

BEYOND ADVOCACY OR ENCOUNTER: TOWARD COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

by

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This paper presents some preliminary thinking about a topic on which the authors contemplate pursuing further work. Comments and reactions about our work thus far are earnestly solicited and will be greatly appreciated. We may be reached as follows:

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Advocacy and encounter--key methods of two powerful social movements that burgeoned in the 1960's and continue to influence our times--share certain characteristics with each other while seeming directly opposed on others. The social movements they represent, "community action" on the one hand and "human potential" on the other, both grew dramatically in the past decade in response to a widespread perception of the need to enhance meaning, participation, and shared community in social life, among other values. Yet the ends toward which the methods appear to be directed--social change and personal growth, respectively, are commonly seen to bear little relation to each other, giving rise to a conception of the methods as largely divergent from each other.

This paper focuses on the key methods of each movement, partly in order to enhance a search for commonality, and partly in order to avoid becoming lost in the organizational backwash that threatened to engulf each movement.¹ It is written from an experiential background that draws on our own participation (marginally) in the "new left" of the middle 1960's and directly in the welfare rights movement, and directly in both the La Jolla Program and the MTL summer institute.² Our value-preferences are clear from these experiences: for both personal groups and social change we choose methods of rational democracy.

By "advocacy" we understand the taking of a position aimed at social change, and working organizationally toward its implementation. An advocacy method typically employs community organizing as a strategy for social change and community development, and has been defined clearly by Alinsky, the Port Huron Statement, and Rothman, among others.³

By "encounter" we understand the open sharing of present-focused interaction in an intentionally-convened group of limited duration. An encounter method typically employs intense group interaction as a strategy to achieve personal growth in the context of a temporary community.⁴

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At first glance, there is much that separates advocacy and encounter. The method of advocacy is typically instrumental in orientation, aimed at group goals of social change, while the method of encounter is usually consummatory, aimed at the individual goal of personal growth. Moreover, advocacy works in the "real world" of politics and organized interests while the world of encounter tends to exist in retreat settings away from the intervention of outside forces. Thus advocacy exists in an "open system" while encounter's system is "closed." An additional difference may be seen in the "hardness" of advocacy's modality (conflict of interests, "direct action") and the "softness" of the encounter method (emotionality, support). One may wish to draw the advocacy ideal as Machiavellian, and the encounter image as Dionysian. And, indeed, the distinction between "social action" and "counter-culture" has been persuasively cast as mutually exclusive.⁵

The distance between advocacy and encounter has been recognized by practitioners and defenders of each method when they consider the other. Thus, William Coulson, one of the founders of the La Jolla program, has written directly about "the trouble with advocacy:"

It is precisely this characteristic--that one does not speak for himself--which defines a position of advocacy. The advocate takes a line, prepares a strategy, and pursues it. He cannot afford to listen--neither to his opponent nor to his own shifting, swirling feelings, lest he be swayed. An advocate cannot risk knowing himself in the moment, or his opponent, lest he betray his official position.⁶

Recalling an experience he had in visiting a southern school district, Coulson reflects:

I realized that day with the southern teachers that we were not going to get beyond where we had already been, at least not in the near future, because no one was speaking for himself for very long; everyone was remembering in time that if he came upon a surprise, if he came to care for someone unexpectedly, he was going to have to account for it when he got home. No one was willing to see the others with his own eyes. No one was meeting.⁷

Coulson's case against advocacy advances when he considers its relationship to violence:

We have to get beyond advocacy if we are to get beyond violence. No longer merely boring,

the institutional committee meeting now is also a forum for advocacy. People plan to push each other around. Violence and advocacy are first cousins, and we haven't moved away from the imminent possibility of violence if there is not some radical improvement on the typical committee meeting.

Violence is the newest form of domestic advocacy . . .⁸

From the advocacy position, critics have been no less lenient with encounter methodology. The major statement is that of sociologist Edwin Schur, who has subtitled his book *THE AWARENESS TRAP* "Self-Absorption Instead of Social Change." To Schur, encounter is irresponsible in a world that is as unjust as ours.

A seductively appealing, but distorted and socially harmful, ideology of awareness is rapidly gaining acceptance. If we allow this to go on, unquestioned and unchecked, we will do so at our considerable peril.

