OBSERVING ORGANIZATIONAL AND INTERACTION BEHAVIORS AMONG MUTUAL-HELP RECOVERY HOME MEMBERS*

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ABSTRACT

This study explored self-governing processes in a mutual-help recovery setting called Oxford House. Residents from Oxford Houses live in communal, same-sex rented houses without professional staff supervision. The present study analyzed behavioral data observed during business meetings at 29 Northern Illinois Oxford Houses (20 men, 9 women). At these meetings, residents discussed organizational operations and developed or modified rules and regulations for effective day-by-day setting operations. Findings indicated that ecological, house-level factors were significantly related to discussions on issues related to house operations, rather than resident-specific behaviors. The implications of these findings on empowering members in the setting are discussed.

RECOVERY HOME MEMBERS

Under modern managed care, private and public sector community and inpatient substance abuse facilities have reduced their services significantly. As an

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alternative, lower cost, residential, non-medical, community-based care options for substance abuse patients have emerged (Jason, Ferrari, Davis, & Olson, 2006). Community-based recovery homes that provide a supportive post-treatment environment transition for individuals who completed in-patient treatment programs may offer participants an opportunity to resolve problems through mutual-help in a naturalistic setting (Kennedy, Humphreys, & Borkman, 1994). In one study, Hitchcock, Stainback, and Roque (1995) examined whether differences in patient effectiveness emerged after male veterans were admitted to either a halfway house or merely provided medically funded, single dwelling housing. These researchers found that participants in the halfway houses, which facilitated mutual-support toward sobriety, stayed in aftercare 60 days longer, had significantly more clinic visits, and a higher proportion completed treatment milestones compared to participants in usual aftercare.

There is a need to know more about the effectiveness of these types of supportive housing options following inpatient treatment for alcohol, cocaine, or mixed alcohol-cocaine abuse dependent individuals. Unfortunately, some aftercare, communal-living mutual-support homes are located in high crime and drug use areas, which may interfere with efforts to remain abstinent (Jason, Davis, Ferrari, & Bishop, 2001). Additionally, residents may resent the fact that treatment staff often establishes rules perceived as arbitrary or not democratically derived (Ferrari, Jason, Davis, Olson, & Alvarez, 2004). One type of recovery home that locates its houses in better neighborhoods and is completely democratically run is called *Oxford House* (OH).

Oxford House was founded in the 1970s, and has now grown to over 1,100 houses across the United States (as well as over 30 Canadian and about 10 Australian houses). No professional staff is involved with the houses, enabling residents to create their own rules for communal governance. Residents live together in a democratic, single-sex home and provide for each other a supportive abstinent mutual support network. The residents must follow Oxford House guidelines, which include paying rent, abstaining from alcohol and drug use, and avoiding disruptive behavior. Residents continually support each other to find and maintain employment, as members use this income source to pay their rent. Although Oxford House is not affiliated organizationally or financially with Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, most Oxford House members participate in 12-step program meetings (Nealon-Woods, Ferrari, & Jason, 1995).

Jason, Ferrari, Dvorchak, Groessl, and Molloy (1997) found that Oxford House residents typically were never married (53%), young (early to mid-30s), Caucasian (58%), and male (70%). Positive outcome data have also been reported for this approach. After six months of residency in an Oxford House, Bishop, Jason, Ferrari, and Huang (1998) found that 69% of those male residents from Illinois and Majer, Jason, Ferrari, and North (2002) found 69.2% of male and female residents from Missouri either remained residents in their house or left on good terms. In a recently completed study, Jason, Olson, Ferrari, and Lo Sasso

(in press) recruited individuals who were just completing their substance abuse treatment. Half were randomly assigned to live in an OH, while the other half were randomly assigned to a usual after-care condition. At a two-year follow-up period, 69% of those assigned to the OH were abstinent versus 35% among the control group. In addition, 76% of those assigned to OHs were employed versus 49% of controls, and average monthly income for the OH residents was $989, whereas average monthly income for the usual care group was $440.

