

**THE EXPERIENCE OF TRANSFORMATION OF SELF AS REVEALED
IN A COUNSELLING RELATIONSHIP**

by

Lorna Anne Maximick
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We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

[REDACTED]
Dr. Antoinette Oberg, Supervisor (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

[REDACTED]
Dr. R. Vance Peavy, Professor Emeritus (Department of Educational
Psychology and Leadership)

[REDACTED]
Dr. Norah Trace, Outside Member (Department of Educational Psychology and
Leadership)

[REDACTED]
Professor James P. Anglin, External Examiner (School of Child and Youth
Care)

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University of Victoria

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Supervisor: Dr. Antoinette Oberg

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the inquiry was to explore the nature of the experience of transformation of self in a counselling relationship. Transformation as described in this study is the human experience that is characterized by a profound difference in a person's Being-in-the-world. Transformation is about significant, multidimensional shifts: it is a major qualitative change in the human psyche.

The study draws from three sources: literature in the existential-phenomenological tradition, autobiographical reflections on my own transformational experiences, and audio-taped conversations with three persons who were involved in their own personal development and presently in a counselling relationship with someone other than myself. The methodology used in this thesis is phenomenological and hermeneutic.

Several themes emerged from the data that elucidated the phenomenon. The significant themes revealed by the co-researchers were: Self-compassion that included awareness, acknowledgement and acceptance, the importance of coming to know one's self through body awareness, and the development of a more "Authentic Self." In addition, the co-researchers identified significant facilitative characteristics of their counsellors that provided a crucible for their transformation.

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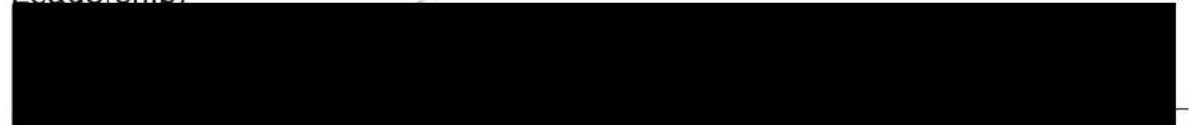
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Dr. R. Vance Peavy, Professor Emeritus (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership)



Dr. Norah Trace, Outside Member (Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership)



Professor James P. Anglin, External Examiner (School of Child and Youth Care)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Illustrations	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication	viii
1. COMING TO THE QUESTION	
1.1 Approaching the Question of the Lived Experience of Transformation.	1
1.2 Standing on My Own Ground - Finding My Voice	2
1.3 Dwelling in the Question	5
1.4 Beginner's Mind	6
1.5 My Journey Toward My Question: What is Meant By Transformation?	8
2. TOWARD A SCIENCE OF THE PERSON	
2.1 Hermeneutic Phenomenology as Human Science Research	17
2.2 The Emergence of Hermeneutics	21
2.3 Understanding Toward Meaning	23
2.4 Understanding and Self-understanding	24
2.5 Application of Understanding	29
2.6 Conversation with a Purpose	30
2.7 Beginning With Reflection on the Question	34
2.8 An Ethical Choice: Conversation	37
2.9 Autobiographical Dimensions	43

2.10	The Pilot Study: Early Beginnings	48
2.11	A Conversational Relation	49
3.	THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP AS CRUCIBLE FOR TRANSFORMATION	
3.1	The Counsellor's Acceptance of the Client	54
3.2	The Congruency and Authenticity of the Counsellor	65
4.	THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TRANSFORMATION	
4.1	Anxiety as a Path to Transformation	70
4.2	From Darkness to Light: Our Pain is Our Opening to a Deeper Understanding	78
4.3	Becoming One's Self: Through Body Knowing	85
4.4	The Self In Process: Toward the "Self One Truly Is"	97
4.41	Movement Toward Our Authentic Self	98
4.42	Letting Go of the Ideal Self	102
4.43	Self-compassion: The Royal Road to Authentic Self	110
	(A). Awareness	110
	(B). Acknowledgement	114
	(C). Acceptance	118
5.	A PERSONAL REFLECTION	
5.1	My Learning as a Counsellor	124
5.2	My Learning as a Scholar/Researcher	127
5.3	My Learning as Person	132
6.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	139

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The Ideal Self Model	p. 108
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Dale Kelly, who has encouraged me throughout this project. He has supported me through ungrounded moments of chaos, delighted in my growth, and taught me patience. Our relationship has been enriched through our dialogue.

Chapter 1. COMING TO THE QUESTION

1.1 Approaching the Question of the Lived Experience of Transformation.

This thesis represents a six-year study in an M.A. program. It portrays the culmination of experiences and insights of a twenty-year journey of my personal and professional development as an educator and counsellor. It is a record of the evolution of my thinking and learning. It is a significant marker on my path of understanding the experience of transformation for others as well as myself. In this thesis, I have made public some of my own transformational moments as well as those of the co-researchers who participated with me in conversations about transformation. Those stories are interspersed with passages pertaining to the nature of my inquiry into transformation and its relationship to phenomenological-hermeneutic investigation. This thesis has been an opportunity to examine further the work of scholars who have contributed to my philosophical foundation. This investigation represents a major milestone for me in my own development as a scholar/ person. It initiates my public expression (on paper) of my own philosophical beliefs that have developed over these years.

The writing and ideas of many humanistic scholars located within the existential-humanistic tradition have been influential in my professional life. I have resonated with their ideas and integrated these into the way I work with people and live my life. They have contributed to my knowledge and furthered my understanding of human beings. This group of scholars includes Carl

Rogers, whose theories and writing have encouraged and guided my thinking. His concepts of the characteristics necessary for a healthy therapeutic relationship and framework of “becoming a person” have been significant and influential for me. In addition, Rollo May’s ideas on creativity and courage have been important. Abraham Maslow’s investigation of self-actualizing people taught me that the personal development path is transformational. Sidney Jourard developed ideas on self-disclosure that have contributed to my way of being in my life. The pioneering work of Virginia Satir on self-esteem and family dynamics touched me deeply at a young age and has continued to do so. Peter Koestenbaum provided a philosophical framework for me to consider while integrating my ideas from psychology. Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen provided a comprehensive interpretation of the ideas of various existential-humanistic psychologists. Their writings assist me to understand transformation more deeply.

1.2 Standing on My Own Ground-Finding My Voice

In this thesis I stand on my own ground. I use the term “ground” to refer to the experience of “becoming oneself”, which includes living in a relationship of integrity with one’s values and feeling strength within one’s self. A grounded person experiences his or her standing as an experience of centeredness and groundedness in his or her being. Many existential-humanistic philosophers would say our Being is our grounding (Levin, 1985). I have undergone my own transformation from a place of insecurity and uncertainty to a place of

confidence. I feel my feet firmly established on the ground and a willingness to acknowledge and accept myself as a phenomenological researcher. Of ground Levin says, "This ground is not individuated, because it is earth, the elemental; but it is the source of our individuation, since it lets us stand becoming ourselves" (1985, p. 289).

In the initial stages of this investigation, I did not anticipate the intensity of engagement in my own transformation that would inform the writing of this thesis. In reflection, I would describe this process as a heuristic journey (Moustakas, 1990). I did not design this starting point, nor did I carefully map the route as a heuristic journey; it evolved. At a deep level I had a felt sense of the significance of this project for me, although for years I was unable to express it. If I now declare my sense of groundedness, I use the term "ungrounded" to describe my initial feeling of uncertainty and my lack of confidence and trust in myself as I stood between research paradigms. In the initial stages I pursued my investigation from a distant and objective stance. I began my project with little previous research experience, and my attitudes were embedded within the traditional researcher paradigm. Through self-reflection I discovered that I had constructed my identity as a researcher within the dominant cultural paradigm, that of natural science and empiricist research. I also discovered that natural science, which attempts to understand human beings based on the dominant cultural paradigm of scientific materialism, falls short for the study of human beings.

Throughout the initial stages of my investigation I experienced an internal conflict between the two paradigms: my positivist, empiricist research voice, which I had internalized as the voice of “true research,” and my emerging human science research voice. In a struggle to determine the voice in which to speak (wanting to step away from the positivist paradigm), I found my place, my ground, by risking. In a leap of faith I moved from one tradition to another. The writing of Clark Moustakas and Max van Manen supported this shift. I resonated with the qualitative theories and realized that I could be in my research in a personal way. Scientific research pursued from the positivist, empiricist stance required “objective data” and was strongly opposed to the inclusion of personal experience, whereas a phenomenological-hermeneutic investigation acknowledged subjective experience as “scientific data.”

A qualitative investigation seemed the most appropriate research method for the nature of my research question, which required an approach grounded in the personal, and the subjective. A phenomenological-hermeneutic investigation, which attempts to both describe and interpret the meaning of lived experience, seemed the most balanced and grounded method. Within this paradigm, I could pursue the understanding of my question and experience my “Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 78). In the existential-phenomenological (phenomenological-hermeneutic) tradition, grounded existence always implies “Being-in-the-world.” A person exists in a context. A person and the world (which includes other persons) always exist in relationship with one another. It is through this relationship with the world that

the meaning of a person's existence emerges for him or herself. It seemed essential for me to dwell in the question as I deepened my understanding of the experience of transformation in a phenomenological-hermeneutic manner.

1.3 Dwelling in the Question

In the phenomenological inquiry process, when a researcher considers a question, she or he enters into it fully and is always present within the question. I use the metaphor of dwelling in the nature of my question to address how I have lived in it. What does it mean to dwell in one's question? For these past six years I have lived with this thesis and brought my question into each situation conversing with those who were curious about its development. Whether an exchange with a colleague, a conversation in a university classroom, discussion within a workshop, or individual conversations with friends, these dialogues shared similar themes and questions. Both Aoki (1991) and Moustakas (1990) refer to this nature of dwelling in the question. Dwelling suggests deepening one's contact with the question. One establishes a relationship with the question, turning inward to seek a deeper comprehension of the nature of the quality of human experience.

Dwelling comes from a root word meaning, 'to tarry' or 'to hesitate.' In a sense we think about dwelling when we pause to consider those stopping places, those points of rest or hesitation, or those places where tarrying gives deeper insights during various phases on the journey.

(Berman, 1991, p. 185)

Dwelling involves time spent by the researcher to reflect and rethink the ideas gathered on the research journey, to search for understandings which come about as a result of the experiences on the journey, and to wrestle with the aspects of the question. To allow new ideas to influence us and feelings within us to surface are part of dwelling in one's question.

1.4 Beginner's Mind

Phenomenological investigation encourages "beginner's mind," which is a concept that means more than "mind." It is the ability to see things fresh and new, with an open mind, and an attitude that includes both doubt and possibility. In my investigation it was with "beginner's mind" that I explored my question. I sought not to answer the question but to be open to the possibilities of what was there through dwelling in my question. For in phenomenological investigation there is no answer to be pursued but characteristics of a particular phenomenon to be revealed. Phenomenology is oriented toward uncovering what is there and toward discovery. Heidegger writes that, "Phenomenology means. . . . letting be seen. . . . that which shows itself" (1962, p. 53). Starting from a place of "I don't know" is an essential step on our own path of discovering for the self. The Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki called this act of putting aside opinions, beliefs, and preconceptions "beginner's mind." As he put it, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the experts there are few" (Suzuki, 1970, p. 21). Beginner's mind helps us open our awareness to those questions we ponder so that we can ask essential questions that reveal

new discoveries. The mind of the beginner is empty, free of habits of the “expert,” ready to doubt, and open to possibilities.

In my investigation of transformation I used my journal writing to help me stay open to the possibilities. I recorded my reflections on transformation from the perspective of scholar, counsellor, researcher and person. My thoughts resonate with those of J. Welwood, who says in Journey of the Heart that “The most powerful agent of growth and transformation is something more basic than any technique: a change of heart. This kind of inner shift can only happen when our questions or difficulties really touch us and arouse our willingness to approach things in a new way” (Welwood, 1990, p. 6). My question touched me deeply. Levin suggests that our heartbeat “is a deep source of wisdom. . . . Understanding begins in, and begins as, a bodily granted feeling” (1985, p. 266). When we listen to our hearts we can begin to understand how to dwell, stand on the earth, and begin to deepen our understanding of our question. This deepening requires that we let our questions work on us in order to intensify the experience. In living our questions as described here, we bring awareness to the unconscious parts of ourselves and summon our inner resources. This provides us with a larger, deeper sense of who we are. Our questions, as we dwell in them, stimulate our creative intelligence and activate our intrinsic growth response, triggering transformative powers within us. In order to transform, we need to be fully engaged in our question. “Honoring the ‘I don’t know’ instead of fighting it can help us discover new possibilities and resources--in the midst of whatever we are facing” (Welwood, 1990, p. 7).

Thus, opening to our questions is the essential ground of the transformative path.

1.5 My Journey Toward My Question: What is Meant By Transformation?

Throughout my years as counsellor I have been curious about this human experience of transformation. At times, I have sat in my counselling office after a client has left and wondered what contributed to their movement at that time. For example, movement from a stuck place to one that allows a sense of more options. At other times, I have observed a sense of relief on a person's face, or a change in the body posture, or that the breathing had changed. Clients said such things as, "I feel lighter, I feel as though I have lifted a load off my back," or, "I understand this pattern more clearly now!" As witness to my clients' transformational processes, I have been encouraged to deepen my understanding of the experience of transformation for others and myself; I have sought to do so through this study. I think of Michael Fullan's words: "We can only begin with ourselves. With personal vision and purpose. This must be kept in line. Reflection on what we are doing and why" (1982, p. 13). So I began with myself.

My research into *The Experience of Transformation of Self as Revealed in a Counselling Relationship* began with my reflection on the experience of transformation in clients and myself. What is it like to find oneself in the chaos of profound personal transformation? What is it like to feel one's center and one's

world shift irresistibly and irrevocably? What are those moments that touch us to the core of our existence and leave us experiencing our Being-in-the-world differently?

My experience of being with counsellors in a personal way has profoundly affected how I live my life and influenced who I am as a person. I have made significant personal gains while shaping my life in relationships with counsellors. My understanding of my Self has deepened through my experience of being counselled. I have experienced internal shifts, a stronger sense of my self, and new perspectives that have been transformational. I would also say that I have “deepened” as a person through the counselling process (Levin). What is this “Self” that I have experienced? What I call the “Self” is the identity that is an on going process of self-development, a structure organized toward learning and growth. Self is not an object but a process, which is neither fixed, or a final state. Through these experiences of transformation of self, I developed a passion for understanding the meaning and significance of transformation in the lives of others. As Hollis says, “Passion is what fuels us, like vocation, less a choice than a summons” (1993, p.105). For me, a significant experience years ago changed my way of Being-in-the-world and became a guide for understanding the experience of transformation.

Potent life experiences are both magnetic and elastic -- magnetic in the sense that they attract new meanings across time and elastic in that they expand to help structure and inform those new experiences.

(Neimeyer, G.J., 1995, p. 111)

I periodically reflect on this circumstance that has informed me, whenever, as a counsellor, I am supporting someone in his or her significant life shifts. Its impact was powerful in my life. I describe it in the following story. My story illustrates this transformative experience, initiated during a counselling session nineteen years ago.

Equality.

During a counselling session I had been dealing with several issues related to my sense of my Self and specifically my self-worth. The counsellor and I had met together in sessions before to explore my issues. I sat across from her that day. I felt my vulnerability, and my distance. I remember being preoccupied, my self-talk active that day as I listened to her. I was not fully present in the session. The words from Virginia Satir's book, Peoplemaking, echoed in my mind, "low pot, low self-esteem, low self-worth." I'd felt worthless--not worth it-- at times—and as though my being, I, was of less importance than others were, as I did that day. Tears slid down my face dampening my cheeks. They had often accompanied this feeling of sadness. My counsellor's words caught my attention and drew me away from my mind's chatter. I asked her to repeat her last words. She said, "I see you as equal to me." I can still feel the words in my gut as I write them down. I felt something in that moment in time. That statement had a tremendous impact on me. When I first heard the words, I wasn't sure what to make of them or how to hear them. I experienced dissonance. My perception was that I was not equal to her but was less than. I judged her worth as greater than mine. Prior to this encounter I had not considered myself an 'equal' as a possibility. "I see you as having equal worth as a human being," she told me. "I may have more life experiences, I am older, and I have more training in this field than you do, but I see you as an equal person. I questioned her, "What do you mean I am equal?" I felt differently having

heard those words at that time. Something deep within me resonated with her words. I did not know what sense to make of them, in the immediate moment; yet, at some unconscious level I knew there was an opportunity to see/experience myself differently. I knew in my entire being. My knowing or understanding went beyond cognition. I felt deeply affected. I left the session feeling somehow quite different. It was hard to articulate just what it was; yet, something inside of me had changed. My being-in-the-world was changed. I did not know then that I would be different from that moment on. Later, in reflection, I recognized that over the course of growing up I had developed a belief about myself, formed as part of my identity, and lived my being-in-the-world from a place of inequality. My counsellor's statement frequented my thoughts for weeks as I wrestled with the notion of equality. I realized that the belief I held was different than the one my counsellor had. With my new awareness I began to embrace the idea that different beliefs existed and that mine was learned and only one possibility. I saw for the first time the possibility of changing my belief, and that I had a choice about what my beliefs were. I understood the consequences of my beliefs. I recognized the power of beliefs, in a way that I had not up until then. So, I pursued my curiosity musing on such questions as, "Where had I learned this belief? What did I gain from this belief? Did I still believe it or was it a habit? Slowly, over time I constructed new meaning and began to experiment with a new expression of my equality. I perceived myself differently. I began to live an identity as one who is an equal person. The context of the counselling session provided an opportunity for me to begin this transformation. It was during the session that the beginnings of a new construction of my identity began. Some period of time later, I relinquished the old belief, which no longer served me. I came to a new way of understanding myself that day and have been different since.

Through reflection on the co-researchers' experiences of transformation and my own transformative experiences, I identified these following five characteristics of transformation: 1) to become conscious of something that was previously unconscious; 2) to experience deep feelings; 3) to recognize one's construction of reality; 4) to experiment (cognitively) with the possibility of a new expression of one's self; and 5) an alteration of one's "being." Through my experience of these five characteristics of transformation I became qualitatively different in the world. The "Equality" narrative illustrates such a transformational shift for me. My experience with the counsellor had a deep inner quality to it, and involved a way of relating which significantly altered my perception and, subsequently, how I related to my Self and others from that time forward. As Polkinghorne acknowledges,

Our knowledge about the physical universe does not change it as it is in itself... Our knowledge about ourselves, however, does change something: our self-understanding and our relationships with others.

(1983, p. 8)

Transformation is also the process of transforming the expression of the deep structure. The deep structures as defined in Structuralism (Levenson, 1972), is the basic nature of our personality. Structuralism proposes that human experience is structured by deep, underlying patterns of behaviour that are always pressuring for expression (Levenson, 1972). The self as defined in structuralism, is mostly the potential that we are born with and the basic nature of our personality. A general assumption in this paradigm is that each one of us

is born with this structure that tends toward the expression of characteristics unique to the person. In Structuralism human beings “are viewed as being ‘set’ to perceive patterns in the world around them” (Popper, 1963 cited in Neimeyer, 1995). Structure is a dynamic ordering of experience. In Structuralism there is a self-perpetuating nature of the structure; as new experiences and events occur, they will be fitted into the existing structure. Our basic personality structure is constant in spite of changing experience. In terms of our self, our basic personality is largely set from the early days of our lives. Transformation of self thus involves the transformation of the expression of the deep structure (patterns) and shifts in perspectives on these patterns.

How we construct our meaning changes. The basic tendencies remain; how they are expressed can be modified. The “basic personality structure is the same, with a different emphasis” (Wong & McKeen, 1998, p. 244). To use a musical analogy, one could say that each person “manifests a major melodic line, melody being a sequential pattern of events (notes). This melodic line is played out harmonically in a variety of circumstances, in all the person’s life experience. . . . Every aspect of his life. . . . will be harmonic variations of the same melodic line” (Levenson, 1972, p. 40).

Wong and McKeen describe the deep structure as “... an amalgam of inherited tendencies, early experiences and learning, that will persist for a lifetime. This deep structure is not a thing, and it is not anatomically located; rather, it is formed of the interrelationships of deeply ingrained tendencies of activity in the personality” (1992, p. 22). Transformation does not involve

change of the deep structure; rather, it means shifts in perspectives on these patterns.

Although it is not possible to change one's history, or deep structure, one can transform the expression of the deep structure. The basic tendencies remain; how they are expressed can be modified. In transformation, the basic deep structure is accepted, acknowledged, and studied. Ever deepening self-knowledge arises from such an investigation of one's tendencies. We can become more aware of these patterns and learn to anticipate them before they manifest themselves. The patterns are our basic structure. Thus, transformation does not involve change of the deep structure; rather, it means shifts in perspectives on these patterns.

(Wong & McKeen, 1992, p. 23)

In terms of the Self, the process of transformation is a change in the expression of the essential structure. A person's essential structure remains the same, their expression of who they are changes.

In this thesis I intend transformation to mean the human experience that is characterized by a profound difference in a person's Being-in-the world. Transformation is about significant, multidimensional shifts of how a person is in the world. In the "Ideal Self" model, transformation involves movement toward the "Authentic Self." There is an interplay between body, mind, heart, and spirit (soul); each is engaged. Transformation is a major, qualitative change in the human psyche. It is that experience of a definite and fundamental shift, at the core level, particularly of self, or identity, which is sometimes sudden and abrupt and at other times gradual. It is an inner shift from our usual sense of identity

and values, how we engage within the world, and involves a new way to understand and a new way to perceive reality. This difference in perception or world-view can be described as a change in a person's self-awareness.

Transformation occurs when there is a shaking apart of and a reorganization of personal reality; a shaking that challenges and interrupts old assumptions, beliefs, outlooks, and attitudes in a manner that changes a person's version of themselves and the world. In a following protocol Dean referred to his transformational process regarding his dependency on women to meet his emotional needs, and Theresa talked of the significance of feeling her sense of her "Authentic Self" in her body. Transformation encompasses body wisdom. Transformation includes an unconscious process felt bodily without language or thought (Levin, 1985). A person experiences a physical shift or difference in how he or she feels. The person not only understands differently but feels differently. Transformation is also referred to as 'the creative process' by some.

