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LABORS OF AUTHENTICITY: THE FUNCTION OF SPIRITUALITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELFHOOD IN THE AMERICAN BUSINESS

by

JAMES DENNIS LORUSSO

Under the direction of Christopher White, PhD

ABSTRACT

In light of claims that liberalism has led to a breakdown in society, this paper refutes these claims by examining how workplace spirituality at Starbucks Coffee impacts the identities of several employees. While others have examined workplace spirituality as a management technique, this study illustrates how it could be understood as a distinctly modern way of being religious. By linking the ethnography to recent religious trends, this study illustrates how employees are cultivating a spirituality of an inner self. Specifically, these employees accomplish three things. First, they claim to discover their true authentic self. Also, despite the alienation of modern life, workplace spirituality helps employees establish new forms of community. Third, they rework traditional notions of authority in the workplace in ways that strengthen a connection with their inner selves. Finally, the author briefly explores the broader ethical and religious implications that arise from understanding the dynamics of workplace spirituality.

INDEX WORDS: Religious Studies, Workplace Spirituality, Starbucks Coffee, Spirituality, Authenticity, American Religion, Corporate Religion, Personal Identity

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2007

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December 2007

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my good friend, Lauren Pearcy, for providing the initial inspiration for pursuing this project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank my director, Dr. Christopher White, for his enduring commitment to developing my writing skills during this project.

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Introduction

We do not know what will shape the future, although I have not resisted the temptation to reflect on some of its problems, insofar as they arise from the debris of the period that has just come to an end. Let us hope it will be a better, juster and more viable world. The old century has not ended well.[1]

The above passage from historian Eric Hobsbawm gives voice to a common concern among late twentieth-century thinkers worried about the specter of cultural decline. In the view of these commentators, the indispensable threads weaving together human societies are vanishing, and they have been for quite some time. Charles Taylor argues that, since the beginning of the modern period, the rise of individualism and notions of equality have led to a "tension or breakdown in modern moral culture."[2] This disintegration of community, as Christopher Lasch notes, has also been destructive to individuals, because modern conditions remove precisely what is needed for a functional self: "a personal history, friends, family, a sense of place in the social hierarchy. Under siege, the self contracts to a defensive core, armed against adversity."[3] Without its necessary constituents, such as community and narrative, the self becomes a problem whose resolution remains elusive. Because the real sources of the self are obscured, modern Americans have become preoccupied with identity, searching for, but never finding that authentic self.[4] The individualism of modern societies, both Lasch and Taylor agree, exaggerates this inward focus, leading people to devalue community institutions even further.[5]

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[1] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 17.
[2] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1989), 498.
[3] Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 15.
[4] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 29.
[5] Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self*, 160, and Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self*, 502.

Hence, because identity is constructed in dialogue between self and community, social decline leaves individual identity with no community in which to establish an authentic self. [6]

While the conversation on decline continues, other scholars approach these same phenomena from another angle. Robert Wuthnow, for instance, "suggests that social relationships have not so much declined as taken on new forms."[7] Perhaps, then, we can discuss the modern self not as the victim of decline but something in motion, changing with the context and discovering interesting ways of seeking spirituality, forming community, and understanding notions of authority.[8] In doing this, we turn our attention away from how the self has been lost to considering new ways in which the self is being constructed.

This essay explores one interesting and unusual modern context, Starbucks Coffee Company, as an arena in which new forms of identity and spiritual fulfillment are being realized. Elizabeth Denton and Ian Mitroff refer to companies (like Starbucks) that are "guided by strong spiritual principles or values" as exhibiting a spirituality of the workplace.[9] These organizations display a kind of civil religion, offering a combination of religious philosophies, symbols, and "enlightened" corporate leaders in order to increase worker loyalty and effectiveness.[10] The literature on "workplace spirituality" is robust, yet it does little to unveil the nuances of these developments and how they influence American religious conceptions.[11] My project will

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[6] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 33.
[7] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 37-8. In this latest study, Wuthnow takes issue against Robert Putnam's assessment that social capital has declined in America in his work, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
[8] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 142-67.
[9] Elizabeth A. Denton and Ian I. Mitroff, "A Study of Spirituality in the Workplace," *Sloan Management Review* (Summer, 1999): 90.
[10] Douglas Hicks, *Religion and the Workplace: Plurality, Spirituality, Leadership* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 118.
[11] For a through and general source for the discourse on workplace spirituality, see the compilation of articles in *Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance*, ed. Robert A. Giacalone and Carole L.

redirect the conversation on workplace spirituality in two ways. First, I will approach the data as a scholar of religion, not from the precepts of management studies or some other business-oriented research. Also, while other studies within religion have focused on the organizational role of workplace spirituality, this study looks almost exclusively at how it is spiritual and its impact on the identities of several Starbucks employees.

With the assistance of Human Resources at Starbucks Coffee, I was able to obtain permission to interview a handful of current employees. Of the interviews that were conducted, the sample included a range in tenure from four months to over ten years, and a range in job position from entry-level customer service to regional director of operations. The interviews generally lasted one hour and probed the personal and professional experiences of the participants. In total, I conducted nineteen interviews between April and September 2007. As such, because this study is qualitative and minimal in scope, I seek merely to point us to the possible existence of these patterns on a broader plane.

Overall, I demonstrate how workplace spirituality at Starbucks Coffee brings to light a distinctly modern way of being religious, one that resolves the anxieties of modern life that are often cited by critics of social decline. In this way, my project acknowledges the validity of these anxieties while showing that Americans are finding solutions to them through spiritual means. I develop this idea in three ways. First, I reiterate a point made by other scholars that workplace spirituality encourages a kind of self-transformation that follows patterns similar to religious conversions.[12] These transformations become the means by which individuals gain access to the sacred, moving them away from an inauthentic self to a new, vulnerable, authentic

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Jurkiewicz (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003). The term "workplace spirituality," though never definitively explained, has become a widely used term to express a particular way of operating an organization.

[12] Peter Ackers and Diane Preston, "Born Again? The Ethics and Efficacy of the Conversion Experience in Contemporary Management Development," *Journal of Management Studies* 34:5 (September, 1997): 677-701.

self. Next, I discuss how this spirituality of authenticity results in new forms of community in which employees discover meaning and purpose. Thirdly, I show that workplace spirituality provides two therapeutic mechanisms that reconfigure how authority is understood. Starbucks teaches its managers to be charismatic, to play roles that are more like therapists than task managers, while the company's values provide employees with an avenue to release feelings of helplessness and powerlessness therapeutically, helping them to achieve a sense of authenticity.

