

Well-Being in Cohousing:
A Qualitative Study

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A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of Humboldt State University
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts degree in Sociology

August, 2007

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Humboldt State University

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ABSTRACT

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Cohousing originated in Denmark in the 1960s and, after much success, spread to North America in the 1980s. In the United States, the 1980s marked a period of ever-increasing suburbanization. With this shift in neighborhood organization came a related perceived loss of community. Some people who felt alienated from their neighbors and unsatisfied with typical housing opportunities turned to cohousing. These people hoped to find solutions to “community lost” by living in cohousing developments whose aims included creating safe “fifties style” neighborhoods that promoted the well-being of residents through shared common spaces and community decision making.

This research is an ethnographic study of a cohousing community, referred to in this paper as Emerald Hills, established in 1998 in a small town in Northern California. I entered the setting in Spring 2005 and exited the community at the end of the year. In addition to participant observation at community meals and meetings, I completed fifteen one-on-one semi-structured interviews. In those interviews, I encouraged participants to speak about their cohousing expectations and experiences and questioned them about relationships with others in the community and the emotional aspects of their experiences.

I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software to analyze field notes and interview transcriptions and reviewed the data looking for common themes and coded

accordingly. To analyze the data, I relied on the existing literature on cohousing, well-being, social interaction, social support, individualism and expectations.

Participants developed a sense of well-being at Emerald Hills through regular community meals, community projects, shared political outlooks, friendships with neighbors, a good environment for raising children and other resources from those relationships. Conversely, conflicts over money, the absence of mediation and consensus training, the lack of a unifying vision statement, individualism and disagreement about expectations for relationships among community members negatively affected the well-being of residents of Emerald Hills. However, those community members with lower expectations prior to moving into cohousing expressed a greater sense of well-being from living in Emerald Hills.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: COHOUSING AND WELL-BEING

Cohousing is an intentional community. According to McCamant and Durrett (1994), it has six main characteristics: Participatory Process, Intentional Neighborhood Design, Extensive Common Facilities, Complete Resident Management, Absence from Hierarchy, and Separate Incomes. Graham Meltzer (2005), in his book on cohousing, lists two additional characteristics: A Balance of Community Life and Private Life, and The Integration of Cohousing Groups with the Larger Society. In their book, *The Cohousing Handbook (2005)*, Chris and Kelly Scotthanson include three more important characteristics of cohousing: Purposeful Separation from the Car, Shared Evening Meals, and Varied Levels of Responsibility for the Development Process.

While writing my thesis on cohousing, I was often asked what cohousing is. So as not to bore my questioner, I gave a brief response. I explained that cohousing is a subdivision with a twist. Everyone owns his or her own home and also jointly owns a share of the common house (like a clubhouse). The cohousing development is designed to increase social interaction, and the clubhouse is used to eat shared meals and discuss community planning and problems. Then I explain that the development where I conduct my research has common meals three times a week and a meeting once a month.

Cohousing originated in Denmark in the 1960s and, after much success, moved to America in the 1980s (McCamant and Durrett 1988). Its success was due to a perceived loss of community due to suburbanization. People who felt alienated from their

neighbors and unsatisfied with typical housing opportunities sought cohousing. It was believed that by participating in an intentional community, the neighborhoods of old could be reestablished and the sentiment and safety of those times resurrected. Cohousing has existed for nearly fifty years worldwide and almost thirty in the United States.

This research explores the goals of cohousing, which are creating a safe “fifties style” neighborhood, curing feelings of alienation, and promoting the well-being of residents as they relate to their cohousing community. In this paper the community studied is referred to as Emerald Hills and was established in 1998 in a small town in Northern California.

This thesis is separated into eight chapters. Chapter Two begins with a primarily quantitative review of literature on well-being and related variables and concludes with a review of central cohousing texts. Chapter Three gives an in-depth explanation of methodologies employed in this research and the reasoning behind those methodological choices. Chapter Four through Chapter Seven are the analyzed results from interviews with and participant observation of residents of Emerald Hills and discuss difficulties associated with living in cohousing, residents’ expectations prior to living in cohousing, residents’ suggestions for change at Emerald Hills, and aspects of cohousing, which residents take pleasure in. Chapter Eight concludes the thesis with a discussion of findings and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: WELL-BEING, INDIVIDUAL, AND PLACE

Well-being is a complex and even elusive state for social scientists to understand. In this chapter, I will discuss some of the complexities of the concept *well-being* and elucidate aspects of well-being that social scientists have come to understand. Although this thesis relies on qualitative measures of well-being, the majority of research on well-being has been based on quantitative measures that are the foundation for this review. Also included in this review are some popular press writings on cohousing, which offer great insight into the interplay between community and well-being.

This thesis begins with a definition of well-being followed by a review of the primarily quantitative variables of financial stability, self-expectations, social interaction, individualism, and community. Following that review, well-being in cohousing will be explored from the major viewpoints of the three primary texts on the subject: McCamant and Durrett's *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves* (1988), *The Cohousing Handbook: Building a Place for Community* by Chris and Kelly Scotthanson (2005), and *Sustainable Community: Learning from the Cohousing Model* by Graham Meltzer (2005).

Well-Being Defined

The most common synonyms used in sociological literature for well-being are: happiness, quality of life, and life satisfaction (Lou and Shih 1997; Oswald, 1997;

Radcliff, 2001). In this thesis, as in much of the literature, those terms will be used interchangeably. Some researchers differentiate between happiness and well-being arguing that happiness is a transitional state of emotion, whereas, well-being is an overall feeling of contentment with one's life (Mehl 1978; Lou 1995), yet most research does not make that distinction. In this thesis, well-being is the preferred term, and synonyms are only used in direct reference to literature which employs them.

Well-being, like *race*, and *community*, has proved to be one of the more difficult variables for researchers to classify. The *Oxford Dictionary* (1996, Second Edition) defines *well-being* as “the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous.” For sociologists, *well-being* is a multi-dimensional variable that is not so easily categorized. The most commonly used definition of *well-being* is a positive evaluation of one's life after a thoughtful reflection on both past experiences, present circumstances, and life expectations (Smith 1979). This definition, which includes three aspects of *well-being*, the past, present, and the future, was proliferated by national quality of life studies that emerged in the 1960s (Keyes 2005).

Later researchers refined definitions of *well-being* to include the presence of positive affect, the absence of negative affect, and a perceived sense of self-efficacy (Davidson and Cotter, 1991; Natvig, Albreksten, and Qvarnstrom 2002). Still others argued that well-being must include good physical health (Sagan 1987), a healthful physical environment (Browswimmer 2002; Shutkin 2001; Tainter 2001), the benefits of love and the possibility of communication (Mehl 1979), and a sense of faith (Lin 2003). In an intensive review of literature on *well-being*, Keyes (2005) suggested that at least

thirteen dimensions of well-being had been documented in research definitions and methodologies.

I would argue that refinements to the definition of *well-being*, on the whole, have merely been the addition of indicators by which *well-being* is measured. A state of well-being remains a positive evaluation of one's life. Researchers simply use positive affect, a perceived sense of self-efficacy, a healthful physical environment, and other similar indicators for measurement. Methodological limitations arise from the way researchers attempt to measure well-being, which will be discussed later, yet the concept remains viable.

The one exception to qualifications made to the definition of *well-being* is the important methodological consideration of duration, which must be tied to the definition of *well-being* (Beiser 1974; Mehl 1979; Diener and Biswas-Diener 2001). As stated earlier, Lucien Mehl (1979) asserts that happiness is a temporary state of mind, in contrast to well-being, which is a state of life. By that definition, *well-being* only exists if it is sustained.

In this thesis, *well-being* will thus be defined as a *sustained* positive holistic evaluation of one's life taking into consideration past experiences, current life situations, and expectations. This definition does not preclude bad days. A person who is found to live in a state of *well-being* will continue to experience life's tragedies; however, these tragedies will not consume his or her generally contented perception of life. All things taken together, a person who is seen to live in a state of *well-being* will view life's hardships as exceptions to a generally benign existence. Conversely, a person who is

seen to be living in a state of discontent, the antithesis of *well-being*, will view good days as exceptions to a generally malignant existence.

A final consideration when looking at individual well-being is its relation to social well-being; the literature demonstrates that *social well-being* and the *well-being of the individual* are inseparable. In the words of Max Weber ([1919] 1949), sociology “is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects” (p. 36). That definition implies that there is an assumed societal relation between the macro and the micro. More recently Kenneth Wilkinson, in his book *Community in Rural America* (1991), explicitly reveals the connection when he writes that “the well-being of the individual is not possible without the well-being of the community” (p. 18). Keyes (1988) explains that the failure of scientists to recognize the connection between *well-being* and *social well-being* has been a limitation in their methodologies: “Although the existing models emphasize private features of well-being, individuals remain embedded in social structures and communities, and face countless social tasks and challenges” (p. 122). The significance of the interconnectivity between social well-being and the well-being of the individual will, therefore, be acknowledged throughout this thesis.

Financial Stability and Well-Being

Much social research has reported a positive relationship between financial stability and well-being. A study conducted from 1946 to 1995 showed that reported levels of life satisfaction had risen significantly, but only slightly in the United States and

Europe in correlation with the post World War II economic boom (Oswald 1997). The same study found a stark exception among the poor. The poor were three times less happy than their counterparts during the years studied (Oswald 1997).

Clark and Oswald (2002) later found money to be directly related to happiness. Their research demonstrated that any damage to *well-being* that occurred as a result of divorce, job loss, spousal death or other unfortunate events could be mitigated by an increase in income. For example, in the instance of widowhood, they found that it “would take, on average an extra £170,000 per annum to offset the loss of a husband” (p. 12). In addition, they determined the dollar amount (or in their study, the English pound) that positive events had on *well-being*. Their research showed that “Getting married, for instance, is calculated to bring each year the same amount of happiness, on average, as having an extra £70,000 of income per annum” (p. 14).

Kacapyr (1998) challenged the findings of Oswald and Clark (2002), showing that non-financial household wealth slowed from 3.9 percent to 1.6 percent in 1994, while the *well-being* index grew from .7 to 1.1 percent over that same period of time. Kacapyr asserts that there is no connection between economic *well-being* and social *well-being*. Oswald (1997) argues, however, that an economic index is not a valid indicator of well-being but rather “what matters to someone who lives in a rich country is his or her relative income” (p. 16), not wealth in general. Support for Oswald’s thesis was found in a study of two Israeli towns with similar characteristics (i. e. religion, age, sex, education, children, etc.) but with unequal income distribution (Morawetz et al. 1997). One town was organized communally and had equal income distribution, and the other

was organized under private ownership, where income distribution was unequal. Those who lived in the city with equal wealth distribution rated themselves almost one point higher (on a ten point scale) than those who lived in the city with unequal wealth distribution.

Money does appear to “buy happiness,” or at least self-reported happiness. The economic post war boom did seem to increase happiness in the United States and Europe, and Oswald and Clark were even able to quantify the amount of “happiness money can buy ” Though two notes of caution should be mentioned here: a) the amount of money needed to overcome the death of a spouse (£170,000) could not be easily attained and b) two of the three studies showed that economic wealth does not equal well-being if those around the individual are experiencing higher levels of wealth. Those two important exceptions demonstrate the interconnectedness between financial stability, social interaction, and historic location. To live in a state of *well-being*, it is not only important to be financially stable, but it is also important to have strong and healthful relationships because their absence is literally “costly.”

Self-Expectations and Well-Being

Self-expectations, like finances, appear to have a close relationship with well-being. Research indicates that high expectations, when unrealized, have a negative effect on well-being while modest expectations facilitate transition and have a more healthful impact on well-being.

A survey of 119 hospital patients who were prescribed an exercise routine by their physician reveals the adverse effects high expectations can have on individuals (Jones et al. 2005). Respondents filled out a quantitative questionnaire and had objective physical results tabulated by a doctor during a six month study. The study found that those with more modest expectations were more likely to complete the routine and report higher levels of well-being upon its conclusion. Conversely, those with high expectations were more likely to drop out of the course and report lower levels of well-being at its end. The authors suggested that having doctors establish realistic expectations might increase chances of successes in exercise programs and could also diminish the effects of failure on well-being. A study of 473 married, white middleclass women, pregnant with their first child had similar findings (Kalmuss, Davidson, and Cushman 1992). Women were interviewed at the final trimester of their pregnancy and one year later. The study found that many women expected things to be better at one year than they actually were. When expectation exceeded experience in regard to relationship with spouse, physical well-being, maternal competence, maternal satisfaction, and family support with child care, the result was difficulty in adjustment to parenthood and lower well-being. A quantitative survey of 761 families in Toronto, Canada further reinforces the connection between expectations and well-being (Michelson, Belgue, and Stewart 1973). Those researchers found that women's considerations in moving were more practical than their male counterparts, who focused more on environmental factors. While women expected a new home to be in close proximity to good schools and shopping, men expected their future residence to be larger in square footage and offer more amenities than their current

home. The authors found that the closer their expectations were to the realities of their new residence, the easier adaptation to a new environment was for couples. Likewise, a quantitative survey of forty-one women missionaries, who had served for at least one year overseas, found that women, whose expectations were closely related to what their roles would consist of as missionaries, had higher levels of well-being and lower stress than women, whose expectations were incongruent with their actual roles as missionaries (Hall and Duvall 2003).

Literature on expectations and well-being is in agreement that having high expectations relative to actual consequences results in lower well-being. There appears to be a gap in the literature in regard to low expectations, however. More research needs to be conducted on the effect of low expectations on well-being.

Social Interaction and Well-Being

The relationship between social interaction and well-being is less clear than the relationship between financial stability and well-being or expectations and well-being. Outcomes on social interaction and well-being research differ greatly based on the type of social interaction, its duration, and the characteristics of the population being studied. The research findings are unclear about individual characteristics or interactions and their effect on well-being. Findings also conflict on the relative advantage of intimate relationships versus acquaintances as well as the role that physical environment has on well-being.

Social support

Adams (1992) studied social ties among Detroit residents and their effect on well-being. Using data from 1,194 qualitative interviews, he tested whether the size of a neighborhood or neighborhood stability had an effect on the well-being of residents. Initially Adams concluded that the longer people remained at a residence and the more socially integrated they were with it, the higher their well-being. After controlling for ecological, individual, and social network variables, Adams determined that well-being had more to do with individual characteristics than with interpersonal relationships. A counter finding (Ingram et al. 1999) demonstrated that AIDS patients, who reported unsupportive social interactions, were more depressed even after accounting for individual personality traits, physical health, and social support networks. The authors stress the importance of looking beyond individual causes of depression and separating the study of social support into positive and negative categories.

Type of interaction

Literature on social interaction makes the important distinction between supportive and non-supportive relationships or close friends and acquaintances. In a study on social relationships (Cohen, Gottlieb, and Underwood 2001), the authors differentiated between supportive and non-supportive interactions. They concluded that even non-supportive relationships could be beneficial by giving individuals a “diversity of...self concepts, feelings of self worth, and personal control, and conformity to behavioral norms that have implications for our health” (p 9). A contradictory finding was made in research on married men and women with children (Antonucci, Akiyama,

and Lansford 1998). The study concluded that the number of friends did not seem to affect the respondent's well-being. Differentiating between close relationships and acquaintances, they concluded that those with fewer close relationships had lower well-being; the same was not true about the number of acquaintances, revealing that well-being is solely dependent on close relationships.

Neighborhood stability

There is some literature on social interaction indicating that remaining at a residence for an extended period of time will create more solid ties and thereby increase well-being. In a comparison study of urban versus suburban neighborhoods, Adams (1997) found that the longer people had remained at a residence, the more they were socially integrated with the neighborhood, which reflected positively on their well-being. Similarly, Young, Russell and Powers (2004), in a study of women's attitudes toward their neighborhoods, found that "Women who had lived longer at their current address had a better sense of belonging to their neighborhood, as did women living in non-urban areas..." (p. 12). An exception, however, was found in the relationship between neighborhood stability and well-being in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Ross, Reynolds, and Geis (2000) in their study of crime rates in Illinois determined that "Neighborhood stability is associated with psychological well-being only in economically advantaged neighborhoods. It does not benefit the mental health of residents of poor neighborhoods, and there is some evidence it makes it worse" (p. 594). They hypothesized that neighborhood stability increased feelings of hopelessness in disadvantaged

neighborhoods, therefore indicating that community stability could also negatively affected well-being of poor residents.

Individualism, Community, and Well-Being

The loss of community, the rise of individualism, and the repercussions of those events have been discussed for more than a hundred years in sociological writing. That discussion began with the work of Ferdinand Toennies and Emile Durkheim.

A book commonly discussed in most introductory sociology classes and read in almost every class on community is Ferdinand Toennies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* ([1887] 1957). In that seminal work, Toennies differentiates between two types of societies that are the impetus for the book's title. *Gemeinschaft* is characterized by strong familial traditions, obligations, and support. *Gesellschaft* is found away from the family in the world of politics and work and is marked by individualism and bureaucratic rules rather than by familial obligations or mores. Toennies was critical of the shift he saw society undergoing. He theorized that through industrialization, *Gesellschaft* would overtake *Gemeinschaft*, and society would become individualistic, isolated, and without meaning. In the introduction to the 2001 Cambridge publication of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, titled in English, *Community and Society*, the editor, Jose Harris, enumerates the threats Toennies felt *Gesellschaft* had on the individual in a comparison of Toennies' *Gesellschaft* to Hobbes' *Leviathan*. "Whereas in Hobbes's system, artificial social and political institutions tamed and civilized naked human aggression, in Toennies' system they fostered and unleashed it. Whereas Hobbes's men and women moved out of

isolation into sociability, in Toennies's account they moved in the opposite direction" (Toennies [1887] 2001: 25).

Durkheim ([1893] 1964) also looked at the emergence of individualism in a societal shift, which he wrote about in *The Division of Labor in Society*. In that work, he postulated that society was undergoing a shift from mechanical to organic solidarity. In mechanical societies of the past, small groups of people were united by similarities. Those similarities included shared norms and goals (as in a tribe), and shared skills (i. e. little differentiation in labor). Organic societies, conversely, were united by their differences. A complex division of labor in modern society meant the absence of shared skills and goals found in mechanical societies, but this complex division of labor created a strong interdependence. This interdependence Durkheim likened to an organism having different organs with different functions which come together to create an interdependent whole; hence, the name *organic* solidarity.

Like Toennies, Durkheim was apprehensive about this shift in society. Yet Durkheim's argumentation was more nuanced than Toennies and accepted individualism as having positive aspects as well. Although Durkheim argued because of their interdependent nature, organic societies were more stable than mechanical societies, he was also aware of the threat individualism posed to the system. While differentiation with a complex division of labor created interdependence and stability for society on the individual level, differentiation meant fewer commonalities among neighbors and created mental distress in individuals. That distress was a topic which Durkheim would spend much of his life studying.

