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Interpersonal Processes in Nineteenth Century Utopian Communities: Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists*

JAMES ISAAC and IRWIN ALTMAN

TRADITIONAL AND EMERGING social values often clashed amidst the dramatic changes sweeping through the new American republic in the early years of the nineteenth century. The former colonies reveled in their freedom but had not yet fully worked out the norms of the new order; the fledgling industrial revolution created new economic opportunities and uncertainties; and political and social freedoms expanded, especially those involving rights of participants in close interpersonal relationships. For example, divorce, birth control, abortion and prostitution were more readily available, people were freer to choose their own marital partner, and women's rights were enhanced (Altman and Ginat 21; Foster 223–238; Kern 34–49).

Not surprisingly, there were reactions to some of these liberalizing trends, often based on religious ideologies that called for restoration or re-interpretation of traditional values and approaches to everyday life. The Shakers and the Oneida Perfectionists were two examples of utopian movements of the era who sought “ideal” and stable lives for individuals, families, and communities. These and other social experiments promised security and religious salvation through unique family structures based on strict behavioral norms, strong authority systems, economic self-sufficiency, and a degree of separation from society at large (Foster 1–13; Hayden 3–6; Brewer 5–6).

The present article focuses on interpersonal relationships in Shaker and Oneida movements, especially their unique attempts to restrict or prohibit close and intimate heterosexual relationships. Although differing in many ways, both Shaker and Oneida doctrine sought to eliminate monogamous marriages, or any form of enduring or permanent heterosexual relationship—an idea that sharply contrasted with long-standing values in America and most western societies. Traditional heterosexual relationships, these groups argued, often resulted in selfishness, inattention to spiritual responsibilities, and insufficient commitment to other people and the larger community. To achieve an ideal life, the Shakers called for their members to practice celibacy and sharply curtail informal contacts between men and women. In contrast, but in order to reach the same goal, the Oneidans practiced “group marriage,” in which men and women could engage in physical sexual activity with many others—albeit only in accordance with strict rules designed to prevent permanent bonds. (Later, they practiced “stirpiculture,” a eugenics-like program in which more enduring relationships sometimes occurred.)

To understand the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in Oneida and Shaker communities we pose the following questions: 1. How did the Shaker and Oneida movements employ environmental design, rules for use of the physical environment, and social practices to control close heterosexual relationships? 2. How viable were their approaches to close interpersonal relationships in light of present day concepts and theory?

Our research and theory on close relationships is based on transactional and dialectical philosophies or “world views,” which we here apply to an analysis of Oneida and Shaker ideologies (Altman and Rogoff 7–37; Altman, Vinzel and Brown 117–126; Brown, Werner and Altman in press). Briefly, the transactional perspective calls for a holistic understanding of interpersonal relationships. This means, first, that one simultaneously attends to multiple aspects of behavior that are inseparable, function as an integrated unity, and reflect several domains of interpersonal activity. Consistent with our earlier research, we describe how the design of homes and the physical layout of Shaker and Oneida utopian communities were related to interpersonal relationships. Next, we discuss how the two groups guided their members in the use of physical environments. Finally, we address how they prescribed a variety of social rules, norms, and behavioral practices regarding heterosexual relationships. In so doing, we illustrate the complementary and holistic unity of several domains of Shaker and Oneida lifestyles.

Second, the transactional perspective treats interpersonal phenomena as inseparable from individual, cultural, and historical contexts. Thus we describe how Shaker and Oneida approaches to heterosexual relationships were embedded in social, economic, political, and community organizational contexts, and in individual role requirements of the era.

Third, the transactional perspective assumes that both stability and change appear in all of the preceding qualities of close relationships. We examine how Oneida and Shaker movements regulated close relationships over the years, how they responded to internal and external pressures, and the viability of their approaches to heterosexual relationships.

Our transactional perspective also incorporates a dialectical approach which assumes that social bonds involve oppositional qualities of *engagement*, *affect*, and *regulation* (Altman et al. 117–126; Baxter and Montgomery 3–17; Werner and Baxter 348–355; Brown et al. 7–17). *Engagement* refers to oppositional tensions for participants in a relationship to become integrated, involved, connected and interdependent with one another versus seeking to be individuated, less involved, disconnected and independent of one another. Obviously, some degree of engagement is necessary for a relationship to occur, but there can be variations in levels of engagement as circumstances shift, as contextual factors enter in, as individuals change, and as the dynamics of relationships evolve. Thus on some occasions participants may be highly interdependent; at other times they may be more autonomous, yielding differing relationship dynamics.

The second dialectic—*affect*—involves a range of positive and negative emotions associated with a relationship. Positive affect may include approval,

agreement, friendliness, liking, and love versus negative affective qualities of disapproval, disagreement, hate, dislike, and hostility. Differing strengths of these oppositional processes also may occur at different times and in different circumstances. The third dialectic—*regulation*—refers to the internal rules or norms that participants in a relationship adopt or create to manage their social bond. Regulation can include rules for dominating or submitting, controlling or being controlled, and offering direction versus receiving guidance; approaches to seeking change in a relationship versus maintaining stability; and norms regarding individual freedoms and rights versus couple-oriented attitudes and restrictions.

The freedom of people to exercise varying degrees of interpersonal *engagement*, *affect* and *regulation* was a new norm in eighteenth and nineteenth century America—one that we pretty well take for granted nowadays. Yet the Shakers and Oneidans sought to vigorously counter this emerging value system of their era by sharply restricting such freedoms, and prohibiting voluntary and varying levels of *engagement*, *affect*, and *regulation*.

In the following sections we apply transactional and dialectical approaches to describe how Oneidans and Shakers attempted to manage close relationships through architecture and interior design, rules for use of the environment, and norms regarding social practices. We also assess the viability of their programs of rigid control of close relationships.¹

The Shakers

The Shaker religious movement was founded by Ann Lee, an English woman, who migrated to the United States in 1774 with a handful of followers.² Influenced by Quaker concepts of love and pacifism, and experiencing visions of an earthly paradise and sinless human beings, Ann came to see herself as a female counterpart to Jesus Christ (Hayden 65; Brewer 1–6), a “Mother in Christ” (Schiffer 5). Perhaps influenced as well by the loss of four children in birth or early infancy, she viewed sexual relationships as the “source and foundation of human corruption” (Schiffer 5).

Through promises of a peaceful, loving, and pure way of life on earth, the movement grew in the turbulent new American republic. They came to be known as the Shakers because of their singing, dancing, whirling, speaking in tongues, and rolling on the floor during church services—behavior in sharp contrast to their otherwise staid demeanor and low-key religious practices (Foster 25; Schiffer 5–7).