Ferrari, Jason, Sasser, Davis, and Olson (2006) reported that the physical structures and interior/exterior designs of OHs from across three diverse regions of the United States (east, midwest, and west coast) were surprisingly similar. In fact, Ferrari, Jason, Blake, Davis, and Olson (2006) compared these U.S. houses with Australian OHs on characteristics of their physical neighborhoods. Regardless of geographic location with the United States and across nations, Oxford Houses were described as typically private, well-maintained homes providing warm, comforting dwellings located in mid to high SES neighborhoods with available public amenities (e.g., grocery stores, hospitals, and restaurants) and low illegal drug and crime activity in the surrounding community. Local communities even report that residents of Oxford House blend well with the neighborhood and make "good neighbors" (Jason, Roberts, & Olson, 2005).

In a study directly related to the present investigation, Ferrari et al. (2004) compared operational policies from 55 Midwest U.S. Oxford Houses with therapeutic communities. Both types of facilities did not permit self-injurious behaviors (e.g., physical self-harm or over medication of drugs) or destructive acts (e.g., destroying site property or possessions of others). Oxford Houses, however, were significantly more liberal in permitting residents personal freedoms compared to the aftercare facilities. The Oxford Houses, for instance, permitted greater flexibility in terms of residents' smoking in their rooms, sleeping late in the morning or staying out late at night, going away for a weekend, and having "private time" in their locked room with guests.

Oxford House is only one type of support group, but there are many others that involve mutual-help (Maton & Salem, 1995; Toro et al., 1988). In addition, some investigators have used behavioral observations to document what occurs within these types of mutual-help groups. As an example, Roberts, Luke, Rappaport, Seidman, Toro, and Reischl (1991) developed a behavioral observation system for assessing mutual help group meetings for individuals with serious mental illness who were part of a self-help organization. These researchers observed comments indicative of a positive, supportive climate, and negative behavior was infrequently recorded. In addition, a substantial proportion of the comments made during meetings involved efforts to help one another. Information sharing accounted for more than a third of the comments while only 7% were coded as self-disclosure. It appears that members focused on problem solving as they dealt with ordinary events and activities. Using behavioral observations,

Roberts, Salem, Rappaport, Toro, Luke, and Seidman (1999) also found giving help to others predicted improvements in psychosocial adjustment.

Viola, Ferrari, Davis, and Jason (2006) recently reported that helping behaviors to other Oxford House members were common among a national sample of residents. Nevertheless, there remains no direct observation of the processes that occur within a mutual-help, community living setting such as Oxford House. As has been found by Roberts at al. (1991), it is possible that much of what occurs in mutual help residential group meetings involves discussion of organizational issues and how one deals with day-to-day activities, rather than self-disclosure of emotional material. Research is also needed to investigate whether communications recorded within these mutual help settings are related to ecological social regularities within and between these settings (length of time the setting has been in operation, the gender of the members, number of members, length of meetings, etc.). This could help investigators better umderstand the processes behind setting governance within naturalistic, mutual-help supportive communities.

In the present exploratory study, we developed a behavioral observation system to assess what occurs during business meetings within a sample of Oxford Houses, and investigated how behavioral interactions were related to social regularities within Houses (e.g., length of time the House has been in operation, the gender of the House residents, number of residents, number of shared bedrooms, length of meetings, etc.). As this was an exploratory study, we did not hypothesize specific relationships between behavioral interactions and social regularities within the Oxford Houses. We categorized our behavioral data into organizational and resident-specific behaviors to examine more closely the dynamics of weekly group meetings. We hypothesized that the Oxford House business meetings would involve discussion of organizational issues and day-to-day activities, rather than more resident specific items such as self-disclosure of emotional material.

METHOD

An Overview of Established House Governance Processes

Each Oxford House operates with a few set procedures, including total abstinence from drugs and alcohol, contributions to the financial operations of the House, and non-disruptive behaviors. At least 80% of the members living in an Oxford House need to vote *yes* for a new person to join their mutual-help house. If the new member comes from a treatment facility, he or she is placed on a newcomer's contract which states that they are not allowed to spend a night out of the house, and are also given a curfew of 11:30 p.m. for two weeks. If the new resident comes from a treatment facility where they had stayed less than 30 days or if they were entering OH without treatment in the past 30 days, then the same

curfew rules apply for 60 days. During this initial period of time, the new Oxford House members are asked to attend eight self-help meetings during this first month.

