2002

To widen the circle: a grounded theory study of couples co-creating transformation

Kirk Eugene Zinck
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd

Part of the Developmental Psychology Commons, and the Family, Life Course, and Society Commons

Recommended Citation
Zinck, Kirk Eugene, "To widen the circle: a grounded theory study of couples co-creating transformation " (2002). Retrospective Theses and Dissertations. 965.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/965

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI
To widen the circle: A grounded theory study
of couples co-creating transformation

by

Kirk Eugene Zinck

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies
(Marriage and Family Therapy)

Program of Study Committee:
John M. Littrell, Co-Major Professor
Harvey Joanning, Co-Major Professor
Jan R. Bartlett
Maurice MacDonald
Ronald J. Werner-Wilson

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2002

Copyright © Kirk E. Zinck, 2002, All rights reserved.
This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation of

Kirk Eugene Zinck

has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Co-major Professor

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Co-major Professor

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Program
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DEDICATION**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

- Inspiration for the Research 1
- Purpose of the Study 5
- Research Questions 5
- Significance of the Research 7
- Definitions 8

**CHAPTER 2. METHOD**

- Orientation to the Chapter 10
- Grounded Theory 11
- Distinctions of Grounded Theory Research 13
- Theoretical Sensitivity 16
- Role of the Researcher 19
- Data Collection 25
  - Participants 26
  - Method of Data Collection 29
  - Interview Questions 34
  - Theoretical Sampling 36
- Data Analysis 45
  - Coding 45
  - Memoing 46
  - Querying the Data 49
  - The Coding Paradigm 50
  - Microanalysis 51
  - Open Coding 55
  - Axial Coding 57
  - Selective Coding 61
- Trustworthiness 63
  - Credibility 64
  - Dependability 67
  - Transferability 68
  - Confirmability 68
- The Use of Literature 69

**CHAPTER 3. RESULTS**

- Orientation to the Chapter 74
- The Process of Co-Created Transformation 75
  - An Overview of Co-Created Transformation 76
DEDICATIONS

To Mary Jo Stanley
whose support, optimism, and love helps me shine

To Dr. John M. Littrell
friend and mentor

To the memory of
George and Arney Messerschmidt
my grandparents
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially grateful to Mary Jo Stanley, whose support and love is a continuing source of strength. Mary Jo was often an editor, research assistant, and consultant, throughout my doctoral studies. Her confidence in me, patience with the process, and creativity were and continue to be gifts. Throughout the pursuit of the Ph.D. she did whatever she could in order to free me to fully immerse myself in my studies.

Infinite thanks to Dr. John Littrell. He guided my dissertation research, continuing the role of mentor, innovator, and source of inspiration that he has played since we first met. John’s excitement about learning, belief in me, and his guidance led me to many new professional experiences and accomplishments. He has helped me to see and create transformative openings. The professional collaboration, and friendship that we share is a great pleasure. We have achieved interesting things together and enjoyed a lot of laughter on this journey. The future promises a continuation of these worthy endeavors.

Thanks to my doctoral committee: Dr. Harvey Joanning who taught me how to think in new and different ways; Dr. Jan Bartlett who recently joined my committee and became an immediate friend. She has been a gracious, supportive and well-informed consultant; Dr. Linda Enders; Dr. Maurice MacDonald; and Dr. Ronald Werner-Wilson.

I also appreciate the influence of people from the Houston Galveston Institute. My internship experience at HGI continues to profoundly influence my thinking about philosophy, psychotherapy, and research. Dr. Harlene Anderson provided me much valuable guidance, supervision, and inspiration. Dr. Saliha Bava shared postmodern ideas and posed provocative questions during our ongoing dialogues. George Pulliam and Dr. Leonard Bohannon offered constructive insight and alternative perspectives on human behavior. All
of these people challenged my thinking and reminded me to observe carefully, reflect thoughtfully, and multiply the lenses through which I view people and events.

Dr. Patricia Keoughan offered her ongoing support throughout my time at ISU. She has readily shared her gifts as a scholar, fellow psychotherapist, and teacher, modeling effective approaches to working with adults and offering useful guidance.

Dr. Mary Littrell has been supportive. I have enjoyed the benefit of her occasional guidance and I value the friendship that I share with her and her husband John.

Thanks to my ISU colleagues. Those of us who joined together in creating collaborative learning communities and a social group of friends, are richer for the connections. We shared many pleasant times exploring philosophy, trying out ideas, learning, and laughing together.

Special gratitude is extended to the participants in this research, who were gracious in giving their time and who have continued to show an active interest in the progress of this study. It was fun, interesting, and a great opportunity to study transformation from different perspectives.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Inspiration for the Research

There are couples among us who are quietly creating profound transformations in their lives. They are changing as a relational unit. In the process, these couples appear to be enriching their shared relationship as well as enriching their relationship with the communities and the world in which they live. Their co-created transformations are internally driven. The couples enhance their lives in ways that give new meaning to their partnership and to their mutual relationship with the people around them.

As potentially inspiring as these co-created transformations are, this specific form of change does not appear to have attracted the attention of social scientists. Existing studies of change pursued by couples tend to focus upon changes related to conflicts or concerns originating within relationships and/or imposed by the action of outside forces. These concerns include marital conflict (Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1999; Dym & Glenn, 1993; Huss, 1994), family dysfunction (Jory, 1998; King, 2000), political and economic issues (Negy & Snyder, 2000), changes related to the pursuit of education (Chhabra & Stanley, 2000), changes related to adult development (Hudson, 1991; Sheehy, 1996), and changes brought about by illness (Serovich, 2000). Addressed through the lenses of psychology, sociology, medicine, religion, law, economics, or human growth and development, most studies propose broad solutions or provide models meant to inspire unique solutions to these problems in living. The emphasis is upon the resolution of problems.

Existing studies of transformation (i.e. change motivated by an alteration in values and a drive to create new meaning) tend to emphasize individual experience. These studies often
result in documents consisting of a collection of biographies tied to a discussion of
developmental theory. They seek to convey the essence of transformative experience to
individuals seeking inspiration or models upon which to base their own changes. For
example, Sinetar (1986) studied 51 adults and wrote of “transcendent” change with a focus
upon how and why individuals choose an “alternate path” in life. Levinson studied
developmental change among individual men (1986) and women (1997). In her study of
adult development, Sheehy (1996) updated her earlier study that addressed the individual
experience of transition through defined stages of the life course. Early studies of lifespan
development like those by Erikson (1968) also addressed change in terms of the individual.

Absent among studies of change are those that address changes initiated and pursued
by couples acting in unison to incorporate an affirming and positively connotated
transformation in lifestyle and values. This type of change leads a couple to create new
meaning and depth in their relationship to each other and to their world. While the changes
referred to as transformative do not rule out conflict, dysfunction, or economics in the mix of
motivating factors, the focus of this study is predominantly on transformation that is intrinsic
in nature and benevolent in origin and process. Co-created transformation is likely to
originate within the relational unit through the mutual discovery, incorporation, and
development of humanistic values that are nurtured and joined within the context and the
history of the relationship. Thus, co-created transformation is, in part, the incorporation of
new values or a return to old values with new understanding, coupled with the commitment
to act upon those values.
A prominent example of such transformation is that of Jimmy and Roselyn Carter (Brinkley, 1999). Their move from world leadership as President and First Lady to a life of service to the disadvantaged is evident through their involvement in Habitat for Humanity and in the work of the Carter Center. Habitat for Humanity provides housing for poor families; the Carter Center serves multiple missions focused on bringing peace and prosperity to citizens of the world and mentoring those individuals and groups who wish to do the same. Decisions made as a couple and values revisited with new understanding were a force behind the creation of the Carter Center.

Ordinary couples also co-create transformation. Driven by changing values and confident in the strength of their relationship, these couples seek transformation, accepting the risk that comes with making change and creating new meaning. The following paragraphs briefly describe couples that the reader will encounter in this study. All couples' names are pseudonyms and identifying information has been changed to preserve their confidentiality.

Couple 1: Dan and Dena lived in a city and earned incomes that allowed them to satisfy almost any material desire. Recognizing that their lifestyle afforded them little time together and kept them from the pleasures and activities they valued most, the couple decided to pursue a simplified lifestyle in a small coastal village. "Trading dollars for years instead of years for dollars," they now report enjoying abundant time together and look forward to the years ahead since they have the time to pursue what they value most as a couple.

Couple 2: Shelly and Scott wanted to live aboard a sailboat as "long-distance cruisers," exploring the world by sailing across oceans and making extended sailing excursions along international coastlines. They transformed their lifestyle from land-based
workers and scholars to become mariners living aboard a 38-foot sailboat for 11 years. In the process, they developed new strengths and made profound changes in their relationships with each other and in their mutual relationship to communities of people.

Couple 3: As a young couple, Gary and Gina were up and coming leaders in the fundamentalist Christian church to which their respective families of origin belong. As church members from earliest childhood, each was immersed in church doctrine. Yet, as a young married couple they began to develop values that conflicted with the “programming” and “cult-like” beliefs of their church. Together the couple set out to create a life that fit their values of acceptance, inclusion, and the belief that humans are, by nature, essentially good. They have transformed their life together and continue to define and embrace a “global spirituality” in which they explore and appreciate a multitude of belief systems and interact with people of many faiths. In the process their relationship and their appreciation for each other continues to grow. The couple made participation in this study a part of celebrating the 25th anniversary of their marriage.

Couple 4: Midway through their 30-year marriage, Joan and Jay found themselves in a state of confusion, doubt, and conflict about their philosophy of life and relationships. Shifting values during the course of their marriage conflicted with traditional beliefs and practices. A chance encounter with a book of Eastern philosophy provided the catalyst for a profound change in their lifestyle and philosophy. In the process, their relationship with each other and with their children was transformed to a new level of caring, calm, and mutual acceptance.
Purpose of the Study

This grounded theory study resulted in the development of a substantive-level theory. The theory, represented as a conceptual model, describes the process that couples engage in when co-creating a transformation in their lives and relationships. The theory is expected to facilitate an understanding of co-created transformation for: (1) couples who are contemplating or in the process of co-creating a transformation, (2) family members or significant others who directly or indirectly participate in the process, and (3) therapists or human service professionals who may serve as mentors and guides to couples contemplating the pursuit of a co-created transformation.

Research Questions

Based on guidelines provided by Creswell (1998), Glazer and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1992), and Strauss and Corbin (1998), the research questions in this study were few and general in nature. The research questions and subquestions guided the researcher in eliciting information about how couples co-create transformation in their lives. The questions were generative, designed to elicit a range of responses, stimulate creativity, and reveal multiple viewpoints. Emergence was a purposeful aspect in the design of this study. By posing only a few general questions in his interviews with couples, the researcher sought to facilitate the comprehensive unfolding of participants' stories. The emphasis was upon experiences, ideas, and viewpoints that participant couples determined were important and significant in the telling of their stories (Anderson, personal correspondence, October 17, 2000). The generative unfolding of stories told by participant couples allowed all involved to experience
a unique and intriguing view of the process of co-created transformation. As stories were
told, those telling and those who witnessed the telling, created and recreated individual,
dyadic, and collective meanings of the experiences described (Gergen, 2000). In the
combination of stories in this study, the researcher discovered the commonalities and the
essence of experiences, from which the model of co-created transformation emerged.

The research included three guiding questions. The questions and subquestions that the
researcher sought to answer are as follows.

1. **How do couples co-create transformation in their lives?**
   - How do couples decide to co-create a transformation?
   - What individual and relationship qualities are important?
   - What forces influence the process of co-created transformation?

2. **What meanings do couples make of their experience of transformation?**
   - How do couples define co-created transformation?
   - How do couples describe the process of co-created transformation?
   - How does transformation influence a couple's relationship?

3. **What can be learned about co-created transformation that may inform couples
   wishing to make similar changes in their lives and relationships?**
   - How can couples contemplating transformation use these findings?
   - How can counselors and human service professionals use these findings to
     mentor couples desiring to co-create a transformation?
Significance of the Research

Among the studies of couples making change, co-created transformation, as defined in this context, appears to be missing in scholarly and popular literature. Though many couples appear to pursue co-created transformation, a search of databases, abstracts, and catalogues of professional literature indicates that models for co-created transformation within marital relationships or cohabiting partnerships do not exist.

The emergent model of co-created transformation presented in this paper may provide: (a) inspiration for couples contemplating change, (b) a reference point for researchers who will study co-created transformation, (c) guidance for couples on the verge or in the process of transformation, and (d) knowledge for counselors, educators, and other human service professionals who guide and mentor couples in co-creating a transformation.

The discovery of a process followed by couples who co-create transformation may offer those who study relationships a new perspective or paradigm within which to frame certain types of change. It may offer counselors, clergy, and other human service professionals a new view on strengths that exist within relationships, a model of a unitary process of transformation, and ideas regarding alternative approaches to common practices in the area of relationship counseling and consultation.

The researcher sought out multiple views of how couples co-create a transformation in their lives. Through interviews and analysis the research provided insight into the process of co-created transformation. This resulted in a collaborative definition of co-created transformation and provided a model that may guide the efforts of couples involved in co-creating transformation and scholars involved in future research.
Definitions

**Co-Created Transformation.** Transformation occurs when a relationship changes in external form, inner nature, and function. Co-created transformation is a collaborative change in the relationship or lifestyle that is initiated, embraced, and acted upon by a couple as a unit.

**Code.** Code refers to concepts, phrases, and synthesis statements that emerge during data analysis in grounded theory research and represent or summarize aspects of participant experiences.

**Driver.** The term is an in-vivo expression representing a motivating force that is based upon core values which move people to make changes, pursue goals, and follow dreams.

**Grounded Theory.** Grounded theory research is a qualitative approach to examining human behavior. The researcher enters the field as a learner to investigate phenomena about which little is known or which has been inadequately explained in existing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher carefully suspends or brackets off preconceptions, hypotheses, and prior learning in order to be instructed and guided by themes that emerge from the data (Creswell, 1998; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In an ongoing and intertwined process of data collection, analysis, comparison, and concept development, the research is focused on the generation of a substantive level theory. This basic, almost descriptive-level theory is intended to be the subject of testing, modification, and further development in subsequent studies, where it may assume increasingly abstract qualities (Creswell, 1998).

**In-Vivo Code/Expression.** Concepts stated in the language used by research participants to describe or express their experience are referred to as in-vivo codes (Creswell,
The use of in-vivo coding in grounded theory research is intended to preserve participant voices and enhance the legitimacy of the researcher's interpretations.

**Journey.** Participants referred to the process of co-created transformation as an ongoing journey. "Journey" is an in-vivo code, a term used by participants to summarize and assign meaning to their experience.

**Substantive Level Theory.** According to Creswell (1998), a substantive level theory satisfies the basic definition of a theory while being specific to a particular issue, group, or context. Thus, a substantive level theory predicts and explains behavior and systematically integrates concepts and categories of behavior that occur within a specific context. Substantive theory establishes a foundation upon which to build more formal and abstract representations of human experience. In contrast, a formal theory is broad in scope and predicts and explains behavior such that it can be generalized to other contexts and actions. Substantive theory is often descriptive in nature, yet is distinguished from description by its ability to predict and explain behavior and through the inclusion of interpretation, details that description does not provide. "A substantive level theory may assume the form of a narrative statement, a visual picture [model], or a set of propositions" (Creswell, 1998, p. 56).

**Widening the Circle.** This in-vivo expression refers to (1) embracing a philosophy that transcends the self, the couple, or the culture, (2) inclusion and broad acceptance of people, viewpoints, and lifestyles (3) a sense that all people are, by nature, essentially good, and (4) finding nature within the spiritual domain and the spiritual within the province of nature.
CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

Orientation to the Chapter

Chapter II presents a detailed description of the methods used in this research study. In this introduction a brief methodological summary is provided to orient the reader. An expanded explanation of methodology follows, beginning with the section titled "Grounded Theory".

Through theoretical sampling, 15 couples were interviewed by the researcher. A 16th couple was included, via a secondary data set, using an interview transcript from another study. All participant couples were interviewed as a relational unit and audiotaped. Interviews lasted from 1.5 to 2 hours. Nine interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed through at least the second (of four) levels of abstraction in the coding paradigm. The remaining seven interviews were partially transcribed and analyzed according to the researcher’s decision to supplement or compare parts of them with emergent data. Member checks, phone conversation, e-mail and meetings provided opportunity for additional information and feedback from participant couples. Memos, diagrams, and peer debriefings were employed by the researcher to guide, track, and enrich data analysis.

After consultation with three members of his doctoral committee, the researcher chose the transcripts of four couples who exemplified co-created transformation for detailed analysis. Of the 16 couples included in the research, seven couples were successful in co-creating a transformation, six were struggling toward transformation, and three were in marital crisis.
A detailed analysis of the chosen transcripts produced a four-stage model of co-created transformation. Three conditions were determined to be necessary for a couple to successfully progress through the model of co-created transformation. These were broadly classified as relational attributes, basic needs (met), and intellectual resources.

Grounded Theory

The overarching purpose of qualitative research is to gain understanding of the meaning and nature of human experience. This is accomplished in part through the researcher's interaction with participants in the field. It is also accomplished through immersing oneself in the data and allowing emergent ideas to guide data analysis.

Grounded theory researchers commonly explore substantive areas about which little is known; they may also explore known phenomenon with intent to gain new understanding. In this inductive process, a substantive level theory is discovered (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Creswell (1998) defined a substantive-level theory as:

A low level theory that is applicable to immediate situations. The theory evolves from the study of a phenomenon situated in one particular situational context. Researchers differentiate this form of theory from theories of greater abstraction and applicability, called midlevel theories, grand theories, or formal theories. (p. 243)

A substantive level theory may assume the form of a conceptual model (Creswell, 1998), or a set of principles (Huss, 1994) or propositions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

A grounded theory is derived from data that is systematically gathered and analyzed throughout the research process (Creswell, 1998). Glaser and Strauss (1967), who developed the methodology, stated that theories may result from either deductive processes based on logical assumptions or inductive processes based on observation and exploration of a
phenomenon. As an inductive process, this grounded theory research incorporated multiple representations of human experience such as interviews, observations, casual conversations, written correspondence, and the examination of artifacts such as newspaper articles and books. Through a circular and intertwined process of data collection, analysis, and comparison, this research method generates theory grounded in data. Grounding means that data is collected, compared, and analyzed through progressive levels of organization and abstraction; it includes developing, examining, and synthesizing emergent themes into the concepts, categories, and propositions from which a theory is developed.

To ensure grounding of the theory in data, the researcher sought to "bracket" (Kerlin, 1997) bias, preconception, and hypothesis in order to embark on a true voyage of discovery. Research was approached from a position of becoming informed in process (Anderson, personal correspondence, October 17, 2000, March 12, 2001; Gergen, 2000; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to inductively generate new meaning and understanding. The method contrasts with other research methods, which test pre-existing hypothesis or theories or fit incoming information into a pre-existing structure. Grounded theory research is utilized to explore a phenomena about which little is known or to explore a phenomena about which knowledge exists in order to develop new understanding. This is achieved only through a researcher's suspension of bias and pre-knowledge so that fresh understanding can be achieved (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
Distinctions of Grounded Theory Research

Two primary characteristics distinguish grounded theory from other research methods. The first lies in the purpose of grounded theory research, which is theory development. In particular, Glaser (1992) and Creswell (1998) have stressed that the goal of the discovery process is to develop a substantive level theory. A substantive level theory is very close to descriptive in nature, though it will meet the two basic criteria, prediction and explanation, that distinguish a theory. Once a theory has been developed, the study is concluded. Theory testing is reserved for another study (Creswell, 1998, Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In turn, however, substantive theory may be developed into higher-level theory using grounded theory methodology or other methods in follow-up studies. Grounded theorists consider theory to always be emerging and evolving; no theory is considered static.

The second distinction is the constant comparative approach to theory development. Using the constant comparative method, the researcher “...seeks similarities across disparate domains in order to reveal the dimensions present” (Star, 1998). As themes and other aspects of the phenomenon of interest emerge from the data, their discovery leads to the analysis of situations that otherwise might be taken for granted. Attention is focused upon both commonalities and distinctions of a phenomenon in terms of experience and meaning as described by study participants, as well as the conditions under which such experiences occur (Moustakas, 1994: Star, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Other characteristics further distinguish a grounded theory study. While briefly described below, the characteristics will be expanded upon in the balance of this paper. They are as follows:
Data collection. Data collection is guided by an ongoing, intertwined process in which analysis, beginning with the initial interview, guides the ongoing collection of data. Consequently, “data are collected, analyzed, and revised cyclically as checked against empirical findings” (Star, 1998 p. 221).

