

Understanding Group Dynamics in an Electronic Environment:  
An Analysis of Two Electronic Discussion Groups

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the dynamics of two electronic discussion lists, Outcmten and Legalten, that were established by the Health Services Research Institute (HSRI) to provide a forum where interested parties could explore issues related to evaluation in the field of mental health. After a year and a half, participants in Outcmten continued to discuss issues according to their original goal. Legalten, on the other hand, had dissolved from being the most active of the lists to one with hardly any activity. This thesis examines why usage of the two lists evolved so differently and seeks to help policy and strategy planners understand how they can harness electronic discussion groups to bring together all relevant parties into a learning environment.

Using a lens drawn from negotiation theory, I examine group dynamics in both lists. The lists set out to accomplish very different goals. The discussions in Outcmten were very technical and the participants homogeneous regarding their views and ways of communicating. In Legalten, the discussions were a great deal more contentious and personal, and the participants had conflicting communication norms. The differences between participants in Legalten often escalated into intense discussions and personal attacks. Attempts to use negotiation techniques to defuse conflict and build consensus were ineffective in this environment in the light of personal attacks. Eventually, the environment in Legalten became so negative that many subscribers stopped participating.

From an analysis of the Outcmten and Legalten discussions, and from interviews with several list moderators, I argue that a moderator may be necessary to maintain an environment where parties with an adversarial history can exchange ideas and develop consensus regarding policy that affects them. I conclude with a simple set of recommendations for any policy or strategy planner interested in harnessing electronic discussion groups to develop learning environments.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the dynamics of two electronic discussion lists that were established by the Health Services Research Institute (HSRI), a non-profit organization based in Cambridge, MA, with a grant from the United States Federal Government. The two lists, Outcmten and Legalten, were part of a group of four lists created to provide a forum where interested parties could explore issues related to evaluation in the field of mental health. Specifically, Outcmten was intended to be a forum for discussing "problems of assessing and analyzing outcomes of interventions aimed at improving mental health systems," and Legalten, a forum to "facilitate the implementation and use of rigorous evaluations at the interface of the mental health system, the criminal justice system, and the courts" (HSRI, 1995a).

Both lists started out with a large number of subscribers and with a similar percentage of active participants (subscribers that posted messages). Yet by the end of August 1995, there were very few subscribers posting messages in Legalten and about a fifth of the subscribers that had been there three months before had left. In contrast, total subscribership in Outcmten grew by about 14 percent during the same time period, and by the end of 1995, the list was still relatively active.

Neither the creators nor the subscribers of the lists expected them to develop into what they did - especially Legalten. As a result of the goals each list set out to achieve, different issues were explored in Outcmten than in Legalten. Discussions in Outcmten were very technical and participants shared similar views and norms for communicating them. In Legalten, topics of discussion were a great deal more controversial and personal. Members of the consumer/survivor/ex-patient (c/s/x)<sup>1</sup> community took advantage of the unique opportunity that the electronic environment presented them - a level playing field - and actively questioned the values of the mental health and judicial systems. The discussions that resulted were very intense and differences of opinion were often exacerbated by differing communication styles.

The archive data of Outcmten and Legalten are extremely rich. In this thesis I focus on those periods of activity characterized simultaneously by high message frequency and a high participation rate to examine the kind of group dynamics present in the lists. Using a lens drawn from negotiation theory, I examine group dynamics in both lists during these periods, with a special focus on the role of the moderator in each. Because of the divisive nature of the discussions in Legalten, several participants, including the

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of terminology is understandably a very sensitive one in Outcmten and Legalten, due to the history of power and abuse of labels. I use the general term "c/s/x," to refer to those who experience mood swings, fear, voices and visions, as well as users of mental health services. There is no consensus amongst the community on the appropriate terminology. Some use the term "mental health consumer," while others prefer "psychiatric survivor." "That's how I like to call myself," explained one psychiatric survivor, "Unless you want to put down 'diagnosed psychotic'! That's my diagnosis. Imagine carrying around a label like that, huh?"

Chair, tried to use negotiation techniques to build consensus and/or defuse conflict. Their efforts were only partially successful, however, inspiring new threads of discussions which eventually died off or being deluged by personal attacks from a few individuals. In contrast, there was little need for consensus-building or conflict resolution in Outcmten, and the Chair participated in a manner similar to the other participants.

Ultimately, this thesis explores how one electronic group, whose members covered a spectrum of values, grappled with the issues surrounding individual rights vs. group safety. In Legalten, at the core of most of the discussions was the debate around involuntary treatment - should individuals be forced into institutions because they could be a potential threat to society? An interesting parallel discussion on the tone of the list during the discussions on involuntary treatment. Participants advocated different criteria for what was considered appropriate or inappropriate behavior on the list. Both discussions debated similar issues, including: Who had the right to determine what was appropriate behavior? At what point was the groups safety jeopardized by an individual's actions and who's responsibility was it to ensure the balance between the two was maintained?

From the analysis of Outcmten and Legalten, and from interviews with several list moderators, I argue that a moderator may be necessary to maintain an environment where parties with an adversarial history can exchange ideas and develop consensus regarding policy that affects them. I conclude with a simple set of recommendations for any policy or strategy planner interested in harnessing electronic discussion groups to develop learning environments. Electronic discussion groups provide unique opportunities for planners to bring together relevant parties to discuss and learn about each others' experiences. With this extra knowledge, strategies and policies may be developed which are more effective, more comprehensive and which address the needs of a greater number of constituents.

This thesis is structured as follows. In the next chapter, I provide some background to the electronic medium and the research setting, and then provide details of the research methodology I used to study Outcmten and Legalten. In the following two chapters, I discuss my results, detailing the group dynamics of each list, and then analyzing these in terms of a negotiations framework. I then conclude with some implications for practice and research.

## CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODS

### *Background*

The past few years have seen a great surge in the number of people connecting to the Internet and participating in electronic discussion groups. The Internet is the largest and fastest growing communication medium and consumer electronic technology ever - more so than the fax machine or personal computer (The Economist, 1995). In 1994 there were about 40 million people using the Internet - a number that is expected to climb to 56 million by the end of this year (Bournellis, 1995). Along with the increase in people connecting to the Internet, is a boom in the number of electronic discussion groups. It is impossible to estimate the exact number of electronic discussion groups on the Internet except that most people agree that there are "thousands and thousands." Just in Usenet, a sub-family of electronic newsgroups, 14,000 different electronic groups exist, covering such areas of interest as environmental politics, goldfish, and Turkish culture (Furr, 1995).

While electronic discussion groups do not eliminate the need for face-to-face discussion, they can be used to leverage face-to-face meetings by preparing the participants better and providing a forum where preliminary discussions can take place (without many of the constraints of the real world) so that the real meetings can be more focused. Most important, though, electronic discussion groups provide forums for discussion where none had existed, connecting participants who might never have had opportunities to interact.

In a society where people with common interests but different schedules are located in different parts of the world and in different time zones, electronic discussion groups (or lists) are convenient mediums and tools for communicating with others of similar interests. Anyone with access to a computer and listserver can start and participate in a list.

### *What is an Electronic List ?*

According to Sproull and Keisler (1993, p.25), an electronic discussion list

...can be used to send a message to many people as easily as to one person. A list of people's names and computer addresses is given a name - such as "Sales Group" or "Science Fiction Lovers." A sender mails one message to the group name; then the computer automatically mails a copy of the message to every person whose name and address are on the distribution list. The sender does not have to specify - or even know - the names and addresses of the group members in order for them to receive the message.

The list owner is the person who owns the equipment and software that makes it possible for the messages to be broadcast in such a manner. In the case of electronic lists, there is no one location where one could go to view the discussion in progress. There is no single forum as in the case of other electronic discussions groups such as Usenet where one can see the current discussion either in an outline form or in the form of a history tree. One becomes a member of an electronic list by subscribing to it. This means that one's electronic mail address has been added to a list of addresses and that, as a result, one will receive any message that is sent to the list. Only subscribers can send a message to the list. Once sent, such a message is received by all the subscribers to that list (which could be thousands of people).

A "conversation" in an electronic list, refers to the sequence of messages that results when someone sends a message to the list, and others send responses to that message, which in turn, may inspire others to respond to those responses. In contrast to conversations that take place in electronic "chat rooms," where the conversation is synchronous and rarely recorded in an archive, electronic discussion lists are asynchronous and archived.

On an electronic list there are two kinds of participants: active participants and passive participants. Active participants are those subscribers who post messages. They are also referred to as "posters." Passive participants, more commonly referred to as "listeners," are those subscribers who read the messages posted to the list but do not post any messages themselves. Passive participants often make up the majority of the subscribers on a list.

The unique nature of electronic lists lends itself to special group dynamics. Several key features of the medium are important to be aware of:

*Asynchronicity* - These discussions do not take place in real time but are fragmented according to when the participant checks his or her mail. One can post and receive messages at one's own convenience, independent of when others choose to participate.

*Person-to-Computer* - One of most profound and obvious differences of interacting in an electronic environment is that one is not speaking face-to-face with others in the group, but instead typing alone in front of a computer screen. It is easy to forget one's audience. This creates a distancing effect which heightens the users' sense of anonymity, and as a result, may decrease their social awareness and sense of accountability for what they write. In addition, users may participate in a list under a false guise or simply anonymously, allowing them greater discretion to without significant repercussions (Sproull and Kiesler, 1993).

*Written Medium* - One establishes a presence in this environment by what one writes and nothing else. There is no need to worry about appearances, or that dictation or physical performance will undermine one's status. One study showed that in face-to-face conversation, 93 percent of people's intent was conveyed by tone of voice and facial expression (Sproull and Kiesler, 1993, p.40). In electronic groups it is hard to tell how others are feeling. "Power lies in the ability to communicate and pass on knowledge." (Sproull and Kiesler, 1993, p.42)

*Speed and Convenience* - For many users, e-mail is extremely convenient and easy to use.

*New Medium* - Norms and conventions for communication have yet to be developed for this new communication medium. Without guidelines being set up by a list manager, appropriate electronic etiquette may be ambiguous (Orlikowski et al., 1995)

The unique environment can also lead to flaming. Flaming is when someone sends a personally insulting message and is a common phenomena in electronic groups. The distance between the participants of an electronic discussion group is conducive to loosening of inhibitions by participants and increasing the emotions they will show in comparison with their face-to-face behavior (Sproull and Kiesler, 1993). This also makes it easier for people to criticize. The result can lead to easy insults, great emotional damage, and arguments that escalate out of control.

These particularities of the medium have been extensively studied over the past several years, especially in the private sector, where information networks, similar to the Internet, have been in place for quite some time.

Lee Sproull from Boston University, and Sara Keisler from Carnegie-Mellon University, have studied the effects of information networks on the way people work together in large organizations. They have documented these electronic group dynamics in their book *Connections*, from which several findings are worth noting:

- In the real world, groups usually take a position that is more extreme than the average of the individual positions held by group members before meeting. These extremes are magnified in the electronic environment.
- Electronic group meetings are less predictable than face-to-face meetings. There are several reasons for this. Because of the asynchronous aspects of electronic discussion groups, one can advocate a decision before "listening to others." And, because the environment offers a more level playing field,

people are less inhibited to participate and contribute ideas. As a result, brainstorming is more effective in electronic groups. Face-to-face discussions, they discovered, tended to produce conventional decisions, whereas the electronic discussions produced unconventional ones that were riskier.

- If a decision requires consensus, an electronic group has to work harder to achieve it than a comparable face-to face group does. Because more people are willing to brainstorm and more people can be consulted, the number of alternatives increases. And because the environment favors expertise over status, better quality decisions are developed. Thus it may take longer to reach consensus, but the overall project is much more effective and satisfactory to a greater number of constituents. This in the long run can save a great deal of monetary and emotional resources.

### *Research Setting*

In early 1994, H Stephen Leff, Ph.D., principal investigator and director of the Evaluation Center@HSRI, wanted to create a community of people interested in evaluation of mental health systems which would provide technical assistance and an electronic forum for addressing evaluation issues.

HSRI, the Health Services Research Institute, is a non-profit research and planning organization located in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Evaluation Center@HSRI, funded through a three-year grant from the Center for Mental Health Services, was established to provide, for free or at a nominal cost, technical assistance related to the evaluation of adult mental health system change. One of its primary goals was that the services of the Center should "reflect the diverse perspectives of consumers, family members, evaluators, providers, planners, policy makers and funders" (HSRI, 1995b).

With this goal in mind, Leff wanted to develop a community that would be accessible to a variety of people and would continue running after federal funds dried out. "The challenge," as Leff explained, "was how do you create something that might really be a contribution to the field and will also have a chance of enduring beyond the Evaluation Center ?" (Leff, 1996).

At that point, HSRI had just started to hear about the Internet. HSRI staff knew that scientists, such as physicists, had been using it a great deal for collaborative research. Leff was especially interested in two projects: PIE-On-Line and the MacArthur Foundation Research Networks. PIE-On-Line (where PIE stands for Policy Information Exchange) was a dial-up library service set up by The Mental Health Policy Resource Center where documents could be published and downloaded. Rather than build another electronic library, though, Leff decided to create a forum where individuals' expertise could be brought together and where people could interact. Instead of duplicating the efforts of The Policy Resource

Center, Leff wanted to compliment their work in such a way as to have each leverage the other. To develop the structure chart of the discussion lists, Leff used as a model the MacArthur Foundation Research Networks on Mental Health and Human Development, an experiment in new kinds of collaborative scientific research. How exactly this was done is explained in more detail later.

Leff bounced his ideas for using the Internet around HSRI and they caught the interest of two new hires: Matt Weiss and Jonathan Hurwitz. Weiss had a Masters in biostatistics but was more interested in the Internet. He was relatively literate in networking and helped HSRI network its computers, buy modems, and connect the organization to the Internet. Hurwitz, a philosophy major from Cornell with minor interests in mental health, had been hired as a summer intern. He also had an interest in electronic networks and had just finished working on a book on electronic mail of the rich and famous in New York (Leff, 1996).

Together, Leff, Weiss and Hurwitz set up The Topical Evaluation Networks (TENs) Program, a series of four electronic lists designed "to foster continuing dialogue among various stakeholders interested in the evaluation of mental health system change." (Leff, 1996) Each electronic list was available for free to anyone who was able to participate in e-mail discussion lists. They did not establish any restrictions regarding who could participate because they welcomed anyone who was interested in the various topics addressed by the four lists.

Below is a brief description of each of the lists, as described in a informational brochure published by the Evaluation Center@HSRI (HSRI, 1995a).

#### Outcmten - Outcomes Evaluation Topical Evaluation Network

The purpose of the Outcmten mailing list is to develop a broad collective expertise with respect to problems of assessing and analyzing outcomes of interventions aimed at improving mental health systems.

#### Legalten - Evaluation and Legal & Forensic Issues in Mental Health Topical Evaluation Network

The purpose of the Legalten mailing list is to facilitate the implementation and use of rigorous evaluations at the interface of the mental health system, the criminal justice system, and the courts.

#### Evalten - Evaluation and Methodology & Statistics Topical Evaluation Network

The purpose of the Evalten mailing list is to provide assistance, information and contacts regarding (1) issues in evaluation, (2) experimental and quasi-experimental design, (3) instrument and survey development, and (4) statistical analysis for mental health systems evaluation.

#### NHCten - Health Care Reform and Managed Care Evaluation Topical Evaluation Network

The purpose of the NHCten mailing list is to discuss the evaluation of managed care initiatives and other state and national health care reforms as they may affect the delivery of mental health care and substance abuse treatment services at the state and local level.

Of these four, only two, Outcmten and Legalten are still active. Evalten and NHCten became inactive by mid-1995 due to a loss of interest from the subscribers.

#### *Structure of the HSRI Lists*

While each list focused on a unique theme, all four shared a common structure involving the list owner, the technical administrator, the list Chair, and the list subscribers.

#### *List Owner*

Leff's role as list owner was "to decide what to do ultimately." He took on the role because he typically knew the people who were involved in the discussion personally, was familiar with the history of an issue and, as he explained, "had the vision of where, from an evaluation point of view, we wanted to end up." And where exactly was this? "We always wanted to end up with what you end up in any science - something that pushes knowledge further. Either a consensus that the facts in fact show this, or a hypothesis that needs to be tested or experimented - something that would push the frontiers of the field"(Leff, 1996). Whether or not the lists were successful in achieving this goal will be explored later.

#### *Technical Administrators*

To manage the technical aspects of running the electronic lists, Leff always had at least one technical administrator managing the lists to make sure that they were running properly. During the first six months, there were two technical administrators: Jonathan Hurwitz and Matt Weiss. Afterwards, the task was performed by a single person, Sharon Shea, who did the job until March 1996.

According to Leff, the role of the technical administrators was not simply to make sure that the hardware was functioning properly, but also to deal with the "social psychology of the lists" (Leff, 1996). For

example, when the lists first started, if someone on a list accused another of being a liar, Hurwitz and Weiss would get together with Leff to discuss what would be an appropriate reaction. Should they respond to this? If they did respond, should it be on or off the list? Should they ignore it and hope that the list members would correct it amongst themselves? Hurwitz and Weiss would explore what was happening on other lists, collect a variety of options, and then discuss with Leff what should happen on the TENs. It was in this fashion that decisions regarding the social norms of the list were made.

Though Leff was the official owner of the list, his ownership power was unclear and assumed to be limited by the Constitution, because the project was Federally funded. As a result, when a participant was using language considered objectionable by other participants, Leff did not feel he had the authority to censor the poster unless the exchanges turned into personal attacks.

### *List Chairs*

Inspired by the MacArthur Foundation Research Networks on Mental Health and Human Development, an experiment in new kinds of collaborative scientific research, Leff appointed a list Chair for each list. In the MacArthur Foundation project, nine different interdisciplinary research groups - called "networks" - were developed. Each was headed by a Network Chair - someone well recognized in a particular field. Leff took the idea of establishing a Network Chair and applied it to each of the four Topical Evaluation Networks.<sup>2</sup> HSRI recruited very prominent academics from the field of mental health to serve as Chairs for the TENs. The role of the Chair was simply to facilitate discussion on the lists and it was left to each of the Chairs to define exactly what that meant.

### *Subscribers*

An important purpose of appointing Chairs was to use them to attract subscribers to the TENs. When the lists were announced to the public, the names of the Chairs were published as well. Because the Chairs were known as leaders in the field, many people subscribed for the opportunity to communicate with the Chairs. Soon, list membership "snowballed." As people subscribed to the list, they would tell their peers about it, and they in turn would subscribe and let their peers know, who would also subscribe, etc. "If you think of [the lists] in an academic sense," Leff explained, the subscribers "saw this as a chance to all be in one big department."

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that the MacArthur Foundation Research Networks on Mental Health and Human Development, developed in 1993, barely used the Internet to support their networks. It had only been used sporadically by the secretaries of the investigators, but never by the investigators themselves. When Leff asked the MacArthur Foundation for recommendations regarding effective uses of the Internet, they warned him "that e-mail stuff doesn't work" Leff believed that this poor experience was simply the result of their timing. Had the MacArthur Foundation waited five more years, they would have had very different results.

HSRI developed an informational campaign to promote the electronic community idea of the Evaluation Center@HSRI. A brochure was designed which included a description of the TENs. This was mailed to some 3000 people who were considered important in the field of evaluation of mental health system change. Included in this mailing were academics, psychiatrists, service providers, and members from the consumer/survivor/ex-patient (c/s/x) community. The brochures also had a needs assessment form which, amongst other things, asked people if they had Internet access, and solicited their e-mail addresses. In this way, e-mail addresses were collected.

According to Leff, membership subscription to the TENs came in two waves. The initial wave, during the Fall of 1994, was the result of the first announcement that HSRI made regarding the lists. A second wave of subscribers occurred in the Spring of 1995 when the TENs were announced on America On-Line (AOL). These subscribers were predominantly service providers and mental health care users - people from the evaluation and mental health community who were not academics or had university access to the Internet.

When HSRI first started the TENs, Leff had predicted that there would be about fifty people per list and that one message would be posted a day. On January 26, 1996, Outcmten had 568 subscribers, while Legalten had 325 subscribers. During their peak usage, Outcmten received 20 messages a day and Legalten received 30 messages a day. It is not possible to determine the demographics of the subscribers because no records were kept of the different constituencies they represented. However, in some messages, participants included a brief paragraph of who they were, and from this it is apparent that subscribers who participated in the discussions included academics, psychiatrists, service providers, and members from the c/s/x community.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Two types of data were collected: extensive textual data supplemented by retrospective interview data. The textual data were collected from an archive developed by HSRI and St. John's University in Vermont. It is important to understand the limits of the textual data as one tries to make sense of the group dynamics that evolved in Legalten and Outcmten. The archives only provide a peep-hole view into the relationships among the subscribers. It is as if we studied the relationships among the participants of a large convention from the inside of a single conference room. We would be missing the conversations that take place for example, in other conference rooms, in the halls, during the food breaks, and in other conventions. The same dynamics occur on the Internet. Many of the members of Legalten and Outcmten subscribe to other electronic discussion lists and sometimes discuss similar issues in different lists. It is also common for subscribers of the lists to mail messages to each other privately. One subscriber from

Outcmten, for example, described continuing conversations started on the list at conferences or over the phone. In addition, the archives do not say much with regards to the history shared by the subscribers. I have tried to make up for some of these limitations by interviewing a number of participants from both lists.

### *Textual Data*

When the lists were first set up in June 1994, HSRI hosted the computer server for the lists. Each message that was sent to the list was saved onto a disk by Hurwitz. Beginning in December 1994, the host computer for Legalten and Outcmten was moved to St. John's University, which uses the computer software Listserv to maintain lists. This software automatically archives every message sent to the lists, and is thus an extremely reliable archive of all messages posted to both Legalten and Outcmten after December 1994.

To create a data set of all the archived messages for analysis, I first combined all of the messages that had been collected by Hurwitz on disk (June 1994 - December 1994) into a single document. Some messages had been saved individually, others had been grouped together by week, and some had been saved twice. I combined all the messages and copied them into a single Word document, checking the document to make sure that there were no duplicates.