The Shakers advocated a most unusual approach to heterosexual relationships, namely, celibacy and prohibitions against any social relationships between a particular man and woman. They viewed close heterosexual relationships as self indulgent and an obstacle to a simple and virtuous religious life (Brewer 5). Instead of engaging in intimate personal relationships, Shakers were encouraged to love all people, serve the whole community, and avoid acting for personal gain or self-aggrandizement. If these principles were followed, the Shakers believed that a veritable heaven on earth

would result (Brewer 70; Andrews 54–69; Schiffer 5). Shaker theology also called for diligence and pride in work, creating useful and simple things without frills, and absolute integrity in business dealings (Brewer 79; Schiffer 13; Hayden 98). The results were impressive, with Shaker communities acknowledged to be well designed and carefully maintained, and their many inventions and products known to be simple, creative, practical, and of high quality.³

The Shaker movement grew steadily, with eighteen communities and a peak number of about 6,000 members in New England, New York, Kentucky and Ohio in the years prior to the Civil War (Andrews 70–93; Lassiter 17–18). Thereafter, membership declined, with only about a thousand members at the beginning of the twentieth century (Andrews 224). At present only a handful of Shakers remain active.

The Shaker dream was initially appealing for several reasons: religious fervor and interest in evangelical movements in the early 1800s, desire for a peaceful lifestyle following the Revolutionary War, availability of land for community development, and a growing market for manufactured goods. The promise of a stable and organized life, a supportive and safe community, and religious salvation also attracted many converts. However, conversion rates dropped and apostasies mounted over the decades as a result of internal and external problems, including tensions associated with their prohibition on interpersonal relationships. Although early converts adhered to principles of celibacy and separation of the sexes, increasing numbers of men and women thought or acted otherwise in subsequent decades. A number left the movement as couples, and many who had been in the movement as youngsters wished to have heterosexual relationships as they approached adulthood. Reports of attractions, secret relationships, and inappropriate contacts between men and women rose over the years, while resistance mounted to an array of severe restrictions on individual behavior. Other internal factors contributing to the declining membership included conflicts about leadership, a diminished leadership pool as younger and middle-aged people left the movement and as the number of new converts dropped, and only lukewarm commitment to Shaker theology by many new members.

Changing conditions in society added to the problem. The Shakers's original economic successes in hand-crafted manufacturing eroded over the years as mass production and new technologies developed. Furthermore, the improving national job market reduced the potential pool of converts—many of whom were probably previously interested in the Shakers for economic as well as religious reasons. Brewer (181–186) and Stein (277–284) also noted that Shaker leaders in the last half of the nineteenth century coped poorly with larger macro-economic issues, e.g., making bad financial decisions and failing to develop new economic plans.

We next examine the details of the Shaker approach to interpersonal relationships—the “ideal” they envisaged, the mechanisms they adopted to minimize heterosexual relationships, and the accommodations they made to internal and external pressures.

Shaker beliefs called for minimal or zero relationships between individual men and women.⁴ Opposite sex persons were to be treated as “brothers” and “sisters,” with no special or enduring bond between any pair of people. Rather, a person’s energies were to be devoted to the community, work, a simple life, and observance of religious values. In the logic of our dialectic analysis, Shaker men and women people could not voluntarily choose a level of *engagement* or involvement with one another; it was required to be minimal. Shaker principles also discouraged any expressions of *affect*—positive or negative feelings toward individual members of the opposite sex—in order to avoid any semblance of a relationship. Finally, a man and a woman were prohibited from developing unique rules and procedures for *regulating* their interpersonal exchanges. Instead, guidelines for heterosexual encounters were rigidly prescribed by the community and monitored by religious leaders.

How did Shaker communities enforce these restrictions on interpersonal dynamics? As suggested earlier, they developed a variety of innovative environmental design features, rules specifying how members could use public and interior spaces, and social practices and norms to guide interpersonal behavior.

Engagement

To prevent opposite sex members from engaging one another, the Shakers designed separate building entrances and stairways, and sometimes separate hallways, for men and women (Hayden 81; Schiffer 9). In addition, men and women entered the common dining hall through different doorways, sat at separate tables in different parts of the room (Lassiter 20), and ate in silence (Rocheleau and Sprigg 139). Bedrooms were also segregated, with same-sex groups sleeping in dormitory-like arrangements (Hayden 85–87; Rocheleau and Sprigg 136; Lassiter 19; Andrews 178–179). The sleeping rooms for men and women might be on the same floor (separated by sleeping areas of religious leaders), in different wings, or on different floors of a building.⁵

Men and women also worked in different buildings or separate areas of the same building (Hayden 69; Rocheleau and Sprigg 159). Women’s jobs included cooking, cleaning, textile work and sewing, whereas men farmed, were tradesmen, and operated heavy machinery (although there were occasions when the sexes worked together) (Brewer 80–81; Rocheleau and Sprigg 158). Men and women were also segregated during religious and other gatherings—entering the meeting house through different entrances, and sitting on benches in separate areas (Schiffer 8–9; Hayden 81–87).

Other design features of Shaker villages also restricted possibilities of heterosexual engagement. Walkways and paths between buildings were intentionally made to be narrow, making it difficult for people to walk side by side and interact (Rocheleau and Sprigg 223). Some communities built observation towers on buildings, offering members an attractive vista, but

also enabling religious leaders to monitor members' activities (Andrews 178–179). Finally, boys and girls lived apart, under close supervision.

These restrictive architectural features of Shaker communities were supplemented by an array of rules for using the physical environment. Entitled “Millennial Laws, or Gospel Statutes and Ordinances . . .” (recorded in 1821 and revised in 1845, Andrews 249–289), these stringent rules were invoked by successive generations of leaders to limit heterosexual engagement. For example, men and women were not to talk to one another for reasons other than work, be alone together, shake hands, or exchange gifts; women were not to mend men's clothing while they were wearing them; men and women were not to keep their clothes together; women were not to sew their initials on men's clothing; women were not to go to fields and barns alone (where men worked); men and women were prohibited from borrowing garments, books or personal items, were not to engage in private conversation; injured or ill members were not to be treated by persons of the opposite sex; and conflicts could not be settled without permission of religious elders (Andrews 178). These rules arose, in part, because of increased heterosexual contacts over the years, and one can easily imagine incidents that precipitated them (Brewer 138).

The Shakers also followed a fixed daily routine that prevented heterosexual encounters (Andrews 181–182). Arising in the predawn hours, they first kneeled in prayer, stripped their beds, neatly folded their sheets and blankets over chairs, and left their bedroom within 15 minutes after arising. Women made all beds, entering the men's sleeping areas only after they had departed. Before meals men and women assembled in separate areas, awaited a meal bell, marched into the dining room, sat at sex-segregated tables, and ate in silence. After meals, and at the end of the segregated work day, men and women returned to their rooms. They later assembled separately and marched to the evening meeting, following which they returned to their rooms, prayed, and went to bed—everyone at the same hour. This orderly and rigid routine largely separated the sexes in all uses of the physical environment.