Durkheim's most famous work, *Suicide* ([1897] 1951), gives great insight into the threat individualism in a society has on the well-being of citizens. *Suicide* is a large scale international study of suicide rates over decades. Again, Durkheim is measured in his view of individualism. He argues that some individualism is necessary, yet excessive individualism leads to social ills and to suicide. Still, many of Durkheim's conclusions warn of the dangers of social independence. In his review of *Suicide*, Peter Kivisto concludes that "What is clear in this study is that two of the types of suicide he [Durkheim] identified are reflective of the modern condition: egoistic and anomic. Both arise due to an excess of individualism" (Kivisto, 2003: 103).

Writing some fifty and ninety years later respectively, Robert Nisbet and Robert Bellah continue in the vein of Toennies and Durkheim in documenting the effects of individualism on community.

Like Toennies and Durkheim, Nisbet, too, sees a shift occurring in societal organization that brings a rise to individualism. Nisbet writes about that shift in his book *Quest for Community*, a title later changed to *Power and Community* (1962). Nisbet argues that institutions run by the state take on the functions of communities and sever community relationships, thereby, leaving citizens alienated. Whereas Durkheim would call this deterioration of community a shift from mechanical to organic solidarity, and Toennies would call this a shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, Nisbet explains phenomenon as shift from decentralization to aggregation of power by the state. In all three instances the results point to a shift toward individualism. The effect of Nisbet's individualism is apathy, which he likens to Holden Caulfield's experiences in J. D

Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Holden Caulfield, the book's central character, sees no meaning in life, allows his grades to falter until he is expelled from prep-school, and indifferently accepts his confinement in a mental institution at the novel's conclusion.

By 1985, the publication date of *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Bellah and his colleagues document a society in which its citizens are so separate from community that they view it as a threat. Over several years, Bellah and his colleagues travel the United States conducting lengthy qualitative interviews with people from all walks of life about their feelings in regard to community. One of the marked trends is "the fear that society may overwhelm the individual and destroy any chance of autonomy unless he stands against it" (p. 144). Many of those interviewed feared the time commitment and the obligations inherent in community relationships. There were exceptions, however, to the general rule of individualism. On occasion they would come across individuals who define their freedom in relation to the greater society. Those individuals recognize the interconnectedness of all and feel a responsibility to pay their debt to society.

An international comparison

The exceptions noted in *Habits of the Heart* (1985) are the rule in many Asian countries. Numerous studies which focus on the difference between the well-being in western versus Asian nations offer insight into the individualism/collectivism dichotomy. In their comparisons between Asian nations and western nations Lu (1997), Sanchez-Burks et al. (2003), and Radcliff (2001) all found that the individualistic nature of

western nations resulted in higher reports of subjective well-being than in Asian nations. Sanchez-Burks et al. believe that the individualistic nature of western nations leads to higher levels of well-being because residents of western nations feel that it is acceptable to take care of their needs and plan around creating life experiences that will continue to satisfy their needs. In “collectivist nations, interdependent self-concepts, and extrinsic values are more focused on others...[which] may lead people to attend less to their psychological needs...” (p. 21). Sanchez-Burkes et al. warn however, that one should not conclude from his research that individualistic nations are better off than collectivist nations. Collectivist nations are known for their harmony and social stability, whereas, individualistic nations have higher rates of suicide, divorce, and worse environmental degradation. In addition, the differences in reported well-being between Asian and western nations might not be as large as it appears because people in the United States may “inflate their happiness level because it is socially desirable to be happy” (Smith 1979). Another study demonstrates that some portions of the population are better off in Asian nations than in western nations. In Lu’s 1995 study of 600 Taiwanese adults, he found that older respondents were more satisfied and happier than younger respondents. That finding has not been replicated in studies of western nations. Lu concludes that the age-related difference in SWB (subjective well-being) may have been cultural. In Lu’s words: “Traditional Chinese society is based on a clearly defined hierarchy; seniority commanding almost unconditional respect and obedience, represents power, wealth, and achievement” (p. 13).

Governmental organization

While differences in Asian versus western nations are apparently cultural, some literature suggests that a nation's government can directly affect well-being. A study of fifteen industrialized nations (Radcliff, 2001) found that "Decommodification and Left dominance" accounts for higher social satisfaction. Radcliff postulates that the well-being of a nation is tied to the market in capitalist nations and "To the extent that a society insulates people from market dependence, it insulates them from the stress and anxiety of the market" (p. 25). Radcliff's findings align with the findings noted earlier which indicate more equal wealth distribution result in higher levels of subjective well-being (Morawetz, 1977). Others see the connection between government policy and well-being as well. Arthur Schlesinger (1964) studied the phrase "the pursuit of happiness," as written in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence, to determine what the authors really meant by those words. He concludes the authors of the Declaration of Independence felt it was the government's responsibility to uphold that right, but their ardent feelings were lost in a "more concise rendering." Mehl (1978), writing later on topic of well-being, argues it is a moral responsibility on the part of governments around the world to provide an environment where individuals can experience a state of well-being.

Well-Being in Cohousing

Since cohousing's arrival in the United States in the 1980s, there have been three major works written specifically about the subject: *Cohousing: A Contemporary*

Approach to Housing Ourselves (McCamant and Durrett 1988), *The Cohousing Handbook* (Scotthanson and Scotthanson 2005), and *Sustainable Community: Learning from the Cohousing Model* (Meltzer 2005). Because so little has been written on cohousing, the authors of all three works were aware of each other, and intentionally chose to cover separate aspects of cohousing: introducing cohousing as an idea, the practicalities of building a cohousing project, and the environmental consequences of cohousing. Although there are differences in the material which the authors cover, a careful reading of the three works reveals similarities in theme.

Cohousing emerges in the United States

The first book published in the United States on cohousing, and referred to by cohousers as “the cohousing bible,” is *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves* (McCamant and Durrett 1988). In the second edition of their book, McCamant and Durrett (1994) introduce cohousing as a necessary next step in housing evolution. They explain that:

. . . the modern single-family detached home, which makes up 67 percent of the American housing stock, was designed for a nuclear family consisting of a breadwinning father, a homemaking mother, and two to four children. Today, less than one-quarter of the United States lives in such households. Rather, the family with two working parents dominates, while the single-parent household is the fastest-growing family type (P. 12).

They assert that cohousing is a practical solution for the changing family structure and an emotional salve for the isolation characteristic of nuclear family homes.

After introducing cohousing and describing its characteristics, McCamant and Durrett go on to give case studies of both Danish and American cohousing communities.

In the case studies, McCamant and Durrett give general statistics about the number of residences, the size of the common house, and the architects as well as a biography of each community.

The Cohousing Handbook: a different approach

Sixteen years after the first edition of McCamant and Durrett's book, *The Cohousing Handbook: Building a Place for Community* by Chris and Kelly Scotthanson (2005) is published, which differs greatly from "the cohousing bible." Unlike McCamant and Durrett's work, *The Cohousing Handbook* is more a how-to book on building a cohousing community. It is less informative about the experiences of cohousers themselves and does not include biographies of existing communities. Instead, it includes chapters entitled: *the development process, working with professionals, buying land, and legal issues*.

Another way *The Cohousing Handbook* differs from McCamant and Durrett's book is in the significant amount of time it devotes to group process. This handbook gives descriptions of how to create a group vision, how different types of personalities fit within groups (suggesting taking Myers-Briggs personality tests to help members better understand each other), how to manage/organize meetings, and how to deal with consensus.

Again, *The Cohousing Handbook* differs greatly from McCamant and Durrett's book because it sets out to do something different from McCamant and Durrett's work and because cohousing existed for many years prior to its publication. The Scotthansons realize McCamant and Durrett already cover community biographies, so the Scotthansons

choose to cover more practical and legal issues not addressed by McCamant and Durrett thereby filling a void in cohousing literature with their publication. In addition, because so much time passes since the publication of McCamant and Durrett's book as well as the initiation of cohousing in America, they believe they have new and important information to contribute. Sixteen years after the publication of McCamant and Durrett's text, information is available about the practicalities of making cohousing communities come to fruition.

Cohousing and sustainability

Originally published as a doctoral thesis on the web and later published as a book, *Sustainable Community: Learning from the Cohousing Model* by Graham Meltzer (2005) focuses on "the ecological interconnectivity of the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability" (p. 15). Meltzer explains living in cohousing and its effect on consumption patterns. He considers, for example, the relationship between cohousing and recycling, buying in bulk, and carpooling.

The book begins with the same format as McCamant and Durrett's with case studies of cohousing communities in North America, mainly on the west coast, then a look at a cohousing community in Japan, and lastly the stories of two cohousing communities in Australia. Meltzer explains in the preface that he chooses the communities in the United States for their uniqueness and for the fact that they are not covered by McCamant and Durrett. Given the emphasis of the book, the biographies of the communities focus heavily on the environmental steps taken by the communities with less attention to community and well-being.

Central Cohousing Text Insights on Community and Well-Being

The three cohousing texts above discuss both positive and negative effects cohousing has on well-being. On the negative side, getting a cohousing project off the ground is arduous, securing group participation and consensus is difficult, and adjusting to cohousing as a form of life is challenging. On the positive side, cohousing communities provide social support, a sense of community, and the provision of a safe and nurturing environment for children.

The above outcomes are in no way conclusive. For example, it is possible that the frustrations and set-backs of construction and finances could potentially form strong bonds between residents, thereby, increasing the well-being of the community as a whole. Likewise, the multiplicity of playmates and role models available for children in cohousing developments could potentially cause empty nest syndrome to develop for some parents. Regardless of their negative or positive effects on well-being, each of the themes has the potential to affect the individuals and groups who choose to live in cohousing and, therefore, should be explored further.

Difficulties

The arduousness of getting a cohousing project off the ground, the difficulty of group participation and consensus, and adjusting to cohousing as a form of life can each potentially have negative effects on well-being. In the sections below, biographies in McCamant and Durrett's and Meltzer's texts, and the writings of the Scotthansons, are analyzed to explore those themes.

Getting it built. In the accounts of cohousing communities in Denmark and the United States, McCamant and Durrett repeatedly reveal stories of financial setbacks. Almost without exception the founders of cohousing developments encounter unforeseen construction costs and are forced to change plans to reduce costs or raise significant funds to continue with the project. At the same time, accounts reveal that working with the local government is often tiresome. This occurs more so in the United States where cohousing is less established than in Denmark, though on both accounts, tales of stolid city officials are reported. Lastly, group cohesion is not always possible to maintain. For this reason it is reported that several projects stagnate or die while other groups divide in two. The accumulation of these problems create delays in construction up to ten years and on average from three to five. The aggregated stress of all these trials have the potential of significantly affecting the well-being of those involved.

The Scotthansons' text also recognizes the difficulty of getting a project built though they focus primarily on "do-it-yourselfers." They argue do-it-yourselfers will delay and or kill a cohousing project in their attempts to be parsimonious. Additionally, not having the knowledge base of experts, do-it-yourselfers have been known to make errors in judgment and thereby cause hostility toward themselves. That hostility has the potential to stagnate and/or cause ill will within the group. To avoid that pitfall, the Scotthansons suggest that it is wise to employ experts to get the project off the ground and to prevent headaches later on.

Meltzer's work reinforces the Scotthansons findings. Of the eight communities studied in North America, the most successful were built by professionals, not by

members. The best illustration of this is the biography of WindSong Cohousing in Langley, British Columbia, whose glowing history is unmatched in Meltzer's investigation. The group employs professionals in the beginning to help the group determine site and development options. Meltzer explains that "group members, consultants, and contractor together navigated a treacherous development course" (p. 30).

Participation and consensus. Once communities are established established, the accounts given by McCamant and Durrett reveal problems with participation and consensus. Poor participation rates are sometimes mentioned in stories; they are also made apparent by the juxtaposition of the description of some communities as having nearly full participation at dinner while participation rates are not mentioned in other accounts. Problems with consensus are similarly evident in McCamant and Durrett's accounts. Often during the development stage, the inability of residents to agree upon a few standardized floor plans leads to increased costs for the development as a whole. Consensus can also be seen as problematic in accounts of meetings. Some developments adopt voting instead of consensus methods or are forced to have several additional meetings to deal with more difficult problems. Finances are often cited as one of the more prickly subjects. The frustration associated with carrying the workload of inactive members or trying to come to resolution over issues affecting the community can potentially both fatigue individual's and groups' mental states.

Written with the perspective of several years of cohousing behind them, the Scotthansons emphasize group communication and visioning much more than do the

writings of McCamant and Durrett. The Scotthansons dedicate an entire chapter to establishing open and productive lines of communication early on, so that they are available during difficult times. They maintain that if those lines remain intact throughout and post construction, it is likely that the group will have less frustration with one another.

Windsong, the paragon community in Meltzer's text (2005), can again be seen as exemplary in the use of communication. Meltzer notes that "A...distinguishing characteristic of WindSong Cohousing Community is the concentrated effort applied to effective communication. Open communication is deemed essential for improving and deepening social relationships" (p. 34). The combination of the use of professionals and open communication help explain why Windsong was the seen as the most successful cohousing community in Meltzer's review of North American cohousing.

Feeling at home. Since cohousing offers a unique form of living, adjusting to cohousing as a lifestyle can be both a positive and negative experience. For example a resident of Muir Commons in Davis, California reports that etiquette had to be established (McCamant and Durrett 1988). Residents who are used to more privacy have to learn the norms of cohousing, which, designed to increase social interaction, encroaches on privacy. This transition has the potential of being seamless and enjoyable or of being awkward and upsetting. For some the loss of the intimacy of the nuclear family is upsetting, while others find it liberating.

Meltzer (2005) acknowledges the adjustment process to cohousing and proposes a theory of evolution in cohousing communities to explain it. In the conclusion of the case

study of Swan's Market Cohousing development in Oakland, California, Meltzer notes that apathy in a new community is quite common:

A level of distraction from the essential cohousing social aspirations of the community is not unique to Swan's or urban projects, generally. Indeed, because cohousing is a mainstream phenomenon, it is common to almost all cohousing groups. And the perception of a general lack of commitment is prevalent in most new projects. There is inevitably an initial period (typically between two to four years) of settling-in, recovery from an exhausting development phase, getting to know one's new neighbours, fine-tuning management systems and developing cultural and social pursuits. (P. 83)

Thus, according to Meltzer, over time communities establish equilibrium. For this reason, initial speculation about the well-being of residents may need to be taken with a grain of salt.

Spreitzer (1992), the author of a master's thesis on two cohousing communities in Davis, provides further support for the evolution theory (Meltzer 2005). Spreitzer proposes that cohousing groups go through what she calls "growing pains." She says that "Similar to an adolescent struggling to be an adult, many cohousers dream of the day when they don't have to agonize over every decision or analyze every alternative" (28). Spreitzer explains that although meetings will continue to be important to Muir Commons and N Street (the two Davis communities she studied), to keep abreast of issues as they arise, meetings will be fewer and less intense as the communities stabilize.

Blessings

Accounts found in McCamant and Durrett's (1998), the Scotthansons' (2005), and Meltzer's (2005) works reveal that cohousing has the potential to increase well-being by

fostering social support, creating a sense of community that contributes to a high quality of life, and providing a safe and nurturing environment for children.

Social support. Niels Revsgaard, a sociologist and resident of Drejerbanken in Denmark, reveals in his interview with McCamant and Durrett (2005) that having so many people around to support you is a great benefit. As an example, Revsgaard shares how divorce for a woman with children may seem less threatening to her as a resident of cohousing, who has a support system to help her deal with the grief and childrearing. A woman in a nuclear family may fear leaving a relationship because the support network is not there. Similarly, a woman living at the N Street cohousing community in Davis explains that she feels less needy as a single woman because of the social support she receives from friends in the community. This security residents speak about may have lingering positive effects on their well-being.

Although Meltzer (2005) focuses chiefly on the effects of social support on environmental lifestyles in his book, he notes that “social support can be critically important in times of tragedy” (p. 142). Examples of social support are: removing a mother from the cooking roster after the birth of a baby, providing emotional and monetary support for those who find themselves unemployed, being there for a resident who is ill, or helping a person through a divorce. Other forms of support are mentioned during less life-shifting times, for example, helping with gardening, moving heavy objects, house sitting, or most commonly, childcare. Though intended to draw the connection between cohousing and environmental action, Meltzer’s data are particularly valuable because they show a relationship between cohousing and well-being.

Community. Creating community is the intent of cohousing. McCamant and Durrett are cohousing consultants who publicize their beliefs that cohousing develops community and many they spoke with agreed. In conversations with residents a repeated theme was feeling a sense of belonging in the cohousing communities which did not exist in prior living experiences. Thomas, a resident of Sun and Wind in Demark, reported that his job caused him to travel a great deal and as a result, he lost touch with many people over the years. He is quoted as saying “Finally, when I decided to settle down, I realized that I didn’t have a place to return to that felt like home” (p. 63). McCamant and Durrett report that Sun and Wind provided the sense of home he longed for. For those whom cohousing makes feel at home, a measurable contribution to well-being is achieved.

Torres-Antonini’s (2001), the author of a doctoral thesis entitled *Our Common House: Using Built Environment to Develop Supportive Communities*, reveals the ability of cohousing developments to create community. Her dissertation, a case study of Lake Claire Cohousing, focuses on the structural aspects of cohousing and how they relate to social interaction and community building. Because Torres-Antonini’s thesis is so heavily focused on structural aspects of cohousing, it has less relevance to this paper than other sources. However, Torres-Antonini does confirm the long held assumption of cohousing literature that the design helps facilitate community (McCamant and Durrett 1996; Scotthanson and Scotthanson 2005; Meltzer 2001).

Child rearing and family support. The role of children in cohousing is a prominent theme in McCamant and Durrett’s book. Stories mention the practicality of large amounts of common space which children would not otherwise be able to enjoy had

their parents chosen to live in a single-family detached residence. In cohousing communities, the absence of fences means the space children have to play is multiplied by the amount of houses in a development. The existence of multiple role models of various ages to look to as children mature is also mentioned as beneficial. Children are able to model themselves after older teens, and teens, in the same way, are given the opportunity to model as adults for younger children. Similar symbiotic relationships are possible between elderly and adult residents and children. Additionally, parents mentioned feeling a sense of freedom because babysitters are so readily available. Since many know each well and live as neighbors, finding a babysitter is quite easy in some cohousing developments. Finally, for children the abundance of playmates their own age is reported to be a thing of great value.