To get all of the messages that had been archived by St. John's University, I first downloaded 15 archive documents from each list (where one archive document contained all the messages of a particular month) onto an Athena terminal at MIT. This simple task took a while due to the limited number of archives that I was allowed to download per 24 hour period by St. John's University, and due to the limited disk space I was allotted by MIT (the total memory requirement of all of the archives combined exceeded 15 MB). Thus the task was broken down over a period of several days as I waited for each 24 hour period to expire and I figured out where to store all the data.

At the recommendation of a technical expert (my brother, Diego Fonstad) I put each message from Legalten and Outcmten into a Lotus Notes database. Before I could import the data into the Lotus Notes databases, I needed to format the messages so that Notes could read the archive appropriately. Through trial and error (and many computer breakdowns) I was able to create a format that was acceptable to the Notes software and useful for my analysis.

Some further cleaning up of the data was necessary due to the structure of the Notes system. For example, there were a few cases where participants would send their messages to the technical administrator, who in turn would forward the messages to the list. Notes would read this as two posts

by two different participants. This distorted the actual number of messages and rate of participation, as the technical administrators did not personally contribute to the list but simply passed on the contribution of others who had posted incorrectly. These distortions needed to be corrected.

After cleaning up the data I had four databases: one for each year, 1994 and 1995, of Outcmten and Legalten: Outcmten 1994 with 326 messages; Outcmten 1995 with 1277 messages; Legalten 1994 with 195 messages; and Legalten 1995 with 1475 messages. Because the history of message archiving during 1994 was ambiguous, I focused my analysis on 1995, when the messages were automatically archived at St. John's University.

In the Notes database I developed a view called "All By Date," which lists all the messages that were entered into the database according to the date that appeared in the "date" header of the message. In the "All By Date" view, all the messages posted on a particular date are listed in alphabetical order according to sender. Also included in the view is the subject of each message.

Another view available on Notes simply lists the data as it was entered into the database. For both lists, I exported this view into a spreadsheet (Excel) and used various functions to determine the frequency of messages posted per day. These data were then graphed (see Outcmten: Figure 1.a, Legalten: Figure 1.b).

To determine the daily participation frequency, I manually examined each date in the "All By date" view and counted the number of participants. While an extremely tedious task, the "All By Date" view facilitated it because it grouped all the messages alphabetically according to the person who participated. I entered the numbers directly into the respective Excel files for each of the lists and derived a graph of "Participants per Day" for each of the lists (see Outcmten: Figure 2.a, Legalten: Figure 2.b).

On each of the lists, between March and September of 1995, Shea periodically posted the total number of members subscribed to the list. I collected the data from these posts and graphed it together with the data from "Participants per Day" to show the distribution of total subscribers relative to active subscribers during 1995 (see Outcmten: Figure 3.a, Legalten: Figure 3.b; note the different vertical axes).

Using "Messages per Day" and "Participants per Day" I derived a measure of "Messages per Participant per Day," as an indicator of the rate of participation in each list. This is graphed and shown in (Outcmten: Figure 4.a, Legalten: Figure 4.b).

Because I was most interested in multi-party consensus-building, I decided to focus my content analysis on periods of activity where there was both an especially high daily message frequency and a high daily

participation frequency. It is in these high intensity periods when we are more likely to see attempts at consensus-building. Thus in Outcmten, I read and analyzed 385 messages posted during February 6 and April 7, 1995. In Legalten, I focused on the months of June and July, during which 798 messages were posted. In both lists I also read other periods of activity to understand the context of and history of conversations.

#### *Interview Data*

I interviewed Stephen Leff (list Owner) and Sharon Shea (List Technical Administrator) face to face, and Bill Fisher (the Chair of Legalten) and Sylvia Caras (a disability rights activist who participated in both Legalten and Outcmten) by phone. All four interviews were taped and transcribed. Follow-up questions were conducted via electronic mail.

I also interviewed list subscribers. I first identified possible interview candidates from the archives, then I sent them an electronic mail asking them if they would be willing to answer, via electronic mail, a few questions regarding their experiences on the lists. Those who agreed were sent a set of short, open-ended questions on topics of list expectations and outcomes. To identify possible interview candidates for Outcmten, I went through all the messages that were posted between February 6 and April 7, 1995, and collected the e-mail addresses of those who posted. I sent out requests to 42 people. Seven responded and agreed to be interviewed via electronic mail; of these 4 responded to the questions. Likewise for Legalten, I went through all the messages posted during the months of June and July 1995, collected the e-mail addresses of those who posted, and sent out requests to 54 people. Ten subscribers responded, with nine agreeing to be interviewed via e-mail; of these, seven responded to the questions.

Data from the face-to-face, telephone, and electronic mail interviews were used together with the text data from the St. John's University archives to begin to characterize group dynamics in Outcmten and Legalten, and to assess these lists in terms of their potential for negotiation.

#### *The Negotiations Framework*

Outcmten and especially Legalten were valuable opportunities for subscribers to learn from the diverse points of views and experiences of fellow subscribers. This diversity, however, also made it extremely challenging to maintain a common "language" for productively discussing differences and identifying commonalities. In an environment marked with tension and adversity, basic negotiation skills can be powerful tools for reducing conflict and for maintaining a supportive environment for dialogue. Some concepts that are especially relevant are role reversal and active listening. The idea behind both is to help participants understand the positions and interests of the other parties. The ability to "put yourself in the other's shoes" will help a negotiator develop solutions that are attractive to all parties. I was interested to

see if any participants of the lists used negotiation techniques to build consensus or reduce conflict, and if so, to see what worked and what did not.

The primary source for the negotiations framework I used was the comprehensive tome, "Negotiation," written by Roy J. Lewicki, Joseph A. Litterer, John W. Minton, and David M. Saunders (Lewicki et al., 1994). The authors have collected, compiled and synthesized the most important works and studies in the fields of negotiation, conflict resolution and consensus-building as well as related research in communication and organizational behavior. In this thesis, I chose to focus on five strategies for reducing conflict discussed by Lewicki et al. (1994):

- Enhancing the desirability of the options that each side presents to the other.
- Enhancing communication, particularly to understand the other party.
- Reducing tension and defusing volatile emotions.
- Establishing a common ground on which the parties can find a basis for agreement.
- Controlling the number and size of issues at stake.

These strategies have been used in a variety of negotiations. They emphasize the importance of understanding the other parties with whom one is negotiating, and facilitate the development of integrative, or win-win, agreements (as opposed to distributive, or win-lose agreements).

Given the unique opportunity provided by the HSRI lists (to bring parties from traditionally conflicting points of view together within in an apparently level playing field) I was interested to see multi-party consensus building played out in these lists. I adopted a negotiation framework to examine which, if any, strategies were used, how they were received by the group, and what they achieved. My results are discussed in the following two chapters.

## CHAPTER THREE: GROUP DYNAMICS IN THE LISTS

In this chapter, I will first discuss the usage of the two lists, before turning to a detailed examination of their dynamics.

### *The Figures*

#### *Outcmten*

Figure 1.a shows the distribution of messages in Outcmten in 1995. During this year, 1277 messages were posted. An average of 3.5 messages were posted each day, with a standard deviation of 4.37. Figure 2.a shows the number of participants per day during 1995. An average of 3 subscribers posted messages each day, with a standard deviation of 3.55.

The number of active participants in Outcmten made up between one and two percent of the total subscribers to the list. Figure 3.a shows the total number of subscribers per day relative to the number of active participants per day during 1995. Due to the large differences in scale between the two data, I have used two different scales in the graph. Figure 3.a shows that there was a gradual increase in total subscribership during the period in which data were collected. The average number of subscribers during that period was 418.

The distribution of the number of messages posted per participant per day is shown in Figure 4.a. As the graph illustrates, it was not common for participants to post more than one message a day (this can also be shown by comparing Figure 1.a with Figure 2.a and noticing how they basically follow the same distribution pattern). In 1995, for example, there were only nine days when participants posted two messages each. Only once (March 5, 1995) did the number of messages posted per participant exceed two. The textual data show that this occurred when a new participant introduced himself and was then questioned by a psychiatric survivor regarding an assumption in his introduction. As a result of their ensuing conversation, which lasted only one day, the new participant posted three messages, and the psychiatric survivor two.

An examination of the distribution of messages per day (Figure 1.a) with the number of messages posted per participant per day (Figure 4.a) reveals that there is no apparent correlation between periods of high message frequency and periods of high participation. Only once does a period of high message frequency coincide with high participation. This occurs between February 6 and April 7.

### *Legalten*

The distribution of messages posted in Legalten during 1995 is shown in Figure 1.b. 1473 messages were posted during 1995. An average of 4 messages were posted per day, with a standard deviation of 5.96. Figure 1.b shows three distinct periods of activity during 1995: the first in early January; the second during March, and the third between June and August. After the third period concluded, there were almost no messages posted on Legalten. Figure 2.b shows the number of participants per day in Legalten during 1995. An average of 2.7 subscribers posted messages each day, with a standard deviation of 3.4 .

In Legalten, about one to three percent of the total subscribers were active participants. Figure 3.b shows the total number of subscribers relative to the number of participants per day during 1995. It shows a sudden jump in subscribership during the beginning of March (this was when the list was announced on America On-line) but then a gradual decrease in membership during the final period of heavy activity between June and August, possibly reflecting the frustration several list subscribers had with the direction Legalten was going in. The average number of total subscribers to Legalten for the period data are available was 298 subscribers.

Figure 4.b, which shows the daily frequency of participation in Legalten during 1995, also shows three distinct periods when the number of messages per participant was greater than one. These periods of activity correspond to the periods of high message frequency shown in Figure 1.b.

Below I examine in more detail the periods in both lists where there was the highest correlation between high message frequency and high participation. I was interested to find out commonalties and differences in group dynamics between the two lists during such active and more engaged periods. I show how HSRI staff participated on the lists, explore general developments in both Outcmten and Legalten, and then, in the next chapter, use a negotiations lens to analyze the use of consensus-building and conflict resolution techniques by participants in each list.

Figure 1 a: Outmtiten 95 - Messages per Day

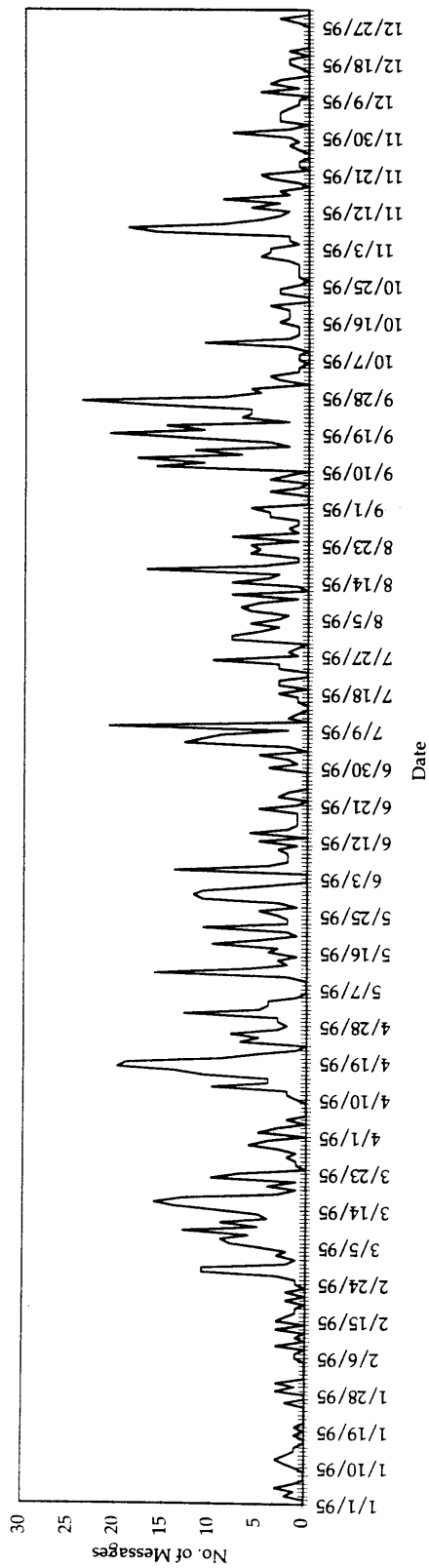


Figure 1 b: Legalten 95 - Messages per Day

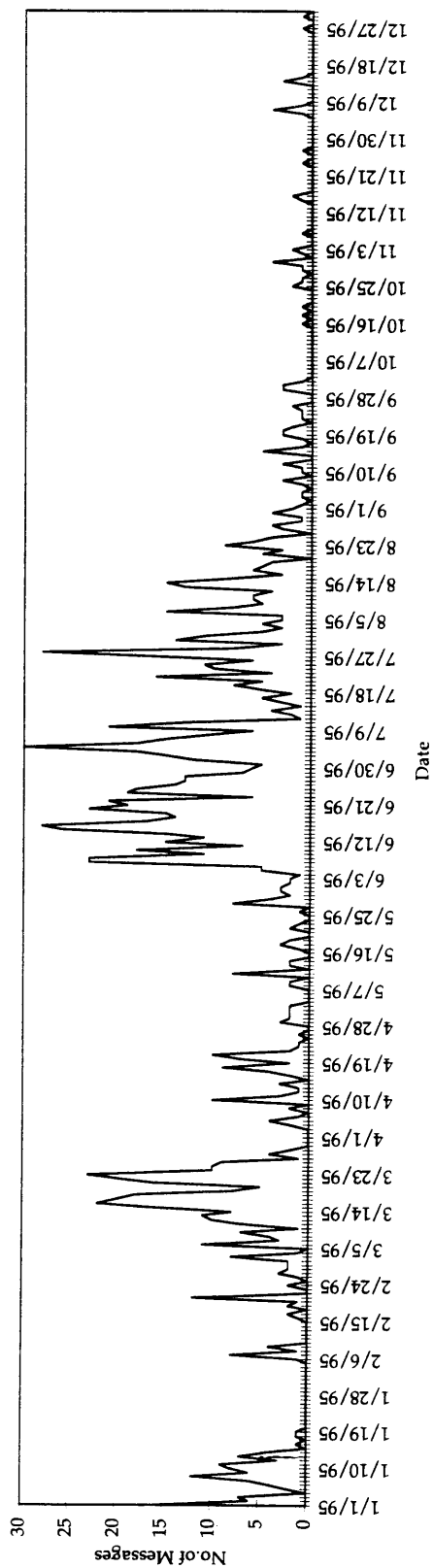


Figure 2.a: Outtmten 95 - Participants per Day

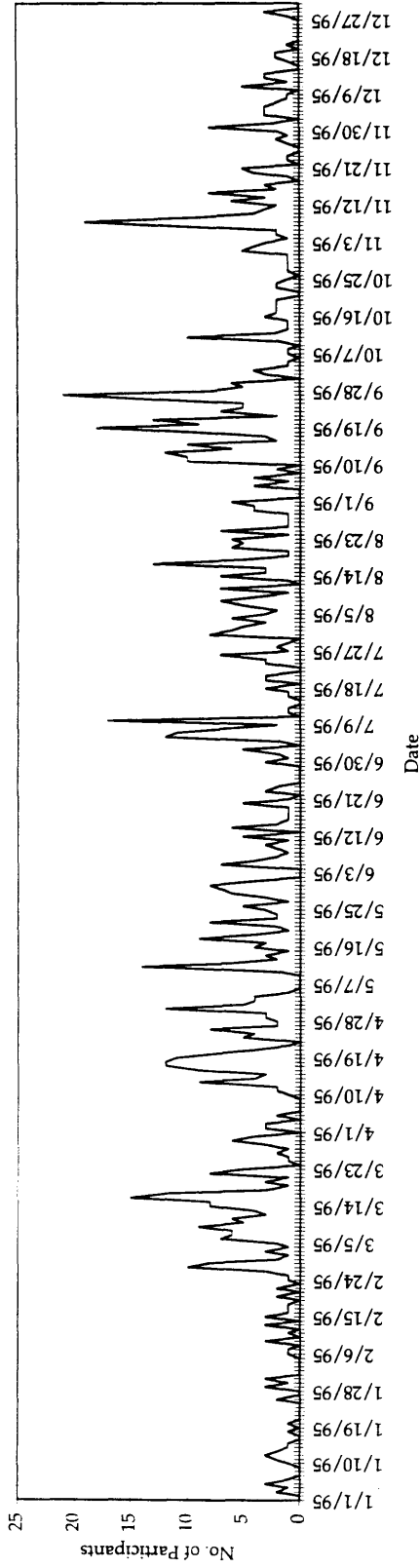


Figure 2.b: Legalten 95 - Participants per Day

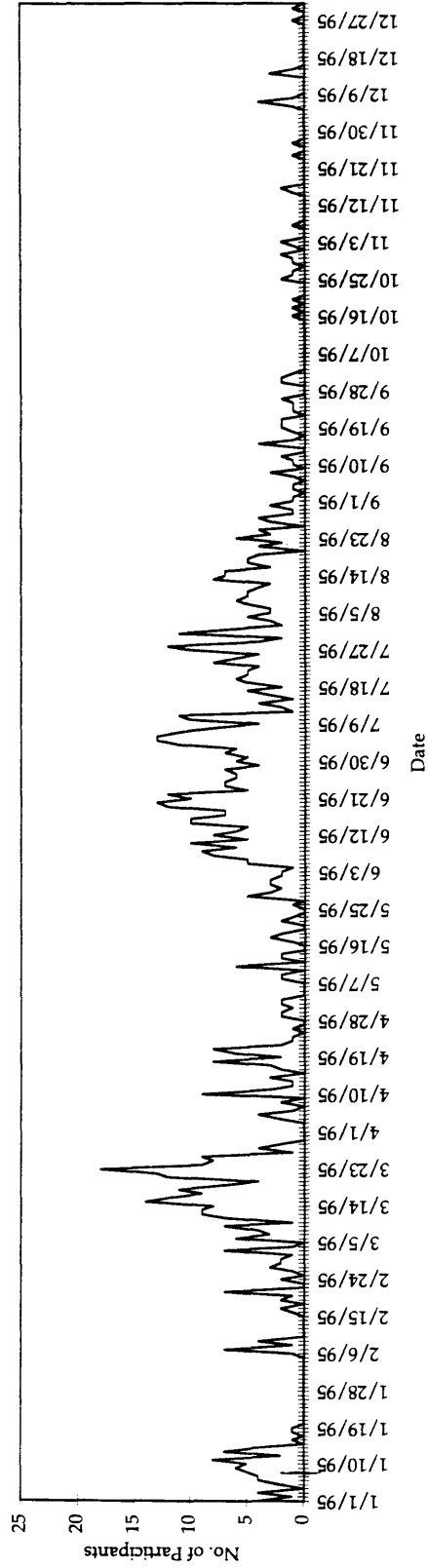


Figure 3.a: Outcmten 95 - Active vs. Total Subscribers  
 Note: Two Different Scales in Graph

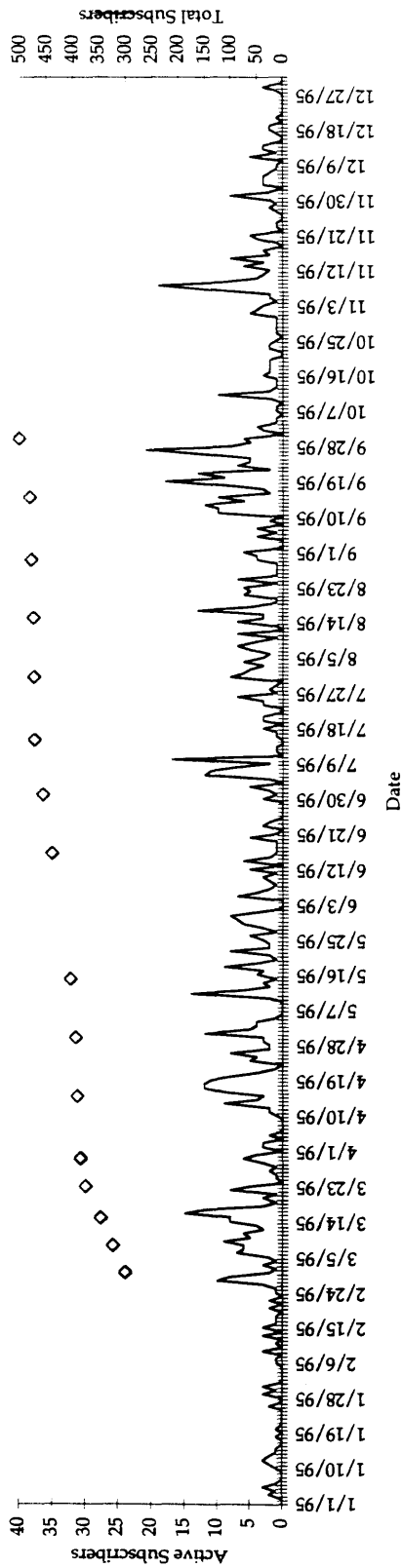


Figure 3.b: Legalten 95 - Active vs. Total Subscribers  
 Note: Two Different Scales in Graph