There were also strict prohibitions about behavior in public spaces, e.g., people were prohibited from having casual conversations or “loitering” in entrances, hallways, or outdoor places, and there were strictures against men and women passing one another on stairways or in hallways (Andrews 178; Hayden 46).

Although their rules against voluntary and informal interpersonal engagement mounted over the years, the Shakers also instituted some practices by which men and women could interact with one another, albeit in very limited and controlled ways. For example, group meetings were often held in the evenings and involved a variety of activities—choral singing, group dances, exercises and marches. In an early “square order shuffle” dance, straight ranks of men and women faced one another and moved forward and backwards in a patterned and rhythmic way (Andrews 141–142). Or, groups of men and women motioned with their hands or clapped while singing in unison (called “step songs”); ring dances involved singers standing in the

middle of circles of men and separate circles of women, with participants engaging in systematic and carefully orchestrated movements as if they were “finely drilled soldiers” (Andrews 142). In these and other activities men and women were always in groups, not individually paired, with all movements stylized and uniform, reflecting controlled and minimal engagement processes.

In a slightly less formal arrangement the Shakers held “union meetings”:

A group of four to ten members of each sex met in a brethren’s retiring room, where they sat facing each other in rows about 5 feet apart. . . . then, for a stated period, one hour on weeknights and one or two on the Sabbath, each member of the group conversed freely and openly with the person opposite him [or her] on some familiar or suitable subject; or the occasion might be turned into a singing meeting. The pairs had been carefully matched, on the basis of age and “condition of travel,” by the elders. (Andrews 179)

People sometimes smoked, drank cider, ate, and sang songs during union meetings. They discussed political and theological issues, but intimate and personal topics were prohibited, and different pairings of men and women were arranged by the religious elders. Thus union meetings were highly organized, with religious leaders monitoring and restricting engagements between particular men and women.

Rocheleau and Sprigg summarized heterosexual engagement among Shakers, as follows:

Life in the Shaker world was defined by a dynamic tension. The sexes were always together, in a large communal family living under one roof—and always apart, since celibacy was a cornerstone of the Shaker way. Like the ancient principles of Yin and Yang, Shaker men and women circled each other in their homes, workshops, and meeting houses in a never ending, side by side dance, always joined and always separate. (70)

The Shakers’s goal of minimal or zero engagement between men and women contrasted with emerging norms in society of the era, wherein men and women were gaining freedom to voluntarily decide how involved and connected versus uninvolved and separate they would be in interpersonal encounters, and to change their mutual engagement from time to time. But the Shakers attempted to “freeze” heterosexual engagement at one pole of the dialectic, allowing almost no encounters, variations, or opportunities for change over time.

Affect

The Shakers also ruled out expressions of positive or negative affect (approval or disapproval, joy or sadness, liking or disliking, love or hostility) by a particular woman or man toward another. Everyone was to ideally “love,” nurture, and support all members of a Shaker family, and any displays of affect that reflected an intimate, special or unique heterosexual bond were to be avoided.

Many of the architectural design features of Shaker communities described earlier restricted both engagement and displays of heterosexual affect, as did rules for using interior and public places, e.g., group dancing, singing, and marching to various places, a rigid daily living and work schedule, and others. Furthermore, prohibitions against gift giving, touching, borrowing or exchanging personal items, or settling of conflicts, reflect control over both engagement and expressions of positive or negative affect for a particular person of the opposite sex.

Shaker members also periodically confessed their sins to a religious leader. Among other disclosures, the confessional may have allowed people to express their feelings about others, enabling leaders to monitor, censure, and guide members along a proper Shaker path.

In contrast to prohibitions against interpersonal affect, the Shakers encouraged members to express their individual feelings and emotions. Perhaps the most dramatic example was wild and frenzied behavior of individuals in religious meetings—dancing by themselves, shaking, whirling, laughing, speaking in tongues, singing, shouting, falling down—all without any visible coordination between participants (Andrews 28; Schiffer 5). For example:

... everyone acts for himself, and almost everyone different from the other: one will stand with his arms extended, acting over odd postures, which they call signs; another will be dancing, and sometimes hopping on one leg about the floor; another will fall to turning around . . . ; another will be prostrate on the floor; . . . People sung with their own tune, laughing, bumping into one another, clapping hands, leaping, even throwing off outside garments. (Andrews 28)

In summarizing such behaviors Andrews stated:

Religion in the meeting room was a catharsis. There the Shakers could indulge their love for song and rhythmic movement, for fantasy and glorious utterance, for abandonment to the joys of a divine fellowship. Outside of a meeting . . . religion assumed the guise of a passionless devotion to utilitarian pursuits. (177)

Two things are important to note about these displays of affect. First, they were individual and did not involve interaction with another person, especially with an opposite sex person.⁶ Second, they involved bizarre and unusual behavior and expressions of feeling that would never occur in everyday settings. Indeed, Shaker doctrine called for non-spontaneous, rigid and rule-governed everyday behavior that downplayed emotional expression.⁷

As an indirect way of expressing individual affect, Shakers were encouraged to view work as a religious activity, take pride in their occupational accomplishments, learn multiple skills, and invest their energies and devotion in their jobs. The results were impressive, given the many Shaker inventions, the high quality of their products, and the excellent architecture and interior design of their communities and buildings. One can easily imagine the strong feelings of pride and satisfaction Shaker members felt by virtue of the high quality of their work products.

There was also some relaxing of the solemnity and rigidity of everyday activities over the years, allowing for more open expressions of individual emotional feelings. Brewer (169–170) noted that by the 1860s younger Shakers had begun to relax a bit; they told jokes, were humorous, laughed, enjoyed some activities outside the community, and even wore beards—which had been prohibited previously. And people were allowed to have musical instruments, pets, flower gardens, add a bit of decoration to their clothing, and engage in a variety of similar personal pleasures (Rocheleau and Sprigg 232).

In addition to these individual modes of affective expression, Shakers practiced group or community-oriented emotional displays. Although they were highly organized and did not include spontaneous actions, group dancing, marching, and singing were popular sources of pleasure and recreation (Andrews 140–141). Note, however, that any emotional feelings involved individuals and/or the group as a whole; affect displays were not unique to a specific pair of people.

There were many other group or group-to-individual expressions of positive and negative affect in the history of the Shaker movement. A revival period in the middle 1800s resulted in visions and messages from the spirit world criticizing those having too much contact with the opposite sex, displaying personal pride and arrogance, and other misdeeds—all of which had been growing over the years (Brewer 105–106; Andrews 144). Another form of group-to-individual negative affect was more direct, whereby a person suspected of having lost faith or who had acted inappropriately “. . . was deluged with imprecations ‘woe, woe, woe,’ accompanied with a general concert of groaning, shouting, shaking [and] stamping” (Andrews 143).

