
However, there are subtle ways that racism can emerge in psychotherapeutic intervention exercises or structures. In order for a paradigm to be politically effective, it is important to be honest and aware of how a paradigm or exercises can be embedded in white middle class assumptions. For instance, an exercise I experienced in a “Despair and Empowerment” workshop called ”Evolutionary History Mediation” subtly reproduced habitual racist perspectives. Through guided visualization and movement, we were walked back through history: first envisioning our own lives, then the lives of our parents, and ancestors. We then traveled through different ages from industrial society all the way back to prehistoric ages. Finally, we imagined and embodied evolutionary origins such as the eras of mammals, dinosaurs, the appearance of birds, reptiles, amphibians, water creatures... to when life was entirely one celled organisms, water, and gases.

I enjoyed this experience and found it evocative and powerful. Reflecting on the experience afterwards with an African-American friend of mine who also participated in the weekend, I realized that I had been distracted by the ways that the perspective of human history outlined in the exercise was quite Euro-centric. For example, the implication in the way that generations are ordered is that industrialization universally occurred at a certain time that in fact correlates only with European history. “Third” world civilizations, Western imperialism and recent industrialization are eclipsed and Euro-centric notions of progress, civilization and history are subtly reinforced as universal.

Perhaps this seems appropriate if the vast majority of an audience is white. However, this way of tracing of ancestry can also reinforce illusions about racial “purity” by assuming white participants all come from exclusively European ancestry. In terms of pedagogy or healing, it would be interesting to see how less Euro-centric notions of history would effect participants experiences. If while in their experiential mediation, participants would feel stimulated or hindered by
having their own assumptions revealed while doing exercises that are meant to assist them in investigating themselves. I realize that the intention of the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm is to enhance participants sense of oneness with humanity, and I think this is an important feeling to support. However, I was also aware of how people I care about were subtly left behind in this one process.

For any intervention, it is relevant to consider how confrontation of assumptions effects the "safety" needed to do emotional healing work. Alternatively, challenges to identity and history can also enhance experiences in workshops. The questions of the extent to which an workshop aspires to be a therapeutic or pedagogical emerges once again. If an intervention is going to be respected by political activists and by a diversity of cultural audiences, being conscious about how commonalty in the audience is being created, by whom, for what ends, and naming or remembering what is being left out, all matter.

The following quotes give a sense of the complexity that confronting racism and white privilege might introduce into any psychotherapeutic experiential workshop for activists. Feminist Aida Hurtado, writes:

The public/private distinction is relevant only for the white middle and upper classes since historically, the American State has intervened constantly in the private lives and domestic arrangements of the working class...The political consciousness of women of color stems from an awareness that the public is personally political. Welfare programs and policies have discouraged family life, sterilization programs have restricted reproductive rights, government has drafted and armed disproportionate numbers of people of color... locally police forces and the justice system arrest and incarcerate disproportionate numbers of people of color. There is no such thing as a private sphere for people of color except that which they manage to create and protect in an otherwise hostile environment.

In keeping with this quote, one facilitator commented that the pervasiveness of oppression or injustice in people of color's lives inevitably sensitizes them to the need for radical social transformation. People more protected from daily oppression are more likely to need workshops like the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm
to support the development of feeling the need for change and acting. Support
would be less relevant or look very different for people whose lives are impacted by
injustice because "the pain is in their faces" on a daily basis. Within a group of
activists at a workshop, is it politically and psychotherapeutically important to name
or examine difference in how people experience and understand the need for
change and their relationships to self, state and community? How is the integration
of the personal and political lived differently by participants? Although the
following reference is to teaching in a university environment, the complexity and
pain of communication and emotional vitality take on new meaning.

Teaching does not permit or perform anger, but real life meanings,
grievances and injustices are daily brought into the room where I
teach, a real relation of violence obtains in the room itself. I am a real
person who is angry at having to prove to real people grown
accustomed to racism, that it has a history, political economy, culture
and daily existential dimension.... Unless I am to die from this
violence of the daily social relations of being non-white, South
Asian woman in a white Ontario classroom - I have to dissociate.
(Bannerji, 1991, p. 7/6).