A Further Look at Meltzer's Work

Some of the work of Graham Meltzer (2005), which was first conducted for a doctoral thesis, and later released as a general publication, provides unique insight into cohousing which is not replicated in the works of McCamant and Durrett (1998) and the Scotthansons (2005) and could, therefore, not be included in the above categories. Meltzer contributes to the understanding of well-being in cohousing by establishing a connection with living in cohousing and behavioral change, noting the effect of a diverse socio-economic and physically disabled population on community stability, and postulating that living in cohousing can potentially reduce individualism and materialism. For those reasons, his unique contributions are addressed separately below.

Cohousing and behavioral change

While the first half of Meltzer's book concerns biographical information about the communities he visited in North America, the second half of Meltzer's book focuses on quantitative data that he collects through surveys. He uses the data, along with literature and his personal experiences, to establish the connection between cohousing and increased environmentally conscious behavior. Meltzer concludes that in cohousing:

- *Circumstance* facilitates human *interaction* which builds meaningful social *relationships*;
- Supportive *relationships* in a community context imbue a sense of *belonging* to that community;
- *Belonging* (to geographical community and therefore, 'place') induces confident *engagement*;
- And *engagement* with *circumstance* is the very basis of effective *environmental praxis*. (P. 156)

Meltzer begins with the premise that cohousing establishes community because the design of cohousing developments facilitate social interaction. Once people are interacting, community is established in which people discuss problems. Those discussions create a sense of solidarity and belonging among the residents. Because of the demographics of cohousers, usually left leaning and environmentally concerned (see Meltzer 2005), the discussions move toward environmental consciousness and action. The combination of feeling a sense of belonging to a community, and the environmentally conscious dialogue characteristic of cohousing communities, creates

change in individuals who reside there. Green advocates of the community exert influence through education about environmentally friendly practices which socializes less eco-conscious members of the group. In the end, Meltzer found that people change their behavior and become more environmentally conscious in their actions after living in cohousing.

Significantly, for change to occur in cohousing residents environmental behaviors, relationships must be established which are characterized by Meltzer as including close sharing and social support. Those relationships are key to Meltzer's theory of changing environmental actions. Without close relationships, influence is far less likely to be accepted. It is through the investment in relationships that expectations of environmentally conscious behavior emerge.

The diversity challenge

One other noteworthy theme in the work of Meltzer is the problem of diversity. This problem is demonstrated in the case study of an atypical community called Quayside Village in Vancouver, Canada. Unlike most cohousing developments which are highly homogenous (see McCamant and Durrett 1998; Scotthanson and Scotthanson 2005; Meltzer 2005), Quayside Village makes it part of their mission statement to incorporate diversity of income, ethnicity, and physical abilities. They include wheelchair ramps, low income housing options, and actively recruit people of varied ethnicities and religions. Meltzer notes in his study of the community that diversity is perhaps their biggest challenge. Two mentally disabled members, children of current residents, have caused tension between members who felt that the parents' advocating for their children

has hampered consensus. This one study is, of course, not generalizable, but it hints at an area that should be further researched.

Individualism and materialism

Through his ten years of research on cohousing, Meltzer concluded that, “Material consumption reduces in importance as social relations and environmental quality become more valuable” (156). He asserts that individualism and materialism, attitudes which are ubiquitous in Australia and North America, are diminished by living in cohousing. That occurs because “In cohousing, through deepening one’s connection with others, such aspirations are dismantled and reassembled into a more altruistic, outwardly-focused caring for the well-being of others. The focus of caring shifts from self (and family) toward unrelated others...and from material to social need” (148-149). This significant finding is mentioned almost as an aside and certainly deserves further attention and exploration.

Conclusion

The literature reveals that well-being is a state requisite to several specific factors. Some quantitative research finds that well-being is promoted by financial stability, moderate expectations, a socially supportive environment, and socially democratic governments. However, other quantitative research uncovers contradictions. Conditions that promote well-being for one individual are sometimes found to antagonize others. Oswald (1997) demonstrates that while one group benefits from an economic boom, others are affected negatively. And while some groups benefit from neighborhood

stability (Adams 1992), others require large amounts of turnover to maintain the vivacity of their locality (Ross, Reynolds, and Geis 2000).

Likewise, data on the effect of individualism on well-being are ambiguous. While the writings of Ferdinand Toennies and Robert Bellah are severe in their criticisms of individualism, viewing it as the cause of anti-social behaviors, apathy, and fear of commitment, Emile Durkheim and some contemporary sociological writers (Smith 1979; Lu 1997; Sanchez-Burks et al. 2003) have a more clinical view of individualism, arguing that intense community obligations are just as insidious in their effects on a person as living a life of isolation.

Qualitative literature is equally uncertain in its estimation of the effects of living in cohousing on well-being. While some aspects of the cohousing environment appear to be detrimental to the well-being of residents, the process of getting a project built, maintaining group consensus, and adjusting to the culture of cohousing all can cause stress for residents. Other aspects of cohousing seem to mitigate those added stresses: the social support of neighbors, the feeling of belonging that accompanies being part of a cohousing community, the creation of a safe environment for children, and the abundance of caregivers.

With the understanding that conditions which effect well-being can be highly circumstantial, and in some cases even individual, the following chapters attempt to illuminate variables which have the potential to affect the well-being of residents of cohousing, either positively or negatively.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This study is based on participant observation and one-on-one interviews with residents of Emerald Hills cohousing development. Below I will discuss the setting in which the research was conducted, the process of gaining entrée, navigating my dual role of researcher and participant, how interviews were conducted, my use of ethical research practices, how well-being was measured, and how data were analyzed.

The Setting

The setting for this research is a cohousing development in a small college town. The total population of the cohousing development at the time of the research was 28 residents. The cohousing development is located in a town with a population of approximately 16,000 permanent residents and a student population of approximately 7,000.

Cohousing literature suggest that the ideal size of a cohousing development is from twelve to thirty-six homes (Scotthanson and Scotthanson 2005; McCamant and Durrett 1994). Emerald Hills is at the low end of the scale at thirteen houses. However, four residents converted their garage space into studio or one bedroom apartments, which increases the amount of households, though not the number of homes.

Getting In

I initially found participants for this study through Emerald Hill's web site. On the web site, contact information was listed for residents of Emerald Hills who designed the web page. After interviewing the first person, I discovered getting into the community was going to be more difficult than I had anticipated. Prior to starting the investigation, I assumed that entry would be seamless, even though I had read about difficulties in obtaining access in methodological literature (Lofland and Lofland 1984; Berg 2001).

Some describe the process of "getting in" as an often frustrating one, a roadblock that some researchers never overcome. Lofland and Lofland (1984) explain that if an outsider wishes to gain entrance into a community, it is best if they possess four intangible things: connections (with those you wish to study), accounts ("a carefully thought-out account or explanation of proposed research"), knowledge (of the population which you propose to research), and, lastly, courtesy. I possessed all save one of those requirements: connections.

Cohousing groups are made up of professionals--as one resident explains in her interview: "Cohousing communities tend to be made up of highly educated, affluent, left thinking, and rarely religious centered individuals." Professionals are busy people and as such don't bother with the inconsequential. Without a sanction from someone they knew, residents of Emerald Hills viewed my initial emails and phone calls as suspect and did not bother to respond to them.

Fortunately, after about six weeks of perseverance, I was introduced to Alberta, a resident of Emerald Hills, who opened the gates of the community to me.

Alberta endorsed my presence in the community. Out of respect for her, I did not abuse that courtesy. An early journal expresses my thoughts on the matter:

I have gone out of my way during this investigation not to burden Alberta. I give her space because she went out of her way to get me into the community, and I do not want to trouble her further. I don't want her to regret her choice to invite me into her community. I want her to feel like she made a good decision, and she doesn't have to baby-sit me there because she is at her home, and she should be able to relax.

My sensitivity towards Alberta's privacy allowed me to get to know other members of the community to whom I hadn't been introduced. Giving Alberta space meant that I had to go against my generally shy nature and take the first steps to introduce myself to others. That took courage and caused some minor anxiety during the first few encounters.

Participant Observation: Membership Roles

The participatory observation for this paper occurred from the month of August 2005 through the month of May 2006. Participatory observation took the form of eating and or cooking meals twice a week, on average, at Emerald Hills; it also included the attendance of one financial meeting. After my research was complete, I continued to cook dinner once or twice a month at Emerald Hills for the months of June through August of 2006.

Once introductions were made, a deeper problem arose; for many weeks I failed to have more than superficial interactions with residents. That was not only problematic for research, but also affected me personally. Excerpts from journals demonstrate my initial feelings: “I want to talk about my feelings about the community thus far. I feel awkward and nervous. I don’t feel like I am part of the community just yet.” And then later, “Somehow I am just not feeling a connection with these people. It feels strained. I don’t know if it’s the community or if it’s me.”

As time went on, I identified two reasons for my feelings of dissonance. The first cause of my discomfort related to my role as a researcher:

It’s tough to be there listening--knowing that I am not going to remember everything, but wanting to. Feeling that I need to categorize things and put them in a place in my head where I’ll remember them, yet that makes it difficult for me to concentrate on what is being said. It makes it difficult for me to be a good listener sometimes. I am focusing on what they are saying and not focusing on where I can participate in the conversation as much.

My nervousness about collecting data made me act unnatural. If it were any other situation, I would have been contributing to the conversation. To correct this pattern, I made a conscious decision to turn off my researcher lens for the evening and participate fully in discussions. In a short time results were recorded in my journal “I kind of relaxed and ate dinner. I had a glass of wine. I wasn’t really thinking of my research.”

The other explanation for my discomfort had to do with defining my role in the community and feeling needed. As part of the Emerald Hills dinner process, I was

required to cook on average twice a month and the remainder of the meals were labor free. My journal documents a trend on the evenings that I prepared dinner: feelings of discomfort were absent.

“We got cooking together. I did a lot of chopping. I noticed during this dinner that I have become more confident with my cooking skills. I’m feeling more comfortable.”

“Tonight was a good night. I felt super comfortable. It wasn’t awkward. Everything flowed smoothly. The food was good. The cooking was good.”

On the evenings that I prepared meals, the residents were truly appreciative. Their appreciation made me feel needed and I was, consequently, more at ease.

Beyond wanting to feel needed, ethically it was important for me to be contributing to the community, who had allowed me to come in and research them. Before I had officially begun my research, I spoke with a relative of one of the residents of Emerald Hills, Maria. I shared with her my intentions of learning about cohousing and using it as a research topic. She was wary of that prospect. She argued that if I wanted to do research at Emerald Hills, I should find a way to contribute to the community. It was unclear if she had had bad experiences with researchers herself or if she were simply protective of Emerald Hills. Regardless, her hesitation about my presence as a researcher hit home because I was at the same time reading a book entitled *Liberation Sociology* (2001) by Feagin and Vera, who adamantly assert that sociology came about as a philanthropic science and that it has lost its way in the halls of academia. They postulate that elite sociologists have reinterpreted the work of its founders through a lens that

excludes moral and ethical issues. From their persuasive perspective, purse strings have taken the morality away from sociological research and left it with the soulless pursuit of data. It was my goal to be sensitive to Maria's concerns as well as Joe Feagin and Hernan Vera's. By bartering my cooking skills for the data I collected, I felt more at peace with my role.

Other readings equally affected me. Stringer (2004), in his book on action research, advocates for total honesty between the researcher and the researched. He suggests that those being researched should play a role in the direction the research takes. Stringer argues that rather than going with the traditional researcher/researched dynamic, it is better to include those being researched in your investigation because they are the experts. Keeping those you wish to learn from at a distance robs the research of light participants can undoubtedly shed on it. To that end, I strove for full disclosure during my participant observation and during interviews and I encouraged participation of community members in formulation of research questions and as fact checkers of my hypotheses.

Interview Methods

Interviews lasted on average one-hour each. Interview questions were open-ended and respondents were encouraged to speak for as long or as little about each question as they felt inclined. Interviewees were rarely redirected from tangents, as tangents often revealed great insights. The majority of the taped interviews took place in the home of the interviewees, with one taking place in a coffee shop and one conducted at

the common house. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed at a later date (using pseudonyms to obscure references to people and places). Additionally, I conducted several informal interviews while cooking meals or eating dinner at Emerald Hills. Those interviews were not recorded but the same, or similar questions, from the one-on-one interviews were asked and salient responses were written down at a later point.

During interviews, my role as a researcher was made explicit, and I strove to disclose my feelings as well to foster a more equitable exchange; however, I was sure to share my personal feelings after respondents had given theirs, so as to not “lead the witnesses.” For example, in an interview with Stephanie, a partner guest, she explained, a little insecurely, that she felt she was able to enjoy the benefits of the community without doing any work. At that time I shared with her my observations of her as a contributor to the community, which stood in direct opposition to her perception. I explained that her commitment to the community was documented by others I had spoken with and was apparent in the actions I had witnessed during my tenure at Emerald Hills. Similarly, in an interview with Ayden, a member who had not lived there as long as some of the other residents, he shared with me the discomfort he first experienced while attending dinners. It was easy for me to empathize with him as my experiences mirrored his, and I shared with him the similarities in our experiences. Through my admissions to those I spoke with, I hoped to breach some of the barriers traditionally associated with sociological research.

Full disclosure is a fine line to walk. On at least one occasion I think it would have been wiser for me to keep my mouth shut. During my one-on-one interview with Earnest, who was sharing his feelings about the community, I also shared with him some information from an interview I had conducted earlier. Earnest explained that he once thought living in cohousing was possibly a hindrance to finding mates because it is a nontraditional lifestyle that could potentially scare women away. I explained that I had spoken with a woman, who told me that living in cohousing had made dating a more enjoyable experience because having the network of friends from her cohousing community made her feel less needy in her pursuit of mates. Earnest then concluded that he felt much the same way. Though I think he may have eventually shared with me that very revelation, the fact that I introduced the idea before he voiced it made his conclusion less concrete.

Ethics: Confidentiality

Ethical research practices were sought out at all phases of the research process. Before beginning research, I submitted an application for approval from the Human Subjects Internal Review Board at Humboldt State University (IRB approval #04-80). Throughout the research process my presence as a researcher was continually made explicit (which I will discuss more fully later). In addition, I made known the methods of data collection and analysis and what the information would be used for in the future. To ensure that only the content of the stories were maintained, and not personal information, all references to real names were assigned pseudonyms in the transcription of the tape-

recorded interviews. Also, while writing, I avoided even using pseudonyms when referencing commentary made by residents that could potentially instigate conflict; I recognized that in a careful reading of this paper residents might decipher my pseudonyms. Consequently, I avoided *any* reference to interviewees in the chapter on finances.

To further protect confidentiality, tape recorded interviews were destroyed thirty days from transcription, and records that could potentially link participants with data were kept in a secure location. Finally, a consent form was provided to all participants with contact information, for me, my faculty advisor, and the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, so participants had recourse if they had any concerns they wanted addressed.

To demonstrate how my role as a researcher was made explicit, here are a few examples. During one of my first dinners at Emerald Hills, I was asked directly by two residents: “What are you doing here?” In response, I explained that I was a researcher and that I was doing participant observation. They then asked me what I hoped to learn from my research: I responded that I hoped to see if there was a relationship between social interaction and well-being. During another dinner, Earnest, a gentleman who showed significant interest in my exploration, asked how I was documenting my observations. He asked if I simply made mental notes of everything being said and then jotted them down later. I told him that it was not possible for me to remember everything being said but that I tried to remember general trends at the dinners, which I later dictated to a tape recorder and typed at a more convenient time. As my research continued, the

occasional guest would arrive and would often mistake me for a resident of Emerald Hills. When this occurred, I would correct them and explained my role. During one of those clarifications, a resident, who had overheard my explanation commented, “Yeah, we’re his subjects!” and began acting like a monkey- pretending to eat insects off of her partner. My presence was so evident that it was the residents themselves, after some time there, who suggested that I wasn’t getting a complete view of cohousing by simply attending dinners and encouraged me to attend financial meetings (held monthly). Even though I prided myself on being open about my presence as a researcher, I learned in interviews that residents frequently forgot my intentions. Residents explained that they understood logically that I was a researcher, yet they rarely reflected on my investigative role in our interactions and viewed me primarily as a member of the community.

Participation by respondents in the research process

My interview guide had as its concluding questions: “*Now that you have an idea of what I am doing with my research, are there any questions you would ask that I have not?*” And, “*If you were conducting this research, what questions would you ask?*” Interviewees shared with me their answers and those answers were integrated into my interview guide; in that way, the investigation was continuously evolving. In addition, because my presence as a researcher was often discussed during meals, residents were able to informally give their opinions about the direction my research should be headed. Earnest, whom I mentioned earlier, offered to proofread and fact-check my thesis as it progressed.

Measuring Well-Being

Most studies rely on self-reported data in measuring well-being. Of the almost thirty well-being studies I reviewed, only one measured observable, or objective, well-being (Morgan 1934). Many studies try to determine the effect of marital status, income, education, and other self-reported measures on well-being (Adams 1997; Kacapyr 1997; Deiner and Biswas 2001; Clark and Oswald 2002; Wise and Stake 2002; Hall and Duvall 2003). Studies were almost exclusively quantitative and the majority measured well-being by asking the *Quality of Life Question*. The basic question is similar or identical to this one: “Taking all things together, how would you say things are these days--would you say that you’re happy, pretty happy, or not too happy these days?” (Smith 1979).

Objective measures of well-being are problematic. Arthur Morgan (1943) and his assistants watched an eight-month-old baby, twenty-four hours a day, for seven consecutive days. Happiness was charted based on “objective” indicators, such as the baby smiling or laughing. Yet, over seventy percent of the time, the baby was in a state of neutrality. The researchers defined the time the baby spent intently playing as a neutral state, whereas, it could have easily been called a state of well-being or at times, frustration.

Oswald (1997) also measured well-being through observable phenomena. He studied suicide rates across countries as an indicator of well-being. The problem with his hypothesis (that countries with higher rates of suicide would have lower rates of well-

being) was that suicide rates may be a better indicator of mental health, a biological condition, than well-being, an emotional state.

For this research, I did use observation to measure well-being, but my measure was far less subjective than previous research because it was used solely as a fact-check against information given in one-on-one interviews. It also differed from previous research in its duration: over a year, compared with snap shots of respondents' lives in previous research.

The reason so many studies are concerned with qualitative rather than quantitative data is probably a result of a larger trend in the social sciences to appear more scientific and because quantitative studies are easier to fund. In their book *Liberation Sociology (2001)*, Feagin and Vera demonstrate this point by stating that the instrumental-positivist movement has “reduced the richness of social life...to columns and punch cards” and that, “the great increase in social science grants created umbilical linkages to government agencies and private foundations” who are interested in hard data, not qualitative analysis. The government *is* interested in well-being. They fund national studies on an annual basis, and the data from those studies is, in turn, reanalyzed in much of the literature. In articles referenced in my bibliography, strong evidence can be found to support their claim.