Once dominant, this ideology could push our society in highly undesirable directions . . . the current interest in awareness strongly reflects our culture's long-standing emphasis on individualism and self-help. . . . Even in the more theoretical works on the new awareness, a . . . casual optimism prevails--tied to the notion that we must all accept "responsibility for ourselves." We cannot expect other people to solve our problems for us. By the same token, we cannot solve theirs.

Along with the stress on continuously exploring one's feelings, this represents a clear invitation to self-absorption. The latent political implication seems equally apparent: complacency for those who have succeeded; resignation or self-blame for those who have not.⁹

Schur notes that for the disadvantaged, "the awareness movement offers a particularly inadequate type of 'liberation.'"

Oppression is not . . . simply a matter of certain individuals behaving in unloving or unliberated ways. It is systematic, socially structured and culturally reinforced. To understand and change it, we usually will need to focus on a great many sociocultural factors--

ranging from economic structure to the mass media, from status hierarchies to the legal system, from employment opportunities to child-rearing attitudes. When problems transcend the personal or interpersonal levels, so too must the solutions. This is perfectly clear to the black man unable to find a job, or the woman denied a legal abortion. In such situations, no amount of self-awareness will suffice.¹⁰

Now both Schur and Coulson are engaging, and self-consciously so, in polemics in their contentions regarding the other camp. Schur notes that the "new quest inwards, if kept in proper perspective, might in some ways prove quite beneficial,"¹¹ and Coulson outlines what he would do were he "in a position of institutional authority."¹² But both have persuasively probed chinks in opposition armor, and their dialogue clearly invites the reader to take sides. But we, finding personal and social benefit in both, choose first to probe for lines of convergence before taking sides.

That advocacy and encounter might not be, after all, polar opposites is suggested by the similarity of their constituencies, their underlying values, and certain aspects of their ideological content. Both methods have appealed to young, change-oriented, and experimental individuals. Both methods have been viewed as radical and divergent with prevailing practice. And both have placed in a central position in their ideology the concept of "community," at least in a number of persuasive statements.

The common focus on "community" is a point often overlooked by the new critics of encounter, whether or not they share the advocacy position. Thus, to take three examples that have appeared within two weeks of this writing as lead statements in Newsweek, New York, and The New Yorker, the common criticism of contemporary forms of group dynamics is of its focus on "me" and its emphasis on "self-fulfillment," both instances of what Schur calls "self-absorption." The argument is as persuasively stated from the conservative position as from Schur's liberalism. Tom Wolfe approaches it in true Burkean fashion:

The husband and wife who sacrifice their own ambitions and their material assets in order to provide "a better future" for their children . . . the soldier who risks his life, or perhaps consciously sacrifices it, in battle . . . the man who devotes his life to some struggle for "his people" that cannot possibly be won in his lifetime . . . people (or most of them) who buy life insurance or leave wills . . . and, for that matter, most women upon becoming pregnant for

the first time . . . are people who conceive of themselves, however unconsciously, as part of a great biological stream. Just as something of their ancestors lives on in them, so will something of them live on in their children . . . or in their people, their race, their community--for childless people, too, conduct their lives and try to arrange their postmortem affairs with concern for how the great stream is going to flow on. Most people, historically, have not lived their lives as if thinking, "I have only one life to live."¹³

The New Yorker also uses classic imagery of conservatism; quoting from a letter received from a friend:

What chilled me was a more general sense of the transformation of our society from one that strengthens the bonds between people to one that is, at best, indifferent to them; a sense of an inevitable fraying of the net of connections between people at many critical intersections, of which the marital knot is only one. Each fraying accelerates others. A break in one connection, such as attachment to a stable community, puts pressure on other connections: marriage, the relationship between parents and children, religious affiliation, a feeling of connection with the past--even citizenship, that sense of membership in a large community which grows best when it is grounded in membership in a small one. If one examines these points of disintegration separately, one finds they have a common cause--the overriding value placed on the idea of individual emancipation and fulfillment, in the light of which, more and more, the old bonds are seen not as enriching but as confining.¹⁴