Sampling. There are two distinct aspects of sampling. They are:

1. Theoretical sampling. Inclusion of participants in a study is determined in part, by the ongoing comparison and analysis of interviews and other data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Beginning with analysis of the initial interview, sampling is driven by the intent to make the emerging concepts and resulting theory as rich as possible. Thus, participants are selected based on their potential to enrich the data and analysis. Population or site-based sampling is not a concern in grounded theory research. Emphasis lies upon complexity, comparison, and “densifying” description and upon the relationships discovered in the process of analysis.

2. Theoretical saturation. As categories are developed, the researcher must determine when he or she has gathered enough data to consider the category “saturated” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Saturation is indicated when “(a) no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category, (b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (c) the relationships among categories are well established and validated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1978, pp. 212). Saturation is critical to insuring density and precision in the developing theory.
Data analysis. Data analysis is accomplished through multiple levels of coding. Ideally, data analysis is initiated with the use of “in-vivo” coding of transcripts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as was done in the process of this research. In-vivo coding uses participant language to describe and categorize emergent themes. Through four levels of analysis: microanalysis, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, concepts and categories of experience discovered in the data were woven into an increasingly rich description of co-created transformation at progressive levels of complexity and abstraction. These concepts and categories formed the basis for the development of a conceptual model.

The use of literature. Unlike other research methods, in a grounded theory study related literature is not consulted prior to beginning the study. Instead, the literature is consulted after the development of a theory. Then the theory is compared and contrasted with relevant existing research regarding the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 1998; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, a moderate amount of relevant literature was consulted in an ongoing and interweaving process, as data collection and analysis proceeded (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In grounded theory studies, the common convention is that the literature review is conducted once a theory has been developed and is only then used to compare and contrast existing research with the discovered theory. The reasoning underlying this approach is that grounded theorists believe the researcher should arrive in the field as uncontaminated as possible by bias or preconception. On this point Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1992) are adamant. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated,
It is impossible to know prior to the investigation what the salient problems will be, or what theoretical concepts will emerge. The researcher does not want to be so steeped in the literature that he or she is constrained or even stifled by it. (p. 49)

These experts suggested that if a researcher turns to the relevant literature before a study, it be with the purposes of formulating research questions or identifying gaps in existing research. In another approach, literature consulted during the research process may stimulate questions during analysis, identify areas for theoretical sampling, confirm findings, or demonstrate where pre-existing studies fail to adequately support their findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity develops out of multiple contexts. The researcher's sensitivity was established through a unique combination of life experience, professional training and experience, and research experience. Of equal significance was sensitivity developed as the researcher became immersed in the data of this dissertation research.

Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. ...[It] refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42).

Thus, theoretical sensitivity allows the grounded theorist to recognize concepts, discover connections, and perceive patterns of perception and action. Drawing upon his experience and training in counseling and research, the researcher in this study sought to be sensitive to what the data revealed and to be aware of and “bracket off” any preconceptions that might develop in order to let the data reveal the story and patterns of co-created transformation. The
The following biography provides a glimpse of the background that enhanced the researcher’s sensitivity.

The researcher has been a psychotherapist for 22 years. He began his professional career in public school teaching, serving students at all grade levels. During this period, he discovered an ability to help students who were coping with significant problems in their family, school, and personal lives. He found that he and these young people related quite well with each other.

Leaving the classroom, the researcher pursued a counselor training at Northern Arizona University, completing his Master’s degree in 1980. He resumed work in the public schools as a counselor in middle school, high school, and alternative school settings. Practicing evenings and weekends, he honed his skills as a therapist by working in a variety of agencies, conducting a private practice, and pursuing advanced training and education. A developing interest in marital and family therapy led the researcher to focus his learning and experience in that area. This resulted in his doing some innovative work in the school setting, seeing families for short-term counseling and doing intensive individual and group work with adolescents who were learning about dating and relationships in destructive ways.

While practicing as a school counselor, the researcher developed particular sensitivity to the issues and experiences of victimized adolescents. A growing effectiveness in the treatment of victimization resulted in students, parents, and professional peers seeking him out to work with victimized adolescents and adults. This aspect of his work eventually grew to encompass systemic interventions addressing ethnic tension, anger, gender preference, and
bullying affecting the schools and community. In the process he trained other adults to do similar work.

The researcher is a licensed marriage and family therapist in Alaska, Iowa, and Texas. He is a National Certified Counselor and a National Certified School Counselor. He is a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy and also holds Supervisor in Training status. The researcher received doctoral level training in marital and family therapy at Iowa State University and completed a doctoral internship at the Houston Galveston Institute, where he was privileged to work and train with Dr. Harlene Anderson, a developer of Collaborative Language Systems Therapy.

The researcher has authored many professional publications, among them, three referred journal articles (Littrell, Zinck, Nesselhuf, & Yorke, 1997; Littrell & Zinck, 1999b; Zinck & Littrell, 2000), two book chapters (Littrell & Zinck, 1999a; Zinck & Littrell, 2000), and a training videotape (Microtraining Associates, 1998) coauthored with Dr. John Littrell. The researcher has also conducted over 50 professional presentations and trainings. He has taught graduate courses to aspiring counselors and marriage and family therapists. The most recent was a research course, taught in the Houston, Texas extension program of Our Lady of the Lake University.

The researcher is currently employed as a community mental health counselor serving the remote communities of Seldovia, Port Graham, and Nanwalek on the southern Kenai Peninsula in coastal Alaska. He also provides group supervision to mental health clinicians in Homer, Alaska. From his home in Seldovia, the researcher commutes to work by air taxi (small planes) and by boat, as there are no connecting roads in the area. Two of the
communities he serves are Alaskan Native Villages, governed by a tribal hierarchy. Access to outsiders is limited. Sensitivity, careful listening, and assuming a "not knowing stance" (Anderson, 2000) are attributes that permit the researcher to be welcomed and counsel effectively within the native cultures. These are the same skills that the researcher brings to the gathering and analysis of data.

As a counselor, the researcher deals with multiple problems on a continuing basis. Psychotherapy is often focused upon remediation and repair of wounded people and fractured relationships. Thus, when the researcher considered a dissertation topic, he turned away from problem resolution, aspiring to explore characteristics of couples in fulfilling relationships, who collaboratively sought to enhance their life experience. He refers to this exploration as "strength-based research" and the behavior of interest as "co-created transformation." It has been a refreshing and thought-provoking change of pace.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher joins with a multitude of voices, to bring a study to fruition. Grounded theory research is an interactional study of human behavior and experience. It is value laden and emphasizes the interactive creation of social experience and the meaning that is made of such experience. The researcher does not stand apart from the creation of experience or the making of meaning. Instead, the researcher is immersed in the experience. It is important for the researcher to be aware and alert to his or her own biases, making them "public" (Anderson, 1997) by acknowledging their effect, then setting them aside during data collection and analysis.
The researcher's role included carefully and sensitively listening to participants’ accounts of their experience. He created a context of comfort, respect, and understanding in which participants could freely tell their stories. The researcher’s purpose was to facilitate and extend the conversation about the participants’ experience (Anderson, personal correspondence, October 17, 2000; March 12, 2001). In a brief review following each interview, participants indicated that telling their stories provided an opportunity to affirm their transformative experience and their relationship to each other and their world. The researcher's intent was to discover new and interesting ideas, create a substantive-level theory, and develop a useful description of co-created transformation.

Interviews served as the primary source of data. The researcher called upon friends, co-workers, students, acquaintances, and research participants to identify and invite couples to join the study and advance theoretical sampling. This networking helped the researcher connect with 16 participant couples to generate a diverse and robust sample.

Because transformation was to be largely defined by the participants, the researcher provided only basic information about the study and its purpose. Potential participants were provided a flyer that included a tentative description of what transformative change might look like. This provided sufficient information to excite potential interest in the project. By assuming a “not knowing stance” (Anderson, 1997; Gergen, 2000), the researcher uncovered unique meanings of transformation as participants described their experiences. In the researcher’s response to participant questions, any speculation as to the outcome of the study was limited to anticipating that the process would (a) be an affirming experience, (b) provide
participants an opportunity to reflect upon a unique experience in their life as a couple, and (c) serve other couples who desire to make a transformative change.

Bracketing off preconceptions regarding the phenomenon being investigated, a grounded theory researcher seeks to enter the study uncontaminated by suppositions, preconceptions, beliefs, and pre-existing knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998; Glaser, 1992; Kerlin, 1997). The researcher must be open, receptive, and naive in listening to and hearing participants describe their experience (Glaser, 1992). This stance allows the researcher to be informed by participants regarding the nature and meaning of the experience. The researcher allowed himself to be educated by each participant in order to hear the unique language and experience the meaning making that occurs each time a story is told. This approach characterizes the opening stage of grounded theory analysis; value is placed upon discovering emergent information and themes, as stated in each participant’s voice (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In-vivo coding (analysis stated in the participant’s language) was utilized to foster understanding of how participants represent their experience to themselves and to their community. Recognizing that simple interaction is in itself transformative (Anderson, personal correspondence, October 17, 2000), the researcher asked few questions and offered only enough explanation to facilitate a rich conversation with participants.

Because grounded theory methodology is a recursive process and is guided by what emerges from the data, it may at times seem ambiguous. The grounded theory researcher must be flexible and sensitive to emerging ideas and thoughts, and endure ambiguity secure in the belief that it is characteristic of emergence and complexity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
In recognizing human behavior and meaning making as complex and intertwined, the grounded theorist tolerates uncertainty, allows the research process to unfold, and calls upon intuition to guide his efforts (Moustakas, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These important qualities enable the researcher to reflexively determine what information, actions, and experiences to pursue as the research process unfolds.

In working with data, the researcher may be absorbed in the interplay between self and the data. Absorption, a common consequence of embarking on a grounded theory study, is an attribute that enhances the integrity of the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In analyzing data, grounded theory researchers recognize that their experience "provides a foundation for making comparisons and discovering properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 5). In the process of becoming informed, new learning is compared against experience, literature, and incoming data.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest eight characteristics that typify grounded theory researchers. They include the attributes discussed in the following paragraphs.

1. A desire to discover the process and patterns of interaction in human behavior. Webster's Dictionary (1985) describes process as "a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead toward a particular result" (p. 937). This definition portrays the emergent process that developed in the course of this research. The study focused upon changes and outcomes created through the interactive behavior of couples in satisfying relationships. Necessary conditions were investigated. The results indicate that in the presence of certain conditions, co-created transformation can be a natural and gradual occurrence.
2. **An interest in multiple perspectives regarding the experience or phenomenon of interest.** A variety of perspectives were developed through the diversification of participants and through consultations held with colleagues at the Houston Galveston Institute and Iowa State University. Of special note is the perspective provided through the assistance of Mary Jo Stanley, a professional colleague who served as a consultant and second reader. Mary Jo’s training as a counselor had sensitized her to patterns of behavior and language, and she was consistently available to process ideas and discoveries with the researcher as the study proceeded. As careful listener and a thoughtful provider of feedback, she often affirmed the researcher’s interpretations and understandings, and readily offered alternative perspectives for consideration.

3. **A desire to learn how participants interpret interaction and to weave participant perspectives into the developing conceptualizations.** In data analysis and interpretation, the researcher attempted to preserve the language and meaning of participants. This is evident in the use of in-vivo coding throughout the research. The emphasis on participant perspectives included member checks, in which participants were provided a summary of the interview and asked to comment upon how accurately it reflected their viewpoint. There were also follow-up conversations with the couples who are the focus of this research.

4. **The capacity to step back and critically analyze situations.** There were many occasions when the researcher while absorbed in the development of a concept or category, returned to the interview transcripts or tapes to review a participant’s statements in relation to a particular concept. Sometimes these reviews showed the researcher that the data did not support an interpretation he had created. This is in keeping with the recommendations of
Glaser (1992), who warned the grounded theorist against “forcing the data”; and suggested that concepts and connections must emerge through a careful examination of the data.

5. **Receptivity to input from others and the flexibility to utilize such input.** Input was sought regularity and utilized throughout the process of this research. The research was guided in a collaborative manner by the researcher’s co-major professors and a committee member with expertise and experience in grounded theory research. Other consultants included prominent researchers and marital and family therapists with expertise in qualitative research. All have positively affected the course of this research.

6. **Absorption in the research process: immersion in the data.** The researcher was involved in all aspects of data gathering, analysis, and theory development. Immersion in the data provided an intuitive and experiential sense of participant experience as the researcher conducted 15 interviews, listened to tapes of the interviews and fully or partially transcribed all conversations. The transcript of a sixteenth interview was provided by a professional colleague who had conducted an interview in the course of other research. The interview fit with the data being gathered and was separately coded by both the researcher and his colleague. Following coding the two compared and contrasted their findings. Occurring early in the research process, this procedure allowed the researcher to affirm and refine his coding skills. As the process of interviewing progressed, emergent information prompted the researcher to seek other interviews, to consult colleagues, participants, and literature, and to return to the data and analysis of prior interviews in order to compare emerging themes and concepts.
7. **An appreciation of the intrigue and complexity of human relationships.** In the words of one of the participants, "I find fascination in many things." There is intrigue in the investigating and making sense of human relationships. This intrigue attracted the researcher to the field of counseling and he finds a similar intrigue in research. In this research, interviews provided opportunities to observe the tone, language, interaction, and pace of participant couples as they shared their respective stories. Transcription and data analysis served to further immerse the researcher in the language and descriptive expressions developed and used within the varied relationships. Discovery merged with understanding into a collective description of how people co-create transformation.

8. **An appreciation of the provisional nature of research findings.** The grounded theory researcher must consider all interpretation, including theory, as temporally limited. This is because the nature of interpretation allows for endless elaboration and challenge. Research is bound by context and subject to the conditions of cultural ideologies. This consideration is reflected in the conditions attached to the model of co-created transformation that emerged from this research. Due to this state of tentativeness, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that a researcher must be secure enough in his or her findings to regard their theory as modifiable, qualifiable, and open to negotiation.

**Data Collection**

Data collection or "sampling" was accomplished by interviewing couples. The interviews occurred between May 7, 2000, and September 28, 2001. Analysis followed each interview. Once initiated, ongoing analysis guided sampling as the researcher sought out
participants with the potential to add to the evolving theory. In grounded theory research, data collection is founded upon theoretical sampling. The ongoing or constant comparison of concepts and categories that emerge from data analysis guide theoretical sampling.

Participants

The research involved couples who had completed or were in the process of co-creating a transformation. Having been provided some basic information about the study, potential participant couples were invited to decide if they had made a change that they considered to be transformative. Interviews were scheduled based upon participants' assessments as to whether their experience matched the focus of the research. All interviews were conducted with couples as a unit. Prior to commencing this study, the researcher sought and received research approval from the Human Subjects Committee at Iowa State University (see Appendix A).

To inform potential participants about the study and to invite their involvement in the process of creating an emergent definition, co-created transformation was minimally defined. It was anticipated that minimal definition would allow participants to define in their own words (a) transformation as it applied to them, (b) meanings made in the process of co-creating a transformation, and (c) how the process unfolded. Concepts were expected to emerge from the collective data, so also was a collaborative definition of transformative change. In interviews, this process of self-definition set the stage for participant couples to enjoy a rich experience in sharing their story and making new meaning of their co-created transformation.
In the written recruitment and disclosure statements (see Appendix B & D), transformation was defined for potential participants as a change in the form, nature, or function of a relationship. Some potential properties of transformative change were listed as “possible indicators of change.” The properties were described in minimally definitive terms in order to allow potential participants to create their own meaning around these thoughts. A list of these properties follows.

- The manifestation of a significant change in values. This may include adopting new values, returning to old values with new understanding, or prioritizing existing values in new and different ways.
- Mutual change in perspectives on life, work, and relationships.
- Changes within the relationship.
- Mutual changes in relationships with family, friends, and community.

Initially, the researcher considered limiting the participation to couples within a designated age group who had been in a committed relationship for an arbitrarily selected number of years. This was an attempt to ensure that the changes described were truly transformative and mutually determined. Upon reflection, the researcher eventually decided that to select participant couples in this manner would impose unnecessary limitations upon the research and the eventual definition of transformative change. Therefore, couples who defined themselves as having made a co-created transformation, whether young or old, and regardless of the length of their relationship, were potential participants in this study.

It was anticipated that participants would be couples from varied aspects of experience, income levels, social and status, and lifestyle. Any couple who defined themselves as “being
in relationship” was welcomed into the pool of potential participants. Diversity was expected to provide for a rich description and a complex explanation of transformative change. Thus, participation was open to couples of any social, educational, economic, and relational status. The resulting theory was to apply to couples in whatever arrangement they manifested.

One aspect of developing rigor (Joanning & Keoughan, 1996) in a qualitative study is conducting alternate case analysis (Creswell, 1998). In the interest of rigor and in accordance with the comparative nature of grounded theory, a portion of the sample was to include couples who define themselves as having maintained an unchanging lifestyle. It has been the researcher’s experience that maintaining a steady relationship and avoiding “too much” change is a source of pride among some couples. While these accounts may be as fascinating as the accounts of transformative change, the planned interviews of unchanging couples did not materialize. This was because of distance and inaccessibility in two cases, and reluctance to be interviewed in two other cases.

In the process of data collection, alternative cases did emerge. Three couples proved to be in severe marital conflict and in each case it became evident during the interviews and follow-up conversations that the motivation to participate in this study had to do with the desire of one partner to transform the relationship. Other participant couples fell into a category that the researcher terms “struggling to transform”. Strugglers actively discussed transformation and attempted it, but due to varied factors were unsuccessful in reaching a decision and making a commitment to the process. The contrast offered by these two groups has provided insight, via alternative case analysis, about the qualities and conditions that distinguish couples who are struggling from those who achieve transformation. Of primary
importance are the qualities of reciprocal regard and the awareness and readiness to perceive transformative openings.

The 16 couples in this study reported the length of their relationship ranged from 3 to 50 years. Most participant couples were married. Two couples were unmarried but defined themselves as being in a committed partnership. Individual ages ranged from 24 to 75 years of age. Participants live in the states of Alaska, Iowa, Texas, and Washington. One couple was from central Asia. Another couple was from South America. Two couples were in cross-cultural marriages, where in each case the wife was from a Central American country and the husband was from the United States.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection consisted primarily of interviews. Couples were the unit of interest. This allowed the researcher to learn through observation and conversation how the participant couples worked together and mutually constructed experience and meaning.

Interviews took the form of conversation, with an effort made to allow information to emerge from the conversation about transformation, rather than prompting it with numerous questions. Each interview was recorded on audiotape and transcribed for analysis.

The conversational interview provides time and a context in which participants could describe their experience and elaborate at will, without the constraining influence of a long list of questions (Anderson, personal correspondence, October 17, 2000). Interviews lasted 1.5 to 2 hours. To create a context conducive to thoughtful and unhurried conversation, participants were interviewed in their homes, their offices, or in the researcher's home. This
strategy appears to have created an atmosphere of comfort and informality; several
interviews gave way to social conversation afterwards.

Grounded theory methodology is an intertwined process of data collection, analysis,
and comparison. In the progression of this research, newly analyzed data were compared to
previously analyzed data, incoming data, and at times, relevant literature. Analysis drove data
collection and was in turn directed by two considerations. The first was that as analysis
proceeded, questions arose, and gaps in information were identified. The emergent questions
served to direct the researcher back into the field to collect related data or back to existing
transcripts and analysis to clarify and contrast his perspective with participant descriptions,
or to compare one couple's description with those given of similar events by other couples.

The second consideration regarded the coding of transcripts (see "Coding"). In the
process of coding, participant experiences and descriptions were categorized. As
relationships among different codes emerged, they were grouped together in increasingly
distinct categories in order to facilitate the development of relational statements
(propositions) and diagrams that provided a foundation for an emerging model. Data
collection continued until categories approached saturation. A category is saturated when the
further collection of data adds little to the information and explanations already arrived at

Supplemental forms of data included the limited use of letters, newspaper articles,
books, telephone or e-mail conversations, and observation. These enriched participant
accounts and complemented the process of analysis and theory development.
Categorical saturation began to occur after three interviews were completed. In total, 9 of the 16 interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed. The remaining 7 interviews were partially transcribed and examined or coded. Initial analysis produced approximately 1400 concepts and approximately 400 pages of transcription. At this point, the researcher consulted with three members of his program committee. It was agreed that the researcher would narrow and focus analysis on four couples who he identified as exemplifying co-created transformation. This decision is in keeping with the writings of Kvale (1994) who cautions against what he terms the “thousand page interview.” He points out that interviews produce a massive amount of data. Qualitative analysis of large quantities of data runs the risk of confusing the analysis and overwhelming the researcher.