Finally, I will briefly explore the implications of these points from a higher altitude. Dramatic ironies come into focus when considering the authenticity of workplace spirituality. As the literature on workplace spirituality and Starbucks reveals, companies often adopt these postures not principally for the sake of employee well-being, but to increase productivity, loyalty, and, ultimately, profitability. Workplace spirituality, thus, begins to look increasingly inauthentic, like something a company markets to its own staff. Despite the real spiritual transformations involved in workplace spirituality, the ethical dimensions are questionable when companies use this highly responsive quasi-religious style to encourage corporate goals of success.

I. Authenticity through Personal Transformation

Business scholars have argued that workplace spirituality transforms the individual in ways that have to be called religious.[13] I agree that characterizing self-transformation in Starbucks as a religious phenomenon helps us understand its totality and depth. In this section, I use the stories of several Starbucks employees to depict how workplace spirituality works on the modern self, helping individuals achieve meaningful and purposeful lives. By listening to these tales, we gain access to the narratives that show these people who they are. These transformations cause these self-narratives to shift from an old way of seeing one's self to another, in which they discover what they describe as their true selves.[14] As the evidence will show, the transformations in these stories are more than ways of improving one's life. Rather, they bring about spiritual changes in the employees. The task of gaining access to one's authentic self is the penultimate concern in the lives of some of these employees, imparting to the self a kind of sacred status. Therefore, the relationship one develops with the authentic self is like the relationship a religious convert might obtain with a sense of transcendence.

The story of fifty-nine year old store manager, Frank, best illustrates how these transformations cultivate a spirituality of the authentic self. He declares proudly, "I am a totally different person than what I was when I came to Starbucks."[15] Frank found in Starbucks the possibility of becoming the authentic self he thought he'd been all along. Before coming to Starbucks, Frank spent twenty-five years in the hotel industry, holding a variety of positions from concierge to catering. He enjoyed his job at the hotel, especially because of the company's commitment to treating its employees fairly. Thus, as far as Frank understood at the time, his

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[13] Ibid.
[14] For an argument that identity is best understood as the place where narratives coalesce in the individual, see Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 416-418.
[15] Interview by author 8 August 2007, digital recording, private collection.

life was satisfactory. Once a regular customer at Starbucks, he eventually took a part-time job at a store as a way to afford his growing caffeine habit. At Starbucks, Frank would be able to receive free drinks while working in addition to a free 1lb. of coffee every week appealed to Frank enough to take on the extra workload. Little did he know, however, that Starbucks would change his way of life.

Reared in a strict Southern Baptist household, Frank found church and organized religion distasteful. "All the preachers spoke about was your sinful status; they wanted you to be dependent on them," which for Frank meant that you couldn't be authentic.[16] From an early age, therefore, he gave little time or energy to spiritual or religious matters. As Frank interacted with the people at his new job at Starbucks, however, deeper questions began to emerge. Specifically, Frank was being asked to examine his own behaviors as well as his own beliefs, matching them against the *Green Apron* behaviors.[17] Up to this point, Frank had always been able to quickly offer a list of his virtues and could describe his own character without flinching. However, he was now being asked to discuss past experiences that reflected these virtues. As he had conversations with his manager and more tenured coworkers, Frank's own narrative began to shift. "After going through the training process, I realized that there was an inconsistency between who I was and who I thought I was," he recalls.[18] Frank found himself doubting his own authenticity. He thought he was a good person but now knew that he wasn't acting like one. The experience was profound for Frank, bringing him to a point where everything was shaken. While not "convicted of his sin" as an evangelical convert would have been, Frank did see his

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Starbucks provides all employees upon hire with a *Green Apron Book* that stresses "Five Ways of Being:" 1. Be Welcoming, 2. **Be Genuine**, 3. Be Considerate, 4. Be Knowledgeable, and 5. Be Involved. For more explanation on these behaviors, see Joseph A. Michelli, *Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning the Ordinary into Extraordinary* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 20-21.
[18] Ibid.

life as incomplete and unfulfilled. This perhaps more closely resembles something that scholars have called the *softening of the self*, which means the former boundaries of the individual break down, leaving one seeking to form a new more integrated self.[19] Feeling this uncertainty about his identity, Frank turned to Starbucks and its culture to fill this newly recognized void, transforming him into the person he had always thought himself to be.

As a Starbucks employee Frank discovered his true, spiritual self once again. "I saw more opportunity to challenge myself and grow into the person I wanted to be."[20] Today, Frank sees himself as very spiritual, constantly working to be his true self. The practices help him to define his new integrated self. Frank calls this way of life, "achieving wholeness:" a spiritual style that he grounds firmly in the workplace spirituality of Starbucks. "My vision is the same vision as the Howard Schultz's vision (Starbucks CEO), regardless of what else is going on, inside or outside of work, the vision keeps me going. It's an all-inclusive vision of wholeness. Nothing's broken about you; you are either being your whole self or always working to become a whole healthy person."[21] Whereas he had once found little time for religious concerns, Frank now continuously seeks a spiritual relationship with his authentic self. In order to rendezvous with the sacred, he must become whole. His spirituality demands that nothing obstruct the path to his purest, innermost self.

These sudden and radical shifts to different ways of thinking about the authentic self occur frequently when individuals engage in workplace spirituality at Starbucks. When Assistant Store Manager Michelle began working for Starbucks nearly three years ago, she was depressed, self-loathing, and suffering from high-blood pressure. Her life was about to change dramatically in her first training class. While being introduced to the company, its values, and

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[19] Steve Tipton, *Getting Saved From the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 237.
[20] Interview by author, 8 August 2007.
[21] Ibid.

long-term career opportunities, Michelle confessed to the instructor her fears of failure. The instructor responded with words that still echo with Michelle to this day. He said that "people that work at Starbucks find that they don't often fit in other places; but when they come here, they find it full of people just like themselves."[22] Until this point in her life, Michelle always viewed herself as an outsider, a person unnoticed and insignificant.[23] The instructor painted Starbucks as the haven for awkward ostracized individuals. She immediately began to see herself differently; she was a misfit in the world, but she could be herself at Starbucks. Over time, this transformation has gained momentum, bringing radical consequences. Today, Michelle is her authentic self, "no longer anchored to the opinions of others… Starbucks was my place of escape from my old life, but it's a healthy place of escape. I truly believe that this company and what they stand for, has changed not only my work but also made an impact on my everyday life."[24] She maintains happiness and confidence in her life through this inwardly focused relationship to something sacred. In Michelle's transformation at Starbucks, her "anchor," the bedrock of her life, moved from the external world to her authentic self.

While Michelle learned to shed her old negativity, workplace spirituality changes the self in other ways. In his book *How Starbucks Saved My Life*, Michael Gates Gill describes how he learned to view his old life as inauthentic. While walking home from work one day, Gill describes his transformation:

> I started walking, then literally stopped with a shock of revelation: "I am happier than I have ever been," I said out loud…. What was going on? I had to admit, for the first time and with a brutal honesty, that I had hated large swatches of my former, high-status life,

[22] Ibid.
[23] The modern individual as helpless and anonymous is issues discussed in sections II and III of this study.
[24] Interview by author, 20 July 2007.