...Feldman (1988) called creativity 'the construction and appreciation of crafted transformations'-- a living out of the 'transformational imperative' in human beings to create something new... This transformational creativity does not have to be evidenced by artistic product. Rather, evidence for its presence can be found in the process of self-creation.

(Baird Carlsen, M. 1995, p. 135)

Transformation is a process of self-creation. This ability to transform one's experience into new patterns of significance and personal understanding is a uniquely human capacity. Human beings have the capacity to construct

new meaning as a result of their experiences. In my dialogues with all co-researchers they described the ability to recreate or reconstruct themselves. Whether awakening to, or becoming more aware of new aspects of one's self, or, pursuing a journey of learning about one's self, all participants experienced profound movement in their experience of themselves.

Chapter 2 TOWARD A SCIENCE OF THE PERSON

2.1 Hermeneutic Phenomenology as Human Science Research

The selection of a research strategy is determined by the nature of the research question and by the purpose of the study (Morse, 1994). The choice of method selected by a researcher should reflect the nature of the phenomenon being investigated, needs to be consonant with the researcher's orientation to human experience, and ought to maintain a certain harmony with her or his deep interest. Polkinghorne (1983) encouraged researchers to let each question posed determine which strategies are most useful in revealing the phenomena.

The purpose of my study was to come to a deeper understanding of the experience of transformation of self in a counselling relationship through an examination of the participants' descriptions and understanding of their lived experience of transformation. I identified and explicated themes that characterized the participants' experience. These themes, as referred to by van Manen, may be understood as "experiential structures that make up the experience" of transformation (van Manen, 1990, p. 79).

I chose a human science approach for this investigation because in dealing with the nature of human experience it was the most appropriate in understanding lived experience. Phenomenologists are human science researchers who want to know how we experience the relationship between our selves and those things outside ourselves. Van Manen describes phenomenology as "the attentive practice of thoughtfulness in a search for what

it means to be human” (1990, p. 11). A person’s inner experience cannot be observed, and thus it is not quantifiable. Natural science cannot deal with the basic human issues, such as joy, love, freedom, whereas phenomenology allows us to contact lived phenomena. Phenomenology, an aspect of human science research, requires a qualitative paradigm. “We explain nature, but human life we must understand, said Dilthey. . . .” (van Manen, 1990, p. 4). Dilthey’s focus was to develop an appropriate science for the study of human phenomena. He asserted that human experience is organized, makes sense, is understandable, and appears as related and meaningful. The researcher’s task, as Dilthey saw it, was to examine the life experience itself, uncover the patterns, and notice the structures and relationships that shaped the way in which the experience was meaningful.

The phenomenological researcher asks, “What is the nature or essence of this experience so that I can better understand what this is like for people?” Phenomenology is the systematic study of “pure experience” and is derived from the research of the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl. It is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the internal meaning structures of lived experience. It is systematic in that it uses specially practiced modes of questioning, reflecting, and focusing. It involves the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear so that we might come to a fundamental understanding of human experience. It attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world and the way we make meaning. Husserl believed that what creates our lived experience are the essential structures or

ideas that order and give form to our experience. Polkinghorne develops further Husserl's perspective stating,

Phenomenology attempts to examine all premises, including its own, so as to permit the phenomena to show themselves in their essential structures.

(1983, p. 43)

An important feature of phenomenological method is "bracketing." In order to understand a phenomenon, one attempts to suspend one's preconceptions and presuppositions (i.e., biases). To bracket is to set aside what one already presupposes with the "expert mind" and to approach the phenomenon with the "beginner's mind," a willing suspension of judgement. It requires one to be open to the phenomenon and structure as it stands by suspending judgement of the phenomenon. Bracketing serves the purpose of making the implicit assumptions and presuppositions explicit from the onset of the research (Polkinghorne, 1983; Valle & Halling, Eds. 1989).

Each person constructs his or her life through a series of assumptions (belief systems), most of which are learned from others. Thus, our awareness is built through interpretive schemes that are passed on to us from our culture and from our interaction in the environment. We hold these beliefs and opinions about the world, other persons, and ourselves and we act from them. Our beliefs about reality influence the method we choose and how we pursue our research. Kirby and McKenna suggest, "Methodology, theory and ideology are intertwined. How you go about doing your research is inextricably linked to how you see the world" (1989, p. 63). Human science research acknowledges that

understanding evolves from the worldview of the researcher. The decisions a researcher makes concerning what she or he will investigate are determined by a set of presuppositions. It is important that the researcher identifies these assumptions and makes them explicit (bracketing) as an initial step in phenomenological investigation. Later in this chapter, I discuss this process of bracketing in my pilot study.

In the phenomenological research methods the emphasis is always on the meaning of lived experience, not statistical relationships or predominance of certain behaviours or characteristics; the topic is a question of meaning to be inquired into.

The human being is a person who signifies--gives and derives meaning to the 'things' of the world. In other words the 'things' of the world are meaningfully experienced, and on that basis these 'things' are then approached and dealt with.

(van Manen, 1990, p. 14)

Phenomenology recognizes that to be human is to be concerned with meaning and to desire meaning. Phenomenology is the investigation of the lived meanings and attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them and to describe these meanings with depth and richness. In phenomenological inquiry personal meaning becomes more directly accessible through clear descriptions of lived experience.

2.2 The Emergence Of Hermeneutics

It became clear through my investigation of qualitative research methods and through the refining of my question that a combined hermeneutic phenomenology methodology was best suited for my study of transformation. When I began to analyze the “texts” of the participants, I realized that in addition to getting descriptions of what the participants’ experience was like, I wanted to “understand” the fundamental nature of their Being-in-the-world, and I was interested in their insights into the “meaning” of their lived experience. This led me to explore hermeneutics.

Descriptive and hermeneutic methods supplement each other, the first focusing beneath the surface of individual events in order to describe patterns, the second focusing on the linguistic and nonlinguistic actions in order to penetrate the meaning of these events. (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 21)

Hermeneutic phenomenology attempts both to describe and interpret the meaning of lived experience. The phenomenological (descriptive) human science approach aims to uncover the structures of experience, the organizing principles that give form and meaning to the lifeworld, while the hermeneutic (interpretive) approach concentrates on the interpreted meaning of experience. The fundamental method of this approach is textual reflection on the “meaning” of lived experience. Hermeneutics supplements the phenomenological (descriptive) approach by seeking to “understand” human actions and expressions.

Hermeneutics is at a basic level the study of understanding, especially understanding texts. The life texts for hermeneutic phenomenology can include as admissible data works of great literature, works of art, protocols, or conversation. Broadly, one could say that people are constantly involved in “reading” and interpreting life as though it were a text (von Eckartsberg, 1986). Understanding in hermeneutics goes beyond a purely academic fashion and involves one’s own personal, existential engagement with the text. One’s understanding moves beyond the text as one tries to grasp the world that “the text” represents or “opens up” for the researcher. Hermeneutics is a method of procedures designed to assist the researcher in the task of understanding and interpretation. The term comes from the Greek word “hermeneuein,” which means “to interpret.” Hermeneutics seeks to make explicit our practical understanding of the human realm (lifeworld) by providing an interpretation.

Interpretive techniques are required to make meanings clear because the meanings of actions are not always immediately apparent. When engaged in such interpretation, it is often necessary to reflect on the information about basic structures revealed in descriptive methods used by the researcher. Interpreting the meaning of a particular conversation often requires knowledge of the structure of the language in which the conversation is taking place. My task as a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher was to construct an interpretive description of an aspect of the lifeworld, specifically the lived experience of transformation of self in a counselling relationship, in order to provide an understanding of this phenomenon.

2.3 Understanding Toward Meaning

People live in a context of meaningfulness, yet “meaning” is not a phenomenon that can be subjected to empirical observation. Hermeneutics provides a methodology to investigate this meaningfully oriented behaviour. Interpretive understanding attains access to this non-observable realm of meaning. Understanding, in this sense is a particular kind of perception that allows meaning to be known. The researchers take the “meaning” from what is understood and shape it into concepts (themes) that can be represented and communicated. The task of hermeneutics is to explore and make known the process by which this understanding comes about.

According to Polkinghorne (1983) Heidegger proposed that understanding was a basic form of human existence. It is not a way we know the world, he said, it is the way we are in the world. Heidegger maintained, as did Gadamer later (1990), that to be human is to be interpretive, for the very nature of the human realm is interpretive. A basic Heideggerian assumption is that all human knowledge is interpretation because it is derived from a historical and cultural perspective. “Interpretation then is not a tool for knowledge; it is the way human beings are” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 224). According to Heidegger (1962) all cognitive attempts to develop “knowledge” are expressions of interpretation, and experience itself is formed through interpretation. We create our “truth “ in our engagement in the world. True understanding is the result of human engagement, for there is no “pure truth” that lies outside human engagement with the world.

Gadamer's (1990) perspective was that understanding occurs in interpretation. The hermeneutic philosopher, Gadamer, followed his mentor Heidegger stating that ". . . . understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding. In accordance with this insight, interpretive language and concepts were recognized as belonging to the inner structure of understanding" (1990, p. 307). Gadamer believed that language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs, asserting that "All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language that allows the object to come into words and yet at the same time the interpreter's own language" (1990, p. 389). My use of understanding and interpretation follows Heidegger and Gadamer's assertion that our knowing is through interaction and engagement with the world.

2.4 Understanding and Self-understanding

Hermeneutic phenomenology as method is the study of first-person experience where lived experience and self-understanding contribute to the understanding of others. There is a reciprocity between understanding and self-understanding. "From the perspective of hermeneutic consciousness understanding authors, texts, and the realities intended by their words is. . . . always a function of self-understanding" (Gadamer, 1981, p. xix). Self-understanding is always on the way; it is never complete. For once we understand something, our understanding changes, and there is yet another understanding to embrace. Our interpretation is always on the way. There is a

corresponding relationship between my self-understanding of my lived experience of transformation and my understanding of the transformation of the co-researchers. Another person's understanding and my understanding are related because self-understanding relates to understanding the other, for when you understand another person you understand your self differently. Knowledge about one's self not only changes self-understanding but one's relationship with others.

In the hermeneutic philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer the concept of the "hermeneutic circle" becomes a fundamental principle of self-understanding, (a person understanding his or her own nature and situation). A person comes to know the self through interpretation. An understanding of the possible worlds that the interpreter and the text open up when a new meaning emerges permits a new understanding of ourselves, our Being-in-the-world. In this circular process of understanding and interpretation, the part and whole are related: in order to understand the whole, it is necessary to understand the parts, while to understand the parts it is necessary to have some grasp of the whole. It is the process of repeated movement from parts to whole, self to other, that is referred to as the "hermeneutic circle." As readers relate to the text, it opens itself to a multiplicity of interpretations and provides a springboard for making meaning. The act of responding to a demand for new meaning, the demand of emerging realities to exist by being voiced in new ways: meanings are thus created and re-created.

Hermeneutic understanding demands a self-understanding.

Heidegger's (1962) view is that there is no presuppositionless knowledge. All understanding presupposes a prior understanding. A person's perception always comes with previous understanding of his or her own situation. I bring my presuppositions to my interpretation of the text and these presuppositions mediate my perception. My preunderstanding is my set of presuppositions (assumptions); these are a function of my history, cultural and personal background, and lived experiences. For understanding entails "an awareness of self and others that is itself contexted, purposeful, situated interpersonally and historically, and embodied" (Halling & Dearborn Nill, 1989, p. 191). In hermeneutics the context-bound nature of interpretation is described as the "horizon." The horizon marks the intersection at which a person integrates meaning. The horizon for me includes my self-understanding and my understanding of the other's situation.

Gadamer contends that in general, understanding what an author has written always involves understanding differently (Gadamer, 1981). Frederick G. Lawrence in his translator's introduction to Gadamer's Reason in the Age of Science refers to understanding differently: "Underlying Gadamer's point is the incontrovertible fact that whenever one understands anything significant . . . one is already engaged in the business of taking up a stance toward the future in light of the past. Reading then, is a matter of anticipating meaning and of correcting one's anticipations, precisely because human living already has that kind of structure" (Gadamer, 1981, p. xvii).

Jean Graybeal (1993) suggests that to know one's self in the fullest sense of the word is to know others. In her discussion of Julia Kristeva's work, she contends that the proclamation of the ancient oracle of Apollo at Delphi, "Know thyself," is at the center of Julia Kristeva's ethical reflections. Graybeal reminds us:

To read Kristeva is to learn how it may be possible to know the self, and about what the consequences and concomitants of self-and-other knowledge might be. Both the oracle at Delphi and Kristeva address the questions of desirable relation to others and various ways to live and act in the world by referring to the otherness within, to the difficulty and necessity of self-knowledge, and to the pathways that make it possible.

(1993, p. 33)

The principles that guide me are a form of self-knowledge that includes care for others. My understanding of others includes being with them in an authentic and personal way. I bring not only my technical knowledge but also my self and that self's lived experience. I bring my own process of "becoming a person" and my own lived experiences of transformation to the situation. I bring the application of that understanding to my clients whom I counsel and to the co-researchers in this study. It is an ethical way of being. I act in relationship to the other from a personal response rather than from a social role. I bring my "personal ethics" to bear on the situation. I am accountable as a person. This is the beginning of ethos, moral action: I am responsible for myself and responsible for the other. Louise Berman (1991, p. 149) refers to the root of ethics as ethos that means "common abode" or "custom." It is a place where

people dwell, in a particular way, which is ethical for self and other. The following excerpt from my journal illustrates an ethical dwelling:

Journal entry, March 2000: I reflect on a counselling session with a young woman. I was struck by my experience with her. I noticed something significantly different in how I was with my clients today. I recognize and judge that my presence, my being with this young woman in the manner that I was, seemed the most important and authentic thing I could have done. I brought "counselling skills" to the situation, but somehow what is profound for me was how I felt care for her, deep care--perhaps even resonance. I haven't said this before in quite this way. I know it though, it isn't new. I feel strange thinking like this and writing this down, yet, I thought a large part of what I was doing with this young person today was feeling my love for her and acting toward her in a loving manner. I felt open. Love, loving a person in my work? (I shared this story with my husband that evening.) My being in this way seemed important for her. (I did not consciously say at the time, "I think this would be a good strategy or way of being." I just responded to the situation.) She told me, "I feel like you're treating me like some kind of friend and I hardly know you. Thank you. Most teachers tell you what to do." I had wondered if I should have. I did offer support, direction, and problem-solving strategies... but mostly I listened in a caring manner and she came to some understanding about what she wanted to do, for herself. It was not an easy decision yet circumstances required that she decide. Throughout the session I was very aware of feeling my care for her. I am reminded of the significance of my own experiences of feeling cared for by counsellors in my past. I do value how I was with this particular young woman today. This situation called forth this "mode of being."

This entry is an example of the application of my self-understanding to how I understand another. My understanding is situated and grounded in my life. Since understanding is always embedded in a situation, understanding something always implies application to my life and an openness to observe what lies before me.

2.5 Application of Understanding

Application is considered to be an integral and necessary part of the hermeneutical interpretive process. Understanding, interpretation, and application occur simultaneously. In a hermeneutic sense, understanding is not complete unless we see what is understood as applying to us in some concrete manner. “[U]nderstanding always involves applying the meaning understood” (Gadamer, 1990, p. 333). To understand means that which we understand has a requirement of us; we appropriate the meaning to our own thoughts and actions in some way. In terms of application, the researcher does not simply read or take what is there, but she or he becomes part of the meaning she or he apprehends and “belongs to the text” in some way.

The nature of my understanding as a researcher and counsellor requires understanding beyond the words; it is opening myself to a deeper understanding of another person’s lived experience and to that deepest sense of what it means to be human. “The practice of understanding, is similarly the expression of the affinity of one who understands to the one whom he understands and to that which he understands” (Gadamer, 1981, p. 48).

It requires the ability to resonate with and have empathy for the other. Diane Michelfelder, referring to Gadamer, reminds me that “the literal meaning of understanding, *Ver-stehen*: is to stand in the place of the other directly,” to be an advocate for the other, to be able to tell the story of the other (Michelfelder, 1989, p.47). This ability to stand in the place of the other, to understand the other is an ethical behaviour. Understanding another person includes being open to that other person, and it involves care. Nel Noddings (1989) refers to this as the concept of “relational ethics.” In the application of my preunderstanding to the co-researcher’s text, my interpretations are embedded in my self-understanding and in my understanding of the words spoken by those whom I have counselled and cared for. For “[I]n every human encounter . . . there is a possibility for caring. . . . it’s a decision, a choice, an attitude” (Noddings, 1989, p. 222). I am oriented in this relational manner to each conversation that I participate in.

2.6 Conversation With a Purpose

My autobiographical reflections of my own transformation and the texts transcribed from the audio-taped conversations with my three co-researchers that explore our co-created understanding of transformation, are the life-world texts that are the focus of the “hermeneutical reflection” in this thesis. These texts were gathered from conversations with three co-researchers during a five-month time period. The conversations with the three co-researchers took place in a congenial, relaxed environment, usually at their homes. I listened to these taped conversations, transcribed them, and then repeatedly read the transcripts

for analysis. I sought common themes for detailed analysis and interpretation. This selection of themes (patterns) was not random, but rather the themes were chosen because they represented my understanding of transformation as found in the full data.

The strategy for relating with the co-researchers in the unstructured “interviews” was through hermeneutic conversation (Carson, 1986) where the co-researchers were asked to reflect on significant lifeworld experiences of transformation in a counselling relationship. The topic of these conversations was the lived experience of the participants.

A conversational relation is a hermeneutic endeavour rooted in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics which considers interpretive acts in their widest possible sense as the ontological task of understanding the nature of human being-in-the-world.

(Carson, 1986, p. 75)

A researcher develops a conversational relation with the topic he or she is investigating. There is a conversational relation between the phenomenon being discussed, the co-researchers, and myself. In a conversational relation, “[T]he basic subject matter is no longer objective data to be quantified, but meaning relations to be interpreted” (Kvale, 1996, p. 10). Information of the lifeworld is obtained through an orientation toward understanding by means of conversation with the human beings to be understood. My application of conversation as a mode of research for understanding required both parties to commit themselves to a communal venture of discovering transformation with each other.

To establish a conversational relation with the co-researcher requires that both persons enter each other's phenomenological world and view it from a shared perspective while remaining aware of individual contexts at the same time. Gadamer (1990) has described this process as a dialogic structure of question and answer. There is openness in the conversation that invites meaning to emerge through dialogue, a two-way question and answer framework. To participate in a conversation means to allow oneself and others to be guided by the topic to which those in conversation are mutually oriented.

The intentions of the conversing partners give way to what Gadamer calls "the law of the subject matter." When one enters into a dialogue with another person and is then carried further by the dialogue, it is no longer the will of the individual person that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter is at issue, and it elicits statement and counter statement and in the end plays these into each other.

(Kvale, 1996, p. 21)

These conversations develop a hermeneutic thrust: they are oriented to sense making and to interpretation of the phenomena that stimulate the conversation. The purpose of these conversations is to describe and understand central themes of the daily lifeworld from the subjects' own perspectives. The art of the researcher in a hermeneutic conversation is to maintain openness to the meaning of the phenomenon as well as openness to herself and the co-researcher, while remaining oriented to the structure of the phenomenon being questioned.

In my experience, during this study, both the researcher and co-researchers were deeply engaged during the conversations. Gadamer describes a genuine conversation:

Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it is belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual, but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that they can be at one with each other on the subject.

(1990, p. 385)

The co-researchers and I entered into a dialogue in an attempt to understand what each other said, and the conversations were “talking together like friends” (Burch, 1991, p. 98).

Here, by way of a brief biographical sketch, is an introduction of the three co-researchers. Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality. Dean has had a successful business career, then trained as a counsellor, and has had a successful counselling career. He is now a private consultant in business. He is an avid reader of psychology and philosophy. At seventy years of age he reflects back to his many years of counselling and personal development courses. He has been involved in his own counselling as a client for twenty-five years. Theresa is a counsellor working in a remote community as part of a larger mental health team. She has trained as a dance therapist and incorporates dance into her work. She has been involved in being counselled

herself for twenty-five years. Her professional training, including an MA in counselling, has assisted her in integrating her personal experience into her professional life. Faye has had a varied career beginning with teaching before she moved into business. She later trained as a counsellor and holds a Master's degree in counselling. She is well read in the fields of psychology and philosophy. Faye has been involved in her own counselling process for twenty years.

The co-researchers in the disclosure of their experience acknowledged their appreciation of the opportunity to participate in the conversations. The conversations became opportunities for them to clarify and reflect on significant life experiences. Each person described the process as rich and personally rewarding. Faye described her experience of conversation with me:

F: Well, it's really nice for me, it's good for me, to talk about my process. It's like it's a witness thing, it's the same thing, and it's like you're my therapist. Only you're not being my therapist, only it's a little like that. To have a witness for me to be talking about it. I don't normally ever think about, well, why is it good? What's there for me? What is it that's happening? It's great . . . Yeah, do steer me in directions useful to you because I don't really have a sense of what you might want to know. All of the conversation is very useful to me.

2.7 Beginning With Reflection on the Question

Hermeneutic inquiry begins with an attempt to understand the question itself. This is what Gadamer has referred to as "the hermeneutical priority of the question" (1990, p. 362). To ask a question means to bring it into the open: to

bring one's curiosity to it, to dwell in it. Hermeneutic interpretation begins with an uncovering of the question that is being pursued. I entered into conversation about transformation with the co-researchers and attempted to clarify the question itself. Two of the co-researchers initially questioned the meaning of the word "transformation" and had difficulty relating to it; thus our conversations began with an exploration of "What is this phenomenon, transformation?" One co-researcher, in the midst of our first conversation, shared her experience:

Theresa: When you used the word transformation or transforming I was thinking about what that would look like for me and I can not really wrap my mind around those words yet. When I think about the word transformation or to transform I think that there is some solidness to the self and I don't feel solid in myself. Yet, I remember when I was with Todd (pseudonym) I was always doubting my abilities. I wondered if I could be a good counsellor and wondered if I could be out in the world. Now I'm not in that relationship, I'm not with Todd and I don't have that question anymore. I don't have questions. So maybe in that sense I have transformed. I don't have a question of (tears) my abilities. I think that I know that I am good.

Later in our conversation Theresa discussed how both her Master's program and her primary relationship had been contexts in which she felt that she had considerable support. She questioned whether or not she experienced transformation, which led us back to the question itself: What is transformation? Theresa's thoughts return to her challenge to define transformation and we both enter a dialogue about transformation:

Lorna: So you're going through a lot of changes right now?