Also during the initiation period, residents are involved in *one-on-ones* with every current member of the house, which allows the new member to tell his her story about addiction and what techniques are being used to maintain sobriety. When a newcomer fails to adhere to the guidelines, a financial *fine* is usually given by majority approval of the OH. Fines may be imposed on any resident who does not meet the rules established in the setting. During weekly business meetings, fines that are levied are billed to a person's weekly rent. Fines are used to pay for house expenses; they are recycled and ultimately provide additional resources to the house.

If a new resident needs a job, typically another house resident may help the new member find *employment.* It should be noted that some of the rules (e.g., not breaking curfew and attending business meetings) may be broken if they interfere with a person's employment schedule. This emphasizes the critical role of employment in the OH model. If residents receive disability funds, they are required to perform local volunteer work in order to be a productive community citizen.

In order to develop *responsibility and leadership skills,* the following six executive positions exist within each OH: president, treasurer, comptroller, coordinator, secretary, and building maintenamce. These positions rotate every six months so that every house member has the opportunity to become a leader and help regulate policies. The revolving leadership system is also a method of preparing people who are inexperienced with financial issues and general management to become more effective in the real world. Houses also are part of chapters, which meet monthly, so each house has a member who votes at these chapter meetings. Members who attend these meetings report that it is easier to have rules enforced by residents of their own house, who understand their situations and also must comply with these rules, than by professionals who might be more distant and removed (see Jason, Ferrari, Davis, & Olson, 2006, for more details on the OH leadership process).

To maintain cleanliness within the Houses, each resident is assigned one of seven types of *weekly chores,* such as cleaning the kitchen, dining room, living room, laundry room, bathrooms, and the hall and stairs. Assignments last for approximately two weeks, and are done four times within those weeks. Residents typically spend about 40 minutes a week on chores. New house members must assist in doing chores around the house in order to adjust to the new environment, which may take about a month. There is one Coordinator for the house who grades each of the details twice a week along a 4-point system, with 4 being the worst score resulting in an automatic fine (two consecutive 3 scores earns a person a financial fine). If these details are not done, or if they are not done appropriately, the resident will be fined. A blackboard is mounted for all residents at this site to

see, and when violations occur, the offense is posted on the board. Violations to house rules are discussed at the weekly house meetings.

Oxford House meetings generally commence with the Treasurer reading the financial report followed by the Comptroller reading a weekly report. If residents do not pay their rent on time, they are given a $5 late fee for the first week, $10 for the second week, and $20 for the third week, and during this third week of being fined, the resident also has the possibility of receiving an additional $25 "disruptive behavior" fine. Failure to do one's weekly chores can result in fines of $5 to $10. At times residents are placed on contract, involving one or more fines or required behavior changes that need to be paid or made by a certain date. These fines and contracts give residents a clear understanding of what the house policies are, and in a sense, the guidelines set clear standards and consequences. Such contingencies may help new residents begin the process of behavior change (Jason et al., 2006).

Rules are a way of providing safety for all members, and to ensure that residents are keeping on their path to a drug-free life style (Ferrari et al., 2004). House members are required to comply with local community and state laws, demonstrating publicly to neighbors that residents are responsible citizens. Public posting of documents is also a way of alerting all residents of the house to the seriousness of a particular behavior. Failure to comply with contracts would result in eviction from a home. Even if one is evicted from the home, a resident may still deal with the offense (e.g., if a relapse occurred, the person could make another commitment to abstinence), and the person might then apply for admission to another OH after 30 days.

The Present Settings and Study Procedure

Observations in the present study were collected across seven months during business meetings at 29 Oxford Houses (20 male, 9 female) located in northern Illinois, with each house including on average seven residents and an average of two residents per bedroom. On average, these houses were in continuous operation for seven years ($SD = 4.0$). The business meetings ranged in length from 60 to 240 minutes (M length = 143.8; $SD = 40.4$) and were held once per week. One observation session occurred for each Oxford House.