Confronting race and white privilege has the potential to introduce whole new
terrain of information and awareness into workshops.

Conclusion

In moments of sanity we were realizing that...you have to take
care of yourself in order to take care of the world. And that at some
point, the converse was true. That you had to take care of the world
in order to take care really good care of yourself, because there is no
distinction ultimately...If you define yourself broadly enough, your
Self begins to expand beyond the boundaries of your skin...so that you
eventually come to realize that the whole creative universe is part of
yourself - co-equal with it. But, even without that large philosophical
junket, it was clear to be a whole and healthy person was to have some
awareness of and involvement in what is going on in the world (B-
365-75)
Both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change. Offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering. But revealing new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications.

Patricia Hill Collins (1991, p. 222)

At an overt level, workshops such as the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm are political in that they support individuals in taking action in response to political situations. Moreover, the workshop's intention of helping self-identified activists become more vital, sustained and effective in their political commitments has direct political impact. Both the longevity of the workshop's existence, and feedback facilitators have heard clearly indicate that some activists have engaged in and found value in the "Despair and Empowerment" structure. In my mind, there is no ambivalence about the "Despair and Empowerment" workshop as a very valuable form of political praxis in its integration of the personal and political. I feel that the paradigm and insights of the facilitators interviewed are both considerable contributions to developing political healing activist praxis. The overt ways that the paradigm nurtures sustainable action and the ways that it implicitly offers alternatives to many problematic psychological, social and activist practices is unique. My hope is that examining these questions may help to further realize the political and psychotherapeutic complexity and potential of any paradigm that attempts to integrate personal and social transformation.

I believe that the discourses of social and personal healing offered through the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm are not depoliticizing. Some activists after taking the workshop may feel that their levels of political action may need to decrease, and to some activists this may seem like a step backwards. I see the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm as political in that it creates a forum for
activists to reflect on their emotional needs and experiences. This transforms praxis and may help to create more sustainable and appealing ways to contribute to social change whether a person is committed full time or involved in less conventional forms of political transformation. I feel that the work the facilitators of the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm are doing expands and transforms notions of political action. Rather than diminishing political action and effectiveness, I see this paradigm expanding possibilities. More research into actual outcomes would be helpful to substantiate the ideological shifts that seem evident in what the "Despair and Empowerment" paradigm intends to do.

Questions about sustainable activism on an individual, organizational, and movement level are being addressed in a variety of circles by therapists, healers, activists and academics (State of Environmentalists, 1993; hooks, 1993; Steinem, 1992; Fisher, 1996; Davis, 1996). However, particularly now with the current political and economic configuration of the right gaining momentum globally and the accelerating deterioration of social welfare state, I feel and this research suggests that the demands on many activists are acute. Developing effective, transformative and collective ways to support and sustain activism is crucial right now, as many social justice organizers are under increasing stress with fewer resources and a more precarious or de-stabilized network of solidarity around them. Given that there is insufficient research on burnout among activists, questions of how to fully support the needs of all social change agents are relevant. Creating collective healing modalities that support radical personal and social transformation is necessary for both the well-being of individual activists and for continuing the increasingly urgent project of social transformation. This research offers but one example which can serve to provoke or inspire further creativity into this ongoing question of personal and global healing and radical transformation.
Appendix 1
Resource List of Experiential Workshops/Resources for Activists

1. Butler, Sandra. Mothers, Daughters and Activism
   Butler is a feminist psychotherapist from the San Francisco Bay area. The basic premise of this work is that until women have more consciousness around their relationships with their mothers, feminists continue to reproduce behavior from this relationship that undermines our ability to organize together effectively.

2. Center for Social Action and Contemplation
   This Jesuit center in Albuquerque, New Mexico offers programs for those engaged in social justice work to reflect on the intention and outcomes of their actions.

3. Goldstein, Joseph and Sharon Salzberg
   Goldstein is a mediation teacher at the Insight Meditation Center in Barre, MA. Yearly IMS offers by invitation a meditation retreat for prominent social activists to gather for reflection on the intention and spirit within their organizing.

4. The Moment Project
   This group in Toronto, Ont. offers facilitation process that allow communities to reflect on the state of their organization at a given moment in history and integrate the personal and political into their analysis.