A profile of each of the four couples chosen as the focus of analysis follows. The discussion describes the lifestyle of the couples before their engagement in the transformative process, provides information about the situation that prompted them toward making a transformation, and describes the actions taken to co-create a transformation.

**Couple 1: Darren and Dena**

Darren and Dena are in their mid-forties. The couple are professionals who lived and worked in one of the larger cities in Alaska. For this couple, especially the husband, work was a driving force in their lives. In the beginning of their marriage, Darren’s job required that he be in the field and far away from home for months at a time. In more recent years, Darren founded a technical consulting firm. This allowed him to remain in town. The firm developed quickly and attracted a large clientele. The nature of the work required that he be available seven days per week. The business thrived and the couple found themselves in a
remarkable situation. "At that time money was never an issue," Darren explained and then went on to say, "we could do whatever we wanted to do except we didn’t have unlimited time... we could jet off to wherever we wanted to go, but it didn’t matter.”

Acknowledging the mutual desire to live life at a different pace and have the time to do the things they loved to do, Darren and Dena began to talk, entering the initial stage of the transformative process. Eventually they left their jobs and established a home near a small and remote coastal town. In their new home, the couple transformed their life together, simplifying their lifestyle and building their own home in the process. They garden and fish to provide some of their food and they indulge their fascination with the study of the plant and animal life in their area, as well as indulge in frequent kayak journeys.

**Couple 2: Shelly and Scott**

As a young couple, Shelly and Scott dreamed of living aboard a sailboat and making long-distance cruises. As the years went by, they owned boats and sailed on weekends and holidays; however, this did not satisfy their dream. Finding themselves caught up in work and schooling instead of sailing, they intensified the discussion of their desired lifestyle. In the process, they determined that living as long-distance sailors was practical and achievable; their discussion and reading became increasingly focused. Eventually this couple acquired a boat that would allow them to realize their dreams, yet they remained caught in the cycle of work. Finally, pushed by a change in Scott's job status, they moved on board and for the next 11 years made the sailboat their home and sailing their primary activity.
Couple 3: Gary and Gina

Gary and Gina were in their early twenties and had been married approximately three years when they entered a process of transformation. Coming from different states, they met at college. Each had been raised in families that were devout members of a fundamentalist Christian church where the religious practices, according to Gary, were comparable to a cult. As a young couple, the two brought a number of questions and doubts about their religious practices and beliefs into their marriage. As a partnership, they developed values and beliefs that differed from those their families and their church sanctioned. However, they continued as members of the church. Gary and Gina were viewed as potential leaders in the church, by the administrative hierarchy, and by members of the congregations in which they had been members. This stature was especially important among the members of Gina’s family as her father was a minister. Yet discomfort persisted.

Gary and Gina described the moment that prompted their entry into the transformative process. At a lecture they attended, a church leader drew a circle inside a circle on a chalkboard. The inner circle was the membership of their fundamentalist church, the outer circle represented all those people (even Christians) who believed and practiced differently. He then stated that all of the people in the outer circle were destined for Hell. At that point Gary and Gina became aware of “how we continually had very much of the same kind of visceral response to these guys.” Gary went on to say “that (incident) really kind of pushed us over the edge, I mean that very night we started talk… we couldn’t do it any more.” Gina stated, “We had to be true to ourselves.” The two began to discuss their values and a search for a different church began in earnest. While religion was important to them,
the couple was driven to find a religion that was compatible with their values. Their subsequent move to a different church placed them among a group of academicians and theologians who sponsored Gary’s education at a prestigious university where he subsequently earned a Master of Divinity degree. Twenty years later the transformation continues. It consists of the ongoing development of a “global spirituality,” one that is inclusive of all people and does not judge a person by the religion he or she practices.

**Couple 4: Joan and Jay**

Married 30 years, Joan and Jay described their transformation as a transition from western values and spirituality to an eastern philosophy. They described their search for a meaningful spiritual philosophy, and how at one time, the conflicts experienced in their search threatened the stability of their marriage. Reconciling their differences, the couple began to discuss their needs and explore other spiritual practices. The gift of a book that they read and discussed was an event that pointed them in a new direction. It outlined an Eastern philosophy that “fit” for them and prompted an eventual decision to explore Buddhism. As Joan and Jay explored and slowly embraced this age-old philosophy, they also created profound changes in their relationship.

**Interview Questions**

In grounded theory methodology, research questions serve two major purposes, to structure interviews and to query the data (see “Querying the Data”). Effective interview questions invite participants to respond easily and to elaborate upon the response. Questions may either open up conversation or shut it down. Wording, timing, and the time allowed for a
response are very important. The use of “minimal encouragers” (e.g., “oh”, “really”, “that’s interesting”, “can you tell me more?”) encourages elaboration without interrupting the process. Skillful reflection of participants’ statements expands conversation, producing more information. According to Anderson (personal correspondence, October 17, 2000), essential for researchers is the expertise to facilitate, extend, and expand conversation. Listening, intuition, and comfort with silences are key interviewing tools.

Questions were used sparingly. Anderson (personal correspondence, October 17, 2000; March 12, 2001), Creswell (1998), and Moustakas (1994) recommend that a researcher use a very few questions, which serve to initiate and then expand conversation. The researcher must trust the participant to create a complete picture in their account of an experience. This approach demands that the researcher become an expert in facilitating conversation rather than an expert in constructing an interview.

Calling upon 22 years of experience as a psychotherapist and information gained through discussions with colleagues concerning questioning strategies, the researcher determined that a full account of a couple’s experience of transformation could usually be gained by posing three to five questions during the interview. In fact, the researcher had developed a list of many questions that he hoped to answer during the interview process (see Appendix C). However, rather than using the question list to direct interviews, the researcher set the list aside and checked it toward the end of an interview to determine if all of the questions had been addressed in the participants’ accounts.

The creation of a welcoming environment, careful use of questions, and attentive listening allowed interviews to unfold so that participants tended to naturally answer all of
the researcher’s questions (not just the ones asked) in the interview conversation. With less expressive couples, more questions were asked. In conversations following the interviews, participant couples indicated that the interview was a fulfilling experience. The couples expressed much pleasure at having the opportunity to tell the story of their transformation. One couple, stated, “we take pride in the story,” while another stated, “telling about our transformation has allowed us to look at it in a different way. We weren’t really aware of the heroic aspects of the story.”

**Theoretical Sampling**

A major issue in conducting a grounded theory study is obtaining data necessary to develop concepts and categories and construct the evolving model or theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In grounded theory research, data is collected through a process of sampling that progresses from openness to increased selectivity. Sampling in this manner, based on the continuous analysis of incoming data, is known as theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The analysis that followed each interview served to guide the ongoing collection and development of data. Initial recruitment of participants focused upon couples who defined themselves as having experienced a profound and mutual change in their lifestyle and relationship with each other. Following the initial three interviews and the accompanying analysis, sampling became selective and participants were recruited upon the basis of their potential contributions to the development of an evolving set of categories, relationships among concepts and categories, and the beginnings of a model.
In grounded theory research, theoretical sampling is interwoven with coding. Coding, a form of analysis, satisfied three basic goals in this study. These were the identification of concepts, the grouping of concepts into categories, and the identification and development of core concepts around which the resulting model was constructed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The recursive combination of theoretical sampling, coding, and constant comparison are the engines that drive grounded theory research. Constant comparison is the ongoing comparison of incoming information to instances, events, and activities discovered in previous analysis of existing data with the goal of saturating a category (Creswell, 1998).

Initial data collection was directed at discovering the nature of transformation. The researcher entered the field assuming a “not knowing stance” (Anderson, 1997; Gergen, 2000), thus allowing himself to be educated by participant couples regarding co-created transformation. This approach yielded information about concepts, definitions, dimensions, and ranges of experience in relation to co-created transformation. Ongoing analysis and comparison of incoming information expanded upon the existing categories, themes of experience, and meanings.

Theoretical sampling is cumulative. Incoming data builds upon previous data collection and analysis as the nature of sampling changes. Creswell (1998) offered the following description: “Often the process begins with a homogeneous sample of participants, who are similar. As data collection proceeds and categories emerge, the researcher turns to a heterogeneous sample to see under what conditions the categories hold true” (p. 243).

As research proceeded beyond basic discovery, emergent themes began to repeat themselves; concepts were grouped into categories of experience. The focus of sampling
turned to expanding and comparing the emergent information, learning the dimensions of emergent categories, and the exploring of the range of variation among the categories.

The general progression of theoretical sampling is: (1) to elicit codes from raw data at the start of data collection through constant comparison, (2) to use emergent codes to direct further data collection, (3) to fully develop categorical properties and discover any linkage with other codes and categories. As categories emerge, sampling begins to focus on the full definition of a category. According to Glaser (1992), “Theoretical sampling on any category ceases when the category is saturated, elaborated, and integrated into the emerging theory or model. In short, theoretical sampling in grounded theory is the process by which data collection is continually guided” (p. 102). Accordingly, as concepts and categories developed, the researcher focused on identifying, developing, and relating concepts. A conceptual model began to evolve.

In keeping with the emergent nature of grounded theory research, the sample is not pre-determined before beginning the research. Sampling is guided by concepts that emerge from analysis and appear to have relevance to the evolving theory. These concepts (a) are repeatedly present (or sometimes, noticeably absent) in the data when comparing incident to incident and (b) act as conditions that give variation to a major category. The aim of theoretical sampling is to maximize opportunities to compare events, incidents, or happenings to determine how a category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 202).

Comparing similarities and differences among concepts provided the opportunity to densify categories, differentiate among them, and specify their range of variability. As analysis progressed, the focus of sampling shifted to maximizing return in terms of elaboration, understanding, and contrast to the developing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theoretical sampling consists of systematic comparison (see “Comparison”) done to insure that each category is fully developed. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998),
sampling and analysis may occur sequentially or recursively. The use of analytic questions and comparisons enhance data collection by (a) providing a basis for sampling and (b) making comparisons across various conditions.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) described stages of theoretical sampling. Initial sampling is termed “open sampling.” Sampling done during midlevel analysis is called “comparative sampling.” Sampling during advanced level analysis is called “discriminant sampling.”

A brief description of each sampling level as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) is provided below. The link between the sampling variation and coding taking place, as it occurred in this research, is also discussed. Coding is discussed in the section on data analysis.

*Open Sampling*

When conducting open sampling, the researcher seeks out participants pragmatically. The focus is basic; whoever has experienced the phenomenon of interest and is willing to participate is considered able to contribute to the process.

In the present research, data collection was pragmatic, driven by identifying couples who were interested in being a part of the process, would allow recording of the interview, and permit the researcher to publish information based on their account. Interviews incorporated a moderate level of diversity, as couples from Alaska, Iowa, Texas, and Washington, were included. Further, there was a diversity of social and cultural backgrounds as well as participants from three foreign countries.
Open sampling was closely followed by microanalysis and open coding, during which the researcher focused on discovering and naming phenomena according to their properties, and upon discerning variations and common factors within participants accounts of their experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data gathering at this stage of analysis was intended to open the collection process to all possibilities and sampling focused on persons, places, and situations that provided the opportunities for discovery. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested,

To ensure openness, it is advantageous not to structure data gathering too tightly in terms of timing, type of persons or places, even though one might have some theoretical conceptions in mind, because these might mislead the researcher or foreclose on discovery. (p. 206)

Because data analysis closely followed each interview, and provided an ever-growing amount of information, the pursuit of interviews soon began to focus upon learning more about emergent concepts. Questions developed as discoveries emerged in the analysis of one interview and were compared to discoveries from another interview. While sampling remained primarily opportunistic, emergent questions and discoveries had a growing influence upon the recruitment of participants.

Relational and Variational Sampling

As coding proceeded, the focus of analysis shifted to relating categories to their subcategories (properties) as well as developing categories in terms of their properties and dimensions. This level of analysis is called axial coding. Data collection began to focus upon comparing incidents and events from previously collected data to incoming data in order to identify significant variations or relationships among the developing concepts. At this stage, the researcher seeks to discover “incidents that demonstrate dimensional range or variation of a concept and the relationships among concepts” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 210).
Discriminant Sampling.

Sampling that occurs during selective coding, an advanced level of analysis, is deliberate and discriminating. At this point in the process of grounded theory research, participants are chosen to maximize differences. Alternate case analysis is used to provide a continuum of experience upon which to base conceptual underpinnings of the developing theory. Selective coding is done to “integrate categories along the dimensional level to form a theory, validate statements of relationships among concepts, and fill in any categories in need of further refinement” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 211). It is through discriminant sampling that the researcher creates contrasts and fills gaps in information.

In practice, the preceding two levels of sampling became mixed. As the initial need for discovery began to diminish and the need to compare and contrast concepts, categories and relationships grew, and recruitment of participants turned to increasing the diversity of the sample. Purposeful attempts were made to incorporate cross-cultural couples, gay couples, co-habiting couples, elderly couples, and young couples.

Diversifying the sample provided an opportunity to compare similarities among transformative couples. It allowed the researcher to contrast couples who exemplify transformation with couples who do not achieve transformation. Two sets of couples described transformative experiences that were similar in nature. This offered an opportunity for comparison of concepts, categories, and characteristics. Three couples were in severe marital conflict. These couples highlighted the necessary preconditions for transformation. A grouping of participants, whom the researcher referred to as “struggling to transform”,...
emerged. This event offered further contrasts and provided information regarding factors and conditions necessary to co-create a transformation.

Comparison

Questioning is the basis of comparison. As questions enable comparison, so too does comparison drive questioning. Grounded theorists refer to comparison as "constant comparison," or "constant comparative analysis" (Glaser 1992, Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Strauss & Corbin 1998). In accord with the nature of a grounded theory study, comparison infused the entire research process from data gathering through model development and description of results.

Incident-to-incident comparison is the comparison of similar instances or experiences that emerge in the data gathering process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It was used pragmatically as a means of establishing the properties and dimensions of similar experiences and meanings as described by participant couples.

Incident-to-concept comparison establishes the category or property of a concept represented by individual instances within and among participant accounts of experience (Glaser, 1992). The researcher found that taking a concept back to the data enriched the development of a category as specific incidents could be grouped under a particular concept or category and this contributed to the understanding of similarities in the nature of experiences described by interview participants.

In this research, theoretical comparison enabled the researcher to examine metaphors that participants used to describe experience. It involved comparing the ways that people
framed experience. Thus, “life at six knots” a term used to describe sailing by one couple, served as a metaphor for slowing down and allowing experiences to unfold since on the ocean, weather and currents influence the speed and direction of a sailboat. A metaphor used by another couple, “today is a good day to die” also served as a metaphor for allowing experiences to unfold and dealing with what is given by nature on a particular day. Both metaphors signify a change of pace in the way life is lived. Change of pace is a common factor in participants' descriptions of transformation.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), people think comparatively and speak in metaphor, which itself is a type of comparison. In understanding metaphor it is necessary to determine the properties of experience or meaning that are represented. Rather than convey specifics, metaphor conveys feelings and compares one (usually common) experience to another. An example is one participant who stated that remaining in the lucrative business he had founded was “trading years for dollars.” In exploring this metaphor, the researcher learned that the interviewee viewed his probable opportunity to become wealthy as representing time away from his relationship with his wife, mutually valued activities, and a relaxed and a contemplative lifestyle. While the participant could have invested a few demanding years to attain wealth and the consequent unlimited discretionary time, experience had taught this couple that the requirements of reaching that point (long hours, travel, and seven-day weeks) left no time in the present to engage in the relationship and activities that they valued as mutually fulfilling. Further, a few years of seven-day weeks and long workdays to gain wealth did not guarantee the health, energy, and quality of relationship
in the future that would enable the couple to enjoy such activity together. Years of an appealing quality of life could be lost in the pursuit of wealth.

While Strauss and Corbin (1998) speak of theoretical comparisons as a distinction of grounded theory, Glaser (1992) does not discuss theoretical comparison. Along with other researchers he speaks instead of the ongoing and interwoven comparison as one of the distinguishing characteristics of grounded theory (Creswell, 1998; Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Moustakas, 1994. This researcher found that in accord with the emergent nature of analysis in this research that comparison occurs naturally and there is less need to distinguish the type of comparison conducted than there is to attend carefully to what is revealed.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) list ten functions of comparison in a grounded theory study. Each function was interwoven throughout this research. They are evident in the explanation given in this chapter regarding the methods used in this research. Comparison provides the following.

1. Highlighting obscure meanings in events described by participants.
2. Enhanced sensitivity to properties and dimensions in data.
3. Suggesting further interview questions or observations based on the evolving theory.
4. Moving analysis quickly from the level of description to that of abstraction.
5. Countering tendencies to focus intently on a single case by moving analysis to an abstract level.
6. Examination of the researcher’s basic assumptions, biases, and perspectives.
7. Encouraging examination of the evolving theory and the qualification or alteration of the initial framework, as needed.

8. Increasing the prospects of discovering variation and general patterns.

9. Encouraging a fluid and creative analytic stance.

10. Facilitating the linking and densifying of categories. (p. 85)

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a grounded theory study is accomplished through coding, a three-level process of concept identification, concept categorization, and the emergent designation of a core category from which a theory is developed. Coding is interwoven with querying the data and memoing. These facets of the analysis are described in the following sections.

Coding

The process of analysis begins after the first interview and analysis follows each interview thereafter. "Coding is the fundamental analytic process used by the researcher" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 9). Grounded theory methodology prescribes a multilevel analysis, which Strauss and Corbin (1998) described as microanalysis, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Though commonly considered a progression, the four stages of analysis may be utilized according to the needs of the researcher. The coding process is recursive and intertwined. Hoffman (1974) defined recursion as an ongoing and infolding process of becoming informed. Each part of the process has the potential to connect with any other part
of the process, driving the researcher to repeat steps of the analytic process, initiate a given step of the process at any point in analysis, or modify and combine steps as necessity and logic dictate. The bottom line is that coding is not a clean step-by-step process, though in all cases in this research when new data was collected, the analysis of this incoming data was initiated with microanalysis.

In the process of studying co-created transformation, the researcher followed a four-step coding paradigm developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). This coding paradigm is explained in detail following an explanation of the other two aspects of data analysis, memoing and querying the data. This section concludes with a description of how analysis was supplemented to increase the rigor of the analytic procedure.

**Memoing**

Memos in grounded theory research are used to record ideas about the evolving theory. Ideas may take the form of propositions, ideas about emerging categories, or thoughts about the connection of categories (Creswell, 1998). There is no prescribed form for a memo, it may record the products of analysis or directions for the researcher, and vary in content, degree of conceptualization, and length (Strauss, 1987). In general, memos are conceptual rather than descriptive in nature, though the level of conceptualization will vary. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that diagrams be used to supplement the use of memos because diagrams depict relationships among concepts.

Beginning with the initial analysis, memos became a part of the analytical process and were written as ideas occurred to the researcher. The organization of memos was based
on Huss's (1994) description of three types of memo: (a) operational notes, related to data collection and analysis, (b) code notes, related to the development of concepts and processes, and (c) theoretical notes, related to actual and potential categories, properties, dimensions, and their relationship within the coding paradigm. To this organizational paradigm, the researcher added fourth category, random notes, to incorporate memos that were not readily classifiable.

Memos and diagrams developed in the early stages of coding may be quite basic; however, "both evolve as research progresses and grow in complexity, density, and accuracy" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 217). Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, memos may be sorted, reviewed, reflected upon, and compared to provide direction for data collection, and assist the researcher in developing and integrating categories.

In the study of co-created transformation, memos were used to satisfy four basic purposes, expanding upon the purpose of memoing described by Huss (1994). They are described in the following paragraphs.

*Generation of Ideas.* Ideas were generated through the use of the coding paradigm were often placed in memo form. Memoing assisted the researcher to focus upon relating the pieces of data that form concepts through determining properties that operationally define categories, generating hypotheses regarding the relationships between categories and their properties, and integrating categories into central categories.

*Freedom of Expression.* Memos often included the free expression of ideas. Being unconstrained by rules about content or form, memos recorded "brainstorming" as well as technical and formal ideas.
Creating a Memo Bank. Memos generated by the research were sorted into four types: operational notes, code notes, theoretical notes, and random notes. Entered into the computer, they were designated by the type of note, titled by subject, and dated. Throughout the project, the notes were available for printing and sorting as the researcher determined was necessary.