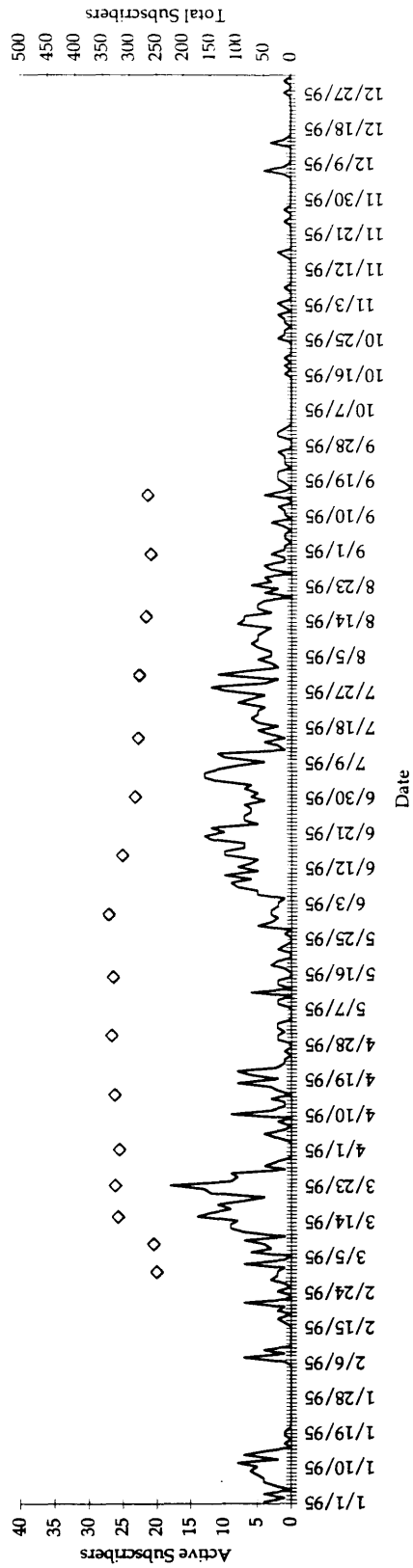


Figure 4.a: Outcmten 95 - Number of Messages per Participant per Day

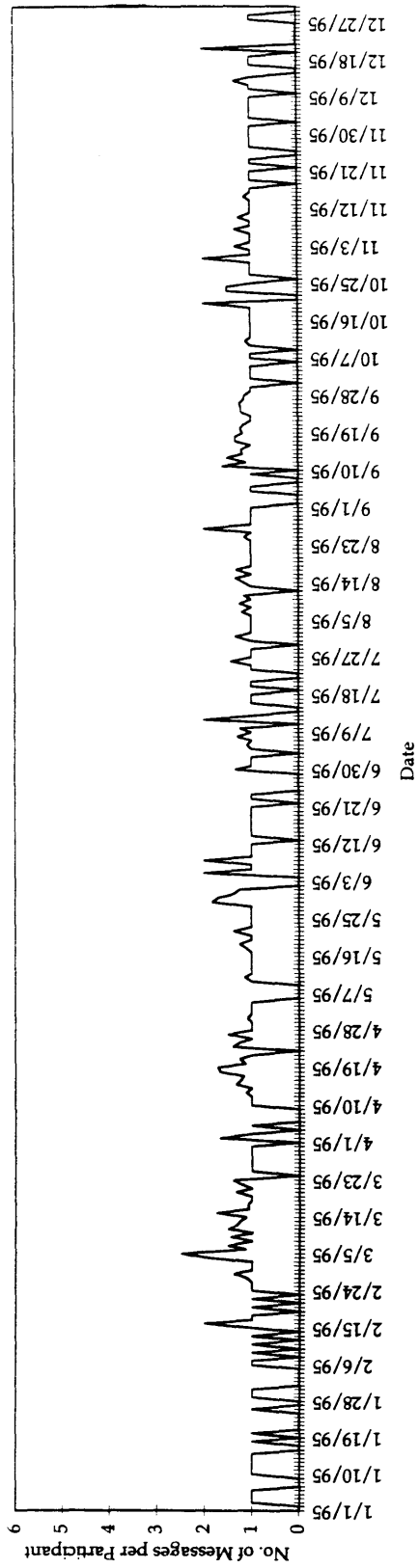
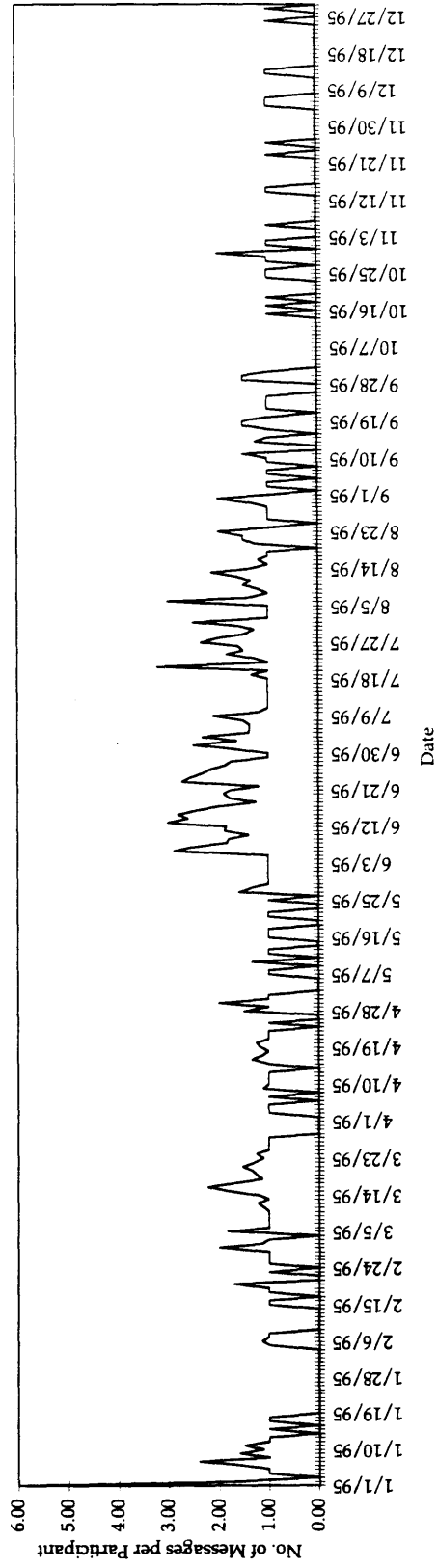


Figure 4.b: Legalten 95 - Number of Messages per Participant per Day



### *The Participation of HSRI Staff*

Leff participated in the Topical Evaluation Networks (TENs) either as a participant of a discussion - requesting or disseminating information - or as an authority on the lists themselves. As a discussion participant, his messages tended to briefly summarize a current discussion and then request more information on a particular discussion thread or post references for those who wanted to obtain more information. When participating in this manner, the only indicator in the message of who Leff was relative to the list was his electronic signature at the bottom, noting that he was director of HSRI. If Leff ever felt a discussion was becoming too unproductive or there were people contesting ownership of the list, he would participate as an authority on the lists and send a message to the list reasserting its purpose. The note would often explain what the HSRI was, who he was, why he started the list, and what the goals of the list were. "We want people to express themselves on this list but we want to go beyond expressions ...because we are a federally funded evaluation center, our mission is ... to make evaluation happen out of the values that were expressed" (Leff, 1996).

The technical administrators participated in the list discussions in two basic ways: as technical facilitators and/or as participants in the list discussion. As technical facilitators, the technical administrator would post informational messages to help subscribers navigate through the electronic environment. These posts included messages outlining the available list software commands, messages about "netiquette" (what is considered proper behavior on the Internet), and messages about usage statistics (how many people were subscribed to the list, how many people left, etc.). It was not uncommon for new subscribers, who were unfamiliar with the medium, to send messages to the technical administrators for posting to the group. The technical administrator would simply forward these messages to the list, without adding any comments.

Whether the technical administrators participated directly in the list discussions depended on the individual's interpretation of his or her role. Hurwitz would sometimes post information from other lists that he felt may be helpful to the discussion in Outcmten or Legalten. Shea would principally post technical information on the list and usage statistics. As an owner of other lists which she had started on her own, she felt that it was not her responsibility to become involved in the list discussions. "My role, as I understood it," explained Shea, "was to be there technically in the background." The single time she did get involved beyond her technical role was when there was a serious confrontation in Legalten (explained below) and she felt obliged to raise some liability issues.

## *Outcmten Dynamics*

Could you provide the cites for the Achilles and McCraw papers on social desirability? I am pleased that this group is tackling this issue, which is crucial to work on positive outcomes as well as work with symptom measures (e.g., the MMPI). Thanks, PJ

(Message posted on Outcmten)

It is an interesting ebb and flow. A topic will come up and be hot for a while and cause a lot of messages, and then things will die down for a while. Some people are dominant on it, but a wide range of others participate as well.

(Outcmten participant describing the list's dynamics)

From the archives, the reason for subscribing to Outcmten cited most by participants was to discover the issues and interact with the key players in the area of program evaluation in mental health. In general, through a discussion with a variety of stakeholders, they expected to get more information on the subject of measuring outcomes for behavioral healthcare programs or services. For some, their expectations were only partially met, while for others, they were exceeded. "As with any of these talk networks," explained one respondent, "the wheat-to-chaff ratio is pretty small. The extremely wide range of participants has been interesting sometimes, but has led to discussions that are irrelevant to me at other times." Another subscriber, impressed by how the list helped him work more efficiently, commented; "I got even more than I anticipated. The rapid responses helped shape my opinions and direct some of my work more quickly than would have been possible in any other way given the large numbers of states involved with this type of work."

Most participants would spend about two hours a week on Outcmten, mostly during work hours.

Figure 5 shows a typical exchange in Outcmten. A participant posts a question to the group. If she has not introduced herself before, she would also typically include a paragraph explaining who she was and what her interests were. Then, often within just a few hours, at least one person would respond with the requested information or with a response to the question.

### **Figure 5. Outcmten: Typical Discussion**

Date: Wed, 15 Mar 1995 09:33:39 -0800  
From: Alice Berkely <aberkley@bcd.efg>  
Subject: Re: Private practice outcomes

Could you post how to get your manuscript to the mailing list?? I am sure I'm not the only one very interested in it!

On Wed, 15 Mar 1995, Charles Draper wrote:

> I worked with a family therapist, Eric Frisk, in the Philadelphia area for a couple of years on

### Figure 5. Outcmten: Typical Discussion (cont.)

> identifying outcome measures for his patients. He made good use of the HSCL-90. He graphed  
> assessments for several weeks, then made less frequent assessments until discharging the patient. He  
> grouped results to see patterns/trends. I recommend that you read Rosenblatt & Attkisson's paper in  
> the journal Evaluation and Program Planning, Vol. 16, number 4, Dec. 1993, covering the different  
> areas you might want to assess. Then, let me know if you want a copy of my roundtable presentation  
> that lists 95 outcome measures and a brief (author, year) citation. I am also working on a manuscript  
> for guiding researchers in the selection of outcome measures. Once it is accepted for publication, I  
> would be happy to share it with you.  
> On Wed, 15 Mar 1995, George Henley wrote:  
>  
>> I am a family therapist in private practice looking to evaluate my own work in some objective fashion.  
>> Do others of you have experience in measuring client satisfaction with treatment, effectiveness of  
>> treatment, etc. in a one-person private practice? How could this be done in a simple and yet  
>> meaningful way? My idea (besides informing myself as to my own effectiveness and thus bettering  
>> my practice) is to have information on hand in the event insurance companies or others are interested  
>> in my work.  
>>  
>> I hope to hear from some of you.  
>> Thanks.  
>> George Henley  
>>  
>

-----  
Date: Fri, 17 Mar 1995 16:34:07 -0800  
From: "Charles Draper" <rcdraper@hij.klm>  
Subject: Copies of two outcome measures papers

While this message is for everyone, I am most interested in alerting Alice, Bob, Philip, and Mary Lou that I received your request for one or both of my papers concerning outcome measures. I plan to work with HSRI to get you a copy of the roundtable presentation on 95 outcome measures. The other paper on Criteria for Selecting Outcome Measures will appear in the journal Residential Treatment for Children and Youth, possibly late this year. However, the editor of the special issue has indicated to me that I may be able to share a pre-publication version with you in 2-3 months. Currently, it is under revision.

Sometime this weekend, I plan to send a follow-up set of clarifications for the roundtable presentation on 95 measures. I have tried attaching files to messages on my node, but have not been successful. So, I will just clutter everyone's mailboxes with a long message. The roundtable presentation has the tables in it, but is short on explanation of the findings. I hope you find the clarifications useful.

Several of the participants in Outcmten were new to the electronic environment and would begin their messages asking other list subscribers to be understanding. One poster started his message explaining:

As a newcomer I had hoped to do some "lurking" before I jumped in but several recent exchanges beginning with a response by Frank Gorman to Hillary Issacs, Mar. 6, and another response by Jack Kenny have caused me to jump in. I have not yet learned all the niceties of electronic communication and ask some latitude in that regard if I've failed to follow them.

In general, participants would thank others for information, give positive reinforcement to questions, and when disagreeing with a point, emphasize that their comments were meant to be constructive. For example, after writing a message questioning the robustness of a measurement scale, a participant wrote:

"In case this comes out sounding harsh (which some of these communications do, inadvertently) I am in no way challenging or disputing your scale; I am just trying to generate further discussion."

The discussions in Outcmten were very specific to evaluating outcomes in the mental health field. Towards the end of March, one poster summarized the discussions that were taking place and thanked those who were participating in them. In the words of his message, topics of discussion included:

- What is the average number of sessions that clients typically attend therapy for ?
- What kind of assessment tools are used in the field ?
- How do we identify the more effective and less effective therapists ?
- How many sessions does it take to move from a distressed population norm (high stress symptoms/low well-being, for example) to an average population norm (average stress symptoms/average well-being) ?

The Chair of Outcmten was Lee Sechrest, Ph.D. of the University of Arizona Department of Psychology. During the time period I examined, he participated once in a discussion regarding health insurance. His post generated several other messages both agreeing with and challenging some of his points, and these developed into a discussion on financial incentives in the mental health care system.

The values of a participant were questioned only once during the time period that I examined Outcmten. In contrast, most of the discussions in the other list, Legalten, focused on the values and beliefs of the participants. The discussion in Outcmten (Figure 6) on values was limited to two participants and lasted a single day. It was on this day that the number of messages per participant exceeded two (2.5). The number would have been two, but Greg Hendersen, when writing his introduction hit a wrong key and produced two messages instead of the intended one. The values discussion arose when a subscriber of Outcmten questioned an assumption stated by Hendersen in his introduction. Hendersen responded in agreement and the person who had questioned his assumptions simply added some comments to his agreement. The discussion was brief and concise apparently because the participants shared the same basic beliefs.

#### Figure 6. Outcmten: Discussion on Values

Date: Sun, 7 Mar 1995 15:19:34 -0800  
From: Ema Farley <efarley@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: Interested in SMI evaluation

In the message of Greg Hendersen:

>  
> I am interested in outcome measures for long term mentally ill persons, especially in light of the onset  
> of  
> managed care. So many of the MC criteria and protocols and outcome measures used by MC companies  
> presume a

**Figure 6. Outcmten: Discussion on Values (cont.)**

> return to health. Who is doing What for managing care and outcomes for SMI adults?  
>

Are you assuming that people who experience mood swings, fear, voices and visions can't/don't/won't return to health? The expectation may well be what dooms "SMI adults." What managed care may show is the inefficacy of current protocols.

Users of services advocate alternatives to current systems, no use of force, peer-support, attention to enhancing life quality and living conditions and, arguably most important, a valued place to make a valued contribution.

---

Date: Sun, 7 Mar 1995 19:14:37 -0500  
From: Greg Hendersen <GHendeersen@ghi.jkl>  
Subject: Re: Interested in SMI evaluation

Nope, and I have spent a career looking for and offering alternatives to the label "chronic" and the hopelessness that comes with it.

Perhaps I should have said that the current protocols and criteria anticipate a quick return to health. There seems to be little inherent in the protocols to justify comprehensive rehabilitation alternatives. For example, the entire Managed Care paradigm seems a poor fit for alternatives like the Clubhouse.

---

Date: Sun, 7 Mar 1995 19:52:18 -0800  
From: Ema Farley <efarley@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: Interested in SMI evaluation

In the message of Greg Hendersen:

> There seems to be little inherent in the protocols to justify comprehensive rehabilitation alternatives. For  
> example, the entire Managed Care paradigm seems a poor fit for alternatives like the Clubhouse.  
>

So far managed care has functioned in the private arena. As they start to contract for Medicaid and other public programs, they will have to adopt other strategies.

I think it is crucial that users of services become part of managed care policy making to include the alternatives that enhance user life quality. (I'm not fond of the Clubhouse, but that's another discussion.)

In all of 1995, there was only one period when a discussion about the tone of the list took place. It is helpful to examine this exchange as it provides a valuable contrast to one from Legalten on the same subject (see later). What follows is a summary of the discussion on list tone in Outcmten. Appendix A is the full transcript of that discussion and gives the reader a better idea of what it was like participating in the list discussions.

The tone discussion in Outcmten occurred when one poster, Andrew Benson, from a university research center, used condescending remarks in a response to the comments of Valerie Wagner, a psychiatric survivor. His message began "Bad, Valerie, bad ! I suppose it is rhetorically correct to exaggerate to make a point, but I can never tell whether you are exaggerating !" Her reply ignored his condescending

remarks and instead suggested a dialogue exploring a particular treatment. "OK, Andrew Benson," she began, "let's talk about the [treatment model]." After briefly listing a few points she concluded, "If you can show me exemplaries to the contrary, I'd be glad to listen. In any case, dialogue is important, even when we disagree." Benson quickly apologized. "Thanks for your even-tempered rejoinder to my rather rude posting," he began, "I'm for dialogue, too." Wagner then encouraged others on the list to join in the dialogue. "I'm glad Andrew Benson and I have started on this dialogue. Anyone else care to chime in?"

The following day, another participant, from an academic institution, sent a message criticizing their exchange.

Is it just me or did the tone and content of this list take a left turn recently? It is important no doubt to gain a broad exposure to issues relating to outcome and evaluation, but I think the tangential and vituperative tone of the most recent postings seems a little out of place.

Given this personal aside I have some thoughts on this issue ...

He then listed several of his points regarding the treatment model issue and attached to the end of his message Wagner's message encouraging others from the list to join the dialogue.

The issue of content and tone did not come up again until four days later, when Wagner replied to a message she found insulting. "I find your trivialization of suffering really insulting," she wrote, "This is not a trivial issue for those of us who have been locked up, forced drugged, and stigmatized. Your insensitivity reveals a lot about you." The message that followed, posted by John Krisp, criticized Wagner's tone as "inappropriate for this forum." "I have really been trying to stay out of this discussion (if it can really be called that)," the message began, "However, I think it's time that this discussion be moved elsewhere ..." This triggered a debate about what was appropriate or not on the list. Two people disagreed with Krisp's criticism. "Gee, I don't agree," exclaimed one respondent, "I think understanding the differing points of view (understanding those points of view exist!) is essential to doing good research." Krisp responded to both in agreement and clarified his point: "My previous post was not meant to discourage discussion ... it is the unpleasantness to which I am referring. Posts that insult (however subtle) are inappropriate and discourage conversation..."

The last post in the discussion concerning the tone of the list was Wagner's response to Krisp's first critical message:

This is an ivory tower view of "research." If we are going to research something, we have to look at what our beliefs and biases are, otherwise, it will contaminate the research.

Whether or not psychiatric treatment is a benign force, and what one's personal beliefs are about the question, are vital in terms of the research you may do and the results.

No one responded to her message.

The issue of tone on the list did not ever escalate into conflict. The participants did not use personal attacks, or intense language to express their points and alternate points were recognized. Finally, the tone issue was dropped and not brought up again. As I will show later, this same issue was handled quite differently in Legalten.

In general, Outcmten was simply a forum where subscribers would exchange information regarding evaluation of outcomes in the field of mental health. Discussions were predominantly technical. Participants had a common set of beliefs regarding the topics of discussion as well as common norms for communication. Issues such as the beliefs and values of the participants, or whether the current tone of the list was appropriate or not, were rarely discussed and when they were, they were quickly resolved or dropped. As a result, there was little need for a moderator to defuse conflicts or develop consensus. As I will soon show, this was not the case for Legalten.

### *Legalten Dynamics*

Hi, Tracey, welcome to the list. Here you will find not only mental health practitioners and lawyers, but also psychiatric survivors, many of whom question the very premises of 'mental illness' and an 'appropriate' interface between psychiatry and law.

(Greeting posted on Legalten by a psychiatric survivor to a new subscriber)

I have watched the back-and-forth on the forced medication of homeless people issue over the last few days. While both sides make good points, I am disheartened at what appears to me to be a lack of respect for differing opinions. Some of the dialogue has lost a tone of professionalism that we as academics and/or advocates need to keep in our professional communications.

It seems to me that many of the participants in this debate have very strong feelings on the issue. And I think that's great -- as we should be impassioned about such issues. On the other hand, while certain substantive arguments are being addressed in the crossfire, the substance of those arguments are outweighed by the arguments ad hominum that have been in nearly each of the postings so far, regardless of the side of the issue on which the author finds himself or herself.

That being said, I would like to address two substantive matters. ...

(Legalten participant describing the list's dynamics)

When Bill Fisher, Ph.D., Director for Psycho-Social and Forensic Services Research, Department of Psychiatry, for the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine, Worcester, became Chair of Legalten, he was not very clear about what he was meant to do - he had never done anything like this before. Fisher had agreed to chair Legalten because he was interested in finding out about any new and important developments in the area of criminal justice and mental health (such as civil commitment) at

the state and county level. The Legalten Network was a way to be connected to people at those levels and to find out what exactly was happening there - it was a way for the Technical Evaluation Center, which housed the Topical Evaluation Networks, to perform a more accurate needs assessment. He imagined "a bunch of lawyers and psychiatrists and maybe mental health agency people talking with each other - but that never really happened."

At first, he tried to respond to what people were saying on the list, but soon, found that he couldn't keep up and, as he described it:

The whole thing got away from me ... what I envisioned this being and what it became were really very different ... There was much more consumer and advocacy involvement than I thought there would be. On the other hand, I by no means regret that. I think it really enlivened the discussion. I learned a lot from it. I hope others did too, if they took it in the spirit that this is finally an opportunity to hear everybody's voice.

Several consumer advocacy groups were on the general HSRI mailing list and received the original HSRI mailing campaign advertising the TENs. For members of the c/s/x community, the invitation to participate in the TENs was a unique opportunity. For 25 years, the Consumer Movement had been fighting to get a "seat at the table," only to be awarded a few token seats which many felt did not have much power or influence. The relationship between consumers and psychiatrists has traditionally been very stratified with consumers seen as patients and on the bottom layers.

"One of the things that Legalten did was really level the field," explained Fisher. "Everybody had their say, everybody had a chance to finish their thought as best they could, nobody had really any particular advantage over anybody else. Credentials, degrees, and positions and all those kinds of things really didn't matter as long as people could make their point." This gave people - who had always had a strong opinion that they wanted to voice to professionals - an opportunity to do so.