5. Mindell, Arnold. Worldworks
   Mindell is a therapist in Portland, OR. His therapeutic process for communities is very unstructured and the issues or “shadow” of a community are voiced and addressed.

6. McLaughlin, Corinne and Gordon Davidson. Spiritual Politics
   McLaughlin and Davidson are in the Washington DC area and offer workshops to mainstream and grassroots political groups on the interior motivations and significance of the political work that people are called to do.

7. The Compassionate Action Network - c/o the Learning Alliance- New York, NY.

8. Institute for Deep Ecology- Occidental, CA.

9. Centre for Psychology and Social Change- Cambridge MA

10. Steven and Michelle McDonald Smith- Honolulu, Hawaii. - Offer meditation retreats for activists.

11. Interhelp - Box 61, Delmar, NY, 12054.
Appendix 2

Approach and Consent Letters

Barbara Jull (413)-448-3352
c/o Kripalu Center- Box 793
Lenox. MA. 01240

Interhelp
PO Box 61
Delmar, NY 12054

Date

Dear Interhelp folks,

I have heard about the work you do through friends, and the writing of Joanna Macy and Katrina Shields. I am writing to you because I am currently doing research for my Masters degree in Community Development around psychotherapeutic workshops for activists (more information about the research is attached). My preference for this research would be to do a case study on workshops leaders within one organization.

My desire in approaching you is to see if your organization would be interested in involvement in this research. Interhelp appeals to me strongly in offering a political and psychotherapeutic space for activists to examine the interface between the internal and external, and gaining insight collectively through experiential reflection. I would be very open to meeting with any Interhelp representative to see if we could create a mutually beneficial relationship. This could range from simply helping me connect with individuals who run workshops under your umbrella in the New England area, and me approaching them independently, to discussing if this research could be modified slightly to offer your organization information/documentation about the work these leaders do.

I sincerely hope that we can work together. My degree is through the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education which is one of the largest centres in Canada for activists to gather and reflect on the practice of working for social and environmental justice and transformation. Having personally struggled with burnout and pulls between socially urgent work and personal needs, I hope documenting further the work of Interhelp would benefit the organization, myself and other activists.

I hope to hear from you soon to examine if collaboration or your support of this project can be developed.

Warmly,

Barbara Jull
Dear [Name],

I am a Masters student doing research in Community Development / Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto. My interest is in experiential workshops for activists that explore feelings and issues around balancing the personal and political. This focus originates out of my own experiences doing socially urgent and transformative work while trying to respect my own health and well-being. Before coming to OISE, I worked with marginalized youth and women doing personal and community development through therapeutic outdoor recreation and yoga. This work raised many questions for me about facilitation, healing and personal and social change. My experiences and studies of various activist communities also raised many questions for me about personal and political sustainability. I am interested in how the workshops you offer create a collective arena for action and healing on a personal and social level.

The research that I hope you will participate in involves interviewing workshop leaders about the work they do. My intention in the research is to create an opportunity to explore, reflect upon and document your work. I would like to tape record an interview with you for approximately 1 hr. 30 min ideally in person. Documentation from workshops (content, structure, program evaluations) and/or attending a workshop would be a helpful but not necessary part of the research. My initial analysis will be returned to you for input and I may contact you by phone for further comments you want to make.

If you choose to participate, you would be free to withdraw from the study at any time. The interview tapes will be erased after the study is complete and your identity will remain anonymous. I anticipate completing this project by the fall of 1996, and will give you a summary of my findings and your transcript if you wish. Thank-you for considering participating in this work and I would be happy to discuss your potential participation in more detail if you would like. If you agree to participate, please sign and return the attached letter of consent.

Warmly,

Barbara Jull
Dear Barbara,

I have read the attached letter describing the research that you are undertaking and I agree to participate. It is clear to me that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Date

Signature

Name
Appendix 3
Interview questions

Two samples of the interview questions are given. The first sample was the sent to three participants and the * indicates the central research questions. The second subsidiary sample is a more detailed set of questions that indicates the development of my thinking as well as probe questions that may have been interjected into the tighter framework of sample 1.

SAMPLE 1

ORIGINS

*What is your understanding of the problems or need within activist cultures that first prompted these workshops to be offered? How was this need identified?