Establishing an Audit Trail. The audit trail records the development of the research process, providing a record of how analysis was done, and how the model evolved during the project (Joanning & Keoughan, 1996: Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Memos provided the researcher a means of reviewing process and assisted in the recall of how certain ideas or connections between concepts evolved.

Guidelines for memo organization developed by Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) were modified to fit the needs and organizational strategies of the researcher.

1. Memos and diagrams were entered in the computer using Microsoft Word 2000.
2. Memos were identified by type of memo being written, subject, and date.
3. Memos and diagrams were filed into folders (Microsoft Word 2000) by type. These included code notes (CN), operational notes (ON), theoretical notes (TN), and random notes (RN).
4. Memos generated from the review of an existing memo (e.g., discovery of new categories, inspired thoughts) were referenced to the original memo.
5. Icon labels representing individual notes within a file were identified in abbreviated fashion with the type of note, subject, and date to facilitate finding, sorting, and grouping memos as the researcher determined was useful.
The confidential materials that compose an audit trail including coded interview transcripts, informed consent forms, demographic forms, and audiotapes are stored in a locked file within the researcher’s home. Electronically stored memos and other confidential information is password protected and kept in locked storage.

**Querying the Data**

In examining data, the researcher posed questions to himself, a technique known as “querying the data.” When querying the data, a good question is one that furthers the ongoing discovery and development of concepts and theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this research, questions served three purposes: (a) they addressed practical issues, such as how to recruit participants, who to consult, what other sources of information may be useful, how to focus the inquiry, (b) they facilitated the researcher’s increasing knowledge about co-created transformation, and (c) they were used to raise theoretical issues. The questions used in this process took the form of “if-then” or “how” and explored the parameters and possibilities encompassed in co-created transformation.

Many approaches are useful in querying the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described four types of questions that may be used. They are summarized as follows

1. **Sensitizing questions** alert the researcher as to what the data may indicate. Examples are: “What are the issues or concerns here?”, “Who is involved?”, “How do participants assign meaning to their experience?”, and “What similarities and differences exist among multiple accounts of a similar experience?”
2. **Theoretical questions** address process, variation, and connections among concepts. Examples are, “How do these concepts and ideas compare to and contrast with each other?” “What are the context issues?”, and “How do events and actions change over time?”

3. **Practical-Structural questions** provide direction for sampling and help structure the evolving theory. Examples of such questions include. “Have I reached saturation?”, “Who do I need to interview to elaborate upon or contrast the data collected so far?”, and “Is the developing theory logical; why or why not?”

4. **Guiding questions** serve to direct interviews, observations, and analysis. Initially open-ended, the questions become more specific as theory evolves and a need for supplemental information develops.

**The Coding Paradigm**

To ensure the inclusion of both structure and process during data analysis, coding was done according to a paradigm. Developed by Strauss (1987) and refined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), the coding paradigm recognizes that one must understand the nature of the relationship between structure and process in order to understand why and how events occur. “A paradigm is a perspective taken toward data, an analytic stance that helps to systematically gather and order data in such a way that structure and process are integrated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 128)

The basic components of the paradigm include the following as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998):
1. Conditions are interwoven events that create the situations, issues, and problems pertaining to a phenomenon. There are three types of conditions: (a) causal conditions that influence phenomena, (b) intervening conditions that mitigate or alter the impact of causal conditions, and (c) contextual conditions, which are specific sets of conditions to which people respond through action/interaction.

2. Actions/Interactions are strategic or routine tactics that people use in response to issues they encounter. Strategic actions/interactions are purposeful acts done to solve a problem and shape a phenomenon. Routine tactics are habitual ways of responding.

3. Consequences are the results that follow an action. Consequences may influence action/interaction and conditions, whether they are known from prior experience, or anticipated (pp. 128–129).

Microanalysis

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that in the initial stages of research, a microanalysis of data occur in order to "generate initial categories (with their properties and dimensions) and to suggest relationships among categories, a combination of open and axial coding" (p. 58). Glaser (1992) dismissed microanalysis and much of how Strauss and Corbin (1998) described open coding, as overly detailed, forcing meaning from data, and generating an unmanageable number of concepts. He suggested starting with open coding and allowing the data to reveal concepts. He believed that this approach generates a sufficient number and variety of concepts while keeping the analysis from being mired in detail. Yet, Strauss and
Corbin (1998) presented a convincing argument in describing microanalysis as the initial and
detailed attention to three aspects of analysis. These are: (a) the data, (b) the observer’s and
participant’s interpretation of events, objects, and happenings that compose the data, and (c)
the interplay that takes place between the researcher and the data in the process of gathering
and analyzing the data.

The researcher found microanalysis to be quite effective and used it with all transcript
analysis. Microanalysis was conducted in two passes. The first pass was a careful reading of
the transcript to familiarize the researcher with the content and nuances of the conversation
that it documented. On the second pass, in-vivo concepts were underlined and a few brief
syntheses were written. As analysis progressed, microanalysis of specific sections of a
transcript was often employed to clarify, define, and distinguish an emergent concept, to
discover or rediscover the properties or dimensions of a concept, or to answer questions that
arose. Further, microanalysis served to re-orient the researcher when job responsibilities had
pulled him away from the research for a period of time. This extensive use of microanalysis
highlighted alternative analytic perspectives and allowed a familiarity with the specifics of
data, through generating detail in both a descriptive and an analytic sense.

In combination with transcription, most of which the researcher did himself, detailed
attention to data and interpretation allowed the researcher to gain a sense of how participants
express themselves and how they make meaning of events. During data gathering and
analysis, careful attention to participant interpretations and in-vivo concepts helped the
researcher maintain an ongoing consideration of alternate interpretations. This process was
enriched through regular consultations with a colleague, and frequent discussions with the professor who guided the research.

In discussing grounded theory analysis, Strauss and Corbin (1998) referred to the interaction that occurs between a researcher and the data, as "interplay." Included in the interplay are the data, interpretations made by participants or the researcher as a story is told, interpretations made as data is analyzed, and the collective knowledge and experience that a researcher brings to the context of a research study.

Interplay may be profitably used when it is tempered with awareness (Glazer, 1992, Glazer & Strauss, 1987, Strauss & Corbin, 1998, Wolcott, 1994). Interplay was useful in sensitizing the researcher to the properties and dimensions within the data and created a sense of intrigue with emerged discoveries, as the data was revisited and reanalyzed during the research process. Intrigue, for this researcher, is a sense of discovery, coupled with the surfacing of questions based on the discoveries. It is a deeply satisfying sense of having learned something new and somewhat profound that raises questions and prompts further investigation. Interplay also served to sensitize the researcher to bias at several points in the analysis. During analysis, the researcher at times became intrigued with ideas that developed. He diagrammed relationships, wrote memos, referred to literature, and became invested in certain ideas. While shuttling between data and interpretations, the interplay included an ongoing questioning of emergent perspectives. The data was consulted to seek confirmation of developing ideas. Through this repeated study of the data the researcher was able to recognize that the data did not support an interpretation and that his own bias had come into play. This was the case with the concept of recursion. The researcher thought he had
discovered an overarching pattern of recursion when he was studying the process of co-created transformation. Recursion is a concept that resonates with the researcher and influences his perspective on events. Thus, recursion appeared early in the process of studying transformation. At one point the researcher made it a prominent aspect of the developing model. However, consistent interplay between data and interpretation eventually demonstrated that the data did not support recursion as a prominent feature of co-created transformation no matter how much the researcher wanted to discover it. The data showed that recursion is a minor aspect of the transformative process.

Strauss and Corbin spoke of how pre-existing knowledge brought into the analysis of data by the researcher, may benefit the research. They stated,

The researcher is actively reacting to and working with the data. While objectivity is ideal, it is not entirely practical. Thus, it is preferable to consciously bring disciplinary and research knowledge into the analysis but to do so in ways that enhance the creative aspects of analysis rather than drive analysis. (p. 58)

Interplay between the researcher and data also helped him maintain an awareness of the relevance of data, rather than the specifics of a situation, individual, or couple. While microanalysis served to immerse the researcher in the data, the systematic use of other analytic techniques provided balance by encouraging the researcher to step back, gain analytic distance, and avoid becoming over-involved in specifics. It was an ongoing shuttle, made difficult at times by the fact that the researcher found that analysis intrigued him and provoked many, often tangential, ideas. The shuttle between immersion and distance fostered the emergence of concepts and the development of provisional hypotheses. Interplay also kept the researcher alert to potential bias that he might introduce into the process and promoted the ongoing examination of his assumptions, interpretations, and hypotheses.
Open Coding

Open coding is a “process of unrestricted coding of data whose aim is to produce concepts that seem to fit the data” (Huss, 1994, p. 29). It fractures, examines, compares, conceptualizes, and categorizes data (Strauss & Corbin, 1978). Concepts emerge from the data as the researcher analyzes transcripts or other materials. Using the method of constant comparison, as open coding progresses the researcher compared incident to incident, and as concepts emerged, incident to concept, in order to gain an initial understanding of the data and how pieces of data related to concepts.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the purpose of naming and relating concepts, as follows.

The first step in theory building is conceptualizing. A concept is a labeled phenomenon. It is also an abstract representation of an event, object, or interaction that a researcher identifies as being significant in the data. The purpose behind naming phenomena is to enable researchers to group similar events, happenings, and objects under a common heading or classification. Although events or happenings might be discrete elements, the fact that they share common characteristics or related meanings enables them to be grouped. (p. 101)

Microanalysis was used as a means of immersing the researcher in the data and identifying the initial in-vivo concepts; open coding was used to discover more concepts and to begin the process of querying the data to discover meanings, contextual and temporal components and to raise new possibilities and questions. More importantly, open coding was used to begin categorization. Concepts remerging from microanalysis and open coding were placed into small groupings of words with the same or very similar meanings. Open coding was treated as an exploration of the data. Individual concepts were written on halved index cards and color-coded to indicate the transcript, from which they originated. Laid out on
tables, the cards could be easily moved around which allowed the researcher to experiment with varied groupings of concepts. This process allowed the researcher to gain a sense of dimensions, properties, patterns, and relationships. Large sheets of white paper posted on walls and the use of whiteboards allowed the researcher to diagram relationships, thus adding a kinesthetic and visual dimension to analysis.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), open coding initiates categorization. In this process concepts are grouped according to commonalities they appear to share. In referring to categorization, Glaser (1992) also agreed that open coding initiates categorization. He stated,

Open coding is the initial step of a theoretical analysis that pertains to the initial discovery of categories and their properties. The mandate of open coding is that the analyst starts with conceptual nothing – no concepts. Open coding ends when it yields a core category. This initial categorization of data through the constant comparison method is the first basic analytical step into the data. During open coding, the data are broken down into incidents to be closely examined and compared for similarities and differences, while constantly asking of the data the neutral question, “What category or property of a category does this incident indicate?” (p. 39)

The process of open coding maintains an intensive focus upon the transcripts. The process of document analysis and querying the emergent data includes asking, “What is going on here?” and “How does this information differ from what has already been coded?” (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In practice, as the researcher became immersed in analysis he employed a mixture of approaches that allowed ongoing analysis to reveal the most appropriate approach at a given time. This is in accord with the expectation that as analysis proceeds, the resulting data will indicate the most productive units to code and analyze (Glaser 1992, Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher was guided by six rules of thumb offered by Strauss (1987) to facilitate effective open coding:
1. Identify in-vivo codes. These are terms used by the participants.

2. Give a provisional name to each code, in-vivo or constructed.

3. Ask yourself specific questions about words, phrases, sentences, and actions.

4. Move quickly to dimensions that seem relevant to given words and phrases.

5. Seek comparative cases, if analysis fails to reveal them.

6. Attend to the items in the coding paradigm: conditions, action/interaction, and consequences. (p. 30)

In the initiation of open coding, terms were underlined and synthesis statements were made in the margins of the transcripts. Memos were created on the computer, scraps of paper, and 3x5 cards as the ideas flowed. Many of these memos detailed ideas and thoughts about emerging concepts and categories. Comparisons and relationships that appeared among the emerging concepts and categories were noted as was an emerging awareness of properties and dimensions.

Axial Coding

Axial coding moved analysis into organizing the information that was both fragmented and experimentally grouped during open coding. The concepts and categories developed during microanalysis and open coding were subjected to increasingly purposeful comparison, combination, and recombination in a procedure that linked process and structure to behaviors manifested in response to a common set of conditions. On one level, axial coding involves the discovery of conditions, actions, and interactions that contribute to understanding human behavior. Yet, the overarching goal of axial coding is to systematically
develop and relate categories, in such a way that they contribute to building a model and/or theory.

Axial coding and open coding were not necessarily done sequentially. Initially open coding preceded axial coding so that concepts and categories upon which axial coding is founded were established. The two soon intertwined; even as axial coding proceeded, open coding continued. Because grounded theory is a process of discovery and emergence, new concepts and categories may emerge at any time in data analysis, sometimes suggesting new directions for analysis. This quality of emergence prompted the researcher to collect pertinent data or return to examine previously analyzed data. During advanced coding the researcher at times returned to microanalysis to uncover concepts, perspectives, or relationships that may have been missed in prior passes through the data. These forays were targeted at a specific area of the transcript, as the researcher had become quite familiar with the data.

Creswell (1998) and Strauss (1987) suggested that an important aspect of axial coding is the identification of central categories related to the phenomenon of interest. Though central categories of interest may emerge during open coding, the identification of central categories continued and intensified during axial coding. The objective is to begin creating "a dense texture of relationships around each "axis" of a small number of central categories" (Strauss, 1987, p. 64). During the process of axial coding, several categories emerged as the focus of attention. A subsequent search for relationships among categories served the purpose of reducing the number of categories to a dozen as they gradually folded into each other.
According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), axial coding involves four basic tasks.

1. Defining categorical properties and their dimensions (initiated in open coding).
2. Identifying conditions, actions, interactions, and consequences relative to phenomena.
3. Linking categories to their properties through relational statements.
4. Seeking cues in data regarding relationships between major categories. (p. 126)

Building upon the above, axial coding in this research incorporated five tasks, which are explained in the following paragraphs.

*Interrelating Categories and Their Properties.* In analyzing the data, categorical properties were highlighted, listed in margin notes, and included in memos. Comparing and combining the data incident-to-incident and incident-to-category revealed a number of logical combinations, as the researcher questioned the data and the various combinations that developed. Questions such as “How does this property influence behavior?” “How does this property fit the category?” and, “What distinguishes one category from another?” were a few of the questions asked in this process. Establishing relationships between aspects of experience resulted in a number of categorical groupings. Relational statements and diagrams were developed, noted in memos, and displayed in diagrams. As suggested by Creswell (1998), interrelationship included causal conditions that influenced the phenomenon of interest, strategies for addressing the phenomenon, the context, and consequences of undertaking the strategies.

*Dimensionalizing Categorical Properties.* Properties were examined in order to determine the variation existing within a property. They were diagrammed and discussed in
memos. Creating colorful diagrams on large sheets of white paper helped to shift data analysis to a creative and emergent process, and highlighted varied possibilities for representing the findings. Qualifying categories by specifying their properties and dimensions allowed the researcher to formulate patterns of behavior and variations on those patterns.

Exploring Conditions and Actions That Facilitate the Occurrence of Phenomena. This included an ongoing examination of the data in order to determine when, how, where, under what conditions, and with what consequences significant phenomena occurred. As was stated before, highlighting and underlining, writing codes in the margins of transcripts, and memos were all used to record findings.

Determining How Major Categories Relate to Each Other. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described this as an interpretive activity done at a conceptual rather than a descriptive level. It was accomplished through querying the data, memoing, sorting, and reviewing memos, recombining coding cards, and creating conceptual diagrams.

Integrating Structure and Process. Structure creates a context in which events occur. Process denotes the activity, over time, of individuals or organized groups (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) Understanding the relationship of structure to process, as well as the nature of the relationship between these elements and the phenomenon of interest, is critical to a full explanation of phenomena. Axial coding is primarily about relating these events in order to generate explanation. Accordingly, coding identified three basic components of experience: (a) the conditions (structures) under which a co-created transformation is created, (b) individual and interactive responses to events arising out of certain conditions, and (c) the
outcomes of actions and interactions. The combination of elements may indicate a pattern or circumstance that assists the identification of phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

A category is saturated when data collection and analysis fail to generate new information regarding properties, dimensions, conditions, behaviors, or consequences. The researcher must determine when the time and effort invested in analysis are not producing a significant amount of new information. In the research, saturation occurred early in analysis for some categories such as drivers. Saturation of other categories, for example, validation, developed in the later stages of axial coding, as related categories were progressively folded into an axial category and the axial categories themselves were collapsed.

There is no agreed upon definition in the methodological literature regarding the number of major categories to be developed in axial coding. Creswell (1998) stated that the result should be the identification of one category. Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicated that this distinction occurs during selective coding, the next step in data analysis. Twelve axial categories emerged in this research.

Selective Coding

"Selective coding is a process by which categories are unified around a core category and those categories needing further explication are filled in with descriptive detail" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 32). In this research, selective coding resulted in four core categories. While the bulk of grounded theory studies designate a singular core category, Strauss (1987) states that selective coding may produce a small number of core categories. This stance is supported in the literature on grounded theory, which emphasizes emergence as opposed to
forcing data into a particular structure (Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). Selective coding consisted of identifying and refining the core categories and integrating them into a model. The four core categories that emerged were: Activating Awareness, Generating Preferences, Widening the Circle, and Continuing the Journey.

Together the core categories conceptualize findings and explain relationships of behavior to conditions. Brott and Meyers (1999) defined a core category as accounting for variation in a pattern of behavior. Once the core categories are identified, other categories may be related to them in terms of conditions that account for the occurrence of co-created transformation (Brott & Meyer, 1999). Accordingly, selective coding in this current research focused on relating axial categories to the selective categories. The integration of categories and subcategories densifies information and boosts explanatory power. This process ultimately resulted in the production of a model depicting co-created transformation.

"A central category has analytic power...provided by its ability to pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146). Six criteria distinguish a core category from other categories produced during analysis: (1) it is central; it relates to all or nearly all other categories, (2) indicators of the phenomena represented by a core category appear frequently in the data, (3) it advances the model in a logical, consistent, and emergent manner so that data is not forced, (4) it is sufficiently abstract to have the potential to generalize to other contexts and research, (5) it explains variation, including alternative cases, in terms of a central idea, and (6) it has the potential to grow in depth and explanatory power through continued analytical refinement (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
In a manner similar to Huss (1994), selective coding was a five-step process consisting of the following steps.

1. Selection of the core categories.

2. Determining properties and dimensions of the core: relating categories and subcategories to the core through use of a coding paradigm.

3. Relating categories at the dimensional level: determining the relationships of subcategories based on the range of their properties.

4. Validating relationships against data: identifying patterns, and grouping data accordingly.

5. Filling in categories needing refinement. (pp. 46-47)

In accord with Glaser's (1992) description of selective coding, some core categories began to emerge early in the analysis. Glaser advocates for early identification. Accordingly, selective coding was in part integrated in open and axial coding. The five steps outlined above occurred at times in a sequential and continuous manner, and at other times in a discontinuous manner that did not always follow the given progression.

Trustworthiness

There are numerous perspectives advanced by qualitative researchers regarding how verification should be conducted as well as how applicable verification is to the qualitative study (Creswell, 1998). Yet, it is common to see criteria established by Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) utilized in discussions of qualitative research (Creswell, 1994,
Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the basic issue of trustworthiness is how a researcher can persuade an audience that the findings of an inquiry are worth attending to. To satisfy the need for verification, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested four criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of the research: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Within the bounds of each criterion are procedures that may be used to satisfy that criteria. Each criterion is explained in the following paragraphs where the researcher describes procedures used in this research to maintain trustworthiness in the research process.

**Credibility**

Credibility refers to the accuracy of the researcher’s understanding and interpretation of the participant’s perspective and experience. It is also has to do with how well the researcher integrates the perspectives of different participants into the final report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Keoughan & Joanning, 1997). Credibility in this research was established using the procedures of peer debriefing, progressive subjectivity, member checks, triangulation, and alternate case analysis.

Peer debriefing consists of ongoing discussion between the researcher and people who act as consultants in the process. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefers may provide methodological guidance, encourage reflection, or provide the opportunity for the researcher to test out emerging hypothesis.
Frequent methodological guidance was provided through peer debriefing by the professor who guided this research and one committee member who has experience and expertise in grounded theory research. Methodological guidance included planning, brainstorming, and challenging the procedures used by the researcher in data analysis. It forced the researcher to clarify findings and explain procedures so that he was made aware of any biases and preconceptions that might be creeping into the process.