The point that is lost upon the new critics is that the argument, applicable as it is to several of the new and very wealthy peddlers of mass society snake oil to the human potential movement (especially Ehrhard's est, and the Church of Scientology), ignores the classic focus of the encounter method, in the hands of its humanistic founders, on the centrality of the social bond, on community. Thus Coulson titles his book "A Sense of Community" and writes that "Community," "which lies beyond advocacy, is not hand holding, life adjustment, or a softness better left to the home and churches; it is vital to our survival."¹⁵ To Coulson, community is the antidote to violence. And Kurt Back, in a critical article on new trends and old in group dynamics, writes that "Sensitivity training is . . . an excellent synthetic community

experience for a population that has lost the meaning of community but not its sentimental appeal."¹⁶

Our own experiences with the La Jolla Program and NTL have convinced us that participation in community is one of the most important learning products of these programs, highly valued by staff and participants alike, and carefully nurtured in a productive program. At La Jolla, for example, frequent meetings of the up to 100 participants in the 17-day residential program are scheduled, and are called "community meetings." Participants frequently comment in these sessions on the impact of the sense of participation with the entire collectivity. At the end of the 17 days, the sense of community persists for many participants by means of a program communication sent to all alumni, largely consisting of observations about the connections perceived between program experiences and later experiences of alumni, and a relatively large number of participants maintain friendships with some of those with whom they shared the "La Jolla experience."

In a somewhat different fashion, the value of "community" is also sought by the practitioner of advocacy methods. Radical "community organizers," for example, seek to bring a cohesive collectivity into existence within a given residential area seen to share a common political or social interest. And the more conventional "community organization" approach directs itself even more centrally to the task of creating a cohesive identity among participants in a broad range of agency and welfare programs. In both these advocacy approaches, community means the recognition of shared interests and the development among persons who live in the same area of social ties that can foster the advancement of those interests.

Besides subscribing in one way or another to the value of community, three other lines of convergence between advocacy and encounter may be identified. Two tend to be positive, the third represents a failing held in common. The first positive convergence involves a degree of pragmatism shared by the two approaches. The encounter group shows this pragmatism by its customary insistence that the discussion remain in the "here and now." The advocate is similarly advised to take a pragmatic approach, and remain in step with those he/she seeks to serve. Alinsky has defined the advocacy role as that of catalyst, cautioning the organizer to cleave closely to the expressed interests of those being organized.¹⁷ And, Booker T. Washington, the great organizer of the NAACP, expressed the position clearly when he urged that his group "cast down your bucket where you are," drawing a parallel to a folk tale of a ship drifting without drinking water in a sea, unknowingly located at the mouth of a fresh river.

The second additional line of convergence, closely related to the first, involves the emphasis placed upon empathy in both approaches. Seen as the ability to "get inside somebody else," empathy is basic to the contribution of one encounter participant to another. "I feel what you're going through," "I can really identify with that" are commonly-heard phrases in encounter groups. Based on empathy, the participant is often able to work with a fellow participant toward the achievement of a new understanding of a long-held problem.

Similarly, in advocacy, the ability "to take the role of the other" is a basic skill. The advocate needs to know, in a conflict situation, how the other party is likely to react to a particular tactic or an overall strategy. The skill required is more cognitive than emotional, but again there is payoff from being able to understand how a particular "significant other" is feeling and thinking at a given time.

A final line of convergence involves a common failing of both approaches: the inability to construct adequate conflict-resolution techniques. In the encounter group, conflict is often simply accepted rather than resolved. "I hear what you're saying, and I see how differently we feel about it." In a miasma of acceptance, anything goes, including irreconciled differences.

In advocacy, on the other hand, conflict is not simply tolerated--rather it is sought and gloried over. Conflict often becomes an end in itself to the advocate, and other means of conflict resolution that are less dramatic--such as compromise and the search for consensus--are often eschewed in the drift toward the final showdown. Few ask if the coming confrontation is necessary, for to ask the question is to admit to a less than total dedication to the cause of the group. Finally, exhausted, one side or the other sues for peace, and negotiations get underway later than might be possible.