For many from the c/s/x community, the electronic environment of the lists reduced the extreme power imbalance that exists in public spaces between c/s/x and professionals. While c/s/x activists had occasionally attended industry conventions for the opportunity to meet face to face with professionals, they did so under a blanket of caution and self-restraint for fear of being committed involuntarily. As a result, the Legalten list was for many consumers a uniquely safe environment where they could express their concerns without the fear of being involuntarily committed by the person to whom they were expressing themselves.<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Caras, a disability rights advocate and participant in Legalten, explained:

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<sup>3</sup> Yates (1996) questions how much safer the list really is, where there is no anonymity and where one's comments are automatically documented and archived. This kind of "hard evidence" is likely to have more weight than a personal account. I agree with Yates' caution. It is easy to forget that HSRI lists are public lists where anyone has access to the archives. The legal issues regarding the use of list archives as evidence have yet to be resolved.

I want everybody to understand that hanging over all of our heads is the threat of involuntary intervention ... that in a professional conference, half the room is empowered to lock us up instantly. And so any 'acting out' can get easily diagnosed as psychiatric behavior. And it's certainly that awareness [that] inhibits me in all the ways that I behave in public space. I think that isn't often enough brought to the front. So, are there public spaces where this could happen? Not as easily. Not as safely.

When members first subscribed to the HSRI lists, they were asked to submit a brief description about themselves and their interests. Participants originally subscribed to Legalten for the chance to discuss and learn about evaluation issues at the intersection of mental health care and law. Ultimately, though, the evaluation aspects became more of an afterthought to a general discussion of values at the intersection of mental health care and law. Topics discussed included involuntary treatment, electro-shock therapy (ECT), the use of long-term forced neuroleptics, and solitary confinement.

Conversation threads would weave into each other, sometimes connecting with other threads, sometimes getting lost in the other discussions. As one participant described it:

Participants come from a variety of perspectives, professions or backgrounds and even hold different world-views. Such diversity seems to foster what I might call "disconnected, non-linear dynamic." I mean by that various topics appear, several people might contribute to each of them at different times over a period of a week or somewhat more. At the same time new and very different topics appear and are addressed at the same time. No discussion necessarily relates closely to another, but eventually enough information culminates on some topics that it is possible for me, at least, to broaden my understanding.

For example, during a debate regarding legislation permitting forced medication of homeless people, a message originally posted in another electronic mailing list was posted to Legalten. It was from a male who was about to go into electro-shock therapy (ECT) and who was going to keep a daily journal of his treatment (the procedure takes place over a period of several days). This started a discussion concerning the uses of ECT in the States and abroad, with participants sharing their personal experiences with ECT. These extremely personal accounts were scattered amongst other conversation threads on such topics as mental health law suits in North Carolina and whether "potentially violent" people should be treated involuntarily.

Participants would share with the list personal experiences with the mental health care system and/or the legal system. Sharing such experiences typically accomplished at least two things: the personal account would validate the content of past, current and/or future messages and it would also help identify common links between subscribers to the list. These common links were important, especially during disagreements. For example, one participant framed his challenge to two c/s/x rights advocates in terms of his personal experience by writing:

Am I insane? When viewed in retrospect, some of my acts suggest that I have been at times. Only the good fortune of not being caught has permitted me to escape some form of unwanted intervention by either the criminal justice system or the mental health system. Unlike my father, whose Alzheimer's Disease proceeded along a continuum that eventually left him permanently unable to understand his actions, my problem is transitory and for the most part treatable.

The participant then went on to challenge the c/s/x rights advocates, leveraging his points with his personal experiences.

In another instance, when challenged by professionals who questioned the content of some messages, one consumer posted a 1500 word essay describing her life story, while another described how many hospitals and jails she had been to. In both examples, personal history was used to give credibility to a challenge or recommendation.

Discussions in Legalten tended to be more intense than in Outcmten. The greatest contributing factor to this was the difference in goals between the two. The goals of each list outlined what general topics would be discussed, and as a result, attracted different kinds of subscribers. Outcmten was specific - it was a forum for discussing the evaluation of outcomes in the field of mental health. It was very focused on technical issues and attracted subscribers who shared the same basic assumptions, experiences, and communication norms. Legalten, on the other hand, was more general - it was a forum to discuss evaluation at the intersection of the mental health and criminal justice systems. It attracted participants from a great variety of backgrounds, experiences, and norms.

Shea, the technical administrator for Legalten, explained the differences between the two lists in an interview:

I think what happened in Legalten is the minute your throw the word 'legal' into it, it's more involved with value systems and things that actually happened to people. This is not [like Outcmten] where we're an observer or we've got something that's a measuring tool. We're talking about real life circumstances that professionals and consumers have a more personal stake in than just professional.

I think it's the difference between a classroom and a courtroom. Outcmten was more of a classroom, where you have some people who are perhaps more knowledgeable in a particular field, and people are coming here to learn, exchange - such as in a professional classroom. A courtroom is different ... there's going to be a personal investment in what's going on. And that really came out in Legalten.

These differences are more apparent if one compares the one discussion in Outcmten on tone with one of the many such discussions in Legalten. The discussion I have excerpted from Legalten on the subject of the list's tone took place a week after the last message from Outcmten on the same subject was posted. The two discussions had a common participant: Valerie Wagner, a psychiatric survivor. What follows is a summary of the Legalten discussion on the tone of the list. Appendix B is the complete transcript of the discussion.

The discussion in Legalten began when a poster accused several of the list participants of only being interested in starting flame wars. Valerie Wagner responded "I don't feel this is a flame war; it is an

impassioned exchange. It's our liberty, our bodies, our future, that are on the line." Two participants responded to Wagner's message, disagreeing with her, claiming that the list had "degenerated into an argument that will never be won" and "into a series of rants and name-calling." One of these participants exclaimed: "I will not tolerate ... being force fed others' opinions." A third participant, Sam Tuscon added; "I agree ... turn down the heat, passion is not reason and reason is not blaming somebody else for some felt deficit !" Brad Chapman, whose message had been included in the original "flame war" accusation responded:

I haven't seen name calling or the typical "flames" one sees on this list that one sees on the Internet. What's being objected to is "passion." If people have trouble with typed words on a screen as having too much "emotion," how do they react to human emotions in front of them like weeping, or screaming, or trembling?

Also, instead of replying to the point-by-point arguments, some simply label the discourse as "hostile" or "too impassioned." According to my logic textbooks, that is not a reasoned response to the points raised. I think the main emotion that is being raised is \*within\* the persons reacting to some of the pro-liberty posts...

Finally, everyone these days is talking about "empowerment" and "consumer satisfaction" and helping people gain independence. But people seem to want it to come in a "nice" package. But every oppressed group that's stood on its own feet has reached empowerment with struggle.

Expecting empowerment without sparks is not very helpful...

The following day, Tuscon answered back:

Are you expecting "empowerment" to arrive in your email box because you have posted "passionate" arguments? I submit that this venue is not [sic] appropriate place for your political action.

By posting here, you have made the other readers your political opponents just by the fact that you send accusatory postings.

As I have already said, the tone of the postings generate more heat than light! If you want discussions then turn down the flames (i.e. heat!) I may continue to lurk but I don't enjoy contentious email. I don't even like regular mail when I receive lots of advertising!

Chapman responded in kind to the personal attacks, but the discussion did not continue because Tuscon did not respond.

During the tone discussion, one participant reminded subscribers that if they did not like the tone of a particular message, they could always delete it. "It isn't being forced on anyone ... I would rather [delete a message] than discourage anyone who has participated in this discussion from continuing to do so." To this, Tuscon and Wagner responded in agreement, and the following day, one of the participants who felt the list had degenerated, reiterated her point and then encouraged others to start new threads. No further messages were posted regarding that discussion.

The differences between the two "list tone" discussions in Outcmten and Legalten are most apparent in the language that the participants used during the discussion. In Legalten, the language was a great deal more intense and extreme and at times could have been interpreted as a shouting match. Those who

were unhappy with the tone of the list noted that it had become a "flame war," "an argument that never will be won," "a series of rants and name-calling," "talk-radio," passionate, political, and "slanging match." In Outcmten, with the exception of two posts, the exchange of messages in question was simply referred to as a "discussion." Throughout the entire discussion, only one person referred to the tone of the list as "vituperative" and its' content "tangential," while another person questioned "if it can really be called that," but never defined it as anything else. This second person criticized some of the participants for having "a less than objective point" that they wanted to convey. Later on, though, he wrote another message agreeing with some of the criticisms of his first post and clarifying his point of view.

The two discussion on list tone help illustrate the differences between the two lists. In the next chapter, I will apply a negotiation lens to the discussions in Outcmten and Legalten to examine whether and what effect negotiation techniques were used in the list.

## *CHAPTER FOUR: THE USE OF NEGOTIATION TECHNIQUES IN THESE LISTS*

What happens to a group discussion when there is disagreement regarding a particular issue? Does it erupt into a flame war? Is there an attempt to achieve some kind of consensus? Given the diverse backgrounds of the subscribers in both Outcmten and Legalten, I was interested to see how each list dealt with disagreements and what negotiation techniques, if any, were applied by the participants. I begin with a brief overview of the communication process in each list, and then explore five different techniques for preventing a breakdown in that process, examining if and how these techniques were used in Outcmten and Legalten.

As described in the two previous chapters, there were some basic differences in Outcmten and Legalten that led to different electronic group dynamics. Table A summarizes some of these differences. The subject matter in Outcmten was very technical and the participants relatively homogeneous with respect to the subject matter. As a result, there were very few disagreements, and those that did occur were handled in an amicable manner. In Legalten, on the other hand, the subject matter was a great deal more controversial and personal and there was a greater heterogeneity amongst the participants regarding their views on the subject matter and their communication norms. This led to many more conflicts, many of which never were resolved and/or escalated into personal attacks. Thus in Legalten, there was a much greater need for negotiation skills for consensus building or conflict resolution than in Outcmten. The following analysis focuses primarily on Legalten, but where appropriate, examples from Outcmten are included.

### *The Communication Process*

A basic model of the process of communication is helpful to understanding the system dynamics of communication - how elements of the process are interconnected and affect each other. This model emphasizes the fact that communication is not a one-way process. Lewicki et al. (1994, pp.199-200) describe it this way:

A sender source has a message in mind. The source intends to encode the message into language that the receiver will understand...The message may be encoded into verbal language (e.g., words and sentences) or it may be encoded into nonverbal expression (such as facial gestures, hand waving, and finger pointing.) Once encoded, the message is then transmitted (i.e., sent via voice, facial expression, or written statement) through a medium (e.g., face-to-face interaction, video, letter, telegram, etc.) to the receiver. The receiver's receptors - eyes and ears - pick up the transmission and decode it, giving it meaning to the receiver...in the feedback process, receivers decode the message - through reading or listening - to assure their own understanding and comprehension of what the sender said. They then ascribe meaning to the communication by comprehending the information content of the message as well as interpreting the content. Receivers then become senders of communication back to its original source.

**Table A: Characteristics of Outcmten and Legalten Electronic Lists.**

| <b>Characteristics</b>   | <b>Outcmten</b>   | <b>Legalten</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Original Goal</b>   | To discuss problems of assessing and analyzing outcomes of interventions aimed at improving mental health system. | To facilitate the implementation and use of rigorous evaluations at the interface of the mental health system, the criminal justice system, and the courts. |
| <b>Sample Topics of Discussion</b>   | Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of various mental health services.                                       | Involuntary treatment of homeless people, electro-shock therapy, the rights of individuals vs. group safety.  |
| <b>General Discussion Characteristics</b>  | Technical discussions regarding mental health system evaluation   | Predominantly intense and personal discussions on involuntary treatment and values in the field of mental health.   |
| <b>Views of Participants</b>   | More homogeneous  | More divergent  |
| <b>Number of Messages Posted in 1995</b>   | 1277  | 1475  |
| <b>Average Number of Messages Posted per Day (Standard Deviation)</b>                                      | 3.5<br>(4.37)   | 4<br>(5.96)   |
| <b>Roles Played by the List Chair</b>  | Participant   | Participant and Mediator  |
| <b>Periods of High Message Frequency Characterized By Participants Posting More Than One Message a Day</b> | No  | Yes   |
| <b>Number of times the word "you" is used</b>  | 1152  | 2467  |

In the electronic list environment, the encoding is limited to alphanumeric characters. Over the years, however, a number of symbols have emerged in electronic media to cue the receiver about the intended impact of a message. Several of these expressions were used by participants in both lists. For example, to emphasize a word or phrase, posters would frame the word with '\*'s or use all caps. To express a particular mood, some participants created 'faces' to represent good humor (also known as "smileys"), confusion, or dismay, etc., while others described their mood between "< >." Especially active participants of electronic discussion groups have developed short-cuts for expressions. For example, expressions such as "By The Way" and "In My Humble Opinion" became respectively "BTW" and "IMHO," and "Oh well, what can you do ? <grin>" would be reduced to "Oh well, what can you do ? <g>" (see Figure 6 for examples)

### Figure 7: Legalten: Examples of Textual Cues

#### *Emphasizing*

I DO NOT support the use of ECT, although I do support the use of forced psychiatric treatment FOR A LIMITED TIME.

Is this \*really\* the case in the US ? In my part of the world this is blatantly untrue and completely incorrect.

#### *Expressing Moods*

I really get the impression that you never have suffered through the hurt, humiliation, discrimination of a real-world psychiatric disorder, yourself. (well, the label of "lawyer" comes close ~8\*}0...)

Finally, you cheat - by posting on pacific time, you can answer me after I go to bed, and I don't get to reply until the next day. I demand equal time. You should only post at 4pm CDT. :-)

BTW, I'm no longer practicing, so no one here need fear confiding in me. I'm safe ! <g>

Given the limited environment for expressing oneself, the chances of misinterpretation are increased. For example, the use of caps is generally considered bad "netiquette" because it is considered shouting - yet not all participants of the Internet are familiar with this norm and use caps simply to emphasize a point, much like they would use italics in paper communication. If caps are used to emphasize a point, the receiver may become annoyed because he feels the sender is yelling. There is no way for the sender to know this until the receiver communicates her reaction.

### *Negotiation Techniques for Preventing a Breakdown in the Communication Process*

In any negotiation, the potential for a breakdown is always very great. There are a variety of factors that can contribute to an increasingly unproductive environment. This is especially true when the issue is a highly emotional one and the parties involved are strongly committed to their viewpoints, "seeing themselves as firm, principled, or deserving, [while] the other side, behaving the same way, is seen as stubborn, bullheaded, inflexible, and unreasonable" (Lewicki, 1994, p.145). In such an environment, the negotiation can quickly become personalized and as a result, unproductive or even destructive.

No subscriber joined Legalten with the intent of working to achieve consensus on any particular issue. Subscribers saw it instead simply as a forum for exchanging ideas. Even so, many of the conditions necessary for having a productive discussion environment are the same as those required by a negotiation. Good communication is essential in a negotiation, and as a result, the conditions that could contribute to a breakdown in a negotiation are just as relevant to a forum for exchanging information. Likewise, the strategies that have been developed to help reduce conflict in a negotiation, are likely to be applicable to preventing a breakdown in communication within an electronic forum.

I will examine some common strategies that are used in negotiations to reduce conflict and see if any were used in Outcmten and Legalten. The intent of this analysis is to understand what negotiation techniques, if any, were applied (intentionally or not) and whether they were successful towards avoiding and reducing conflict.

Lewicki et al. (1994) describe five major type of strategies to help reduce conflict in a negotiation.

- Enhancing the desirability of the options and alternatives that each side presents to the other.
- Enhancing communication, particularly as to understand the other party.
- Reducing tension and defusing volatile emotions.
- Establishing a common ground on which the parties can find a basis for agreement.
- Controlling the number and size of issues at stake.

The principal idea of the first two points is that participants need to understand the other parties. If one is going to develop options that are desirable to the other parties, then one needs to understand their needs. Lewicki et al. describe the communication process as a two-way process. To understand the needs of the other parties, one has to be able to communicate with them to find out what their needs are. If the other parties are doing the same, then the chances of all parties developing solutions of mutual gain are substantially higher.

*Enhancing the Desirability of Options and Alternatives*

Lewicki et al. (1994, pp. 198, 148) wrote:

Negotiators should focus their efforts to the following question: How can we get them (our opponents) to make a choice that is best for us, given that our interests diverge? This approach is largely a matter of focusing on the other's interests rather than our own.

Although it is often easy for outsiders to see logic, rationale, and potential commonalities on both sides of a conflict, recognizing them when we are personally involved in a conflict is another matter.

One of the most important skills to have when communicating with someone is the ability to understand their frame of mind - to be able to "put yourself in their shoes." In a negotiation, if the goal is to get the other parties "to make a choice that is best for us," one needs to understand the other parties. Active listening is a technique for understanding the positions of other parties, anticipate potential conflicts, and identify commonalities. With a more comprehensive view of the situation, one is more likely to develop more integrative (win-win) solutions.

Because this was the first time that all subscribers could voice their opinions from a level playing field, participants in Legalten were more caught up in getting their message out on the table rather than making sure they were being taken in as well. Rather than direct their efforts to understanding the other side's needs and devising a proposal that would meet those needs, most participants emphasized their own position and let the other party suggest alternatives that they then approved or criticized.

In Legalten, though there was a great deal of venting, rarely were there any messages that restated what was heard to check to see if the original message was accurately understood. In negotiations, particularly in tense negotiations, it is not uncommon for one party to misunderstand a statement of disagreement from another party as a challenge, put-down, or personal attack. The offended party will respond in kind and soon the negotiation escalates into conflict. The best way to prevent such escalating from happening is to use active listening - a technique that, ironically, is used frequently in interviews and therapy settings.<sup>4</sup> Active listening is when the receiver, in her own words, lets the sender know that she has heard and understood both the content and emotional strength of the message. Active listening helps avoid mis-communication and lets the other party know that their message is understood. It does not mean, though, that the receiver agrees with what they have understood.

One common technique for constructing a message to be posted is to cut and paste sections of the message to which one is responding. Doing this allows all readers to interpret for themselves the original

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<sup>4</sup> I say 'ironically,' because it was surprising that these participants, many of whom are familiar with using this technique in therapy, did not extend it to themselves in their discussion list. One fear may have been that c/s/x participants would have been critical of such an approach because they would have felt that the list was becoming a therapy session. They may have found the use of such techniques applied to them condescending.

comment and decide if they agree or not with the response. This is not active listening, though. Cutting and pasting removes comments from the context of the message. Active listening requires that the listener state *in her own words* what she has heard so that she can check to see if she has really understood. This process requires more energy from the listener than cutting and pasting but it is ultimately more efficient than a potential flame war.

In the example below, Jim wrote to Tom asking him if his interpretation of Tom's message was correct. Jim included the original message from Tom, and then proceeded to criticize Ted if his interpretation was correct.

Date: Fri, 6 Jun 1995 13:09:13 +22305931  
From: user1@abc.def  
Subject: Re: Informed Consent

>  
> Well I would say it is clear that there is a communication dysfunction and that the professional  
> needs to accommodate the disability of the patient and use a communication device that works. In  
> this case, I would suggest using a peer of the patient as a way to communicate in a way that the  
> professional can't.  
>

Excuse me Ted? Are you seriously suggesting that the inability of a floridly psychotic patient to take in info being handed to them by another person should be blamed upon a "communication dysfunction"? If so, then your experience with people in the throes of delusions is clearly limited. If I have read you incorrectly, I apologise. Please explain further.  
jim

Active listening works best when one restates what one has heard and waits to hear if one's interpretation was correct or not before reacting to the interpretation. Clearly, Jim did not do this here. The idea is to clear up possible misinterpretations before passing judgment.

Bill Fisher, the Chair of Legalten, was the participant who most often used the technique of active listening to try to refocus the discussion away from personal attacks. When Fisher returned after a summer vacation, he found in his electronic mailbox a large number messages from Legalten debating possible legislation regarding forced treatment of homeless people. During this discussion, another more general discussion between a psychiatrist and several of the c/s/x rights advocates had begun on involuntary treatment. By the time Fisher had rejoined Legalten, the involuntary treatment discussion had already turned into one filled with personal attacks. In his first message after returning from vacation, Fisher wrote:

Having just returned, I see we are debating the forced medication of the homeless mentally ill. Again interesting comments, but I wish we could refrain from the personal attacks. If people insist on "flaming" one another I wish they could contact one another and do it directly. As bouncers in bars often say to potential combatants, "Take it outside."

On a substantive note. I personally favor a debate (civil, of course) over the forced medication/hospitalization of the homeless mentally ill, because, frankly, rightly or wrongly, public tolerance for with [sic] encountering psychotic individuals in the streets may be wearing thin. I'm surprised, in fact, that something like this hasn't been proposed before. While there are clearly civil liberties involved, the public's seeming acceptance of the

Clinton proposals in the wake of the Oklahoma bombing suggests a willingness to compromise these liberties in the interests of public safety. The debate on this network seems to go something like this.

\* Kassebaum (and sort of the public's) position: The homeless are a pain in the neck and a potential threat to public safety. We want them off the street or at least sufficiently "intact" that they don't scare people.

\* C/S/X position: Forced medication or hospitalization is torture and undue denial of civil liberties.

The Kassebaum bill has established a "solution" to this problem. Those disagreeing with the position can't simply say it's wrong, immoral or illegal. They have to offer a response. This response can take one of two forms.

1. There is no problem.
2. There's another, better solution.

So which is it? This is NOT a rhetorical question -- I'm serious -- what's a reasonable response to Kassebaum's issues?

Bill F

Fisher's message asked the participants of the discussion to "refrain from the personal attacks" and simultaneously encouraged further discussion on the subject. He restated in his own words how he read the debate, focusing on the issues, not the positions. His post generated three responses, including one from Brad Chapman, to which Fisher responded:

I have not always been in agreement with Brad Chapman on some of the positions he's taken. But I have to say that I think he's "nailed it" in the response he provided to my original question about "what to do with the homeless." There are indeed some good programs, and the one run by the much celebrated "Howie the Harp" is among them. Brad is also right in his assertion that we need to develop some kind of "triage" of emergency shelter and long term housing. Also, his assertion that the history of mental health policy is about homelessness is interesting. Certainly, it's been about finding a place to put "those" people.