Theresa: Or am I? Interesting question. I don't know you know if I go through change. I think sometimes I think I am. Yes and no. I mean my struggle is still the same . . . I don't know, sometimes it feels so familiar and other times it feels new. (Sigh) I don't know. Do you see me shifting?

L: Well that's an interesting question. I find this word transformation a challenge to deal with. I'm finding it a challenge to write about. And I find it difficult to talk about in terms of my own self shifting.

T: You see I think I'm hooked with the word transformation. Because I think if one transforms then it is for the better. You see then I think, if I were transformed then I would be happy or content. So I have kind of a picture of transformation. The picture of transformation is that my eyes are shining, I'm beautiful and I'm a different woman than I was. Right now I see myself as a woman who is just trying to be real with what is true and that is not always light and beautiful. It is not heavy either, but I travel, I'm happy and then I'm not happy so the transformation is shifts from different states of being to another.

L: Yeah. This is why I say death is a transformation. Transformation is not always a metamorphosis. It's not always the worm turning into a caterpillar. That's what I'm coming to think in terms of transformation of self. So then I say, "How do I know what a transformative experience is?" I've been asking myself that.

T: Me too.

In the act of reflection on their significant experiences of transformation, the co-researchers and I began to consider what would constitute the meaning of transformation. Through our mutual discussion we came to an understanding of what could constitute the meaning of the question about transformation.

2.8 An Ethical Choice: Conversation

The work of several scholars influenced my ethical understanding while I pursued my research (Oakley, 1981, Moustakas, 1990, van Manen, 1990, Grumet, 1992, Polkinghorne, 1983, Carson, 1986). Anne Oakley, a feminist researcher, has suggested several methodological problems with the traditional interviewing paradigm. She outlined these as 1) the belief that the interview is a one way process; 2) the interviewee is seen as an object, "data," not as a person; 3) the interviews are viewed as "irrelevant" and without personal meaning in terms of social interaction. Oakley (1981) presents several reasons for her departure from traditional, hierarchical means of doing research in her interviews; she alerts us to the consequences of adopting a purely exploitative attitude to interviewees as "sources of data" and of ignoring their "humanness." What she is suggesting is that "personal involvement is . . . the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (Oakley, 1981, p. 58). Doing research in a conversational mode changes the hierarchical relationship between primary researcher and co-researchers. The co-researchers and myself became known to one another; our stories intertwined. "Conversational research does offer the possibility of developing a community of cooperative investigation" (Carson, 1986, p. 83).

I followed Oakley's departure from traditional and hierarchical research means through my use of open-ended conversations. If one regards the conversation as hermeneutic reflection with a practical intent, it becomes more

than just a “data gathering technique.” “The nature of the conversation is quite different from the interview question... [for conversation] ...implicates a revealing of something held in common” (Carson, 1986, p. 78). The primary researcher and co-researchers are coequals who carry on a conversation about mutually relevant topics. The researcher uses himself or herself as a research instrument in the dialogue and is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. Kirby and McKenna (1989) were among those who guided me toward ethical human science research. Their ideas reinforced my beliefs that research is a human relationship in which the researcher can be personally involved, and that conversation itself is an opportunity to share ideas, philosophy, and experience, as well as an invitation to share one’s self in the midst of collecting data. “Mel Miller argues that dialogue is a form of ethics narrative research is not only ethical but life-enhancing for both the participant and the researcher” (Josselson, 1996, p. xvi). The research relationship becomes dialogical when both people become aware of the “humanness” of each other and relate person-to-person. The conversational relationships I established were dialogical. There was reciprocity in the communication. This interactive relationship facilitated the reflective process which revealed meaning for both parties in an atmosphere of acceptance and empathy. It was an exchange in which each person was willing to engage with honesty and openness and listen to the other. This involved sensitivity to what the other person felt, thought, wanted, and perceived.

This interpersonal process was one in which we came to know the other and ourselves and to apprehend our human existence.

For me, conversation is an ethical choice of how I am in the interpersonal relationship with the other. What guided me in my conversations with the co-researchers was not my technical knowledge as a counsellor, although I believe that I am highly skilled, but my personal ethics. Personal ethics involve the personal position and perspectives that I have and are determined by my value system. They are not morally determined but personally decided. Wong and McKeen say that "Discernment does not mean abandoning society's moral guidelines but it does mean thinking for oneself" (1990, p. 78). I recognize that different situations vary in their requirement and demand careful scrutiny to determine how I will act: these are situational ethics. In my presence with the co-researchers, my practice as an ethical being is brought to bear on the situation. In my dialogue with the other, I care for them. I bring my previous understanding (preunderstanding), my entire mode of Being-in-the-world, as an ethical caring person to the situation; this includes the application of my counselling "skills" and my previous understanding of transformation. The principles that guide me are a form of self-knowledge grounded in my personal experience. I am guided by my personal development, my understanding of myself, and by my relationship with others.

I have made a decision to be aware of my own self and my values while being sensitive to the concerns and values of others. My ethical stance includes a decision to be personal and to act from my own personal principles,

which include authenticity, responsibility, and sensitivity to self, other, and context. I have developed a commitment to maintain a connection with myself while in connection with the other. As primary researcher, I took to heart my responsibility to consider the trust that the co-researchers granted me as well as themselves within our relationship. What was called forth in me was a personal response as a whole and unique person, not some abstract accountability. My reflection on the counselling session that involved a young woman for whom I felt care is an example of this.

The transcript excerpt that follows embodies the dialogic exchange. Theresa and I completed two of our conversations back to back. We had an evening conversation followed by an informal gathering of acquaintances. The following day she joined me for brunch at my home and we engaged in another conversation. When Theresa arrived, she seemed visibly different in her “being.” Her dark, gloomy presence seemed lighter, and she seemed more spirited. She moved in her body differently and appeared more fluid and grounded, suggestive of an openness to contact. We began to converse on the topics she wished to pursue. I was intrigued and eager to pursue what I witnessed as a significant difference in Theresa from the previous day. Time moved along easily. Theresa seemed somewhat intrigued that day to talk about transformation and her thoughts on it. The conversation moved back and forth easily as our stories intertwined:

Lorna: Well it depends on how you define transformation. So I guess that's the question right now. What is transformation to you? What is your experience of transformation? What would you say? Think of your own definition.

Theresa: I think I see myself now and I think of how I was yesterday I think I would describe myself as my sparkle is back, my spirit is back in my eyes. I'm curious again, I'm laughing again, I'm feeling good about who I am, where I'm going and what my life is about.

L: Now is that transformation?

T: Is that a fundamental change?

L: What I'm more interested in is what happened for you yesterday?

T: Yeah.

L: What happened? We both acknowledged a difference today. What do you think was significant about yesterday? Your state of where you were yesterday and where you are today is very different.

T: What happened for me was I got triggered when we were talking about Todd, (her ex-husband) right? Then what was really important for me was that there was room for me to talk about it and acknowledge that I was in the grieving and I kept forward and true to who I was at that time. So there was not one moment in the time that you mentioned Todd to me today that I was not true to myself. So I didn't withdraw, I didn't shut it down, I didn't distract myself. I stayed and I travelled wherever I needed to go.

L: So you gave yourself permission to do that?

T: Yeah, and then what was important was that you travelled with me and you were responsive. I stayed open.

L: What do you mean I travelled with you and was responsive? How?

T: Well you did not . . . You stayed with me in the sense of you were listening, so there was a real element of witnessing. You knew me on my travels. There was no judgement. There was no, "Okay that's it. I have had enough." It's just that you stayed there. You stayed present.

So I stayed open and then when we went to the event I was true to myself there too. I didn't withdraw. I kept putting it out and people responded. So I was capable or able to stay connected with the people and feed myself. I nurtured myself with the warmth that was coming my way . . . So it gave me room to be who I was . . .

L: So somehow you felt changed over the course of the evening with those two specific contacts you talked about as well as in your contact with me.

T: Yeah, I think what was important was that I didn't cut off my process. So I was in the midst of it . . . So it was a continuity of the transformational process. (L: Yes.) So I didn't feel jarred or didn't feel (voice trails). So it was a natural process of my journey . . . It was very loving. Big heart.

As I wrote this section of my paper it was as though I were in conversation again. The recollection of the experience re-engaged my memories and feelings of that day, of that conversation. I re-entered the text as though Theresa and I were once again speaking. I felt my care for her in the moment. I remembered how struck I was by the difference I perceived in her being. I felt my sadness as I remembered her struggle and pain. I resonated with the experience she shared, feeling empathy, and I deeply identified with "the other." I felt in my heart.

Ethics, says Ricouer..., is born of a project in which the human being wants to take a stand with regard to her/himself, to affirm her/himself as free. At the root of ethics is however an ethical intention... what is required is ... the recognition of the freedom of others as being similar to our own. ... All ethical intention arises in

the context of a situation which is already ethically delineated.

(Kemp 1989, p. 67)

I brought my ethical mode of being to my conversations with Theresa because I had already gone through many of my own transformational experiences. This conversational mode of research involved my decision to do research in an ethical manner. My ethical behaviour is part of my expression of my practice. My practice is to allow and facilitate self-knowledge. It involves the recognition and experience of my connection or relatedness to everyone else. The relationship between others and myself was genuine and a person-to-person ethical encounter. My own transformational experiences and my reflection on these influenced my way of being while in conversation with the co-researchers. My autobiographical reflections added insight to my knowledge as a human science researcher and were important in my move toward ethical research.

2.9 Autobiographical Dimensions

Before we ask others to furnish us with their lived experience description of a phenomenon we wish to examine, we might do well to try such descriptions ourselves first, so that we have a more precise sense of what we are attempting to obtain.

(van Manen, 1990, p. 64)

I follow a tradition of human science research that includes the active participation of the researcher. Max van Manen, (1990) suggests that when one does research in a connected and “intentional” way, research is a caring act because we want to know that which is most essential to being human and are involved in the research from a place of full participation. This active

participation of the researcher cannot be learned from theoretical knowledge alone. There are a number of ways to ensure that the human science researcher becomes more sensitive and attunes himself or herself to the significant. I was guided by Madeline Grumet who wrote, "When . . . researchers employ autobiographical methods of inquiry they too become subject and object of research" (1992, p. 36). A self-understanding of my own transformation explored in my autobiographical writing was important to reveal how I lived in the question as part of the research process. My exploration of the phenomenon of transformation through autobiographical reflection exemplifies a search for knowing that is based on a heuristic approach to inquiry. "The root meaning of heuristic comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of an internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of the experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). Heuristics is closely related to phenomenological hermeneutics, in that it is first person experience (observation or description of inner awareness) which is then interpreted to become knowledge that can be communicated. The major difference is that in heuristics the human essence is retained throughout the study. Heuristic research involves direct, personal encounter with the topic. The researcher herself has undergone the experience in a vital way. "In heuristics, an unshakeable connection exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling and

awareness” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 12). There is an emphasis on the researcher’s internal frame of reference and intuition. “. . . indwelling lies at the heart of heuristic inquiry” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 12). Heuristic inquiry requires a return to the self, recognition of self-awareness, and a valuing of one’s own experience. Clark Moustakas’ book on heuristic research had a significant impact on me. My transformation toward greater self-acceptance is revealed in the following excerpt from my journal:

Journal entry, July 1995: A response to Heuristic inquiry: I have found a research process that I can relate to! For the first time research does not seem so distant from me, the person. I have been feeling lost in my search for a research method that would encompass the processes that I think are important in investigating human experience. Thank-you dear colleague, Amal for introducing me to this book. It is a gem. In fact, as I read about heuristic research, I read that there is a “demand that I fully dwell in the topic,” and I’m not sure if I’m ready for that level of engagement, commitment. Whatever that would look like, I’m not sure. I am fearful. There has been a safety that I have experienced in maintaining objective distance in this study so far. I just recognized this fear of leaving my comfort zone. I fear leaving safety. What does it mean to enter into the topic of transformation?

As I moved through the research process it was important for me as a researcher to be a participant in the research. I wanted to account for myself in the process of inquiry. My engagement in autobiographical writing provided a method to further my understanding and sensitivity to my topic. Autobiography is a conversation because it is a story that is told to someone.

My autobiographical reflections focused on my own transformational experiences, as well as on my journey and transformation through the research process. My goal was to understand for myself the phenomenon that I had asked the co-researchers to participate in.

In the process of writing about my own experiences of transformation I came to understand transformation deeply. Autobiographical reflection is an important aspect of research in the conversational mode because there is an experience of Being-in-the-world that directs our attention to the question in the first place. My writing helped me focus on the question, open to it, and seek it with others. In my self-reflection I articulated several themes that emerged as part of my own transformation. I became alert to these themes and open to other themes in the co-researcher's stories. My self-understanding changed as I entered into a dialogue with the texts (of both scholars and my own autobiographical writing) juxtaposing and weaving the concepts into my understanding. Through my understanding the research process evolved. My research stance shifted from the positivist researcher, whose mode was to objectify the interviewees from a distance, to one of a human science researcher who lived her topic, engaged in ethical conversations and gained descriptions that were then interpreted for meaning. As a researcher/person I have gone through my own transformation in the writing of this thesis.

Through autobiographical reflections, the researcher becomes another subject in the research process and is able to develop greater awareness of what it means to participate in the study. Through my use of autobiographical reflections I have become another "subject" or participant in the research process. Through the autobiographical writing I prepared myself to participate in the conversational interviews, to hear what it was the co-researchers said about transformation, and to gain clarity regarding my presuppositions.

My participation in what was a dialogue was informed by my reflection on transformation and by my subsequent writing about my experiences. As a result, I was well prepared to recognize the “structures” of transformation in the conversations. In addition, I recognized that I had asked the co-researchers to enter into a very intimate dialogue with me, and I developed a deep respect for them. To participate in my research project these co-researchers were required to accept risk and to trust themselves. My autobiographical reflections played a major role in the overall tone of the questions and in my presence in the conversations. They facilitated the development of a dialogical relationship.

Through “journalizing” (Aoki, 1992), another method I used early in my project, I sought to understand transformation more deeply. Aoki suggests journalizing as a means of sensitizing oneself to the significant. Journalizing is thoughtful reflection that attempts to render the deeper meaning of one’s experiences. Aoki suggests journalizing as layered writing, wherein the first writing is the top layer, and the second layer is the deeper layer used for thoughtful writing upon revisiting the words of our first writing. “Journalizing in such a two-folded way is meant to open ourselves to a deeper understanding of the lived experience, to a deepened sense of what it is to be human” (Aoki, 1992, p. 30). This process of journalizing allows for understanding differently. When I reflected on my own experiences and rewrite “another layer,” I experience a deeper sense of my topic, and I find that my self-understanding changes. Through journalizing I became a participant in the research process, changing the traditional power hierarchy that has existed in research. Another useful aspect of this process is that it allowed for me as researcher to account for myself continuously in the process of inquiry and to create personal meaning.

2.10 The Pilot Study: Early Beginnings

I began the process of Revealing the Experience of Transformation of Self in a Counselling Relationship through a pilot study with a colleague in addition to the autobiographical writing specific to my topic. In the pilot study, I engaged in conversational interviews with a colleague with whom I have a ten-year friendship. Initially, I formulated a series of questions with the intent of asking my co-researcher to respond to these. My intent was to have the questions assist me in staying focused on my research topic, and they proved to be useful in this manner. As the pilot study progressed though, it became evident that a conversational mode was most appropriate for the nature of my inquiry. During the pilot study conversations I asked opening questions and let the interplay of the conversation between my co-researcher and myself determine the further course of the interview. I recorded the conversations, transcribed them, and in later interviews met with her to check the accuracy of my understanding and grasp of the meaning of her experience. I also asked my co-researcher about her experience of the questions and interview process and listened to her feedback to restructure the subsequent conversation. My goal in the pilot study was to sensitize myself to the interview process and to the topic of transformation and to prepare myself to use the interviews in the most useful, productive manner possible.

The pilot study also served as an opportunity to acknowledge my preconceptions and presuppositions and bracket them. The initiative to do the pilot study grew from my recognition that I was imposing my own interpretations and assumptions onto the study in a biased fashion. I had begun to narrow my thinking and to look for my own experience in others. I wanted input from another person in order to move away from my “position” or “stance” so that

I would not “impose” my beliefs (worldview) on the study. As I made my assumptions explicit I shifted my behaviour. The pilot study assisted me in staying open to the experience of others as it was revealed to me by them, and it helped me to be familiar with my own presuppositions.

2.11 A Conversational Relation

The four researchers selected for the study were four adults who had been involved in a counselling relationship with a counsellor other than myself, and believed that they had experienced transformation. They were selected through my network of colleagues who knew that I was involved in a research project. Having been informed about my project, potential participants called me for further information. After an initial phone contact and letter, an interview was scheduled with each person. As it is necessary for a researcher to build rapport and a sense of mutual trust with his or her co-researchers, I selected as co-researchers people I knew through informal professional association. They had a willingness to participate in the conversations knowing the deeply intimate nature of the topic. They were prepared to take risks and develop trust with the primary researcher. They were asked and agreed to be co-researchers. I had confidence in their ability to participate in the research project and I believed that they would be appropriate candidates for the research. As a professional counsellor I judged these persons to be emotionally stable, and high functioning competent adults who did not have any mental disorder or dysfunction that would interfere with their participation in the

study. They were each engaged with a counsellor and had supportive friendships. I initially began with four co-researchers but one person withdrew early in the study for personal reasons. The study is based on work with three co-researchers. The participants and I entered into a conversation about their lived experience of transformation because I believed that through the conversations we would gain new insight into the lived experience of transformation.

In each conversation I spent time with the co-researchers establishing rapport prior to exploring the topic. Although I often taped our conversations for one-and-one-half hours, I spent one-and-one-half to three hours with my co-researchers. This period of time allowed me to establish a relationship with each of them wherein trust was built, and reciprocity with the participants became part of the conversational relationship. The participants had a deep level of trust and rapport with myself and a willingness to disclose their lived experience in a very frank and honest manner.

As the primary researcher, I have considerable expertise, skill, and sensitivity to bring to the research conversations. I have been influenced by existential-humanistic psychology tradition and by existential-phenomenological philosophy. Through reading, workshops, and training I have developed a rich philosophical foundation. My life experience, my counselling training, and my extensive reading were brought to the interviews as preunderstanding. My professional background as a counsellor with therapeutic skills and experience, coupled with my personal development

background and research activities (specifically autobiographical writing and a pilot study) had prepared me well for the conversations with the co-researchers.

Gadamer captures the depth and quality of my understanding of transformation and my relationship with the participants when he states that “The practice of understanding, in life as in science, is similarly the expression of the affinity of the one who understands to the one he understands and to that which he understands” (1981, p. 48). I entered the conversations with a clear sense of the phenomenon under investigation, yet maintained “beginner’s mind,” open to discover the possibilities. My interpersonal skills enabled me to conduct the unstructured conversations in an ethical and purposeful manner. As primary researcher, I was very intentional and open with the co-researchers during each conversation, and chose a way of “being” that expressed the qualities of respect, empathy, authenticity, care, sensitivity, responsiveness, and curiosity.

Chapter 3 THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP AS A CRUCIBLE FOR TRANSFORMATION

The therapeutic relationship provides a safe context, a “container,” in which a person can develop their potential toward becoming a more authentic human being. “The whole therapeutic process must be aimed at opening up the healing potential within the patient or client” (Baldwin & Satir, 1987, p. 51). The therapeutic context is an interpersonal relationship in which a person learns about “becoming a person.” In the existential-phenomenological tradition a dialogical relationship exists which encourages a person to live out Socrates dictum, “To thine own self be true.”

The ideas of Carl Rogers had a significant impact in the field. Rogers perceived the person who sought counselling as basically self-responsible and self-directing. The focus was on process rather than structure of personality change. Psychotherapy was seen as a constructive interpersonal relationship with a focus on the inner phenomenological world of the client, and emphasis on the immediacy of the counsellor’s presence and attitudes, rather than skills or techniques, was a key element in the process of therapy. The therapeutic context, in which interaction is key, becomes a life enhancing context between client and counsellor, who responds personally and humanly. The counsellor is a self, interacting with another self.

This therapeutic relationship is an interpersonal relationship that encourages a person to move toward his or her own inner authentic being, to be vulnerable, and to self-disclose aspects of the self that are usually only

experienced in the internal world and not shared. The person can “bare their soul” in privacy, share secrets, remove social masks, and speak the words that would not be publicly aired in daily living. The therapeutic context provides a “space” in which a person can completely “be oneself” without fear of ridicule, rejection, or injury by the other. “It must be unequivocal, clear at all times that the counselor is on the client’s side, regardless of what comes up in the counselling intervention” (Koestenbaum, 1980, p. 215). This is a rare experience in a person’s life. In most other circumstances people have expectations that require us to behave in particular ways.

I think that therapy is most effective when the counsellor’s goals are focused on the process of the therapy. In Michelle Baldwin’s words, “If think that if the therapist feels ‘I want to be as present to this person as possible. I want to really listen to what is going on. I want to be real in this relationship,’ then these are suitable goals for the counsellor” (1987, p. 47). The whole process of therapy is a process of self-exploration, of getting acquainted with one’s feelings and coming to accept them as part of the self. Therapy can be an intimate experience: for this sense of touching our innermost core is the essence of intimacy. “The outstanding quality of the intimate experience is the sense of being in touch with our real selves” (Malone & Malone, 1987, p. 19). To facilitate self-transformation, a context is required that will allow a person to become open and to become vulnerable: intimacy provides this. It is the therapist’s responsibility to create a context in which clients feel safe, and this requires that therapists be sensitive both to themselves and to their client.

3.1 The Counsellor's Acceptance of The Client

In the interviews there were many qualities of therapy that the co-researchers identified as important. One of the most important qualities for the co-researchers to perceive in the counselling relationship was unqualified acceptance by the counsellor. When they perceived acceptance by the counsellor, the co-researchers' abilities to develop greater self-acceptance occurred. Self-acceptance was key in the transformative process. The question arises: "What does it mean in a counselling relationship for someone to say that they feel acceptance?" In the following conversation Theresa and I were engaged in discussion about the value of counselling in our lives. Theresa was involved in on-going sessions with a counsellor during the course of our interview schedule.

Lorna: So are you going to continue your relationship with your counsellor while you're in the city?