To summarize the argument to this point: advocacy and encounter share several important characteristics. Each seeks to create and enhance community; each works best in the "here and now;" each is enhanced by a sensitive awareness of the position of other participants and actors. Moreover, neither approach has perfected a method of conflict-resolution, encounter erring toward the expression of excessive tolerance, advocacy toward excessive acting out. It is our further contention that a synthesis of the two methods might permit a creative emergence of new organizational forms that would meet many situations to which we often turn for either advocacy or encounter. We call this synthesis "community leadership" and turn now to its brief identification.

The concept "community leadership" has for us a double connotation, one internal to a group, the other in its interaction with other groups. Internally, community leadership is a process of developing community within a group, of establishing "maintenance" patterns that foster openness, trust, and interpersonal comfort within the confines of the group. Externally, community leadership is a process of enhancing the common purposes of members of the group in interaction with other groups in the broader social environment, of achieving goals in an efficacious and economic fashion outside the immediate circle of the group.

The internal aspect of community leadership closely resembles the encounter process, as the reader will have noted, and the external aspect looks much like advocacy. But the two methods are best combined not simply sequentially, but in a more organic and thorough blending. It is our suggestion that the most effective and humane styles of community leadership, both in internal process and external relations, attend carefully to the blending of advocacy and encounter modalities in several ways.

Thus we see community leadership as a process engaged in by self-conscious individuals, aware of their own group process, who can empathise with both their fellow group members and others beyond the group's boundaries. Further, the process in which they engage is one in which decision-making is dispersed democratically, and internal leadership often takes the form of facilitation of group process. Decisions, therefore, incorporate the full resources of the group, and are more likely to recognize social realities, both internal and external to the group, than are authoritarian decisions.

These characteristics of self-consciousness, empathy, democratic decision-making, facilitative leadership and "here and now" pragmatism are functional to the group both in its internal process and external relations, we contend. Internally, they may be read as characteristics of successful encounter, and externally, they may be viewed as rationality, understanding of other actors and groups, adherence to democratic process, "catalytic" organizing (Alinsky-style), and pragmatic political style. With this double reading, they are characteristics that allow a group to "get it together" and then to enter the political arena well able to engage in the realistic and productive assertion of purpose and interest and resolution of conflict.

We offer our model of community leadership as an hypothesis, and are aware that it is vulnerable to criticism as either utopian or excessively consensual. And, surely, it does rest upon the assumption that much conflict--personal, group or social--emerges from confusion of purpose and communication rather than conflict of interest. The method is designed

to clear the former from the latter, to permit confrontation to be limited to those instances in which interests conflict, and the clear search for their adjustment is required.

Our point is not that conflict should always be avoided, but rather that as early a point of adjusting interests as possible should be sought to avoid both unnecessary expenditure of time and energy and the poisoning of social relations. There are surely times, however, as when a "mobilization of bias" prevents a group from getting its interests on the societal agenda, that direct action is required to address an administrator or decision-maker effectively and clearly.¹⁸ Once the concern is on the agenda, direct expression of interest continues to be appropriate, but may be enhanced by attentiveness to the concerns of other actors, and the potential of mutually satisfactory resolution.

That such community leadership can be developed productively is suggested by a review of several differing contexts in which it is currently being employed, at least in general outline. At the Highlander Folk School in rural Tennessee, social change is produced from a residential community of long standing.¹⁹ And, in the new neighborhoods movement, a variety of groups seek to achieve goals as diverse as community crime prevention and neighborhood political autonomy from a process of block organizing and neighborhood meetings.²⁰

Within larger social institutions, and especially corporations, the "OD" (organizational development) approach is achieving much support and success by focusing on the human elements as well as structural aspects of organization.²¹ And in the world of volunteerism, the National Information Center on Volunteerism and Ronald Lippitt and Eva Schindler-Rainman have developed training methods that focus on the development of group process in the search for external advancement of purpose.²²

The list can surely be expanded (the Peace Corps, the Ecumenical Institute, Quaker Social Action, and Carl Rogers' "quiet revolution" are other examples), but our point is that the phenomenon is real, and that it works. What seems to us the primary task is to examine for the range of groups, organizations, and institutions in which it is efficacious and appropriate, and to draw from actual experiences a sharper bead upon its implementation and fine-tuning. But if the point is sufficiently plausible to be accepted, we can at least urge a halt to the false dilemma of choice between advocacy or encounter: the task is their most fruitful combination.