Given that the majority of studies are based on subjective well-being, are those measures valid or reliable? The most common measure of well-being, the *Quality of Life Question*, has two major flaws according to Tom W. Smith (1979). The two flaws are a.) It does not capture all the variance in peoples feelings because only a few response

categories are offered and b.) It is an unbalanced question offering two positive responses and only one negative response.

Another criticism of the *Quality of Life Question* was offered by Stephen Shamanske (1977) in his article “Life-Cycle Happiness in a Discounted Utility Model.” In the article Shamanske states that “it is not clear whether the human subject’s self-reported happiness level corresponds to a backward looking assessment of satisfaction with one’s life, a current assessment of how happy one is at the moment, or a forward looking assessment of what may be expected from the future.”

An additional criticism of the studies using the *Quality of Life Questions* concerns the question ordering. Norman Bradburn (1989) formulated what he terms the “subtraction hypothesis.” In essence, he hypothesizes that when people are asked about their well-being after they are asked about the happiness of their marriage (which most report is happy), they will subtract their marriage and, consequently, give a deflated response of their overall happiness. Further analysis of this subtraction hypothesis, however, has not confirmed its validity (Tourangeau, 1991).

Yet another factor that affects the responses to questions about subjective well-being is the *forced comparison theory* (Fujita and Diener, 1997), which claims that people determine their well-being by comparing themselves with people closest to them. A study by David Morawetz (1977) and a study by Harsha Mookerjee (1997) show some evidence that respondent’s take the quality of life of those around them into account when evaluating their own well-being.

Others purport that a *coping approach* (Fujita and Diener, 1997), which states that people are more flexible in choosing whom to compare themselves with, provides a better explanation for how people assess their subjective well-being. They argue that “Imposed social comparisons are unlikely to have long-term effects except possibly in the situation where a total environment imposes a standard that is adopted by virtually everyone” (p. 13).

Because of the numerous disagreements about quantitative measures of well-being, I chose to proceed with research using qualitative measures. I used open-ended questions which allowed residents to contextualize their responses. My reasoning was affirmed by Bruce Berg in his book on qualitative methods where he succinctly states: “Clearly, certain experiences cannot be meaningfully expressed by numbers” (Berg, 2001:3). By allowing respondents to elaborate on their perceived well-being in context with other answers given and my own observations during this study, I was better able to understand their answers in relation to their personal biography. Unlike quantitative data, I was also able to clarify uncertainties or apparent contradictions by questioning respondents directly about those confusions when they arose. Therefore, interview questions were not subject to the problems of unbalanced response categories or question order. I chose to employ a qualitative methodology not only because data suggest it is the more accurate way to measure well-being but also to combat the aforementioned deficit of qualitative literature on well-being.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using Nvivo software. Themes were identified in the transcriptions of my tape recorded interviews and participant observations and organized in a way that I hope accurately represents the stories the participants shared with me. I used Lofland and Lofland's book for analyzing the ethnographic element of my research while I used Bruce Bergs book *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* to organize my writing (2001). Berg's chapter entitled *Writing Research Papers: Sorting the Noodles from the Soup* was used for my organizational basis.

CHAPTER 4 COHOUSING CHALLENGES

This chapter presents a collection of issues, identified in interviews and field observations, which are seen by residents of Emerald Hills as obstacles to the well-being of the community. Much of this chapter is dedicated to the effect money has on the relationships of residents of Emerald Hills. Yet beyond money, other systems and markers of stratification are at play in Emerald Hills. Also addressed is the absence of mediation or consensus training, the lack of a unifying vision statement, the presence of individualism, and disagreement about expectations for relationships among community members. In closing, this chapter includes community responses to the above conflicts.

Perceptions of Money Shape Emerald Hills

Money is a large and somewhat volatile topic at Emerald Hills. In the words of one resident, “People have a lot of psychological things around money, and property, when they actually can afford property. And before I actually came [moved in] that is where the friction came from, from what I could piece together.” In this statement Leah explained that not only is money a current problem at Emerald Hills, but it had deep seated roots prior to her moving in. Analysis of interviews and conversations with residents reveal that divergent perceptions of money, such as how it should be spent and what privileges it should entail, have caused rifts among residents of Emerald Hills.

From the beginning

The history of Emerald Hills is an arduous one that is rife with financial problems. Although other reports of cohousing developments discuss financial crises during their development stage (McCamant and Durrett 1988; Scotthanson and Scotthanson 2005; Meltzer 2005), the story of Emerald Hills has, comparatively, an overrepresentation of financial setbacks.

In the several years from conception to construction, the founding members of Emerald Hills encountered severe financial impediments. The first problem concerned the preexisting common house, a former industrial site. To be environmentally conscious and to save a few dollars on construction, the founders of Emerald Hills chose to convert the old industrial site rather than tear it down. Unfortunately, after renovation of the common house began, major structural damage was discovered, which resulted in raising the cost of the building by \$40,000.

Some time later, another problem occurred with financing through a local bank. The bank, which had originally agreed to finance the project reported to the members that a loan of \$1,000,000 was too large and that it needed to go to a larger institution to help carry it. The secondary institution backed out causing the smaller institution to report that it could no longer honor its loan. As a result, each resident had to purchase the footprint of their homes, instead of all land and homes being owned in common. Homeowners also had to come up with almost \$50,000 in down-payments.

Later in the construction, it was discovered that an additional \$70,000 was needed per family to complete the project. This meant that the members had to find further loans, which were secured through friends and/or a bank.

To further complicate the situation, before construction began, toxic soil was discovered on the site, which was the group's largest setback. Since the location of the common house had been an industrial site, large amounts of toxic soil were also discovered. As the new owners of the land, the founders of Emerald Hills were required to resolve the problem before continuing construction. Working with the city, the previous owners of the land, environmental consultants, and lawyers, they managed to spend an additional \$100,000 before the dilemma was satisfactorily resolved. As a consequence of the long time it took to resolve the soil crisis, the construction loan and the building permit were about to expire. The group had to work with the bank manager to extend the loan and come up with an additional \$6,000 to retain the building permit.

Residual effects of financial crises

The combination of these financial crises created rifts among individuals and the community as a whole that remained visible, though much subdued, during my ethnography at Emerald Hills.

Haley, a resident, theorized that even after residents moved in, they were still so shaken by the numerous recent financial crises that they became insecure. Their insecurity caused them to become possessive and protective of their homes instead of being more communal.

In interviews and conversations with residents, I learned that much of the blame for the financial problems was placed on one founding member, Samantha, who was viewed as incompetent in her decision making. A few residents argued that the soil crisis was a result of her not having a soil test conducted prior to purchasing the property. While the opposing side maintained that a soil test had occurred and had come out clean; yet, somehow, toxins were later discovered.

The division over Samantha's competence in decision making was again demonstrated in controversy over the design of the homes. All were in agreement that the houses were unique and beautiful. However, some argued that the design of the houses had not been economical and felt the design should have been simpler in order to make the houses more affordable. Again, blame was placed on Samantha for this more expensive design choice--though the plans had been approved by the entire group. In the words of Leah, a resident who spoke for several of those living there, "The design choice was indicative of the cavalier attitude some residents had in regard to money."

Leah revealed in her statement that the division, which initially appeared to be in regard to incompetence, was really about how shared money was spent. Those who sided with the decisions made by Samantha were characterized by a less conservative attitude toward spending money; whereas, those who opposed Samantha's decisions were characterized by parsimony.

Class or something else?

How one is inclined to spend money appears to be a class issue; however, research has revealed (see Meltzer 2005), and my observations have confirmed, that

cohousingers are a pretty homogeneous group. The vast majority are left-leaning middleclass professionals.

Susan explained why this was so: “I think it’s a self-selecting thing. It’s such an eco-groovy sort of thing that you’re not going to end up with any Republicans here.” The ideals associated with cohousing, coupled with its cost, self-select, Susan explained, so that those who move in are left-leaning and financially stable enough to purchase their own home and a share in the common house.

Thus, coming from similar socio-economic backgrounds and being financially established, arguments over how money is spent result from factors beside class location. Those factors will be explored in the discussion section of this chapter.

Diversity dilemma

As stated above, the general format of cohousing developments self-selects members. However, because of the costly financial history of Emerald Hills, home ownership became even more selective than at the average cohousing development.

Originally, Emerald Hills intended to offer affordable housing, but with the aforementioned financial crises, the cost of homes rose significantly; as a result, fewer people could afford to live there. During several interviews, current residents discussed their initial hesitancy about purchasing a home at Emerald Hills because of the cost. In addition, partner guests, who attended meals but did not actually live in the community, frequently mentioned in interviews or discussions that they would live in the community were the cost of the homes less restrictive.

A further financial limitation was explained by Susan, a professional living in Emerald Hills with her husband. She informed me that as a result of the loan crisis with the bank, it was not possible to “wrap the common house mortgage into your home mortgage.” She went on to explain, “So that means you need someone with an extra \$20,000 or so to put into the common house, which further limits the number of people to whom you can sell.” That limitation was quite a barrier to first time home buyers, who often have not accrued capital.

Susan asserted, however, through refinancing of loans, perhaps the burden of the common house could be reduced. Exploring this thought, I asked Susan what changes would occur in the demographics if financial barriers or “peculiarities” as she put it, were done away with. She responded emotionally, but also as if she had spent some time thinking about the matter:

We would have younger people and poorer people. I think we would have more energy and flexibility that come with poorer people. That’s principally what we would have. Because the kind of people who are looking at buying houses in this community are in their fifties and sixties, which is great for having a lot of accumulated wisdom, but is really bad if you are doing things like power washing the outside of the common house or putting in pathways. So I think it would be a huge emotional windfall to us if we could deal with the financial thing.

Susan went on to say that at this time, age was not much of a problem; however, if the members of the development continued to age, without having younger residents move in, Emerald Hills would suffer from a lack of age diversity.

The common house as a contributing factor

The common house at Emerald Hills differs from others in cohousing developments in one key financial aspect. In an interview, Alberta tries to explain the fundamental difference between the common house at Emerald Hills and those in other cohousing developments. Alberta says that in addition to dealing with the regular financial obligations associated with a cohousing development--upkeep of common space and budgeting for the future--at Emerald Hills residents also have to deal with rental space. The common house at Emerald Hills, as mentioned earlier, was an already existing large structure. Because of its enormity, there was ample space for all the residents' desired requirements--a playroom, wood shop, kitchen, guest room, and large dining room--and more than enough space remaining for other uses. The founding residents chose to turn that excess space into commercial rental suites to help pay for some of the costs of the site and upkeep of the development. Alberta informed me that that rental space can be quite a burden, "We have to do repairs. We have to decide on rent, when we are going to raise the rent, and what's going on with the upkeep of the building. It's a big deal."

Management of the common house then, involves decisions over money. Those decisions have to be negotiated between groups of people whose perception of what is financially wise differs greatly. During a budget meeting which I was allowed to observe, those differences came to the fore. I watched a financial conservative argue that surplus money from rentals should be saved for repairs and upkeep, while others argued that excess dollars should be used to make improvements or be returned to owners.

Not all were involved in the argument, however. In fact, the majority of those in attendance were more interested in resolving financial decisions quickly and moving forward. Most simply wanted to go the path of least resistance and eagerly worked toward consensus.

The upside of the unique situation of the common house was that in time, rentals would pay for its cost. When the mortgage was paid, funds would revert to the community and for maintenance. Until that time, however, the financial responsibilities involved with the common house will continue to create tension at Emerald Hills.

Owner/Renter Stratification

The daily lives of renters and owners in Emerald Hills are distinguished by their financial, social, physical, aesthetic and other experiences living in community. Emerald Hills has a significant renter population. Most houses have their basement or garage space converted into apartments after construction, and one of the thirteen homes was also leased to a tenant by a distant owner. Over time, dynamics between renters and owners emerged that created a gap in their living experiences.

Financial experiences and social hierarchy

One woman I spoke with at Emerald Hills suggested that there were two tiers of experience: one for the owners and one for the renters. She explained the following:

There are the people that have put their whole life savings or whatever into the place and have to keep everything going and constantly pay out money because we have insurance for all this land and there are maintenance fees and there are all these things that go into it, plus the fees

over there [meaning the common house]. And as a renter... they have as many rights as we do, but there is no investment.

Thus, there was a feeling voiced by this resident, and shared by some other owners, that renters should not be entitled to the same rights as owners because they have not made a large financial investment or long term commitment to the community. They complained that although renters should not be entitled to the same rights, they were given them and could even veto important issues or make changes to the community, some of which were viewed as disruptive.

It is important to note that not all owners agreed with the two tiers attitude. One owner I spoke with, Susan, felt that renters were an essential part of the community who helped keep it vibrant. Susan resented the owner/renter distinction that some owners made. There were other owners who agreed with Susan's position, which created further contention. There was disagreement between the owners who wanted less involvement and rights in regard to renters and those owners who felt renter's rights should be equal to owner's rights.

From the perspective of renters, many reported feeling unwelcome in the community as a result of their renter status. The following quotes from two separate renters reveal this sentiment:

"I came in with the feeling like I'd like to be part of stuff, but then there was something initially where I felt distanced. So then I was like, maybe it's not something I want to be involved with."

“I haven’t been nearly as involved in Emerald Hills as I thought I would be when I first moved in. There were some weird vibes because I was just a renter when I moved in. Some people had a problem with that.”

These quotes revealed that renters were made aware of the “two tiers of experience” shortly after moving in, and it has caused them to be less active in the community than they would have wished.

Physical, aesthetic and other hierarchy markers

Interviews reveal the renter/owner distinction is further emphasized by the physical arrangement of the cohousing development, the difference in age between renters and owners, and renter/landlord relationships.

Ayden, a renter, pointed out to me in our interview: “One of the things about this place is the renters face the street side. The homeowners, I think their main entrance is actually that front walkway.” The arrangement Ayden was referring to is a result of changes that have happened to the houses over time. Initially, all the homes were single family detached residences, but in an attempt to fully utilize space and make a few dollars, most residents converted their garages into studio or one bedroom apartments. Because the garages, which soon became apartments, faced the street, whereas the front of the houses faced the wildlife sanctuary, a physical and aesthetic division evolved between where owners and renters entered their homes. This physical separation was viewed by Ayden as a reinforcement of the renter/owner distinction.

Another divisive element was age. Renters, generally, were significantly younger than owners. Because of this age distinction, one young renter explained that she was

more likely to associate with renters than owners. Therefore, age, coupled with physical separation, reinforced the renter/owner distinction at Emerald Hills.

Finally, some renters stated that because they resided in the same house as their landlords, because garages were converted into apartments, they made a conscious effort not to participate in the community. The explanation given for this was they were not interested in mixing business with pleasure. They wanted the relationship with their landlords to remain professional. To the extent that landlords always have power over their tenants, and in this case they live in close proximity, these relationships further solidified the stratification system between renters and owners in this community.

Dinner and Dollars

The significance of money and its effect on relationships pervaded even the most peaceful of experiences: common meals. During my tenure at Emerald Hills, I attended dozens of dinners which were, almost without exception, peaceful experiences. Dinners were marked by laughter, gentle banter, and kindred exchanges. At the end of a difficult day, residents put their troubles aside and came together to eat, a physical necessity that we all share. Those who made the food spent hours in its preparation and were eager to see the reactions of the feasting diners. For their part, the diners were thankful for a labor free meal and were anxious to enjoy their meals.

Because most meals were so pleasant, the few unpleasant experiences I recalled from those dinners were significant. An argument during a common meal could have been compared to a child's presence in a night club: curious and unsettling.

The only two arguments I witnessed resulted from tensions over financial decisions. While religion and politics were commonly discussed without event, the mention of financial decisions caused one resident to leave early on one occasion, and a later discussion caused two normally peaceable residents to emit hostile body language and to cease speaking.

The first argument was over a surplus in the dinner budget and how that money should be spent. One resident suggested that the excess money should be used to make improvements to the kitchen in the form of new pans, utensils, and the like. In frustration, another resident said that surpluses in the budget should be returned to home owners, who had been heavily taxed by costs associated with other aspects of the development. An argument ensued and a resident, who routinely stayed late and returned for seconds, left after only one serving without excusing himself or saying goodbye.

On another occasion, a discussion began about repairs at the development. Both residents were in agreement that repairs needed to be done, but one argued that they should be conducted by a resident while the other insisted that all work done on the development should be conducted by outside contractors. The woman arguing that the work should be done by a resident of Emerald Hills cited cheaper costs on labor and convenience, while the gentleman arguing that all work should be done independently stated that having residents do the work would cause disputes if the work were found faulty later. The argument escalated until both parties stopped speaking and an uncomfortable silence befell the table.

Barriers to Conflict Resolution

Unfortunately, the deep seated conflicts at Emerald Hills do not appear to be going away, though some have diminished over the years. While interviewing residents I learned of two major obstacles to conflict resolution that Emerald Hills faces: The absence of a third party mediator or consensus training and the absence of a shared community vision in which expectations for behavior are established and diverse expectations for the community are united.

Absence of mediation or consensus training

One major consequence of not having open lines of communication is that no set conflict resolution strategy has been put in place. When I asked residents how conflict was resolved in the community, I received these responses:

Informally and usually not very well.

Badly or well depending on who they happen to and what the circumstances are. Some better than others. I would say that is one of the weaknesses of Emerald Hills that they don't have a good conflict resolution strategy.

There's no agreed upon dispute resolution or grievance procedure, which I think is a mistake. And yet nobody wants to talk about it, and nobody wants to look at it. It's kind of like the elephant in the living room--sometimes it's pretty damn big. It grows, and it shrinks, and it grows.

The above examples, from three different members, were indicative of the majority's sentiment and reveal that conflict resolution was inadequate at Emerald Hills.

The final example, which used the elephant simile, highlighted the nature of the inadequacy. The fluctuation in the size of the elephant occurred because problems which

were not addressed for awhile appeared to be gone, until they resurfaced, still unresolved. Decisions over finances were good examples of such elephant-like grievances. Conflict over finances were often ignored for significant periods of time and then, when addressed, caused explosive episodes.

Many residents I spoke with mentioned wanting to hire a third party mediator to come in to help residents work through issues, and others advocated for having members take consensus training classes. Yet, hiring a mediator or taking courses in consensus building would involve decisions over money, which was the root of one of their biggest conflicts. This “Catch 22” scenario has had effects which will be discussed in detail later.

No unifying vision

Over a cup of coffee, Eric told me his hypothesis for why there was a lack of problem solving procedure at Emerald Hills.

What Emerald Hills was was a group of developers who thought maybe they'd want to live together. So what happened is that they were successful: they developed. They got a whole bunch of houses onto a piece of land, and what they didn't develop was a community. No they did, they've got a community, but highly dysfunctional.