Theresa: Well I hope so. I hope so. I mean it depends on my budget. What I mean is it's a very important one. Because I don't feel I'm out of the woods yet. (L: Mmhuh.) Then I isolate myself and get very lonely. In the workshop with this counsellor I also developed the hero and what came up for me was like, I'm the damsel in distress, and I want my other counsellor to rescue me. And what is really loving is that I do feel rescued by him.

L: Rescued, in what way? Tell me about an incident.

T: Well I don't know, maybe rescue is the wrong word. There is an incredible confirmation or affirmation coming from my counsellor that I probably never had from my Dad or any other man.

L: And he says.

Theresa: He says... so what I bring forward he will say, "Yes, of course. Yes of course Theresa that makes sense." And what's fascinating is that he brings people like Victor Frankl and, he's a well-read man, so he brings other authors in to give me another edge to what I have been saying. So I'm not crazy. I'm not the only one that has been struggling.

Lorna: So he talks about Victor Frankl and different people and talks about their struggles, shares them with you. (T: Yeah, yeah.) And that helps you in your sense of not being alone.

T: Yeah. Yeah. So in that sense, to go back to the rescue, so in a way I do think my soul is in pretty dire straights, and whatever my counsellor is doing, I let him rescue me too. So I go and share my despair, and he's right there.

Theresa referred to the way in which her counsellor helped her to see that others before her have gone through the struggles of life. She recognized that she was not alone. This perspective assisted her in gaining stability. Theresa went on to speak of her sense of her counsellor's presence: "He is right there." Her perception is that her counsellor accepts her, even with her issue of abandonment. This helps her to accept herself. "For Buber, the essential quality of therapy is authentic presence--not just being present, although that is necessary. Nor is it merely, being present--that too is necessary. What is unique is the quality of the presence--of being totally available, in tune with the other" (Baldwin, 1987, p. 45). Michelle Baldwin, states it like this, "Over time I think that I have become more aware of the fact that in therapy I do use myself. I recognize that when I am intensely focused on a client my presence seems to be healing and I think this is probably true of any good therapist."

From my perspective as a counsellor, to become known as a person to the client facilitates the client's development. Presence involves intimacy: a revelation and sharing of myself. My presence involves being an authentic person while in relationship with the client. It includes my willingness to reveal myself in my humanness. Carl Rogers (1961) referred to this as genuineness. For Sidney Jourard (1971) authentic presence includes self-disclosure. The important thing is to be aware of my own process, and to decide whether it needs to be expressed or is appropriate to express to the client. In the following story, I chose to express my care for this person. What was important for the following client, I believe, was my openness. I expressed my acceptance of her.

I recall a client with whom I had worked for several years. The crucial turning point was when she had given up and felt deep despair and hopelessness. I said, "I realize that you don't care anymore, but, I care about you." She asked, "Why?" "I just do," I said, "I have come to know you, and I care about you." She broke into sobs. That was a turning point in her therapy. I had responded to her feelings and accepted them and expressed my feelings towards her. In subsequent sessions she moved toward greater acceptance of all parts of herself.

Theresa's ability to accept herself is linked to her counsellor's sensitivity to her state of being. She described the effect of his sensitivity to her. When the counsellor told her that he was going on holidays, and assured her of his intention, "What I want you to know is I won't abandon you" he reinforced the safety of "the container," of their counselling relationship. This action

demonstrated how he constructed safety and encouraged her trust in him.

Theresa's perception of his dependability supported her self-development:

Theresa: I remember when my counsellor was going on holidays, when he said to me, "I am going on holidays. What I want you to know is I won't abandon you." (Tears.) I think that I really appreciated that. I think that I have been around a lot of helping professionals and I have never heard that. And somehow I had thought that maybe feeling abandoned was the wrong thing to feel or a bad thing to feel. (Tears) I thought it was so kind of him just to say, "I won't abandon you." (Tears.)

Lorna: And really important for you too at that time. What happened for you knowing that he wasn't going to abandon you? What did you do with that?

T: (Blows nose) Well I think that it's kind of like I was so pleasantly surprised that he would make a point of saying that that I thought, If he's not abandoning me, why should I abandon myself? (Tears.)

This is a significant point in Theresa's experience of herself with her counsellor. With his acceptance, she is learning self-acceptance. As he values her, so she considers herself worthwhile. In her statement, "If he's not going to abandon me, why should I abandon myself?" she deepens her commitment to herself, and her self-acceptance moves her toward a decision to not abandon herself.

By listening acceptantly [sic] to every aspect of the client's experience, the therapist is modelling the notion of listening to oneself. And, by being accepting and non-judgmental of the feelings within the client, the therapist is modelling a non-judgmental self-acceptance in the client. By being real and congruent and genuine, the therapist is modelling that kind of

behaviour for the client. In these ways the therapist does serve as a model for the client.

(Baldwin, 1987, p. 47)

By being “real” and congruent, and listening with acceptance to Theresa she felt supported by her counsellor. He modelled acceptance.

Lorna: So he helped you commit to yourself.

Theresa: Yeah, because I think that is really what has been lacking.

Lorna: Commitment to yourself?

Theresa: Feeling abandoned and yeah, “Is it worth it to stay committed to myself? So it’s basically, “Am I courageous enough and do I have enough courage to get through this pain?”

Theresa found the courage to be herself through this counselling relationship. In a sense Theresa re-created her self through her decision that she was worthwhile. “Life is a continual series of choices for an individual. . . . Every person, is in part, ‘his [sic] own project’ and makes himself” (Maslow, 1968, p. 193). Theresa’s counsellor embraced the qualities of acceptance, non-judgmental listening, and authenticity. His way of being facilitated her choice. Her counsellor elicited and reinforced authentic behaviour by manifesting it himself. Faye, another co-researcher, now speaks of the significance of the context of her counselling relationship. Her perception is that her counsellor accepts her and she interprets that her experience of acceptance and validation by her counsellor promoted her development of self-acceptance.

Faye: So I can’t remember the second question. So the question was, How did I become more self-accepting? Did I answer that? I think it’s allowing, a big piece is being, is allowing myself to notice when I’m being

accepted by others. It's a big piece of it too. So that's a piece I learned at workshops as well as in counselling.

Lorna: So how is that not field-dependent or other-validated?

Faye: Oh I think it is. I think it started with that, I think it started with being validated and accepted by others, and allowing myself to notice that.

Allowing myself, as I let myself show more of my authentic self, because that balance shifted from performance to more authentic and noticing that I'm still being accepted, then I can kind of let go, "Well, maybe I am all right. Maybe my terrible fear that I'm not all right and therefore everything will go away and everybody will go away. Maybe it's not true, maybe I am all right." I feel I get to feel more. So I think it happens in the context of relationship.

Faye's comment illustrates Buber's (1970) notion that "human life is fundamentally constituted by relationships. . . [and] that it is through one's engagement in relationship that one's growth as a person takes place" (Halling & Dearborn Nill, 1989, p. 184).

Lorna: With another who is in contact with you to provide that?

Faye: I think so. And then the field dependency becomes less in that I've been validated enough that I don't have to be validated every minute by everybody. I'm still okay.

Faye referred to her relationships with counsellors in which she felt validated. Through these relationships she developed the capacity for self-validation. In Faye's comment: "I've been validated enough that . . . I'm still okay," reflected that she confirmed her own self-worth and valued her experience. "Confirming means . . . [the counsellor] accepting the whole potentiality of the other" (Rogers, 1961, p. 55).

Lorna: There's value in other people's recognizing and accepting and validating who you are.

Faye: I really believe it. I really believe it's very key. That's where I think therapy is so useful because sometimes that's somebody's first experience of really getting that somebody accepts them. (L: I agree.) And doesn't think they have to be different.

L: I felt this wave of sadness as you were saying that. I felt sad that here we are all these people feeling that sense of not being worth it, just for ourselves and you and I, I think have been lucky to have contact, to be in contact with places and people where we've had them say, "You're okay." (F: Mmhuh.) "Just as you are." And like you just described. Then hearing that message and feeling that in my body, although you didn't talk about feeling it in your body, that's my experience, I could feel it. I feel it and then I knew it. Like you I didn't need to hear it as frequently. I started experiencing it internally.

I resonated with Faye's story of being accepted by a counsellor. I shared several stories of the value of my own experience of counsellors who embraced Carl Rogers' (1961) conditions for a therapeutic relationship. When a counsellor had these qualities: genuineness, authenticity, congruence, unconditional positive regard: a positive attitude toward the client, and listened empathically I perceived that the counsellor was there as a person and was "on my side."

Lorna: Who have you experienced self-acceptance with? You talked about workshops and counsellors and some other people.

Faye: I went to see this counsellor for awhile.

F: I wanted to do bodywork. I wanted the feeling of being authentic and liking myself and having some sense of who I was.

Lorna: And you knew enough about this counsellor that he used a body focus that you wanted.

Faye: Yeah, body focus has always been important to me, I know I didn't mention it, but it's actually very important. I feel in my body and know in my body and know what is not okay in my body. That's so, so that was good.

L: So you went to this counsellor and did some bodywork?

F: Yeah. I felt accepted by him and that was good.

L: How did you know you were accepted by him? Where did you feel that? What's your memory of that experience of being accepted?

F: Mmhuh. I think I feel it in my chest. I think I did feel it in my chest. But there was something just so relieving to be able to say to him whatever was happening for me and have him go "Yeah, yeah, this is what it sounds like to me." And to hear myself. It was also the experience of when I hear my own self saying it out loud those things that were only in my head before.

L: Verbal. You shared those things verbally.

F: I may have shared them with my husband but I needed to share them with somebody else. And some of them I probably haven't even shared with my husband. My own crazy thoughts.

L: What happened when you shared them?

F: Well, I got taken seriously and nothing dreadful happened and he didn't reject me or abandon me. One of the things I was afraid of. I could come back! I mean it's obvious! But from that scary place I need to know that. I felt liked by him. It didn't seem like, I didn't have a thing that he particularly liked me more than other clients, anything like that, but I felt like he liked me. That I was okay. And yet I was telling him these things that were going on for me that seemed not all right to me you know. They'd always been labelled not all right. So I think it was really important.

Faye experienced a compassionate witness to her process. Like Theresa, Faye's counsellor's acceptance of aspects of her that she felt unsure about helped her to accept herself. The counsellor's unconditional acceptance of Faye allowed for the safety in the counselling relationship. Acceptance is one of the most significant factors that allows for self-acceptance. The therapeutic context, in which interaction is key, becomes a life enhancing environment between a client and a counsellor who responds personally and humanly. The dialogical relationship is a crucible for the realization of one's potential. The therapeutic crucible is the crossroad of personal development; the process of self-construction. A crucible is a resilient vessel in which metaphoric processes occur.

Faye discusses another counselling relationship in which she gained considerable understanding of herself. She talks about the significance of having a counsellor there to witness her process.

Lorna: So in talking about wanting a witness, takes me to another counsellor that you worked with, you mentioned her earlier in our conversation. I'm curious in pursuing this. There's something about her witnessing and something about how she reflected your experiences and feelings back to you in a supportive manner you said. What's the supportive manner that she demonstrated to you?

Faye: Uhh, confidence that what I was going through was important and useful and all right.

In this example, Faye's counsellor's confidence in Faye's process was perceived as acceptance, and Faye felt validated in her experience. From this she developed a willingness to accept more of herself.

Lorna: How did she let you know this?

Faye: Well she would listen to me, and she'd say something to me like, "I could see that this is really hard for you right now." Whatever, she would reflect back, and then she would say something like, "And I'm really excited for you that you're feeling these things and moving through this, that you're letting yourself have this experience that you need to be having right now of grieving, or anger, or whatever it was." She would, you know, she would be, she would say that what I was feeling . . . you know, it was validating, I guess she would say that, yeah that it was important for me to be feeling what I'm feeling. And, I have a great disinclination to be feeling what I'm feeling.

L: Yeah, so there's some validation and her saying that you gave yourself permission somehow (F: Yeah.) to accept what was going on for you?

F: Yes. Yes. Whereas I would just think, oh I feel yucky, I need to not feel yucky, what can I do to not feel yucky. I mean some distraction from something, but she would say, "No, I really get that you're feeling yucky and get how yucky it is, it's really, really yucky, and I can see that you need to be feeling this, good for you, great."

L: (Laughs. Faye joins in.)

F: And it would help. I would think, "Oh yeah, good for me" (laughs) you know instead of, "Oh shit, how the hell can I get out of feeling this." Yeah, so it was very useful, I really learned something from that.

L: Yeah, would you say self-acceptance, that you learned some self-acceptance?

F: Yeah.

L: Or is that my word?

F: Well, I think that would fit, but, but more than that I learned expansion, and self-acceptance. I learned that I could be more, that more of me was acceptable than I ever thought.

L: Ah, so that's the expansion.

Faye: Yeah that's the expansion part. Not just yeah, I'm acceptable, but she would see me in an expanded way and give me a broader picture of myself as somebody who was going through this piece and she would name it in a way that made it seem significant and important. And so she saw my life as significant and important when I would sometimes think, "Oh this part of my life isn't significant and important, this part of my life is just a waste." But she would see it as significant and important which allowed me to tolerate my feelings better.

Like Faye, many people are often the last ones to recognize the significant in their own lives. We gloss over events and feelings as though they were insignificant. Faye's counsellor drew her attention to the significance of all her experiences in her life. Faye's counsellor encouraged her to value her experience, invited her to explore it and discern the relevance of it to her life. In the counselling relationship, special attention is given to the elusiveness of experience. In therapy, it is a time to reveal one's drama of life and all is interesting. It is a time especially set aside for the purpose of viewing one's life. Much of what happens in life floats on the periphery of awareness. What often escapes notice are those events which give context and continuity to life. As a counsellor I invite the exploration of one's full drama of life. I refer to this quality in a counsellor as "a miner of experiences." Through therapy Faye gained a broader picture of herself.

Lorna: So you were able to tolerate your feelings and, you've got a broader perspective.

Faye: Yeah, broader perspective.

L: Broader and more expanded sense of your self.

Faye: Yeah, I think it's really important, and I think that's another way of putting what I get out of the counselling, that I have an expanded sense of self.

3.2 The Congruency and Authenticity of The Counsellor

Another aspect of the counselling relationship that the co-researchers found to be of importance was the counsellor's congruence. In the following transcript excerpt, Theresa and I talked about her counselling experience of the previous evening. It had a profound impact on her. She had felt seen, nurtured, listened to, witnessed, and in connection with her authentic self when in conversation.

Lorna: You were open to being influenced by her.

Theresa: Yeah. Yeah.

L: I also thought love is there. There's loving.

T: Mmhuh. It was very loving. Big heart.

L: I'm really curious about. . . . There's some connection in my mind to that experience you had last night and some of how you experience yourself with your counsellor. I'm not sure what it is. See I'm most interested in, you said, you were open to her. We just talked about it in detail. (T: There's openness to my counsellor.) Yeah there's openness to your counsellor and I'm fascinated with that openness. There's something about your self in there. (T: Yeah.) You're willing to be your self. You're true to your feelings. There's that openness.

I believe that Theresa experienced what Virginia Satir refers to when she says, "The Therapists can model ways of learning and growing. It is also important to model congruence --one looks like one feels--says what one means and acts in accordance with what one says. Such congruence develops trust. This is the

basis for emotional honesty between therapist and patient which is key to healing” (Satir, 1987, p. 21). In the following excerpt Theresa identifies what she perceives as her counsellor’s congruency and its significance for her.

Theresa: Well I think that... It is interesting. I think that probably what is really important to me with that, with my counsellor, is the congruency. So that there is in both, especially with him, there’s a real openness to being congruent, so I am not ever being questioned nor do I have to question him.

Lorna: Questioned about what?

T: Where he comes from or who he is or where he is and what his motives are. I’m clear.

L: And what are you clear about? What are his motives?

T: Well his intent is goodwill. Loving connection with me.

L: So that’s his contract or his intent?

T: Yeah that’s his intent.

L: How do you know this?

T: (Pause) He tells me with his body. So he’s congruent. So the congruency seems to be a word for me that is very important.

L: So let’s talk about how your counsellor is congruent. Your experience of his congruence seems to be many things. His body (T:Mmhuh.) is with you in a particular way. (T: Mmhuh.) How is that?

T: It is the... I come back to the word witness again. His body is very still. He’s very still when I’m with him.

L: You’re talking with him?

T: When I’m talking with him. He’s very still and yet there’s a very vibrant energy around him. I look at his eyes, his eyes are very clear and he’s there. There is a very present in his eyes. I don’t have to worry that he is going away or that he is not going to be present. So he’s very still and very. . . . There’s that incredible quality of listening in him.

L: Of listening?

Theresa: Mmhuh. And then his voice is very congruent to his state. If it is a very quiet voice, then his movements are very quiet, very respectful.

Lorna: What do you mean by respectful?

T: He matches my movement. So it is a physical dialogue.

L: Mmhuh. So if you're feisty and angry he matches that?

(T: Mmhuh.) He's feisty and loud?

T: Well I don't think that his behaviour would be feisty and loud, but his presence is. He's there!

L: So energetically you're matched. He may not mimic or imitate your behaviour, but energetically you feel met?

T: Energetically matched. Yeah. Yeah. So there's that differentiation that's still going on all the time. I never feel that he's fused with me or I have to say, "What is going on here?" It is very clear. Boundaries are very clear.

L: Clear meaning?

T: He's on his own.

L: Okay. So you get a sense of him being over there and you being here.

(T:Mmhuh. Mmhuh.) And you're not confused about that at all.

T: No.

Theresa described her counsellor's congruence: his movement matched hers in "physical dialogue," he was respectful and clear, his voice was consistent with his state. He was available to her as an authentic person and he was able to "match her," yet maintain his own boundaries. Such congruence develops trust. The term "congruent" means that whatever feeling or attitude I am experiencing would be matched by my awareness of that attitude and my behaviour: voice, tonality, body stance would communicate a similar message. Of the therapeutic relationship, the co-researchers would agree that:

What is required is the space, the opportunity, the freedom to be. Psychotherapy deals with intimacy. It is concerned with providing a nurturing relationship within which primary feelings develop and a person matures into naturally being themselves. Therapy concerns itself with promoting the client in developing a sense of responsibility for his or her own life. Intimacy is always relational. In intimacy you must be yourself.

(Malone & Malone, 1987, p. 235)

To the existential-phenomenological therapist the notion of a dialogical relationship is significant (Koestenbaum, 1980). A person can gain definition and potential in conversation in a counselling relationship. The self realizes its uniqueness in relation to the other. "It is through this relation that man [sic] becomes known to himself and to others as a self" (Buber, 1970, p. 80). Our potential for self-awareness and self-knowledge can be gained through growth and development, which primarily occurs in the context of an interpersonal relationship. In relationship: letting our self be known to the other, the premise is that we have the potential for knowing ourselves: our Being-in-the-world more fully. The co-researchers' stories revealed many qualities of a counselling relationship that they perceived to facilitate their transformation. Both Faye and Theresa talked about a disinclination to accept the reality of their perceptions, thoughts and feelings. They learned to accept the self through their counsellor's acceptance of all aspects of them. With the counsellors' validation of them they learned self-validation and to recognize the significance and value of their life experiences. Theresa and Faye developed greater trust in themselves through

their relationships with their counsellors more and moved toward more authentic being.

Chapter 4 THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TRANSFORMATION

4.1 Anxiety as a Path to Transformation

To venture causes anxiety,
but to not venture is to lose oneself.
S. Kierkegaard

Existential philosophers and clinicians see anxiety as a basic phenomenon of life underlying all change, growth, transformation, evolution and achievements. Anxiety is a condition of existence. The very state of being alive is accompanied by a chronic state of tension known as existential anxiety, also called “ontological anxiety” or the anxiety of “Being.” It is because of our awareness itself and of the complexity of our lives that we experience this chronic uneasiness.

“Existential anxiety is one feature of the human realm; this includes the terror of nonbeing” (May, 1977, p. 183). Through transformation we encounter many things that move us out of certainty and into chaos. This process of shifting from one identity to another is a source of great anxiety. When we encounter the unexplored in ourselves, there is fear of being absorbed into something greater than ourselves, which brings with it an intensity that may be more than that which we are accustomed to. In this state, our sense of identity is at stake; our sense of identity is threatened; the world is not as we experienced it before and since our being is in the world, we no longer are what we were before. The anxiety we feel is temporary rootlessness and disorientation: it is

the anxiety of nothingness, nonbeing. The difficulty is that anxiety includes the terror of nonbeing. The concept of nonbeing helps us contrast existence.

“The first assertion about the nature of anxiety is this; anxiety is the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing; anxiety is the existential awareness of nonbeing” (Tillich, 1952, p. 34). It is not the abstract knowledge of nonbeing that produces anxiety but the awareness that nonbeing is part of one’s being. Anxiety is finitude, experienced as one’s own finite state of being.

Human beings are aware of their fragility and finitude, and thus we experience profound anxiety, ontological anxiety. People seek to alleviate the anxiety state because it is difficult to tolerate. In an attempt to cope with this anxiety, each person creates a particular life style. This is the basic substance of our lives and includes our family, friends, and culture. To contend with our anxiety, we involve ourselves in our life’s activities. Sometimes, the involvement is to such an extent that we lose sight of our inner realm of “Being” and become totally absorbed in the external world. A change of circumstance or a crisis often focuses our attention back to ourselves, and we are faced once again with our nonbeing. Theresa came face to face with her nonbeing after her separation from her husband. In the course of our lives we experience greater anxiety at times when our “life-style pattern” does not adequately deal with the ontic anxiety. An underlying feeling of despair or a sense of feeling lost may surface. Dean’s reference to himself in the past exemplifies this. To face ontic anxiety and to face themselves people must accept profound insecurity.

It requires courage. Dean's story provides an example of courage. He embraces his anxiety as though it were his teacher:

Lorna: So Peter was a very insightful person. (D: Oh yeah.) Something happened for you being around him.

Dean: Well he got me to accept anxiety. Up until three or four years ago I had a level of anxiety that fifteen milligrams of valium a day couldn't knock down. I took everything to try to get the anxiety down.

This example shows how difficult it may be to tolerate the anxiety state. Valium was the life style choice that Dean sought to alleviate and contend with his anxiety.