> full of so much meaningless activity…. I hated to think that my whole life had been a lie.[25]

Employees like Gill establish a spiritual connection with their inner selves not by discovering that they have always been good despite their self-loathing, but in finding out that, for most of their lives, they have been untrue to their inner self. He believes that Starbucks has shown him the truth about his life, so that he can now, as a man entering his twilight years, finally begin to live connected to his authentic self. As we will see throughout the remainder of this study, these individuals sharply divide their lives into two distinct periods: (1) one before Starbucks where the self is lost or broken, and (2) one after Starbucks where the discovery and repair of the self become the person's ultimate concern.

Workshops represent one important way that workplace spirituality accomplishes these transformations at Starbucks. One such course, *Increasing Human Effectiveness* (IHE), dramatically changed Store Manager Lucy's life.[26] "It teaches us how to be a better human being" learning to "use affirmations and to use positive thinking to identify goals and the tools to achieve them".[27] She had to articulate to the other participants her most positive image of herself, in order to eliminate the negative "self-talk" that had inhibited her from realizing her unique potential as a person. IHE, then, seeks to inculcate an alternate vocabulary, one that uses visualization techniques of one's best self-image to generate a state of well-being. These techniques mirror conversion mechanics in certain religious traditions. Susan Harding has suggested that religious conversions take place when the potential converts subscribe to new ways of understanding themselves and the world. She describes "conversion as a process of

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[25] Michael Gates Gill, *How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live Like Everyone Else* (New York: Gotham Books, 2007), 205.
[26] *Increasing Human Effectiveness* is a program licensed to Starbucks Coffee by the Edge Learning Institute. Information on this workshop is available at http://www.edgelearning.com/ihe.php.
[27] Interview by author, 29 April 2007, digital recording, private collection.

acquiring a specific religious language."[28] Starbucks managers put their goals and aspirations into what Lucy calls "IHE language," which reworks these statements as if they had already been achieved in the present.[29] For instance, if a person wanted to become more financially responsible, they would simply tell themselves every day that they already are a financially responsible person. Lucy explains how, after the workshop, she was given tapes and other tools that further inculcate this new language. Over time, the goal, then, is to shift to a new way of understanding their authentic selves, removing the layers of negativity and self-deception that have stifled success in their pasts. While IHE is not presented as religious or even spiritual, a certain religiosity pervades the program. When people undergo these transformations through IHE, they cultivate spiritual practices that sacralize the self. Lucy's relationship to her authentic self remains indispensable in her life. She uses these practices to maintain her well being, keeping the negativity from obscuring her "true" self. Although she does not use this term, "sacred," to describe her authentic self, such practices have been associated with particularly modern styles of religious expression. For example, Wuthnow notes that contemporary Americans sometimes "view that they can cultivate deeper spirituality only by gaining a better understanding of themselves."[30] Clearly, Lucy's sense of authenticity holds a place of primacy in her life that is not dissimilar from something sacred.

Another workshop has also transformed the life of at least one other employee who participated in this study. Doug, a District Manager, describes how another course, *Servant Leadership*,[31] transformed his life. In this program, he learned of five values important at

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[28] Susan Harding, "Convicted by the Holy Spirit: the Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion," *American Ethnologist* 14:1 (February, 1987): 167.
[29] Interview by author, 29 April 2007.
[30] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 152.
[31] *Servant Leadership* is a program that is based on the book, *The Servant Leader: How to Build a Creative Team, Develop Great Morale, and Improve Bottom Line Performance*, by James A. Autry (Three Rivers Press, 2001).

Starbucks. Doug explained how the program is based on Jim Autry's book, *The Servant Leader*, which emphasizes the following five behaviors:

- Be Authentic
- Be Vulnerable
- Be Accepting
- Be Present
- Be Useful

Servant Leadership offers character virtues for employees who manage others within the company. For Doug, one trait stands out: Be Vulnerable. For most of his life prior to Starbucks, Doug felt that "mistakes or ignorance was a sign of weakness."[32] Thus, he often hid his own insecurities from others and even himself, and chastised those who, according to him, were "weak."[33] Through *Servant Leadership*, however, Doug was forced to be vulnerable and, consequently, authentic—no easy task for the closely-guarded manager. "Having to be vulnerable in front of other people is tough," he recalls, "but it's something that Starbucks expects from its employees."[34] In fact, Doug's own self-narrative changed during this experience. He realized that it took more strength to be himself with all the flaws and imperfections than to hide behind an illusory wall of strength and dominance. *Servant Leadership* transformed the way he interpreted the world and himself. Doug's old narrative had been one where fears and insecurities should be hidden. He felt positive about his ability to consistently display strength and confidence to others. Now, he admires those who can comfortably 'be weak' and admit their shortcomings. Doug works to become a more vulnerable person in not only work, but in personal encounters as well. Overall, he states that "now, I'm a

[32] Interview by author 14 July 2007, digital recording, private collection.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

kinder and gentler Doug and less of an arrogant ass."[35] Here, "arrogance" now describes behaviors once claimed as "confidence". As with other employees, he has acquired a new language that defines his identity.

These transformations are more than just important changes in self-image or self-confidence. They are spiritual transformations because they help these employees encounter a self that is imbued with a sacred status. Again, Robert Wuthnow has already explored how Americans have "a renewed interest in the inner self as a way of relating to the sacred."[36] By viewing these stories of transformation through the lens of religious conversions, we gain insight into the reasons why workplace spirituality has such enormous staying power for these individuals. We can understand the magnitude of the changes that occur in the self. Workplace spirituality addresses the modern ultimate concern, the problem of authenticity, transforming narratives and urging people to display their original good selves transparently. Employees that encounter this workplace spirituality see themselves as more fully avoiding artificiality and negativity above all. Like more traditional religious forms, this spirituality of the authenticity drives what these employees see as their purpose, clarifying guidelines for their lives. Doug, Frank, and the others that are described here nurture a deeper spirituality from the fruits of ongoing self-reflection. In order understand exactly which fruits are being cultivated, however, we must return again to those critics who have articulated the problems of modern life.

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 142.

II. Authenticity and Community

Robert Putnam points to the general decline in community participation as evidence that modern society is headed for failure unless certain measures are taken.[37] Christopher Lasch argues that the psychology of modern people has become dependant on notions of autonomy to such an extreme that people no longer value social connections.[38] Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas take this argument further. They claim that since religion provides communities with meaning and purpose, liberal societies that define religion as a private affair, render modern religious life essentially empty.[39] All these scholars blame modernity for a percieved collapse of the social fabric. People move through the world anonymously, seeking only self-gratification and insulation from a cutthroat external world. At Starbucks, however, workplace spirituality sometimes performs the functions that, for MacIntyre and Hauerwas, are tasks of religion. It helps some people to establish new forms of community, centered not in a neighborhood or a church but in an environment more suited to a looser and more transient contemporary life.