The content-based observation system was created based on a measure devised by Roberts et al. (1991) to examine mutual-help interactions. The codes for the Roberts et al. study, however, were more focused on therapeutic support group behavior rather the residential life that exists in Oxford House. While there are some similarities to the interactions that might occur in a 12-step group, the codes from the Roberts et al. measure do not cover the many business- and family-oriented concepts that were likely to arise in an Oxford House business meeting.

There were a number of sources that contributed to the development of these codes, including a full recording of several business meetings, and discussions with Oxford House alumni. One preliminary study of our looking at contingencies within a single house (Jason, Olson, Ferrari, Layne, Davis, & Alvarez, 2003) suggested some of the codes related to financial issues (e.g., money and fines) and techniques to reduce tension within the house (e.g., conflict). Several theoretical constructs relevant to mutual-help interactions (Olson, Jason, Ferrari, & Hutcheson, 2005) also contributed to the creation of codes relevant to observable psychological processes (e.g., self-disclosure, emotional support, non-emotional support). In sum, a set of 16 codes was developed.

Through pilot testing with the use of several research assistants and volunteers, and extensive design by the third author, a final reduced set of codes was created. Several iterations of the scale were used at actual business meetings within houses not included in the present study to further test this measure. This final set of codes seemed to best fit the interactions at hand in a way that was broad enough to catch less likely interactions, and yet specific enough to allow scoring with sufficient speed.

A system was developed that categorized 14 discreet behaviors observed at the meetings. These 14 meeting-related behaviors were classified into the following two categories: six behaviors considered *organizational-oriented* (i.e., non-money, explained, money, questions, vote, and action plan) and eight behaviors clustered as *resident-specific* (i.e., calling out, conflict, humor, self-disclosure, fines, emotional support, regroup, non-emotional support). These two domains allowed us to conceptualize whether meetings focused more on rules and regulations for setting operations and processes (organizational-oriented) or potential interpersonal, resident communications (resident-specific). The 14 target behaviors are listed and defined in Table 1.

Two independent observers assessed the 14 target behavior observations for six business meetings to obtain inter-rater reliability. Data from only one of the observers was used for data analysis purposes. We decided to use this approach once we found extremely high inter-rater reliability (see Results). Once adequate reliability was established, the two observers then collected data from other houses. In every minute during the meeting, the trained observers watched members for 20 seconds then recorded observed behaviors for 20 seconds. This was followed by a break for 20 seconds before repeating the process at the start of the next minute. Inter-rater reliability was calculated separately for each of the 14 observed meeting behaviors.

To fully understand these democratically run, communal recovery programs, we felt it was important to understand the self-governance policies and social regularities within and between Houses. Toward this aim, we collected data on the *static, ecological variables* about each House (length of time the House had been in existence, the gender of the House residents, number of residents, whether houses had shared bedrooms, length of meetings, length of chores, and whether

Table 1. Definitions of Observed Target Meeting Behaviors

Organizational-Oriented Behaviors:

Non-money: Comments regarding the status of something within the house other than finances such as review of any rules (e.g., something is broken, chore assignment, review of the last chapter meeting or new rules, upcoming conferences)

Explain: Comments made to give information or clarity

Money: Comments regarding the monetary or financial status of the House bank accounts

Questions: Questions asked by an individual

Vote: Act of decision-making, including motions

Action plan: Comments regarding a plan of action to change an identified problem made by the acting individual

Resident-Specific Behaviors:

Call out: An act that identifies disruptive behaviors toward another individual or House operations

Conflict: Comments/actions observed conveying mutual tension, anger, frustration, or sarcasm/bullying within the group

Humor: Funny comments made eliciting laughs/jovial responses from others but not made at the expense of other residents

Self-disclosure: Sharing personal information (e.g., personal life, emotions, hardships, personal faith), or comments made intending to elicit sympathy or support

Fines: Assigning a financial penalty for breaking rules

Emotional support: Offering emotional praise or encouragement (e.g., "Good job,") or suggesting a course of action

Regroup: Comments intending to keep the meeting process focused on the task at hand

Non-emotional support: Comments directly offering informational or tangible support (e.g., use of a car, knowledge about a job opening, etc.)