Dean: Peter said, "Well, let me tell you something. If I had a choice between having no anxiety and having anxiety as a way of living I would always choose anxiety." (L: You would.) He would. (L: He would.) He said if you could just acknowledge or accept the fact that having anxiety is the life force that's going to change your life. And when you accept that anxiety you'll have gone a long way to understanding yourself. In other words I was fighting the anxiety, trying to get rid of it with pills and especially with martinis. I didn't know that. This wasn't conscious. When I'd go to conventions I'd look for excuses to have two or three scotches before dinner.

Wong and McKeen believe that in their unwillingness to deal with ontic anxiety people will defend against it and convert it into neurotic anxiety and the accompanying neurotic defences, such as compulsions, addictions, and other destructive behaviours, rather than deal directly with the terror of being. "Drugs help to relieve the symptoms without attacking the underlying cause. At the same time, they contribute to a blunting of life's experiences, a levelling of the

human condition to one of sedation and mediocrity" (Wong & McKeen, 1998, p. 95). According to Rubin (1975) this is an aspect of self-hate. Of excessive alcohol and drug use, Rubin says:

They are often used as sedative and anaesthetic devices in an attempt to relieve self-hate . . . some people with unbearable hatred for themselves will use excess alcohol. . . . to put themselves in a temporary haze to avoid feelings. But this becomes a way of inundating and drowning oneself in self-hate in order to escape self-hate and is a form of slow suicide.

(1975, p. 50)

At the point in his life referred to in the above excerpt, Dean sedated himself rather than deal with the deeper issues in his life. Dean expressed his despair in one of our conversations. Most people would rather have symptoms of a neurosis, a reduced version of ontic anxiety, than deal with the terror of being. Dean chose to cope with his experience of anxiety by numbing his feelings. This only took him further away from his "Authentic Self."

Dean: I don't do that anymore now. I try to get out of it. I like drinking don't get me wrong. I love to have a drink. I love to drink wine. I probably still do a little bit too much but it's different now it's conscious. (L: Yeah.) Before I was trying to drown something. (L: Escape from anxiety.) Escape. Koestenbaum said, "Heh, wait a minute. It's life force. It's telling you something. You know what anxiety is? Anxiety is the message you need to change." Just think of it. That has been my word since I was with him that day. We were in a conference. We were all sitting at long tables. When we went out I felt this arm on my shoulder. It was Peter; we were going downstairs to the men's washroom. He said, "You haven't said much." I said, "I'm just terrified." He said, "What?" I

said, "My anxiety is just out the ceiling. " He said, "You worried about being anxious? I said, "I hate being anxious!" He said, "Hey, it's life! Anxiety is a life force, use it. It's telling you that you need to change something. So don't give it a bad time. Accept your anxiety and you'll know what to do with it."

Dean came to accept the reality that anxiety is a condition of human existence. He understood that it was not something he needed to mask or get rid of, in fact, it was a messenger that could assist in his fulfilment of life. Peter Koestenbaum's perspective, that the very state of being alive is accompanied by existential anxiety, encouraged Dean to see its life-enhancing quality. "Indeed, anxiety is a condition of existence, and without it, we would not be alive and human!" (Wong & McKeen, 1998, p. 95)

Dean: And of course I needed to change. I needed to get my own set of values. I was living on some other, planet.

Lorna: So you embraced this idea of anxiety as your teacher.

D: Oh sure. Well anxiety was the message. (L: Yeah.) It's the messenger. (L: Yeah.) Anxiety is the messenger that says, "There's something going on in your life. I, anxiety, don't know what it is but you do. If you'll just let it be and don't sedate it."

In the following transcript Dean gained the courage to experience his anxiety rather than rid himself of it. His anxiety became something that contributed to his self-understanding. Dean chose to accept anxiety and live in the face of it. "Man [sic] is what he makes of himself. And the courage to be oneself is the courage to make of oneself what one wants to be" (Tillich, 1952, p.150). Dean chose to be more fully his "Authentic Self."

Lorna: And you made a decision in there?

Dean: I made a decision to accept some anxiety.

L: To entertain accepting it or to accept it?

D: Yeah, and sort of unpack it and look at it and see what's going on.

And all of a sudden one day I woke, and said, "I don't have anxiety." I said, "I don't know if that's good or not." (Laughs) I've never been without it in my life. And just with the thousands of things I did, courses I took, books that I read, all of a sudden the acceptance of my anxiety, and it's gone. And I haven't had anxiety since.

L: So if anxiety is the message that you need to change, you heard that, that was powerful for you, and there was an acceptance there. What meaning do you make? It's the need to change, so I'm curious, confused, wondering if it's brought out the need to change, if you haven't had anxiety since, how do you know you want to change?

D: Well, I don't have anxiety as much as I did before. I still change but it's conscious. I don't need anxiety to change me anymore.

L: So you were... (D: It was like...) it was in your life.

D: It was in my life and when I changed it went away. When I did what the message was, when I lived out the message, which was examine yourself, understand yourself, examine your values, live according to your values, not according to someone else's, and adjust your life. You had no idea of the adjustment of my life. It's just been phenomenal.

L: So I get this sense of this huge shift for you.

D: But it was over twenty-five years remember. It did not happen overnight. Anxiety had been there. I was forty-five years old when I went to that workshop.

L: So that anxiety...

D: So it had taken all that time for me to be able to say, "I'm, not living this hell I used to live." I couldn't sleep my anxiety was so high. So what Koestenbaum said, "That's the message."

Lorna: Somehow you took that on, you embraced the idea that anxiety was the need to change.

Dean: It made sense. It just made sense. All of a sudden it goes, "Oh, I wonder. I just need to feel the anxiety and not try to get rid of it." I was trying to get rid of it rather than try to live with it and delve into it.

Understand it wouldn't be quite the right word but it's close. Experience it. Experience the anxiety to see what the message is. What my task was I thought philosophically was for me to figure out what the anxiety message was. Oh yeah. I've done it. And it's still going on but I'm not ... it doesn't mean anxiety disperses. It's almost as if anxiety sits in there, somewhere (inside him) and says, "You don't need me anymore. But I'll be here." (L: Yeah.) If you don't keep ... live by your values. If you don't live by what you set up, I'll be back. I like that feeling.

In another conversation with Dean we discussed other areas of significant learning for him from Peter Koestenbaum, a clinical philosopher (Koestenbaum, 1980). Dean refers to his self-deception. His self-deception was a form of self-hate. He did not have to live up to his "Ideal Self." Dean was dealing with a great deal of anxiety and self-hatred. The growing accumulation of self-hatred can be experienced as anxiety and depression. Dean embraced Peter Koestenbaum's statement about anxiety and became curious and willing to learn from his anxiety.

Lorna: The self-deception statement was powerful for you?

Dean: Oh yeah because it was true. It was true for me. So just because you know it though you don't, it's not easy to get out of it. (L: No.) So Koestenbaum had a big influence on me in terms of the self-deception and the authentic, being authentic and developing the I am.

L: Tell me about that I am.

Dean: The I am is the self, is how you feel about yourself. It's coming from here (points to self) rather than coming from outside, the person I mean, there has to be a lot of personal in it but it's a way of, for me it was away of avoiding the I am, and using other people to help build that business. (L: Mmhuh.) So Koestenbaum's I am is one of his, he says it's really difficult to go on to the transpersonal in all the other areas of life if you don't develop the I am and face all the existential day-to-day stuff including yourself . . . I learned a lot from that man. He had a very highly developed sense of self.

Lorna: How did you know this? How did you make this judgement?

D: Well because of the way he spoke and the way he presented himself. I was talking to him one day about anxiety, and he said, "You know, if I had my choice of two ways of being in the world with or without anxiety, I'd choose anxiety." He said, "What anxiety means is, it's a life form, and it's giving you a message to change." That's what I learned from him. What I was going through and this dislike of self, the anxiety was, "Well do something about it. Change." (L: Yeah.) "Find out what it is." And it was when I finally got that sense, more of a sense of myself, my anxiety left and I've never had it since. That anxiety disappeared. I woke up one morning and I said to J. "I think this is the first time in my life I can remember waking up without anxiety."

L: This particular anxiety.

D: (Sighs.) Anxiety which used to cripple me.

L: And you don't have that anxiety?

D: I don't have anxiety at all. I have some reluctance, it's going the other way now, what I'm looking for now is (pause) being on my own.

Dean and I further explored his changed perspective on anxiety, which he mostly attributes to his relationship with and learning from Peter Koestenbaum. Dean's life is no longer ruled by anxiety: in his choice to accept

anxiety he chooses his “Authentic Self” and embraces nonbeing as part of his existence. Of nonbeing, Tillich says, “For if being is interpreted in terms of life or process or becoming, nonbeing is ontologically as basic as being” (1952, p. 32). The concept of nonbeing helps us understand anxiety as being part of existence. Nonbeing is equated to the loss of the self. “If one asked how nonbeing is related to being-itself, one can only answer metaphorically; being ‘embraces’ itself and nonbeing. Being has nonbeing ‘within’ itself” (Tillich, 1952, p. 34). With Peter Koestenbaum’s counsel Dean was supported in his choice to live according to his own values. Koestenbaum in his Existential Crisis explains:

Therapists must ask what function the anxiety attacks perform today, how his life would be different if he were to give them up, why he maintains them in being, from what do they protect him, and finally, what do they reveal, not about his past, but about his destiny and his responsibility towards fulfilling that future.

(1980, p. 235)

Dean’s choice required courage. For “courage is the affirmation of one’s essential nature, one’s inner aim or entelechy, but is an affirmation which has itself the character of ‘in spite of’” (Tillich, 1952, p. 4). The choice to live his anxiety was a transformational experience for Dean.

4.2 From Darkness to Light:

Our Pain is Our Opening to a Deeper Understanding

In the course of transformation a person often enters into a crisis phase. As self-awareness develops one recognizes that old structures are outdated

and self-defeating: the old identity gradually falls apart. Feelings of anxiety, emptiness, darkness, and chaos often occur in that period in between the old and the new identity. Metzner (1980) refers to this time of chaos and crisis described by the co-researchers as a death and rebirth. There is a time of transition between the dissolution of the old identity and the emergence of the new. Where the reconstruction of a new self involves a destruction of the old, there is an experience of leaving the familiar, safe, and known. One enters into the unfamiliar and unknown and one's entire existence can feel out of control. The research participants described this feeling as "fragmented" and "ungrounded." In my own experience this in between state is a very challenging place. Both Dean and Theresa, co-researchers, referred to it as "Hell!"

Metzner's metaphor, "from darkness to light" describes this aspect of Theresa's transformation. After her separation from her husband, Theresa experienced the dissolution of her old identity, an identity that had defined a large part of her existence. This led to a subsequent crisis of meaning for her. It was difficult for her to relinquish her old identity of "wife" and "couple." Her doctor witnessed her "falling apart." She experienced much grief and loss and went through "the darkness of the night," a journey into the unknown and the unfamiliar. She descended into the depths of agony, anxiety, and pain in a movement toward a greater understanding of herself and a new identity. In the following story we are witnesses to one of Theresa's death-rebirth experiences.

Lorna: We've been talking about transformation, I'd be curious about your experience of transformation, the shifts of patterns and differences. What do you think the relationship of consciousness, which I call

awareness, and transformation is? Do you think there is a relationship? I'm interested in your experience.

Theresa: Well, you know I find that fascinating because when I was laying on Pat's (pseudonym) couch. I had gone to the doctor because at that point I couldn't be conscious anymore. I don't know why. So Pat took me to the doctor. So I got the Paxil, the anti-depressant and the nurse said to me, "You have to go to the hospital. You look awful, terrible." It was almost like in that moment I made a conscious decision that I was not going to go to the hospital. I said to her, "No, I'm not going. I will be fine. I will be here." Then they said, "What do you need?" and I said, "I need a watch." So they had a suicide watch for me and I disappeared inward. I don't know for how long. I noticed I was burning (hot). I thought that if hell existed that it would be like that. I was gone and it was frightening for everybody else, especially for Pat because she didn't know if I was going to make it or not. But what happened in that time, I couldn't make a conscious decision anymore. I couldn't decide, "This is over." And whatever happened, I don't know what happened, but I woke up. It was as if my spirit was taking over and went with whatever I needed to do and I transformed. I got up and I said, "Okay what do I need to do?" And I needed to go to school. So I picked up, got my shoes on, and I went back to school. So I think transformation for me comes out of pain. Again I can't control it: I can only go with it. Sometimes it can be consciously done and sometimes not. But, somehow, if I am staying in tune so that when it is there I recognize it, and maybe that is then what it is for me.

A shift in identity requires uprooting oneself and is often accompanied by fear, "loss of self," and an experience of "falling apart." One's entire existence may be in question. During this time there is an experience that Rollo May (1977) and Paul Tillich (1952) refer to as "existential anxiety," that threat of

nonbeing. As Tillich (1952) put it: “Nonbeing threatens man’s ontic self-affirmation, relatively in terms of fate, absolutely in terms of death” (p. 41). The anxiety of death increases with the increase of individuation.

In addition to anxiety, feelings of emptiness, a void, can dominate one’s inner life. As the old self is shed, a feeling of that loss often emerges. The existence and meaning of one’s life as it was has vanished. To relinquish the old self identity may leave an empty feeling and sometimes depression will occur, as it did for Theresa. One is “falling apart” in order to birth a new identity. Ken Wilber says it like this: “As evolution proceeds. . . . each level in turn is differentiated from the self, or ‘peeled off’ so to speak. The self, that is, eventually dis-identifies with its present structure so as to identify with the next higher-order emergent structure” (1980, p. 80).

Theresa returned to the topic of her transformation through the separation from her husband in another conversation.

Lorna: It feels like a long time since we got together. I don’t feel connected with your process, your experiences. Are you still seeing your counsellor?

Theresa: No, I haven’t seen him for quite awhile but I have done quite a bit of work with another counsellor that I have not talked about, and that has been an incredible experience actually, especially the last one. It is like that whole process, (sigh) the separation of grieving, the blossoming of the self in the midst of all the grieving, and I came through it more or less. Well the last session was about my owning of the woman that I am now through the grieving.

L: Can I go back? You said blossoming of the self while grieving.

T: Through the grieving.

Lorna: Through the grieving. What do you mean? Like I know you've started to talk about it, but you chose blossoming.

Theresa: Yeah, I think that for awhile after my husband and I separated, all I knew was that I was just black. I was all grief: I was just black and dark. So there was no beauty. I didn't feel beautiful in my grieving, I just felt incredibly hunched over and dark and old. The struggle of life and death was there. I think that in the workshop (tears) I became the dignified. When you separate. . . . When you're separated it doesn't have that much of a status. Anyway, I think in the workshop I had more a sense of me as a woman grieving the losses I had and I it was acknowledging the blackness, and I got dressed and I was just absolutely gorgeous. I felt like I was the bride. It was dark but there was life at the same time. There was the separation and the self and the dark. Before, I was all mess and I didn't know who I was except the dark blob.

L: So there was the darkness and you watching the darkness?

T: Yeah, it'd be fully stepping, like consciously being in the dark, consciously being in the black. I was all in black.

L: How did you get to that? What stuff did you do?

The counsellor's directions in the psychodrama workshop guided Theresa. The counsellor presented a model and provided a form within which the participants could engage. They were encouraged to enact the parts of the self that were most prominent. In interaction with the counsellor Theresa enacted her current issue.

Theresa: Well there were six women together and she (the counsellor) had material from the book, The Wounded Soul. So there's all the archetypes in the book with all the different parts, like shadow, the good daughter, the dutiful daughter versus the warrior versus the martyr, and I think I created my own. I don't know which one I actually chose. I acted

out a scene that helped me bury all the losses that I had. I took off the black. It felt just wonderful to strip it all off and I had fun with it and I actually went to my bra and underwear. I got more into the sexy movement, which I haven't felt for a long time. The veil came off.

Lorna: So as well as taking layers off. What a neat experience, powerful. So what's that about? What meaning do you make of that? What's happened since? I'm curious. How has that workshop drama played out in your life or affected your life?

Theresa: Well it is like... It is definitely the separation of the self with all the pain and the loss that I had. I was enmeshed with it all. All the fun that I have, the clarity that I have, the sexual energy that I have was all buried. So with the separation, with the stepping As I was stepping fully into the loss, at the same time I also could let it go, so I also stepped out of it, and so I all my other energy became freer, became more fun. So I have been feeling lighter. The energy has been flowing more. I don't cry so much anymore. I felt less a victim, I can still get into my little revenge. A couple of days ago I just ranted and raged at my ex-husband in my dreams. In the midst of it all I said, "I still love you." So there are other things coming up. I don't know if I really love him. (L: Mmm.) I'm still kind of wondering about that, but the possibility's all there. A wider range of my emotions and feelings and thoughts and my heart feels less broken. I am more at ease with where my life is going. I haven't had a panic attack. I haven't had a panic attack for quite awhile. So there's more settling into my life. "This is my life. I'm alone and this is where I'm going."

L: I have an experience of you being more settled into your world, of letting go. Like you stripped off all of that. It's a great metaphor that fits, to me, just fits my experience of you.

T: Mmm. So a couple of weeks ago Pat was saying that she experienced me more like the Theresa that she had known before the separation. Feeling somewhat the old me and I said, "Yeah, there are parts of me

again.” I’m saying “Oh yeah, I remember, I remember me.” (Laughs). So there’s, “Yeah this is how I know how I remember me.” Yet there’s also new parts. Like I have been quiet today so there’s also more quieter in me than I’ve been. But it feels kind of a grounded quiet.

Lorna: So there are some differences?

Theresa: I think the change is that even though I’m wondering if I’ll ever get a man, a partner, I feel less dependent on a man. I feel less dependent. Actually there are days that I don’t think about a man or think about, “Will I be in a relationship?” I mean I’m quite fine on my own, or sleeping on my own. So in my other relationships, when I separated and was between men I wanted approval of a man and was quite lonely a lot of the time. I’m not there this time. Actually I don’t feel so lonely.

Occasionally. So I like that. I like that place.

L: So in this last while you don’t feel as lonely?

T: Yeah. So it was like the work with my counsellor in the workshop was looking at my life as a woman on my own. I stood and acknowledged my peace, and I stood alone in my darkness while the world looked on and I looked quite beautiful. (Laughs softly) So there’s where the blossoming is.

L: Okay. There seems to be a blossoming. I recognize, you used the word, I noticed dependent, you don’t feel a sense of being dependent on needing a man. That seems quite huge to me in terms of the shift I see in you. Somehow you’ve settled into, I wonder, the possibility of being alone? (T: Yes.) And as we said earlier there is an acceptance at some level that you can survive if you are alone that somehow feels different than it did when we talked last. (T: Yeah, yeah.) A couple of months ago it was like you’d die if you didn’t have a man. That’s a bit exaggerated, it was a fever kind of. (T: Yeah, yeah. It was feverish.) Feverish in the sense of in order to be and exist you needed to have a man. Feverish and now it’s like there’s a separation of you are okay without a man. You may have a primary partner at some point too.

Theresa was guided in her transformative process by skilled counsellors, and she experienced “healing” and a richer, new self-identity. Theresa used her counsellors’ support and groundedness to sustain her toward the next level of her Being-in-the-world. The counsellors assisted Theresa to maintain some sense of ground and stability throughout her chaos.

4.3 Becoming One’s Self: Through Body Knowing

[We need to reflect on] our experience . . .
inhabiting the world by our body, inhabiting the
truth of our whole selves.

Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*

(in Levin, 1989, p. 136)

As a counsellor I have heard innumerable stories about what I refer to as “body knowing.” I believe that “body knowing” is fundamental to the fulfilment of the self’s potential. To encourage transformation toward a more fulfilling life, I have helped clients to develop awareness of this knowledge and encouraged them to use their body wisdom. I encourage them to center their attention on their life concern at the body’s physical level, their “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1981), to open their awareness to the present moment (here and now), and to describe their body experience with “beginner’s mind.” Characteristically, at the moment when there is bodily engagement in the process of exploration, a dramatic shift occurs in the client’s experience. In my professional judgement, to live directly from one’s inner center, to acknowledge one’s internal sense, is restorative and healing. I am convinced that if we turn our attention inward and become more fully aware of our inner realm, we experience our “inner truth,” which guides us

in how to live our life. In my own life, my learning from my body (embodied knowing) evoked a process of transformation that led me through some deep psychological conflicts and out the other side to a profound transformed sense of identity. I have difficulty in my search for language to express the “felt sense.” what I have learned from my body knowing. The feeling/experience is one of “knowing” at a visceral level. Carl Rogers acknowledges that “Learning as it takes place in therapy is a total, organismic, frequently non-verbal type of thing which may or may not follow the same principles as the intellectual learning” (1961, p. 86). In conversation with Faye, one of the co-researchers, she expressed many of the body knowing themes that emerged both in my client’s lives and in the themes referred to by the literature.

In order to “become one’s self,” we must have knowledge of who we are. I refer to this process of self-understanding, wherein we deepen our knowledge of self, as self-awareness. Self-awareness is the ability to be aware of one’s experience or the “experiencing of one’s experience” (Rogers, 1961, p. 76). One route “back to our self,” or toward developing self-awareness, is through our body. Through our receptivity and responsiveness to our body we can understand our experience of Being. Levin (1985) offers his perspective on embodiment. He asserts that we “cannot articulate our existential potential for being without going into the depths of our experience of embodied being” (p.8). His perspective provides an important focus on body understanding, which contributes to the full story of the self’s “Becoming” and the self’s fulfilment of its potential.

Levin writes:

Our first understanding of Being, and of ourselves in relation to Being, the primordial understanding we already enjoy as a child, is given to us by way of our embodiment.

(1985, p. 8)

I believe that our conceptual knowing is rooted in experience. If we understand experience to be embodied in our Being-in-the-world, then we see perception and understanding as a process rooted in the body experience. There is an embodied dimension to all our actions:

Merleau-Ponty writes of the “body subject” as a way of conveying the intertwining of the physical and mental, and of “corporeal schema” to refer to our intimate, preconscious attunement to the world around us.

(Valle & Halling, 1989, p.187)

We carry our meaning, history, and life in our body. Gendlin (1981) emphasized the level of meaning we carry at a bodily level. Lowen (1970) characterized movement as the language of the body. Reich (1972) believed that it is through movement that we express feelings and, therefore, through the lack of movement that we block them.

Our knowledge of self through our body can lead toward the experience of our self in a new way; we shift toward the experience of “Being,” a different person. We can have a new response to a particular issue, for example, fear and pain. We can feel more connected to our self, and somehow more accepting of that very thing that earlier we were not accepting: a previously

unaccepted aspect, feeling of self, prior to body insight. Through body knowing one learns to make friends with oneself, and learns to be what one is.