In this section, I analyze the relationship between community and the authentic self, trying to show how employees are finding resolution to problems associated with modernity. I argue that workplace spirituality functions precisely because it produces a sense of authenticity and new forms of community simultaneously. Starbucks teaches its employees to value cooperation, enhancing the ability for members of this community to achieve authentic selfhood. Workplace spirituality, thus, performs the functions that American society traditionally relegates to religious structures.

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[37] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 25,
[38] Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self*, 51-2.
[39] Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?How the Church is to behave if freedom, justice, and a Christian nation are bad ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 15-16, and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 54-55.

Authenticity, at Starbucks, brings a community of customers and employees together. This is true even for some less-tenured employees. As an entry-level employee, Ashley found a sense of community. Despite only working for four months, she already holds a strong connection to her customers and coworkers because she feels that they are "being themselves."[40] Whereas Ashley's past jobs had expected her to conform to tightly controlled workplace etiquette, the staff at Starbucks acts as if they are not at work, not under the heavy burden of, in Ashley's words, "pretending to care."[41] Here, according to her, the employees and the customers *actually* care about one another. Surrounded by these interactions, Ashley desires to be a part of this fun and amicable community. "Even when it's 4:30 in the morning and I have to be at work to open the store, I *am* looking forward to going to work. I really like working with these people because they are allowed to be who they are."[42] The employees at her store let their guard down as if they were in their own house, leading customers to act similarly, and, thus, work feels more like leisure and less like a series of laborious tasks. In a way, Ashley gets "paid to hang out and be with people" she enjoys: both customers and coworkers.[43] Hence, we could Ashley as someone who believes that Starbucks is a community of people who act authentically with one another. From this perspective, the community depends on the authenticity of each member, leading to mutual trust between employees. Simply, she feels that the authenticity of one's coworkers builds community, which, then, the she seeks to join, urging her to be authentic.

Starbucks lays the groundwork for this reciprocity between community and authenticity by stressing behaviors that cultivate cooperation instead of competition. Ashley expresses that "sometimes it seems like a pretty dark world out there. Everybody's out to get what they can get

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[40] Interview by author, 15 July 2007, digital recording, private collection.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

but it seems like Starbucks creates a place where we all can work together for the good of each other."[44] While competition traditionally represents a virtue of modern capitalist societies, critics state that it has become, in contemporary life, a necessary survival strategy in a world composed of bureaucratic corporate institutions. "Competition, for example, now centers not so much on the desire to excel as on the struggle to avoid a crushing defeat."[45] In other words, if this argument holds, people no longer value competitiveness; they simply must be competitive if they are to survive the pressures of modern society. Starbucks encourages a different approach, offering an ethic of cooperation in which all success is a shared success. This novel alternative deflates the fear and mistrust of others that prohibit potential for both community-building and authentic action in the workplace.

Doug, the District Manager who described *Servant Leadership* earlier in this study, has learned to value cooperation as a result of his experience at Starbucks. As a child, he was home-schooled, leaving Doug without a perceived need to be social. In his words, "I didn't know how to play well with others."[46] Consequently, at other jobs before Starbucks, he approached his work with a very competitive and self-absorbed spirit. "The other jobs were male-dominated and testosterone-driven. You had to step on everybody else to move forward."[47] At Starbucks, he now sees the successes and failures of others as his own. He states, "I don't gain anything from your failure. We should all get a second chance if we make a mistake. Success is a shared success."[48] Doug gained these meaningful connections to others because of behaviors that Starbucks calls *Star Skills*. The company introduces three behaviors to employees during their first training workshop: 1.*Maintain and Enhance Self-Esteem, 2. Listen and Acknowledge, 3. Ask*

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self*, 72.
[46] Interview by author, 14 July 2007.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

for Help. Over time, the continual emphasis on these behaviors becomes routine for employees. For Doug, such behavior was unfamiliar territory. He recalls how an old girlfriend actually ended their relationship because of his inability to listen. "She said I never paid any attention to what she had to say, and I realize now that she was absolutely right."[49] At some point, then, Doug, like others, underwent a self-transformation that altered how he saw himself because he had absorbed these skills. "Starbucks taught me that I was not a good listener that I simply wanted to hear myself talk."[50] A fruit, then, of Doug's transformation was membership in a community of authentic individuals.

While these skills alleviate competitiveness in the workplace, they are also teaching people to build and strengthen communities outside the work environment. For instance, Doug states, "my relationship with my brother used to be strained. But, now, we have become great friends. From time to time, he mentions how I'm a much more easy-going person."[51] Michelle, also, has learned much about relating to others from her experience working for Starbucks. As a child and young adult, Michelle lacked any long-lasting and deep friendships. Her unstable life at home taught her to remain protective of her thought and feelings. Her fear reflects Christopher Lasch's 'survival' mentality: the individual who competes out of necessity to survive, trusting only one's self. When she came to Starbucks, Michelle's life changed. "For the first time in my life, I fit in, unlike other jobs and at home. I have been able to build relationships with coworkers and customers that extend outside of work. Starbucks is a place of positive energy for me."[52] She learned to trust others around her, which opened her to the possibility of deeper connections with these people. "The communication skills I've learned,"

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Interview by author, 20 July 2007.

she expresses, "have led to friendships and have come in handy elsewhere, especially in my home life."[53] Starbucks has given Michelle two things: a place to belong, and the tools to construct connections in all areas of her life. Doug and Michelle have taken these skills and applied them to more general interaction with others. These skills transformed their lives, who they thought they were, and who they have become. Ultimately, Doug and Michelle have been able to build communities that are functional in and out of work, despite the competitiveness of contemporary society. Additionally, they have found authenticity in these communities of which they are a part. Each now understands that trusting others, working *with* them, not in competition, leads to stronger sense of belonging, more meaningful relationships with others, and an emboldened confidence in their own identity. Their stories show how workplace spirituality is not merely something that builds a team environment at work but leads to overall improvements in the lives of its adherents.

Just as cooperation drives community-building, nevertheless, the community molds and reinforces the employee's authentic self. Cooperation requires that each party to recognize the authenticity of the other. When the community recognizes a person's authenticity, they gain a stronger sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Lucy, a store manager, states, "Starbucks places a great emphasis upon the importance of building relationships, of creating human connections."[54] By this, she implies that for many people in the corporate workforce, retail or otherwise, life on the job lacks such meaning. Workers instead feel virtually anonymous in the larger context of a multinational business. Anonymity, according to Christopher Lasch, actually characterizes all facets of life in a post-industrial culture.[55] Lucy is no exception. "At other jobs," she says, "it didn't matter if I showed up or not, I just felt like I was there, and if I was to

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Interview by author, 29 April 2007.
[55] See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*; and *The Minimal Self.*

quit, somebody else would simply slide unnoticed right into my place."[56] Starbucks allows employees like Lucy to feel essential and valued. "Here, I am not just a cog in the machine. What I do is significant and recognized by those that I work for at Starbucks."[57] This recognition provides Lucy with components crucial to an authentic self: a sense of purpose, a sense of uniqueness, a sense of individual worth.