House members permitted smoking within the site, etc. . . .). The length of time the house had been in existence was recorded in years. For gender of the house, female houses were defined as 1, and male houses as 2. The number of residents referred to total number of residents living in the house when the observational data were collected. Shared bedrooms referred to whether or not two residents shared a bedroom in a house. Meeting length referred to the length of meetings in

minutes. Length of chores referred to the total number of hours that residents were involved in chores each week. For the smoking permitted variable, the variable was recorded using the following scale: 1 = not allowed, 2 = discouraged, 3 = neutral, 4 = tolerated, and 5 = allowed. Inter-observer reliability was calculated by independent assessments by either the House President or Secretary at these Houses. Overall, interobserver reliability ranged from 94-97% per item, and more details about this reliability are located in Ferrari et al. (2004).

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the mean proportion of time during a meeting spent focused on each of the 14 target observed behaviors. As noted from Table 2, inter-rater observer reliability was consistently high across observations (*Md* = 0.995, range = 0.87 to 1.00). Mean proportion of time was calculated using the amount of time spent in that behavior divided by the total length of minutes for the meeting. The amounts do not add up to 100% because the two or more observed behaviors could occur during any particular time period. Results indicated that majority of the time at OH meetings was spent discussing organizational matters, as opposed to 3% for individual resident specific matters (*M* = .03, *SD* =.03). In fact, the three most frequently occurring variables were *non-money (55%), explaining (36%),* and *money (20%).* Because non-emotional support was not observed, it was not included on Table 2.

Examining the Interrelation between Observed Behaviors at Meetings

To determine whether the separate observed behaviors were related to each other, *zero-order correlates* were calculated between the 14 target behaviors. As noted from Table 2, among the six *organizational behaviors* observed at the meetings, *money* related matters were significantly negatively related to *asking questions* for clarification and gaining *explanations* of policies and discussion matters. Organizational matters related to *voting* to establish or modify house policies were significantly positively related to asking questions for clarification of operations and to developing action plans for the house residents. Furthermore, *actions plans* were significantly positively related to gaining explanations and asking questions to other members.

Also noted in Table 2, among the *resident-speciflc behaviors* observed at the meetings, the act of *calling someone out* (i.e., publicly noting someone's inappropriate behaviors in the house) was significantly positively related to a sense of *conflict* or tension among house residents. *Self-disclosure* by residents observed at the meetings was significantly positively related to interpersonal conflict among residents. Obtaining *emotional support* from other residents was significantly

Table 2. Mean Proportion and Zero-Order Correlates among Observed Organizational and Resident-Specific Meeting Behaviors

	M	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Non-money	.55 (.26)	[.99]												
2. Explain	.36 (.18)	-.28	[.89]											
3. Money	.20 (.08)	.28	-.34*	[.97]										
4. Questions	.14 (.10)	-.28	.56**	-.35*	[.98]									
5. Vote	.13 (.04)	.29	.04	.09	.45*	[.97]								
6. Action plan	.10 (.08)	-.11	.46*	-.23	.58**	.43*	[.99]							
7. Calling out	.06 (.11)	-.25	.00	-.37*	-.03	-.50*	-.20	[1.00]						
8. Conflict	.05 (.10)	-.53*	.14	-.47*	.26	-.40*	-.09	.79**	[.97]					
9. Humor	.04 (.08)	.10	.39*	-.17	.55**	.50*	.35*	-.13	-.11	[.97]				
10. Self-disclose	.03 (.04)	-.50*	.41*	-.36*	.66**	.11	.21	-.09	.37*	.25	[.96]			
11. Fines	.03 (.02)	-.17	.16	.00	.16	.15	.11	-.01	.14	-.09	.14	[1.00]		
12. Emotion sup	.01 (.01)	-.12	.37*	-.20	.38*	.27	.62**	-.04	-.08	.65**	.18	-.15	[1.00]	
13. Regroup	.01 (.01)	-.26	.26	-.23	.21	-.03	.41*	.04	.14	.23	.00	-.11	.53*	[1.00]

Note: Values in parentheses are standard deviation; values along diagonal are inter-observer reliability.
$n = 29$ settings
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

positively related to nonoffensive *humor* that was not directed at another resident, and helping the residents at the meeting *regroup* or refocus attention to interpersonal issues.