From this introduction, Fisher then went on to challenge the discussion further and was successful at generating several responses from other subscribers.

Though Fisher did not always agree with participants, he would focus on the content of the message he was responding to, and restate in his own words what he had read. As a result, he never received any personal attacks. This was certainly not the case for several other participants who did not acknowledge and summarize what they had read and instead would assume incorrectly the beliefs of a participant and respond with a personal attack.

### *Enhancing Communication*

Active listening is one important technique for enhancing communication. In general, though, it is critical to be aware of the effects language can have when communicating, especially in a text-based environment such as the Internet where other communicative cues are unavailable for clarifying an intended message.

How one says or writes is just as important as what one says or writes. Lewicki et al. (1994, p.189) write:

In negotiations, language operates at two levels: the "logical" level (for proposals or offers) and the "pragmatic" level (semantics, syntax, and style). The meaning conveyed by a proposition or statement is a combination of a logical, surface message and other pragmatic (i.e. hinted or inferred) messages.

On this topic, Lewicki et al. (1994) cite the work of Gibbons, Bradoc, and Busch and their studies of key linguistic characteristics of threats including polarized language, verbal immediacy, and language intensity. Their definitions of each are quoted below:

1. The use of *polarized language*, in which a party uses positive words when speaking of his own position (e.g., generous, reasonable, or even-handed) and negative words when referring to the other party's position (e.g., tight-fisted, unreasonable, or heavy-handed).
2. The conveyance of *verbal immediacy* ( a measure of intended immediacy, compellingness, or relative psychological distance), either *high* and intended to engage or compel the other party ("Okay, *here* is the deal" or "*I take* great care to ...") or *low* and intended to create a sense of distance or aloofness ("Well, *there* it is" or "*One should take* great care to...").
3. *Language intensity* has significant influence on how a communication is received. Lewicki et al. (1994, p.214) write:

The intensity of the language negotiators use has a major effect on their persuasiveness ... You might think that more intense language would also be more persuasive. To the contrary, language of relatively *low* intensity seems to be more effective than highly intense language (Bowers, 1964). Evidence indicates that people react negatively to persuasive attempts using language they perceive as too intense (Burgoon and King, 1974). People under stress seem to be particularly receptive to messages using low-intensity language and more inclined to reject those using high-intensity language (Jones and Burgoon, 1975). The impact of language intensity is even more complex, however: research has shown that the effect of intense language depends, in part, on who uses it. Sources with high credibility can use more intense language than those seen as credible (Burgoon and Stewart, 1975) (Lewicki, 1994. p214.).

The use of polarized language, verbal immediacy and language intensity seem to have the same potential effects in electronic discussions. Who delivers the intense message, to whom, and in what context, all influence the effect. The discussion topics on Legalten were extremely controversial and complex. And because many from the c/s/x community focused the discussion on the values of these issues, discussions tended to be even more controversial. At stake were the foundations of many of the participants - and a contest of anyone's foundations will naturally receive a great deal of defensive reactions. Given this environment in Legalten (which again, for many of the participants, was not the original intent), this list was a stressful environment for many of the participants on all sides of the argument.

During the time period that I examined Legalten, there was one participant, in particular, who had a definite influence on the dynamics of the list. The messages of Brad Chapman generated a series of

reactions both in regards to the information he posted and to the presentation of that information. While he was not the only one who would challenge the basic assumptions and foundations of mental health systems and law, his messages were relatively lengthy, used polarizing language, had high verbal immediacy, and were very intense. One participant described his messages as "repetitive, angry, hostile, and ad hominem postings." This was predominantly true, though, only *after* other participants had directed messages to Chapman that could just as well had been described as repetitive, angry, hostile and ad hominem. The messages of Brad Chapman were being read in a stressful environment and by people who had already developed strong opinions of him based on past interactions or who they felt he represented.

The participants who were most critical of Chapman's tactics were familiar with him from other lists or from his involvement in the c/s/x movement. They had already developed unfavorable opinions of him. Other participants who were not as critical of Chapman but did argue with his tactics, tended not to dismiss him as quickly or they apologized and continued discussing with him.

On the surface, reading Chapman's messages one gets the impression that he is very antagonistic, but after several readings, one realizes that Chapman very rarely *initiated* personal attacks - that is, attacks on the person who wrote the message. In fact, it was not uncommon for people to employ the very tactics they accused Brad Chapman of using, and Chapman would be the first to point this out. In his messages, however, he used potentially insulting metaphors and intense language, which people often interpreted as personal attacks and responded critically. It was to these responses that Chapman would respond with an intensity that many subscribers found unacceptable, especially when he used personal attacks.

The example below illustrates how Chapman responded when one participant, Carl Dennis, wrote to say he was insulted by a generalization that Chapman used.

Date: Wed, 26 Jul 1995 11:26:48 -0400  
From: Carl Dennis <cdennis@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: kassebaum update

Many erroneous, overblown, exaggerated posts. Virtually any effort at reasoned discussion on this topic has been destroyed by your incorrect rhetoric. While I know I'm not supposed to get "personal" on this message I feel your tone has been insulting many times and you were WRONG. OK gang, bash away at me - but he hasn't been calling your life's work murder on a daily basis as he has mine.

---

Date: Wed, 26 Jul 1995 13:59:36 -0700  
From: Brad Chapman <bchapman@hij.klm>  
Subject: Re: kassebaum update

Be clear that it is Carl Dennis who is apparently personally attacking us, not the other way around. I do say that forced psychiatric drugging is resulting in mass murder. It is Carl Dennis who is taking that personally. Spare this list a flame war Carl Dennis, and take further personal exchanges off list. Thank you.

Brad Chapman

On Wed, 26 Jul 1995, Carl Dennis wrote:

> [Carl Dennis' message]

Both participants targeted each other personally, used polarized language, and conveyed high verbal immediacy. Chapman addressed Carl Dennis by his full name three times in one paragraph, and accused him of "personally attacking *us*" [emphasis mine]. Rather than foster constructive dialogue, such messages often increased the intensity and tension of the discussions on the lists.

### *Reducing Tension*

There are two effective ways for releasing tension during a negotiation: humor and letting others vent without responding in kind. In Legalten, several participants used humor as a way to try to defuse the intensity of their argument. Sometimes this worked, other times, the sender was interpreted as being disrespectful or flip, or the humor was not very obvious and ultimately confusing. Self-deprecating humor was the most effective way to gain sympathy.

There were several instances of humor directed to the receiver or to another group. During one discussion that was very close to becoming an exchange of personal attacks, Brad Chapman, after having been accused of being naive, wrote back a lengthy message and ended with the following comments:

We're not naive. We've always known DSM and APA are primarily about power and politics.

You've been naive to think we and the public were just going to just keep on taking it. You've been naive to think the taxpayer and insurance customers are going to keep on paying for it. You've been naive to think all those folks tied into restraints, locked into solitary, slapped with all kinds of HURTFUL labels, were just going to shut up and not come back to say, "NO!"

You've been naive to believe the experts and drug companies so much yourself, and to fail to realize a lot of folks are learning to disbelieve those "experts" and drug companies.

Co-coordinator of [the c/s/x rights organization he started], Susan Bellamy, has authored the "Ten Warning Signs of Normality." I'm afraid that you've actually qualified for #7. Here it is, do a self-test:

"#7. GULLIBLE: You believe that the doctor always knows best, that the media is telling the truth (major newspapers always print the facts, right), and that the medical model of "mental illness" has been proven scientifically. Your diagnosis is 'Normal Naivete' Disorder [NND]."

Sam, I'm ... really sorry to break this news to you, but... NND is far more severe than simple "naivete", please seek help! It can easily develop into #9: "corporate asskissingitis."

Brad Chapman

In response, the person who first accused Chapman of being naive also wrote a lengthy message and, after addressing some of the points of the discussion, concluded:

3) I don't mind your calling me gullible or assigning the NND label to me. most of my friends think I am unduly cynical. so I plan on showing your post to them. it will make me seem nicer. I would point out that I don't meet

the criteria you list however because I don't think that doctors always know best, I don't believe that newspapers always print the facts and I don't think that the medical model of mental illness has been proven scientifically.

The effects of this kind of humor on the participants is unknown, but from reading the exchange of messages which followed, the humor did not seem to improve or worsen their rapport.

When the humor is directed at someone else, especially during a heated argument, one runs a risk that the receiver will not find the comment particularly humorous, and instead, may be insulted by it. Using humor directed at others to defuse tension can backfire and instead increase it. Given the heated and delicate discussion that was developing, and the antagonistic environment in which it was taking place, it was fortunate for all participants that the humor was taken as that, and not as anything else. In highly emotional discussions, it is safest to use self-deprecating humor to release tension.

In the electronic environment in which Legalten took place, anyone could vent as often as they wanted to. The ability to "release steam" or "tell it like it is" can be very helpful in a negotiation when the other party does not respond in kind. It is during these emotional releases when one can learn a great deal about the other party and understand their point of view. In several cases, the venting was closely associated with an account of something that happened in the participant's life, explaining why the issue was such a personal one and simultaneously validating the experience and opinion as genuine. Venting can be productive when the receiver can listen to the message and respond constructively. For example, simply acknowledging to the person who just vented that one understands that they are very frustrated with the negotiation can be a productive step towards a conclusion.

The following exchange from Legalten between two participants shows how the good-spirited response of one participant to a potentially personally insulting jibe from the other evoked a personal vent that helped the discussion get to a new level. Both participants were able to articulate their point of view in a clearer, more personal way and conclude their conversation.

Date: Sat, 20 Jun 1995 20:10:14 -0500  
From: T.J.McGregor <TJMcgregor@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: your mail

Sandy Trevor replied to me on 6/24:

>  
>You miss my point completely. 100% of the patients who say they are not mentally ill get force-drugged; not  
> 100% of all patients who have hearings. It is "denial of illness" that is being equated with incompetence.

>  
>Sandy@ghi.jkl

>  
>I do miss your point. Are there persons who have hearings who are not force-drugged? I see that hearings would be held on those who say they are not ill and don't want Rx. Denial of illness is certainly not = to incompetence, however, it may be a factor. Simply denying that you have arthritis, or that I have high blood pressure, does not make it so. Can you expand? (Is it possible to not have you expand?<g>)

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Date: Sun, 21 Jun 1995 07:34:54 +0059  
From: Sandy Trevor <sandy@ghi.jkl>  
Subject: Re: Forced drugging hearings in Mass.

In Mass., patients who refuse drugs are entitled to a Rogers hearing. The state wins most of them.

However, the state wins all of them (100%) when part of the patient's reason for not wanting the drugs is that "I'm not mentally ill," no matter how many other reasons he/she has, no matter how rational.

My point is that, while a person is free not to believe in other things, he/she is not free not to believe in mental illness, which has become a secular religion.

The reason the state wins most of the hearings is they take to court only the ones they think they can win. The others are allowed to refuse drugs (although they are usually hounded, denied "privileges," etc.).

Does this clarify?

Sandy

P.S. Are you implying that I talk too much? <g>

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Date: Sun, 21 Jun 1995 19:00:33 -0500  
From: T.J.McGregor <TJMcgregor@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: Forced drugging hearings in Mass.

> [Sandy Trevor's entire message from above was included in here]

Sandy: You don't talk too much, you just say things some people don't want to hear. I respect your desire to promote equality, and yes, you did clarify your point. It is difficult to discuss all of this, because each of us is shaped by all our experiences, and mine have been to spend more than 20 years total fighting to get treatment for the mentally ill. I don't think I'm God, and the jury decides who comes to me and who goes to jail. But if you have the right to "not believe" in mental illness, then I am free to believe that certain people whose beliefs are extremely different from the rest of the world, and as a result they are suffering in ways that I believe, based on everything I've ever read, studied, or seen in mental hospitals, are dangerous to their own health in ways that they appear to not understand, then I have an obligation, as someone who is sworn to do the best I can to help others, to help. (Long sentence, huh?) I have had patients who chose to not take medications, and I respect those choices, in general. There are times, however, when the Law, and my own agreement with it, says that people are unable to know better.

We all routinely do things for children "for their own good" that they dislike, but we don't give them a choice. Like you, all of us people have good and bad days; I've even been known to make mistakes. Mental Health Professionals never sat down and said "let's cause these people distress." Instead, we have been looking for thousands of years for ways to treat sick people. We have over the years gone down lots of blind alleys. I suspect (like Simone) that governments have been too eager to do the cheapest thing, and as a result, there is no "asylum" in the hospital.

It will not get anybody ahead to deride the DSM-IV; there has been plenty of scientific debate over it, but there HAS to be a way to classify illnesses, and therefore agree on treatments. Would you like for your surgeon to make up treatment as he/she goes along? I think not. Neither in psychiatry. As an aside, PMS is not a diagnosable illness in DSM-IV; it is listed, after LOTS of debate, under "conditions that may be a focus for future research," just because many people still argue about its status.

There are plenty of errors made by psychiatrists, and there are some real jerks in this, and any, profession. But we start with the idea that we are trying to HELP, and attacking us as uncaring and ignorant is not a good way to create a dialog. (you aren't doing that, much- just a general comment.) We are not the enemy. Whether you believe that what we are doing is the best way to handle things, you can't expect a world that has never, ever tolerated "craziness" to just say, oh, ok, walking down the freeway nude is only a life-style choice. Since that's not going to happen, we should all work together to get legislators to write laws that allow more than "drug 'em and dump 'em," funding, and ways in which alternatives can be constructive. That, I believe, is a goal we can reasonably work on.

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Date: Sun, 21 Jun 1995 20:47:19 +0059  
From: Sandy Trevor <sandy@ghi.jkl >  
Subject: Re: Forced drugging hearings in Mass.

Dear T.J.McGregor,

Thanks for your thoughtful message.

While we do things to children "for their own good," adults who may be diagnosed as mentally ill are not children, and it is wrong (IMHO) to treat them as such.

You say that psychiatrists are not the enemy, and that they don't do things out of evil motivations. I agree with the latter, but not always with the former. It's hard for me not to think of the people who have locked up people like me, drugged us, and tortured us (and, yes, I consider straitjackets, solitary confinement, and forced drugging to be tortures) as my enemies (you're not the only one who can write long sentences).

Why do you have a compulsion to "help" people who don't want your help. Surgeons don't force people who may need operations, but choose not to have them, to be their patients against their will. In fact, if you want surgery but don't have the bucks (or the insurance), the surgeon probably won't take you as a patient even if you beg.

It's this intertwining of psychiatry and the state which creates the problem. Psychiatrists say they are doctors like other doctors, but other doctors don't use the power of the law to define some people as "patients" against their will.

sandy@ghi.jkl

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This above exchange could have developed differently if Sandy Trevor had not responded so well-spirited, especially given that during this conversation thread, there were other, more intense exchanges taking place. T.J.McGregor seemed appreciative of this and in response, revealed a great deal of personal information.

#### *Establishing Commonalties*

Lewicki et al. (1994, p.152) note that "parties in escalated conflict tend to magnify perceived differences and to minimize perceived similarities. This was certainly the case in Legalten. During a heated discussion, the messages tended to focus more on differences rather than commonalties.

In Outcmten, participants would not necessarily disagree with each other as much as elaborate or qualify specific points. As a result, a message could generate a collection of qualifications or modifications. The following excerpt illustrates how one participant collected the responses from two other participants to highlight their common ground.

Date: Tue, 13 Mar 1995 09:30:52 -0800  
From: Fred Gordon <fgordon@abc.def>  
Subject: magic number and managed care outcomes

Jack and Sam,

Thanks for your response and questions. I think we are all basically saying the same thing.

On March 8, Jack wrote:

> I really think we would be wise to think in terms of "effective therapy" not in terms of brief, short-term, mid-term, long term therapy.

while on March 9, Sam wrote:

> Some cases need only a few sessions. Others need more. If the therapist is sensitive to that, then the average > will be about what the HMOs want (about eight to ten per client).

I agree.

>This is the key I think that the managed care companies are missing. They might be checking (maybe they are) > to see which therapists carry on longer than necessary, even if sessions are approved.

I don't think we are missing this. We are well aware of it. We are checking. It is finding good therapists that agree with you that we find difficult.

>I have some cases where most of the approved sessions are never used.

That's why I said average "certified" sessions. Claims data shows that sessions certified is greater than sessions used.

Jack asked,

>What assessment measures, if any, does Value Behavioral Health use with there clinicians?

and Sam asked,

> Fred, has ABC come up with any small yardsticks to suggest to providers?

We assess across a number of measures, for example, diagnosis complete and supported by documentation? MSE complete and consistent, functional impairment documented, treatment plan focused, appropriate referrals for meds eval and/or community supports, patient participation in plan and goals, tx frequency and duration, etc. We also send satisfaction surveys to all patients at the completion of treatment.

Fred Gordon

As noted earlier, one very effective way for establishing common links was for people to share personal experiences with the mental health care system. While often such personal histories were used to validate opinions, they also served to highlight common frustrations with the system. Identifying common goals (i.e., "We must do something to fix this bureaucracy") encourages cooperation rather than separation.

One participant, John Kelly, tried to establish common ground in Legalten to generate discussion on ways the various subscribers on the list could organize opposition to the legislation on involuntary treatment of homeless people. To try to achieve this, he wrote the following:

Date: Thu, 20 Jul 1995 11:00:34 -0600  
From: John Kelly <jkelly@abc.def>  
Subject: outpatient commitment

1) this discussion is tragic because it seems designed to exacerbate the differences among the discussants rather than highlight the vast areas of agreement. of course, in a debate that's ok, but I thought we were talking about an actual bill in congress. if so, then we are talking about politics. that means we should be trying to persuade people to support our position and find areas of compromise not piss them off.

2) I suspect that most people on this list agree to the following:

- a) voluntary treatment is preferable to involuntary treatment
- b) treatment should be designed to be user friendly and client centered
- c) community treatment should first be made available to those who want it before anyone is forced to accept it.
- d) outpatient commitment should not be used as a substitute for providing services that are sufficiently humane and decent that patients might voluntarily chose them.

These are all sufficient reasons to oppose the current federal legislation. that is because in many states community mental health services are not available to all of those patients who want them. additionally many community mental health programs are so badly run that only extremely desperate people are willing to go there for treatment. The federal government should not be forcing or even encouraging these states to use outpatient commitment until they have a community mental health system to which a patient might be sent and which could benefit the patient.

3) using language like mass murder and neurotoxins is not likely to be a credible strategy for convincing mental health professionals to join in opposing the federal statute. quite obviously if doctors believed that psychotropic medications were toxins they would not use them and murder (mass or otherwise) requires an intent to kill. death, even negligently caused is not murder. reasonable people can disagree about how one should balance the risks and benefits of any particular medicine, but the fact that most psychiatrists think the benefits of most psychotropic medicines outweigh the risks does not convert these psychiatrists into murderers. It seems fairly clear that calling someone crazy is not apt to convince them to support your political position. calling someone a murderer, is in this regard, no different.

John Kelly

Kelly first outlines the common ground he feels exists in the list, and then recommends that list participants refrain from using such language as "murder." This post never generated any responses, though, because it was posted amongst a series of personal attacks and intense discussions that focused the list back to the differences amongst the subscribers. There were too many other issues being discussed and this one was unable to stand out from the more intense and personally attacking ones.

### *Controlling Issues*

Bill Fisher, Chair of Legalten, realized early on that he had very little control over what issues were going to be discussed on the list. "There is really no way that I know of to supervise a list like this," he explained, "unless you have the authority to cut off certain individuals. And I suppose you could do that by simply not posting their mail, but no one ever even thought about doing that. People are going to say what they are going to say" (Fisher, 1996). In general, the listowner of a list has the right to run the list however she would like to. In the case of the HSRI Topical Evaluation Networks, because they were federally funded, the list owner, Stephen Leff, was unclear about the amount of control he had over what messages were posted on the list. He chose to leave the list completely unmoderated until the discussion became too personal. As a result, the best Fisher could do to control an issue was to post a message and hope it would be influential. "I would try to steer a discussion by floating questions and doing it persistently," remarked Fisher, "but if nobody was interested, nobody was interested."

As conflict arises in negotiations, other issues come into the picture and become tangled in the conflict. This reinforcing loop continues until the negotiation becomes unmanageable and solutions become increasingly difficult to agree on. Two strategies to avoid such tangles are to "fractionate" the big issues into smaller parts and to depersonalize them, separating the issues from the people.

Fractionalizing the issues in Legalten was very difficult due to the fact that the issues at stake were fundamental values (i.e., Do you or don't you think involuntary treatment is wrong?). The problem with such single-issue conflicts is that at least one party sees the only solution as a win-lose solution. When that is the case, it is much more difficult to get an agreement. The challenge is to "expand the pie" so that a resolution can be favorable to all sides. Breaking up the large issue into several smaller issues will provide greater opportunities for identifying shared interests.

Fisher often tried to refocus discussions back to the issues and away from the people arguing for or against them. This technique is one of the most effective in negotiations: focus on the issues, not the positions. In a debate on values as in Legalten, however, it becomes very difficult to separate the issues from the positions.

As described before, some participants in Legalten would criticize groups of people and not consider it a personal attack, while people associated with the target group would take the attacks very personally. Example A showed how Brad Chapman reacted to Carl Dennis' message explaining how he took personally Chapman's accusation that the work of some psychiatrists is murder. This generated several responses, including the three below. The first is from the Chair, Bill Fisher, the second is from Carl Dennis, the person who was exchanging messages with Chapman, and the third is from a new participant, Mike Norman.

Date: Thu, 19 Jul 1995  
From: BFisher@abc.def  
Subject: Psychiatry as murder

I have to agree with Carl Dennis about the level of rhetoric and hyperbole. I would be grossly insulted if someone called what I did "murder" (unless I were an assassin or a terrorist). Since we are on the LEGALTEN, lets think about what the term "murder" really means. For a person to be found guilty of murder, it must be proven that they (1) actually directly caused a death, and (2) possessed mens rea, a "guilty mind." The latter implies that they acted so as to knowingly cause another individual to die, and the actions they took were taken with the specific intention of causing another individual's death. Prescribing medication, even on an involuntary basis, has as its intent the clinical improvement of the individual for whom it is being prescribed. If someone has evidence that a physician prescribed medication for the purpose of murdering a patient, they should pursue that physician through the legal system.