Pain is often the initial impetus for a person's movement toward something different: therefore, a person often encounters pain as part of the process of self-transformation. Pain accompanies us while we enter the chaos inherent in transformation from one mode to another, for example, from one identity to another. My belief is that our pain can be our opening to a deeper understanding. I have found this to be true in my own personal experience as well as in my work with others. I think that by going deeply into our pain, we are able to gain a depth of understanding of the past that allows its integration and alters the course of the future. In his discussion of pain, Levin (1985) suggests being with pain in a manner that simply allows it to be present:

To the degree that we can simply be present with our pain, we are engaged in a process that opens to a new dimension of truth, and therefore we make ourselves more available for a new disclosure of its deeper historical meaning.

(p. 88)

Faye's story begins with her recognition of the importance of letting pain "simply be present" in order to move to its deeper meaning. She discusses her self-awareness and her resolve to be present. Body knowing has been an important source of knowledge for Faye. She has a history of arthritis. At one point in her disease process, Faye's arthritis immobilized her to a level that required her to use a wheelchair. That period of time is deeply imprinted in Faye's reality. She is no longer in a wheelchair yet continues to cope with

arthritis and the ensuing body symptoms. Faye is a keen observer of her body and mindful in her observation of herself. In the following excerpt we are introduced to Faye's story:

Faye: I remember you saying the last time I saw you that it seemed to you that I'm doing more letting go, or something or less driven, or something and I think, "Yeah, I really am." (L: Yeah) What I'm noticing about myself is as soon as I get driven, as soon as I'm really efforting I tighten, I have more pain, I'm less present and my pleasure goes. So my project these days is to stay really present and feel the pleasure that's there if I can be present. Sometimes I have pain at the same time.

Lorna: You have pain at the same time.

F: Sometimes. I have a lot of pain in my body so often I will take a few breaths and then I'll feel, "Oh, my foot really hurts, oh, my arm really hurts or I have a headache." Whatever, but I don't have to hook into that now it seems. Like today in my counselling session I was able to not hook into that and breathe and just go, you know, "Oh, that's interesting about that pain," but just slow down. It's all about slowing down. Really slowing down and just staying with my self and not breathing faster because that's how I learned to do it, or because my counsellor is encouraging me to. It's about staying with myself and staying present and feeling the pleasure that just comes when I do that. Sometimes it's just delicious. I can feel this pleasure coursing down my legs, my hands, or the top of my head.

In the foregoing transcript, Faye refers to "being present" as learned through her body, her pain and the emerging pleasure. She learned to listen to her bodily felt sense. Levin contends that "the development of our capacity for listening, [is] a 'practice of the Self' " (1989, p. 21). Being present involves being

in the here and now, located in the immediate moment. Presence enables a person to be aware of self and other at the same time. It suggests the capacity to remain centered within one's self yet able to respond to the other with awareness. It is a "being with" self and the other in a mode of intense participation and heightened attention.

Lorna: Sensational pleasure. (F: Sensational pleasure.) I want to talk about staying with yourself and staying present. What I just thought. You said something about just keep being present and coming back to yourself. I was curious about pursuing that.

Faye: Yeah, one of the things I really learned in counselling is how I get away from myself and that I've learned to come back, better.

L: How do you learn when you're away from your self? How do you know when you're away from yourself?

F: I've really learned to recognize it. How? I've really learned more than I knew before because now I notice things because of practicing coming really present in counselling sessions. I'm more used to now telling when I'm not really present so I've learned for instance when I come really present I see more clearly and I can just notice, "Oh, I'm really seeing clearly. Oh, I'm really present." Or I'm seeing a little less clearly: I'm only three-quarter present or hardly at all if I'm gone. So I recognize that. That's the first thing I notice. I learned that through my first session with Marie (counsellor). Going, "Oh my goodness, I see so clearly."

Here, Faye uses the metaphor of vision to describe her understanding in her life. She further describes how she has learned to be her self through "being present" to her self. Through her relationship with her counsellor, who drew Faye's attention to her "present and non-present" states, Faye learned to recognize presence for her self. This was an empowering experience for Faye.

Lorna: And how did you learn to be present?

Faye: How did I learn to be present. (L: What happened with Marie?)

F: Well the very first interaction we had, I was just talking about, I was just introducing myself, and I was saying how I had just split up from my husband, and I had split up in March. I started to cry and was feeling quite lost and miserable, and I think I was kind of fragmented, that's a term for that kind of lost, kind of falling apart not together feeling. She (Marie) just said to me, "Are you all right, right now?" And I said, "Well, yeah, actually I am," and I came present. (Laughs) Because it was just that getting me to focus on how am I right now, in the moment.

L: Instead of the memory.

F: Instead of the memory! So it was her getting me into my body and just asking me how I am right now. I had to check in with my body to find out, and there I was. Then I was present, and then I was fine. (L: Yeah, neat.) So how I get into my body now, how I get present now is to come back into my body.

Faye demonstrated the strategy she uses in the immediacy of our conversation.

F: Oh yeah, feel the cushion under my bum and under my legs and under my feet. Be aware of my breathing and just come into my body and then I'm here.

The experience of being right in the moment (here and now) and not thinking about past or future facilitates presence and enhances Faye's well being. Faye further responds to my question with a statement that illustrates a key aspect of the transformational process: bringing the unconscious into consciousness.

L: So in a conscious way you now notice your body.

F: Yeah, yeah. I do it on purpose now because I want to be present. Yeah, that brings me present. So, that's what I'm doing. Does that answer your question?

Lorna: Yeah, the part about present and there was something in there about you're being, becoming more yourself.

Faye: Oh, yeah. Coming back to myself.

L: Coming back to yourself. But I needed to understand the present part about how you were defining present first. You said coming back to yourself. What's that about?

F: Yeah. I think that's about presence too, yeah. I think that's about presence too. When I'm with somebody else the trick for me, because it's not what I used to do, is to stay, is to be in contact with somebody else and still be really with myself. So conscious of myself, still present, in my body, with myself, as opposed to totally out there with you or whoever, which I can do if I'm really anxious. I try to figure out what you want or how to answer you correctly or how to do whatever it takes to stay in contact with you instead of being with myself.

L: So your sense of yourself is different if you're focused on me and outer focused as opposed to present and centered in yourself. Is that what you're saying?

F: Well it's about centered but not exactly about focus because if I'm listening to you I'm with you but I'm also with myself. So that's what I've learned to do that's different, is to be both listening to you and present with you and present with myself at the same time, instead of just kind of locating myself with you or in you in some way and leaving myself. It's very hard to; it's very hard to describe in words. It's probably kinaesthetic more than anything else. It's an experience of my body. It's an experience of when I'm feeling myself, I'm feeling myself in my body. So, if I can't feel my body, then it's like I'm not entirely with myself, or feeling like I'm connected to myself. I think it is about awareness. So actually when I say with myself, there's times when that seems like best language for it but there's other times when actually a better word for that would be aware of myself. But somehow it feels, I mean there's a kind **feeling** (emphasis) right about with myself. So with myself is more about

awareness and **contact** (emphasis) with myself. (L: MMhuh.) When I get anxious I'm not in contact with that or different states.

L: Yeah. It sounds like you've been able to get more in contact with that in your life.

F: Yeah. It's been the last couple of years it's been happening more.

The following story further illustrates the theme of embodied knowing and transformation. Self-acceptance, which emerges in Faye's story, is an important aspect of the transformational process. Several of the co-researchers refer to self-acceptance in relationship to their transformation, and I will pursue this topic later. In the following excerpt, we are witness to Faye's shift in perspective with regard to her fear and pain and the alteration in her belief that she had to get "rid of" her pain before well being occurred. Faye's acceptance of her pain and her insight into her capability for both pain and well being to co-exist led to her Being-in-the-world differently. Alexander Lowen (1970) wrote about the relationship between pleasure and pain. From the bioenergetics viewpoint, pleasure is a phenomenon of letting go. Discomfort is the result of holding on, and pleasure comes in release. In his book, Pleasure, Lowen describes the phenomenon of pleasure:

To have pleasure one has to "let go," that is, allow the body to respond freely. A person who is inhibited cannot easily experience pleasure because unconscious restraints restrict the flow of feeling in his body and block his natural body motility.

(1970, p.29)

Faye consciously practices letting go in order to move beyond her pain.

Lorna: I'm interested in the last couple of years of just various things that stand out as significant. You were telling me last time we were together about one profound experience you had in a particular workshop where you had done a guided imagery and that was really powerful for you. I was interested in your recollection, wherever you want to start some of those significant moments. Whatever comes to mind.

Faye: Sure, sure, significant moments. So the guided imagery was she was getting people to get in touch with their sense of well being in their bodies, and as she did that, I became aware that I wasn't feeling well being, I was feeling pain. As well as pain, what often in my experience comes with that for me is fear because I think, "Oh does that mean I'm going downhill, does that mean I'll have more disability? What does this mean in terms of my life?" So it's not just about I hurt. It's, "Oh, what's this about? Where is it going?" So I was feeling quite crummy about it, feeling sad and scared instead of well being. And that went on for quite awhile. People were having more and more experiences of well being. She said, "Can you experience well being somewhere else in your body?" But then she said, "And can you find somewhere in your body where you're not used to feeling well being, where you haven't noticed it. Can you feel just even a few cells of well being; someplace that's strange to you, where you don't normally feel that?" And you know I'd been listening to all this, that you know I'd been going in and out because of my fear and the pain. And so I thought, "Well, okay maybe I could do that. I don't have any big, you know, there's no well-being happening here but I thought, well there's nothing unhappy about my thighs right now, they're not hurting, there's nothing." So I just imagined feeling a few cells of well-being in each thigh and thought, "Well, that works, I actually have that." And it grew and I was able to really feel that and at the same time that I felt the pain in my foot. And the fear, but I didn't go down the path of fear that takes me kind of away from myself. I just felt the pain and felt the pleasure, the real pleasure in my thighs, and that was the first time I

remember really feeling both, actually able at the same time to hold on to both. And it was amazing, and it's still with me, I mean that was September. It was a real turning point for me. That set me off on this path that I'm going on with my counsellor now.

This is a key turning point in Faye's experience of her self. Through her embodied knowing she has come to a deeper understanding of herself and has been different ever since. Her acceptance of her patterns of existence, her pain, helped her gain a deeper integration within herself. This is a transformational process that has developed from her body knowing.

L: I wondered if where you are now was connected back to that, well I made the assumption it was, but I'm curious how it is connected with where you are now.

F: It seemed just so important to me. It has affected; it has coloured how I am in the world now. It has triggered my reaching a different stage around my disability so that I'm experiencing self-acceptance a lot more than I was. This is **huge** (strong emphasis) for me because I've been struggling with this for so many years. I've been struggling with this since...

L: Yeah, how many years?

F: Let me think, since 1984. I think I first injured myself in 1984. Agh! Thirteen years! I've been struggling with disability and I've reached something. Although it's not the first time I've felt some acceptance, because I did reach a point earlier where I kind of accepted it, "Okay, I have arthritis on the knee," but it wasn't anywhere near as much acceptance as this.

L: I got a sense that this is big.

F: It felt like it was big, yeah.

Lorna: And you described it a minute ago, as you were different now since that experience. Spreading a few cells.

Faye: Yeah, I think one of the things it affected a lot was my fear level. I'm less afraid.

L: Less afraid of . . . ?

F: Less afraid of life. I'm not afraid of life because life is scary, there could be an earthquake and I'm scared of that. But I'm a little less afraid of life. I think I feel more solid in my self in some way. I feel more able to cope, but cope isn't exactly the word. I think it's something like the worst thing that happens to me when I'm really not okay is that I abandon myself in some way. (L: Ah.) That's the worst thing that happens. I'm so scared, I'm so bummed out that I'm fragmented and then nothing's any good. So I'm less afraid that I'm going to do that.

L: Less afraid that you're going to fragment?

F: Less afraid that I'm going to fragment. So there's a way in which then I have a whole self more securely, and I'm less afraid I'm going to lose my whole self if I can't walk or whatever. (L:Ah.) I won't like that. I don't want to have more disability, but I'm less afraid that I will fall apart emotionally. (L: Yeah.) So, yeah, it makes quite a difference to me, because I have the experience of finding some well being even in the midst of pain.

L: Yeah. So there's a sense, it was physical for you. You have a sense of yourself being able to hold pain and well being in your body at the same time. And, previously it wasn't the same.

F: No, previously it was if I had pain I had to wait. I had to figure out a way of getting rid of the pain before I could be okay, and now I have a sense that I can be okay even though I have pain. And I mean kind of a deep okay. I mean, "I'm all right, really."

L: Which gives you what you describe as a different sense of your self.

F: Oh Yeah, you used the word assurance, too. I didn't pick up on that at first, and I think, "Yeah, there is some, there is a kind of assurance in that, in a sense." Yeah.

Faye's description of "more solid in herself" expresses her integration. She defines herself as separate from her disability and expresses a confidence in her ability to carry on her life. Faye's self-acceptance and her willingness to "let go," and accept her pain facilitates this shift.

4.4 Self In Process: Toward The "Self One Truly Is."

An individual can only become
what he is and always was.

Jung, The Practice of Psychotherapy (1966)

The self is a process. We are always moving toward the fulfilment of our possibilities, our potential. Maslow (1968) referred to this as self-actualization. I resonate with Levin's (1985) reference to self-development and self-realization as being synonymous with Heidegger's notion of our capacity for "deepening-our-openness to Being." Jung (1966) called the process of self-realization "individuation." He refers to the part of the human personality that desires to complete itself as "an eternal child." It is the part of the human personality that is always "becoming," a term that Carl Rogers has used extensively. According to Levin, "the 'eternal child,' which is hidden in the typical adult, and which cries out for recognition and an opportunity to develop itself is what Heidegger would call the 'authentic self': that implicit dimension of our existence which is always and already enjoying a primordial attunement to Being-as-a-whole" (1985, p. 6).

A number of existential-humanistic-phenomenological thinkers, including Welwood (1990), May (1977), Rubin (1975), Levin (1985), suggest that our "Authentic Self" becomes lost in the process of everyday living; we lose touch

with our innermost potential for being, and it is through reflection, deepened self-understanding and self-acceptance that we “reclaim” our authentic self.

4.41 Movement Toward Our Authentic Self

One co-researcher, Dean, referred to his process of moving toward his “Authentic Self” as part of his transformational process in the conversation that follows. He introduced “The Ideal Self” model in our conversation and its relationship to his “Authentic Self.” He remembered an early personal growth workshop experience where he developed the understanding that was an opening to his transformation toward “becoming” more authentic:

Dean: All that I did for a good part of my life was try to avoid facing those issues that were created and do something else externally and finally I ran out of energy and the real need to do that. I didn't like who I was so I went to a workshop and then for the first time had to confront myself as other people saw me. Feedback was dreadful. The first group. . . . I couldn't do another workshop for two years after that. I had so much to do. Because the whole concept of self-responsibility, of liking who I was, and holding on to that feeling, because I get it now and my challenge is to know that once in awhile I won't, and that's okay. (L: Mmhuh.) But in those days just the concepts that I had to understand and operating based on what people thought rather than what was good for me. It was the beginning of me not changing but raising my level of awareness about what my effect was on other people and the effect of what I did on myself. Avoiding certain ways of being. That was not a conscious process!

Lorna: Oh, interesting.

D: I think I operated under self-deception of who I really was. (L: Mmm.) What my emotional limits were, what my financial limits, my intellectual

limits. I always thought, in fact I never thought, I just assumed I could do anything I wanted to do. That wasn't true so I think I deceived myself in order to survive. Because I think if I saw all the truth I would've been really depressed. This is what I think happens now.

Metzner (1980, p. 51) referred to this state as "from illusion to realization" and described it: "The transformation of consciousness involves the transcending or dissolving of this web of illusions." In peeling away those layers of deception, Dean's self-perception is altered from deceptive self-images and concepts to "self-realization." This self-awareness assists his movement toward his "Authentic Self." Theodore Isaac Rubin believes that "Hearing illusions can be of enormous value. Tuning into ourselves to pick up on any 'sounds' smacking of illusion is invaluable. Discovery of illusion can be followed by almost spontaneous surrender of illusion. Disillusionment, that is initiated consciously, in the pursuit of compassionate reality can proceed along a much less stormy course" (Rubin, 1975, p. 139).

Lorna: Because who you really were, was...

Dean: Yeah. That's right. I saw what I really was based on; the best way for me to explain it is the ideal self thing that Ben and Jock have. The ideal self, the actual self, and the authentic self. I had no authentic self I didn't even know the concept. I had a very powerful ideal self and had very little idea of my actual self. I had strong ideal self and it was based mostly on external references to my parents, my family, and all the people in society that I knew. That was how I built my life. That came tumbling down.

Lorna: I was just thinking about that. That's who you believed you were to be. It must have been incredibly painful when you started seeing.

(Dean: Seeing the actual self.) Yeah.

Dean: See, because there really wasn't much there. I did have very limited intellectual capacity in comparison to a lot of people. I had very few of the skills that a lot of people have and yet somehow I deceived myself that I had these.

Lorna: So how did you support yourself while you were crumbling?

D: Well what it felt like, I remember a good friend and I talking about this. I told her this loss of illusion is getting to where I can hardly handle it anymore. (L: Yeah.) There were so many that came at me so much at once. She said, "Well, just tie up, pretend they're balloons and they've got helium in them and just let them go and watch them leave." Well I must have done that for three years, "Oops, there's another one." And what mental health was to me was getting rid of all those illusions about myself and getting closer to recognizing the actual self and then hopefully start working on the authentic part of my life, and that's what I recognize I'm doing and have been doing for quite a few years is working. Working is the wrong word, it is moving toward, moving towards being more authentic. (L: Yeah.) Being the authentic self. And I get glimpses of it quite often and know when it's happening and I love it. It makes me feel good. That's where self-esteem comes from for me. It comes from being authentic. So you talk about self. It's being authentic.

L: Where do you feel it in your body?

D: Right here.

L: You feel it in your chest. D: Mmm., (softly, vulnerable?) Are you being authentic right now?

D: Mmm. (Vulnerability? Quiet voice tone, young. Pause).

I recall my feeling during this part of our conversation. I witnessed Dean being present in his vulnerability; he came forward in his authentic being in this moment in our conversation. I noted in my transcription his soft, childlike voice.

Jourard says, “Authentic being means being oneself, honestly, in one’s relations with [others] . . . dropping pretense, defenses and duplicity” (1971, p. 133). I felt connected at a deep level to Dean, in resonance with him at that moment. I felt recognition of my own authenticity. “This would be recognition from the Latin root *re + cognoscere*: to know again, to be reminded of something about the self connected to the other” (Wong & McKeen, 1998, p. 221). I understood authentic being when Dean spoke of being authentic. In the words of Ben Wong and Jock McKeen, to whom Dean referred earlier, “When people understand someone else, they have a felt experience of understanding themselves as they resonate in relationship to the other” (1998, p. 221).

Lorna: I was just getting my picture of you as historically, there you were an ideal self, and that’s all you knew as self and you learned actually all that ideal self, you learned that that’s who the self is and then you came to the place of learning, “Oh god! That’s an ideal self and here’s who I actually am and I have these shortcomings!” And starting to let go and recognize the ideal self. You started to let go of some of that and started to feel who you were, that authenticity more and that’s been your journey, for years.

Dean: That’s been my journey, because the ideal self I think for me required an enormous amount of self-deception. And it was letting go of that self-deception, it was the letting go of illusions. That was painful. In getting to the authentic self, it’s not, it’s not work. It’s there if I let go of the illusions and be who I am and not try to be somebody else or something else, the authentic self moves forward. It’s like it’s there, it’s there. I don’t have to develop it. (L: Mmm.) I think I have to allow room for it. (L: Mmm.) So that is probably the best way to express my journey would be that ideal, actual, authentic self, and self-deception. I remember one of

my counsellors talked about authentic self, he said to me once, I was talking about this, he said, "Well, actually in my office I make appraisals of people and assessments of people based on self-deception. Because I think good mental health, the closer you are to having few self-deceptions the healthier you're going to be." So it means you face yourself as you are. As is.

4.42 Letting Go of the Ideal Self

I have found "The Ideal Self" model valuable in my professional life as a counsellor as well as in my personal life. It is one of the frames of reference that I use to facilitate my understanding of the development of clients when I work with them. I was first introduced to this model in a personal development workshop that I attended called "Phase One: Self Awareness" led by Ben Wong, and Jock McKeen. The focus of the 26-day residential workshop was the development of the self. "The Ideal Self" model provided much insight and a structure to integrate many of my ideas.

A basic premise of "The Ideal Self" model is that we are born with an "Authentic Self," our innermost potential for "Being-as-a-whole." The authentic self is described as:

The basic nature and characteristic personality of the infant. . . .
 [This is] "a particular essence of the individual's being (some refer to it as the "soul"). This includes all the potential of that person's being that could come to fruition with time and future experience.

(Wong & McKeen, 1992, p. 16)

Through daily living the child learns from the parent's expectations and their behaviour toward the child. From these indications the child forms an image of

what is required to please the parents. The child modifies his or her behaviour and develops a self-image that will gain approval and be acceptable to the parents. This developing image of the self that will be acceptable and gain approval is referred to as the "Ideal Self." These expectations and demands become incorporated into a self-regulating system of behaviour in the maturing person. In one of our conversations Dean referred to this phenomenon as his "Ideal Self." He described his recognition that he had internalized his parent's values as part of his "Ideal Self" and had lived according to those values. In the following transcript Dean and I discussed the influence philosophical thinking had on his self-perception.

Dean: And Peter Koestenbaum of course was important. I had more little ahas with Koestenbaum than I have with anybody, well not anybody, but I had a lot from him.

Lorna: You had a lot of ahas around him. What was that about?

D: Oh, philosophical instead of psychological.

L: So what do you mean? What does that mean to you? How is it important?

D: Well philosophy deals to me, with, the meaning of life, the meaning of self, exploration of self, looking beyond the existential day-to-day problems that we all have. That's what I was dealing with, I was just dealing with all the problems of life and not looking at: Well, what am I doing here? What's the meaning of my life? What do I want to do with it beyond work? How can I live without defining myself by my work? That was what I learned with philosophy was living beyond the definition of work. Very important for me. So I learned from philosophy to look at the much bigger picture in relationship to just my job. I was so intent on proving myself to my father that I never really looked around.