Ron, a twenty-year-old shift supervisor (a part-time position one step above the entry-level position, barista), also finds recognition from the company. When he was seventeen years old, Ron started his first part-time job at a Starbucks in New York. He now lives in Atlanta, working at a location in the city while attending college. Although Ron has taken second jobs with other firms, he continues to work for Starbucks because of the special way he feels recognized in the company. "I've worked other jobs," Ron says, "and I wasn't treated very well. I quit because I was just a tool to them. At Starbucks, we might be tools as well, but they treat us, even in the least, as valued tools. We're not as expendable as we would be in other places."[58] Ron, like Lucy, feels that Starbucks acknowledges his personhood.

Narratives like those of Lucy and Ron illustrate the deep uncertainty and insecurity that runs through parts of American culture. These individuals expect a great measure of insincerity from social institutions and express a complementary distrust of these organizations. They feel insecure about their job stability because another person may easily replace them. The workplace spirituality at Starbucks offers an alternative to Ron and Lucy's deep-rooted fears. Each feels that their job means more than completing tasks that are insignificant to the whole corporation. "The corporation," according to Christopher Lasch, "takes on the appearance of a

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[56] Interview by author, 29 April 2007.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Interview by author, 20 August 2007.

total institution, in which every trace of the individual identity disappears."[59] Instead, Starbucks emphasizes the store-level employees as the most valuable in the company. Both Lucy and Ron no longer continually fear that they might be "let go" at any time, because they possess a sense that they, as authentic individuals, matter to the community in which they work.

Besides company and coworkers, customers and those outside the company provide a source of community. Assistant store manager Michelle expresses how customers and others that she encounters offer positive recognition. "When I'm not at work, I see people that are my customers and they will say, 'Hey, that's my girl from Starbucks.'"[60] At such times, Michelle sees herself as a member of a Starbucks community, as well as a part of the larger community of which Starbucks is a part. She is anchored to her role as a Starbucks employee because it means something to the others in the community. Family members and others outside the workplace learn of her job, and Michelle states that they often react with statements like, "How cool!" or, "Wow! That seems like a fun job!"[61] These spontaneous experiences of recognition appear to be at odds with the feeling of anonymity associated with contemporary life.

Although receiving recognition eliminates mistrust and anonymity, some employees gain meaning and purpose through recognizing others in these communities. Callie, a Starbucks employee of four years and shift supervisor, attains a sense of significance not from the recognition she receives from customers, but from how she recognizes them. At her previous jobs, she was like Ron, simply a tool that allowed others to do the "real" work. Callie was unable to incorporate her self-proclaimed compassionate nature into her work, leaving her feeling inauthentic at work. At Starbucks, however, her actions are allowed more complete expression, producing fruitful results. "I might be the first person that someone talks to all day. They're

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[59] Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self*, 70.
[60] Interview by author, 20 July 2007.
[61] Ibid.

able to come to a place where I know them and have a conversation with them. I think this is important because people like being recognized."[62] Thus, Callie's job has meaning because she serves an important purpose to others. In recognizing customers, she is valuable and indispensable part of their routine. The "afterglow", she says, she likes, "the afterglow….It makes me feel better about myself and my work. It's validating that I have concern for people. Starbucks is a place where this can happen."[63] Callie can be authentic at Starbucks. She freely expresses her compassion for others, unlike the other jobs that have frustrated her need to be herself. Her purpose is serving the community, her customers.

All in all, individuals need community in order to attain an authentic self. Only against the backdrop of the social context, people can discover who they are, and, thus, establish a deeper connection with the transcendent, a task performed in the past by explicitly religious communities. While the contemporary social climate is often described as void of community and a place where individuals move anonymously through their existence without purpose, some people are building new forms of community at places like Starbucks. In learning behaviors such as cooperation, they overcome peculiarly modern problems such as competition and meaninglessness. Workplace spirituality gives these individuals a purpose for their lives and a role to play in the social hierarchy without undermining the notion that he or she is autonomous, an essential component for authentic selfhood, a point that we can now explore.

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[62] Interview by author, 20 August 2007.
[63] Ibid.

III. Authenticity and Authority

Workplace spirituality has a significant impact on authority structures and interaction in the corporate hierarchy. While some have lamented a decline of authority in a world overgrown by individualism and self-absorption, in fact workplace spirituality at Starbucks does not eradicate authority as much as it reconfigures it.[64] Though the Starbucks employees in this study locate authority in the self, they recognize the need for order and hierarchy. The solution has been to replace rational authority with therapeutic devices that enhance the self and its spiritual development.[65] Workplace spirituality rests on two aspects of therapeutic interaction. First, managers become therapists instead of task supervisors. They focus almost exclusively on the well-being of their staffs. Additionally, the company's values and the powerful culture surrounding them offer ways for employees to act authentically in spite of the corporate hierarchy.

Joseph's story presents perhaps the most compelling example of the therapeutic management style that prevails at Starbucks. In the course of his Starbucks career, Joseph has been transformed. While he once used threats and counted on fearful obedience to his authority, Joseph learned to let down his guard and express compassion for his employees, which has made his life most fulfilling. Since he sees himself as someone who imparts the ethical culture of the company to his subordinates, we might consider him as self-proclaimed source of workplace

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[64] For more information on the modern decline of authority and its replacement with 'therapy', see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage 1994); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* and *The Minimal Self*; and Philip Reiff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*.

[65] Rational authority is a concept that individuals obey authority based on rational choice between reward and punishment. In the workplace, this meant that individuals performed required tasks simply because those in authority expected their completion. For more on this see Rogene A. Buchholz, "The Ethics of Consumption Activities: A Future Paradigm?" *Journal of Business Ethics* 17 (1998): 871-882; Peter Ackers and Diane Preston, "Born Again? The Ethics and Efficacy of the Conversion Experience in Contemporary Management Development," *Journal of Management Studies* 34:5 (September 1997): 678-701; and Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Allen and Urwin, 1930).

spirituality at Starbucks. Now sixty, he began working for Starbucks over eight years ago, after a long and prosperous career in the food industry. A master chef, Joseph ran his own catering business for fourteen years, giving him a wealth of experience in overseeing others. After turning fifty, he made a momentous decision to sell his business and find a job with less pressure. Starbucks was one option among several, and he was leaning towards another company offering a higher salary. His wife, however, sealed his decision for Starbucks when she admonished him, saying, "You never take the fun job. Why don't you take the fun job, just this once?"[66] Joseph had come to the conclusion that Starbucks appeared to be a "fun" job because, in doing his research on the company, he read a book, *Pour Your Heart Into it*, by the Starbucks CEO, Howard Schultz. It took his wife to change his mind because he remained skeptical. "I remember it being a great book to read. I thought, even if this guy's not a great businessman, it's a great story. When I finished the book, I thought to myself, it sounds great. But, is it real?"[67]