In contrast, some individuals received rewards for appropriate behavior. During revival periods, for instance, “gifts” were given by the group to individuals for their faithful service and adherence to Shaker principles (Brewer 137; Andrews 142). These included “cards of love,” “sacred sheets,” and drawings and paintings that were “. . . glimpses of the heavenly sphere, trees of life and light, celestial bowers, baskets of fruit, wreaths of flowers, and other symbolic designs” (Andrews 157). Sometimes there were overt expressions of positive affect: “Flags were waved, trumpets sounded, boxes opened, robes draped, balls tossed, swords brandished, and cakes eaten in the solemn or joyous pantomime attendant on the reception of these various gifts” (Andrews 158).

However, amidst these opportunities for individuals and groups to display positive and negative affect, the Shakers never relented in their prohibition against displays of positive or negative feelings by a particular man and woman toward one another. They were steadfast in attempting to maintain dyadic engagement and affect at a low or zero level.

Regulation

Participants in interpersonal relationships usually develop a set of unique rules, norms or guidelines for managing their affairs. These regulatory

processes may involve dominance/subordination, decision making, negotiation procedures, stable and changing roles, and other unique dyad modes of relating. Consistent with their approach to interpersonal engagement and affect, Shaker doctrine prohibited any regulatory freedom in even the most casual heterosexual relationship. People were not allowed to develop a unique set of rules for interacting with a particular other person based on their personalities or interpersonal preferences; all rules for interaction were imposed by the religious leadership.

Even in the union meetings described earlier—in which men and women participated in one-on-one discussions—the pairing of a man and woman was predetermined by the religious leaders, conversations were restricted to certain topics, and partners were changed from meeting to meeting. Of course, it is possible that a particular woman and man developed some unique regulatory processes, and perhaps exceeded appropriate affect and engagement levels, given the fact that members of the same “family” (residents of a particular dwelling) probably knew one another for a period of time.

Possibilities for unique interpersonal regulation were even less in the group dancing, marching, and singing activities described earlier. Everyone’s performance was strictly prescribed, and there were no opportunities for unique pairings or actions by particular men and women. In summary, consistent with their approach to heterosexual engagement and affect, the Shaker ideal minimized the possibility of unique regulation or rules of encounter between pairs of men and women.

In sharp contrast to interpersonal relationships, the Shakers gave individuals and communities a complex blend of restrictions and freedoms in respect to regulatory processes. Thus, during religious activities, individuals were permitted to whirl, shake, dance, shout, and act freely in the most idiosyncratic way. Furthermore, members could be inventive and creative in their work, with remarkable results evident in the array and quality of their products. At the same time, a variety of rules, described previously, sharply restricted people’s freedom to regulate their own behavior, e.g., there were instructions about how to walk, lie in bed, sit, stand, eat, etc. Furthermore, at certain periods in their history, the Shakers invoked dietary prohibitions against eating meat, drinking liquor, etc. And even certain clothing styles were required, e.g., women wore long plain dresses, a neckerchief, bonnet and cape; men wore loose trousers, a smock, and broad-brimmed hats. Clothing was simple and functional, decorations or frills were discouraged, and everyone “looked alike,” more or less. In summary, the Shakers articulated a clear set of simultaneous freedoms and restrictions on how individuals could regulate their behavior.

The physical design of Shaker communities also embodied a blend of freedom and restrictions. On the one hand, there was considerable uniformity in the design and layout of the different Shaker communities, buildings, interiors, furnishings, and in their social organization. Shaker buildings were often arranged in a rectangular/right angle configuration, with the

meeting house or family dwelling as the focal point, and with simplicity and functionality of design, e.g., no fancy moldings, cornices, or other decorative details (Hayden 49; Rocheleau and Sprigg 12–14). In addition, the colors of buildings and their interiors were clearly specified. And we described previously how buildings had separate entrances, hallways, and stairways for men and women, as well as segregated sleeping areas.

Other rigid aspects of Shaker communities included their leadership hierarchy and organization. “Families” were groups of individuals living together in a dwelling, and were organized according to seniority in religious beliefs. Within each family, teams of two elders and two eldresses guided the family members, and other functionaries were responsible for various additional aspects of community life.

Along with these homogeneous architectural features and social organization, Shaker communities were free to express some diversity and uniqueness. For example, within the preceding design restrictions, buildings varied in size, shape, and construction materials. They could be built of brick, stone or frame, could be large or small, square or round, and often matched local architectural styles (Rocheleau and Sprigg 14–15; Andrews 127–128). In addition, fencing styles and materials varied among communities, as did selected features of building exteriors and interiors, e.g., men’s and women’s bedrooms could be on the same floor or on different floors (Lassiter 22; Rocheleau and Sprigg 15).

In these and other ways, therefore, Shaker life involved an interplay of freedoms and restrictions as to how individuals and communities could regulate their lives. However, specific pairs of men and women were totally prohibited from developing unique rules and regulations to govern their interpersonal behavior. All rules were prescribed by the religious hierarchy, and were aimed at preventing any special or enduring heterosexual bond.

Taken as a whole, the ideal Shaker life sharply curtailed interpersonal relationships with respect to dialectic processes of engagement, affect, and regulation. Shaker men and women were prohibited from any level of voluntary heterosexual engagement, any expression of positive or negative interpersonal affect, or any freedom to regulate an opposite sex relationship. Heterosexual relations were ideally “frozen” at a minimal level, with little opportunity for change or growth. In contrast, while curtailing individual and community freedom in many ways, the Shakers also allowed some uniqueness and diversity, yielding a dialectic interplay of homogeneity and diversity of behavior in areas other than the interpersonal domain.

The Oneida Community

The philosophical and religious ideas underlying Oneida began to be developed by John Humphrey Noyes in the 1830s. An idealistic and charismatic visionary, Noyes sought a balance between “self” and “society,” a means for enhancing human virtue, and a community in which people could strive for “perfection” in their everyday lives (Fogarty 5; Robertson, *An*

Autobiography, 5–7). By following principles of the early Christian church he hoped to create a heavenly existence on earth through a communal lifestyle (Foster 80). Similar to the Shakers, the search for religious perfection required that individuals subordinate their personal interests to the well-being of the community. According to Noyes, human spiritual perfection could be accomplished through a variety of practices, some of which proved to be quite controversial. His concept of “complex marriage” (or “group marriage”) was based on the premise that there are no traditional monogamous marriages in heaven, but that everyone loves and is married to one another in a unified family. It was possible, therefore, for men and women on earth to engage in sex with multiple partners, but without long-term monogamous commitments (Foster 80; Hayden 187–188). Noyes claimed that group marriage was not a system of “free love,” but a means for all Oneida “family” members to express their love for one another, and avoid the narrow and self-serving “egoism of two” in monogamy (Fogarty 6–8; Foster 85–86). However, sexual encounters required strict adherence to certain rules. Men were to practice coitus reservatus or continence, the sexual act was to be brief, a religious elder had to approve each liaison, a woman could accept or decline an invitation, and a system of public criticism dealt with errant behavior (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 268).