In the above conversation Dean referred to becoming more conscious of his life. His encounter with Peter Koestenbaum and Peter's ideas initiated Dean's awakened consciousness. He became much more aware of himself and his life, and it's automaticity. He began to examine himself.

Lorna: What did Peter do or talk about or how was Peter that some of the ahas happened for you with him?

Dean: Well he was a philosopher to begin with. He had done all those things. He had examined all the transpersonal issues of life himself and so he used to teach that you can't really step into the transpersonal and do all that stuff unless you've dealt with your own backyard which is earning money, raising a family, if you have one. All the things that make up the routine of a life. Those are the day-to-day things. So he wants you to go beyond that and start examining the meaning of your life, an understanding of cultural history so that we can see where we came from. How we evolved this way. The Existential Crisis, I read that book fifteen times and finally started to get it. The difference between the existential and transpersonal. Very important. So then you have to start thinking about spirit, soul, about religion, about all these transpersonal issues, death. I have, I can safely say, I have gone through my fear of death and I don't have it. That's philosophical. That's a learning and a transformation. My mother died terrified at the time, it was **awful** (emphasis). She was a lovely woman, she led a great life and she dreaded dying and my god I've lost that. I used to have that too.

L: So just a little aside for a minute. You mentioned your mother. Is there some connection around your own transformation of going beyond your parents' development with some issues?

D: Oh heavens yes. I think that's what the values things were about. I mean that's a simple phrase to say values but my Mom had values that she brought with her through generations, my Dad brought them and

somehow they combined and they were our model for our values. (L: Yeah.) And I never examined those in the thirty-five, forty years of my life. I never even looked at them. I took for granted that they were okay. When I started examining them they weren't okay. Some were really good. They were honest people. My parents had a lot of integrity and they were bright but not intelligent. Loving, intention of loving, my mother. So I kept or wanted to keep the values I liked, but I would say a good percentage of the values I have now were not shared by my parents.

In his process of questioning his life Dean realized that many of his unexamined values were inappropriate. He had learned his values from his parents; had internalized them for himself and behaved automatically. In thoughtful reflection Dean realized that many of his values no longer fit his life. In this acceptance of the "old part" of himself; the identity that had formed these values, and in his recognition of his "new" emerging identity he was able to discard the old values. This "letting go" represents his going beyond his earlier definition of himself; letting go of his "Ideal Self." He kept the values most suitable for him. For Dean to live in accordance with his own values and stand forth in an individuated way deepens his awareness of himself and others. "To stand forth requires the courage to be oneself" (Wong & McKeen, 1998, p. 152). When one individuates, one makes free choices, and becomes more authentically oneself. This transformation from life lived with unexamined values to life in accordance with a deeper, authentic set of values transpired for Dean in his relationship with Peter Koestenbaum.

Dean: So it was definitely seeing. That's what transformation is, it's seeing where you are, deciding whether that's okay and then taking steps to do something about it if it isn't. And that's going back twenty-six years. That's where I must have made that decision because to leave my wife and kids like I did, it felt like survival. So it must have been some huge internal shift that had to take place. Ben called it, the dark night of the soul. And anything can happen. You walk out on best friends and situations. You quit your job. You do all these crazy things.

Lorna: It was survival.

D: It was survival. (L: Survival of?) My survival. I wasn't going to live long. I tell you I still wouldn't be here if I hadn't done it. I wouldn't be here. I was going to drink. I was going to take drugs. I was going to do everything in order to put down those feelings of not liking who I was. It was **dreadful** (emphasis). I was like that all through childhood. I **hated** (emphasis) who I was, I couldn't stand up for myself. I mean it was a lousy experience.

Dean experienced inner conflict between his "Ideal Self" and his "Actual Self." He recognized that he was out of contact with his inner self and was not living according to his values. This created disharmony, unhappiness, and desperation. Recognition as used here is in the sense of to understand, to acknowledge or identify, and to be aware of something. He referred to his unease in the above protocol, "I was going to drink. . . I was going to do everything to put down those feelings of not liking who I was." When a person lives out of integrity with himself or herself, he or she can experience symptoms such as the despair Dean felt. "I hated who I was." Dean sought to address the "crisis of meaning" in his life.

Lorna: So Peter helped you, there was that opportunity for that delving deeper in a philosophical way to look at, (D: And the transpersonal issues.) the transpersonal issues.

Dean: Which I had never done. I'd never faced a discussion of death; I'd never faced a discussion of the spirit. I had never even thought of it.

With self-awareness, which came out of the influence of Peter Koestenbaum's philosophical thought, Dean moved toward his "Authentic Self," and lived according to his own values.

The developing child wants to express the impulses of the "Authentic Self" which is sometimes in opposition to what is expected initially by parents and, later, by authorities, institutions, and society in general. "As expectations are incorporated within the personality, as a self governing Ideal Self, the struggle becomes an inner one. Once this process has been internalized it occurs even in the absence of parents or any external authority" (Wong & McKeen, 1998, p. 24). In my office I have witnessed many clients play out this "Authentic Self"- "Ideal Self" theme in regard to their life circumstance and struggle between what they "want" to do and what they "ought" to do.

Both clients and myself have found it fruitful to explore client expectations and develop self-knowledge of the client's internalized "Ideal Self."

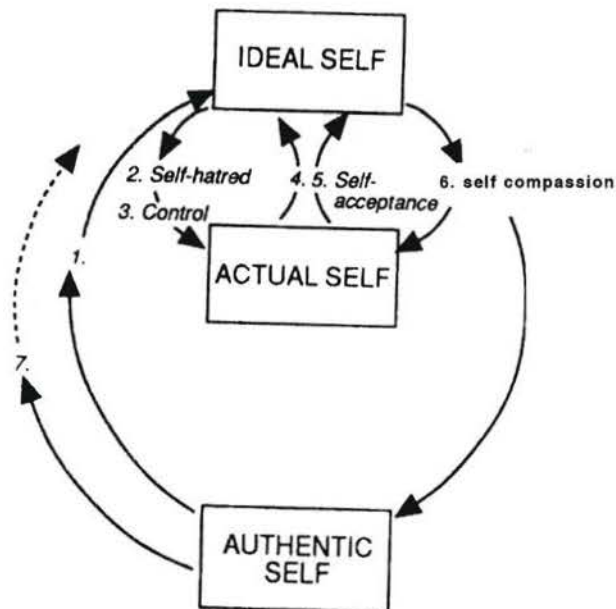
In a further description of their model, Wong and McKeen go on to say:

In most cases the desires of the Authentic Self must be surrendered to the Ideal Self's demands for acceptance. The result is usually some form of compromise that establishes the expressed behaviour of a developing 'Actual Self.' These 'selves' are constellations of a process; they are not separate, or distinct

entities. Through such a process, the child becomes a relatively well behaved, civilised person prepared to be educated for responsibilities as a future adult. Each person lives with these three selves (Authentic Self, Ideal Self, Actual Self), trying to satisfy all of them in order to maintain some emotional balance and ease (“sanity”).

(1998, p. 24)

The “Authentic Self” is the self one “truly is.” The “Actual Self” is the compromise we make between our “Authentic Self” and our “Ideal Self,” the product of morals, rules, prescriptions, and restrictions.



Adapted from A Manual For Life, Wong and McKeen

Additional concepts that illuminate the value of this model for me are self-hatred, self-compassion, and self-acceptance. I will use transcript excerpts to

illustrate the relationship between these concepts and transformation. This model has been of significance to me in my own personal transformation. One major transformation has been an identity shift from a person who lived with a great deal of self-hate to an experience of myself wherein I bring considerably more self-acceptance and self-compassion to my self. Through this shift my experience and definition of myself is markedly different.

To develop the “Ideal Self” people learn to adopt and perform acceptable social roles; these roles help to maintain the image of the “Ideal Self” at the expense of the “Authentic Self.” In order to carry on their lives achieving and accomplishing, those people ignore their deeper nature. Dean spoke earlier of his illusions that he had created of himself. In his inflation of his self: the expectations of his “Ideal Self,” the disparity between his image and his “Authentic Self” emerged as self-hate. Over time people lose touch with their feelings and may experience physical symptoms, emotional unease, and spiritual deadness. Dean talked about this with respect to leaving his marriage; “It was survival, my survival. I was going to drink, take drugs.” Dean’s description of the despair that he felt characterizes the process of a person not in contact with the “Authentic Self. ” Dean’s story described his movement away from his “Authentic Self” over the years. Another time he reports his achievements which reflect his “Ideal Self.” “I had a family, money in the bank, a successful business, yet, I wasn’t happy.” Theodore Isaac Rubin, in his book Compassion and Self-Hate (1975), offers extensive commentary with regard to the process of self-hate and its consequences. The results of self-hate appear

in feelings of anxiety and depression or are witnessed in compulsive self-destructive behaviours, such as over-eating, heavy drinking, over-working, or over-achieving. These patterns of self-defeating behaviour can lead to low self-esteem wherein a person is driven to greater success to overcome the increasing self-hatred felt internally. Some people may develop body symptoms wherein an illness develops. Emotionally a person may feel barren, empty or have a sense of their life lacking meaning or purpose.

4.43 Self-compassion: The Royal Road to Authentic Self

What is the route out of the self-hate cycle one might ask? Wong and McKeen (1998), and Rubin (1975) propose that a way out of this cycle is to learn self-compassion. In self-compassion one draws closer to the self and finds acceptance for all parts of the self. Wong and McKeen (1998) propose the three A's of self-compassion: (a) awareness, (b) acknowledgement, and (c) acceptance. When people embark on a development process of self-compassion through awareness, acknowledgement, and acceptance, they can become sensitive to their deeper authentic nature.

(A). Awareness

In the following conversation Dean discusses his awareness and subsequent shift wherein his perception of himself changed. At the beginning of our conversation I read a poem that represents the three A's that lead to self-compassion.

Lorna: I thought of opening today's conversation by having you respond to this poem by Portia Nelson, [Autobiography in 5 Chapters](#).

Autobiography in 5 Chapters

I walk down the street,
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in.
I am lost. . . I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

I walk down the same street
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it
I fall in, again.
I can't believe I am in this same place.
But, it isn't my fault
It still takes a long time to get out.

I walk down the same street
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it there.
I still fall in. . . it's a habit. . . but,
my eyes are open
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

I walk down the same street
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I walk around it.

I walk down another street.

Dean: Laughs. Oh, I love this. (Chuckles) Changing. I will never change who I am but I can change the patterns that I have learned to live with. I can actually influence and change my acculturation. How I was raised, because then I can bring into consciousness what my parents values were, what my values were, and then actually I can shift those values. In this case, the transformation of the person, the transformation would be self-knowledge about who I am, what my behaviours are, where they came from, and being something else by choice. So that's transformation for me, becoming conscious.

Lorna: What does being something else mean to you?

D: Well, I thought I just said. (L: What's an example?) Well, I had a dependency on women as I grew up with my mother and three sisters. So what I didn't see was how dependent I was on the female, females generally, for my emotional well being, and to be taken care of by them. That was not conscious. So in my work of counselling, that became conscious, then I could make a choice of whether I wanted to keep it or not and I didn't like it. It took me a long time to see it.

The consciousness that Dean refers to is synonymous with awareness.

Awareness of what we think, how we feel, and how we function is consciousness. Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary defines it as: "1. The state of being conscious; aware of one's self and one's surroundings. . . 3. The mental and emotional experience and awareness of an individual." (1978, p. 287). Dean described how he was initially unaware of his dependence on women. He acknowledged his pain in his recognition of himself. His acknowledgement of who he was: dependent on women, and his later acceptance of himself, exemplifies self-compassionate behaviour. In his recognition of himself Dean is able to make a decision. His choice at that time

was to be different, "something else by choice." In acknowledgement, one says to one's self and the other, "This is the way I am. This is who I am."

Dean: It was painful. I didn't even want to see it at first then it gradually dawned on me that to be with another person, to be with a woman, I wanted to be, I had to really know all that part of myself and not stay in those old patterns. Learn new ways to be. Be more dependent on myself for my emotional well being because I was raised in an acculturation where I did not do that. For what reasons it doesn't matter now, I just didn't do it. So, changing a pattern, that to me is a transformation. I was experiencing something in life, about a dependency I grew up with, with my family, mostly with women. I didn't know that, I went to counselling, went to workshops, finally got it, saw the connection to mother, to women, saw how it was being acted out in my life with women, (L: Yeah.) and making or hoping they would do my emotional work for me. Many, many forms that took; cooking meals and doing everything, keeping the house, sexuality on demand. It doesn't matter. It was like a dependency that I took for granted. I didn't like that when I saw it. So transformation is going through that, recognizing it and then being different. Being in a different way. Changing old patterns and values to meet my best. I think that is the biggest thing for me, is I was living by someone else's values. I don't think they were mine, so, my job. Transformation was identifying what my real values were and living by them instead of one's I took on from parent, church, society, and necessity. I learned a lie by necessity. That's a value.

Lorna: You learned what?

D: I learned a lie. Not lie like I would tell a direct lie, but I would not tell the whole truth. I would manipulate women. I would do anything, because that's the way I knew how to do it. But when I saw it I didn't like it. So that's transformation to me. So transformation in counselling

allows me to see my patterns, values and behaviours and then make a choice about changing them.

L: I appreciate you articulating that.

D: That's transformation. So bringing into consciousness the unconscious is one of the keys to transformation. Bringing these conscious, they're almost in every cell of my body.

Dean speaks passionately of his sense of consciousness. His expression of consciousness as key to transformation represents my belief that when we awaken to unknown aspects of ourselves and develop self-awareness our subsequent choices reflect our changed way of Being-in-the-world.

(B) Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement is defined as: "1. The act of admitting: confession
2. Recognition of the existence or truth of something" (Funk and Wagnall's Dictionary, 1978, p. 12). Dean's recognition of his dependence on women is an acknowledgement of his "Authentic Self." When we acknowledge who we are as part of self-compassion we move toward our "Authentic Self." In the following conversation, Theresa, another participant, had been in deep despair since the separation from her husband. The event had thrown her into chaos and a subsequent shift in identity occurred. What came to the foreground for her was how she had formed her self-perception from being "a wife" to her husband, and a "couple" in the world. This sense of self had been unconscious until that identity, as a couple was gone. Our interviews took place six months after her separation and she had shared that this crisis encouraged her to ask existential questions about the meaning of her life: Who am I? What is

important in my life? She entered into a time of chaos wherein a major structure in her life is gone, her primary relationship. In this conversation she revealed her struggle:

Theresa: These days I am asking myself: What is the self? What am I really holding on to? Who am I?

Lorna: You're not sure right now or you're just asking or what's your sense?

T: I think I'm just kind of asking right now. I think that all my life I have always been, (Pause) I have shaped myself around the other. Others were always important so who I was was through others.

L: I remember you talking a bit about that. So is that part different now then before?

T: Well I think the difference... Well I think what it is, having been in a relationship with Todd, and being so intense, (Tears) I think... I think that especially in the last couple of years that I kind of saw myself through Todd's eyes or that Todd was more important than I was. That I, myself, that somehow I was always trying to figure out what he liked or what he didn't like. Or how could I be... And it didn't always work. It never worked actually, it was the worst place you can be in. I think now I don't have him any more. (L: You don't have his eyes.) I don't have his eyes, except his critical eyes. (L: They're still around?) Mmhuh, and I'm somewhat... and I think that I never have known... Well I'm just up against my addiction I think. My addiction of being, what do you call it, of being identified through others.

L: Other identified as opposed to self-differentiated.

T: Yeah. And so I feel my patterns... All the symptoms of addiction like the sweating, the panic attack.

L: When were you going through this?

T: The last couple of weeks.

L: And what do you think that's about?

Theresa: I think it's really about letting go of other eyes. I've been really letting go of Todd. So my dependencies on him; his music, his abilities, maybe my resistance to writing is part of that.

Lorna: So you defined yourself by him.

When Theresa admitted to the painful truth of her dependency on Todd (pseudonym) she acknowledged herself. This required courage. Tillich calls courage "self-affirmation 'in spite of,' namely in spite of nonbeing. . . He (sic) who is not capable of a powerful self-affirmation in spite of the anxiety of nonbeing is forced into a weak, reduced self-affirmation" (Tillich, 1952, p. 66). Theresa gained strength in her affirmation of herself. She speaks of her relationship in an attempt to understand herself.

Theresa: I probably defined myself totally through him thinking he was the greatest man. I don't have the power anymore that I used to have or you know people would say, "You're such a beautiful couple. You're so wonderful together. You're so wonderful. You're so strong. You're so generous."

Lorna: There's a whole identity gone. (T: Mmhuh) A big part of your identity.

T: Yeah a big part. You see I think that I was just in the process of getting that back when I was working. That I, I was the one that was good with people. It's like I got my identity and that was taken away too.

L: Where'd it go? You said that it was taken away.

T: Well it wasn't taken away, but the framework where I could hang my jacket up where I could say, "Okay I will . . ."

Theresa was in the difficult place of letting go of an old identity, feeling the loss of the familiar and known amidst the shifting and the uncertainty. In her

acknowledgement of her dependency she is able to make a different choice.

She sought the support of a counsellor to assist her during her initial separation that she experienced as an unstable time. The counsellor assisted her to locate and connect with the constant aspects of her self.

Lorna: So, you've seen your counsellor a couple of times. Tell me about what's going on with your counsellor.

Theresa: Well I think what goes on with him is that I kind of let go... He's a man. (L: Okay. And that's important to you.) Yeah. He's a man that has known me in different relationships.

L: Okay. So it's important for you to get his feedback? (T:Yeah.) Because he's a man and he has known you over a period of time. (T:Mmhuh.) In different relationships.

T: He's a caring man.... Who says, "I remember you as a good person. There's nothing wrong with you."

L: So he tells you that?

T: Yeah.

L: So he tells you you're okay.

T: He tells me it's really okay to be dependent. It's really okay to go through what I'm going through...

L: So he tells you whatever you're going through is okay. (T: Mmhuh.) What happens for you when you hear that? Do you believe him?

T: Yeah I do. I do. Yeah. So it's the balance because I do question my ability as a woman and then he gives me feedback saying, "Well remember the time that you had a sense of who you were as a woman." Or "No, I didn't see you that way." Or "Yes" or "No" "I remember you as a lovely woman and I remember you being loved." And I say, "Okay, I hear that."

L: So he has a long history with you. So that's part of why you sought him out. (T:Mmhuh.) It's that sense of he knows you well.

Theresa: Mmhuh. So it's kind of seeing myself again through another pair of eyes.... (L: MM.) (Tears)

Lorna: So seeing him helps you.

T: Well I use his eyes.

L: Yeah. How do you use his eyes?

T: Maybe it's not the use of his eyes. Maybe it's just a mirror. Well sometimes it feels that way. I'm saying, "Here I am, this is what is happening."

Theresa acknowledged herself in the statement, "Here I am" In her admission of her dependence on an old identity she moved toward greater acceptance of herself. Her willingness to acknowledge the "truth," of herself enabled her to "own" more fully her "Authentic Self."

T: And it's like I'm in either or anyway so what is happening right now then I think that is **who** (emphasis) I am. So there's that separation that is lacking and then I have my counsellor there who says, "Okay I see you," Or "I have seen you." Whatever I need to hear. So, then I can then step out, use his eyes to look at what I present and then I kind of integrate it and it becomes my own. And then this is separation happening here. Does this make sense?

(C) Acceptance

Acceptance is the act of accepting. To accept means to receive with favour, willingness, or consent. Acceptance of one's self requires a willingness to admit to or accept the self: the person one is. For people to become self-accepting, they need to accept all parts of themselves. They must come to know the "Ideal Self" and acknowledge it, yet, learn that they do not have to respond

to the demands and requirements of the “Ideal Self.” With this awareness of their “Ideal Self” they can open themselves to new patterns of behaviour and feelings. All of the co-researchers described this process. With self-acceptance a person can develop self-compassion and transform his or her patterns and move toward a more “Authentic Self.” Dean and I explored the effect of self-acceptance in his life.

Lorna: So you seem to me to be talking about self-acceptance here.

Dean: Oh absolutely. I could never have it. That’s what’s happened, it started to happen twenty-six years ago. I started to see the path to self-esteem was through accepting who I was.

Self-esteem is the measure by which one regards the self, the value that a person places upon themselves, the respect that they have for themselves. In his earlier lack of self-acceptance, Dean experienced low self-esteem (despair). He was unhappy with his accomplishments, even though by society’s measure he was “successful.” He had a loving family and friends, yet within himself he was unhappy (low self-esteem). No matter how hard he would strive, it was never enough. Dean recognized that the path out of his striving for perfection was self-acceptance. Dean learned to gain self-esteem from his own sense of the importance of how he lived his life: his values and judgements.

Dean: But first of all knowing who I was versus what someone else had said. Values, I had taken on other peoples. I had to get rid of that stuff that I took on as my values. Which weren’t. Some of them were, some of them weren’t, like how my father raised his kids is not a value of mine anymore. I don’t even like talking about it. He was ... It was like a really powerful power trip that he wanted us to conform. I don’t make the kids

do that anymore. So that was a transformation, of seeing myself that way. Let's just see what else was in my journal. (Reads journal.) This was March. Most of this is old. (Dean tells a story about his financial state.) So I said I don't have a security problem, I have plenty of money. So I don't know where it came from. It's like I never defined what was enough. (L: Oh.) See it was open-ended. If somebody had said, "You got three and a half million dollars." "So, I need six."

Lorna: This is a huge change, for you.

D: It's a huge change for me. Unbelievable. That is a transformation for me. In the last five years rather than the last twenty-five years.

(L. chuckles.) I'll own that.

Dean chose to be an autonomous individual and to live in accordance with his own values and beliefs. To own his "truth" of himself, his "Actual Self," and to let go of his strive toward perfection of those things that were part of his "Ideal Self," was a transformative process for Dean.

Lorna: You know we have to keep things in perspective.

Dean: Yes you do. I was going to say something about that. So that transformation around money has swept along with it a lot of other things. I used to be very envious of people. I didn't know it. It wasn't conscious but I would compete with them. There's friend of mine and I used to compare myself to and I came up short. I went through life, my god I couldn't believe what he did. I know I compared myself with other people and that is one of the most destructive things that I could ever do because I don't have the stamina, knowledge, background, motivation, values that he has.