Let's reserve the term "murder" for those situations where it really applies.

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Date: Thu, 19 Jul 1995  
From: Carl Dennis <cdennis@ghi.jkl>  
Subject: Re: Psychiatry as murder

Brad is right - I DO take it personally. Further messages since my post that describe what I do as "disfigurement" only reinforce my feelings. I have spent many years working day in day out with the mentally ill - many very seriously ill. I have also spent a lot of time studying the law and how communities deal with the balance between individual autonomy and untreated suffering. I know there are better ways to do things than the way we are doing them now, and I think some of the issues discussed - housing, respect, quality care are as important as medication. But if someone has delusional disorder (extremely difficult to treat - even w/ meds) the nicest housing in the world is not going to fix them. One such patient killed a security guard at my hospital 3 years ago - after I had spent weeks fighting a system that respected his right to refuse treatment more than those in the community unlucky enough to fall into his delusional system. What makes me very angry however is the openly insulting and degrading tone taken to me and other psychiatrists in these messages. This is our life's work. We are not going to back down. If you want us to listen you have to talk. And yes, I do take a number of things said here - on line to the group - very personally. You can piss in my ear - but don't tell me it's raining.

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Date: Thu, 19 Jul 1995  
From: Mike Norman <mnorman@mno.pqr>  
Subject: Re: Psychiatry as murder

> What makes me very angry however is the openly insulting and degrading tone taken to me and other psychiatrists in these messages.

What you fail to realize is that \*we\* are very angry, as well-- at the "openly insulting and degrading" \*treatment\* we receive from the psychiatric establishment. The long-dominant atmosphere of arrogant disrespect and blatant disregard for the civil rights of those in its care does not engender faith, confidence, or-- in return-- respect for that establishment. You speak of your "life's work." We are speaking of our very lives.

You take objection to the \*tone\* in which these criticisms are voiced? That "tone" is born of psychiatric malpractice and abuse. Our voice is the voice of those who have been terribly harmed-- some beyond repair-- by those who claim to "help." And there are more of us every day. That's the tragedy. But for those who \*do\*

recover from what has been done to us, who gradually regain a semblance of functioning, a sense of self, it is a responsibility to speak up for those who cannot.

Your profession has the power to destroy-- and uses it; for the most part, with complete impunity. We won't lie back and take it forever, nor will we meet it with the deference and unquestioning acceptance that's expected.

Mike Norman

Bill Fisher's approach was most productive for redirecting the discussion, after making it clear that such generalizations were not encouraged on the list. Unfortunately, it preceded Dennis' message, which was more of a vent than an encouragement to continue dialogue. Fisher was in the best position to continue the dialogue, and Norman's message outlines the differences in a clear manner, but their messages, and the responses to them, were soon lost amongst the personal attacks that followed Dennis' post.

Several of the participants in Legalten, especially the moderator, Bill Fisher, used elements of the five major conflict resolution strategies described by Lewicki et al. (1994) Their efforts illustrated, though, that the techniques work only if the other parties subscribe to them. As a result, their efforts were only partially successful - some participants would respond favorably to a particular tactic, and a new discussion thread would take place amongst them. In general though, these efforts did not change the overall environment of the list from one that became progressively divisive and filled with personal attacks.

### ***Individual Freedom vs. Group Safety***

In an unmoderated environment, it is the individual who decides how she/he will participate. When there are no incentives to behave in any particular way, and every individual who participates is "heard" by all subscribers, the safety of the group is especially vulnerable.

In Legalten, people from different (and traditionally adversarial) cultural backgrounds were brought together for the first time to discuss whatever they wanted, however they wanted to, and it was inevitable that participants found others to be "difficult." The challenge was to distinguish between behavior that an individual found difficult and behavior that the list would find difficult. Lewicki et al. (1994, p.171) make several points regarding dealing with difficult people:

- 1) *All of us* exhibit difficult behaviors or are difficult to deal with at times.
- 2) *What is difficult behavior to one person is not difficult to another.* "Difficult" behavior may say as much about the receiver as it does about the sender. Person A may have a great deal of difficulty contending with a very aggressive opponent, whereas Person B has no difficulty with the same opponent.

3) *Difficult people do what they do because it "works" for them.* Their behavior gives them control, feels comfortable, and lets them get their way. We reinforce the difficult behavior by giving in to it, providing the difficult person ample reason to behave in the present and future in ways that were useful in the past.

The use of intense language was considered difficult behavior by some of the participants, while others were not bothered by it. Personal attacks, on the other hand, were condemned by all participants, though that did not prevent many of them from using them. And when they were used, how they were addressed influenced the tone of the discussion.

The following example from Legalten illustrates how one participant, Nancy Okeefe, dealt with a "difficult" person. Nancy Okeefe, from New Zealand, cautiously wrote an e-mail asking how those who felt there should be no enforced treatment/detention of 'mentally ill' would respond to a scenario regarding a violent paranoid schizophrenic who was recently released. She wanted to explore the complexities of granting the rights of an individual while respecting the rights of a group. She began her message by stating "Look, I have sat quietly and not jumped in on this issue because I realize it is in danger of becoming an emotive battle," and concluded after signing off, "BTW - I use [quotation marks] because I am aware of how value laden some of these issues are. I welcome constructive comments from anyone, on the list or privately."

Such framing did not prevent other members of the list from quickly responding and commenting on many of the assumptions in the scenario - some in ways that Okeefe found extremely insulting. The first response was a lengthy message from Richard Stanley. He began it with "Nancy's post ... is so filled with misunderstandings and distortions about those of us labeled 'mentally ill,' it will be very difficult to respond in depth. Just a few points to encourage some thoughts, though:" He then went on to list twelve points which he thought were especially relevant.

Within four hours of having sent the original message, Okeefe was responding to Richard Stanley's message. She began her message: "Well clearly my attempt to prevent emotive responses hasn't been successful." She then went through each point, showing where she agreed and where she was offended. At the beginning of one of Stanley's points, for example, he began with the description "Nancy plaintively asks about the relatives of victims ...," to which she responded "I thought we could have a rational discussion here. The use of the word plaintive is quite frankly insulting to me. Furthermore, this may be the situation in your country, Richard, but it is certainly \*not\* the case here. There are many studies that have shown that ..." Later on, in response to a comment about looking at the roots of violence to achieve peace, Okeefe wrote "Personally, I think the only way to achieve peace is for everyone to actually listen to

what others say and try to see their point of view regardless of whether they agree or not. Jumping on emotive soapboxes and ridiculing another point of view is the root of violence IMO." While communicating the fact that she was offended, Okeefe also reminds others of her original goal: to have a discussion.

Stanley responded to her message with a very short post summarizing a key difference between them but then agreeing with several of her observations, concluding "If we agree on all that, then what's the problem ?" He then asked her for some information regarding the shut down of a facility that she had mentioned. Okeefe responded with a much more positive note as well, and in response to "what's the problem ?," said "No problem, as long as the argument doesn't get personal I'll happily exchange views. I always learn a lot from hearing other's point of view - OK ?"

During the week that followed this exchange, several other threads did turn into personal attacks (though Okeefe was not involved in any of them) and increasingly intense. Remarked one participant: "Seems like this subject area is loaded with emotional energy." Another pleaded: "So let's turn down the fire so that the flames do not engulf everything ! And let's just talk, okay ?" (It was this comment and another one that triggered the discussion regarding the tone of the list which I analyzed earlier.) Finally, after more intense discussions, Okeefe sent a message to the group.

Date: Tue, 13 Jun 1995  
From: nokeefe@abc.def  
Subject: this reader has had enough!

I joined this list believing it was a forum for discussing issues that overlapped between psychiatry and the law. While I will grant that recent discussions began in this vein, I now believe that this list has degenerated into an argument that will never be won. There are too many personal jibes etc. happening and no productive ground being made. People are entitled to their opinions and I respect people opinions, whether i agree with them or not. I will not tolerate, however, being forced fed others' opinions, because they feel they have the 'right' to convince me I am wrong. When the discussion on this list turns to more reasonable discussion maybe I will join in again. Or am I wrong? Is this list set up as a forum for those who feel the need to vent their anger on others?

Nancy Okeefe

BTW - Thank you very much the many who sent me personal email offering support and understanding during some of the more personally offensive, posts. I will gladly engage in any reasonable discussion in the area of legal issues in psychiatry, but i will not be drawn into personal beefs by some who feel they have an axe to grind. Make of this what you will.

The example above illustrates how emotionally consuming it was for some subscribers in Legalten to participate in list discussions. In an unstructured environment such as Legalten, one can influence the direction of a discussion only so much using the negotiation tactics described above. If the other party does not want to respond to one's tactics, then the most one can do is stop discussing or leave.

It is interesting to note that many of the discussions regarding the tone of the Legalten list paralleled the discussions on involuntary treatment. Both explored the appropriate balance between the rights of

individuals to say what they want, however they want, and the rights of society to construct a safe environment for its members. Those participants who expressed a greater understanding of the positions of those who advocated greater rights for c/s/x, also seemed more comfortable with open discussions in an electronic environment.

The spirit in which individuals decided to participate in Legalten had a great influence on what they got out of the discussions. Bill Fisher, the Chair of Legalten, had remarked earlier: "I learned a lot from [the discussions]. I hope others did too, if they took it in the spirit that this is finally an opportunity to hear everybody's voice." For some, the spirit of learning was there, but the unstructured, unhierarchical, "free-for-all" environment of the electronic list was a very difficult one to get used to. Explained one participant in her interview:

...this list, like most I have participated in, has, to this time, been a much less structured kind of discussion than I might find ideal. I think that a list with the quality of participants Legalten has could serve as a much more useful source of education/information. But maybe I need to become less accustomed to formally organized, even authoritarian, means of educating oneself and more accustomed to picking and choosing what I want/need from a variety of topics and sources.

Other subscribers simply did not care to engage in any dialogue with particular subscribers and would delete their messages without ever reading them. This only became an issue when such individual editing was recommended to the list. Wrote one participant:

Of 41 messages this morning I was able to open and delete 22 based on sender ... [she then listed two of the senders and the number of their message which she deleted] ... Would it be possible for people involved in this dialog to exchange their ideas interpersonally instead of via the entire listserv ?

Immediately, one of the senders that was listed responded:

Of course you won't see this because you will automatically delete, but if you find something uninteresting then should we just shut up ? I may find you uninteresting, but others may enjoy reading your posts. That's what an open discussion is all about.

Legalten was an environment where individuals were given a great amount of freedom to act in whatever manner they wanted to. A subscriber could decide, for example, if or how she/he was going to respond to any message on the list. Several of the participants were unfamiliar with such freedom and found the environment very difficult to participate in. Others handled the differences in personal histories and styles of communication by focusing on what was being said, and not how. Yet even if one was comfortable with the environment and with the differences on the list, that did not guarantee one would be immune from personal attacks.

A few days before this thesis was due, a participant in Legalten called another participant an "asshole." Several subscribers posted messages objecting to the personal attack and HSRI posted a message reminding the list subscribers that such personal attacks were not permitted. One subscriber, who threatened to unsubscribe because of the list environment, decided to stay when he saw that such attacks would be quickly stopped. This example, shown in Figure 8, illustrates the challenges of maintaining an environment where individuals can express differing opinions, using various communication norms, and where group safety is enforced using several of the recommendations described above.

Whose responsibility is it to recognize these differences and to try to establish common ground so that the list becomes, at the very least, a "much more useful source of education/information" ? Often this is the role of the moderator of the list. Bill Fisher, Legalten's Chair, tried to establish common ground but, as he said, "the whole thing got away from me." How have other list moderators maintained the balance between individual freedom and group safety ? The following chapter concludes this thesis with an overview of how other list managers have successfully maintained the balance and then outlines several recommendations for practitioners interested in developing electronic lists to harness the unique opportunities of the Internet.

### Figure 8. Legalten: Recent Personal Attack

(This excerpt begins with the post of a participant, Kathy London, agreeing with another participant that personal attacks should not be tolerated. The message with the personal attack was included by London in her post.)

Date: Tue, 25 Apr 1995 12:17:39 -0500  
From: Kathy London <klondon@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: LEGALTEN Digest - 23 Apr 1996 to 24 Apr 1996

I am new to this list but I object to personal hostility being expressed.  
Is there no monitoring?

>>Matt Nelson wrote:

>

>>----- start quote -----

>>PLEASE NOTE: While I am not a lawyer, I believe there would be grave

>>ethical concerns should another lawyer contact you without the advice and

>>consent of your current lawyer.

>>----- end quote -----

>>

>>What if she does not have enough money to hire a lawyer in the first place, asshole?

>>

>>(electronic signature of Diane Epstein)

>

>

> I think this kind of name calling by one Diane Epstein is over the line and uncalled for.

>

> Further, as an attorney (and contrary to popular fiction) I am glad to see folks engaged in assessing situations

> from an ethical perspective - even though I may disagree in this instance with the original message.

>

> Jim Keller, Esq.

>

>

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Date: Thu, 25 Apr 1996 12:37:48 -0400  
From: George Harris <gharris@hij.klm>  
Subject: Re: LEGALTEN Digest - 23 Apr 1996 to 24 Apr 1996

I am new to this list and disappointed by the intemperate language. The discourse can get low enough without this stuff. Please remove me from the list.

Thank you.

George Harris

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Date: Thu, 25 Apr 1996 14:37:47 -0400  
From: sam <samt@nop.qrs>  
Subject: Re: LEGALTEN Digest - 23 Apr 1996 to 24 Apr 1996

>I am new to this list and disappointed by the intemperate language. The discourse can get low enough without this  
> stuff. Please remove me from the list.

>

>Thank you.

>

>George Harris

>

george, one little bad word and you want out? Imagine the bad words at least thought and possible even written by list members when each and every one gets your request to be taken off which none of them can do anyway. In general, you NEVER write to the "list" to be taken off as this merely echoes your request to all members. Simply send email to the listSERVER (in this case, listserv@sjuvn.stjohns.edu) with your sign-off request. try SIGNOFF\* which should take care of things.

sam

**Figure 8. Legalten: Recent Personal Attack (cont.)**

Date: Thu, 25 Apr 1996 13:48:35 -0700  
From: John Smith <jsmith@tuv.wxy>  
Subject: Re: LEGALTEN Digest - 23 Apr 1996 to 24 Apr 1996

I don't know... Sending a listserv message to the list is a common & forgivable mistake. Calling someone an asshole (particularly someone who was just trying to help someone else) is intentionally nasty, uncalled for & way out of line, IMHO.

-John

On Thu, 25 Apr 1996, sam wrote:

> george, one little bad word and you want out? Imagine the bad words at least thought and possible  
> even written by list members when each and every one gets your request to be taken off which none of  
> them can do anyway. In general, you NEVER write to the "list" to be taken off as this merely echoes  
> your request to all members. Simply send email to the listSERVER (in this case,  
> listserv@sjuvvm.stjohns.edu) with your sign-off request. try SIGNOFF \* which should take care of  
> things.  
>

(electronic signature of John Smith)

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Date: Thu, 25 Apr 1996 19:32:48 -0400  
From: Tom Stevens <tstevens@hij.klm>  
Subject: Re: LEGALTEN Digest - 23 Apr 1996 to 24 Apr 1996

Kathy,

You are quite correct. The moderators should remove this message and remove this person from the list.

Otherwise,...."let us all turn to the First Book Of Burgess, pages 42-43, and read aloud. 'And there came The Great Green Card spamming and the offended were mightily angered. Their wrath multiplied.....etc.'"

Tom Stevens

kathy london wrote:

(kathy london's post - the first message in this exerpt - included)

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Date: Thu, 25 Apr 1996 20:57:48 -0400  
From: Lawrence Miller (lmiller@lmn.opq>  
Subject: Re: LEGALTEN Digest - 23 Apr 1996 to 24 Apr 1996

At 12:17 4/25/95 -0500, you wrote:  
>I am new to this list but I object to personal hostility being expressed.  
>Is there no monitoring?

>  
>  
i, too, would rather that gratuitous personal insults be eschewed. however, monitoring is too steep a price to pay -- we would be vulnerable to losing information and resources because the monitor might wax too enthusiastically pc. i suspect that, as in other lists, a warning or two would suffice for most.

peace.

larry

**Figure 8. Legalten: Recent Personal Attack (cont.)**

Date: Fri, 26 Apr 1996 09:14:10 -0400  
From: David Hughes <hughes@WORLD.STD.COM>  
Subject: Recent dialogue on list etiquette

This mailing list is established and maintained by The Evaluation Center@HSRI to provide technical assistance related to the evaluation of adult mental health system change. The Human Services Research Institute is a non-profit research and planning organization based in Cambridge, MA.

Our goal for this list is to promote the exchange of ideas on evaluation issues regarding mental health and the law.

This list is not a moderated list. We view our job as trying to support the list by providing resources for evaluation.

One of the directions that this list has taken is discussing values related to mental health and the law. We support and encourage this aspect of the list.

With respect to recent dialogue on the role of the list owners, the Evaluation Center continues to maintain an open list and an unmoderated list. We do have evidence, however, that when such "flaming" begins the number of list members declines. We feel that this subverts the purpose of the list and the Evaluation Center goal of encouraging dialogue by all persons with interest in evaluating mental health and the law.

We encourage constructive dialogue among list members and thank everybody for their comments.

Stephen Leff,  
Director

David Hughes,  
List Administrator

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FAX (1) 617 492-7401                  hughes@world.std.com

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Date: Fri, 26 Apr 1996 14:29:34 -0400  
From: George Harris <gharris@hij.klm>  
Subject: Re: Recent dialogue on list etiquette

Mr. Hughes:

Earlier in the week I had asked to be taken off the List because of the flaming. Since then I've received several very reassuring messages from the membership that this one an exception.

Based on those comments and your message of today, I would like to be reinstated.

Thanks.

George Harris

(text of HSRI post included)

## *CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION*

In this thesis I have examined two electronic discussion lists, Outcmten and Legalten, set up the Health Services Research Institute to promote communities where participants could learn from each other about evaluation issues in the area of mental health. Outcmten and Legalten each set out to accomplish different goals. Outcmten was to be a forum where issues regarding the evaluation of outcomes in the mental health care field could be discussed, while Legalten was to be a forum where evaluation issues at the intersection of the mental health care system and the criminal justice system could be explored. By the very nature of their discussion topics, the two lists hosted a different mix of subscribers and focused on very different issues. The participants in Outcmten were relatively homogeneous regarding their values and communication style and discussions tended to be very technical. Legalten had a greater variety of participants with an equally diverse set of beliefs and communication norms. Discussions on Legalten tended to focus on the values of the mental health care system and were a great deal more controversial and personal than in Outcmten.

Participants of Legalten did not expect the list to become a forum for debating values. As a result of very different personal histories and interests, subscribers to Legalten had very different value systems and ways of communicating. Subscribers included survivors of electro-shock therapy, consumers of mental health care, parole officers, academics, and psychiatrists who had administered psychotherapy, drugs, and electro-shock treatment. Differences in opinion on very personal issues were exacerbated by differences in communicating those opinions. To express themselves, some subscribers used language that other subscribers considered distracting, too passionate, or inappropriate. Several participants found the discussions on values extremely insightful, while others found the discussions repetitive, exhausting, counter-productive, and insulting. Attempts to use negotiation skills to reduce conflict and achieve consensus were often deluged by intense discussions led by a few individuals that often became personal attacks.

One of the most valued aspects of Legalten was the wide variety of opinions and experiences that were shared regarding the law and mental health. For several of the participants this was the first opportunity to express themselves to others on the list as they wished. The most divisive aspects of the list were the different communication norms that existed. These differences in communicating, combined with very personal issues, made constructive dialogue especially challenging.

Given the unique and valuable opportunity for many to discuss mental health care issues with all relevant parties, including consumers/survivors/ex-patients, what does it take to develop a learning environment in electronic lists? As the experiences from Outcmten and Legalten illustrate, the level

playing field that both lists provided participants was only one important element in developing a forum for constructive dialogue. Two other elements of equal importance were:

- The existence of a common set of communication norms so that differences could be understood by all parties.
- The need for the discussion environment be a safe one for all participants.

These elements raise a number of important questions, such as: Whose responsibility is it to ensure that there is exists a level playing field, a safe environment, and a common language for communication ? Should these be developed by the participants themselves or by the list owner ? These are important issues for future research.

### *Role of List Moderators*

One powerful mechanism that has evolved to deal with these elements is that of a moderator. Such a mechanism is supported by Lewicki et al. (1994, pp. 394-50). They write:

... negotiations are often tense, difficult, and generate more "heat" than "light." Negotiation over critical issues may also reach and impasse free of anger and resentment, but an impasse, nevertheless; the parties are unable to move the process beyond a particular sticking point. At these points, third party intervention may be productive (if not the *only* [sic]) way to break deadlocks and get the negotiations back on track ... at a minimum, third parties can provide (or even reinforce) the stability, civility, and forward momentum necessary for the negotiators to re-address the problems at hand - problems central to the negotiation, and problems that have stalled or derailed it. (Lewicki, et al. 94 p.349-50)

In Legalten, attempts by the Chair to defuse conflict and create consensus were unsuccessful because individuals would continue to issue personal attacks and the Chair was unable to enforce a safer environment. This need not be the case, however. Moderators with the power to take participants off the list have been able to maintain constructive learning environments where individuals are able to express themselves as they wish, as long as they do not personally attack anyone else.

Let us look at an example of a successfully moderated list. I will now examine the roles of moderators who have moderated their own lists, the issues they have faced, and possible strategies for maintaining an environment where ideas can be explored and conflict avoided.

We are a movement of those who bear witness.

We bear witness each to our own experience with madness, to how we have been treated, and to the social consequences we have felt. We bear witness to the common vision and aspirations of people who experience mood swings, fear, voices and vision.