The above statement attempted to give a history to the acknowledged lack of dispute resolution. It indicated that true community was more than the physical structures. For community to develop there must be ideological understandings among those who wished to create it. There must be a vision constructed along with the houses, a vision which would frame the community's spirit.

During interviews I encountered the absence of vision Eric spoke about. When I asked residents to tell me about Emerald Hill's theme or the focus of the community, some reported not knowing a theme, others guessed the theme was *community* or *environmentalism*, but none were certain.

Although a vision statement was originally written during the formation of the community, most residents were unfamiliar with its content. The two responses below demonstrated that the vision of Emerald Hills was not discussed often.

Speaking with Ellen in her home, I asked what the focus of Emerald Hills was. After a thoughtful pause, Ellen told me:

I don't really sense that there is a focus here. I get the feeling that everyone is sort of hither and yon, and they think differently. It might be good to get a mission statement--something to work towards. Along the lines of what I said earlier: having an open forum where people could share problems, gripes, you know, just expressing how we honestly feel.

By mentioning that "it might be good to get a mission statement," Ellen, a long time resident, revealed that she did not know of the existing one on the community's web page.

Rachael, appearing a little embarrassed, echoed Ellen's unawareness:

I know that they have some values that they are kind of cohesive about, like they are more likely to rent the common house to certain groups than certain other groups: groups that are more progressive and environmentally friendly, human rights oriented. But, I don't know if there is a common focus. . . Now I am sure they have some sort of vision statement, but I couldn't really guess what it is. That's kind of weird, huh.

Being unaware of the mission statement was not exclusive to Ellen and Rachael. Not one resident I spoke with gave a definitive answer when asked

about the mission statement of Emerald Hills. So even though one existed on the community's web site, there might as well not have been one there at all because it was not embraced by this community.

The Absence of Communication: Visions Collide

At Emerald Hills, a shared vision was not solidly implemented, so there were disparate expectations and visions of what the community should look like which worked to fragment the community. The lack of a governing vision, coupled with the absence of a proper forum for open communication, had resulted in incongruent visions of the community.

Eric explained:

There's been tons of fights because the original group agreed that they wanted to do cohousing, but they didn't agree on what it was going to be. And so there've been a number of different visions of what cohousing's going to be that clashed, sometimes really strongly. And as a consequence, some people left. Samantha left because her vision of cohousing didn't fit with Bob's vision of cohousing next door. Some of that was never going to get resolved because they are two different people, but some of it's also about cohousing stuff centrally.

What Eric was talking about were visions from multiple people, not multiple groups. That is not to say there were not coalitions, because they existed too and will be discussed in more detail later, but much of the internal strife was caused by the strong personalities of a few individuals and not tensions between fractioned groups. In my observations, it appeared that the effect of having no shared vision was that individualism was unchecked. If Emerald Hills had had a shared vision, an established set of

expectations, I postulate that that vision would have worked as a form of social control over independent minded residents. Without such an inhibitor, however, the attitudes of a few continue to disrupt the stasis of the whole.

The “I” in Team

“It is the fundamental contradiction of the United States of America--the illogical but optimistic notion that you can create a union of individuals in which every man is king.” –Susan Orlean author of *The Orchid Thief*

The national paradox Orlean referred to is so fundamental to our society that it pervades even the smallest groups. At Emerald Hills, an intentional community established to combat the isolation associated with our individualistic society, individualism remained a significant barrier to community.

Whereas residents very much wanted the benefits associated with being part of a cohousing community, many wanted somehow to still remain apart. Their individualistic behaviors were acknowledged as antagonistic in the accounts below.

When I asked Leah to explain to me what was at the root of conflict at Emerald Hills, she responded, “It is a very complex thing, and everybody here is a very complex individual- very strong individuals.”

Eric offered a similar explanation for the frustrations of the community. He explained that he enjoyed living in cohousing, but a few individuals made it very difficult for him to remain there. “I think that the people with anti-social mental health issues

should not live in community. They should live in, not necessarily isolation, but they shouldn't have other people depending upon them for their own personal welfare.”

The problem of “a few bad seeds” was heard again in the account of a partner guest, Stephanie. She shared with me her perspective on the internal conflict, which she occasionally witnessed. I asked her about some of the more unpleasant experiences she has had at Emerald Hills: “Personality conflicts that people just don't seem to rise above sometimes.” She went on to explain that there were certain individuals whom she highly respected but would not want to have to deal with in managing a community.

Explaining her frustration with community meetings, Ellen also cited the obstinacy of a few individuals: “They have their ideas or their versions of reality, how they see situations, and they don't want to budge.” As a consequence, residents gave up on the process altogether “because they feel hopeless and [they feel] there is no point in trying to work things out because people just get stubborn.”

The above responses affirmed that the cohesion of the group was threatened by individualism: members of the community, who were unwilling to compromise their interests for the betterment of the whole. Their actions and words impeded group consensus and unification.

Social Types and Community Unrest

Georg Simmel (1972) introduced the concept of social type in describing characteristics and actions that, while played out by individuals, are common forms of interaction that reside in the social world. In the case of communities and conflict

generation, certain social types are known to generate group conflict. Without adequate mechanisms for controlling the behavior of these social types, community unrest is all but certain.

During my interviews I learned about three such types that generated conflict in the Emerald Hills community. These are descriptions of their behavior, as identified by many residents, and the consequences for the community.

The burning spirit

Samantha, who was discussed earlier in the chapter on difficulties, exemplified, in some respects, the attitude of a strong individual. To be sure, the intensity of her personality was essential to the construction of the community. It took an impressive amount of energy to get the project started and to follow it to completion. The Scotthansons (2005) explained that most projects needed a “burning spirit” to ensure a cohousing development saw completion and did not fail due to lack of follow through. Though essential during the construction phase of the project, sadly, those individuals were often reported to cause disruptions later. Samantha was no exception.

In this succinct statement, Haley confirmed Samantha’s role: “Samantha was our fearless leader.” Haley shared with me how the project was dependent upon Samantha for many important duties which, if not accomplished, would have meant the dissolution of Emerald Hills before it even began. Then Haley told me how some of the decisions Samantha had made later became controversial, and she was blamed for things that were not her fault. In that light, Samantha was seen as a victim of unfair judgments. However, other residents painted the story of Samantha’s involvement in darker hues:

Samantha said ‘fuck that’ which was her response to anything she didn’t want to do. She made this happen, there are plenty of things you can point to her and say she did it wrong, but she *did* do it. But her, she was never a group processor, and sometimes leaders are like that.

The above statement, spoken by a female member of Emerald Hills, was echoed by others in interviews and informal conversations. They asserted that Samantha was a strong force, whose efforts were indispensable to the community’s beginning, but who, later, was unable to work cooperatively. Samantha, an impressive and thoughtful woman, conceded to their sentiment. She explained that she was never much for rules and wanted things to be governed more informally.

Environmental vigilante

Partly created out of conflict over the vision of what the community should look like and a continuing reminder of the absence of an effective dispute resolution policy, Anthony is an infamous member of Emerald Hills. Below, Alberta shared with me a now legendary story involving him:

We had a very typical case. Typical, I mean, I think other cohousing groups have had similar sorts of problems over pets. When we left [for an extended vacation] we rented our house to an absolutely perfect family, and they agreed to take care of our cats as well, so just everything was perfect. And a neighbor, there was conflict about the definition of the cat policy and our agreements, obligations, to the city, with the [wildlife sanctuary] and things like that. [Anthony] took it into his own hands to... well, he basically “cat-napped” one of the cats and sent him to the pound and then killed another cat. And so it was a fairly intense little experience.

Alberta postulated, “I think that there were human things going on there. It wasn’t really about cats. It was really about human relations... They had personal conflicts and it all came out over cats, and it came out in this kind of violent way.”

The “cat policy” mentioned in Alberta’s narrative was a very contentious issue. Because Emerald Hills abuts a wildlife sanctuary populated by numerous birds, many residents felt that it was unethical to allow their cats outdoors. Other residents, owners of cats, were aware of the problem, but because of a strong sense of guilt about leaving their pets quarantined, they did not strictly adhere to the policy. Still others disagreed with the policy altogether. In this unresolved environment, Anthony acted out.

Uncompromising arguer

Edward was also mentioned in every interview with residents. His quarrels with residents were well-known within the community. He was attributed with the disruption of dinners and with the stonewalling of many ideas.

Though many respected him, they felt he was impossible to deal with.

During my investigation, my interactions with Edward were few and peaceable, but the deluge of responses from residents assures me that he had the capability of being a curmudgeon. Stories revealed an independent and combative quarreler. He was reported to yell and curse passionately over issues which effectively scared those present and/or ended discussions. He was cited by more than one resident as a source of tension in the community and a barrier to peaceful communication.

The *burning spirit*, *environmental vigilante*, and *impassioned arguer* are personality types that share a common characteristic, individualism, which is incompatible with community. However, it is not unlikely that their behaviors could have been managed had a conflict resolution strategy or a vision statement been established.

Anthony's anger, though probably part of an emotional history that he carried with him, might not have been expressed in the violent way it was were it offered a healthful avenue of expression within the community. If the conflict over the cat policy had been worked through in a mediated group discussion where all parties could have talked about their concerns and found common ground, perhaps Anthony's anger would have dissipated.

Edward's hostile form of communication might also have been avoided if the community had been prepared for it. If Emerald Hills' vision statement had been detailed in its expectations of residents--including acceptable ways to discuss differences--and all residents had contributed to its drafting and were aware of its contents, perhaps Edward's communication style would have been called into question before it developed into a disruptive pattern.

Finally, if Samantha's role were less central to the development of Emerald Hills or if she moved into Emerald Hills post construction, the chance for her success there would most likely be greatly improved.

Intimacy versus Autonomy

Not all disruption can be placed on the backs of a few. There are large themes that divide members into groups over major issues. Finances, which were discussed earlier, divided the group into the two general categories of financially conservative and less so. Also discussed earlier were the issues over cats near the wildlife sanctuary,

which still have not been generally agreed upon. Similarly, the group was divided by expectations of community relationships and the involvement they entailed.

Some residents I spoke with lamented the nature of relationships at Emerald Hills. From their perspective, the relationships were too informal for such an intimate setting. They argued that cohousing had been designed to create community, but it had not yet been utilized to its full potential. As a reason for this, some cited the infrequent use of the common house. They explained that people used the common house only for eating dinner and not for socializing. Some residents would have liked to have seen people use the space for playing cards, having a cup of coffee, or talking about interpersonal issues. Residents further disparaged the habit of some to eat their food hastily and promptly leave as soon as they had finished.

Ayden shared his feelings on the above subject:

It's almost like there is a mixture of people, and I think everybody feels too busy to actually be involved, which seems like such a sad thing really because there's so much potential for involvement and just people working together and having really cool things come to life, just with the group energy.

On the subject of the potential for intimate relationships at Emerald Hills, Ellen said: "That can happen. You can get to know somebody and you can share, but that tends to be more threatening in a group situation to share your private concerns. It can be done, but it's harder, scarier for some reason."

Although acknowledging that initiating and maintaining relationships were a lot of work and that it was far easier not to interact with your neighbors and simply go into

your hovel, Ellen felt the rewards for the extra work were well worth the effort. “You come out in some other arena that surprises you and enriches you.”

Ellen went on to say that at dinner she wanted to communicate with others about the events in their lives but felt that she was unable to because people limited their discussions to food, politics or current events.

The problem of non-participating members was tied to the way houses were sold, according to Leah:

There’s really no way to influence who buys a house there. We were seeing Clint’s house on the market; Ellen has her house on the market, and Sharon has her house on the market. You can’t influence the buyer. You may get someone who is not that interested and Susan has been lamenting that there are too many houses occupied by people who are not involved. All you can do is hope that the person that buys a house is going to be more involved than the person before. And also when somebody sells a house, the group can’t put pressure on them to carefully screen because those people want to sell their house even if it means to someone that is not going to be deeply involved in cohousing. So those are the kinds of issues I’d like to be chatting with people more about.

There were, however, informal mechanisms which encouraged people to be more active once they moved in. Ayden remembers his first experiences at Emerald Hills: “At first I got the sense that everybody would imply: ‘So we’re gardening this day, so you’ll be there, right?’ And it was never really like that, but it was like: ‘We really need more help. Are you going to be one of the ones that helps?’ But it almost made me like ‘aaah.’”

The above sentiment demonstrated that community members let their expectations of members be known. By sharing with him their hopes that he would be an active participant in the community, Ayden began to feel real pressure to get involved. I

observed similar expectations put forth by residents in regard to work parties and cooking.

Work parties were scheduled in which residents were expected to help clean up the common grounds or to work on improvement projects. In addition, a roster was established for cooking, which required residents to sign up monthly. I witnessed announcements for those activities in the dining room and received emails from the community listserv urging participation. Less formally, I heard discussions among residents about so-and-so's absence from a specific work party or that a certain person had not signed up for cooking in over a month.

Significantly, Ayden's response also exemplified the conflict between individual and community. Ayden saw community involvement and obligations as threatening, yet Ayden had mentioned earlier in our interview a desire for more intimate relationships. So, while he very much wanted the benefits of a more integrated community, he did not want the obligation and work involved in creating those relationships. He was not alone in that paradoxical sentiment.

Ellen, who spoke at length about her desire to have closer relationships with those at Emerald Hills, confessed:

I guess sometimes I don't like feeling obligated to have to do things in community, especially if they are not my interests, but then you feel obligated because you want to participate as much as the next person. But that feels artificial to me. You like to feel that you can choose to participate or not and not feel judgment.

In Ellen's words we see the conflict between autonomy and community clearly. Ellen pined for more intimate social interaction, yet resented opportunities to develop close relationships.

Just as Ellen and Ayden referenced the emotional work involved in relationships rather than the physical work of the community, Eric too expressed feeling strained by community obligations. "It's not a problem I have with cohousing. Like I have a problem with individuals who are out to get me, but cohousing itself is great. Like I don't mind conflicts, I just mind crazy people. That bugs me."

What Eric expressed, and the rest of his interview confirmed, was that he very much enjoys cohousing; he was happy living there and would recommend it to others. However, there were limits to the amount of work he was willing to put into it. That perspective was shared by others. They argued that work was demanding, and when they returned home, they didn't want to have to deal with drama or be bothered with the cooking, meetings, maintenance and other obligations associated with cohousing.

The conflict between individualism and community has just been described above. At first there appeared to be two groups of people at Emerald Hills: those who were interested in community, wanted to form intimate relationships and accept the obligations that they required, and those who preferred to live independently and have more acquaintance-like relationships with those in the community. Further analysis of conversations revealed, however, that Emerald Hills was, in fact, not so neatly divided. Even the staunchest advocates of community building felt threatened by its responsibilities. This vagary of attitude, like issues over finances and the cat policy,

might also be a result of having unclear expectations of community involvement. In the absence of a vision statement, the residents have established informal means to encourage involvement that were perhaps less effective than having written expectations.

Responses to Conflict

The consequences of having unresolved conflict at Emerald Hills were many. Conflict caused resident participation to decline and was even the impetus for some residents to leave the development; conflict made it harder to find new candidates to move in and, one woman argued, was the cause of stagnating home values.

Conflict avoidance

Because Emerald Hills had no procedure to resolve conflict, some residents stopped coming to meetings or meals. When I asked Rachel what some of the worst experiences she had had living at Emerald Hills, she responded:

I tried going to the meetings where they actually make decisions and that was frustrating because we are supposed to do things on consensus, but I don't think they've had any kind of consensus training. It's not that easy, and if they don't get a consensus sometimes they vote. It's just not done right. It can be frustrating and it doesn't always feel good. Sometimes people are inappropriate in the way they handle conflict. And that was frustrating, so I don't go to the meetings anymore.

Another resident shared with me her decision to “drop out” due to frustrations with the group process:

There was a tendency for people to blame each other for things that didn't go well and to not forgive each other for things that didn't go well and to not find the appropriate group process for forgiveness and for trust and for compassion, and those things never went away. [as a

consequence] I decided, after a lot of gut-wrenching decisions, that it was not--it was not good for me emotionally.

We can see by the above excerpt, that the choice to discontinue participation was not always an easy one. Withdrawing from the community meant giving up on a concept, cohousing, which most felt strongly committed to. As a result, some I spoke with expressed feelings of guilt for not having been more involved with the community. However, when faced with conflict and no way to see it through to conclusion, the decision to remain was too difficult.

Community withdrawal

A second group encompassed those whose disputes were so large that they completely withdrew from the community, though they remained physically. Ayden observed:

The one guy, he is not really involved in the community. He supposedly killed somebody's cat. He still lives here but he is not a part of the community. And then there is another woman, who lives here, who is not really part of the community either. They don't get to share everything that everyone else gets to share. They probably use the recycling and stuff, but they basically just live in their own houses.

Alberta confirmed:

So when that came up, they split [left the community] and the person who did it [the cat crimes] ended up being ostracized by everybody. So, that happened in our case and this person ended up withdrawing financially from the system, which makes a hardship on the rest of us. You know, he was not pulling his share of the investment side of it, in addition to all the social/emotional things that were going on. That was a tough one on all angles.

Indeed, those who withdrew made it difficult for the community in many ways. Their financial withdrawal exacerbated the already tense situation described earlier.

While their physical withdrawal meant more work: more cooking rotations because there were fewer cooks, and more cleaning at work parties because there were fewer workers. Additionally, those who withdrew become “Boo Radleys”--victims of myths created by those who no longer associated with them.

Stepping out

A smaller, but significant group of people have chosen to leave the community completely. Samantha, the “burning spirit” whose passion for years was cohousing, chose to leave because the community could not come to resolution on major issues. She said:

“In the end, I decided that the dynamic that was going on at cohousing, for me personally, was a little bit like...well, was a lot like a bad marriage.” Consequently, Samantha gave up her dream and moved into a single-family detached home.

Eric told me of another example of a couple, who chose to leave rather than live in a contentious environment, “So people have moved out, when Anthony killed [the] cat. [The family in] one of the houses, they moved out. They sold their house and jumped ship because they had a little kid and they were scared of having Anthony as their next door neighbor.”

Ayden voiced my own observations: “I am noticing that there are a lot of people trying to move out. There are three houses listed right now.”

One of the houses Ayden referred to was not associated with conflict. It was vacant because the elderly occupant had passed on. The other two, however, were owned by residents, who were no longer actively participating in the community and had chosen

to leave, in part, over disagreements with members of the community. In addition, there were at least two others I spoke with who were considering leaving the community because of ongoing problems within the community.