Joseph's transformation commenced shortly after beginning his training. Although he was hired as director of food and beverage, he, like all newly hired Starbucks employees, spent several weeks learning how to work in the stores as a retail employee. The experience deeply affected Joseph. "Between just having finished Howard's book and being in the stores, watching these young people run circles around me," he recalls, "I suddenly felt like a first grader, so stupid, even though I had all this experience."[68] Like many initiates and converts to contemporary religious movements Joseph experienced a "softening of the self."[69] For the first time in years, Joseph lacked confidence, bringing him low to a point where he would have to construct a radically different sense of self. Shaken to his core, the experience opened him to

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[66] Interview by author, 31 August 2007, digital recording, private collection.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved From the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 237.

learning an entirely new way of interacting with others in the workplace. Of course, since no one actually worked directly for him, Joseph found these softer communication skills to be the only viable options available to him.

After a couple of years, Joseph took a new position as a District Manager (DM), and he was confronted with the problems of rational authority. As a District Manager, he had a number of store managers who reported to him. Joseph remembers an instance, shortly into his term as a DM, when a young female manager received a very troubling review from a secret shopper, an anonymous person who is paid to report to the company on visits to stores. He immediately reverted to the only method known to him for dealing with poor performance; his position would demand respect and response from his employee. "I was so angry, being new in position," Joseph states, "that I couldn't hold it in. I got on the phone and spent a long time, yelling and screaming at her, telling her that she would get fired if this ever happened again."[70] Later that evening, he reflected on the situation. Two years with Starbucks had changed him. Joseph started to feel very guilty for the way he had treated the manager. "When she cried," he remembers, "I completely ignored it."[71] Soon thereafter, Joseph went back and apologized to the woman. He began to reflect, in light of what he'd learned at Starbucks, on his own past. Although he'd been a successful businessman, Joseph's narrative about himself was changing. "Most of my life, I've been an asshole," he states, "I used to take pride in being known for my firings. Basically, I was an axe man, joining messed up businesses and cleaning house."[72] Instead of pride, Joseph now expresses embarrassment in his prior ways. Now, Joseph claims, "I want to be known as someone who's made a difference in people's lives."[73] Joseph's life

[70] Interview by author, 31 August 2007.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

acquired renewed sense of purpose, and he had discovered the person that he ultimately desired to become.

After "getting it", as he refers to it, Joseph's way of approaching and interacting with others profoundly changed. Mostly, he's concerned with the well-being of his employees, helping them grow. "Starbucks will be my last job, hopefully," as he knocks on wood. "I really just want to be able to share with young people what I've learned from this company. You see. I wish I'd had somebody to teach me this stuff when I was younger."[74] Today, Joseph is a regional director of operations, with a number of district managers and nearly one hundred stores for which he is responsible. Despite these enormous responsibilities, Joseph's highest priority is sharing what he calls the "life skills" of the Starbucks culture. He attributes his uncanny success with the company to the leadership skills he's acquired at the company. Thus, despite all the entrepreneurial and traditional management skills that Joseph possessed, he had to become a therapeutic manager, leading others though different means, through his transformed personality, focused on the quality of employee's lives. Joseph, as the therapist, sees himself as guiding people to better lives. Because he seeks to give others the skills needed to uncover their potential, we might characterize Joseph as someone who wants to teach others how to gain access to a sacred and authentic self. From this perspective, he is not a supervisor of tasks, but a minister of the Starbucks faith, ensuring that employees feel the significance, sense of belonging, and the uniqueness that mold the authentic self.

Starbucks also reworks authority by vesting it in an ethical code, which all employees must uphold. This, then, intentionally disperses authority into each employee. The Starbucks mission statement outlines the central component of these values.

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[74] Ibid.

> Establish Starbucks as the premier purveyor of the finest coffee in the world while maintaining our uncompromising principles as we grow. The following six guiding principles will help us measure the appropriateness of our decisions:
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> - Provide a great work environment and treat each other with respect and dignity.
> - Embrace diversity as an essential component in the way we do business.
> - Apply the highest standards of excellence to the purchasing, roasting, and fresh delivery of our coffee.
> - Develop enthusiastically satisfied customers all of the time.
> - Contribute positively to our communities and our environment.
> - Recognize that profitability is essential to our future success.[75]

The company's leaders wanted the Mission Statement to be continuously present throughout the company, even if this meant displacing authority. When drafting the Mission Statement, Howard Schultz, chairman of the board, asked himself, "Do I want a team of employees monitoring management like this, holding us to our own high standards?"[76] The participants in this study share many stories of how the values encouraged them to act authentically at work. It helps them retain moral authority within the authentic self. The unbroken link remains between one's actions and the innermost self because workers may always appeal to these values when other employees seem to step out of bounds. As such, alongside charismatic leaders, these principles serve as another therapeutic device for employees. Because values such as these empower the self, they reflect a contemporary way in which Americans practice spirituality. Robert Wuthnow defines one type of contemporary American spirituality as when "the self has been reconceptualized to offer personal power and to serve as the key to spiritual wisdom."[77]

Some employees use these values to measure situations in the workplace, allowing them the authority to judge issues for themselves. They provide the penultimate moral guidepost for

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[75] Howard Schultz, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 139.
[76] Ibid, 132.
[77] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 152.

Starbucks employees like Callie. Unlike her previous jobs, she now holds the ability to consider and respond to decisions that affect her work. "I'm more apt to challenge authority here, whereas previous environments weren't conducive to speaking out."[78] When Callie speaks about the situations at Starbucks in which she has confronted her managers, her expressions reflect pride and a sense of empowerment about herself. The values shape her orientation toward decisions made in the company. Whenever Callie disagrees with her managers, for example, she can always hold them accountable to the guiding principles. "I've, from time to time, been put in a position to do the right thing or the wrong thing. Even in some cases, where I wouldn't have been found out, I still do the right thing and cast down others who will take the other road."[79] Callie does not limit this "casting down" to her peers or subordinates. Rather, she is not afraid to judge those in positions of authority by appealing to the company's mission statement. These values seem to offer her a way to disagree with others without losing her ability to feel authentic, maintaining the transcendence of the self. "It's hard to justify doing something wrong in this company because there is such an emphasis on the guiding principles. If I am to speak on something that happens, I have that at the very least to go to. I know, here, that if I were fired or let go, that I was doing the right thing, even according to the company."[80] This relationship between each employee and the company's principles maintains the authentic self by making their perspectives legitimate.