(Philosophical Framework, MADNESS Position Paper)

Sylvia Caras spends about 20 hours a week managing MADNESS, a discussion list for "people who experience mood swings, fear, voices and visions" (MADNESS, 1995). She has done so, unpaid, since 1993, when she first saw a need and decided to fill it. MADNESS has successfully challenged the stereotype that "crazy people," a term the members use to refer to themselves when advocating others, are unable to participate in a democracy. On October 14, 1995, the latest draft of the MADNESS Position Paper was completed. Three hundred of the group's members, 20-30 actively, had participated in its development. It is an extensive document which outlines the group's vision, philosophical framework, areas of concern, and serves as a platform for action on such issues as forced treatment, opportunities for crazy people in higher education and access to information and information technologies. Caras organized, summarized and edited the hundreds of opinions into a single voice - a task that would have been impossible without a moderator. The Position Paper has been submitted for ratification at several conferences, including most recently, the United States National Association for Rights and Protection and Advocacy Conference, where it was well received. Yet "the best use," explains Caras, has been to use the Position Paper "as a tool to point to, to say it is more than one who holds these views" (Caras, 1995). She has been able to harness electronic lists to create a space for community and action where before there had been none.

The minimum requirements for setting up an electronic list are a computer and the appropriate software. As a result, the central authority in an electronic discussion group could simply be the computer managing and distributing the mail. There are several discussion groups where this is the case. They are completely unmoderated and unfiltered - anything can be posted on them. So much freedom, though, does not necessarily guarantee communication. Some of these lists simply become virtual bulletin boards and nothing more. To help ensure that the minimum requirements for communication are satisfied, some kind of facilitation may be necessary beyond that provided merely by hardware and software.

While it is agreed that the role of the list manager in electronic discussion groups can be critical, questions such as "What is the ideal role of a list manager ?," and "When is a list manager critical ?" remain unresolved. Sproull and Keisler (1993), for example, noted an interesting University of Arizona study which found that electronic discussion groups with a planted member who was critical generated more new ideas than similar groups where everyone was very supportive of each other. Sproull (1995) has also been studying electronic self-help groups for such issues as depression and arthritis, where there are tens of thousands of people who are participating in them and benefiting from their participation. Most of these self-help groups are unmoderated. Business organizations are establishing their own internal networks (also known as "intranets") and using these to bring employees together in electronic forums. Orlikowski, Yates, Okamura and Fujimoto, in their study of computer-mediated communication in a Japanese R&D project group, concluded that "the sustained effectiveness of computer-mediated

communication technologies in flexible new organizational forms will depend in great part on ensuring that the technologies are relevant to specific contexts of use, and that they continue to be relevant as those contexts of change." They recommend that organizations empower "technology-use mediators" to provide on going contextualization of the technology to ensure it remains relevant to the organization. (Orlikowski, et al. 1995).

As previously noted, in many situations, list moderators are critical if a list is to become an electronic discussion group. As a result, the role of list administrator is emerging as a respected position in electronic lists. Many founders of electronic discussion groups choose to moderate their lists themselves while others hire a list administrator. The challenge to the moderators becomes finding the right balance between control and freedom to achieve the goals of the list. The ultimate amount of central authority depends on the purpose of the electronic group, often determined by its founder or founders, the nature of the participants, and the frequency of gate crashers.

There are no guide books or elaborate training programs which coach list managers on consensus building in electronic lists. Having started an electronic discussion group, one soon learns that it is not an easy job. "Don't get involved in this," warns Sharon Shea, a list manager who has written on what it takes to start an electronic discussion group, "unless you really like people and are interested in their needs !" Sylvia Caras, the list manager for MADNESS, noted: "It's a constant responsibility. I feel like I have an infant to tend. Never really away." She now travels with an Internet-accessible laptop.

It is very important to establish from the beginning who is in charge of the list and what its purpose is. Most lists accomplish this in their Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section. According to Sharon Shea, (Shea, 1994) the FAQ should include:

- technical Basics (The list address for messages, How to subscribe/unsubscribe to the list);
- the purpose of the list;
- the rules of behavior of the list.

Anyone can participate in the list as long as they follow the guidelines stated in the FAQ. It becomes the social contract between the list manager and the participants. If a participant is out of order or does not like the purpose of the list, then she/he can leave and start their own list.

When a list first starts up, people on the list take a while to figure out who else is out there, what kind of people are participating in the list. It is the role of the moderator to make everyone feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts. Sharon Shea explains: "You have to put some kind of feeling for what the space means and who's there." One technique she uses is to pretend to be different people and to start an exemplary conversation with herself. This inspires others to join in. Some people, known as lurkers,

simply like to listen in on electronic discussions. Periodically, they will share some observation with the list manager, or post a comment to the group. But, Shea notes, " a list of pure lurkers isn't going to last long."

Once a list is able to start going on its own, moderators must be on the look out for flame wars. The difficulty is identifying when a flame war is about to erupt and extinguish it as quickly and productively as possible.

"The trigger word is *you*," explains Shea, "When someone writes 'You shouldn't have ...' and addresses the *individual* instead of the *topic*, that someone else is trying to say 'I have more authority, I am more correct' - particularly with people who come from a hierarchical environment - they will trip up more readily." When Shea first spots this sign, she does not "wipe out" the participant from the list. Instead, understanding that for many this is still a new environment, and that they may not be used to a level playing field or to the ease with which one can flame, Shea communicates with the individual and addresses the issue privately. "If he's going to blow up the list just to be the center of attention, then what you have to do is take the attention away. Some people will learn and understand if you just say things gently and say, 'you have a right to speak but why don't we do it this way.'"

A word search for the word "you" shows that it is used 2467 times in Legalten, while in Outcmten it is used only 1152 times, or about half as often as in Legalten. This fact underlines Shea's observation regarding the use of "you" and highlights the fact that discussions in Legalten tended to be a great deal more personal and confrontational than in Outcmten.<sup>5</sup>

Some people, though, never learn, while others purposely try to "blow-up" a list. Such people are referred to as "Gate Crashers." (Shea, 1994) Some lists attract more gate crashers than others, depending on the subject of the list. Social issues, for example, often attract gate crashers. Some lists try to prevent gate crashing by requiring that participants go through an elaborate subscription process. But this is often not very effective because on the Internet it is impossible to know who is really behind the address. It also compromises the notion that a list is open to anyone who shares that interest, and that one should not judge someone at the door but by what they write.

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<sup>5</sup> Ellen Spertus has written a software program that helps detect flames before they erupt out of control. "Even though flammers target different enemies, they often share common grammar. They tend to use noun phrases as appositions - for example "you bozos," "you flammers," and "you people." Like wise, these irate mailers often use the word *get* followed (within 10 characters) by words *life, lost, real, clue, with it, used to it.*" (Garfinkel 96 p.50) Given the rich data of Legalten, an interesting project would be to identify common words or structures that tend to appear during fame wars in Legalten.

Another way to prevent gate crashers or flame wars is to switch the list to fully moderated. In such an instance, all message posted to the electronic discussion group are first read by the moderator, who then posts them to the group. This is extremely time consuming for a moderator, and it takes away much of the spontaneity of an electronic discussion. But it is effective when used temporarily to control a certain problem.

List managers often browse through lists run by other list managers to see how other discussions are being moderated. The best resources for advice and support come from other list managers. List managers help each other identify potential flame wars, gate crashers, or other unwelcomed visitors. Shea described one experience she had on one of her lists:

I had an incident where someone would go into a list, act very friendly, get into conversations and then begin a personal attack. He had done this before. I had been watching [my] lists and then once there was a message that was slightly out of character. Another list manager wrote to me and warned me that this was going to blow up just like it had in the other groups. So I just pushed the button [and erased him from the list] ... Earlier I would have spent much more time to try to straighten it out, but I knew this other list moderator and she gave me a paragraph of background on why this guy was trouble and I said OK.

Such a network of support is critical in an environment that is constantly changing and where potentially hundreds of new visitors are arriving daily.

"You really need a moderator to make it safe enough so that people do not literally kill each other in conversation," insists Shea. She has had several very bad incidents, including one where the authorities had to be called in to trace an e-mailer and arrest him because he was threatening another list participant. Another challenge is what to do with people who post suicide threats. Often, the person who posts the suicide threat only half-hides their real address, so that it is possible, although with some effort, to trace it. "People who are out of control and are scared by their own lack of control," explains Shea, "if they go to an agency, they will lose what little control they have. They go to the Internet, and through their messages say 'Catch me, but don't confine me.' "

### ***Implications***

For the policy or strategy planner who is interested in bringing together all relevant parties to discuss and learn from each other's experiences and to better understand each other, electronic discussion groups can be very powerful tools for achieving these goals. Yet if electronic discussion groups are not managed well, they could potentially worsen relations between participants.

The data from Outcmten and Legalten are extremely rich and a further analysis of the structure of discussions would be very useful for anyone trying to understand group dynamics in electronic

discussion lists. For example, Shea noted that "you" was a trigger word for several heated discussions. Are there other key words or word-patterns associated with any other behavioral characteristics? Similarly, are there any particular message constructions that generate particular reactions? It would also be useful to get a better understanding of the patterns of participation. How many people participated during the "flame wars"? Were they always the same. What was their participation like in other discussions? These are just a few of the many research possibilities the data offer.

As a result of its open structure, Legalten was successful at bringing together a diverse set of views to a level playing field yet it was unable to maintain a safe and constructive environment for many of the subscribers. It is unclear what the writer of the quote above meant when advocating for a "tone of professionalism," but the title "professional" would discourage several subscribers from participating because they would find the environment too constraining. Yet from the experiences of Legalten, some rules of behavior needed to be established and enforced. Caras and Shea have demonstrated that with a basic set of rules, one can maintain an open environment where individuals can express themselves as they wish and group safety is enforced.

To leverage an electronic discussion group successfully, the policy and strategy planner is encouraged to consider following recommendations derived from my analysis of Outcmten, Legalten, and the experiences of other list moderators. These recommendations assume that the goal of the planner is to create a forum where learning can take place. To establish the trust needed for maximum learning, all participants feel must safe to express themselves openly. Recommendations for achieving this are summarized below.

- Have a list moderator with the authority to unsubscribe any participant from the subscription list. The role of the moderator would be encourage constructive dialogue.
- Decision making by list owner and moderator must be transparent in order to establish trust and respect from the participants.
- Each subscriber should be greeted to the list with:
  - a description of the purpose of the list;
  - an explanation of who owns and moderates the list;
  - a description of the technical basics for participating;
  - a description of what kind of behavior is inappropriate and what will happen if there is inappropriate behavior.
- Personal attacks should be prohibited.

- Posters of personal attacks should be confronted privately, off-list, with a general message posted to the list reminding people that personal attacks are not permitted on the list. The general message should summarize the key points of the discussion and encourage dialogue to continue.
- Where personal attacks continue, the offenders should be removed from the list. A general message to the list should explain why the person was removed and encourage comments on the action.
- If a discussion veers towards conflict, negotiation techniques such as active listening should be used to encourage subscribers to understand the other parties.
- Do not censor any messages.

The future of electronic lists depends on the success of those actively participating to make sure their potential is not constrained by poor usage or short-sighted legislation. For policy and strategy planners, the opportunity to hear and learn from the users of their plans could help them create more comprehensive strategies. Developed well, electronic discussion forums where people located all over the world can discuss, debate and develop consensus and policies on a level playing field, promise to be one of the most powerful uses of the Internet.

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## APPENDIX A: OUTCMTEN DISCUSSION ON LIST TONE

Date: Mon, 27 May 1995 14:07:52 +0059  
From: Valerie Wagner <Vwagner@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: Attitudes of Recovery

On Mon, 27 May 1995 user1@efg.hij wrote:

- > I guess I would call that recovery from psychiatric\_abuse\_.
- > What I am interested in is whether or not consumers believe that psychiatric
- > service, especially the kind of 2x week community treatment/rehab supports
- > provided by ACT (PACT model) creates dependency and helplessness.
- > In an era of cheapened/managed care, I notice more and more professionals are
- > arguing that less is more, and becoming advocates for cheaper, less intense
- > services based on the premise of "service addiction" or created dependency.

Well, frankly, it's awfully hard to tell "use" from "abuse" when the things I listed in the previous message (restraints, seclusion, forced drugging, forced ECT, etc.) are considered acceptable "treatments."

There is also an enormous difference between community support and rehab models which promote choice and independence, and PACT, which is an essentially coercive model requiring compliance with (drug) treatment.

Vwagner@abc.def

\*=====\*

(3 other messages)

\*=====\*

Date: Mon, 27 May 1995 13:36:37 PDT  
From: Andrew Benson <ABENSON@HIJ.KLM>  
Subject: Attitudes of Recovery

On Mon, 27 May 1995 Valerie Wagner wrote:  
> It's awfully hard to tell "use" from "abuse" when ... restraints,  
> seclusion, forced drugging, forced ECT are considered acceptable  
> "treatments".

- > There is also an enormous difference between community support and
- > rehab models which promote choice and independence, and PACT, which

- > is an essentially coercive model requiring compliance with (drug)
- > treatment.

Bad, Valerie, bad! I suppose it is rhetorically correct to exaggerate to make a point, but I can never tell whether you know when you are exaggerating! I know that the original PACT program had a practice that when they were appointed substitute payee for someone's SSI check (authority which they sought in some cases, I assume), it was often their practice to ask the person to get their depot shot or pick up their prescription before they would give them their SSI payment. I remember Jay Mahler being very incensed by that practice when he visited PACT as part of the work to design California's integrated services agency (ISA) model, for which the legislation explicitly forbids ISAs to "make one treatment or service (e.g. substitute payee) contingent on a member's accepting another treatment or service (e.g. medication)." I had always assumed this was the basis for the bad name that the PACT program has among some consumer advocates. Otherwise PACT is not an involuntary program, in the sense that consumers can quit, although this never rules out subtler forms of coercion, which would be encouraged by the above practice, I would think.

In my research on program practices, these are the sort of differences I think are important to assess, though I don't have data yet on that specific one. But whether this form of coercion is typical of assertive community treatment (ACT, or the PACT replications) is an open question. My own local experience working with Frances Hepper, a psychiatrist who trained in the other ACT teams in Madison as a resident, and who later was the psychiatrist in one of the experimental ISA programs in California, is exactly the opposite. In our local ACT program, which she heads, she trains her staff (including consumer staff) to focus on what the user wants. They do not nag people about taking their medication. This is not to say that Frances or her staff are not mindful of the likely consequences when a severely disabled and symptomatic person with schizophrenia discontinues or forgets to take their medication, but med issues are dealt with in the context of a working alliance, and the alliance comes first, not the meds.

This experience and others makes me uncomfortable to hear you stigmatizing all ACT programs (of which the ISA is a variant), since most readers of your remarks will not distinguish between PACT (the Test & Stein program in Madison) and ACT replications, of which there are hundreds across the country.

\*=====\*

(3 other messages)

\*=====\*

Date: Tue, 28 May 1995 06:27:36 +0059  
From: Valerie Wagner <Vwagner@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: Attitudes of Recovery

Subject: Re: Attitudes of Recovery

I'm glad Andrew Benson and I have started on this dialogue. Anyone else care to chime in?

Valerie

\*=====\*

(8 other messages)

\*=====\*

Date: Thu, 1 Jun 1995 10:02:50 -0700  
From: Harold Iccus <hiccus@lmm.opq>  
Subject: Re: Attitudes of Recovery

Is it just me or did the tone and content of this list take a left turn recently? It is important no doubt to gain a broad exposure to issues relating to outcome and evaluation, but I think the tangential and vituperative tone of the most recent postings seems a little out of place.

Given this personal aside I have some thoughts on this issue...

It seems that any "valuable" system of performance measurement would be anchored by a consideration of the client's ability to effectively make use of his/her treatment. With the emergence of managed mental health dollars this issue is at the heart of clinical and financial success. Consequently, if a client emerges from treatment (voluntary or involuntary), angry, unsatisfied, and/or more unstable than before, the agency and/or clinician providing the service will no doubt face the very real consequences (economic, professional, & personal) of this failure. Of course this fact is little solace to the person receiving the inadequate care but to contend that it is acceptable or tolerable to the vast majority of professional(s) providing the care is to ignore the economic, professional, and personal realities of their situation. Consumer choice and voice is critical to any successful treatment or intervention. Resistance to this notion or ignorance of it is a quick ticket to failure.

On Tue, 28 May 1995, Valerie Wagner wrote:

> I'm glad Andrew Benson and I have started on this dialogue. Anyone  
> else care to chime in?

> Valerie

\*=====\*

(6 other messages)

OK, Andrew Benson, let's talk about the PACT/ACT model.

Certainly, the original Stein/Test model was explicitly coercive (they boasted about it). If newer replications have eliminated this, fine. But I would need to hear from the users of the service about whether or not they felt "subtly coerced."

In my experiences, these programs, with their embrace of the medical model, exert control in various ways since they believe that it is essential for people with these "illnesses" to take their medication. If you can show me examples to the contrary, I'd be glad to listen.

In any case, dialogue is important, even when we disagree.

Valerie Wagner  
Vwagner@abc.def

\*=====\*

(5 other messages)

\*=====\*

Date: Tue, 28 May 1995 10:06:13 PDT  
From: Andrew Benson <ABENSON@HIJ.KLM>  
Subject: Re: Attitudes of Recovery

Valerie:

Thanks for your even-tempered rejoinder to my rather rude posting. I'm for dialogue, too. I think the issues of control in the many programs where staff "believe that it is essential for people with these 'illnesses' to take their medications" are many, if sometimes subtle and denied by staff. Too bad it's getting so clear that at least some aspects of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder result from illness. I like the reminder that there is some hard-to-avoid tension between caring and freedom. That's a really important theme in what we do, and we need more people in the field who can manage that tension skillfully (as you and I do, of course).

Andrew Benson

\*=====\*

(two other messages)

\*=====\*

Date: Tue, 28 May 1995 21:08:22 +0059  
From: Valerie Wagner <Vwagner@abc.def>

\*=====\*

Date: Mon, 5 Jun 1995 06:55:24 +0059  
From: Valerie Wagner <Vwagner@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: Anti-psychiatry

On Wed, 31 May 1995 pquentin@efg.hij wrote:

- > Hi there,
- > I am a master's prepared, clinical counselor, recovering
- > alcoholic/substance and food abuser working in private practice with
- > over 28
- > years of experience. These discussions over \_Forced or Voluntary \_
- > treatment
- > issues to me, say as much about the speaker as they do about the receivers
- > of
- > the services. I spent twenty-one years working in the Army as a substance
- > abuse counselor and have seen the impact and the results of \_forced\_
- > therapy. Sometimes it works and some times it doesn't. And Life goes on.
- >
- > I don't think this is any issue that is going to be \_solved\_ once and for
- > all, its too complicated. The pendulum does swing back and forth though.
- > As
- > has been said before, This Too Shall Pass.

> Peter Quentin

> I find your trivialization of suffering really insulting. This is not a  
trivial issue for those of us who have been locked up, forced drugged,  
and stigmatized.

Your insensitivity reveals a lot about you.

Vwagner@abc.def

\*=====\*

Date: Mon, 5 Jun 1995 08:56:22 CDT  
From: "John Krisp " <jkrips@tuv.wxy>  
Subject: Re: Anti-psychiatry

I have really been trying to stay out of this discussion (if it can really  
be called that). However, I think its time that this discussion be moved  
elsewhere (to e-mail or to an appropriate newsgroup). It was my  
understanding that this list was for discussion of outcome research. If you  
would like to frame this discussion in that context, please continue.  
However, it seems that some of the participants have a less than objective  
point they would like to convey. Please do not misinterpret me. You have  
every right to your opinions. However, the tone of some of the responses is  
inappropriate for this forum. Let's get back to the research issues.

John Krisp

>> I don't think this is any issue that is going to be \_solved\_ once and for  
>> all, its too complicated. The pendulum does swing back and forth  
though. As

>> has been said before, This Too Shall Pass.

>> Peter Quentin

>> I find your trivialization of suffering really insulting. This is not a  
> trivial issue for those of us who have been locked up, forced drugged,  
> and stigmatized.

> Your insensitivity reveals a lot about you.

> Vwagner@abc.def

>

\*=====\*

Date: Mon, 5 Jun 1995 09:42:00 -0500  
From: Aspen Bunker <abunker@jmn.opq  
Subject: Re: Anti-psychiatry

I don't agree. I find this a valuable & enlightening discussion.  
I would prefer to have the general issues of this debate laid out  
in a forum I am reading than in some other forum I'm not reading.  
I think understanding the differing points of view (understanding those  
points of view exist!) is essential to doing good research.

Aspen Bunker

On Mon, 5 Jun 1995, John Krisp wrote:

> I have really been trying to stay out of this discussion (if it can really  
> be called that). However, I think its time that this discussion be moved  
> elsewhere (to e-mail or to an appropriate newsgroup). It was my  
> understanding that this list was for discussion of outcome research. If you  
> would like to frame this discussion in that context, please continue.  
> However, it seems that some of the participants have a less than objective  
> point they would like to convey. Please do not misinterpret me. You have  
> every right to your opinions. However, the tone of some of the responses  
is  
> inappropriate for this forum. Let's get back to the research issues.

> John Krisp

>

\*=====\*

Date: Mon, 5 Jun 1995 10:03:17 -0500

From: richards@efg.hj

Subject: Attitudes and outcome research

The issues discussed over the past few weeks seem to be very pertinent to a listserv focused on outcome research. We as research/practitioners rarely discuss our beliefs and attitudes that influence the work we do. These beliefs and attitudes influence the methods we use, the outcomes we assess (e.g., level of functioning), and the interpretation of our results. For example, I am concerned by the statements made by some on this listserv who write about the need to conduct research to "justify" the services we provide. I am concerned that those with this orientation will only discuss the "positive" results in support of their practices and ignore or explain away the contradictory or null results. The bottom line, in my opinion, is that these issues must be discussed by outcome researchers, even if they may lead

to some unpleasantness (kept to a minimum I hope).

Eric

\*=====\*

Date: Mon, 5 Jun 1995 10:21:51 CDT

From: "John Krisp " <jkrips@tuv.wxy>

Subject: Re: Re Anti-psychiatry

Please feel free to discuss. Let's not insult or degrade one another for having varying opinions.

Some of the recent postings have been less than constructive.

>gee, I don't agree. I find this a valuable & enlightening discussion.