What are the central issues that activists bring now?

How are these needs identified in your workshops?

How have the needs/issues changed over time?

*Why do you think that these needs weren't being met? the emotional/ material costs/benefits of not addressing this need?

What affect did this problem have on activists?

Were there other ways these needs were addressed that you've heard about or read about?

CURRENT CONTEXT - PARTICIPANTS

Who are the people that come to the workshops?

How is activism defined by you? by them?

*What do you think participants believe these workshops can accomplish?

What are common perceptions of how change occurs? (More theory, therapy, support, processing?)

STRUCTURE

How have the goals of the workshops evolved over time?

*Does structure/content theme tend to differ depending on the community/ movement you are working with? If so, what are some specific distinctions have arisen in the workshops?
How do the issues/format and content of your workshops organized depend on the community you are working with?

How are participant’s different cultural origins taken into account?

PAST CRITIQUE

When the workshops first started, how were the workshops first received by participants and by on lookers (other activists and therapists)?

Was there criticism or resistance? What were they specifically? By whom?

Were there aspects of that critique that seemed useful? or less relevant?

*Why was critique being offered/what were motivations behind the respective critiques in your mind?

*Do your workshops address resistance or critique of doing personal healing work that activists feel personally or that they have encountered from others? What are their concerns?

How could you see these issues being addressed in broader activist and therapy worlds?

*What is the difference between the workshops and therapy?

Have you personally experienced some of the issues that have been raised here? Within Interhelp? Within your own organizing?

*How do you define the role or roles you play in the workshop? (Directive/ non directive-therapist, fellow activist, community development worker, neutral facilitator).

How do you think you are perceived by participants?

How has facilitating these workshops affected your perceptions of activists? of activism?

What are your greatest concerns for activism currently? for activists?

INTERVIEW

How did you experience this interview? Questions? Your experience? Surprises?

How did you react to seeing the questions before hand? How do you think this influenced you?
Sample 2- Subsidiary Interview questions

ORIGINS
What is your understanding of the problems or need within activist cultures that first prompted these workshops to be offered?

What were the reasons for this problem in your mind?

Why do you think that this need wasn't being met? What were the costs/benefits of not addressing this need?

What affect did this problem have on activists?

How did those effects happen?

How was this need identified?

How was this need being spoken and addressed in activist communities generally?

Were there other ways these needs were addressed that you've heard about or read about?

What specific impact did the workshops have in initially addressing this problem?

CURRENT CONTEXT - PARTICIPANTS

Who are the people that come to the workshops?

How is activism defined by you? by them?

What kinds of activist organizations have done these workshops?

What precipitates an organization approaching you? at the request of whom? why?

How are requests congruous/ incongruous with what you actually offer?

What do participants believe these workshops can accomplish?

What are common perceptions of how change occurs? (More theory, therapy, support, processing?)

CONTENT

What are the central issues that activists bring now? How have the needs/issues changed over time?

What were the reasons for this evolution/shift in problems in your mind?

What effect did this need have on people? How did those effects happen?

How are these needs identified in your workshops?

How was this need being spoken and addressed in activist communities generally?
What other ways of addressing this need have you heard about or read about?

How do the workshops specifically make an impact?

**GOALS AND STRUCTURE**

How have the goals of the workshops evolved over time?

How is this reflected in the structure and content of the workshops?

What do you feel it is about the workshops that enable people to accomplish these goals?

What reactions do participants have to the workshop format?

Does structure/content theme tend to differ depending on the community/movement you are working with? If so, what are some specific distinctions have arisen in the workshops?

How do the issues/format and content of your workshops organized depending on the community you are working with?

How are participants cultural origins taken into account?

**BURN OUT**

How is burn out addressed in your workshops?

How do internal/personal behaviors influence burn out according to participants?

How do organizational/external factors influence burn out according to participants?

In different movements, how is good/admirable activism defined, and in what cases can these values lead to burn out?

What are some of the perceived emotional rewards and emotional costs of current behaviors? of changing behaviors?

- the material rewards/costs of current practices? of change?

What are the range of actions that individuals feel they need to take in order to address their burn out?