Mission Reviews are one way that the mission statement maintains the self as sacred. Although Assistant store manager Michelle feels great loyalty to Starbucks, she still feels that the company could do much better in following its principles.[81] While on other jobs, Michelle

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[78] Interview by author, 23 July 2007, digital recording, private collection.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Interview by author, 31 August 2007.
[81] Interview by author 20 July 2007.

would have helplessly accepted this view as typical of a large corporation, Starbucks provides her with a means to, at least, personally cope with these frustrations. "Whenever I'm asked to do things that seem to undermine the company's respect for its people, I either send in *Mission Reviews* or speak directly to the manager or district manager about the unfair things."[82] In *Pour Your Heart into It*, Howard Schultz remarks briefly on the subject of the *Mission Review*. "Writing and posting a Mission Statement wasn't enough. Starbucks needed a way to make sure we were living up to it. Every employee in each store and other location would be given a postcard-sized comment card and encouraged to report to the Mission Review team if they saw a decision that did not support our Mission Statement."[83] Even when these actions fail to lead to any reverse of the decisions that caused dissent, employees like Michelle feel relieved in merely the act of sending in the review and receiving a written response. While many corporate workers might feel quite insignificant and powerless under the sheer weight of the organization, *Mission Reviews* allow people to exert their authority; they express their authentic feelings without risking the loss of community, and, therefore, their identity. These policies, at times, hold back the tides of modern anxieties that threaten to flood one's path to the authentic self. In this way, individuals continue to tend their spirituality.

In the most dramatic instances, however, the company's principles lead people to act in ways that destabilize the hierarchy. The values establish a culture in the company where one often confronts those positions of authority. When leaders fail as therapeutic managers, workers sometimes use the values to stage moments of revolt against them. Store manager, Gary, finds empowerment through the behaviors encouraged in the values. "Starbucks is more of an empowering or enabling place, where my other jobs in foodservice held the motto that 'you must

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Howard Schultz, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 132.

do it this way, or else.'"[84] Because his self becomes empowered, Starbucks enables Gary to act authentically in the workplace. The values are essential for this process. "The company gives us a way to push back. I can ask someone to do something, and they have the right and the obligation to challenge my request, to demand an explanation."[85] These challenges to normal authority are, in a sense, sacrosanct. Gary explains, "employees can expect no retaliation from their actions, and if there is retaliation, then there's action that they can take to make sure that the retaliation is handled appropriately."[86] As a manager, Gary finds himself occasionally in positions where he must act of behalf of his employees when they feel treated inappropriately by the company's authority figures. He describes a time when an executive visiting his store left a partner feeling embarrassed and incompetent. Apparently, the employee failed to adequately answer the concerns of the executive. Gary explains that the employee was not knowledgeable because Gary had failed to inform his staff of certain information. Consequently, Gary states, "I decided that his tone was disrespectful. I talked to my district manager, who, then, conveyed the concerns to the regional executive."[87] When the executive later confronted him, Gary challenged him, using the language of the mission statement as the foundation for his argument. He told the executive that "our culture says that we are business partners before anything else. So, if there's anxiety to one of my employees, then, it's my obligation to deal with it. If this is not okay, then maybe you don't understand the culture of this company."[88] For just this moment, Gary uses the guiding principles to transcend his subordinate position in the company. While other companies impose a disconcerting silence on their employees,

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[84] Interview by author 25 July 2007, digital recording, private collection.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

Starbucks provides a release valve for these pressures. Here, workplace spirituality keeps the authentic self from becoming obscured under negativity and frustration.

Sometimes, therapeutic leadership and the values work together to bolster the authentic self. District manager, Doug, also remembers a vivid experience where Starbucks values subverted the normal roles of employees within the company. During his first six months with Starbucks, Doug, a shift supervisor at the time, faced numerous challenges in his relationship with the store manager. "My manager," he recalls, "wasn't really doing a great job. I was picking up a lot of his slack."[89] After several uneasy interactions, Doug extended his concerns to the district manager, thinking that little if anything would change. Unexpectedly, the district manager called a meeting of the store's employees without the manager present. Doug remembers, "The DM asked us if our manager should be let go. He was serious!! After careful deliberation, we opted to give him a second chance."[90] Here, the district manager placed the authority to make decisions regarding the career of the store manager in the hands of the part-time employees. For Doug, this incident informs him of the essence of Starbucks' values. "We're not perfect, but we're willing to learn from our mistakes. The values allow us to course correct. We look at ourselves in the mirror and correct our mistakes. People should get a second chance, and that's what I like about the company."[91] Each employee temporarily transcended the hierarchy, allowing them to release pressures blocking the authenticity of the self. Workplace spirituality sometimes demands that therapeutic managers periodically hand over authority in order to maintain the spiritual well being of employees.

Therapeutic interaction lies at the core of workplace spirituality at Starbucks. The company re-styles managers into ambassadors of values, people who minister to their employees.

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[89] interview by author, 14 July 2007.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

The guiding principles of the mission statement serve likewise as a therapeutic source for workers. Even though scholars, like Christopher Lasch, lament the consequences of modern life, describing how it leaves individuals feeling helpless, devalued, and afraid in the face of authority, workplace spirituality sometimes repairs these frustrations.[92]

[92] Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self*, 33, 58-59.

Conclusion: Exploring the Ironies of Workplace Spirituality and Final Thoughts

In this final section, I will briefly explore some of the complications implicit in this study. First, I will ponder the degree to which individuals can become authentic when workplace spirituality, as the scholarship asserts, is used primarily for profit motives that are mostly hidden, rendering it inauthentic. Next, I will see whether or not this previous point reduces the therapeutic components of workplace spirituality to nothing but an internal marketing device rather than spiritual guidance. Finally, I will demonstrate how my analysis of Starbucks actually shifts attention away from concerns that individualism has torn society asunder and toward other perilous social changes that have been overlooked. .

One complication that surfaces in this study is the authenticity of workplace spirituality. When employees act authentically, they act transparently, offering up their true feelings. Not surprisingly, employees expect the contours of workplace spirituality at Starbucks to be a transparent reflection of the company. The mission and guiding principles at Starbucks hold real power because employees trust that these values represent the center of the business. Callie, for instance, expresses that "Starbucks does seem to be truer to its mission than other companies."[93] Ashley also states that "this company seems to be the least corporate of any place I've worked."[94] The mission and principles, for employees like Callie and Ashley, honestly, or authentically, represent the organization. However, two points seem to undermine the authenticity of Starbuck's workplace spirituality. First, the company is a profit-driven enterprise, and despite the fact that this is the final guiding principle of the mission statement, this evidently creates problems for some employees. Both Gary and Michelle suspect that behind this life-changing philosophy at Starbucks lies a more important goal of generating profit. "The company

[93] Interview by author, 23 July 2007.
[94] Interview by author, 15 July 2007.

has a "dark under-shadow". It's always under the surface that Starbuck's primary motive is to be profitable," Gary opines.[95] Although he still finds the values-based culture to be useful for accomplishing his job as a store manager, his awareness of the incentive for profit prevents him from really developing any deep-seated belief in the company's spirituality. Michelle states, "sometimes, because the company is a business, too much focus is placed on customers at the expense of employees, but the values and the mission reviews allow us to address these situations."[96] While Michelle remains mindful of the profit motive, her statement indicates a more subtle concern. Even though profit is ultimately the goal of the company, she feels that workplace spirituality exists because it reigns in the excesses of corporate greed and worker exploitation.