>I would prefer to have the general issues of this debate laid out

>in a forum I am reading than in some other forum I'm not reading.

>I think understanding the differing points of view (understanding those

>points of view exist!) is essential to doing good research.

>

>Aspen Bunker

>

\*=====\*

Date: Mon, 5 Jun 1995 10:54:48 CDT

From: "John Krisp " <jkrips@tuv.wxy>

Subject: Re: Attitudes and outcome research

Thank you for summing up this issue very nicely. My previous post was not meant to discourage discussion. As I said, if it is framed in the context of research I'm all for it. However, it is the unpleasantness to which I am referring. Posts that insult (however subtle) are inappropriate and discourage conversation. Let's just leave the personal agendas aside (please distinguish personal agenda from opinion - one is appropriate for this forum, the other is not).

I too agree that our attitudes are reflected in our research. At the most basic level, our attitudes shape the questions we will ask. This is basic to the research process.

I share the concern regarding the justification of services. The "file drawer" problem is already a major hurdle to be overcome when attempting to integrate an area of research. The bias in publishing positive results is not new and will continue to be a problem. But, from a philosophy of science perspective, I am inclined to agree with the likes of Karl Popper. Disconfirmation is an infinitely more meaningful strategy than confirmatory approaches. Remember, a single disconfirmation is worth a thousand confirmations of a theory.

However, this approach has its limits as well....specifically in the social sciences (as pointed out by Meehl and his contemporaries). In a field like physics, hypotheses are put to more and more stringent tests as research progresses. And in fields such as these, increased methodological rigor leads to increasingly "high hurdles" for the hypothesis to clear. However, in the social sciences, the opposite is often the case. For example, large sample sizes are often viewed favorably as a sign of "good" methodology. However, as sample size increases toward infinity, the likelihood of rejecting the null hypothesis goes up as well. In other words, as sample size increases, we are actually lowering the hurdle our hypothesis must clear.

Now, back to attitudes. This sets us (as researchers) up for sort of a dilemma. A disconfirmatory strategy appears to be the best method for testing hypotheses. But this means that there is a risk of rejecting the hypotheses we promote. Thus another source of bias is introduced before the process is even begun (shaping the questions we ask). I believe Platt and Chamberlin addressed this issue. As I recall, they suggested multiple hypothesis as a way of avoiding bias associated with wedding oneself to a single hypothesis. While easier said than done, it does allow a way out of the cognitive trap/bias (cognitive dissonance). Science seeks to be objective. But since science is the product of a subjective beings, there is always the risk of bias.

John Krisp

>The issues discussed over the past few weeks seem to be very pertinent to a  
>listserv focused on outcome research. We as research/practitioners rarely

> discuss our beliefs and attitudes that influence the work we do. These  
> beliefs and attitudes influence the methods we use, the outcomes we assess  
> (e.g., level of functioning), and the interpretation of our results. For  
> example, I am concerned by the statements made by some on this listserv  
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> write about the need to conduct research to "justify" the services we  
provide.  
> I am concerned that those with this orientation will only discuss the  
> "positive" results in support of their practices and ignore or explain away  
> the contradictory or null results. The bottom line, in my opinion, is that  
> these issues must be discussed by outcome researchers, even if they may  
lead  
> to some unpleasantness (kept to a minimum I hope).  
> Eric  
>  
>  
\*=====\*

(3 other messages on a different subject)

\*=====\*

Date: Mon, 5 Jun 1995 22:31:00 EET  
From: Mike Norberg <mnorberg@rst.uvw  
Subject: Re: Re Anti-psychiatry

Here, here  
Mike Norberg  
> I have really been trying to stay out of this discussion (if it can really  
> be called that). However, I think its time that this discussion be moved  
> elsewhere (to e-mail or to an appropriate newsgroup). It was my  
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> would like to frame this discussion in that context, please continue.  
> However, it seems that some of the participants have a less than objective  
> point they would like to convey. Please do not misinterpret me. You have  
> every right to your opinions. However, the tone of some of the responses  
is  
> inappropriate for this forum. Let's get back to the research issues.  
>  
> John Krisp  
>  
>  
>  
>>> I don't think this is any issue that is going to be solved, once and for  
>>> all, its too complicated. The pendulum does swing back and forth  
>>> though. As has been said before, This Too Shall Pass.  
>>> Peter Quentin

>>>  
>> I find your trivialization of suffering really insulting. This is not a  
>> trivial issue for those of us who have been locked up, forced drugged,  
>> and stigmatized.  
>>  
>> Your insensitivity reveals a lot about you.  
>>  
>> Vwagner@abc.def  
>>  
>>  
>  
>  
\*=====\*

(2 other messages)

\*=====\*

Date: Tue, 6 Jun 1995 10:25:30 +0059  
From: Valerie Wagner <Vwagner@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: Re Anti-psychiatry

On Mon, 5 Jun 1995, John Krisp wrote:

> I have really been trying to stay out of this discussion (if it can really  
> be called that). However, I think its time that this discussion be moved  
> elsewhere (to e-mail or to an appropriate newsgroup). It was my  
> understanding that this list was for discussion of outcome research. If you  
> would like to frame this discussion in that context, please continue.  
> However, it seems that some of the participants have a less than objective  
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> John Krisp  
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>  
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>>>  
>>> I find your trivialization of suffering really insulting. This is not a  
>> trivial issue for those of us who have been locked up, forced drugged,

> >and stigmatized.  
>  
> >Your insensitivity reveals a lot about you.

> >Vwagner@abc.def

>  
>  
>

This is an ivory tower view of "research." If we are going to research something, we have to look at what our beliefs and biases are, otherwise, it will contaminate the research.

Whether or not psychiatric treatment is a benign force, and what one's personal beliefs are about the question, are vital in terms of the research you may do and the results.

Vwagner@abc.def

("Flame Discussion" ended here - it was not brought up again)

APPENDIX B: LEGAL TEN DISCUSSION ON LIST TONE

Date: Sun, 9 Jun 1995 22:26:00 EST
From: "Steven Tipper" <stipper@hij.klm>
Subject: Re: "disease" and involuntary treatment

There's one proposition in Brad Chapman's latest long and hostile message which I feel is worth responding to, because I agree with it (the rest I don't think is even discussable in the terms that he is using). Here's the part I found worth a response:

> For example, true cutting edge science is discovering that the human
> thought process is probably in the PATTERNS of nerves firing, and not
> simply in the quantity of chemicals in the synapses.

I agree. Uncovering the dynamics of the nervous system is an exciting trend.

That's it for me -- if the anti-psychiatry participants show an inclination towards something other than a flame war I'll be open for discussion, as I have been in the past.

Bye now.

Steven Tipper.

\* ===== \*

(7 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Mon, 10 Jun 1995 12:36:47 +0059
From: Valerie Wagner <vwagner@abc.def>
Subject: Re: "disease" and involuntary treatment

On Sun, 9 Jun 1995, Steven Tipper wrote:

> There's one proposition in Brad Chapman' latest long and
> hostile message which I feel is worth responding to,
> because I agree with it (the rest I don't think is even
> discussable in the terms that he is using). Here's the
> part I found worth a response:

> > For example, true cutting edge science is discovering that the human
> > thought process is probably in the PATTERNS of nerves firing, and not
> > simply in the quantity of chemicals in the synapses.

> I agree. Uncovering the dynamics of the nervous system is an
> exciting trend.

> That's it for me -- if the anti-psychiatry participants
> show an inclination towards something other than a flame
> war I'll be open for discussion, as I have been in the past.

> Bye now.

> Steven Tipper.

I really don't feel this is a flame war; it is an impassioned exchange. It is our liberty, our bodies, our future, that are on the line.

Valerie Wagner

\* ===== \*

(3 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Tue, 11 Jun 1995 09:37:21 +22305931
From: nokeefe@abc.def
Subject: this reader has had enough!

I joined this list believing it was a forum for discussing issues that overlapped between psychiatry and the law. While I will grant that recent discussions began in this vein, I now believe that this list has degenerated into an argument that will never be won. There are too many personal jibes etc happening and no productive ground being made. People are entitled to their opinions and I respect people opinions, whether i agree with them or not. I will not tolerate, however, being forced fed others' opinions, because they feel they have the 'right' to convince me I am wrong. When the discussion on this list turns to more reasonable discussion maybe I will join in again. Or am I wrong? Is this list set up as a forum for those who feel the need to vent their anger on others?

Nancy Okeefe

BTW - Thank you very much the many who sent me personal email offering support and understanding during some of the more personally offensive posts. I will gladly engage in any reasonable discussion in the area of legal issues in psychiatry, but i will not be drawn into personal beefs by some who feel they have an axe to grind. Make of this what you will.

\* ===== \*

(7 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Tue, 11 Jun 1995 09:19:53 EDT
From: Harvey Ibsen <JSCOTT@UMPSY.AB.UMD.EDU>
Organization: University of Maryland Psychiatry

Subject: This reader has also had enough!

I too have been following the recent threads (or unraveling patchwork) on involuntary treatment, the nature of mental illness, etc.. On the one hand, there have been a number of interesting points and points of view expressed over the last two weeks or so. On the whole, though, I find myself agreeing strongly with Nancy Okeefe about the degeneration of this discussion into a series of rants and name-calling. I agree that the issues are important and it is obvious that passions run high on both sides. However, this "dialogue" is rapidly becoming a monologue. It certainly is true that if you talk or shout (or post) loud enough and long enough you can silence others quite effectively, but it does not mean that you have converted them to your point of view. I suspect that there are actually quite a lot of people on this topical network who have tuned this discussion out by now. I'm wondering whether the way this discussion has been going is what we really wanted this network to be about. The last week's worth of postings reminds me of "talk radio".

Harvey Ibsen

\* ===== \*

(2 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Tue, 11 Jun 1995 20:25:25 +0059  
From: Valerie Wagner <vwagner@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: This reader has also had enough!  
In-Reply-To: <305196A14EC@umpsy.ab.umd.edu>

On Tue, 11 Jun 1995, Harvey Ibsen wrote:

> I too have been following the recent threads (or unraveling  
> patchwork) on involuntary treatment, the nature of mental illness,  
> etc.. On the one hand, there have been a number of interesting  
> points and points of view expressed over the last two weeks or so.  
> On the whole, though, I find myself agreeing strongly with Nancy  
> Simon about the degeneration of this discussion into a series of  
> rants and name-calling. I agree that the issues are important and it  
> is obvious that passions run high on both sides. However, this  
> "dialogue" is rapidly becoming a monologue. It certainly is true  
> that if you talk or shout (or post) loud enough and long enough you  
> can silence others quite effectively, but it does not mean that you  
> have converted them to your point of view. I suspect that there are  
> actually quite a lot of people on this topical network who have tuned  
> this discussion out by now. I'm wondering whether the way this  
> discussion has been going is what we really wanted this network to be  
> about. The last week's worth of postings reminds me of "talk radio".

> Harvey Ibsen

> Talk about invalidation! I, for one, don't believe I've flamed anyone;  
just forcefully expressed an unpopular (on this list) point of view.

Valerie Wagner

\* ===== \*

(26 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Thu, 13 Jun 1995 20:17:10 -0400  
From: Sam Tuscon <stuscon@hij.klm>  
Subject: Re: OUCH!

On Mon, 10 Jun 1995, Valerie Wagner wrote:

> The use of the term "mental illness" was not what was being objected to.  
> Referring to people as "the mentally ill" is objectifying.

Using reason is objectifying thoughts, making abstractions is raising the objective thoughts up to the next level. Your anti-illness position just doesn't wash!

> No Stevener how "good" the "treatment," the fact that it is often  
> administered under legal compulsion is what is being objected to. My  
> outrage is appropriate!

> Your outrage may be appropriate, but it is not a rational argument against  
illness or that illness' treatment.

> Valerie Wagner

I too am willing to continue to discuss, but with and only using reason. I am not interested in the anti position!

-Sam Tuscon

\* ===== \*

(1 other message)

\* ===== \*

Date: Thu, 13 Jun 1995 20:26:08 -0400  
From: Sam Tuscon <stuscon@hij.klm>  
Subject: Re: "disease" and involuntary treatment

On Mon, 10 Jun 1995, Valerie Wagner wrote:

On Thu, 13 Jun 1995, Brad Chapman wrote:

- > On Thu, 13 Jun 1995, Sam Tuscon wrote:
- > > I agree with Steven! Turn down the heat, passion is not reason
- > (snip)
- > > Expecting empowerment without sparks is not very helpful...
- > Brad Chapman <bchapman@qrs.tuv>

Are you expecting "empowerment" to arrive in your email box because you have posted "passionate" arguments? I submit that this venue is not appropriate place for your political action.

By posting here, you have made the other readers your political opponents just by the fact that you send accusatory postings.

As I have already said, the tone of the postings generate more heat than light! If you want discussions then turn down the flames (i.e. heat!) I may continue to lurk but I dont enjoy contentious email. I don't even like regular mail when I receive lots of advertising!

Humanistically, Sam

\* ===== \*

(1 other message)

\* ===== \*

Date: Fri, 14 Jun 1995 09:10:53 -0600  
From: John Kelly <jkelly@abc.def>  
Subject: passion and heat

i disagree with much of what has been said in this discussion group. I think some of it has been intemperate. however, no one has to read it. it isn't being forced on anyone. when I came in to work this morning there were over 20 new postings to the list. not all were worth reading. thats why most email systems allow you to delete messages without reading them and to do a batch delete. I would rather do that then discourage anyone who has participated in this discussion from continuing to do so. indeed if it makes anyone feel better to call me a fascist because I too believe that there are some circumstances in which forced treatment is appropriate--go for it. Criticism can be painful. But if it is incorrect criticism I can reject it; and if it is useful, it will make me better. I am new to the internet and have heard about "flame wars" only from reading about them. but if this is a war, then the typical discussion that goes on in Congress is a nuclear holocaust.  
John Kelly

\* ===== \*

(12 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Fri, 14 Jun 1995 15:52:22 -0700  
From: Brad Chapman <bchapman@qrs.tuv>  
Subject: Re: reasonable passion

On Fri, 14 Jun 1995, Sam Tuscon wrote:

- > Are you expecting "empowerment" to arrive in your email box
- > because you have posted "passionate" arguments? I submit that
- > this venue is not appropriate place for your political action.

I'd rather get back to discussing the particular points raised about forced psychiatry, instead of ad hominem attacks on "tone," and "passion," and "appropriateness." I find that highly offensive, and unfortunately need to respond. (If other readers want to delete at this point, go right ahead.)

There's no "passion" in your posts are there? Oh, no-o-o-o-o. And there's no political agenda that you're promoting, is there? I submit if you want everyone to agree with you, the Internet is not an appropriate (ah, the ultimate mind industry cliché) place.

- > By posting here, you have made the other readers your political
- > opponents just by the fact that you send accusatory postings.

There are quite a few readers who oppose forced psychiatry. If someone uses the excuse of our "tone" to promote forced psychiatry, then they were not truly for liberty in the first place, and would have used any excuse. Please don't speak for "the other readers." Your own post is in fact highly accusatory, and this isn't the first.

- > As I have already said, the tone of the positings generate
- > more heat than light! If you want discussions then turn down
- > the flames (i.e. heat!) I may continue to lurk but I dont
- > enjoy contentious email. I don't even like regular mail
- > when I receive lots of advertising!

Ah, but your tone, on the other hand, is simply sweetness and light, a calm rational tone, never heated, never out of control. Amazing. No contention, no advertising for any particular position. How do you do it?

> Humanistically, Sam

And passion? Does passion ever play a role in being fully human?

I'd rather get back the specific points at hand, rather than have to respond to someone who claims a point of view is not "appropriate" on a public mailing list. That's highly inflammatory in itself.

> On Sun, 9 Jun 1995, Steven Tipper wrote:

> > There's one proposition in Brad Chapman' latest long and  
> > hostile message which I feel is worth responding to,  
> > because I agree with it (the rest I don't think is even  
> > discussable in the terms that he is using). Here's the  
> > part I found worth a response:

> > > For example, true cutting edge science is discovering that the human  
> > > thought process is probably in the PATTERNS of nerves firing, and not  
> > > simply in the quantity of chemicals in the synapses.

> > I agree. Uncovering the dynamics of the nervous system is an  
> > exciting trend.

> > That's it for me -- if the anti-psychiatry participants  
> > show an inclination towards something other than a flame  
> > war I'll be open for discussion, as I have been in the past.

> > Bye now.

> > > Steven Tipper.

> > I really don't feel this is a flame war; it is an impassioned exchange.  
> > It is our liberty, our bodies, our future, that are on the line.

> > Valerie Wagner

I agree with Steven! Turn down the heat, passion is not reason and reason  
is not blaming somebody else for some felt deficit!

Sam Tuscon

\* ===== \*

(3 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Thu, 13 Jun 1995 20:38:33 -0400  
From: Sam Tuscon <stuscon@hij.klm>  
Subject: Re: this reader has had enough!

On Tue, 11 Jun 1995 nokeefe@abc.def wrote:

> I will not tolerate, however, being forced fed others' opinions,  
> because they feel they have the 'right' to convince me I am wrong.  
> When the discussion on this list turns to more reasonable discussion  
> maybe I will join in again. Or am I wrong?

Well, I for one can appreciate the above findings! But I dont enjoy nor will  
I continue to read this on going flame war against treatment!

Sam Tuscon

\* ===== \*

(10 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Thu, 13 Jun 1995 20:27:01 -0700  
From: Brad Chapman <bchapman@qrs.tuv>  
Subject: reasonable passion

On Thu, 13 Jun 1995, Sam Tuscon wrote:

> I agree with Steven! Turn down the heat, passion is not reason

I haven't seen name calling or the typical "flames" one sees on this list that  
one sees on the Internet. What's being objected to is "passion." If people have  
trouble with typed words on a screen as having too much "emotion," how do  
they react to human emotions in front of them like weeping, or screaming, or  
trembling?

Also, instead of replying to the point-by-point arguments, some simply label  
the discourse as "hostile" or "too impassioned." According to my logic  
textbooks, that is not a reasoned response to the points raised. I think the  
main emotion that is being raised is "within" the persons reacting to some of  
the pro-liberty posts...

Finally, everyone these days is talking about "empowerment" and  
"consumer satisfaction" and helping people gain independence. But people  
seem to want it to come in a "nice" package. But every oppressed group  
that's stood on its own feet has reached empowerment with struggle.

Expecting empowerment without sparks is not very helpful...

Brad Chapman <bchapman@qrs.tuv>

\* ===== \*

(6 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Fri, 14 Jun 1995 09:34:11 -0400  
From: Sam Tuscon <stuscon@hij.klm>  
Subject: Re: reasonable passion

Brad Chapman <bchapman@qrs.tuv>

\* ===== \*

(5 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Sat, 15 Jun 1995 08:07:38 -0400  
From: Sam Tuscon <stuscon@hij.klm>  
Subject: Re: passion and heat

On Fri, 14 Jun 1995, John Kelly wrote:

- > i disagree with much of what has been said in this discussion group.
- > i think some of it has been intemperate. however, no one has to read it. it
- > isn't being forced on anyone. when I came in to work this morning there
- were
- > over 20 new postings to the list. not all were worth reading. thats why
- > most email systems allow you to delete messages without reading them
- and to
- > do a batch delete. I would rather do that then discourage anyone who has
- > participated in this discussion from continuing to do so.

True, one can simply "lurk"; as in community meetings where most people just listen!

- > indeed if it makes anyone feel better to call me a fascist because I too
- > believe that there are some circumstances in which forced treatment is
- > appropriate--go for it.
- Masochism doesnt become you!

Criticism can be painful. But if it is incorrect  
> criticism I can reject it; and if it is useful, it will make me better.  
What's the difference between people just talking and therapy?

- > I am new to the internet and have heard about "flame wars" only from
- reading
- > about them. but if this is a war, then the typical discussion that goes on
- > in Congress is a nuclear holocaust.
- > John Kelly

I live near Washington,D.C.....the current congress is more like a nuclear holocaust! Congress doesnt want to take responsibility for anything! Representative government?  
Sam

\* ===== \*

(3 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Sat, 15 Jun 1995 08:58:45 +0059  
From: Valerie Wagner <vwagner@abc.def>  
Subject: Re: passion and heat

On Fri, 14 Jun 1995, John Kelly wrote:

- > i disagree with much of what has been said in this discussion group. I
- > think some of it has been intemperate. however, no one has to read it. it
- > isn't being forced on anyone. when I came in to work this morning there
- were
- > over 20 new postings to the list. not all were worth reading. thats why
- > most email systems allow you to delete messages without reading them
- and to
- > do a batch delete. I would rather do that then discourage anyone who has
- > participated in this discussion from continuing to do so.
- > indeed if it makes anyone feel better to call me a fascist because I too
- > believe that there are some circumstances in which forced treatment is
- > appropriate--go for it. Criticism can be painful. But if it is incorrect
- > criticism I can reject it; and if it is useful, it will make me better.
- > I am new to the internet and have heard about "flame wars" only from
- reading
- > about them. but if this is a war, then the typical discussion that goes on
- > in Congress is a nuclear holocaust.
- > John Kelly

John, we must be getting somewhere. This is the second time I can say I agree completely!

Valerie

\* ===== \*

(12 other messages)

\* ===== \*

Date: Sun, 16 Jun 1995 12:20:27 +22305931  
From: nokeefe@abc.def  
Subject: an attempt to start a \*new\* thread :-))

I know I am not the only person on this list to be finding the current slanging match between members rather repetitive now. Therefore I would like to suggest that a list does not have to be limited to only one thread. Perhaps it is time that a new subject (or two or three or ...) was raised for discussion. I would hate to think that the potential of this group to learn from each other was thrown away because of the unfortunate tension that has developed. I

certainly have questions/issues that I would like to put forth to the group for discussion, but I thought I would throw open the idea for others to jump in first if they wish. In future, I shall not participate in any discussion that resorts to inappropriate personal comments, overly emotive rhetoric or any negative posts whatsoever. For those who wish this list to get back on an even keel, I suggest doing the same.

So - what shall we raise? Does anyone have any issues they would like to put forth?

Nancy Okeefe  
nokeefe@abc.def