Difficulty finding new members

The following excerpt, shared with me in confidence, illustrates the impact of having unmediated disputes on finding new occupants for the houses that have become available at Emerald Hills:

Some of our troubles with individuals have caused troubles with finding other people to move in. If you want to do full disclosure, one of the things you have to say is “you have to be emotionally robust enough to handle being yelled at in meetings” to anybody who is planning on moving in. And I say that routinely to anybody who is planning on moving in. You have to be able to handle it. It’s not that you won’t get support when people yell at you, but it happens. People do yell at each other. And you just have to be able to take it, and not take it too personally, and move on--or blow up! But you have to be aware that it is going to happen, that’s part of what you are signing up for.

Whether a result of full disclosure or something else, during my research I saw, at a high point, four homes on the market. Real estate markets do, however, have fluctuations and selling a home in a cohousing community is not as easy as selling a single family detached home. Even so, for those wishing to purchase a home in a cohousing community, the atmosphere in the community would likely be a deciding factor in the minds of most home buyers.

Stagnating home values?

I spoke with one woman who wanted to leave the community because she did not feel comfortable living there with so many unresolved issues. She confessed that she did

not feel emotionally safe there. She remained, however, because she was unable to sell her home in order to buy a comparable one in town. “Houses [here] aren’t appreciating as fast as other houses in [the area],” she explained. When I asked her why, she said: “Because it’s different, I think, and because the word is out that this community is not filled with peace all the way--there’s been some dissention.”

The accuracy of the above statement was not investigated. The real estate market is not something I am an authority on, but I know there are many factors that cause home values to rise and fall. However, I have included the above quote because, even if there were not a causal relationship between the “bad vibes” of the community and the ability of residents to sell their homes, the perception of such a connection speaks of the intensity of conflict at Emerald Hills.

CHAPTER 5 RELATIVE EXPECTATIONS AND COHOUSING SATISFACTION

Note: This chapter could have been tied to the chapter on divergent visions of community, as expectations were found to be closely related to visions at Emerald Hills: Expectations were found to be visions of what the future would hold. However, because of the large amount of data covered in the investigation of expectations, I chose to designate a separate chapter to this section.

During my first interview at Emerald Hills, I encountered a theory about expectations and their relationship to contentment in cohousing. As part of the interview schedule, I asked residents to tell me about the questions that they would ask if they were given the opportunity to conduct a study of cohousing. One interviewee wondered whether people who came to live in cohousing by happenstance enjoyed cohousing more than those who came intentionally to cohousing in search of community. For example, some of the residents of Emerald Hills lived there because they drove by and liked the location and the look of the houses. Others earnestly sought out an intentional cohousing community.

The above interviewee had anecdotal evidence which suggested that people who came to cohousing by accident, without expectations, were apt to be more satisfied than those who came with foreknowledge of cohousing and the expectations that went along with it.

Anthony, the perpetrator of the “cat crimes” discussed in the previous chapter, was cited as an example of an individual with high expectations of community who ended up being dissatisfied with his experience. This interviewee named other residents, who will be discussed below, who affirmed the hypothesis that having low or no expectations made residents more satisfied with the cohousing experience.

Using grounded theory, throughout the remainder of the investigation, I queried interviewees about how they came to live in cohousing and if they had had any expectations before arriving. Answers seemed to fall into three categories: expectations were met, they were not met, or they weren’t met but that was ok.

No or Low Expectations and Pleasant Surprises

Those with no or low expectations for cohousing seemed to be the most satisfied in the community. The relationships that they developed were in some ways a bonus to having found a comfortable place to live.

Alberta

Alberta, a college professor and active member of Emerald Hills, typified the hypothesis that low expectations translated into contentment with cohousing:

[We were] Thinking about what kind of community we wanted to live in, and this was one of the places, so we just cold--not knowing anybody... I mean we had heard about what this was about, but we didn’t know anybody. We wandered over here and looked at the construction site and wandered around and saw the people, who now, of course, are good friends of ours who lived right next door here. They were just sitting at the back door and we started chatting with them and it started the whole thing...we didn’t come with an introduction; we just wandered in ourselves and started asking about it.

Alberta just stumbled across cohousing, though in her statement she mentioned that she “had heard about what it was about.” If there were any question, however, about whether she had preconceived visions of what the community would be like, her following comments dismiss it:

I had very few expectations, I generally go through life without too many expectations because I figure you’re always walking into something you don’t know, and I just try not to ever make them too high. So, keeping them low, I guess you’d have to say they exceeded them. That, of course, is the plan. So, no, it’s been great. It really has been great. Despite the fact it’s not always easy.

Eric

Eric, who reported being very satisfied with his experiences at Emerald Hills and said he would recommend cohousing to others, also had no expectation before moving in: “It was really not a very big deal. I didn’t understand I was moving into cohousing because I didn’t understand what cohousing was. I was moving to a new apartment that was quiet and that was downstairs from someone that I liked and knew a little bit.”

Stephanie

Similarly, Stephanie, a partner guest, informed me that she and her partner “just stumbled into it.” Having no prior knowledge of cohousing, they were unable to formulate expectations. In support of the expectation hypothesis, Stephanie and her partner reported being very satisfied with their involvement. They were active members that rarely missed a meal and were well-liked by the community.

Earnest

Earnest spoke with me about communal-like experiences in his past that he found to be somewhat stifling. When his experiences at Emerald Hills were juxtaposed against those of his youth, the result was a pleasant surprise.

Before I moved here I was involved with a household with the woman I was married to. We had a household that was the center of a lot of communal activity, mostly around developing and building a food co-op in a little ski town we were living in, in Colorado. That was almost too intense. The door was always open. I sometimes would come home from a trip and there would be fifteen people, many of whom I did not know, in my house. That was a little too much for me, and I think that was part of the influence that made me realize pure communal living would not work for me, but there were lots of exciting times in both of those settings [he had mentioned another communal-like experience earlier in the conversation]. Coming back to Emerald Hills after having left all that behind was like going back to things about which I had very, very fond memories and I had high expectations and Emerald Hills looks like, in hind sight, a nice balance to me. Because it's not purely communal and it's not purely nuclear.

Though Earnest's earlier experiences with community were not entirely unpleasant, they were at times "intense." That intensity kept him from getting involved with intentional communities for years. When he later became involved with Emerald Hills, through a friend of his, and found that the intensity present in communal environments was not present in cohousing, his expectations were exceeded.

Great Expectations and Great Disappointments

Those with the greatest expectations for cohousing seemed to be the most dissatisfied in the community. The relationships that they developed too often fell short

of their dreams. Their visions of community had not taken into account the challenges of living in community and sharing decision making.

Samantha

Samantha, whose story was explored in detail in the previous chapter, exemplified the effect of high expectations on contentment:

Cohousing captured my imagination in way that very few things have, and I gave it all the energy that I've given anything in my life, probably as much as, at the time, that I gave anything, but maybe, the energy that I gave raising my kids... And I did it because I was hoping it would become a community that was like an extended family, that would be the place that I would live for the rest of my life.

Samantha explained that she envisioned the common house as a place where everyone would come together in the evenings to chat, play cards, and have a good time. Instead, people stayed in their own residences. She noted that people attended the dinners three times a week, per the group agreement, but they were not active outside that commitment.

In the end, her disappointment, coupled with difficulties in group process, motivated her to leave Emerald Hills.

Clint

Clint, an elderly gentleman who resided at Emerald Hills, shared with me that he moved to Emerald hills because he wanted community. Over the years he had had many experiences with intentional communities along what he called “the communal continuum.” He talked in a state of reverie about his experiences in communes in the eastern United States where everything was owned in common and there were high

expectations for community involvement. In contrast, he lamented that cohousing was much less collective and repeatedly referred to it, a bit disparagingly, as a “middle class commune.” He said he would prefer to live somewhere more radical but that he didn’t think he was ready for anything more experiments at his age.

It was clear while speaking with Clint that his earlier experiences had imprinted on him an expectation of community life that cohousing did not live up to. Though he remained at Emerald Hills, his mild dissatisfaction with the community could be classified as similar to Samantha’s.

Chelsea

A woman I never spoke with, but learned about through conversations with residents, shared Samantha’s strong desire to become part of a community and disclosed her disappointment to others at what she found at Emerald Hills.

A resident told me:

Chelsea really wanted to live in community--that was her thing. But she was kind of disillusioned actually. She didn’t feel like it... She was a person who really wanted to go deep into her relationships with people, and she didn’t feel like it quite got to that place. It just sort of scratched the surface of what it means to be in community. So she was a little bit disillusioned after a while.

Another resident related Chelsea’s intense desire to be accepted and integrated into the community which was not requited. He explained that she paradoxically wanted closer relationships and, yet, was frequently involved in arguments with neighbors and other members of the community.

Chelsea was in a lot of pain. She hurt deeply over many issues, one of which was her unfulfilled desire for community, and eventually she took her life.

Gloria

A woman, who later confided in me her disappointment with the lack of community revealed, in much the same vein as Clint, her expectations in our interview. She explained that she had seen a flyer “talking about building community,” and she enthusiastically responded. Although she didn’t have the history Clint had with communes, through her life experiences, she had come to recognize community as being very important to her. She told me that largely because of problems over process, but also because of the structure of cohousing, which wasn’t communal enough for her, that she had considered leaving.

Helene

Helene was once involved with another cohousing community at its inception but never saw it through to completion. She had also lived in communities where resources were shared though they weren’t entirely communal. Those experiences were reflected fondly upon in our interview. She then said she was eager to move into Emerald Hills and excited about living in community again. Emerald Hills, however, did not live up to her expectations. Over time her experiences caused her to develop criticisms: the price of cohousing she viewed as prohibitive and, along the same lines, she felt there was not enough sharing of resources. Helene continued:

And my great sadness is: could there ever be something that would work for a more proletariat type person? . . . But it’s just the idea that I wish I could be able to live in community and pay less because my idea of

community is that resources are shared and it's more easy to live. And cohousing is unfortunately middle class and upper middle class even. And couple-oriented: two incomes. And it's great for families because they'd have to do it anyway. Anyway, that's one view that I have: the financial inaffordability of cohousing sadness because I am so in love with the idea of community.

Helene went on to share another of her unmet expectations. "In cohousing I thought everyone would sort of perambulate through the commons and say *hi* to each other and be on porches and wave." Instead she found that it took longer than she would have liked to even get on a first name basis with residents because many of them remained in their private homes. She also noted that when people did interact, they spoke about superficial issues instead of speaking more openly about their personal lives, which she felt would have created more interdependence and strengthened the community.

Helene, like Gloria, also remained at Emerald Hills, though she actively researched alternative intentional communities and planned on relocating to one in the future.

Kyle

In his living room, Kyle recalled his initial thoughts about Emerald Hills. He was aware of the community before he moved in and knew some of the members. "I knew I always wanted to live in community," he told me. So, when a house became available, he moved in.

Things weren't as he expected, however. He identified a communication problem among members which caused meetings to stagnate or become contentious. Kyle, who had had previous experience in management, felt he could help the community and

eagerly worked to facilitate process. Yet, Kyle perceived the community was not open to his suggestions. His proposals for changes to the community or process were consistently dismissed by members without ever giving them consideration.

Kyle's frustration at the problems with process at Emerald Hills, and his inability to do anything to change them, became a source of disappointment. Problems with communication at Emerald Hills were contrary to his expectations of a harmonious community. His inability to effect change went against his self-expectations; he had viewed himself as an excellent communicator and facilitator, and suddenly his skills were proving ineffective--that realization was intensely upsetting.

Kyle's frustrations over the community caused him to disengage from the group. Though he did not mention any plans to leave the community, he was a mostly inactive member. Kyle decided to rarely attend meals and never attend meetings. He remained friends with one or two neighbors but, otherwise, was merely cordial with other members of Emerald Hills. In time, Kyle confessed, he hoped changes would occur in the community that would bring him back into it, but he no longer took action to bring about those changes.

Shortfalls – But Better than Anyplace Else

Aside from those whose expectations were exceeded and those whose expectations were not met, a third group emerged in the data. This third group was few in number, yet still significant. They were residents whose expectations were not met;

however, they were happy with their experiences and would enthusiastically suggest cohousing to others.

Rachael

In her conversation with me, Rachael mentioned the problems with communication, which were mentioned by many other members as being a source of unexpected disappointment. When she began attending meetings, she thought interactions would be more civilized than they sometimes were. Rachael also acknowledged self-expectations that fell short of the mark. “I guess what I expected was to be really involved in the dinners and really involved in planning game nights and things like that--which I did somewhat in the beginning--but I work a lot now, and I don’t get to go to a lot of the dinners; and I’m not as involved as I thought I would be at all.”

Yet, as the conversation progressed, Rachael admitted that Emerald Hills “is still the best living situation I’ve had.” She was most thankful for the relationships that she has developed at Emerald Hills. Her friendships were extremely close and supportive. Rachael went on to explain why, after her disappointments, cohousing continued to be her favorite residence: “I mean there’s drama for sure and problems, but I don’t think that’s a flaw of cohousing, I think its humanity.”

Susan

In much the same way as Rachael, Susan acknowledged the deficiencies and disappointments of cohousing while maintaining a positive outlook on the development as a whole.

Susan was a veteran of community living, like many I spoke with her previous experiences had been positive ones. So positive, she explained, she had become hesitant about moving into another development because of the unfair comparisons she thought she would be likely to make. For that reason, she waited some time after moving out of her previous intentional community before relocating to Emerald Hills. Comparisons were unavoidable, however, she acknowledged.

Those comparisons emerged in the form of expectations about the positive effect the community would have on her social life, but her expectations were not fulfilled. She also had aspirations for the Emerald Hills, which were never realized.

Even though not all of Susan's expectations were met, she remained very satisfied with her experiences at Emerald Hills. She had a clinical view of her expectations, viewing them as an unavoidable, but irrational, part of human nature and dismissing their effect upon her. She also accepted the fact that relationships are sometimes difficult and felt that the benefits of those relationships outweighed the work involved.

Ayden

Ayden stumbled into cohousing with few initial expectations. He was looking for a home, and one was available in the development, so he moved in. After learning about the cohousing concept, however, he began to expect something from his involvement. He explained, "I expected more of an embracing. You know my idea of cohousing would be like it's a big party, and we're all doing this thing together. But, it wasn't like that." Ayden said that people were more reserved than he would have thought they

would be in an intentional community. Similar to residents' comments cited in the previous chapter, he had expected more social intimacy.

Ayden was not judgmental though, and his expectations didn't get the better of his hopeful outlook. He admitted that part of the onus of interaction was his, and he was not a particularly gregarious individual. Similarly, he said that he had a fondness for privacy and could easily empathize with others who shared that sentiment.

Summarizing everything, Ayden concluded "It feels really good now. . . I like this spot."

CHAPTER 6 RESIDENTS' IDEAS FOR CHANGE AT EMERALD HILLS

Below I will discuss residents' responses to the question: "If you were to make any changes to this cohousing development, what would they be?" Answers fell into three main categories: having a mediator facilitate problems in the community or having the community trained in the consensus process, establishing a shared vision, and increasing chances for more intimate interaction. Suggestions that were shared by a minority will also be addressed as will the potential for the community to make those changes.

Mediation and Process

Issues over unaddressed conflict at Emerald Hills inspired residents to suggest having meetings and interpersonal conflicts mediated by a third party or having the group trained in dealing with such problems. Ayden and Ellen told me that they would both like to have a third party come in to mediate meetings and conflicts that have arisen at Emerald Hills. Ayden, who initially felt unwelcome in the community and was less involved than other members, said that having meetings mediated would, hopefully, help with some of the issues between neighbors that he had heard about and observed. For her part, Ellen said that she would like "someone who is a counselor or therapist, who could work through some of the roadblocks that have gotten in the way." She cited poor

participation of residents because of problems and hoped that if a mediator got involved, participation rates would increase.

Leah and Rachael also wanted mediation, but they both mentioned having the residents themselves get trained in effective communication skills, though Rachael also mentioned the use of a third party as Ayden and Ellen had suggested. Leah began by saying, “You have to decide on a decision-making process that is going to work and then have people trained in it. So you can’t just assume that because you are hip and groovy and you believe in consensus that you are trained in that processes.” She went on to discuss another aspect of conflict resolution that she would want implemented: a way to keep conflict between individuals from infecting the group. “And I also think you need to have a process in place for conflict so that the whole...so that if there is conflict between two people, all of us don’t have to be party to that acting out--that there is a way to move it out of the group process. I think that is really important.”

When I asked Rachael what changes she would make to the community if given the chance, she was reticent. She explained that it was really not her place as she was not a particularly active member. But, she said, if she could make the changes without having to do any of the work:

The meetings would be more organized. There would be a facilitator trained in decision making, and people would be trained in conflict resolution and positive communication and consensus building, things like that. There would be more of a format, so there would be less room for more hurtful things to be said and less room for personal attacks to be made and more room for positive decision-making experiences.

Rachael went on to describe what it would be like:

I've heard about this from someone who visits cohousing communities around the world. He told me about a cohousing situation that he was in where they have two separate meetings. They have a meeting where they make decisions about things and then they have a process meeting. I think that is such a good idea. So they have a meeting about where the washing machine gets fixed and all that. And then they have a totally separate meeting where people can say, "When we were having that discussion the other day and we didn't see eye to eye, it really bothered me the way you said such and such to me." And you can check in with each other and talk about...like a format, where you can talk about issues with each other in a non-threatening way. It's just out in the open instead of resorting to gossip. I just think process groups enlighten you so much about your role in the community and your relationships with each other and how you affect other people. I think it would be really cool to have some kind of format like that.

Eric, as those cited above, also wanted to see Emerald Hills adopt a conflict resolution strategy, though he acknowledged it would be more difficult implementing it after the fact than had it been put in place at the beginning:

And there's maybe even a process, which is utterly absent from Emerald Hills, but it's commonly held at other cohousing communities...of having some sort of vibes sub-committee, conflict resolution, some sort of group that deals with conflicts, or some sort of conflict resolution mechanism that they don't have and can't develop very easily ad hoc at this point.

Eric's cynicism in regard to community change will be addressed later on.

Shared Vision

Tied closely with mediation and process, another frequent response was that Emerald Hills should establish a shared vision which would include guiding principles and expectations. Taking breaks between bites of pastry, Leah explained:

I think there has to be a lot more clarification when people move in what to expect. I think there are absolutely no expectations. I don't think you can have a cohousing thing without some clear expectations and agreements. That's just it. I think there needs to be some really clear agreements coming into the cohousing.

This deficiency in regard to vision was shared by most residents. Ellen expressed her interpretation of the community, "I don't really sense that there is a focus here. I get the feeling that everyone is sort of hither and yon and they think differently." Ellen then explained what she thought folks should do about it. "It might be good to get a mission statement--something to work toward. Along the lines of what I said earlier: having an open forum where people could share problems, gripes, you know, just expressing how we honestly feel."