Another debriefer frequently listened to the researcher discuss his analysis and also examined the evolving body of work. In discussions, the debriefer often raised new perspectives that sent the researcher back to the data to examine his interpretations and ensure that the data supported his ideas. Thus, peer debriefing kept the researcher close to the data and to the language and perspectives of the participants.

Progressive subjectivity consists of an ongoing process of reflection, done in a journal. In this research, self-observations were kept in the form of memos by the researcher. The memos recorded reflections, discoveries, ideas, logic, direction, and conversations with consultants. Memos are an important part of the grounded theory method and are explained in the preceding pages of this chapter.

Progressive subjectivity also included ongoing reflection on the relationship of the research to the researcher’s experience (Buikema, 2001). Reflection occurred in written form and in self-reflective thought. This aspect of reflection helped the researcher evaluate and address any chance that his accumulated experience and attitudes might affect data analysis.

Member checks help determine the credibility of the inferences and interpretations that the researcher develops in analyzing the data. Member checks are conducted by asking
participants to comment upon summaries of the interview data.

The interviews of three couples who became the central focus of this research were summarized. A cover letter requesting feedback, a copy of the interview, and the summary were e-mailed as attachments to participant couples, who responded in kind. Commentary from respondents confirmed the researcher's interpretations and added thoughts that were used in the further analysis of data. There were also informal member checks with participants, through phone conversations, e-mail, and chance meetings. These occasions offered the researcher so additional opportunities to ask questions and clarify interpretations.

Triangulation is using multiple methods to gather and understand data (Keoughan and Joanning, 1997). In the research on co-created transformation, a single form of triangulation was utilized. This was the use of a trained consultant as a second reader to code transcripts. Uncoded transcripts of four interviews were provided to the consultant. The consultant coded the transcripts through microanalysis and open coding, and developed synthesis statements. The researcher then interviewed the consultant, comparing his coding to hers and making notes of the interview. With few exemptions, the researcher's coding was confirmed and several new perspectives emerged from this procedure that were incorporated into the ongoing data analysis.

Alternate case analysis is the examination of data that does not fit an emerging model. In this research, 6 of the 16 interviewed couples were identified as struggling to transform. Three other couples were identified as being in crisis. Two interviews of couples who were in conflict and two interviews of couples who were struggling to transform were closely examined to determine which factors seemed to prevent the successful co-creation of a
transformation. The examination served to mark important differences between couples who succeed in transformation and those who do not.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to ensuring the stability and consistency of data, while allowing for the emergence in process and outcome. Dependability was addressed through member checks, triangulation, the establishment of an audit trail, and the use of several colleagues as consultants during the process of data analysis. Member checks and triangulation have been previously explained. The audit trail and multiple consultants are explained below.

An audit trail is an ongoing record of the research. It documents the research process, so that ideally, an uninvolved person could understand how the research project was conducted. This allows for a process review and duplication of methods. The audit trail in this research consists of audiotapes, transcripts containing coding and synthesis statements, process memos, coding memos, theoretical memos, cards used to sort and classify codes, notes made during interviews, and varied diagrams.

The use of multiple consultants is intended to reduce the bias of one person working alone (Joanning & Keoughan, 1996). On several occasions in the process of this research, a trained consultant accompanied the researcher to interviews and provided feedback and observations following the interview. The consultant also assisted the researcher with transcription and followed up on the researcher’s analysis of transcripts by reviewing the analysis, commenting upon the analysis, and asking questions.
Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the research findings may be applied in other contexts. A grounded theory study results in a theory that is close to a specific situation and population of people (Creswell, 1998). The results of this research have limited transferability. The model of co-created transformation requires testing to determine its application in other settings. This is in concert with the objectives and expectations of grounded theory research (Creswell, 1994; 1998; Huss, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In this research, a limited transferability was established through the use of peer debriefings, progressive subjectivity, member checks, alternate case analysis and purposive sampling. The first four have been explained. Purposive sampling is explained below.

Purposive sampling is including a range of participants. In this research, a range of participants was sampled. The sample population ranged in age from 24 to 75 years and the length of relationship was from 3 years to 50 years. As explained earlier in this chapter, people of different income ranges, ethnic backgrounds, and geographic locations were included in the research.

Confirmability

Confirmability consists of grounding the research in the experiences and perceptions of the participants and avoid having the biases or perceptions of the researcher overshadow the participants' story. It is an attempt to introduce neutrality into the efforts of the researcher. In keeping with the common practices of qualitative research, multiple
consultants and peer debriefing were used to maintain confirmability. Member checks, as discussed previously were also useful in this effort.

Multiple consultants were used to increase the probability that the interpretations of data that guide the researcher's work reflect the participant's perceptions. The use of a second reader and the presence of a consultant during some of the interviews introduced an alternative viewpoint that helped in later discussion and analysis to keep the researcher close to the data. In other words, the researcher was "nudged" and challenged to maintain a neutral stance and let interpretation emerge from the data. In using a consultant, it became evident at times, that the researcher was imposing a viewpoint. Consulting prompted him to self-correct.

As described earlier, the probing questions posed by peer debriefers often sent the researcher back to the data, in order to check his interpretations. These checks resulted in self-correction on several occasions, when it became evident that interpretations that originally seemed profound were not supported by the data.

The Use of Literature

Unlike other research methodologies, grounded theory postpones the literature review until either the researcher is immersed in the process of analysis or a theory has been generated and the researcher is comparing it to the literature. This suppression of the literature review serves as a safeguard against researcher preconception and bias (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Glaser, 1992, Glaser & Strauss, 1987). To be open to discovery, a researcher must enter the field with as few preconceptions as possible. Even when carefully monitored,
preconceptions may exercise subtle effects upon the researcher's sensitivity to the subtle nuances, emergent concepts, and relationships within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In contrasting the ways literature is used in qualitative research, Creswell (1994) states,

The researcher may incorporate the related literature into the final section of the research, where it is used to compare and contrast with the results (or themes or categories) to emerge from the research. This model is especially popular in grounded theory studies, and I recommend it because it uses the literature inductively. (p. 22)

Given the nature of grounded theory research, it is impossible to predict the salient issues or theoretical concepts that may emerge in the research process. A researcher steeped in literature develops expectations and preconceptions that may constrain his or her ability to be open and receptive to new information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Using the literature in an inductive fashion does not imply naivety. Researchers enter the field with conceptions gained through life experience, professional experience, and professional training. It is impossible to do otherwise. The researcher must set aside or bracket this pre-knowledge in order to be open and sensitive to incoming ideas. Suppressing the literature review avoids creating more preconceptions (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Huss, 1994). Glaser (1992) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that an a-priori review decreases theoretical sensitivity. Diminished sensitivity heightens the potential for a researcher to miss important new or alternative information.

Literature has important but different uses in grounded theory research. When analysis drives the researcher back into the field to compare emergent concepts, to enrich and densify them, and to dimensionalize them in terms of their relationships to other concepts, consulting the literature may provide questions and ideas as to how to accomplish these tasks. Comparing the knowledge found in literature with information gained through
theoretical sampling may create a thorough and complex understanding of a concept. A common use of the literature in grounded theory research is to review related literature at the end of a study in order to compare and contrast the theory and its underlying concepts to other research. In these ways, rather than directing the research in terms of posing concepts and theories to be examined, the use of literature is dictated by what emerges from the research and piques a researcher’s curiosity. Grounded theory is inductive, that is, the theory emerges as the data are collected. “Data dictate the conceptualization of theory rather than the traditional deductive methodologies that attempt to fit data into a preconceived theoretical base” (Huss, 1994, p. 22). Any literature review is dictated by concepts, connections, and theories that emerge from the data and the researcher perceptions regarding what other information is needed to supplement development of an emergent theory.

In the current research, as indicated in chapter one, professional literature was scanned to determining types of change that have been studied. Abstracts, journals, and books were scanned in a search for indicators of similar studies. The purpose was exploratory and conducted solely to determine whether this type of research had been previously conducted. The purpose was not to seek concepts and theories to test or compare. As noted, the researcher failed to locate studies with a focus upon couples in the process of making mutually determined transformations.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe ways that technical literature (e.g., professional journals, books, and papers) can be useful in grounded theory studies. They emphasize that a researcher must be vigilant in insuring that the literature supplements his or her analysis of data and does not create expectations regarding what will be found. It should be noted that
there is no standard use of literature described among grounded theorists and there is little attention or debate devoted to the use of the literature review (Creswell, 1998; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The following suggestions by Strauss and Corbin (1998) are appropriate to the current research study.

1. Technical literature may suggest concepts that provide a source for making comparisons to data at the dimensional level, thus differentiating and giving specificity to the emergent concept.

2. The repeated appearance of concepts in literature that are also found in the data may highlight the significance of a concept.

3. Descriptive literature, in which events are described with minimal interpretation and classification, may serve to enhance sensitivity as to what to look for in the data.

4. Literature may be used as a secondary source of data.

5. Literature may stimulate questions during the analysis process. For example, when a discrepancy is found between the researcher’s data, and findings reported in the literature, a researcher may be prompted to explore the differences.

6. In the initial stages of analysis, areas for theoretical sampling may be suggested by comparing the researcher’s findings with those in the literature.

7. At the conclusion of data collection and analysis, literature may be used to confirm findings or to illustrate where the literature is incorrect, overly simplistic, or only partially explains phenomena. (pp. 49-51)

Strauss and Corbin (1998) also mentioned the use of non-technical literature such as letters, journals, newspapers, and biographies. These may be used as primary data or as sources of
information used to supplement interviews.

The result of this research, a model of co-created transformation, is presented in Chapter III. In accord with one use of the literature as described by Creswell (1994, 1998) and Strauss and Corbin, (1998), Chapter IV compares and contrasts the model of co-created transformation developed in this research to an empirically validated model of change, that has been subjected to extensive (1) research, (2) development, and (3) use from its inception.
CHAPTER III: RESULTS

Orientation to the Chapter

This chapter is divided into three sections. The initial section orients the reader to the presentation of the results and reviews the research questions. The model of transformative change, which emerged from the research and analysis is presented in section two. Section three presents the emergent categories resulting from the grounded theory analysis. The categories have been placed into two major subdivisions: Transformative Context and Transformative Process. Transformative context addresses conditions that set the stage for co-created transformation. Data analysis revealed that these transformations occurred within a context of necessary conditions. Transformative Process includes the categories that refer directly to aspects of the transformation itself. Major categories in this section are presented sequentially according to the model. The presentation of subcategories is integrated within the categories each subcategory falls under.

The research questions posed in Chapter I, are answered in the explanation of results given in this chapter. Question 3, is also addressed in Chapter V. The questions are (1) How do couples co-create transformation in their lives?, (2) What meanings do couples make of their experience of transformation?, and (3) What can be learned about co-created transformation that may inform couples wishing to make similar changes in their lives and relationships?

The four participant couples have been identified as follows. Couple 1 are Darren and Dena, couple 2 are Shelly and Scott, couple 3 are Gary and Gina; and couple 4 are Joan and Jay. The presentation of the results most frequently identifies participants by name. When
names are not used in the following text, the couples are identified by numbers in parenthesis, so that the reader may know to whom a particular concept or other explanation is related. Since the research generally considers the couples as a unit, numbers in parenthesis indicate reference to a couple. Thus, the couples will be indicated as (c. 1), (c. 2), (c. 3), and (c.4), as necessary. When the presentation of results pertains to an individual, that person’s name is used and is usually accompanied by the couple number.

In the interest of staying as close to the language and meaning of participants as possible, most coding in this analysis was done as in-vivo coding. In-vivo coding refers to the use of participant terminology. This use of participants’ language has been extended to the presentation of the results in an attempt to represent participants’ experience as accurately as possible, and to maintain a focus on descriptions, concepts, and linkages revealed by the data. The frequent use of quotations is intended to provide the experience of transformation from the viewpoint of couples who created it in their lives and defined it in this research.

The Process of Co-Created Transformation

This section begins by presenting the model of co-created transformation and a brief explanation of the process. The following section makes a sequential presentation of the emergent categories that resulted from the grounded theory analysis. Categories and subcategories are presented as an integrated sequence that follows the stages of the model. Each stage is presented and the emergent categories that fit within the stage are detailed and discussed. Presentation takes a narrative form, assuming the characteristic of a story as presented by the participant couples who created and continue to live their respective transformations. The presentation of categories is divided into two sections. The first,
"Conditions of Co-Created Transformation," presents conditions that are necessary for a co-created transformation to occur. The second, "The Stages of Co-Created Transformation is a sequential presentation of the stages, along with the categories, and subcategories that emerged during the analysis of co-created transformation.

An Overview of Co-Created Transformation

A summary of the findings of the research of co-created transformation is presented and followed by a model of the process (see Figure 1). The conditions, stages, and steps incorporated in the model are briefly explained. A summary is provided here to give the reader a unified image of the process before the results are explained in detail.

Necessary Conditions of Co-Created Transformation

In the analysis of the data in this grounded theory research, the researcher discovered that the couples who were successful at co-creating a transformation met several conditions. They had satisfied some basic needs, they possessed certain relational attributes, and were highly educated. These conditions are represented in the model of co-created transformation as basic needs, relational attributes, and intellectual resources. As the model (see Figure 1) shows, the three conditions are the foundation upon which a co-created transformation is developed. According to the data, these conditions must be satisfied before a couple can create a successful transformation. The data also revealed that couples who attempted transformation, but had reached an impasse in the process, failed to meet the basic conditions described here.
Of the three conditions, basic needs and relational attributes have a number of subcategories that further define and dimensionalize them. Each of the three conditions is summarized as follows.

- **Basic needs** refers to each individual within a dyadic relationship having met her or his basic physical, intellectual, and affective needs. Needs are broadly subcategorized as security, connection, value, and actualization. Each subcategory is later discussed in depth.

- **Relational attributes** are the qualities of a relationship that cause it to be fulfilling for the couple as individuals and as a unit. The subcategories of relational attributes include reciprocal regard, aptitude for change, and inquiry. Each subcategory contains another level of subcategories, which are described in the discussion of relational attributes later in this chapter.

- **Intellectual resources** include (a) the capacity to learn quickly, (b) the ability to develop a comprehensive grasp of a body of knowledge, (c) the ability to understand complexity, and (d) the ability to remember detail.

*The Stages of Co-Created Transformation*

Co-created transformation consists of four stages; each incorporates two or three steps. The progression of this process is depicted in the model depicted in figure 1. Starting from a foundation of necessary conditions, the stages of co-created transformation progress from left to right. The stages are summarized following the depiction of the model on the next page.
Figure 1. Model of Co-Created Transformation
Activating awareness. Activating awareness is the initial stage of co-created transformation. Awareness precipitates the readiness to change. There are two steps within this stage. The first is responding to drivers and the second is acknowledging incongruity.

Drivers are mutually held values and attitudes, developed within the context of the relationship. They represent the qualitative changes sought by transforming couples. Five drivers are common to transformative couples. They are: (a) adventure and exploration, which is the desire to embrace new experiences; (b) connection, which is the desire to embrace extended spiritual, relational, and ecological contexts of a couple's world; (c) intention, in which the couple consciously, collaboratively, and independently chooses their lifestyle, activities, and associations; (d) health, in both the physical and affective domains; and (e) meaning, which is the expression of spirituality, intellect, and creativity.

Acknowledging incongruity refers to a couple's recognition of their failure to live in harmony with their values. The awareness of incongruity develops over a period of years. Once incongruity is mutually acknowledged, the transformative couple progresses on to the second stage of transformation.

Generating preferences. This second stage of co-created transformation consists of three steps. Reflective dialogue is the initial step. It is the collaborative discussion and development of ideals regarding the couple's preferred way of living. Reflective dialogue includes conversation, research, mutual reflection, and an evaluation of resources.

Perceiving opportunity is the second step. It represents recognition of "transformative openings" and the readiness to pursue them. Transformative openings are opportunities that link dialogue about transformation to action. In this research transformative openings
included changes in job status, the discovery of an alternative philosophy of life, and inclusion in groups of people who supported and encouraged transformation.

Making decisions is the final step in the stage of generating preferences. Making decisions consists of immediate decisions and unfolding decisions. While each type of decision occurs in a different time frames, both involve making a commitment to act upon the desire to co-create a transformation.

Widening the circle. In this stage, transformative couples embrace new philosophies, relationships, and lifestyles. In a two-step process, they first release attachments to the old ways of thinking or acting. Thus, couples let go of relationships, attachments to material goods, beliefs, and habits of lifestyle that may inhibit or prevent their transformation. The second step is the creation of a supportive community. This means that they develop or redevelop relationships with people who support and affirm their transformative efforts.

Continuing the journey. The fourth stage of transformation marks a point of accomplishment. Here the couple validates the change as a way of acknowledging that they have created a transformation in their lives. Couples also look ahead to how they might extend or continue the transformation, perhaps dovetailing it into a future transformation. As the name indicates, the transformative journey never ends. No couple succeeding at transformation viewed accomplishment of the transformation they described to the researcher, as an ending. Accomplishment serves instead as a marker on a continuing path and a validation of their ability to continue the transformative journey.
Conditions of Co-Created Transformation

The transformative context refers to the combination of conditions that is the foundation of co-created transformation. These conditions, which when taken together are referred to as a conditional matrix (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) are necessary in order for phenomenon under study to occur. Three conditions are described: relationship attributes, basic needs, and intellectual resources. Of the conditions, relational attributes are by far the most complex of conditions to emerge from the interview process. The other conditions are rather straightforward and are presented succinctly. These conditions require little if any interpretation by the researcher and are simply based on information the participants reported on a demographic form used in the initial stage of the interview.

Relational Attributes

Relational attributes consist of learned, co-created or adopted traditions, values, and characteristics that bond a relationship. In the ongoing development of the relationship, these attributes distinguish the couple from other social groups, instill confidence, enhance relational competence, and promote communication. In the case of transformative couples, the presence of these relationship attributes set a context that allowed and stimulated the examination and challenge of cultural norms that both guided and constrained relationships within the parameters of sanctioned social and cultural narratives. The relational attributes that emerged in this research are broadly classified as reciprocal regard, aptitude for change, and inquiry. Each category groups several subcategories. In the following discussion the subcategories are discussed in integration with their respective major category.
Reciprocal Regard.

Reciprocal regard includes knowing and valuing each others strengths, interests, and values, accepting one’s own and a partner’s limitations, and the complimentary use of shared and unique strengths to build the relationship and mutually pursue activities and interests. It is also a respect for individual authenticity and a partner’s definition of herself or himself. The following subcategories expand on the brief definition given here.

Affirmation. Affirmation includes knowledge of one’s partner, respecting the partners’ self-definition, and viewing a partner and the relationship as a multifaceted whole. Knowledge of one’s partner includes familiarity with their likes and dislikes, hopes and disappointments, and history. It is especially important when co-creating a transformation that partners have reciprocal knowledge of each others’ individual talents and abilities. The complimentary use of these individual attributes contributes to relationship strength and the unified capability to decide upon, act, and maintain transformation.

An aspect of affirmation that especially stands out among transformed relationships is that no participant corrected or added to their partner’s description of themselves during the interview process. This is a vigorous contrast to the interviewer’s experience of couples in strong relationships who were struggling toward transformation (6 couples) or those couples trying to preserve a heavily-conflicted relationship (3 couples) by aspiring to create a transformation.

Affirmation includes viewing the relationship as a multifaceted entity with many attributes, quirks, good, and bad moments, and as an ongoing process of change and development. Shelly and Scott (c. 2) described the struggles involved in crewing a 38-foot
sailboat on a 2200-mile Atlantic crossing at six knots (7.2 miles per hour). Their interview is packed with references to the necessity of working out differences, acknowledging each other's strengths, and trusting each other in order to safely and happily accomplishes such an exploit. Portraying themselves as assertive and able individuals in their own right, there were many occasions where differences had to be worked out and each had to accept the other for who they were. In fact, because of his long time supervisory position on an ocean-based oil platform, Scott was used to having answers, making decisions, and giving orders. Life aboard the sailboat changed that. Shelly had ideas of her own; Scott acknowledged, “Sometimes her answer was better than mine.” There were of course other strengths to be acknowledged and different ways of doing things. For example, on day watch, Shelly felt she could be responsible for skippering the boat and read if the weather was calm. Scott felt that one must be fully alert at all times. The necessity of accepting this difference is expressed by the couple in two ways. Shelly stated, “When you're traveling at six knots, you either chill or quit.” The couple also speaks of the necessity of acceptance and trust because a two-person crew standing four-hour watches, each partner must accept the other's way of doing things or not sleep. This does not preclude negotiation around the issues of acceptance.