Later in their history, the Oneidans practiced “stirpiculture”—a eugenic experiment designed to create a superior breed of human. In this experiment, volunteers were screened for religious spirituality, approved as couples or individuals, and matched with others to become parents. Volunteers signed an oath testifying to their religious reasons for participating, stating their willingness to follow the decisions of the leadership in respect to partners, and agreeing to having their offspring reared communally (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 337–338).

Another goal of the Oneida settlement was to blend spirituality with practicality. Members of the community “. . . live[d] a symmetrical life; they had time for intellectual, moral, and social matters, and at the same time worked . . . to make their various industries prosper”⁸ (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 215). In general, therefore, the Oneidans aspired to simultaneously promote individual growth and community cohesion through work, recreation, education, and social activities, with the ultimate goal being spiritual perfection, mutual love, loyalty, and service (Robertson, *Community Profiles*, 55–56).

The Oneida movement lasted from the early 1830s into the early 1880s. During its prime years a few hundred members lived at the main community in Oneida, NY, and in five smaller branch communes in the neighboring region. Following a period of steady growth, the movement began to decline in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Although they eliminated the practice of complex marriage in 1879, a variety of factors resulted in dissolution of the community in 1881, at which time it was converted into a business corporation. The corporation exists today and is noted for manufacturing high quality silverware.

There were many reasons for the demise of the Oneida movement, several of which also affected the Shakers. Factors included the retirement of the charismatic and powerful John Humphrey Noyes in 1876 and resulting internal dissension, the failure of new leadership, changing economic conditions, the development of technology and mass production methods in the United States that weakened the Oneida's competitive position, and persistent criticism of their practice of complex marriage (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 356–357). There was also a general loss of religious faith and, as discussed earlier, mounting resentment by younger members because their seniors had more opportunity for sex with younger partners while they were denied relationships with their opposite-sex age peers.

In promulgating group marriage, Noyes was outspoken about the evils of monogamous relationships, stating that traditional marriages “. . . prevent one from loving others, . . . lead to stinginess and jealousy, [and] . . . warp and pervert the personality” (Whitworth 122). They were also a form of slavery, Noyes said, in which women were subject to a man's demands regardless of his spiritual worthiness (Mandelker 115–116). Thus, Oneida community members were prohibited from forming heterosexual relationships. However, as was the case with the Shakers, no such prohibitions were made against same-sex friendships.

The concept of complex marriage acknowledged normal sexual desires, but attempted to channel feelings into a progressive sense of self control, religious discipline, and love for many community members. In essence, group marriage was designed to prevent or minimize permanent dyadic bonds, but still allow a measure of sexual activity between men and women (Mandelker 117). In order to maintain this ideal, the Oneidans, like the Shakers, restricted the scope of interpersonal engagement, affect, and regulation through architectural design, rules for using the physical environment, and social practices.

Engagement

The Oneidans attempted to limit heterosexual engagement to superficial or uninvolved levels while simultaneously allowing physical sexual activity. In the architectural realm, women and men slept in different parts of the main dwelling—known as the Mansion House in their primary community—either in private bedrooms or in a dormitory setting.⁹ (Note that too much privacy was considered “selfish,” and was discouraged for any purposes other than sleeping [Fogarty 9].)

The Oneidans also set down rules for using environments and regulating heterosexual activities: “The sexes should sleep apart. Their coming together [for sex] should not be to sleep but to edify and enjoy. Sleeping is essentially an individual function that precludes sociability” (Fogarty 9).

They also invoked rules to prevent sexual activity from leading to intimate interpersonal engagement. For example, although any man or woman was theoretically free to request a sexual partner, a liaison (or what they

termed an “interview”) had to be approved by a senior community member. And a woman had the right to reject an invitation conveyed to her by a leader. Moreover, an elder also provided spiritual instruction to a couple, to reaffirm the idea that sex “. . . excludes selfish privacy and makes love a Community affair” (Fogarty 9). To reinforce the idea that sex was primarily a religious act, the concept of “ascending and descending fellowship” stated that more spiritually advanced people were to engage in sexual activities with those who were less spiritually advanced. Because it was primarily elders who were spiritually advanced enough to engage in descending fellowship, most sexual pairings involved younger men with older women, and younger women with older men. As a result, although “horizontal fellowship” among age peers was possible, it occurred less often because of its limited religious value (Mandelker 117–118).

Moreover, sexual encounters were to be brief. “Short interviews will be found the best. Lovers should come together for an hour or two, and should separate to sleep” (Fogarty 9). And conversation during sex was discouraged (Fogarty 9). Furthermore, men were required to practice “continence” in order to prevent pregnancy and to help them learn increased self-control.

Finally, the Oneidans applied group criticism to errant members. Originally done before the whole group, but later by a committee, a person sat silent while his peers openly and frankly criticized his or her behavior (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 129). Thereafter, the person who was criticized expressed thanks and, in the ideal case, renewed his or her faith in the community and in God. It was a powerful, sobering, and often cathartic experience (Mandelker 111–113). In spite of these procedures, some men and women formed enduring relationships. In many such cases, and they were not infrequent, one of the pair was sent to a satellite community, to separate and rehabilitate partners into the idealized Oneida lifestyle. In addition, there was a time period when women who joined the community because of their husbands’ desires, but didn’t accept the community’s values, were physically isolated in a separate wing of the Mansion House (White 128).

Although the Oneidans attempted to prevent close heterosexual engagement, they encouraged men and women to participate in a variety of casual activities in larger group settings. Games, theatrical performances, song-fests, picnics, communal dining, evening meetings, and other events were frequent and widely enjoyed. Meals were communal occasions for social interaction, with people sitting next to whomever happened to be in line with them. But these events were carefully monitored to avoid exclusionary heterosexual relationships.¹⁰

Architectural design was geared to facilitate these group social activities. Although not sex-segregated, gathering rooms were centrally and conveniently located, for example, near main hallways (Hayden 206–219). Others were positioned near bedrooms, as a way of maintaining surveillance and discouraging intimate encounters between men and women. Public rooms were also often elaborately decorated, conveying a sense of community involvement and attachment. The Oneidans also designed circulation

paths and entrance areas (but not private nooks and crannies) to facilitate casual conversations and interactions (Fogarty 35; Hayden 219).¹¹

Another form of limited heterosexual engagement involved women and girls caring for one or more men's clothing. Or, several women might care for a man's clothing (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 306). To denote that this was only a pragmatic maintenance relationship, not one with potential for intimacy, a woman serving in this capacity was called a man's "mother."