How do activists say they feel about these choices in healing? What are the emotional repercussions?

**PAST CRITIQUE**

How were the workshops first received by participants and by on lockers (other activists)?

Was there criticism or resistance? What were they specifically? By whom?

How were criticism communicated (direct, hearsay)?

Were there aspects of that critique that seemed useful? or less relevant?
Why was critique being offered/what were motivations behind the respective critiques in your mind?

How were the workshops adapted?

CURRENT CRITIQUE

What attitudes hamper the behavioral and cultural changes in activists that you are trying to facilitate in activists, movements and organizations?

How are these expressed? How did you become aware of them?

How have the workshops currently been critiqued by participants? by others? by yourself?

Do your workshops address resistance or critique of doing personal healing work that activists feel personally or that they have encountered from others? What are their concerns?

How could you see these issues being addressed in broader activist and therapy worlds?

What is the difference between the workshops and therapy?

What can workshops offer that therapy isn't as effective for?

What can therapy offer that workshops aren't as effective for?

Specifically reflecting on the critiques of healing work as depoliticizing, how has the content and structure of your workshops evolved over time?

How would you like to see the workshops change? Are there others who share this view?

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Have you personally experienced some of the issues that have been raised here?

Within your own organizing?

What brings you to this work?

How do you define the role or roles you play in the workshop? (Directive/ non directive-therapist, fellow activist, community development worker, neutral facilitator).

How do you think you are perceived by participants?

What for you is the most rewarding aspect of doing this work?

What is the most challenging?

How has facilitating these workshops affected your perceptions of activists? of activism?

What are struggles that other facilitators have faced in doing offering these workshops?

What are your greatest concerns for activism currently? for activists?

How is this expressed in things you see, hear, or read about?
What sources do you trust or not trust about this situation? Why?

In your mind what needs to change within activist communities right now?

How do you address these issues in the workshops?

What will it take for these issues to be addressed in activist communities themselves?

What changes have you seen or read about?

How did these changes come about?

INTERVIEW

Is there anything else you’d like to add? How did you experience this interview? Questions? Your experience? Surprises? How did you react to seeing the questions before hand? How do you think this influenced you?
Appendix 4- Coding Frameworks

There was a shift in coding framework as the analysis progressed. List 1 is my original themes and List 2 is the concluding framework. In the second list, the number indicates the code. Some of the codes were regrouped and thus the numbers may appear to be out of sequence at times but this is intentional.

List 1.
Burn out
Depoliticizing
Cultures of activism
Structure of the workshop
self reflection of the interviewee about themselves
workshop origins
blocks/feelings
body
their experience as a leader/facilitator
outcome of/follow-up to/after the workshop
reflections about the organization
therapy/psychology
group/individual distinctions

List 2.
1 Defining activism
2 Distinguishing the Workshop from therapy
3 What are they trying to accomplish-
   3.1 Analysis of origins
       25 shift from nuclear to broad
   3.2 Burn out
   3.3 Internal Messages Activists Work with/Express in Workshops
   3.4 Reaction/ critique of the workshops from others and from facilitators
       Prohibitions about healing expressed by activists
   3.5 Stress
   3.6 values dissonance
4 How they do workshops/ 4.1 Evaluation of the workshops
5 Structure generally
6 Safety
7 Their role in the workshops
   7.1 What they enjoy/get out of facilitating the workshops
8. How healing is defined
9 Reaction to the workshops
10 Diversity/ Contextualizing
   10.1 Attention to context in workshops
10.2 Attention to context in their speech during the interview
10.3 Support they offer one another
27 crediting sources of information
30 Acknowledging that D&E is not THE way or the only means

11 Directness
22 Shifting the framing of activism
29 concern in how activists can alienate others
12 Taking care of people as a part of the workshop
   12.1 The value of witnessing but having to act on expressions of distress
13 Is this a middle class/culturally specific phenomenon
14 Does the focus on social action/utility undermine healing?
15 Body references
16 Activist cultures as gendered
17 Not operating in Isolation
   17.1 External (support/$)
   17.2 Internal (fragmentation/ dissociation of feelings/roles
   17.3 Sense of History
18 Therapy as political?
19 Who they have worked with
45 Victim consciousness
24 Marketing the workshops
31 Gossip
42 Nature
43 leaving people’s regular context to do a workshop- pros and cons
41/47 Transferring experiences from the workshops to other settings
46 Impact of the research on the interviewee
Appendix 5