In a conversation with Samantha, Ellen's sentiment was echoed. Samantha explained that she would like to be involved in a community that worked to "create a world in which there's some compassion for things greater than ourselves." Helene was in concurrence as she told me over a cup of tea that she would like the community to have a common theme. A theme shared by everyone with ritual around it, so that it was honored and celebrated.

When asked what a community vision would look like, most residents were very vague, while others focused on a specific aspect of community that was important to them such as children or relationships.

Haley gave a typical vague response when she said, "It can be anywhere in the continuum, but they need to be on the same place in that continuum...from commune to yuppie condominiums." Equally large in its scope, Ayden humbly observed "I get the

feeling. It seems like if there could be a community that was more into farming or they had more, something beyond just living together in the community, it would help.”

Childrearing Focus

Leah, who at first used general terms in her early visioning discussion, came around to a very specific focus on children. She mentioned one aspect of a shared vision statement which she thought was of particular importance, community child-rearing:

One of the things that we used to say is that we're child friendly. Well, we're child friendly if they're well-behaved. That's not ok. Everybody has different ways of raising children; we've got to accept the ways somebody else is raising their children. And that doesn't always work here. And so there is that quality of judgment that can be pretty oppressive. So, that's one of those things that got lost in the wash. But so, how do you want to make the decisions? How do you want to deal with individual differences in lifestyle, in child rearing, all those kinds of things? I think there are a lot of poignant and fundamental questions that ought to be worked out...

Ellen, whose answer transitions into the next section, envisioned a more emotionally intertwined community:

If there was more open sharing. How people really feel. I mean it might be scary, but it also might be good to break down some barriers. There has to be some sort of permission for that to happen. It can't just happen. It's fine to say it might be good, but some people don't agree with that. It would have to become a group-wide need.

In the above paragraph, Ellen asserted that the community had a problem with being open with one another. To mend this perceived problem, Ellen suggested that intimacy be included in a community vision statement. The following section is a collection of responses from people who generally agree with Ellen's criticism and would likely support the inclusion of intimacy in a mission statement.

Greater Intimacy

Several residents were interested in greater intimacy in community. Especially for those residents who were not in committed romantic relationships, though some couples also expressed a desire for a greater social life.

When Stephanie was asked if there were any changes she would like to see at Emerald Hills, she replied:

I think more opportunities for gathering socially than just like the dining room. And these guys don't have a lot of space to work with, but if there were a little more deliberate gardening area and a recreation and entertainment room where you could watch movies together, or craft art area, exercise area, sauna... all those little things that increase the chance of positive social interaction besides just the meals.

Stephanie's emphasis was on positive interaction which would create community.

Though residents of Emerald Hills interact, it has often been for practical reasons.

Stephanie, and the others below, would like to see interaction that strengthened relationships, not just interaction that allowed the community to function.

Rachael took her time in responding when I asked her how she would improve the community. But after some thought, she said:

I would make it more about the relationships and create less work... I would try to find ways to make less work and more community time. So maybe the meals would be potlucks and we would have movie nights-- things that don't create work for people because something that has been hard for me is that if you want to be involved in the meals, you have to cook like once or twice a month; and if I'm working all the time, I can't always cook. And I want the community but I don't want to feel I have to work all the time. Personally that's not where my needs get met, but I also know that is something that makes the community more cohesive and that some people really do need that, but I am just personally more interested in just knowing everybody.

In her statement, Rachael agreed with Stephanie's desire for more close interaction. At the same time, Rachael offered an explanation for why there was less positive interaction at Emerald Hills than she would have liked.

Like Rachael, Ellen shared a similar understanding of the root of the intimacy problem: "In a way I wish we had a group that talked more personally: more feelings, more openly and honestly about things--less of the mundane aspects of being in a community, just more personal, I guess." Ellen's wish had two parts--she wished for greater intimacy, and she wished to cut back on the interaction that she viewed as its antithesis.

Helene takes off where Ellen finished:

Well I heard Ellen say that we should have more parties and get to know one another, and I thought that was a great idea. Why don't we know one another better? I don't know certain people at all. The people I have met have been at the dinners. I still feel like I'd be intruding if I just went to knock on their door. I still feel like I have to call up on the phone and say, "Well, are you busy?" just like any other type of appointment you might make with a friend. I feel like there should be more... And what is the more? I am afraid people will say, "That's your deal, you're lonely. I'm not going to fill your need. I hope you find a way to take care of yourself." And that's very appropriate--people aren't here necessarily to make me feel less lonely, but this is how I observe. I observe a sort of sad lack of intimacy that I crave, and I would hope that community would be able to feed more.

In the frankness of Helene's statement, the vulnerability of some community members was revealed. Loneliness was a burden that they endured and experiencing it in cohousing was viewed by them as bitter irony; it is the cliché about being surrounded by people but feeling totally alone.

More Communal Action

While issues over mediation, process, vision, and intimacy were the major themes that emerged in conversations with residents of Emerald Hills, other changes were suggested by individuals. Those suggestions are chronicled below.

In a conversation over dinner, Clint told me he wished Emerald Hills were more communal. Clint had experienced living in what he called *more radical* communities in his past. When comparing Emerald Hills to those communities, Emerald Hills fell short. Clint complained that although the land and common house were communally owned, there was room for much more sharing at Emerald Hills. He observed that aside from the shared meals three times weekly, most work was done separately and he would have liked to have seen more cooperative cooking, cleaning, building, and playing.

Helene also complained that Emerald Hills was less communal than she would have liked. Yet, while Clint focused mostly on labor, her emphasis was on “stuff.” In answer to what her ideal community would look like, she said “more shared resources including automobiles and large appliances, computers, blenders...”

In a thoughtful response given by David and Samantha, I learned of the criticism of the size of Emerald Hills. David and Samantha both agreed that Emerald Hills is “a little small.” From their perspective, more people would mean more participants. With more participants there would be less work--specifically when it came to cooking common meals.

As the sky decided whether or not it would rain, Susan and I spoke on her front patio. When I brought up the topic of making changes to Emerald Hills, she had a ready answer: “Be much pickier about who moved in.” She shared with me her view that many of the problems in the community were a result of the actions of difficult individuals, who could have been dissuaded from ever living there. She reasoned that any group would have healthy disagreements but added that there were some people who were more “fluid” in their handling of conflict, which allowed a community to move through it, and on.

Efforts to Make Community Change

After speaking with members of the community about where they thought changes should be made, I was curious whether they thought those changes were possible.

My first interviewee was not so sure that the residents of Emerald Hills would ever see change. When I questioned her about the possibility of the community overcoming their interpersonal conflicts and finding stability, she responded:

I think there are probably two, maybe more people who really aren't interested in it. And I don't want to sound like a bigot, but a couple of them, I don't think have the potential. I mean, there's one person who lives here, who I think is really unconscious (Laughter and a gesture of drawing her hand across her face with a mock blank stare on it). This person's just not conscious. This person just doesn't think or see the ramifications. So I don't think it's gonna go there. At least not in my lifetime, or I'd be surprised.

The above response emerged out of years of dealing with interpersonal conflict that had hurt the above respondent personally. Others shared a portion of the skepticism in the above statement, but they were not consumed by it.

Some I spoke with echoed the sentiment “there are those who will never come around.” They did not, however, give up on the community altogether. They proposed accepting individuals who would never change and focusing their energy on personal accountability, something they did have control over.

One woman told me of a recurring conflict that she had with her neighbor. She explained that she got wrapped up in her neighbor’s argumentativeness--an action that made her complicit. Then she explained how she would have to change in order to improve the stability of the community. “I’d just have to let that go. I’d have to say ‘thanks [neighbor]... and I don’t really have to get to the root of this; that’s not important to me anymore because I want to be part of this community.’”

Over dinner, a man expressed the same perspective. He told me that he had been persuaded:

It is really impossible to get the group together and expect that everyone will equally share the desire to get over things. What you have to do is individually figure out who you are at odds with, and then you go to that person and you try to bridge that one gap. But don’t have the expectation that everybody else in the community is going to.

In my interview with an active community member, I learned that she too was a proponent of “personal accountability.” During the first part of my field research, I had come to know of an antagonism she felt with one of her neighbors. In our interview, which took place toward the end of my research, I questioned her about it. She replied

that she had made peace with her neighbor and explained, as those cited above had, that she had come to understand that the conflict between her neighbor and herself was not going to end if she did nothing about it. She took some time to cool off and then went to her neighbor's house and apologized. Though her neighbor didn't fully reciprocate, she felt better knowing that she had done what she could to alleviate the stress the conflict caused.

Evolution Out of Conflict

Other information gleaned from interviews indicated that it was only a matter of time until the problems of Emerald Hills disappeared. Before I began my official research, I spoke with a woman who had a family member at Emerald Hills. Maria warned me against studying Emerald Hills because it was a relatively new development. She felt that studying cohousing groups on the East Coast that have been around for thirty years or so would provide better data on cohousing. Her argument was that as a new community, Emerald Hills was still working out what she called their "lumps and bumps." Maria had studied biological sciences and compared Emerald Hills to a new plant species, which, when introduced to a new environment, goes through many changes in the quest for equilibrium. She felt that it would take several years for the Emerald Hills community to find homeostasis.

Susan, a resident of Emerald Hills who had lived in another cohousing development, drew the same conclusion as Maria. Acknowledging some of the

communication problems at Emerald Hills, Susan made a comparison to her previous cohousing experience:

I think a lot of it [the communication problems at Emerald Hills] has to do with the age of the community. I know at [the cohousing development where I used to reside]...things were a lot worse and as time went on we got some culture for how to handle problems and for what problems not to do. For example, when you go to a meeting, you bring a task. You bring something that you are doing so you don't immediately engage your mouth. And lots of people who talked too much at meetings just calmed way down when they started doing that. And they did it in order that they wouldn't have to talk so much. They wouldn't feel obligated to talk.

In Susan's opinion, some of the problems at Emerald Hills were merely developmental and would be overcome as the community matured.

CHAPTER 7 COHOUSING AND LIVING WELL

While the previous chapter focused on roadblocks that had the potential to negatively affect well-being, this chapter will address aspects of cohousing that increased the quality of life for residents of Emerald Hills. During my investigation of Emerald Hills, several benefits arose in discussions with, and observations of residents: having people around to interact with and developing friendships through those interactions, eating meals together, working on projects together, living among people who shared a similar political outlook, having a good environment for children to be raised in, and the resources that resulted from the relationships formed at Emerald Hills.

Co-mingling and Belonging

One evening in the common house after dinner, I spoke with Alberta. I asked her what she liked most about living at Emerald Hills. When I asked other residents this question, they inevitably felt stumped. I could empathize. When put on the spot, it was difficult to distill the best from the many experiences one has had. I would respond similarly when who my favorite musician or author was. There would be a pause while I accessed my mental database; sometimes that pressure makes me draw a blank.

Alberta looked away while she thought, then turned quickly toward me and said: “I know, when I came back from Colorado, I thought about not coming back at all. I thought about taking a job and staying. And when I came back, there were lots of awful

things going on in my department (at work). The one thing I looked forward to coming back to was this.”

When I asked Alberta to share more about what she looked forward to upon returning to Emerald Hills, she mentioned the relationships with other cohousers. That perspective was repeated in my conversation with Stephanie, a partner guest, “I don’t know if this would qualify, but just knowing everyone over there and having little interactions with them on a regular basis. Being able to be neighbors, you know. It is just great.”

Ayden concurred, “I think just to realize there are a lot of cool people around and it’s a nice environment.”

Ellen shared a similar sentiment, “The times we went to the beach, just do these get-togethers there, impromptu activities--which is fun, social interaction--because it can get kind of lonely around here.”

There was a general feeling that social interaction was one of the best aspects of cohousing at Emerald Hills. Those I spoke with told me they were glad to have neighbors that they saw around town and ran into on the way to the car or at the common house. Those interactions became the foundation for friendships; some so close they were described as familial in nature.

Fortuitous Friends

Leah’s interview, in which she described how she and her neighbor Paul had become friends, demonstrated how new friendships formed: “Paul and I have really connected because I’ll be standing out front, and he comes home, and I’ll just happen to

be coming home at the same time. And then we're working on this homeless thing together.”

Ellen explained how friends are built into the cohousing experience:

Getting to know your neighbors is much easier because you share meals. It's sort of built into the experience. It's hard not to get to know somebody. You see the same people, and you interact and build a rapport with. You don't get that opportunity in other situations unless you are leaving at the same time as someone else, and you just happen to talk to the...going off to work in the morning or something like that. But you don't run into your neighbors as much as you do people here.

Speaking with me over a cup of hot chocolate, Eric told me what he felt was one of the best things about living at Emerald Hills: “I think a lot of days hanging out with Susan next door, sitting next to her stove. And I wouldn't have met her or known her if she hadn't have been my next door neighbor at Emerald Hills.”

Rachael described the good experiences she had at Emerald Hills as “global.” Among those significant experiences was: “Becoming friends with my neighbor Ayden ... He is one of the best things that has happened to me living there. I'm glad we met him. He's special to me, and I love having him as a neighbor so much. And he comes over *a lot*.”

Pseudokinship

Some residents felt that their relationships with their neighbors were even stronger than friendship. Alberta referred to her relationships with other cohousers as “pseudo-kinship” relationships: “Well, it's a funny family-like relationship. You're friends with some people more than others, but it is really close and kinship-like. And so,

I don't know, when you meet someone else at a political function you have a special tie there. It's nice."

Rachael's sentiment revealed a similar perspective:

I love it because I've made some really amazing friendships with my neighbors. And I love that we can just go to each others houses at any moment. And I, at least, have some kind of relationship with all of my neighbors, and if they were in need or I was in need, we would not hesitate to ask one another for help

The end of Rachel's quote connects her statement with Alberta's. Rachel's feeling that if she were in trouble, she could go to any of her neighbors, despite not being close with them, alludes to a kinship-like connection.

Acquaintances, friendship, and even kinship-like relationships are facilitated by social interaction. Some of that interaction occurred during casual meetings throughout the development but some was part of an intentional routine. Community meals, which occurred on average three times a week, and work parties, which occurred less frequently, were examples of planned interaction. Given that relationships were reported as one of the best things about cohousing, it is not too surprising that experiences where relationships were developed and fostered were considered to be some of the best experiences.

The Ritual of Breaking Bread

One overwhelming trend in responses was that eating meals together was an essential and enjoyable part of community life. All of the residents and partner guests I interviewed, even those who were disenchanted with their experiences at Emerald Hills,

responded positively when asked about meals. Those positive answers were supported by my observation of dinners which were exclusively pleasant occasions. Although many respondents expressed feelings of distrust or animosity toward some of the other cohousers during our individual interviews, there was no evidence of it at the community dinners. Those who had labored on the meal were glad for the chance to relax before doing extensive clean-up, and those who hadn't prepared the meal seemed genuinely appreciative of it.

Ernest, a partner guest of Emerald Hills, who reported being very thankful for his association with the group, told me that: "What happens after dinners--that kind of family togetherness and breaking bread" were in his recollection some of the best experiences he has had during his involvement with cohousing. He explained, "I love that people often linger after dinner and chat with each other and have good times."

Ellen, who was planning on leaving the development to move to a larger city, thought back longingly: "The best experiences. I think the social interaction around meals is fun, it's lively. There's just something about group energy. I like the aspect of coming here around meals all the social interaction. It's a perk for me, just hanging out...jawing with people."

Concerned that her response was not going to be specific enough for me, Stephanie replied, "It's a little general for you, but I'd say my favorite thing about it is sharing meals over there." And Samantha, remembering back when she used to live there, said of meals, "Well, certainly a couple of the Thanksgivings were really nice.

When people shared and had wonderful Thanksgivings all together. Some of the shared meals...some of those were really fine.”

Working on Community

Another oft-heard response, when asked about the best experiences at Emerald Hills, was working together. Those who had lived there since Emerald Hills was constructed remarked on the fun they had during the initial “work parties.” One work party in particular, when the residents tore down an old redwood barn, was repeated by the every senior resident. The intention of the community was to leave as little environmental impact as possible, and the barn became part of that agenda. The wood that was salvaged from the barn was planed down and used as wainscoting throughout the common house; on every initial visit I had a resident point out that fact for my edification.

Haley: And I think of some of the early work days we had before living here, when we first bought the land. One of the work projects we had was tearing down an old barn, that was going to be torn down anyway; and we tore it down by hand to save the redwood, and so all the wainscoting in the common house is that and the molding in my house is that. So that was fun. It was really hard work, and we really got out and worked together.

The story about work on the old barn was retold by many residents. It was a source of pride and a positive memory. Samantha, speaking from her home in town, was animated in her telling of the barn demolition and salvage. Residents who moved in after the incident were also aware of the history and derived pleasure from passing it on to me.

Other residents told of the enjoyment they derived from landscaping the common area and painting the common house. Though some confided begrudgingly that there was often low roll call at work parties; the poor attendance seemed to increase their sense of industriousness and accomplishment.

Me, Too

While friendship and group cohesion were undoubtedly cemented by increased social interaction facilitated by the design of the development, common meals, and work parties, another unifying factor shared was political persuasion. The following quotes revealed that residents counted being around those who saw the world similarly as among the benefits of living in cohousing.

Ellen: I like living here better because this is more conscious. It's nice sharing meals, conversation--just spending time around like people; everybody's pretty liberal to radical, the left side of the political scene, so that's good.

Leah: Just being able to have a good conversation and being with people that basically, even though in the details, in the operation, are different, but from a philosophical standpoint tend to see the world in the same way. That's nice to be in a community that basically...the details haven't been worked out yet, but, in general, they're for world peace, they're politically progressive. It's just nice to be around that and not have to argue those points, but discuss the details.

Ernest: I like that it's not ideological in any way. I like that it doesn't have a metaphysical or spiritual... because it [cohousing] respects people's independence. There's nothing dogmatic about the experience. There's nothing "true believer" like or seriously ideological.

Living among like-minded people created a sense of security for many residents. They had an understanding that those around them cared about the same things and had

common goals. That familiarity also appeared to make fathers and mothers more comfortable with having their children socialize with neighbors.

Child Caring

There was a mostly symbiotic relationship between children and adults at Emerald Hills, which many respondents reported as being one of the assets of living there. Samantha explained:

It's a good way to raise kids 'cause the kids go back and forth between each other's houses and they have an opportunity to, especially when it works, to have other options to have lots of other choices for parental images and for choices, especially as they get older, for... somebody else plays the guitar, their parents don't play the guitar, they... you have a lot more adult role models, a lot more choices.