The scholarship, on the other hand, demonstrates that workplace spirituality has primarily emerged not as a way of creating authentically secure employees but as a means to increase profit of a highly competitive market and to generate the productivity of a resistant workforce. Many of the components of workplace spirituality at Starbucks reflect Gary's description of the "dark under-shadow." The Edge Learning Institute, for instance, touts *Increasing Human Effectiveness* as a workshop that "empowers people with 'tools' to break through self-imposed limitations, resulting in greater productivity and a healthier bottom line"[97]. The subtitle of the Jim Autry's book *The Servant Leader: How to Build a Creative Team, Develop Great Morale, and Improve Bottom Line Performance,* which is the basis of Starbucks *Servant Leadership* workshop, indicates that a productive and effective staff of employees leads to more revenue.[98]

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[95] Interview by author, 25 July 2007.
[96] Interview by author, 20 July 2007.
[97] http://www.edgelearning.com/ihe.php, website accessed 17 October 2007.
[98] James A. Autry, *The Servant Leader: How to Build a Creative Team, Develop Great Mora, and Improve Bottom Line Performance* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001).

Conversely, Starbucks final guiding principle, "profitability is essential to our future success," might paint profit as an indispensable component but not the ultimate goal of its mission.

If Starbucks institutes workplace spirituality as a clandestine way of improving its profit margin, then further complications emerge. In this light, workplace spirituality begins to appear less as altruistic spiritual guidance and more like a marketing technique, directed not towards consumers but to the producers of Starbucks' products and services. The cherished "therapeutic effect",' indicative of Starbucks' values and management style, represent not a way of bolstering each person's independence and authenticity, but rather the contrary. The therapy, instead, obscures the fact that authority still remains with those in positions of power and not in the individual self. While holding onto the impression that they have freely chosen to follow company decisions or otherwise voice discontent, employees may actually face a less empowering reality, and possess less authentic authority. Workplace spirituality offers employees two choices. First, charismatic managers successfully impress the desire to follow their lead. If this fails, a second option exists in which employees may voice their concerns through *mission reviews* or directly under the umbrella of protection found in the guiding principles and values of the company. Once they voice their discontent to the appropriate party, nevertheless, the sense of well-being returns and business continues as usual. The same outcome, then, follows either choice, urging obedience to corporate decisions and superiors in the end. If this is the case, then those that express fears about the therapeutic ethos may in part be well founded; they are instruments of subtle manipulation because workers will perform more effectively for lower wages if they feel that someone cares.[99] Thus, workplace spirituality at Starbucks seems to give employees the façade of authentic selfhood, the appearance of community, and the cloak of individual authority.

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[99] Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self*, 47.

While these complications are important to consider they do not invalidate the conclusions I want to make in this thesis. First, the modern, emotivist self described by Alasdair MacIntyre, "which has no necessary social content and no necessary social identity," clearly is not evident among these Starbucks employees.[100] Even if the company has carefully constructed workplace spirituality for its own financial motives, these people still do experience real spiritual benefits. I hope to have demonstrated that workplace spirituality, despite its contradictions, fosters community, purpose, and meaning for individuals even in late modernity. I suspect that this spiritual style, because it helps modern individuals, is potentially present in religious forums outside of the workplace.

If authenticity is possible for the modern self, then critics of modern individualism have misunderstood important social changes taking place. Liberal principles may not be the real source of their trepidation. Instead, the more likely concern lies in the growth of marketing "lifestyles" that feign liberal ideals while actually undermining them. Workplace spirituality at Starbucks markets a way of thinking, behaving, and even feeling; it creates identities that seem authentic but that actually are packaged and marketed to a labor force made malleable through its transformational power. A different decline narrative now arises to which Jeffery Stout alludes in his work, *Democracy and Tradition:*

> It is in the interest of the business elite to transform all forms of diasporic consciousness, functionally speaking, into obsession with life-style enclaves by commodifying the symbolic means of identification. People obsessed with buying their way into prestige within an ethnically defined lifestyle enclave are giving the business elite what they want in two ways: first, through the transfer of cash; second, by remaining oblivious to the widening gap between the managerial-professional class and the underclass of all racial groups.[101]

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[100] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 32.
[101] Jeffery Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 47.

Stout focuses on how marketing touts various social identities as commodities that serve the moneyed interests, a concept that applies easily to workplace spirituality. Starbucks offers a spiritually transforming experience that constructs a new identity for employees, establishing an authentic self through community and therapeutic devices. The transfer of cash, discussed by Stout, is indirectly affected, as these transformed employees "infuse themselves into their work."[102] Thus, while the achievement of authenticity seems possible in these novel developments in the work environment, they also indicate a danger concealed behind workplace spirituality, the conquest of autonomy and the real liberalism by business interests.

Certainly, these suspicions remain only briefly explored in this study. My analysis merely invites scrutiny into workplace spirituality as a way for illuminating the turbulence and trends of contemporary American religion. Workplace spirituality has already become a voice in current religious thought. For instance, Michael Gates Gill's recent autobiographical account of his own transformation from rich advertising executive to part-time Starbucks employee, *How Starbucks Saved My Life* (2007), reads as a spiritual tale of a man's discovery of himself and lasting happiness through workplace spirituality. Do stories of this kind really reflect an overlooked form of religious life emerging in America? To what extent are books like these and their messages simply more exploitation of a culture willing to consume its religious fulfillment? Even though workplace spirituality does not claim to be a religious phenomenon, there is evidence that it is shaping religious thought in America. Theologians like Leonard Sweet are taking workplace spirituality as fertile soil from which they can grow a restyled Christianity.[103] If workplace spirituality is already encountering American religion, then this study helps us begin to look at American religion in new ways. While certainly more work should be done, I

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[102] Joseph A. Michelli, *The Starbucks Experience*, 20.
[103] Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks* (New York: Random House, 2007).

have disassembled the building blocks of workplace spirituality, and I hope to have pointed to a few ways in which it is religious. Individuals undergoing transformations in the workplace achieve an authentic self, joining new forms of community and finding purpose in their lives. They encounter the authentic self as a modern way to experience transcendence. In this way, workplace spirituality helps to remove the anxieties of life that some critics attribute to modernity.