Another example of affirmation is evident in the journey of Gary and Gina (c. 3). Gary who was completing doctorate in theology spoke confidently and proudly of Gina as an “intuitive theologian.” Though many people trained at the doctoral level might dismiss intuition, Gina's intuitive qualities are utilized to enrich the couple's pursuit of “global theology,” one that is inclusive of many forms of spiritual belief and action. This kind of
affirmation is described by Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1999) who found that strong and happy couples demonstrated high levels of positive verbal cues, agreement, and approval.

Collaboration. A collaborative relationship is characterized by Anderson (1997) as a “mutual endeavor toward possibility” (p. 2). Gergen (2000) characterized collaboration as taking advantage of the multiple skills that participants bring to a context. Collaboration within transformative partnerships includes the following dimensions: partnership, unity, openness to partner’s ideas, and trust.

Partnership was mentioned repeatedly in varied forms throughout the interviews. Marriages are characterized as “strong” (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4) and balanced partnerships. While just one couple used the term “balance” in describing their relationship, all described various ways in which they balance each other out in terms of philosophy, decision-making, interests, and the division of labor. What is striking about the concept of balance among these partnerships is that all participated together in the activities they described as related to the transformation. Thus together the couples have created new communities of friends (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), learned to navigate (c. 2), indulged themselves in learning about nature, plant life, and carpentry (c. 1), developed a spiritual community (c. 3, c. 4), embraced a simplified lifestyle (c. 1, c. 2, c. 4), and so on. Couples speak of “shared interests” (c. 3, c. 4), and shared goals (c. 2) and interdependence (c. 1) in describing their relationship.

Unity is an ongoing thread though all interviews. Participants (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3) speak of the strength in their relationships prior to the beginning transformative process. Joan and Jay (c. 4) spoke of a different experience, conflict and angst at one point in their relationship evolved into the recognition of their strength as a couple just prior to beginning their
transformative process. All couples speak of the unfolding transformative process as having brought them into a greater unity with each other. Some examples of this unity are expressed in the following phrases: "we crossed bridges together" (c. 3), "at every point where we moved ahead, we did that together" (c. 1), "working tightly together" (c. 2), and "it is like a quest together" (c. 4).

A reciprocal openness to a partner's ideas is required for co-creation and collaboration. In myriad ways, there was a collaborative incorporation of each partner's ideas into the transformative process and a respect for the perspectives offered by each partner. Individuals were usually able to acknowledge the merit of an alternate point of view and to approach the creation of transformation as equals. As Scott (c. 2) said of Shelly, "sometimes her idea is better." Shelly described reaching consensus as a "rocky" process. She stated, "sometimes consensus meant turning our backs on each other and shouting our ideas until we heard each other."

Similar to the concept of openness to partners' ideas, Gottman's (1999) studies indicate that stable and happy partnerships are in part determined by "the extent that men accept influence from and share power with women" (p. 52). The importance of acceptance is reflected in co-created transformation. Comments during the interviews indicated that the men in successful transformative couples credited and acted upon the opinions, suggestions, and influence of their partner. Transformative couples appear to balance openness between them very naturally. However, Gottman (1999) and Gottman and Silver (1994) speak of findings that in less happy and stable couples the male is reluctant to accept influence from the female, was reflected in all except two interviews of couples in this research who were
struggling to transform or in marital crisis. In the two exceptions, failure to be open or accept influence appeared symmetrical.

Openness requires a commitment of both partners. This is reflected in the story of Joan and Jay (c. 4) who struggled for a period of years before they were able to really hear each other. Yet, for all couples interviewed who were able to achieve transformation, it has been necessary to maintain openness to a partner’s ideas. The openness described and exhibited by couples who are successful in co-creating transformation is a marked departure from the couples interviewed who were in a reasonably solid relationship, but continued to struggle to actually achieve transformation (6 couples) or the three couples interviewed who were in highly conflicted relationships that threatened the survival of their marriage.

Trust is described by transformative couples in varied ways. It incorporates “respect” (c. 1, c. 2, c. 4) and interdependence. Independence is described in terms related to the stability of the partnership, e.g., “unvarying anchor” (c. 2), and the ability to “fall back on each other” (c. 3) and having faith in the partner, e.g., “belief in each other” (c. 1) and “confidence in the way the boat is being run” (c. 2). Trust was also described in terms of sharing responsibility. Joan and Jay (c. 4) spoke of how much they share their thoughts and feelings with each other. The confidence they share that their relationship and the transformations that they have co-created are well grounded.

*Congruence.* Rogers (1961) characterized congruence as “being genuine, without front or façade, openly being the feelings and attitudes within” (p. 61). He went on to state, “experience is available, and in awareness, a person is able to live the experience of the moment and communicate it...” (p. 61). Congruence is a process of conveying and acting
upon one’s feelings and experience in the moment. Partners co-creating transformation created transformations that fit for each individual and fit the values and attitudes they had co-created as a couple. For example, Joan and Jay (c. 4) each found a lack or satisfaction even credibility in the common religion of their childhood and early adulthood. Yet, each described themselves as spiritual individuals. As they gained exposure to a new point of view [Buddhism], they began to converse together and co-create values around their historical experience of religion ("didn’t fit") and around embracing a new philosophy that was “Western friendly” and that “fit” their individual and collective being.

_Aptitude For Change_

Couples who successfully completed transformation demonstrated an aptitude for change. Their relationship history included geographical location or a series of job changes. Shelly and Scott (c. 2) came from families of origin where change was a tradition, a part of the flow of life. Scott's father was in the Navy and his family relocated according to duty assignments. Shelly's father was a free-lance writer, making a living by following his developing stories and writing interests. But aptitude for change also entails an attitude that makes change desirable. Darren (c. 1) cited his father's advice to be what he wanted to be and "be the best" at whatever it was. Darren and Dena (c. 1) each chose geology as a profession. Geology requires fieldwork and extended time away from home, especially where oil and mineral exploration is a major focus. Further, the couple explained that a geologist often hires on with a firm to do a particular job that may be of only a few year's duration. He or she knows that when the job is complete they will have to seek another position. Thus, this
couple in their professional training and experience learned to see ongoing change as normal and to be expected.

Among those who made a successful transformation, the common attitude was that change offers adventure and was a mutual pursuit worth embracing. Couples who were unsuccessful at transforming themselves had one member who resisted rather than embraced change, often expressing anxiety in the process. Gary and Gina (c. 3) called transformation an "adventure" and a "journey," Joan and Jay (c. 4) called it a "spiritual quest." In the process, the couples portrayed their respective paths as offering new and exciting experiences that they readily embraced even in the face of uncertainty. In the analysis of interviews, four subcategories of aptitude for change emerged. These are tolerance for uncertainty, confidence, transformative commitment, and competence. Transformative couples spoke of the uncertainty of making a change as profound as a transformation. They brought to transformation some unique attitudes that were expressed according to their varied backgrounds and provided them a platform for making change. Such expressions included occupational uncertainty where a job was seen as a "means of support and not an anchor" (c. 2), where the tentativeness is the nature of one's career (c. 1 & c. 2) and where occupational and geographical changes are the norm (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4).

_Tolerance for Uncertainty._ Uncertainty is a philosophical stance as reflected in Darren's (c. 1) comment that "you must learn tentativeness and confidence, and embrace it." This viewpoint is also reflected in the "freelance mentality" of Shelly and Scott (c. 2) and the Buddhist saying, "Today is a good day to die," which inspired Joan and Jay (c. 4) to live fully and embrace change as spiritual and personal growth.
Gary and Gina (c. 3) spoke of the tolerance for uncertainty required to leave their fundamentalist church and the belief system with which they had been indoctrinated for all of their lives. Fear was found in uncertainty and fed by church doctrine that condemned to Hell those who departed or did not believe and practice Christianity as dictated by that particular church.

Because it is a profound change, co-created transformation may invite a greater amount of uncertainty than other endeavors at change. Yet, all research participants speak of change as necessary and a positive contribution to the development of each individual and to the growth of the relationship.

Confidence. Confidence is important, as most transformation is unique in the sense that it is not modeled upon changes made by other couples. Transformation is co-created by couples in which each member is a self-starter, capable in stepping away from the "mainline thing" (c. 3) and charting their own course. Given that all transformations in this research involved a change in financial status and living conditions, a statement by Darren (c. 1) illustrates such confidence. He said, "We can live just fine."

Transformative commitment. The ability to make and stand by a commitment is an important aspect of the aptitude for change. This includes commitment to the partnership (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4) and a determination (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3) to complete the transformation together. An interesting concept was raised by Darren and Dena (c. 1). They described the "work ethic" involved in a transformation. While the term was used only by this couple, it typifies the pursuit of formal education that began and marks the transformative path charted by Gary and Gina (c. 3), the development of a community of learning and support that
distinguishes Joan and Jay (c. 4), and the multiple forms of preparation, including the learning of skills that were essential to physical survival, of Shelly and Scott (c. 2). When describing their dedication to the partnership, Shelly pragmatically stated in nautical terms, “neither one of us wanted to be a single-hander.”

**Competence.** Competence aids transformation. In creating a change, participants voiced the importance of possessing complimentary or shared competencies. Shared competence was especially important for the sailing team of Shelly and Scott (c. 2). Each had to know how to navigate the boat and read the weather in order to navigate successfully. Being multi-skilled as individuals served Darren and Dena (c. 1), who settled on a piece of undeveloped land, built a home, and currently grow much of what they eat. This multi-skilled nature was less important for Jay an MD, and Joan an RN (c. 4) who lived in an urban environment.

**Adaptability.** Adaptability is an important attribute as couples often make major relocations in the process of their transformation, in addition to adjusting the process and path as they embark upon the transformative journey. In nearly all cases (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3), geographical relocation was a major means of creating bridges to the transformative experience and it was beneficial that transforming couples had developed job skills that they could market widely.

**Inquiry**

A final relational attribute that couples bring to the transformative experience is that of inquiry. Inquiry includes questioning cultural narratives, seeking challenge, and the ongoing pursuit of learning. In particular, an inquiring attitude is what pushes transformative
couples to challenge dominant cultural narratives in order to move beyond them and chart their own course. Each of the subcategories is explained as follows.

*Questioning Cultural Narratives.* According to Dym and Glenn (1993), “every couple's development is influenced by the society in which they live. At every point in their life together, partners must engage their culture’s expectations of how to behave.” (p. 28) Couples handle these expectations differently: (1) striving to conform, (2) changing to meet cultural definitions and dictates, and/or (3) rejecting the expectations. Transformative couples question cultural narratives, particularly those that prescribe conformity. They approach dominant narratives with curiosity and look at them from many perspectives, as explorers and as independent thinkers. Cultural narratives whether followed, modified, or cast aside are approached from a stance informed by ongoing conversation, experimentation, individual and co-created values, and self-education.

The readiness to question social, cultural, and family practices spurred transformative couples to consider and then act upon a desire to create profound change. Risking family or social sanction for questioning dominant norms, the transformative couples incorporated an active curiosity and fascination with issues such as spirit, philosophy, and human and planetary ecology.

Inquiry cuts across a variety of cultural norms. For example, Darren and Dena (c. 1) questioned the social norm of dedicating themselves to the acquisition of money and power, which, thanks to Darren's successful business, was within their grasp. The simple question, "Is this a good way to live?" moved them toward a simple lifestyle, toward the development of an intensified relationship with each other, and to living in harmony with a remote coastal
environment. Predominant cultural norms would have had them raising a family and putting off their present lifestyle until "normal" retirement, some 25 years beyond the point at which the couple began their transformation. Many of their friends and business associates look askance at their transformation, and some friends attempted to dissuade them.

A striking example of questioning a cultural narrative is the story of Gary and Gina (c. 3). Raised in a religious denomination that does not tolerate other belief systems, Greg and Gina were seen as "emerging leaders" in the church hierarchy. Questioning came early to these individuals and intensified within their partnership. Inquiry sprang from mutual reflection, ongoing conversation, shared experience, and exposure to diverse cultures, which contradicted church doctrine. Their questions challenged the exclusive and punitive nature of church doctrine. Their decision to act upon these questions opened new perspectives in belief and action and brought rejection from their families of origin and the church-centered culture of which they were a part.

**Seeking Challenge.** Transformative couples seek out activities and philosophical pathways that present challenges and see meeting these challenges as a great mutual adventure (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4). In fact, challenge, as discussed in the interviews, is not confined solely to the transformation under study. Challenge is an attitude toward the new (c. 2) and even perceived as a need (c. 4) that assumes many forms. For example, Darren and Dena (c. 1) explored sea kayaking and challenged themselves to increase the length of their voyages. They built a house together, figuring out the process board by board. Gary and Gina (c. 3) and Joan and Jay (c. 4) are continuing to develop mutual philosophies that fit their emerging awareness of their relationship as individuals and couples to society. Having met
the challenge of coexistence over 11 years in the confined living quarters of a small ship. Shelly and Scott (c. 2) are creating new places for themselves in the community in which they now reside. Shelly produces a community newspaper and Scott serves on the city council (c. 2). In describing their approach to challenge, Shelly summarized an attitude conveyed by all transformative couples studied. She declared, “We are thrilled by the new and seek it out.”

**Ongoing Learning.** Learning is valued by all participants who made successful transformation. In all cases, learning is a multifaceted experience of integrated self-study, formal education, and mutual experience. Transformative couples in this research are highly educated and all continue to engage their ongoing fascination with human processes and nature in co-constructed learning experiences. Some examples of co-constructed learning include the joint study of coastal flora and fauna (c. 1), mastering sea kayaking (c. 1), public service (c. 2), spirituality (c. 3, c. 4), and ongoing formal (university) education (c. 3, c. 4).

**Basic Needs**

The motivation to transform a relationship and intensify mutual fulfillment is founded, in part, upon an ability to meet some basic human needs. Participants indicated that they had satisfied basic needs before engaging in the transformative process. The four subcategories of basic needs that emerged from the data are security, connection, value, and actualization. Actualization is Maslow’s (1998) term.
Security

Participants come to transformation having satisfied basic physical needs (e.g., food, health, housing, transportation, income) and basic emotional needs (e.g., esteem, belonging, interaction) sufficiently to allow a focus upon growth or mutual actualization. Participants indicate that many of their basic needs are satisfied within the context of their relationship. Yet, it is evident that the individuals in each transformative partnership are capable of satisfying these needs in their own right. Transformational relationships involve secure and well-adjusted individuals. Some indications of this are that individual members of a couple maintain a combination of significant relationships outside of the partnership. These other relationships include: relationships with members of one’s family of origin (c. 1, c. 2, c. 4), individual relationships with one’s children (c. 3, c. 4), friendships (c. 1; Joan, c. 3), relationships with business associates (Jay, c. 4; Scott, c. 2), and relationships within the context of community activity (c. 2). Another indication of the capacity is that every individual is a professional person with either a bachelor’s degree (c. 2; Gina c. 3) or advanced degrees (c. 1; Gary, c. 3; c. 4). All individual participants described having fulfilling professional jobs. Individuals continue to pursue the interests that attracted them to their professions, though for some the focus of their interests has shifted to less traditional applications (c. 1, c. 2; Gary, c. 3; Joan, c. 4). For example, Darren and Dena (c. 2) continue their interest in science and geology through their ongoing (non-job related) study of geological formations as they indulge their expanded interest in the environment. Thus, as individuals all participants have shown themselves capable of both self-sufficiency and partnership.
Security also includes having sufficient income. The researcher did not encounter any participants or potential participants during this research who were unable to provide themselves shelter, food, clothing, and transportation, and many higher level needs or desires such as education, travel, and entertainment. Gary and Gina (c. 3) reported the lowest income at under $25,000 per year when they initially engaged in their transformation. Their financial situation improved as they moved into careers. Darren and Dena (c. 1) and Joan and Jay (c. 4) reported incomes of over $100,000 per year at the time of their transformation. Shelly and Scott (c. 2) reported their income during the transformation through the years of sailing as between $25,000 and $50,000. Of the 16 couples interviewed, no couple reported being financially strapped or having to resort to extraordinary means to support themselves while in the process of transformation or attempting transformation.

Connection

The need for individual and mutual interaction with others is met in developing relationships that extend the parameters of partnership to incorporate other individuals, couples, and groups. Beyond establishing a committed partnership (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4) participant couples report identification with groups that Jay (c. 4) calls “like-minded people.” In these relationships individuals, family members, or groups of people interact with the couple as a unit. In their context of these relationships, a couple may receive guidance, exchange information, and unite to confront challenges or share aspects of the transformation with others. Some examples are as follows. Joan and Jay (c. 4) found guidance in their transformative journey from Buddhist teachers; Shelly and Scott (c. 2) exchanged information with other sailors which provided them with information about navigation and
what to expect in foreign ports of call; Gary and Gina (c. 3) established a surrogate family unit when their own families rejected their transformation; Darren and Dena (c. 1) welcomed visitors for a few days at a time, to share their simplified lifestyle.

Connection includes a couple’s relationship with their children. This is illustrated in the situation of Joan and Jay (c. 4) in which their adult children gradually joined the couple in their pursuit of alternative (in contrast to mainstream American culture) forms of spirituality and philosophy.

Value

Each individual participant indicated that they were valued and provided leadership or influence within social groups that were of primary importance to the transformative process. Together, Joan and Jay (c. 4) facilitated Buddhist meditation groups. They were valued in their respective workplaces and individual contexts, influencing others with their awareness and sense of calm, which was a part of their transformation. Shelly and Scott (c. 2) reported that they became integrated into an ever-changing cruising community. They were sought out by members of that community for the expertise they had developed together as sailors, as well as for their individual expertise. Scott was especially valued for his knowledge of mechanics, electronics, and navigation; Shelly for her skill with language and the ability to orient herself rapidly and acquire information on local rules and customs in the changing context of ports visited. Darren and Dena (c. 1) were often sought out by friends, family, and community members for their knowledge of nature; each offers unique knowledge in addition to shared expertise. Individually and mutually, Gary and Gina (c. 3)
provided spiritual leadership to individuals and families. They served as mentors and models to others. Each was popular and influential with people in diverse contexts and cultures.

*Actualization*

Actualization is the drive to engage and expand capabilities and, in the process, to create a "global sense" (c. 3) of fulfillment as human beings and to consider a more encompassing view of human ecology (c. 1, c. 2, c. 4) within our lives. Maslow (1998) referred to the drive for fulfillment and the realization of one's potential as actualization. A necessary condition for the co-creation of transformation is the satisfaction of basic needs and the realization of a drive toward becoming actualized.

*Intellectual Resources*

Intellectual resources refer to formal and informal education and the ability to question, to learn, and to figure things out. The participants in this research were a highly educated group. Of the original 16 couples interviewed, all but one individual hold college degrees. In the four exemplary couples discussed in this research, three individuals hold doctoral degrees (Darren, c. 1; Gary, c. 3; Jay, c. 4), two hold Master's degrees (Dena, c. 1; Joan, c. 4) and three hold bachelors degrees (Gina c. 3; Scott & Shelly, c. 2). Of those who hold bachelor's degrees, Shelly has two degrees, and Gina has two years of study beyond the bachelor's level; Scott continues to receive job related training that is highly technical. Couples who co-create transformation in their lives are high achievers and capable learners.
The Stages of Co-Created Transformation

The following section includes a sequential presentation of the stages of co-created transformation. Categories and subcategories are explained in an integrated manner under the heading of the stage at which they occur

Activating Awareness

Awareness precipitates change. This initial stage of co-created transformation is a two-step process that includes responding to drivers and acknowledging incongruity. These steps are described in the following pages.

Responding to Drivers

Darren (c. 1) used the term "drivers" to describe the attitudes and values that motivate people to act, make change, and construct a transformation. He stated that there are some fundamental or core drivers that are common to most people in a particular culture. It is as likely that there other are drivers that are unique to particular individuals, couples or family groups. As analysis progressed in this research, some common drivers were described by each couple. Drivers run like a thread throughout the transformative process. They exert influence over each stage of a transformation and are found in all parts of the interview transcripts upon which this analysis is based. They symbolize the qualitative changes that couples seek in their journey towards transformation.