In seeming violation of limited heterosexual engagement, the Oneidans instituted a eugenics experiment in 1869, termed "stirpiculture." This selective breeding program sought to create a generation of children (especially females) who would be less likely to be "delicate and feeble," thereby enhancing the likelihood of future propagation (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 335). The stirpiculture program was carefully managed by the Oneida leadership, with only selected men and women permitted to participate. Women were encouraged to bear more than one child, but the average male was restricted to only one such relationship (Kanter 13). Couples or individuals who applied for the program were evaluated by a committee of community leaders, and ultimately by Noyes. Men signed an agreement when applying to participate; women signed another document that included stipulations such as:

... we have no rights or personal feelings in regard to childbearing which shall in the least degree oppose or embarrass him [Mr. Noyes] in his choice of scientific combinations ... we will ... [also] cheerfully renounce all desire to become mothers, if for any reason Mr. Noyes deems us unfit for propagation. (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 338; Fogarty 25).¹²

Fogarty (26–27) speculated that the stirpiculture program may have had a profound impact on the community in several ways. Most important for our purposes, it opened up the possibility for unique and deep levels of interpersonal engagement—an issue of mounting interest in the early 1870s. And, by giving advantage to older and more powerful men, the stirpiculture experiment may have also backfired by alienating younger members who had less opportunity to participate.

Affect

The Oneidans also tried to minimize displays of affect that might result in close relationships between particular men and women. While sexual pleasure was acceptable, it was promulgated as an individual religious and spiritual endeavor, not indicative of an exclusive intimate relationship (Carden 49–54). It permitted men and women to express their love for God, and love conveyed through sex was ideally to be shared with many members throughout the community. Men were also expected to practice continence during sex, and thereby learn self control and achieve a higher level of spiritual purity. So doing would also theoretically lessen the likelihood of permanent heterosexual relationships (Foster 81–82). As noted earlier, attempts

were made to control displays of affect during sex by limiting the time of an encounter, and by insisting that no conversations occur between partners. This array of requirements may have been intended to focus the feelings of participants on themselves, and not on a potential close relationship with their sexual partner (Fogarty 9).

While limiting interpersonal affective displays, the Oneidans encouraged individual and communal expressions of love, pleasure, and joy in group settings and towards others in general. Picnics, games, communal work “bees,” swimming parties, ice skating, an annual strawberry festival, dancing, and other activities were occasions for fellowship, friendship, and displays of collective affection and good will. Theatrical and musical performances were also outlets for emotional expression, with members participating in plays, humorous skits, and vocal and instrumental musical events (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 190–191). Thus the Oneidans provided many opportunities for members to express their feelings toward one another as members of a communal “family,” resulting in individual–group emotional bonds.

Moreover, similar to the Shakers, the Oneidans encouraged pride in work and individual growth and improvement through reading, education, and cultural activities (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 174–176)—all of which may have contributed to self-directed feelings of personal pleasure and self-satisfaction. Thus, although negating displays of interpersonal affect, the Oneidans allowed expressions of individual and community-oriented feelings.

Regulation

Oneida members theoretically had little freedom to develop unique rules, decision making processes, and norms for managing interpersonal relationships. Thus sexual encounters were regulated by community rules and procedures, not by the participants. Community leaders determined who could engage in sex with whom, the duration of the sexual act was prescribed, conversation between partners during sex was to be limited, males were to practice continence, and the sexual act was construed as a spiritual opportunity for men to learn self-control. Couples were not free to develop unique rules appropriate to their personalities and mutual interests. If they did violate these externally imposed regulations, the corrective procedures described earlier, i.e., group criticism, removal to a satellite community, and others, might be invoked.

Exceptions to the general case may have occurred during the period of the stirpiculture experiment. Although many children were sired by a select group of older men, others were the offspring of younger couples, some of whom had “. . . lived together for some time before and for some indefinite period after the birth of their children” (Whitworth 130). It is probable that these couples developed unique rules for regulating their relationships, as well as varying in their levels of engagement and displays of affect.

Similar to the Shakers, and outside the realm of interpersonal relationships, the Oneidans encouraged an interplay of individual freedom and uniqueness versus individual conformity and standardized behavior. On the one hand, they urged individuals to pursue personal growth through formal and personal education. Thus some children went to school through college; adults attended formal classes, read books from the community library, participated in discussion groups, etc. (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 173–176). Involvement in competitive games, theater, musical groups, and a variety of leisure activities noted earlier, also acknowledged the individuality and diversity of Oneida men and women.

People were also urged to explore new avenues of craftsmanship and creativity in their work, for personal and spiritual growth, and for community entrepreneurship (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 212–218). Given the variety of their inventions and fine products, it is evident that the Oneida community released the energies and talents of its members. As an example, one individual's work was praised for his “. . . critical eye, sound judgment, nicety of hand, [and] conscientious attention” (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 228).

Women were also given vocational opportunities that were unusual for the era. They were encouraged to work side by side with men, on an equal footing, develop their individual talents and job skills, and hold positions of responsibility and leadership. In principle, Oneida women were to be as free as men in expressing their talents, preferences, and even criticism of men (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 295–297).

Women's clothing was also a visible symbol of their freedom and individuality. Outrageous and unique for the era, and a means to “get rid of effeminacy,” Oneida women wore knee length skirts, ankle-length pantalets, and short hair (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 294–295). Although standardized within the community, women's attire signified their uniqueness and equality with men—at least in theory.

On the other side of the coin, these freedoms occurred within a bounded lifestyle that set limits on, and partly homogenized the behavior of Oneida members. For example, “selfish” behaviors, or those that threatened religious spirituality, were prohibited. These included drinking liquor, smoking tobacco, stealing fruit or flowers from gardens, careless driving, boisterous talking, scribbling on the walls of one's room, and trampling the grounds, to name a few (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 70). In addition, the Oneidans followed a regular daily schedule. Meals occurred at specific times, bible readings were held in the morning, followed by work or school, with the day ending with the evening meeting (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 47).

Achieving a proper balance of individual freedom and diversity versus conformity and homogeneity was explicitly acknowledged in Oneida doctrine, with a “preponderance” of one over the other considered to be “distorted” (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 100). Yet no such balance was sought in the realm of interpersonal relationships—where minimizing and preventing high levels of engagement, affect, and regulation was the avowed goal.

In summary, the Oneidans, similar to the Shakers, placed strong restrictions on the freedom of heterosexual pairs to develop exclusive relationships, even though they practiced “complex marriage” and permitted sexual activity. Levels of engagement or mutual involvement, displays of positive and negative affect, and freedom to develop unique means for regulating a heterosexual relationship were prohibited or strictly controlled. At the same time, Oneida norms promulgated “love” among all members of the community, participation in a variety of group social and educational activities, and broad-ranging, albeit superficial, interaction between members. Similar to the Shakers, the Oneida Perfectionists also encouraged an interplay of individual freedom, personal growth, and diversity versus individual conformity and homogeneity.