Experiential Exercise Samples - "The Milling" and "Open Sentences"¹

The Milling

Just as the introductory sharing breaks the ice, so does the milling exercise — in a nonverbal, and usually more intense and evocative fashion. It is good to use right after the verbal sharing — or after the nuclear stories (Exercise 11). Instead of letting the power of those shared images and experiences dissipate in a general discussion, The Milling lets them sink in, while also allowing people to get up and move around.

Moving back chairs or cushions, participants are asked to mill — to circulate around the room at a fairly energetic pace. "Just pretend you're hired as extras in a movie about Times Square," I usually say. "Keep moving. No talking. Just circulate, pass each other." I model this, walking around the room, weaving through the people.

This exercise, which takes no more than ten minutes, has four or more parts; they are all nonverbal and participants usually need to be reminded not to talk.

1. In the initial "Times Square" milling, people are hurrying past each other as on a busy street.

2. Now look at each other as you pass. Keep moving, but let your eyes engage. As they do, let yourself be aware that here is a person who shares with you this planet-time . . . Now, as you pass a person, pause for a moment to take their right hand in yours. Be conscious of what this person has just expressed about their pain for our world. Just note that without speaking and pass on . . . . This silent act permits a deep, respectful acknowledgement of what has previously been spoken. It permits people to see each other, openly, free from the necessity to say anything.

3. Now put your left hand behind you, and as you pass a person try to touch their right hand with yours, without being touched back. This is an abrupt change of pace and mood, inviting the participants to a childlike game, full of scuffles and laughter. Again, you will need to demonstrate this, because the shift to playfulness is unexpected. There I got you! Touched your hand first. That's right. Quick now. See if you can touch without being touched back. People begin to dodge and laugh. This moment of the exercise not only vents pent-up energies, but also reveals our simplicity: our "heavy" pain for the world is as normal and acceptable a part of our lives as a game of tag. We are in it together, with all our silly, human normalcies.

4. "Okay. Now stop. Begin just circulating again amongst each other. As you pass a person now, take a moment to face them straight on. Put your raised hands together palm to palm, shoulder-height, and look into each other's eyes. As you do, let the possibility arise in your consciousness that this person may die in a nuclear war. . . . Just look, be open, don't speak. . . . Now move on. Face another, hands together. . . . Let the notion surface in you that this person may be the one you happen to be with when you die. . . . " etc. for three or four such encounters. Some may weep at this time, some may hold each other, but keep your tone matter of fact: we are simply acknowledging the realities. This final part of the milling is a form of "death meditation." It confronts us with the transience of human life, especially under the threat of nuclear war. Depending on the group and your own inclination, that threat can be made more explicit as people look at each other.

Many variations, of course, are possible. For example, it can be effective

at a certain juncture during your tour to have the participants close their eyes as they take a hand in theirs. This heightens sensory awareness, jogs the imagination. Feel that hand in yours... it is still intact, whole... feel the life energy in it... or if it were the last you might ever touch... get to know its personality... is it timidly bold? would it be easy to push around? Test it... now get ready to say goodbye...

Let a final message be conveyed... slowly withdraw...

NOTE: Be sure as the guide that your comments are gentle and non-manipulative. Never tell or command, people what to think, see or imagine. Use language that is suggestive only; do not say: "Let the possibility arise in your consciousness...", allow if you will, the notion to surface that this person may... and the like.

Our workshops reveal that the reality of the threat, especially nuclear war, breaks through our defenses with greater impact when we see it, feel it, know it, as a direct personal experience. Our minds and hearts are more affected by the imagination of our own death; it breaks open our capacity to care.