Drivers have a number of properties. They are changeable. It is natural as a couple transforms that new drivers may arise and some existing drivers modified or relegated to the wayside. Some couples in this research demonstrate that the ideals and values that served as
their drivers before they engaged in a transformative process may no longer be a priority (c. 3 & c. 4). For example, despite growing reservations as young adults, Greg and Gina (c. 3) were involved in denominational “campaigns” in which they went out to spread the teachings of their church. This has changed, and today the couple is motivated to continue reaching beyond the narrow confines of a strict religious practice.

It is likely that many of the drivers that characterize a couple originate within each partner's family of origin and were brought into the relationship as individual values. Some of these individual values are common to both partners and serve, in part, to bring a couple together. Some may be unique to an individual or the individual’s family and upon introduction into the couple's relationship are adapted and integrated into the couple's system of values and motivators. An example of this is Gina, the wife of Greg (c.3), a highly educated minister. She has continued to develop an intuition based theology to guide her exploration of spirituality. Her intuition, in part, also guides the couple's exploration of religion and spirituality. Despite his doctoral level theological education, which might negate intuition, Greg respects Gina’s theology and her input is a valued part of the couple's spiritual life.

The drivers that emerged are common in varying degrees to the couples discussed in this research. Of course, the importance of a particular driver to each couple may be unique. Some drivers are seen as very important and some much less so depending upon which couple is referenced. While it is probable that the actual number of drivers that motivate people to change is unlimited, five drivers (treated here as subcategories) emerged as common to couples who exemplify transformation. They are (1) to seek adventure and
explore, (2) to find connection, (3) to live by intention, (4) to maintain health, and (5) to find or create meaning.

Adventure and Exploration. The term “adventure” was used by three of the four couples who were studied (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3). Participants view transformation as an adventure. Adventure is characterized by the willingness to leave that which is familiar and embrace new experiences. All participants sought to place themselves in a position that challenged their skills or knowledge and required that they learn new ways of being and doing. Adventure is described through different lenses by the respective couples. One couple gave up a comfortable and lucrative urban lifestyle to live on a remote coast (c. 1). Their adventure continues today as they persevere in constructing their home and developing their property, while co-existing with a family of bears who frequent their property during the summer. For another couple adventure involved the mutual embrace of a new philosophy and lifestyle (c. 4). Couples made specific mention of being “thrilled by the new and seeking it out” (c. 2), seeing adventure as a “spiritual journey” (c. 4), “trying out different lifestyles” (c. 1), and expanding the experience of spirituality well beyond the “programming” of their former beliefs and practices (c. 3).

Connection. Connection is the ability of the couple to include themselves in the larger context of their respective worlds. Gina (c. 3) described connection as being part of a “bigger picture.” While the drive to connect is common to all the participant couples, it is enacted in unique ways. The three basic types of connection that emerged in this research are spiritual, relational, and natural connection. Darren and Dena (c. 1) found a sense of connection with nature in gardening, learning about plant life, and kayaking. They placed less emphasis on
relationships with other people and did not talk of spirituality. Gary and Gina (c. 3) emphasized connection at both the spiritual and relational level. They spoke of a global spirituality that includes people of all beliefs and backgrounds. They currently work among people as teachers, theologians, and helpers. People are attracted to them and they take joy in working with others. This is especially true of Gary whom the researcher was able to observe in his work as a teacher. Joan and Jay (c. 4) connect in a more subdued fashion. They speak of seeking connection at a spiritual level and with other "like-minded people." Relational connection was emphasized by Shelly and Scott (c. 2) who integrated themselves into the nautical community referred to by members as the "cruising community." Yet, as they spoke during the interview neither reflected upon being a part of something larger than themselves. It appears that connection may have less systemic significance for this couple.

**Intention.** Living by intention is the self-determination of lifestyle, associations, and experiences through consciously and collaboratively making choices. In living intentionally the couple attends to internal forces and are "driven by what they want to do" (c. 2), instead of driven by external expectations. They do not leave choices, experiences, or the quality of their life to be determined by chance factors or societal dictates. Values are mutually established and serve a reference point for decisions and action.

In discussing intention, the participant couples emphasized the following: living a lifestyle that reflects our values (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), self-definition (c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), and intentional partnership (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4). Self-sufficiency and self-reliance (c. 1) was also important. Of special note is the emphasis that Darren and Dena (c. 1) and Shelly and Scott (c. 2) placed upon freedom related to career and work. Shelly and Scott described this as
having a “freelance mentality” and “not being tightly meshed to a particular career path or identity.” Gary and Gina (c. 3) and Joan and Jay (c. 4) placed more emphasis upon “defining ourselves,” which included accepting and respecting the independent interests of their partners and the contribution of these factors to the partnership. It was also interesting to note that all of the 16 couples that were originally interviewed for this project expressed a great interest in differentiating themselves from the mainstream. Whether they feel they have been successful or not, all of the couples who expressed an interest in making a transformation also defined themselves as unique. As Jay (c. 4) described the couple’s initial forays into Buddhism and its associated practices, he stated that what they were doing “wasn’t mainstream.”

Finally, living intentionally does not cast aside cultural norms and practices. Instead, transformative couples seem to consider each act of conformity as a collaborative decision made in the moment. In the case of Darren and Dena (c. 1) their choice of lifestyle involved fewer demands for social conformity, since they were not residing within a community and could consciously choose when to interact with friends, family, and community members.

Health. Participants described the drive for health in both physical and affective domains. They emphasized emotional health, defining it as having a meaningful and comfortable relationship with one’s partner (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), associating intentionally with people who are caring, calming, and think deeply (c. 3, c. 4), and achieving balance between time devoted to work and time available for activities and relationships (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), and living life at a pace that allows for the full appreciation of a variety of experiences (i.e., not all work and no play) (c. 1, c. 2, c. 4).
Darren (c. 1) finds “fascination” in studying natural phenomena (plant life, tidal action, geology) and learning new skills (carpentry). Their transformation to a simplified lifestyle has allowed he and his partner Dena time to do the kayaking, study of nature, and the gardening that they enjoy as a couple. Scott and Shelly (c. 2) used the term “life at six knots,” to describe slowing down and moving at a pace that was both natural and comfortable.

Joan and Jay (c. 3) placed a special emphasis on balance in their lives. Though both are involved in demanding occupations (he as an oncologist, she as a psychotherapist, nurse, and student), they set aside time to study, meditate, and talk together and to gather with “like-minded people.”

For Gary and Gina (c. 3) and Joan and Jay (c. 4) “spiritual health” was also important. This means living in congruence with their preferred beliefs and practices around religion, making religious practice personally and individually meaningful, and together creating a spiritual path through study, introspection, and dialogue.

**Meaning.** Transformation is pursued in order to add meaning to life. Yet, the interpretations of meaning that emerge from the data are very different for each couple. All participants spoke of meaning and used the term in their respective interviews. The common thread among the different versions of meaning seems to be the satisfaction of a desire for expression. Transformative couples framed expression in creative terms (c. 1), intellectual terms (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), and spiritual terms (c. 3, c. 4).

Other properties of meaning include: a sense of purpose (c. 3), couple-centered affirmation of their experiences and accomplishments (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), the acquisition of knowledge (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), the application of acquired knowledge (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4),
and the mutual accumulation of a variety of life experiences (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4). One factor that stands out is the specific mention by two couples (c. 1, c. 2) that material goods hold little attraction for them. It is evident throughout all 16 interviews that the acquisition of experience and knowledge applied in everyday life seems to create a sense of meaning for couples. While expressing pleasure with their careers, no couple spoke of work as providing the kind of meaning that was being sought in making a transformation. Shelly (c. 2) illustrated this well. She stated, “Meaning is tied to the quality of life, not to meeting the demands of a career.”

The conception of meaning was quite different for each couple. To illustrate the difference and to maintain a connection with the uniqueness of each transformative couple, the following four paragraphs present brief descriptions of how each couple conceptualized meaning.

Darren and Dena (c. 1) found meaning in developing their knowledge of nature. Specifically, they passionately studied coastal flora and fauna. The couple pursued this out of a desire to know and understand nature, simply because they were interested and curious. The knowledge was applied in developing the property they occupy and in gardening to produce food for their table. Both individuals have been successful as career scientists in technical environments. Each enjoyed the work, but also described asking themselves what good their knowledge was if they could not directly apply it to everyday circumstances. In their five years of transforming their lifestyle, they have acquired and applied knowledge of construction, forestry, navigation, and other practical skills that allow them to live a subsistence lifestyle. In particular, the house that they constructed themselves expresses their
mutual creativity.

Meaning for Shelly and Scott (c. 2) was described in terms of applying the skills they gained through schooling and work to successfully "live aboard." Shelly and Scott were able to apply knowledge of technology, languages, and their considerable skills of navigation and boat handling. In addition, they mentored other people within the cruising community.

Gary and Gina (c. 3) continued to explore and broaden their understanding of religion and spiritual practice. Meaningful living for them included being able to see issues and ideas from different points of view, connecting with, and teaching people of all backgrounds, and developing and practicing a concept of global spirituality, where all people could come together in a context of respect and acceptance and not be judged with fundamentalist standards.

Joan and Jay (c. 4) continued to acquire wisdom about mindful living through their Buddhist practices. They applied this wisdom and knowledge to create a sense of "calm" and "balance" as they went about their daily activities. Meaning rests in increasing their understanding of Buddhist philosophy and its spiritual practices. It also incorporated gathering with others who studied and practiced as they did to create a mindful community.

Other specific aspects of meaning that were mentioned include "making sense of the world" (c. 3), adventure as giving meaning to life (c. 1-c. 3), the search for a "better way to live" (c. 4), choosing meaningful interactions instead of those prescribed by work or a particular context (c. 1), and relating present day practices to what was meaningful in one's family of origin (c. 2).
**Acknowledging Incongruity**

Incongruity develops when a couple finds themselves in a life situation that stifles their drive to act in keeping with their values. The incongruous situations that provoke a couple to transform appear to develop over a substantial period of time. All couples described the development of incongruity to the point where change was pursued, as a long process ranging from approximately three years (c. 3) to fifteen years (c. 1). As Gina stated in describing the incongruous situation that prompted the transformation of she and Gary, "this had gone on for years; it was time to make a change."

Incongruity may develop in relation to the demands of a job (c. 1), through delaying plans due to a couple's involvement in work and schooling (c. 2), or through the development of viewpoints that conflict with a cultural or institutional norms (c. 3, c. 4). Each factor cited is tied to a particular couple or couples; however, the data show that a combination of situations creates incongruity, with one situation identified as predominant. The data also reveal that the determination of which situations present an incongruity is unique to each couple.

The incongruous situations experienced by each of the participant couples were previously described in the sections titled "Participants". These situations are briefly reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Darren and Dena (c. 1) found themselves in a situation of incongruity when they realized that although they had the monetary resources to do whatever they wanted, they were unable to make time together to enjoy the activities they really valued. In part, because he was so successful, Darren's business demanded full-time attention and did not allow for
time away from the job to pursue other interests or even to allow the couple much time together.

Shelly and Scott (c. 2) dreamed of living aboard a sailboat and spending their time sailing, especially of doing long-distance cruises together. Instead, they were caught in a cycle of work and study. Scott's employment demanded that he be away from home approximately 50% of the time. The couple had little time together and with the passage of time, the sailing idea had been continually postponed.

Gary and Gina (c. 3) were each raised within the context of a restrictive religious denomination. As a young married couple they gradually realized that the judgmental approach of church doctrine neither fit their experience or the values that they were developing as a couple.

Joan and Jay (c. 4) struggled to find a meaningful philosophy of spirituality. In the course of their marriage, they had found themselves in conflict regarding how they would pursue spirituality to the point, that at one time in the middle of a 30-year marriage, their relationship was threatened.

Acknowledging incongruity induces a couple to begin the transformative process. Yet, acknowledgment of incongruity is not a sufficient condition to initiate transformation. The acknowledgement of incongruity requires awareness and readiness in order for a couple to initiate and continue the transformative process.

Awareness is the mutual recognition by a couple that their lifestyle does not match their goals or values, coupled with the recognition that change is possible. Readiness is the mutual willingness to acknowledge incongruity and to enter into a dialogue about change.
These basic concepts are important pieces of the transformative process. In the broader context of this research and in his career as a marital and family counselor, the researcher has spoken with couples who were unaware of the circumstances that created disharmony and were therefore unable to acknowledge the incongruity in their lives. Generally, the lack of awareness and inability to voice incongruity was related to their relational conflict or competition. Thus, they were not ready to move into a dialogue about incongruity and to discuss their preferences in the sustained and open manner that the next stage of the transformative process requires.

Generating Preferences

The second stage of co-created transformation, generating preferences, incorporates three steps: reflective dialogue, perceiving opportunity, and making decisions. Initially these occur sequentially. As the transformative process continues, couples may find themselves temporarily returning to a particular step of generating preferences as they move thorough the balance of the transformative process. It should be noted that the stage of reflective dialogue precedes perceiving opportunity and the other stages of the transformative process; however, once reflective dialogue is initiated, it permeates the balance of the transformative process. Reflective dialogue is integrated into all of the other stages and steps that occur as an ongoing component of the entire transformative process. The following section presents the emergent categories and subcategories that define and explain generating preferences, a critical stage in the process of co-creating a transformation.
Reflective Dialogue

Reflective dialogue refers the discussion and development of ideals regarding a couples' preferred way of life. It is accompanied by the corresponding “evolution of thought” (c. 1) regarding an eventual transformation. Reflective dialogue is a multifaceted practice that incorporates collaboration, emergent thought, extended reflection, research, and evaluation. While reflective dialogue initially precedes decision making in the transformative process it is eventually is integrated into a recursive process and incorporated in decision making as transforming couples return to reflection and dialogue during the step of decision making.

Like all aspects of the transformative process, reflective dialogue is energized by a couple’s drivers. In the stage of generating preferences, drivers are especially influential because they represent the fundamental motivation for making a transformation. Accordingly, they profoundly influence the generation of preferences and ideas that are the product of reflective dialogue.

Collaboration. Collaboration is the mutual development of ideas. Specifically, participant references to collaboration include acknowledging alternative points of view (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), the mutual development of new meaning and perspectives (c. 2), shared enlightenment (c. 4), openness to ideas (c. 3, c. 4). Openness is not always natural in partnerships (c. 3, c. 4), yet among transforming couples it is a marker of success. Scott (c. 2) and Jay (c. 4) speak of learning to be open to their partner’s ideas as an individual transformation in the context of the co-created transformation. As a changed Scott (c. 2) said pragmatically of his partner Shelly, “sometimes her idea is better.” Jay (c. 4) indicated that he came to “really enjoy” hearing his partner’s thoughts.
**Emergent thought.** Emergent thought refers to the way that ideas become evident during a collaborative conversation. Participant references to emerging ideas included emergence (c. 3), enlightenment (c. 3, c. 4), growth of ideas (c. 2), and evolution of thought (c. 1).

**Extended reflection.** Extended reflection refers to the many times during ongoing dialogue that participants conclude a conversation and then individually reflect upon it, eventually coming together again for more dialogue. It includes talking with each other from an interpretive stance as opposed to generating new ideas (though admittedly, this is a fine distinction). Some examples of participants references to reflection are “through the years, we talked” (c. 1) and “turn it over” (c. 2), a reference to reflecting on and discussing a specific idea over a period of time. Gary and Gina spoke of developing ideas in dialogue with each other, then subsequently engaging together in reflective conversation with friends and teachers. Among the participants in this research, this extended reflection went on for a period of many months to years before the process moved into decision making.

**Research.** All participants referred to reading for information and guidance, and “exposing themselves to alternative ideas” (c. 3) during the transformative process. Reading and discussing a particular book precipitated the active transformation of Joan and Jay (c. 4). Participants also referred to trying out the ideas they developed and of developing pertinent skills in anticipation of someday putting them to use. Scott and Shelly (c. 2) put in a “trial summer” aboard a sailboat.

**Evaluation.** Evaluation included considering the financial resources would be required in order embrace transformation (c. 1, c. 2), appraising an idea’s potential for
adventure (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3) and its potential to positively challenge existing skills and abilities (c. 1, c. 2), examining the compatibility of ideas with mutual values and personal ethics (c. 3), and considering the practicality of ideas in terms of achievability (c. 2) and being “user friendly” (c. 4). Gary and Gina’s (c. 3) evaluation included “figuring out what we don’t want,” while Scott and Shelly (c. 2) focused on “what we want to do.” How that evaluation occurred was unique to each couple.

Other influences. Participant’s descriptions of their reflective dialogue included a number of other influences and considerations that were unique to the couple. Some of these influences were intuition (c. 3), a fascination with knowing (c. 1), a sense of predestination (c. 1), and doing what your heart tells you to do (c. 3).

Perceiving Opportunity

Perceiving opportunity is the next step in the generative process. As participants described their experiences, the occurrence of a particular event prompted them to move from the mutual contemplation of reflective dialogue to making a decision. This opportunity, which the researcher calls a “transformative opening,” links discussion to decision making. Each transformative opening is unique to the couple. A single commonality in the openings that occurred among the participant couples is that two openings stemmed out of a change in job status, one voluntary, one involuntary.

Gary (c. 3) described a transformative opening as “a fork in the road.” It is a point where the process of transformation will either proceed or stall. Unfortunately couples who wish to transform and fail often do so because they are blind to the options presented by such an occurrence. To perceive an opening requires that a couple be both aware and ready.
Awareness is developed through the collaborative discourse that occurs in reflective dialogue. Readiness occurs when reflective dialogue has reached a point of saturation; the couple has talked through a situation sufficiently to know what they want and they have developed the necessary resources to proceed with a transformation. The term *resource* refers to having met the necessary conditions described at the beginning of this chapter. Because each situation is unique, the researcher has chosen to briefly describe the openings each couple encountered.

Darren and Dena’s (c. 1) transformative opening developed when Dena’s employer determined that a reduction in force was necessary. The offer of an early buyout prompted the couple’s decision to pursue the transformation they had been discussing. It was determined that Dena would accept the early buyout, though it meant forgoing traditional retirement. The buyout offer allowed Dena up to two and one half years to work before resignation. Having determined they would have sufficient resources to make the relocation to a remote community and pursue their desired lifestyle, the couple used the interval allowed in the buyout agreement to locate and purchase land, and to begin developing a home site. Darren also began to phase out of his business and gradually turned it over to his associates.

In contrast, there were some other factors the couple had to consider. One was that Dena would not receive a retirement income. The second was that Darren, by getting out of his business at age 40, was passing up the probability of becoming “filthy rich.” Had they adhered to social and business norms, Dena may have found another job and Darren would likely have continued building his business. However, even though Darren enjoyed his job,
the couple determined they had sufficient financial resources to allow them to live the lifestyle they desired and that to continue to work would result in "lost opportunity" for adventure and experience. Daren stated that "continuing to work would just be trading years for dollars, and what good are all those dollars" when compared to the opportunity to experience a different way of living.

For Shelly and Scott (c. 2), a transformative opening developed out of an involuntary job transfer. Scott was to be moved from his field position to an office. Though the transfer was benevolent, Scott was not given a choice. Scott enjoyed working in the field and did not want to move to an office. Upon discussion, the couple decided that this was an opportunity to embark upon their sailing adventure. Reflective conversation had gone on for several years and they had purchased the boat of their dreams, yet hesitated to embark. Seeing this job situation as presenting an opportunity for change, the couple said to each other, "the money is in the bank... if we don't do it now, we won't do it." "Let's go sailing!" Scott amicably resigned from his position, and they "moved aboard."

An involuntary job transfer could be viewed adversely. Scott could have accepted the situation or began looking for another job. Yet this couple made another choice. While not dramatic, this incident illustrates the awareness necessary for transformation. It is perceiving an opportunity even in a situation that a person cannot control.

For Gary and Gina (c. 3), the transformative opening was a two-step process. In the process of seeking a new church, they were invited into a congregation where they found people who thought deeply and studied intently, and whose philosophy fit for the couple. As Gary states, "They were academicians." This event alone may have been a sufficient opening
to allow the couple to make the transformation they were seeking to make; however, a second and even greater opportunity occurred when a group of academic theologians with whom the couple had become acquainted offered to sponsor Gary's graduate education in theology. They offered to pay his tuition at a prestigious university where he would train with people who studied carefully, thought deeply, and considered multiple viewpoints in their pursuit of religious knowledge and practice.

Awareness in this case consisted of having the wisdom and intuition to accept the offer of a paid education. This event allowed the couple to move on and fully embrace the spiritual values that they sought as Gary entered the ministry and the couple continued to explore and develop the kind of global spirituality and open connection with people that they sought.