Discussion and Conclusions

The Oneida, Shaker, and other utopian movements of the nineteenth century sought to infuse individuals, interpersonal relationships, and communities with ideal moral and spiritual values. According to our transactional framework these ideals were reflected in the design of their settlements, buildings and interiors, rules for using the physical environment, and social norms and practices. Although individual, interpersonal and community arenas are intertwined, we focused on how Oneida and Shaker movements attempted to manage interpersonal relationships. In both groups, close and intimate heterosexual relationships were prohibited, on the grounds that they reflected selfishness and detracted from loyalty to the community as a whole. Instead, members were encouraged to “love” everyone in the group equally and to achieve spirituality through personal worship and growth, and by serving the community as a whole.

To understand, compare, and assess the viability of these interpersonal experiments, we applied a holistic transactional perspective and a tripartite dialectic framework of fundamental aspects of interpersonal relationships: engagement (involvement, connection, and interdependence versus separation, autonomy, and independence between participants), affect (positive versus negative expressions and feelings), and regulation (variations in participants’ approaches to rules, norms, and decision processes governing relationships) (Brown, Werner and Altman 7–17).

In applying this framework, we posed the following questions: 1) How did each movement address these dialectic processes of engagement, affect and regulation in environmental design, use of the environment, and social practices? 2) How viable were their approaches to interpersonal relationships in light of dialectic and transactional perspectives?

Both utopian groups sought to completely eliminate, or carefully restrict, any engagement or affect displays between particular pairs of men and women, and also prohibited them from developing unique rules, norms, or regulations for interacting. For example, the Shakers segregated men and women by designing separate building entrances, hallways, stairways,

sleeping areas, eating sections in dining rooms, and seating in public meetings for each sex. The Oneidans had separate sleeping areas for men and women in private bedrooms or segregated dormitories, and designed public rooms for people of both sexes to participate in games, discussions, and other activities as a way of fostering group identity (but not intimate heterosexual bonds).

Both groups also attempted to implement their interpersonal goals through a variety of norms and social practices. The Oneidans required an "application" to the leadership for a sexual encounter, pairings involved "ascending and descending fellowship," i.e., between higher and lower spiritually advanced parties; sexual encounters were to be short, males were expected to practice continence, group activities were encouraged in lieu of dyadic encounters, and a system of public criticism was used to deal with deviant behavior. Similarly, the Shakers required men and women to work in separate places, daily activities were scheduled to minimize heterosexual contacts, there were many rules prohibiting exchanges between women and men, and the sexes were almost always separated in public meetings and group activities.

Our second question regarding the long-term viability of the Shaker and Oneida movements is not answered simply. Many factors in the society of the era, and within the groups themselves, led to their eventual demise. For example, national economic conditions which improved many years after the groups were founded contributed to mounting apostasies and lower conversion rates; advances in technology and mass production manufacturing overpowered their smaller scale capabilities and economic bases; successive generations of members were more resistant to life in socially restricted and isolated settings. Moreover, the failure of successive leaders to adapt to changing social and economic conditions added to their difficulties.

Along with these macro-societal factors, our analysis suggests that the Oneidans and Shakers attempted to create an interpersonal social order that was not viable over the long term, and that their subsequent attempts to accommodate their members' interpersonal needs and desires fell short of the mark, and/or were introduced too late in the history of the movements.

To put this theme in perspective, our transactional approach assumes that social systems involve many interrelated units—individuals, primary groups of dyads and families, larger social networks of neighborhoods and other reference groups, and society and culture. This approach also portrays relationships within and between these social units in terms of a variety of dialectic oppositions. These dialectic tensions are fluid and dynamic, and may involve processes described earlier, namely, engagement, affect and regulation in interpersonal domains, as well as pressures toward conformity, homogeneity, and similarity versus independence, diversity, and uniqueness within and between individual and community or societal levels.

According to this approach, a viable social system involves dialectic oppositions whose strengths change with circumstances and shifts in the character of social systems, and in which oppositional processes are not

necessarily in perfect balance or equilibrium, but function in ever-evolving constructive tension. This means, for example, that societal pressures for individuals to conform co-exists with individual freedom to be idiosyncratic and unique—with the relative strength of either pole of this opposition varying from time to time. It also means that neither total conformity to social norms, nor total freedom from social norms, can yield a viable social system. Rather, this way of thinking calls for an ongoing oppositional tension in which polar processes shift in strength as situations change, but in which neither pole ever completely or permanently dominates.

This conceptual perspective applies in part to the history and viability of Shaker and Oneida social movements. Both groups seemed to have adopted dialectically responsive strategies for individuals and communities. That is, each permitted a measure of freedom, flexibility and diversity to individuals and communities, but simultaneously enforced certain forms of homogeneity, rigidity and uniformity. At the individual level, for example, the Oneidans required members to be religiously observant, work and act on behalf of others, avoid selfishness, and not engage in immoral acts (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, stealing, etc.). At the same time, and in dialectic opposition, members were encouraged to become educated, read and learn new things, explore new crafts and job skills, and express personal tastes to a limited extent. Similarly, the Shakers invoked many restrictive rules about individual behavior (e.g., how to walk, talk, eat, lie in bed, clothing styles, etc.). Yet, they also encouraged people to learn multiple job skills, and encouraged individualistic whirling, dancing, shouting, and speaking in tongues during religious meetings.

A similar pattern of dialectic homogeneity and diversity occurred at the community level. On the one hand, Shaker communities followed certain design guidelines, for example, rectangular arrangements of buildings, specific paint colors for different buildings and interiors, etc. Yet, they also permitted variations in architectural styles, building materials, and other features. And although rigidly specifying their leadership structure and social hierarchy, both groups encouraged diverse entrepreneurial activities by their communities. Thus Shaker and Oneida movements displayed a complex dialectic interplay of freedom and restriction, and homogeneity and diversity at individual and community levels of their social systems.

Such a dialectic interplay was notably absent at the interpersonal level. In this domain, both groups attempted to fix dialectical processes at a particular level, with little possibility for variations in heterosexual engagement, displays of affect, or ability to regulate interactions. Instead, opposite sex relationships were ideally “frozen” at zero or minimal levels, with no dialectical ebb and flow as a function of circumstances, individual personalities, or interpersonal compatibility. According to dialectic and transactional perspectives, such a state of affairs is inherently flawed and not viable. This view is confirmed in some measure by increasing numbers of violations over the years in both groups, accounts of close heterosexual relationships formed in spite of prohibitions, and apostasies precipitated by prohibitions on close relationships.

As their situations deteriorated, the Shakers and Oneidans responded in two ways. On the one hand, they became more punitive and restrictive regarding interpersonal relationships. Thus the Shakers's 1845 Millennial Laws, based on accumulating rules over the years, codified a litany of interpersonal prohibitions (e.g., men and women were not to shake hands, exchange gifts, care for ill members of the opposite sex, etc.)—rules that were surely precipitated by specific incidents. And among the Oneidans, the principle of ascending and descending fellowship, whereby senior men and senior women engaged in sex with younger counterparts of the opposite sex, was strongly enforced.