Dean's acknowledgement of the strivings of his "Ideal Self," helped him develop self-compassion and move beyond some of his self-hate.

Dean: I don't even want to do what he did. I don't even think that I could do what he did. He was a one in a million. So what I wasn't doing was accepting who I was in relation to anybody else out there that was successful. (L: Mmhuh.) And what I didn't acknowledge was that I was successful. I never acknowledged that I was ever successful.

(Lorna: On your own.) On my own. I never had any help from anybody. I've never had a problem making money. So somehow I got all that mixed up and I was hoping somebody would come and rescue me or lie to me or some goddam thing because everybody does that.

Lorna: You've gone back a couple of times to, and I'm curious about exploring it, this thing about accepting, you just talked about it again accepting who you were and living according to your own values and you used the phrase, who I am really. Living according to who I am really, (D: That's after I get through...) What does that mean to you and what's that journey been?

D: Well that's the journey I've been talking about. When we get rid of the values that we've taken on from somebody else, live by those, and be really uncomfortable with them. Which is what was happening in 1992 was when I went to a workshop, I thought I had it all squared. I wasn't living by my values. I wasn't doing the things that made me feel good inside. I was doing something because my father did it or my mother did or somebody taught me it or I thought the world expected it of me or some stupid assumption I made. So, what was the statement? Really who I am?

L: Yeah, you said a couple times, "I wasn't being who I am, really."

D: Yeah. What I am really is I'm ... That's who I'm getting to know. The person that I really am. Doesn't have all those structures. That person who I'm really has it's own set of values. I didn't have my own set of values before. I had values from my culture.

L: So would it be fair to say you're more and more familiar, over the years, with what your own values are and you're living according to your

own values, (D: Yeah, mostly.) and owning them, and carrying forward according to your values.

Dean: Pretty well. It's still going on. The clarification of values is still going on but it's like fine tuning them. One I worked on for years was integrity. I thought I had it. I've always said I had a high level of integrity. I do things now and I think, "Mmm. That wasn't integrity." Now I have a better idea of what it is and that's living by my values not based on what I think other people want me to be or want me to do. So self-acceptance is huge. That's one of the biggest transformations because I did not like who I was nor did I accept who I was.

Lorna: And that's been a long journey.

D: From childhood.

Throughout this chapter the co-researchers described their experiences of transformation. It seems that an important dynamic of transformation is self-compassion: awareness, acknowledgement and acceptance. The journey of self-compassion occurs over time. As Dean's story reflected, "It's been a long journey, from childhood." When the co-researchers devoted their attention to the development of self-compassion and self-acceptance they experienced a fuller sense of the self, their "potential" for Being-in-the-world. Through awareness of the "Ideal Self" and "Actual Self," a person can begin to accept all parts of the self with warmth and understanding. As revealed in the co-researchers' stories: to become aware of our patterns, then to acknowledge these patterns to others as well as to oneself helps us to overcome these. In this revealing of the self, acceptance is demonstrated and furthered. Through acceptance individuals can develop self-compassion transforming old patterns.

When a person engages in a counselling relationship, the counsellor facilitates this process.

Chapter 5

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

At each stage of learning we must give up something
even if it is a way of life we have always known.

Ginevee, Australian Aboriginal

One of my committee members suggested that I track my reflections about writing my thesis using the following three questions:

- 1). What did you learn as a counsellor?
- 2). What did you learn as a scholar/researcher?
- 3). What did you learn as a person?

In my reflection these questions have proved a useful means to organize my thoughts; however, it should be recognized that they are an arbitrary separation because the personal cannot be separated from the professional. My Being-in-the-world as counsellor, scholar/researcher, and person are one. As I moved through the research process, these questions were in my consciousness and helped me to reflect on my learning in my journal entries.

5.1 My Learning as a Counsellor

For if we think of this existence of the individual as a larger or smaller room, it appears that most people learn to know only a small corner of their room, a place by the window, a strip of floor on which they walk up and down. Thus they have certain security

Rilke in Bly

I would say that as a counsellor I am more open. I am more willing to embrace life "as is." I am able to welcome what is there and see it with fresh eyes.

My altered perspective is an attitude, a way of Being, that I value. This new openness encompasses my vulnerability and enhances my honesty with myself while working with my clients. This openness manifests itself as self-disclosure in each of my interactions with my clients. I make myself accessible by extending myself to them. My relationship with my clients has deepened through my ability and willingness to be open with them. I am more authentic with my clients and more grounded in my self.

These are also some of the qualities that the co-researchers in my study referred to as important for them when they described their experiences of transformation. I have removed more of the “professional mask” that I was taught, and learned so well, early in my counselling training. I am more conscious of those presuppositions that guide my actions and interactions with others. I am more phenomenologically oriented, which means I bring an even greater understanding for the “other” and his or her lifeworld. For instance:

Journal entry, March 1999: Chaos. Old patterns continue to surface. This place I feel in today is the place I encourage my clients to tolerate. I think of Sally in particular at this moment. Her words, “I can’t stand this place much longer.” I encourage her; I support her. Today I want out! I feel as though I can’t tolerate much of this place. Will I be different with Sally the next time?

I am mindful of the research Irvin Yalom (1980) cites, which attempted to correlate client and therapist perceptions of key moments of change or growth in therapy, only to find that what the therapist imagined was critical or insightful was frequently not so perceived by client or patient. My attention is on their

phenomenological world. The personal experience of the client is at the center of Carl Rogers' teaching.

Journal entry, April 1998: I struggle a lot--and part of my deep structure is to define life as a struggle; I put my struggle lens on and seek it or at last notice struggle. I am reading Carl Rogers, Becoming a Person, again. I am "getting it." I feel richer as a person, counsellor, as I deepen my understanding of the concepts I write about in my proposal. I abandon my struggle momentarily and resonate with the language constructs of Carl Rogers.

Experiential learning has been important for me. Once my academic education in psychology was complete, it came as a relief to train with Bennett Wong, M.D., Jock McKeen, M.D., Jim Sellner Ph.D., Judy Sellner Ph.D., and Virginia Satir. These professionals and others were very clear about a premise I was willing to accept: the person is at the center of the counselling process, not the techniques. They taught experientially. In the experiential context I learned to reflect on my personal experience and apply my understanding of the conceptual knowledge to myself. This deepened my understanding of others. I have sought both personal and professional development workshops that enabled me to deepen my knowledge in an experiential manner. Through the decision to write this thesis, and further reflection, I have deepened my understanding and connection with my self.

Through its several doors, many people enter the psychotherapy profession in an effort to deepen their connection with the Self. Too often, professional training patterns take over and the Self is obscured or put to sleep. (Keith, 1987, p. 61)

Journal entry, November 1998: This shift in how I view my MA has created an openness and creativity in my work that was not there six months ago. I experience the “personal development” nature of my writing and reading. This was exciting for me because I began to understand transformation differently, my topic more deeply. Experiential knowing more than cognitive knowing. My understanding/meaning of transformation was changing, developing, unfolding.

These experiences have contributed to the development of my whole self, not just my “head self” as a professional. They have kept me “awake.”

If the therapist cannot be a self, neither can the patient. It is my recurring belief that if the therapist remains in a professional role, the patient is unable to leave the complementary role. The model for the role-dominated patient is the good child, socially adapted, but without imagination.

(Keith, 1987, p. 62)

5.2 My Learning as a Scholar/Researcher

In the process of doing hermeneutic phenomenological research I have deepened my self in yet another manner. As I said in chapter 1, this thesis has been an opportunity to examine in depth those scholars who have contributed to my philosophical foundation. There have been several significant learnings. In the course of this project, I have had to struggle with my own lifelong anxiety about writing. I am an inexperienced writer and I have doubted my ability to produce a document that other professionals could understand. Thus, to write with clarity about transformation has brought me close to the edge of chaos.

Journal entry, December 1998: I don't know where the scholar in me is today, yesterday. I am amidst my "old me" and experience my fear of failure as rage and anger. I feel my rage. I feel my abandonment. I am up against my difficulty of rewriting this particular piece and saying what it is I need to say. I have lost perspective.

I have had to steady myself as the ground beneath me shifted. The above journal entry reveals my process as I shifted from my identity of "non-writer" to writer. I learned to recognize my on-going pattern that surfaced when I wrote. Over time I learned to steady myself while amidst the chaos and to trust in my own resources. I felt my fear and continued to write. Through my in depth reading of scholars who shared my philosophical viewpoint my confidence in myself as a scholar grew. As I developed my writing and as my understanding changed I validated and accepted myself as a researcher/scholar. I understood my ground differently.

Journal entry, November 1998: Standing on my own ground: Speaking from that place: During a meeting with my supervisor, I asked her: "Where can I look to help me understand autobiographical writing?" Her response to me was: "Yourself." Yourself. These are difficult words for me to hear. My Self. The idea of looking to myself and speaking from myself is a most threatening one. During the course of our meeting, I had felt confident and had been trying out new behaviour wherein I was expressing some of my new understanding and confidence about my writing process. With my supervisor's words, "Yourself," I regressed once again to an earlier place. I quickly returned to the abyss for two or three days, immobilising myself and ruminating in my past definition of myself. I became conscious of what I was doing; yet, I still went there. I think of the poem, *Autobiography*

in 5 chapters. The poem expresses to me how difficult it is to change. How can I speak from my own ground? I know that this is exactly what this thesis process is about speaking for my Self. This has always been the case for me. This is my task, this is what I set out to do four years ago: speak from my own ground. I knew that it was an important task for me.

I had to find my voice and allow myself to speak. Through reading the literature and reflection I found suitable language to communicate what I wanted to express.

Journal entry, March 1999: My relationship with writing, from struggle to creativity. My perspective on writing has changed, and thus my relationship with writing is different. In the past I thought writing was stagnant. For the first time I am seeing the dynamic life of writing. I see it as alive, in motion, moving. Reading too is a dynamic, alive process. When I read and re-read, it is always different, my understanding changes. Although the words are black and white and they sit on the page, my response/meaning/understanding is always different. I am always changing. I am also aware of the life of my own writing: it will always be different, changing... *So my relationship with reading and writing is shifting.* I know it's not stagnant: it's moving. This is really exciting because I'm not tied to it being stagnant anymore. It's okay with me if it moves: it's really exciting. I learn new things: new meaning comes out of it. It is only there for a moment in time. Each one of us is improving on our writing in each re write, this is part of the process. I have not only become more comfortable but really excited and enthusiastic about *the movement of my writing.* I can let words be on the page now and know that they will change. There's a different investment for me. What a relief! I feel quite relieved. The struggle itself has just now transformed from the struggle to a creative

process. It is a creative process that I am involved in that requires much of my energy, time and attention. Because of the nature of the time required and my pain (emotional) experienced, I had framed it as a struggle in which I felt personally lacking in abilities. I thought that *I, me, this Self*, fell short. I thought that I was not smart enough to do this project, that I was not bright enough to do this, that I was somehow lacking in some academic stamina, rigour, talent, you name it, in order to pursue this project. I was ready to give up, to “fail” to complete my thesis fuelled by the belief that I just didn’t have the drive nor the skills to enable me to do it. I recognize that within a creative process there are at times difficulties to be overcome that are by no means a reflection of anything wrong with me: they are just that: difficulties to embrace. When I framed my experience as a struggle, I took everything as my fault. I surfaced my insecurities and beliefs that, “I can’t do this. I am a failure. I am not intelligent. I am not a scholar. I am not a person who can do an academic paper of this nature. I am not capable.” I have equated the development of my writing, and quality therefore of it, with my own self-worth. Aha. Self-definition. This is a key piece. I understand this very differently now.

As this journal entry reveals I have come to a different relationship between text and the reader, where I am able to call attention to myself, who is interpreting, as well as to the interpretation itself.

At one time I separated myself from my understanding. My introduction to the work of Heidegger (1962) and his concept of Being-in-the-world has been a significant learning. His assertion that understanding is a basic form of human existence clarified my understanding of my philosophical ground. Prior to this project, I did not have the facility for expression of my understanding. One of my

presuppositions now is that understanding is a basic form of existence.

Therefore, I have a deeper understanding of the interpretative nature of being human. The work of Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1981, 1990) helped me to articulate my understanding. I believe that we create our “truth” in our engagement in the world, and that true understanding is the result of human engagement. Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs (Gadamer, 1990). I now understand that our knowing is through interaction and engagement with the world.

The concept of self-understanding contributed to my understanding of others. There is reciprocity between understanding and self-understanding. It was important for me to grasp that self-understanding is never complete. For, once we understand something, our understanding changes, and there is yet another understanding to embrace.

Journal entry, November 1998: One of my advisors said:

“This is part of what you write about autobiographically. The struggle of doing this kind of work and the kind of shift of identity that it entails and how difficult that is.”

The above statement evoked fear in me. I felt my resistance, my doubt, and my lack of confidence in my Self to produce anything worthwhile. It was an automatic response. It was immediate that I moved into my identity of incapable self. The above statement represents one person’s belief that I have a legitimate voice, and that my experiences are worthwhile to speak and are valid in the university context. For someone, such as myself who has learned not to trust or value her own experience, to take on the task of writing requires me to shift my identity. This very task, moving beyond where one is, I encounter in

my clients who come to me to fashion some kind of change in their lives. The heart or the core of this project for me, transforming my Self, my identity as an “academic” in a university setting, is living my topic of transformation. I have been avoiding writing about this struggle. I have approached it several times. I have written about it. I have been encouraged on many occasions. Only now do I feel some safety to risk embarking more fully on this leg of the journey. To do so I feel my fear. To do so I feel my vulnerability.

The relationship between understanding and self-understanding has been a critical learning for me. When I refer to Being-in-the world differently, it is the influence of Gadamer and his contention that interpretation is always on the way, and that we always understand differently that has been significant. For me to recognize that there is no “correct” understanding and that the nature of our understanding constantly changes has been transformative.

5.3 My Learning as Person.

An important learning for me has been “beginner’s mind,” which is to view experience as though it were for the first time. This vantage point is part of my new openness. I bring greater curiosity and uncertainty to the movement. I am not so quick to define what is in front of me: rather I am eager to observe it. I would describe my experience of understanding differently as a shift in consciousness. I am conscious of how I apprehend my reality. I am conscious in an on-going manner that “all” is interpretation of reality.

The concept of dwelling was also very significant for me. To dwell in my question meant to deepen and open myself in new ways. For example,

Journal entry, October 1998: I have known or believed for some time now that I have been “living” my research. Heidegger would say dwelling. Moustakas would say I am becoming one with what I am seeking to know. I have been encountering transformational experiences in this process of pursuing my MA. Dare I say *I* am transforming? I continue to know transformation differently as time progresses. My experience of doing this research continues to change over time. I am moving more deeply into my own transformation of myself as a researcher, scholar, academic in a university setting. I am moving closer to being my Self in this writing journey. What do I mean by this being my Self? What Self am I referring to? For I come up against the “old me” identity and witness the unfolding of the “new or transforming me” all the time. I am dwelling in my research differently now than I was three weeks ago, or six months ago, or two years ago. How? What is the significance of this?

Heidegger’s notion of Being-in-the-world (1962) stresses that human existence is fundamentally relational. It acknowledges that to be a person is to be open to, in relation to, concerned about, a world. This concept helped me clarify and extend my interpersonal perspective of existence.

Journal entry, July 1998: Bringing the unconscious into consciousness is key to transformation. I became conscious that I was feeling isolated in my writing. I did not have a writing group. This coupled with my fear of sharing my writing with friends and colleagues led me to isolate myself. Writing itself is an independent task that one pursues alone. It requires long hours sitting independently at a computer composing, writing, rewriting. Reading too is a solo task. The sharing of ideas with others is one way of engaging in the topic and ideas and involving others, but I find this difficult to do at times both personally and logistically. When I recognised (became conscious of) how

isolated I was feeling, I was able to make a change. Koestenbaum's statement, "If you go to a therapist as many people do and say, my creativity needs work. I would say then, let's work on your personal relationships. If you work on your personal relationships your creativity will come up," was key in shifting my perspective and giving myself not only permission, but encouragement to nurture my personal relationships for the purpose of enlivening my creativity! This has paid off.

I now define myself and the world to be in interaction with one another. Before this investigation, my thinking was dualistic. I perceived the world out there and myself here. I no longer separate the world and myself. I treat my clients, the world, and myself differently with my new understanding. This is a fundamental shift for me. I have also grown in my confidence as a writer and phenomenological researcher.

Journal entry, July 07 1999: What is it like to be in this process of transformation? Shifts in being. I resonate with the co-researchers. AO says, "Cultivate, you have lived with awareness through a period of time. Write now. I have observed a really big change in you in the past eight months, really good data." How can I describe this major shift that I've just been through? A turning point. I have moved into a new place this week. New territory: a sense of being in the world differently, a greater confidence in my work, deepening my understanding of inquiry, letting go of an old identity, having faith in my researcher ability, redefining scholar, grounding in my values, being in the creative process.

I am able to articulate my thoughts more clearly, and I am willing to take risks.

Of integration, I wrote:

Journal entry, June 29, 1999: I did not feel as “attached” to my ideas as a measure of my SELF, self-esteem. I have separated, finally! my self from my writing. A paradox: I am and I am not my writing.

I have already moved to new places in my learning. This is exciting for me. I want to further my understanding of the ideas of some of the scholars. My relationship with text and with writing has significantly changed since the initial days of this thesis. Throughout the pursuit of my academic interests, my orientation was to “fixed knowledge,” a paradigm that seems outdated now. I held the belief that there was “fixed” and “correct” knowledge that I could know. A test of my intelligence was my ability to comprehend the “it.” When I felt that I didn’t get “it,” I felt dumb. Throughout those years I believed that there was something deficient within myself if I didn’t “get more” information when I read. “More” meant whatever it was that I did not understand. A vicious circle developed. I am reminded once again of R.D. Laing’s poem, *Knots*, which represents this historical aspect of my relationship with learning. I feel ridiculous even telling this story, but it is true in terms of how I treated myself. My perspective has changed. I do not believe that there is any “thing” to know. There is understanding. My relationship with text is now different. I have shifted from knowing to understanding.

Knots

There is something I don't know
that I am supposed to know.
I don't know what it is I don't know,
and yet am supposed to know,
and I feel I look stupid
if I seem both not to know it
and not know what it is I don't know.
Therefore I pretend to know it.
This is nerve-racking
since I don't know what I must pretend to know.
Therefore I pretend to know everything.
I feel you know what I am supposed to know
but you can't tell me what it is
because you don't know that I don't know what it is.
You may know what I don't know, but not
that I don't know,
and I can't tell you. So you will have to tell me everything.

(Laing, 1970, p. 56)

Earlier in my thesis, I referred to the deep, underlying pattern that exists in each person as "the deep structure" (Levenson, 1972; Wong & McKeen, 1998). I face my own deep, underlying pattern when I feel my fear as I face an empty page and doubt my ability to write well. I continue to structure my experience through my template; my pattern: "I will fail. I am not good enough."

My initial experience of feeling my fear of failure is felt at the body level, which Gendlin (1981) refers to as a body “felt sense.”

Journal entry, October 1999: Identity and the challenge of transformation: Transforming one’s identity is a difficult process because it requires uprooting oneself from what’s familiar and solid and known and certain and moving into the unknown, which is ungrounded and in movement and indefinite and feels quite scary.

When I feel my fear of failure I face the experience that Tillich (1952) refers to as nonbeing; my basic existence is threatened. Koestenbaum (1980) refers to this as ontological anxiety, the fear of death. The first voice that emerges and speaks is my critic. This is the voice of my “Ideal Self,” and this self wants first copy writing immediately, not draft writing! I know that this is unrealistic: yet, the template is there. I am still somewhat attached to my pattern of self-hate. My “Ideal Self” advocates my mask (persona) of unattainable perfectionism. I know that my perspective has changed, yet . . . the pattern continues: the initial response is to escape my anxiety (Maslow, 1968; Koestenbaum, 1980; May, 1977; Tillich, 1952). My identity is at stake: I am required to face my anxiety. These days, I consciously invite my voice of self-compassion to address the critic. For, with “self-compassion, one draws closer to the self, and finds acceptance for all aspects of the self, including imperfections . . . self-compassion encourages strength” (Wong & McKeen, 1992, p. 25).

This project has been a work of self-acceptance for me. I agree with Rubin (1975) who suggests that self-acceptance is the path to developing one’s

potential. I have spent years in conversation with clients and others, talking about the significance of self-acceptance. In my conversations with the co-researchers they described the significance of the therapist's acceptance of them and their subsequent ability to accept themselves. With self-acceptance each co-researcher accepted "more" of himself or herself. In my journal I wrote:

Journal entry, June 1999: Once the date and time were confirmed for my proposal meeting, I sent an email to my supervisor and informed her that two voices spoke: the voice of fear and anxiety, and the voice of excitement. She responded. Her first sentence was, "We are here to support you." This sentence was followed by several logistics. I felt incredibly supported and accepted in that response. It was significant in terms of my self-acceptance.

My understanding of self-acceptance deepened through this investigation. As I listened to the co-researcher's stories, the significance of their self-acceptance and transformation was revealed.

I have dealt with my patterns of self-hate and developed compassion for myself in this inquiry process. The self-hate sometimes re-surfaces. In my mind I compare my almost completed thesis to others: "It's not as intellectual as that one, not as creative as that one, not as rich as that one" There are endless comparisons that can be made. There is no winning this comparison for me. In my self-acceptance I can say, "This is my thesis. It represents my evolution of my thinking, learning, process at this time, for right now." This thesis is not only an exploration of transformation as experienced by my co-researchers but also a manifestation of my own transformation.

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VITA

Surname: Maximick

Given Names: Lorna Anne

Place of Birth: Campbell River, British Columbia, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1994-2000
University of British Columbia	1990
University of British Columbia	1987-1988
PD Seminars	1987-1999
Simon Fraser University	1983-1986
Antioch University	1984
Vancouver Community College, Langara campus	1979-1980
Okanogan College, Salmon Arm	1977-1979

Degrees Awarded:

B.G.S.	Simon Fraser University	1986
Professional Teaching Certificate	Simon Fraser University	1984

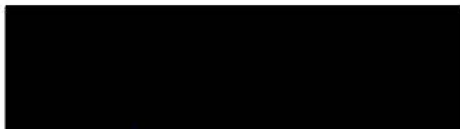
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Author



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