Assessing the Interrelation between Target Behaviors and House Ecological Variables

Table 3 presents the 14 observed meeting behaviors with the ecological characteristics recorded about the 29 Oxford Houses. In examining the *organizational behaviors,* the longer a house was in existence the more often weekly meetings discussed financial matters (i.e., money). The gender of the house was significantly positively correlated to money and non-money meeting issues, as well as negatively correlated with the development of action plans and clarification or explanation of house policies. The length of house meetings was significantly negatively related to discussions on money and non-money issues. In terms of management of chores, the only organizational behavior significantly related to ecological characteristics was a negative relation with voting frequency. Permitting smoking within and around the House was significantly positively related with money, non-money, and voting.

Among the *resident-specific variables,* the length of time the House was in existence or operation was not significantly related to any ecological characteristic, but the gender of House residents was significantly negatively related to the need to regroup the residents at meetings to the target issue being discussed (i.e., more regrouping was needed at women than men Houses).

The number of residents within a House was significantly related to the frequency of fines, and the frequency of shared bedrooms was significantly negatively related to the use of humor at meetings and positively related to the use of fines. The length of house meetings were significantly positively related to matters associated with conflicts and self-disclosure. Calling-out and conflicts were significantly positively related to the length of chores, and the management of chores was significantly positively related to the number of fines imposed to residents. Permitting smoking within and around the house was significantly negatively related to conflict among members and the need to regroup residents at meetings.

DISCUSSION

The present study provides some insight into the naturalistic, ecological functioning of a mutual support group for men and women in substance abuse recovery. The results from our direct observations of weekly meetings among men and women Oxford Houses, designed as self-governed settings for persons in addiction recovery, suggest that house meetings are a time to discuss financial and *organizational matters,* while socializing and therapeutic interactions are less

Table 3. Zero-Order Correlates between Observed Meeting Behaviors and Ecological House Variables

	House existence	House gender	Number of residents	Shared bedrooms	Meeting length	Chore length	Smoking permitted
Organizational-oriented behaviors:							
Non-money	.32	.49*	.30	.08	-.58**	-.13	.39*
Explain	-.16	-.40*	-.01	.01	.27	.06	-.22
Money	.47*	.51*	.19	-.02	-.44*	-.33	.39*
Questions	.02	-.36	-.21	-.14	-.01	.28	-.01
Vote	.06	.00	.18	.06	-.27	-.49*	.43*
Action plan	-.31	-.56**	.03	.05	.14	-.06	.04
Resident-specific behaviors:							
Calling out	-.09	-.03	-.27	-.15	.21	.73**	-.23
Conflict	-.24	-.28	-.26	.04	.48*	.84**	-.67**
Humor	.08	.00	-.07	-.38*	.02	-.25	.18
Self-disclose	-.06	-.25	-.25	-.21	.43*	.01	-.32
Fines	.04	-.31	.42*	.58**	.00	.16	-.01
Emotion sup	.02	-.20	-.27	-.13	.29	-.01	-.21
Regroup	.03	-.42*	.26	.04	.31	.26	-.55**

Note: $n = 29$ settings
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

common. Though mutual support may have been provided to group members outside weekly meeting (Jason et al., 2001), these business group gatherings focused more on practical day-to-day matters, as consistent with the findings from other mutual help groups (e.g., Roberts et al., 1991).