In support of Samantha's statement, another resident I spoke with said that children of the cohousing community seemed more secure than other children because they have so many role models. She compared them with other children whom she worked with as a teacher. In her observations they were more secure because of the nature of the relationships and the attention they received in cohousing. To demonstrate her perspective, she told me that the other day while watching some music being played in the common area, a child came up and sat on her lap. She argued that adults here are kind of interchangeable to children. The abundance of role models and the increased amount of people to go to for attention strengthened children's well-being.

“The kid thing has worked out really well. The kids, they have a little group and they’re nice kids; they do well together and they’re good for each other--so, that’s been a great part of it.” –Alberta

Along with having more adults for guidance, education, and attention, I also observed the benefits children reaped from having older children as mentors. During my involvement with cohousing, I watched children taking on the role of older brother or sister to a younger neighbor. This took the form of serving younger children their evening meal, teaching them a craft, educating them about proper behavior or playing a game with them.

The other half of the child equation is the benefit adults without children garner from having children around. Leah, a single professional, proclaimed: “The dinners were always great because of the kids. I just really, really enjoyed the interaction with the kids. I mean I enjoyed the interaction with the parents, but I came here to be around a lot of kids and I really love that.” She went on to describe the close relationships she had with two of the children who resided at Emerald Hills and the joy it brought her to be around them. She laughed as she told me about a child whose life she has been involved with for years and how she eventually earned godmother status.

Earnest also took pride in his mentoring role to children of Emerald Hills:

I think that Susan and Bob would say that I am some kind of a god-parent, informally, to their children or an uncle, something like that. There’s a lot of warmth there. There’s a lot of appreciation from Bob that I talk about his kids with him. I’m older than him, I’m no wiser than him, but I am older and my kids are grown, so I watch his kids and see a lot of what he is doing as a parent. I could sort of see how he parents, and it’s fun to watch; and I feel some appreciation to him for that. I feel some

connection with his kids, who like me around and who make kind of independent contacts with me. I am a person in their lives to a limited extent.

While Rachael gave me examples of aspects of the community that were significant to her, she told this story:

I remember all the kids in our neighborhood started fighting; they were being aggressive. Mostly teasing, they weren't being violent, and they were taking sticks and pulling plants up to like run and chase each other with and it was becoming a problem. Instead of punishing all the kids or the parents getting mad at each others' kids, the parents got together and had some kind of meeting, and someone got all the kids bamboo and put their names on them. So each kid had one. And they made it this game to run around with their bamboo as long as they didn't hurt each other with it and just played. That way they didn't have to pull up plants or get sticks or anything. They all had something, and it was like their special toy, and right after they gave them all to the kids, the sun was setting and the kids were all running around so happy and playing with their bamboo, and it was just like one of those moments. I was like we are just like a little family and those are the kids so happy right now together. That was a good moment. I mean there are moments like that, that happen a lot but are really special to me.

Rachael, a single working professional without children, had symbolically included the children of the community in her familial vision.

Social Capital of Community Living

The term *social capital*, coined by Pierre Bourdieu, is well known by social scientists. Eric, in his interview with me, agreed with Samantha's understanding of cohousing, which included a definition of *social capital* most social scientists would agree with:

It's an understanding that she has that communities are a good way to live on an emotional level and on a strategic level. You gain real things,

physical, tangible, money things, by working together, by working together as well as emotional good feelings of having someone in your house that you like, that you get to laugh with and talk about sex with and have good meaty conversations with.

Yes, *social capital* means the real things that result from relationships with others.

Social scientists study groups and measure their interconnectedness to determine if they are rich in social capital or not. A book entitled *Bowling Alone* documented the decline in social capital in the United States over the past fifty years (Putnam 1995). Putnam argued that it was television, which demanded attention at the cost of all else, leaving people disconnected from the social world, that is responsible for the marked decline in civic participation and the social capital that accompanied it. Because social capital is dependent upon social interaction, a decline in social interaction correlates with a decline in social capital.

Eric went on to give examples of social capital that he was able to cash in on while living at Emerald Hills:

The things I really liked were my next door neighbor was really into books, fantasy books like me, we shared authors, so we started hanging out and sharing books. And I liked to cook a lot so I got into meals, and they made it really easy for me to compost where my previous house was difficult to compost; they made it easier for me to recycle. There were facilities there that really worked with my lifestyle. I could go run in the [wildlife sanctuary]. The way it's set up to share space and share efforts where people take on tasks and share meals and stuff. I loved it. I thought it was great.

And specifically in regard to Eric's relationship with Samantha:

Samantha and I have shared; she has given me things that were going out on the edge a little bit. She loaned me money different times. She opened up her house to me when she didn't know me very well, let me hang out, eat her food, whatever. And our lives have become intertwined, and now I

have a job and I've hooked her up. I've really advocated for her...for [the company I now work for], so she's gotten tons more work.

Employment

Advocating for employment was a common theme among residents of Emerald Hills and an exemplar of social capital. During my interview with Stephanie, a partner guest at Emerald Hills, I learned of a symbiotic relationship between her employer and the residents of Emerald Hills.

Stephanie: I would say it has been hugely positive. It's increased our kind of network in the area and that's really been beneficial in my job and stuff. Just knowing people in the health department has relation to [my work] sometimes. And turning people on to activities that they can do with their children. Just kind of back and forth resources with my job has been helpful.

Rachael recalled the story of a relationship she had with an older resident, Haley, who had given practical advice as a mentor and aided her in finding employment:

Having Haley there has been really awesome because I don't really talk to her that often, but I feel like she's an important role in my life. That she's a mentor in some ways, and she has the same career that I do, but she has been through a lot more than I have. She's been so helpful about when I first moved here. Trying to find a job, telling me who to call. And then over time she'll just see when I'm getting overwhelmed or stressed out with my job, she'll just check in with me and it is really awesome to have this strong older woman who knows what I am talking about. And to have her to check in with has been really amazing.

A similar relationship developed between Ernest and Susan. Susan and Earnest met through work and then supported each other at work as well as in their career goals.

I was running one of the programs at [the] college... and that is when I met Susan. I met her because she applied for a position teaching for me. She mentioned Emerald Hills to me in our friendship. We also became pretty active with each other as co-teachers, we worked together a lot.

And she invited me to meet her family and then also to come to dinner as a guest of her family at Emerald Hills.

Over the span of their relationship, Earnest made a career change, and I witnessed him assisting Susan with making a similar transition. When he found new employment, he advocated for Susan with his new employer so that they could work together again.

Domestic and community labor

An advantage of living in close proximity with so many people was that for many there is a ready-made workforce. Whether it's a building project or childcare needs, there are many people around who can help.

Leah, thankful for the time with children, told me: "You know Evelyn can call on me if she needs babysitting. If Thomas needs somebody to take Charles to school, to be with him or do something with him, he even just needs a break, that's what I really like."

I also learned of childcare taking place informally. Interviewees said that a neighborhood child would drop by for visit and they would end up entertaining the child for an hour or so. Residents also included children in outdoor projects or played games with them when either one needed a buddy. The parents of Emerald Hills also shared child care duties. When cooking dinner with Alberta or Angelica, I learned about arrangements they had made for picking up and/or dropping each others' children off at school or other activities.

Being well-connected with their neighbors meant that residents of Emerald Hills could simply knock on a door, and they would receive help with whatever project they were working on. Susan gave some examples:

You know, Alberta and I have talked about if she wanted fruit trees. And I loved the idea of her having fruit trees, [so] I went with her at the nursery and helped her pick them out and looked things up, and we were checking which trees were the best trees to get. And we dug the holes and I helped her move the compost over. I helped her pull the stones out of the gravel. It was a lot of work. And then Lindy and I were over cleaning Ellen's hot tub--we are the ones who do that now. And this morning I was over weeding Ellen's garden bed because she's selling, and it would be nice if the place looked nice for the people.

Susan acknowledged that being involved with her neighbors was complicated, and at times difficult, but she accepted it as being part of living in cohousing.

The meal club is a central example of social capital at Emerald Hills. According to the scheduling, a resident was required to cook only two out of twelve meals per month. That meant that after putting in their time to design, prepare, and cook a meal twice a month, residents could enjoy the remainder of the meals labor free. This was seen by more than one resident as "a pretty sweet deal." Along with being a benefit in terms of work, attending common meals was one of the primary events where residents interacted. It was, therefore, a factory of social capital: eating together reinforced social capital by strengthening community.

Common space

Some who did not physically reside at Emerald Hills also received the benefit of the common facilities there. Stephanie, a partner guest, told me about the home she and her partner purchased in the neighborhood that was in extreme need of remodeling. She said that being involved with Emerald Hills during the remodeling of her kitchen had been a lifesaver. Three times a week they were able to eat at Emerald Hills and escape

the construction zone their house had become. As an added perk to the remodeling,

Stephanie recalled:

And we also bought into the woodshop there in the rec-room. At first it was there because somebody lived there, and then he left the community and wanted to sell his equipment; and it's really nice wood working equipment, and we needed it because we were doing all this stuff, so we helped purchase it. So we own kind of a share of that, which is great because we have no place to put a shop.

The social networks at Emerald Hills allowed those living in the community, and those associated with it, to utilize free used books, employment leads, child care, an extra hand, and an extra kitchen.

CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION

Interviews with residents of Emerald Hills revealed important insights into aspects of cohousing which effect well-being. Participants developed a sense of well-being at Emerald Hills through eating meals together, working on projects as a community, living among people who shared a similar political outlook, developing friendships with neighbors, having a good environment for children to be raised in, and benefiting from resources drawn from those relationships. Conversely, conflicts over money, the absence of mediation or consensus training, the lack of a unifying vision statement, the presence of individualism, and disagreement about expectations for relationships among community members negatively affected the well-being of residents of Emerald Hills. Interviews further revealed having realistic or low expectations prior to moving into cohousing mitigated the negative effects on the well-being of cohousing residents of Emerald Hills.

The role money played in the shaping of Emerald Hills can be understood by looking at earlier research on cohousing. Chris and Kelly Scotthanson (2005) and Meltzer (2005) found that the absence of professionals during the development process could have lingering negative effects on the well-being of cohousing projects. That lesson was illustrated by the story of Samantha, a founding member of Emerald Hills, who became the scapegoat for the development's setbacks. The tension over her decisions created fissures in group cohesion. Had professionals been employed from the

start, the dissonance experienced over early decisions would likely have been directed externally. Angst directed externally might have strengthened internal bonds rather than disrupted them (see Wiggins, Wiggins, and Zanden 1994).

Quantitative research on finances and well-being helps us understand dissonance in a homogeneous class of people. Oswald (1997) and Morawetz (1997) both showed the effect of relative income on well-being. They found that “relative wealth” is an important factor in individuals’ sense of well-being. For example, the well-being of a person living in a small house in a country club development in Beverly Hills might be determined to be lower than the well-being of a person living in a comparatively large home in South Central Los Angeles. With that in mind, what appeared to be insignificant differences in income between homeowners of Emerald Hills may have contributed to the differences in residents’ sense of well-being. This understanding might help explain why perceptions of money differed among residents.

Yet, perhaps the best explanation for the disparity in perceptions of money is that an arena was not established at Emerald Hills where financial understandings could be negotiated. As one of the earlier cohousing developments in the United States, Emerald Hills did not have access to important literature on cohousing development and the centrality of structures for communication and decision making. After cohousing had been in existence in the United States for a decade and a half, researchers began to recognize the role communication played in the success of cohousing developments (Scotthanson and Scotthanson 2005, Meltzer 2005). Those writers learned through observation and research that the most successful cohousing developments worked as

earnestly at creating open lines of communication as they did on the actual physical structure of the development.

Emerald Hills residents revealed that neither a group vision to unite diverse views had been established nor had a process been created for handling disputes. This apparent oversight had cascading effects. Without a shared vision, an environment was created that fostered individualism--the antithesis of community. Strong-willed individuals then argued over community direction and the remainder of the community suffered from those disagreements. Without an established method for resolving disputes, those arguments festered.

Ferdinand Toennies ([1887] 1957), Emile Durkheim ([1893] 1964), Robert Nisbet (1962), and Robert Bellah (1985) documented the effects of individualism, which had manifested at Emerald Hills: anti-social behavior, mental distress, apathy, and fear of community. Toennies warned that without the regulations of community, individualism would emerge allowing for anti-social and aggressive behavior. The story of Anthony epitomized such conduct. In an atmosphere of ambiguity toward the "cat policy," Anthony acted out. Durkheim cautioned that extreme individualism would create a variety of mental distresses. Among them were anxiety, alienation, and disenchantment. In the many stories of those frustrated with the actions of a few, we see confirmation of Durkheim's presage.

Residents also suffered from apathy as Nisbet (1962) noted. Many no longer attended dinners, some stopped participating in community meetings and other events. Others simply left the community. In *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah (1985) found that

American society had become so individualistic that *community* was viewed as suspect. At Emerald Hills, a microcosm of the United States, there is rich data to support Bellah's conclusions. Many residents viewed the obligations of community as threatening to their personal freedom or individuality.

Meltzer (2005) reported that individualism was mitigated through participation in cohousing. Meltzer found that the strong behavioral controls of the cohousing communities caused residents to focus on the needs of the community, rather than on their own individual needs. This research, however, does not support Meltzer's findings. The apparent reason for the disagreement in research conclusions is that a shared vision, an essential element of Meltzer's theory, is missing at Emerald Hills.

Others have suggested that high expectations lead to greatest disappointments and lower sense of well-being (Jones et al. 2005; Kalmuss, Davidson, and Cushman 1992; Michelson, Belgue, and Stewart 1973; Hall and Duvall 2003). Interviews with Samantha, Clint, Chelsea, Gloria, Helene, and Kyle affirmed that high expectations relative to actual consequences result in lower well-being. Interviews with Alberta, Eric, Stephanie and Earnest confirmed that modest expectations facilitate transition and have more healthful impact on well-being.

Interestingly, those who were single reported being unsatisfied with cohousing at a much higher rate than those who were in a relationship. Five out of the six people who were single reported that their expectations of cohousing were not met at Emerald Hills. One explanation for singles dissatisfaction may be that they do not have a "family unit" from which to draw support. They in turn expected more from the casual interactions at

Emerald Hills. One solution to this problem would be to organize events for singles within the community. Those seeking more intimate relationships could have regular outings, game nights, movie nights, and the like, while those whose social needs are met at home could opt out of such events. Hopefully future research will explore more thoroughly the differences in the experiences of singles versus couples living in cohousing.

The main suggestions for change mentioned in interviews at Emerald Hills, related to identified problems: mediation and process, intimacy, and vision. Given the great deal of agreement on problems and potential solutions, change could conceivably move quickly.

Hope for change can also be found in the literature on cohousing evolution. Susan and Maria's speculations that Emerald Hills would advance through their growing pains was also noted in the work of Graham Meltzer (2005). Meltzer observed in his many years of research that cohousing communities mature with time. He found that older communities were generally more stable.

As change does occur at Emerald Hills, it is likely that changes in one area will cause a cascading effect on others. With the establishment of mediation, greater intimacy will be achieved. With greater intimacy, a shared vision will likely develop, which will have a positive effect on process. And, if a shared vision is developed, it would consequently bring about intimacy and would likely mitigate problems that arise in the running of the community.

The chapter, *Cohousing and Living Well*, coincided closely with literature review findings. In the literature review, studies of social support (Adams 1992; Ingram et al. 1999), social interaction (Cohen, Gottlieb, and Underwood 2001; Antonucci and Lansford, 1998), and social environment (Adams 1992; Young, Russell and Powers 2004) found conflicting results. There was disagreement among authors about whether the effects of social support were positive or negative, whether increased social interaction was beneficial or harmful to an individual's well-being, and whether social environment had any effect on well-being. In the same way, relationships which were seen as the primary corrosive element to community in the chapter entitled *Cohousing Challenges* were seen to be a source of cohesion in the chapter, *Cohousing and Living Well*.

The chapter *Cohousing and Living Well* added insights to the relationship between social capital and well-being. While Meltzer (2005) explored social capital in its relation to decreased environmental waste, he did not relate it to well-being. The findings in this paper, however, reveal a close connection between social capital and well-being. The security involved in having social capital to draw from created a sense of well-being for residents of Emerald Hills. This relationship between social capital and well-being is akin to the relationship between financial security and well-being found in other research (Oswald 1997; Morawetz et al. 1997; Kacapyr 1998; Clark and Oswald 2002).

The findings in this paper reemphasize the difficulties associated with studying well-being. Individual experiences in cohousing vary because of differences in personal histories, attitudes, needs, and expectations. However, this paper and cohousing literature

indicate that certain steps help bridge those differences. The establishment of a vision statement, the implementation of a conflict resolution strategy, and the presence of a mediator appear to encourage a more peaceful environment. Time also appears to play a role in the stability of cohousing developments. Over time, cohousing developments tend to establish equilibrium. Nevertheless, it is important to not over-estimate the benefits of living in community. Cohousing developments will never create utopias. Living effectively in community takes work. Community evolution does not do away with that work but provides maturity and wisdom in accepting and working through the difficulties associated with community living.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. If you were talking with someone who had never heard of cohousing before, how would you describe it to her or him?
2. Can you tell me the story of how you came to live here?
3. How did you first hear about cohousing?
4. How did you first hear about Emerald Hills?
5. Why did you choose to live at Emerald Hills?
6. Was there a screening process for getting into Emerald Hills?
7. Tell me about the places where you lived before coming to live at Emerald Hills
(Tell me about some of the past living situations that stand out in your mind).
8. How do those experiences compare with living here?
9. What are a few of the best experiences you have had living here?
10. What are a few of the not-so-good experiences you have had living here?
11. Can you talk about the rules/agreements here at Emerald Hills?
12. How do you feel about those rules/agreements?
13. How do the agreements work?
14. Do disputes ever occur? If so, how are they handled?
15. Can you talk about your relationships with other cohousers?
16. What do you like about living here?
17. What do you dislike about living here?
18. How long have you lived here approximately?

19. How long do you plan on living here?
20. Would you recommend cohousing to others? Why or why not?
21. Looking back on your experiences with cohousing, has cohousing had any effect on your life?
22. Have you changed as a result of your experiences with cohousing?
23. If you were to start a cohousing project, how would you do it differently?
24. Are there any changes or suggestions you would make in regard to this cohousing project?
25. I spoke with someone who told me all cohousing projects have a theme. What would you say the theme or focus of this group is?
26. Do you feel like you are needed here?
27. How have you felt about having a researcher here at Emerald Hills?
28. If you were to do away with the financial obligations of this cohousing development, how would that change things?
29. Can you tell me about the emotions you feel when you think about cohousing?
30. Now that I have interviewed you, and explained a little about my research, are there any questions you would add to this questionnaire? If you were in my position, what questions would you ask your neighbors or other cohousers?