Since strong responses are evoked in the course of the millling, some facilitators like to permit participants to express them verbally at the end of the exercise. This can be done in twosomes, with people sitting down for a few minutes of pair-sharing.
D/E Exercise 10
Open Sentences

This exercise is also appropriate for the first stage of a workshop. It brings out in rapid, consecutive, verbal form each participant's felt responses to the condition of our world. It helps each to reflect on his or her habitual ways of dealing with them, while providing the opportunity to hear and be heard in a simple, thorough, nonthreatening fashion. It also offers a structure in which to practice listening with total receptivity. For many it constitutes a first opportunity to speak to certain issues without fear of comment or having to deal with rejoinders.

People sit in pairs, face to face, close enough to attend to each other without distractions, and refrain from speaking until the guided verbal exercise begins. The one in each dyad who is ready to go first is asked to signal this by tapping the other on the knee, and becomes Partner A. Partner A is instructed to repeat the unfinished sentences the guide will speak, and to complete them in addressing Partner B. Partner B is instructed to participate by saying nothing (stress this: nothing), and by listening as attentively and supportively as possible. Allow about a minute for the completion of each sentence; and give the participants warning each time before you begin a new sentence, by saying "all right" or "stop", so they can finish up in time to hear the next. The sentences I have found most useful are these nine in sequence:

1. I think the chances of nuclear war are getting . . .
2. I think the condition of our environment is becoming . . .
3. When I think of the world we are going to leave for our children, it looks like . . .
4. One of my worst fears for the future is . . .
5. The feelings about all this, that I carry about with me, are . . .
   (The syntax is awkward, but suggests the ongoingness of such feelings. We are asking people not what they feel at a given moment, but what they are conscious of carrying with them subliminally and continually).
6. When I try to share these feelings with other people, what usually happens is . . .
7. The ways that I avoid expressing these feelings are . . .
   (Keep that question in the plural; we only begin to guess at our patterns of avoidance).
8. The ways that I avoid experiencing these feelings are . . .
9. The ways I can help other people deal with their feelings of pain for our world are . . .

When the responses to these sentences are finished, invite A to express nonverbally his appreciation to Partner B for her support and presence; invite B to express nonverbally her respect for Partner A, for his courage in sharing in this fashion. Have them do this without speaking. Then reverse the roles, letting B complete the sentences while A listens.

NOTE: It is important that the listening partner not speak. What most of us most need is to hear ourselves say what is on our minds and hearts; and we are usually inhibited by the thought that we may appear to be asking for comfort or discussion. Note also the progression of these sentences. They move from views (what one observes to be occurring) to feelings (the midway and pivotal sentence) to our ways of dealing with these feelings.
Appendix 6

Facilitator's Observations of Feelings Commonly Expressed by Activists

These messages can be examined at two levels - first as a representation of what activists specifically have expressed and also as an expression of the framework that these facilitators most spontaneously recall or draw forth when they think of activists as a distinct population.

It was difficult trying to code or organize this section because each sentiment can have layers of feelings to it that are artificial to separate out and categorize. So when categories overlapped, each feeling would be counted in each respective category. Emotions were grouped into large categories, and sample sentences follow which illustrate the texture and content of a grouping.

It is also interesting to note differences in what each interviewees most emphasized. This could be a reflection of vocation (therapist, educator) or personality (peoples conscious and unconscious interest in or discomfort with certain feelings).

the frequency of mentions of this feeling in each interview

Responsibility: A-6 B-0 C-2 D-5
Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Feeling over responsible because other people were under responsible
- Feeling they are on a one person crusade
- That they are the one person who always is taking care of everything
- People can’t do it like I can- less experienced
- Trusting that if they don’t do it all that someone else will pick up the slack

FEAR A-11 B-13 C-2 D-2
Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Shy people wanting to get more bold and excited about initiating and following through on their own ideas
- Fear of confrontation
- Fear of taking on leadership in their organization
- One facilitator noted the real sense of danger and secrecy during her early activist experiences of organizing politically around Central America anti-war and imperialism issues, especially after their offices were broken into and searched. An atmosphere of secrecy and fear was hard to shake after that time.
- Needing to affirm I can be alright (physically and emotionally safe)
- Wanting insight into fear and wanting to be invisible
- Fear of feeling and then losing functionality
- It's hard to go back out into my community or the outside world because people see me as a fool or spouting off, or "there she goes again". It embarrasses me, makes me feel ashamed, or that I am the only one.