Meetings tended to be open dialogues between members where policies and organizational issues were discussed. For instance, results indicated that voting was associated with lower conflict and increased communications involving action plans, humor, and information-gathering (see Table 2). Therefore, it is possible that voting allowed residents to feel that they were making a contribution to the success of the Oxford House, and as a consequence, voting might have been beneficial to the cohesion and sense of democracy within Oxford Houses. In addition, developing an action plan was related to humor, receiving emotional support, and the need for regrouping a meeting to focus on the topic at hand. Examples of possible action plans include strategies to overcome debt to the house or ways to correct a problem behavior. It is clear from the behavioral observations that these types of action plans, in addition to voting, explanations, and questions are the most common types of exchanges, and they involve efforts by the residents to better deal with day-to-day policies and decisions that need to be made for successful house governance.

In terms of resident specific behavior, Table 2 indicated that self-disclosure was associated with questions and conflict, and negatively associated with monetary and non-monetary comments. It is possible that questions and conflict bring up more opportunities for self-disclosure, but when monetary and other non-monetary issues are discussed, they tend to be impersonal and generate little self-disclosure. Not only was self-disclosure observed infrequently (3% of the time), but there were also low levels of emotional support witnessed at any meeting (1% of the time). Emotional support tended to be associated the strongest with action plans and humor, as well as explanations, questions, and regrouping. Taken together, these behaviors might have encouraged or provided an occasion for some emotional expression.

The relationship between the observed meeting behaviors and the ecologic static variables provides some interesting insights (see Table 3). For instance, the longer houses were in existence, the more they tended to talk about money issues. It could be that houses with more experience recognize the importance of dealing with the financial management of houses, and make sure that they have adequate time to resolve financial issues. Female houses had negative relations to explanations, action plans, and regrouping; and positive relations with money and non-money comments. It is possible that female houses have more difficulties with coming up with plans and keeping their meetings focused on the task at hand, and are more comfortable with dealing with financial and other non-financial aspects of house governance. Clearly, there appears to be some dynamics among women houses that were not witnessed in men's houses (see Davis & Jason, 2005).

It also appears that houses with more residents and more sharing of bedrooms have more fines and less humor, and that more individuals in a house might lead to more non-compliance issues which in turn ultimately results in more fines. Longer meetings were characterized by more conflict and self-disclosure, and less time talking about financial and non-financial house issues. It is possible that when conflict does emerge, individuals begin to share more personal material with each other as a way of coping or dealing with the conflict.

It is of interest that longer chore length was associated with more calling out and conflict, and less voting. Possibly the length of the chores is reflected in how well the houses are managed, and those houses that have management difficulties along assignment and completion of chores are also ones where more conflict and less sense of ownership and participation are operating.

Finally, having smoking permitted within the house vicinity was associated with more time for money and non-money comments, more voting, but less conflict and regrouping at meetings. Perhaps allowing the residents more opportunities to smoke relieved them of some anxiety, provided more autonomy, and permitted them to reduce some tensions and provided them with the ability to participate in discussions and voting (see Ferrari et al., 2004).

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. For example, the observations occurred at only one time point, and future studies might attempt to gather more longitudinal behavioral observations in these types of settings. In addition, it is important to recognize that these were business meetings, and many other exchanges that involve the provision of social support might occur within OH at other times. Attempting to assess these more unstructured interactions would provide investigators with a more comprehensive analysis of what occurs within these settings. Also, Tables 2 and 3 include almost 200 correlations, and 10 may have occurred by chance at the .05 level of significance. The fact that there were 50 correlations significant at the .05 level suggests that the results reflect more than chance findings. Still, more weight should be given to those correlations at the .01 level of significance.

In summary, the present study provided data about the actual daily operations of this self-governed, communal living setting. The present study extends previous environmental research specifically on the Oxford House model (e.g., Ferrari, Jason, Davis et al., 2006; Ferrari, Jason, Blake, et al., 2006; Jason et al., 2006) by demonstrating that the OH system provides members opportunities to develop their own rules and contingencies under which all members may live. It is possible that the process of self-governing and voting on policies allows different factions to express their views and gain a sense of trust, comfort, and sense of community (Bishop et al., 1998).

Behavioral observations of business meetings within mutual help settings can provide investigators with a unique perspective toward a better understanding of what occurs within these significant helping modalities.

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