Although rigid in their restrictions against close heterosexual relationships, both groups gradually allowed some flexibility—but probably too little and/or too late in their histories. For example, the Oneidans fostered group social activities, dances, plays and other events in which men and women could interact—but only in group settings. They also established “stirpiculture,” a eugenics experiment which permitted selected couples to bear children, suggesting the likelihood of more than a temporary and casual relationship between a man and a woman. But this experiment was introduced late in their history, and involved relatively few people, often senior males and younger women. Over the years the Shakers also became slightly more open to heterosexual relationships. Along with the prohibitive rules noted above, they eventually allowed highly organized dances of groups of men and women, and “union meetings” in which men and women were paired off for discussions on circumscribed topics.

These accommodations in the interpersonal arena by both groups were modest and probably insufficient in the face of mounting desires by members for closer heterosexual relationships. And with larger social and economic forces also working against them, their minimally increased flexibility in the interpersonal realm seems, in retrospect, to have been wholly inadequate, and perhaps too late, to forestall the downfall of the Shaker and Oneida movements.

We might speculate about why the Shakers and Oneidans continuously resisted a greater dialectic interplay of engagement, affect and regulation in the interpersonal realm, when they seemed to have allowed more flexible dialectic processes at individual and community levels. A possible explanation goes back to their origins as reactions to a variety of liberalizing events in western societies during the late 1700s and early 1800s. Of particular note were trends in the era allowing people more freedom in interpersonal relationships—choosing one's marital partner versus marriages based on family and kinship contracts; ease of divorce; the industrial revolution and associated mobility; increased breadth of social contacts including the availability of a variety of interpersonal relationships; and mounting independence and opportunities for women outside the home. Many religious and other groups, including the Oneidans and Shakers, reacted strongly to these changing values. Such utopian groups sought to stabilize interpersonal life, establish social roles that were rigidly fixed, and sharply curtail the new

freedoms of the era that seemed to be producing upheaval and uncertainty in everyday life. Originating under the aura of charismatic leaders with unique personal and interpersonal experiences, utopian movements appealed to many people who sought secure, stable, and predictable lives.

In one way or another, however, utopian philosophies of the era eliminated or negated traditionally important facets of western culture—heterosexual family units, independent nuclear or extended family households and dwellings, couples bearing and raising their children, generations of extended kin, and other aspects of family life. Did their persistent and extreme denial of the interpersonal/family level of societal functioning and its traditional components eventually contribute to their demise? We think so. We also believe that they could not succeed in the long run because all levels of societal functioning—individual, interpersonal/family, and society as a whole—must involve a variety of dialectic oppositional processes that a social system can function and adapt as contexts change, and in light of diverse and shifting needs of participants.

Although we do not attribute the eventual decline of the Shaker and Oneida utopian movements to any single factor, we offer the possibility that they might have been more successful if they had acknowledged the necessity for a dialectic approach to interpersonal processes of engagement, affect, and regulation—as they did in respect to individual and community levels. Would they have adapted better to changing external social and economic forces if they had allowed more freedom for some form of dyadic and family relationships to emerge and weather these external pressures? Would they have been able to have more successful leadership over the years, and lower apostasy and higher conversion rates, if they had allowed the development of heterosexual family structures and extended kin groups who could buffer against external and internal threats? After all, heterosexual relations were and are a major keystone of western culture, even though they may take many forms. By totally removing or rigidifying all such relationships, and thereby eschewing some form of long-standing traditions involving family life, children, ancestors, and succeeding generations, one eliminates a crucial aspect of culture that mediates between individuals and society. Without this bridge across social system levels, and/or by denying its inherent dialectical character, the Shaker and Oneida utopian experiments may have been doomed to fail from their very beginnings.

NOTES

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1. Our analysis is necessarily focused on only limited aspects of life in these utopian communities. Interested readers will find a rich and extensive body of information on many features of life in Shaker and Oneida movements readily available.
2. See Stein for a comprehensive history of the Shakers up to the recent decades of the twentieth century.

3. The Shakers invented unique versions of the clothespin, cooling fan, chair tilter, window sash weight, cut nail, circular saw, condensed milk, pea sheller, threshing machine, windmills (Schiffer 13); utility box, rocker, metallic pen, apple parer, one-horse wagon, corn broom (Lassiter 15–16).
4. Apparently, there were no such prohibitions against close same-sex relationships in either the Shaker or Oneida groups. People who worked together over long periods of time were permitted to develop strong friendship bonds, and evidence indicates that pairs of same-sex men and women friends participated in many activities together (Brewer 74; Robertson, *Community Profiles* 58–59). Many of these relationships were very strong, involved deep feelings, and were long-lasting (Stein 154–155).
5. Even husbands and wives who joined the movement lived apart in separate “families” and dwellings (Rocheleau and Sprigg 73).
6. Andrews (144) noted that women occasionally embraced and saluted each other, with men doing the same thing, but never embraced members of the opposite sex.
7. For example, the 1845 list of rules (Andrews 249–289) included such behavioral prescriptions as sitting erect at prayers and in church, lying straight in bed, not laughing or talking loudly, assuming equal lengths of stride when going to meetings or walking, keeping feet straight while turning directions in a hallway; not telling stories of the outside world, avoiding vulgar expressions, lying or gossiping; cutting food in squares or rectangles while eating; not displaying pictures, paintings or other personal objects in bedrooms, etc.
8. Emphasizing the importance of hard work and individual initiative, the Oneidans developed central heating systems, a variety of implements and tools (potato peeler, lazy susan, mop wringer, and lawn furniture). They also developed methods for preserving fruit, and used scientific gardening and agricultural procedures (Hayden 197–198).
9. In the early years they had several “tent rooms” that combined a sleeping area and a public gathering place (Hayden 206). A series of beds separated from one another by cotton cloth material were clustered around a central gathering area, forming adjacent private and public settings. The main tent rooms were originally used by married couples, whereas two single women shared a space in smaller tent rooms and unmarried men slept in dormitories. In later years, everyone slept in single rooms (White 117).
10. For example, at one time chess playing became almost fanatical, with members spending unusual amounts of time in the game. “Chess boards multiplied, and for months silent but tense groups could be seen everywhere, either playing chess or earnestly watching moods of the contestants” (Robertson, *Community Profiles* 56–57; Robertson, *An Autobiography* 189). Perhaps because people were distracted from other pursuits, or because the activity implied highly engaged relationships between pairs of people, the leadership banned chess temporarily.
11. See White for a comprehensive analysis of the history of changes in architectural design of Oneidan living arrangements and buildings.
12. At least 25% of the pairings were directed by the committee, and the more spiritual individuals (who were often older men) fathered a large percentage of the children (Fogarty 26). Fifty-eight births resulted from the stirpiculture experiment (Robertson, *An Autobiography*, 340).

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