FOOTNOTES

1. Thus, the clear organizational principles of the Port Huron Statement gave way to the thuggery of National Caucus of Labor Committee's violence toward their ideological cousins, the American Communist Party, and the rather inept terrorism of the Weather Underground. And, on the other side, the "non-directive" approach of Rogers and his colleagues at the Center for Studies of the person and founders of the National Training Laboratories tended to be displaced, both in the media and the market, by the hucksterism of Werner Ehrhard's "est" and the cult of Scientology, among others.
2. Van Til, while never a direct participant in "new left" organization, participated in the student strike at Berkeley in 1964, and later was involved in a range of "Welfare rights" leadership positions in Pennsylvania (see his "On Becoming an Applied Sociologist" in Arthur B. Shostak, PUTTING SOCIOLOGY TO WORK (New York: David McKay, 1974), pp. 223-228). Heller, as Van Til, has participated in a 17-day encounter program, the Center for Studies of the Person's La Jolla Program; she has also completed Phase I of the Graduate Student Professional Development Program of the National Training Laboratories.
3. Cf. Saul Alinsky, REVEILLE FOR RADICALS (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1946) and RULES FOR RADICALS (New York: Vintage, 1971); Students for A Democratic Society, "The Port Huron Statement," in Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, eds., THE NEW RADICALS (New York: Vintage, 1966) pp. 149-162; Jack Rothman, "Three Models of Community Organization Practice," in Fred M. Cox and others, eds., STRATEGIES OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION (Itasca, Ill.: R. E. Peacock, 1970) pp. 20-36. An excellent reader in the field is edited by Ralph N. Kramer and Harry Specht, READINGS IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION PRACTICE (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975).
4. For a general introduction to encounter, see Carl Rogers ON ENCOUNTER GROUPS (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) and Arthur Burton, ed., ENCOUNTER (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969). The leading empirical study has been done by Norton A. Lieberman, Irvin D. Yalom and Matthew B. Hiles, ENCOUNTER GROUPS: FIRST FACTS (New York: Basic Books, 1973). Timely articles on issues in encounter are found regularly in the pages of the JOURNAL OF HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY and the JOURNAL OF APPLIED BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES.

5. Cf. James E. Crowfoot and Mark A. Chesler, "Contemporary Perspectives on Planned Social Change: A Comparison," 10 Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences, 3, 1974, pp. 278-303.
6. William R. Coulson, A Sense of Community (Columbus: Addison-Wesley, 1973), p. 5.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 6.
9. Edwin Schur, The Awareness Trap: Self-Absorption Instead of Social Change (New York: Quadrangle, 1976) pp. 3-4.
10. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
11. Schur, 1976, p. 194.
12. Coulson, 1973, p. 5.
13. Tom Wolfe, "The 'ME' Decade and the Third Great Awakening," (New York: August 23, 1976), p. 39.
14. "Talk of the Town," August 30, 1976, p. 22.
15. Coulson, 1973, p. 6.
16. Quoted in Lieberman, Yalon and Miles, 1973, p. 452.
17. Alinsky, 1946.
18. Cf. Jon Van Til, "Becoming Participants: Dynamics of Access Among the Welfare Poor," 54 Social Science Quarterly (September, 1973), pp. 345-358.
19. Cf. Frank Adams, "Highlander Folk School: Getting Information, Going Back and Teaching it," 42 Harvard Educational Review (November, 1972).
20. Cf. Janice E. Perlman, "Grassroots Groups in 1970's U.S.A.," paper presented at International Sociological Association, April 1976.
21. Cf. Warren G. Bennis, Organization Development: Its Nature, Origins and Prospects (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969) and Edgar F. Hughes, Organization Development and Change (St. Paul: West, 1975).
22. Cf. Ivan H. Scheier, "People Approach: Three New Strategies," 9 Volunteers for Social Justice (Spring 1976), 1-12, and Eva Schindler-Rainman and Ronald Lippitt, The Volunteer Community (Fairfax, Va.: NTL Learning Resources Corporation), 2nd ed. (1975).