**Short-comings in the work/community**  A-5  B-0  C-4  D-5

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- It's hard to hold on to the future and to things we have accomplished in the face of all there is to do.
- I am not heard in my group so that is why I don't go to meetings anymore
- Tired of feeling even within my own group there is conflict, so we are dealing with conflict in the world and I go in with my own group and we have different ways of dealing with things, we have conflicts as well so that it doesn't become a safe place to work from
- One person always seems to take over.
- It's hard to share or to delegate or to recruit new people.
- How can local and national branches of an organization interact respectfully

**Resentment**  A-6  B-0  C-0  D-0

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Tired of always being the one to bring up issues
- Tired of being the weird one in my community (isolation/judgment)
- Feeling like other people aren't doing enough, that it's just me
- Tired of feeling guilty (having more than others, not doing enough)
- There is always something else to do, I never get a rest, it feels unending
- Activists are always too serious
- I have good ideas but am hesitant to say them, or not fast enough or loud enough

**Anger**  A-1  B-10  C-6  D-3

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Gender issues, reaction to sexism specifically
Inadequacy

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Tried everything they think is possible
- Not articulate enough
- That they are stupid
- Need reassurance that "I've got what it takes"
- Questioning their legitimacy as an activist

Guilt

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- There is such urgency about what we are doing that it would be selfish to...
  - Think about making our space nice
  - Take time to think about myself
- I don't put in enough time or energy and this obstructs the group
- I am letting personal things get in the way of my responsibilities and commitments
- Guilt about having resources when others don't

Lack of Resources

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Time - family pressures- my children/partner are demanding of my time
- Too much work
- Urgency
- Challenges in allowing themselves time and space for self care
- Not enough money organizationally and personally
- Not enough people are active or care

Overwhelmed/ burnt out

Phrases/ Examples given by facilitators:
- Too much work, too big
  - Frenzied, frenetic pace
  - We are never going to change anything.
  - Denying themselves all sorts of nourishment in the rush to save the world.
Pain

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Feel they are a victim
- Personal lives had gone to hell—whether relationships, their families, work, their bodies

Alienation

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Wanting reassurance that there are other people who feel this way
- I am not crazy, to feel so despairing about the world
- The stress of values dissonance between progressive circles and family of origin or general population

Despair/sadness/sorrow

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Nothing is ultimately going to change
- The powers that be have got more money, they're bigger, they are more powerful
- There are always people who have more power
- How to get the message out to enough people to really make a difference

Frustration

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Feeling they are stuck
- Can't move forward
- Obstructed
- Nothing is working in terms of the impact on the community
- Struggle trying to find a balance
- Were ready to drop out
- Feeling co-opted by the government or status quo
- Struggle between local and national branches of an organization
- Confusion
- Irritable/Frustrated

1Suicide among activists was mentioned as an extreme form of this despair, but facilitators never mentioned it was a feeling that activists were confronting in the workshop.
DEPLETED/BLOCKED

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- Numb 1 8 2 0
- Lack of connection to their internal feelings.
- Tiredness
- Flat affect
- No joy
- No passion
- Doing life/activism on momentum/ by rote.
- Feeling dead inside
- Lost whatever original motivation that had gotten them into being an activist
- No real feeling
- No real juice
- Absence of spiritual grounding in their activism or lives
- No ability to have emotional response to the terrible things they were working with
- No compassion, humanness or depth
- Nothing was any fun- their work wasn't fun, and nothing else was fun, they didn't know how to have fun
- Bottled up feelings of sadness, grief, fear, anger, rage
- Depression

Physical concerns

Phrases/Examples given by facilitators:
- No longer had the heart for it, the stomach for it1
- Suffering from really bad health attributed to stress, bad diet, no rest, emotional problems

Other

- Realizing there was emotional turmoil in them coming out in some pretty weird ways - they were taking their anger out on themselves, their co-workers, their families- whoever happened to be in their path
- They were closing down out of frustration
- Hard not to feel personally everything that is happening because they have a strong connection to the issues (wanting more distance or relief)
- Emotional turmoil generally
- Struggling with conflicting emotions/ confusion

1It is interesting to consider these colloquial phrases as reflection of the actual physical toll a person may be feeling but unable to speak directly.
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