A transformative opening for Joan and Jay (c. 4) occurred in the gift of a book entitled Original Goodness. This simple gift to Jay, from a coworker, played an important role in the couple's decision to mutually pursue a new philosophy, spiritual practice, and lifestyle. Commenting upon her reading of the book, Joan stated, "I was really attracted by the philosophy; it is based on meditation practice and is Western [civilization] friendly. It was not threatening... it embraced all faiths." She shared her fascination with Jay who subsequently read the book. His assessment was, "This really fits for us." The result of this event was a decision to study Buddhism. The couple began their study slowly, learning and engaging in meditation with others, a core Buddhist practice. It seems, in part, that the opening was due to chance. Jay had set the book aside. Joan picked it up and read it. Awareness came in Joan's recognition that the philosophy described was congruent with
their changing and developing values, and this prompted Jay's subsequent reading of the book.

For Joan and Jay the embrace of Buddhism provided a blend of philosophical and spiritual experience that satisfied each partners' individual needs as well as their mutual need. Jay found a meaningful philosophy that allowed him to practice spirituality and be fulfilled in his quest for meaningful and pragmatic expression. He stated that he approached his work with a new sense of calm. Joan was able to immerse herself in spiritual expression and enhance her connection to Jay and to other "like-minded people." This change enhanced the ongoing dialogue between the Joan and Jay and began a profound and co-created transformation that continued to evolve.

While events that offer a transformative opening seem common to the researcher, what stands out about couples who do not transform is that they miss seeing these openings. In interviews with couples who were struggling to transform, it was apparent that they were unaware of transformative openings. While transformative couples experience struggles, the struggles do not dominate. Yet those who struggle to transform appear to be engaged in an ongoing process of subtle or overt struggles for power or control to the point that the mutual insight essential to perceive an opening does not and cannot occur.

Making Decisions

Making decisions refers to a couple making a mutual commitment to transform their lifestyle and pursue the ideals that they have been discussing up to this point. Two basic decision-making styles emerged from the analysis. These are the unfolding decision and the immediate decision.
Unfolding decision. The unfolding decision is an incremental process. It is the type of decision Joan and Jay (c. 4) made in committing to their transformation. Jay refers to it as “embracing a path,” a metaphor that fits well with the Buddhist philosophy the two have adopted. Their decision to create a transformation started with the practice of meditation. As their involvement and commitment deepened, they began join “like-minded people” for study and meditation during short retreats to ashrams (learning centers). After participating in “satsangs,” [i.e., meditation groups] for a while, Joan and Jay began to facilitate groups in their home, even developing a room for that purpose. The decision to make a transformation deepened as their involvement in this philosophy and practice increased.

Immediate decision. An immediate decision is one in which the participants become quickly and fully immersed in a transformation. Once a decision is made, the couple initiates the actions, that will expediently allow them to make a transformation. An example of this is Darren and Dena, who upon deciding to commit themselves to the transformative process, sought out and purchased a remote piece of property. Soon after Darren left the company he had founded and the two relocated to their new home. They converted a shack on the property to temporary living quarters and began the construction of their current home.

While the other participant couples discussed their decision to make a transformation as a time of excitement and satisfaction, Gary and Gina (c. 3) described making the decision as “agonizing.” Even as they knew that leaving their church would allow them to realize their ideals and aspirations for a life of connection with people of all beliefs, they risked condemnation and faced being disowned by families. According to Gina, “to our parents, we
were lost, lost forever.” For all of their lives the couple had been taught that, “those who left the church, even for another Christian church, were going to Hell.”

The process of making decisions was indistinct. Couples spoke of decision making as informal (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), rapid (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3), and as a matter of deciding and doing (c. 1). In the initial interview and in a number of informal contacts following the interviews, participants were mostly unable to outline a specific way of going about making the decision. They were more absorbed in talking about the changes (c. 3) made or the insights gained (c. 1) in the course of transformation.

Widening the Circle

“To widen the circle” is Gary’s (c. 3) term for embracing a congruent spirituality and connecting with people of all backgrounds and beliefs. The term, referring to the third stage of co-created transformation, seems an appropriate expression of the embrace of new and different philosophies, relationships, and lifestyles that mark the creation of a transformation. This stage consists of a two-step process in which transformative couples release attachments to relationships, materials, lifestyles, and beliefs that may inhibit or prevent transformation, and embrace a new community of people who serve to support the creation of a transformation.

Releasing Attachments

In leaving the closed culture of their church with its restrictive belief system and discriminatory view of human beings, Gary and Gina (c. 3) released old attachments and embraced a more compassionate and compatible philosophy of spirituality and the nature of
humankind. In a similar fashion, the experience of other transformative couples includes letting go of attachments that might limit their progress. In their respective ways, they too were able to embrace a new and different philosophy and connect with a compatible community of people.

As used in this discussion, attachments indicate factors that tied people to ineffective behaviors, which were based on beliefs that no longer fit with their values and aspirations. Attachments among participants in this research fell into three subcategories. They are possessions, institutional practice, and security.

Possessions. The acquisition, maintenance, and storage of possessions were mentioned by two of the couples (c. 1, c. 2) in reference to representing a restriction on the ability to travel and simplify life. Specifically, the reference related to not allowing ties to “material possessions” to stand in the way of gaining experience. In each case, the transformations made by these people meant paring down their possessions. Most material possessions have little value in the cramped living quarters of a 38-foot sailboat (c. 2). In the case of remote living where everything must be carried in, possessions are judged pragmatically with an emphasis on utility (c. 1).

Institutional practice. Limiting institutional practices refers to the attitudes and norms common to work settings, social and cultural groups, and other aspects of a particular culture or subculture. Specific expectations seen as limiting by participants included accumulating wealth (c. 1), developing a career and staying with it (c. 1, c. 2), conforming to the beliefs and norms of a couple's respective families of origin (c. 3, c. 4), friends (c. 1), a social group (c. 4), or religious culture (c. 3, c. 4). It was suggested by Mary Jo Stanley with whom the
researcher consulted during this project that friends and family members sometimes have an emotional hold over couples, that may be used to influence or even enforce conformity and prevent a couple from stepping outside of the box.

Specific situations mentioned are Darren and Dena's (c. 1) need to release certain friendships in order to proceed with the changes they were making. Some friends could not relate to the couple's acting upon their values and the resulting change in lifestyle, other friendships revolved around business, and some friends pressured them to remain in the city. Gary and Gina (c. 3) confronted the frightening message from their families and the members of their congregation that by leaving the church they would be condemned to Hell. Their parents grieved. According to one expert on fundamentalist Christianity, the family members of those who leave such a church sincerely believe that the leavers are condemned and grieve it as a death (Keoughan, personal correspondence, October 20, 2001). The grief endured. Gina cites an occurrence three years after the couple left the church, when her father encountered Gary's mother in a store. In tears and desperation, the mother asked, "What are we going to do about Gary and Gina?" Occasionally Gary and Gina struggled with the effects of the religion in which they were raised. As Gina stated, "every once in a while that old goat raises its ugly head." For this couple releasing attachments was a very difficult step in the process.

Security. Finally, in making a transformation or any significant change, a couple must set aside some of their concerns and beliefs about security. There is risk, and if dwelled upon risk can limit the ability to progress. While most couples prepared themselves adequately, proceeding with the transformation still required that couples compromise regarding financial
security (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3), safety (c. 2), emotional security in terms of acceptance and support of family and friends (c. 1, c. 3, c. 4), and a comfortable lifestyle (c. 1, c. 2).

Couples confronted hurdles in two basic ways by first, immersing themselves in their new lifestyle and embracing it fully and second, actively practicing skills and attitudes appropriate to the new situation. For Darren and Dena (c. 1) this consisted of simplifying the way they lived, building their home, doing without plumbing and electricity, growing part of the food they consumed, and developing the land. Scott and Shelly (c. 2) used the considerable navigation skills they had acquired in using boats from childhood on, and from studying. The couple added to their navigation skills in the process and also became immersed in the culture of the cruising community and proficient in negotiating the language and culture and laws governing foreign ports. Gary and Gina (c. 3) and Joan and Jay (c. 4) studied with like-minded others and practiced the new philosophy and spirituality associated with their respective transformations.

Creating Community

Creating a community of concern and support is the second factor in widening the circle. Upon initial analysis of the data, the researcher was struck by the seeming lack of emphasis or concern regarding having a supportive community of family, friends and acquaintances who might serve to encourage and affirm the transformative couples effort and with whom they might share their accomplishments in conversation or activities done together. Later, repeated analysis revealed that each couple did in fact have a community that supported them in spirit, words, and even by sharing aspects of the transformation from time to time. During the interview and in informal conversations that occurred at other time
couples confirmed that they would have initiated and proceeded with a transformation regardless of whether family or friends were supportive (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3). They had faith, confidence in their abilities, and strength within their relationships sufficient to proceed on their own. All couples entered the process independently. When consultation occurred, certain family members (c. 2) friends (c. 1, c. 3), or acquaintances (c. 1) were consulted about specific skills or procedures. Transformative couples asked others for suggestions on how to proceed, not for their opinion on whether to proceed. Even in the face of misunderstanding by friends (c. 1), opposition by friends and family members (c. 1, c. 3, c. 4), or concern of family members about safety (c. 2), transformative couples proceeded to act upon their desires and decisions.

Widening the circle includes the creation of a new community of family friends and acquaintances who provide support, encouragement, and companionship to the couple in the process of transforming and in the maintenance and extension of the transformation.

Members of this community included children (c. 3, c. 4), parents (c. 1, c. 2), a cousin (c. 3), and siblings (c. 1, c. 3). Other members of the support community were drawn from associations with a progressive community of friends and acquaintances who were contemplating or making similar changes in their lives (c. 2, c. 3, c. 4) and who were often part of a learning community (c. 2, c. 3, c. 4). Learning communities included “like-minded people” coming together to study a particular philosophy (c. 3, c. 4), and teachers, guides, and mentors (c. 2, c. 3, c. 4) who comprised collaborative-learning communities. For Joan and Jay (c. 4) this community included ashrams, an established community of learners who retreat for days or weeks to meditate and study under the guidance of a teacher. It also
included satsangs, a gathering of people who meditate and dialogue together. Couples also mentioned the helping community of therapists and religious leaders (c. 3, c. 4) who occasionally provided both guidance and mentoring. Finally, each couple composes their own mini-community: all participants mentioned the strength and support of the partnership. This is especially evident with Darren and Dena (c. 3) who demonstrated the least inclination to engage a community of support and readily disengaged from relationships as necessary to the progression of their transformation. They stated in the interview that they have a very close and supportive relationship with each other.

Participants descriptions of what they perceived as support from their respective communities included affirmation, such as family members “not being critical” and letting the couple know that “they wanted us to succeed” (c. 2), a father’s encouragement to “be the best at whatever you do” (c. 1), and an active expression of affirmation when Scott’s (c. 2) father, a retired navy veteran, joined the couple on their boat for a 22-day Atlantic crossing. Other affirmation came in the form of an annual visit of “the mothers” when Darren and Dena (c. 1) were joined at their remote cabin by the two elderly women to celebrate and appreciate the relationship, lifestyle and beautiful setting of their home. Support also came through inclusion, as participant couples studied with others (c. 3, c. 4), collaborated with people whom they encountered during the transformative process (c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), and were joined by friends and family for portions of the transformative journey. In addition to the visits of family members already mentioned, other examples of this joining included Joan and Jay’s (c. 4) adult children joining them in Buddhist meditation, the series of short-term relationships that Shelly and Scott (c. 2) enjoyed with members of the “cruising community,”
and the development of surrogate families (c. 3). Shelly and Scott's (c. 2) experience included “cruisers” assisting each other to become familiar with new ports of call, anchoring together between ports for protection and companionship, assisting each other with various aspects of boat maintenance, and sharing technical expertise and practical experience. Shelly and Scott described this community involvement as an important aspect of their transformation. In an interesting description of inclusion, Gary and Gina (c. 3) described how “people who were formerly enemies embraced us and became friends.” Gary and Gina found that as they moved away from their restrictive church, the “unbelievers” with whom they had been prohibited any meaningful association, were warm, well educated, and spiritual. Further, as Gary and Gina's parents disowned them for leaving the church, other families the couple encountered in their transformative journey embraced them. Two of these families developed into their surrogate families.

Of interest related to the couple as a community of two, analysis of the data revealed that couples encountered situations when one partner experienced or embraced change at a different pace than the other (c. 2, c. 3, c. 4). At these times the slower partner felt temporarily stuck. For example, Gina (c. 3) referred to a time when Gary was in college, “He had all this Mecca stuff going on, and I was working to support us.” (By “Mecca stuff,” she met insight and discovery.) Jay described Joan's (c. 4) embrace of change at times, as more rapid than he was ready for. Further conversation revealed that this difference might be attributed to variations in temperament, the way each person processes information (c. 4), or to a situational difference in opportunity (c. 3). Jay appears to observe carefully and seek evidence of applicability before he embraced a difference, while Joan engages the new with a
passion. Gina, who was working a temporary job as Gary completed his Master's degree was only peripherally involved in the learning that Gary was experiencing at the time.

Among transformative couples these differences are not allowed to hinder the process of change. Whereas impatience and even competition on the part of one partner may inhibit change in couples who struggle with transformation, couples who achieve transformation address change by returning to a reflective dialogue and sharing their learning and experience with each other. Transformative couples describe patience and acceptance as essential and recognize that there will be differences in the individual pace of learning and integrating changes (c. 2, c. 3, c. 4). Those who begin transformation without these qualities soon develop them in the process. Scott described his development of patience and acceptance as "maturing." Gary (c. 3) described his development of patience as a change in temperament, while Shelly (c. 2) described the development of these qualities as "learning to work together." In regard to sailing in which pace is solely dependent upon wind and current, Scott stated, "When you move at six knots things don't happen real fast ... and so you either chill or quit doing what you are doing." This is an appropriate metaphor for approaching mutual change in terms of flow, allowing for differences, and accepting that change is an ever-developing process. Thus "Widening the Circle", while referring in part to the embrace and acceptance of other people as they are, also refers to the growing and changing partnership of the transformative couple.
Continuing the Journey

Continuing the Journey is the final stage of the transformative process. It consists of the couple's validation of their achievements in co-creating a transformation and looking ahead to the future.

Validating Achievements

Validation of the transformation was a combination of three events. Couples examined and evaluated the outcomes of the changes made, they arrived at a mutually understood definition of the transformation, and they shared the story of their transformation.

Validation occurred via a combination of methods. The validation of participant transformation included validating the partnership (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), philosophical validation (c. 1, c. 3, c. 4), connecting with family (c. 1-4), connecting with friends, associates, and community (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), reconnecting with estranged family members (c. 3), internal affirmation (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4), external affirmation (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4) and definition (c. 1, c. 2, c. 3, c. 4).

The recognition of their respective change process as being a transformation was developed from the perspective of couples taking a look back at what they had accomplished and seeing how their lives and relationships had changed. In fact, couples tended to label their changes as rather ordinary in nature as they engaged in a natural and unfolding process.

The term "transformative" as related to the changes made was introduced to participant couples by the researcher in the attempt to recruit and reach couples who had mutually created a profound change in their life. In the process of research, the definition of co-created transformation emerged as interviews were conducted. Initially the term
transformation was focused on mutually created actions that participants had taken in their lives to significantly alter their lifestyle. This transformation did, in fact, happen. Yet emerging from the interviews was a deeper meaning as participants began to define transformation in their own unique ways. Actions taken, like relocating, a change in philosophy, moving aboard a boat, and affiliation with a church appear less significant than the couples' relational and attitudinal changes. Even adventure, a concept valued highly by participants, took a back seat to the discussion of changes in relationships and attitudes.

Definitions of transformation were not succinct. It was in the course of interviewing and analysis that each couple's unique definition emerged. Staying as true to the words of each participant as is possible, the researcher has summarized each couple's definition of their transformation. The definitions are presented as follows.

Darren and Dena (c. 1) characterized their transformation as moving "back to self-sufficiency." The couple developed the confidence and skill so that they could care for themselves in an environment that did not offer the amenities or services of the average town or city. They built their house, they garden and fish to produce some of their own food, and they continue to develop their property. They refer to "the lack of an imposed schedule" and the reduction in their "stress level" as differences created in the process of leaving the life of urban professionals to embrace a simplified way of living. In essence, retiring early gave them a substantial amount of time in their lives to "pursue a life of our own choosing."

Darren and Dena also suggested that by "stepping out of the world that most everyone else subscribes to, all of a sudden, you lose a tremendous amount of commonality." In ongoing discussion, they talked about how their associations with other people changed.
They now live on the outskirts of a small community. Their property is accessible only by walking or by boating into it. They are involved with people in the community but limit their involvement, choosing instead to spend time together on their property. Annual visits by their mothers, who come together, and occasional visits by other family members or friends are enjoyed. Their life is generally a cohesive partnership in quiet solitude.

Darren and Dena speak with pleasure of the almost unlimited time they spend together as a couple, working at home, exploring the forests, kayaking and traveling, and contrast this with the years in their career when the demands of work took them apart from each other, literally, for as much as five months at a time. The relationship, which they characterized as strong going into the change, is a valued companionship and partnership.

Shelly and Scott (c. 2) primarily described transformation as achieving balance in their relationship and gaining the ability to effectively work together. Before sailing, Scott’s work assignment kept him away from home and in the field 50% of the time. He explained,

Moving onto the boat forced us to work more closely together because previously we had had so much separation in our lives. While we shared a lot of goals and tastes and stuff, we really hadn’t worked that tightly together and you know, that’s what we really had to master to cruise together.

Thus, transformation for Shelly and Scott consisted of developing the skills and ability to work together as a team. In the process, they gained newfound respect, trust, and admiration for each other. They described their sailing experience as leaving them “the fundamental legacy of having worked together.” This legacy is a cornerstone of their relationship today.

The transition from spending 50% of their time apart, due to Scott’s job requirements, to spending nearly all of their time together on a sailboat was a significant change in lifestyle.
Shelly stated,

For us it was particularly interesting to live in such close quarters because for many years beforehand Scott had worked a schedule of two weeks on and two weeks off, or month on, month off. We figure we lived together half the time for most of our marriage before that point [of moving onto the boat].

Perhaps the anticipation of this factor is what contributed to delay their dream for a few years. Though prepared to work together as they entered their adventure and prepared with extensive knowledge of navigation and boat handling gleaned from research and experience, the couple describe their initial few months aboard as “mayhem.” They were intensely engaged in the process of working out their relationship in order to sail together, do it safely, and make it enjoyable. In his former job, Scott had supervised 120 men. Shelly had grown very independent during Scott’s long absences. Yet, teamwork, trust, and confidence in the abilities of one’s companion are essential in living aboard and long-distance sailing. Shelly stated, “The common knowledge of the culture is that the couples for whom it works, both are involved in making the cruising a success; both are engaged in the daily running of the vessel and both are really committed to it.” She went on to describe an inability to achieve balance in the relationship as “a known peril in the cruising community,” and further stated, “While many relationships persevere and are made stronger by cruising, there are fallouts.”

Achieving balance requires a great deal of mutual adjustment. According to Shelly, achieving balance was the biggest adjustment they had to make, as they embarked on their sailing adventure. She stated,

The fact that we did it [achieved balance] successfully … and other people didn’t, I don’t know what to say; we did it differently. Perhaps it was simply that we were both so pigheaded that we were going to make this work because we both wanted to do it, and we knew that we needed the other person with us to do it. Neither of us wanted to be a single-hander.
Dedication, openness, and a commitment working out difficulties and disagreements allowed the couple to achieve the balance necessary to sail together successfully. They are unclear on how they actually achieved balance. Shelly said, “I can't really put my finger on how we pulled it off, but certainly it was rocky.”

Other factors mentioned as aspects of their transformation included the ability to share the responsibility of leadership as (“a boat needs a captain”), increased patience, acceptance and understanding, and appreciation for the natural environment and increased ability and interest in connecting with other people. Regarding connection, successful sailing appears to demand that a variety of information be shared among those who are living the cruising lifestyle. This information may pertain to weather, characteristics of various ports, piracy, safety, and practical knowledge regarding boat handling and maintenance. They described themselves before sailing as having little interest in involving themselves with their community. Their cruising experience resulted in a change. Having left the boat for dry land at the time of this interview, the couple lives in a small town where both are involved within the community and interact with a variety of people both socially and in their respective capacities as volunteers and professional people.

Gary and Gina (c. 3) defined their transformation as an ongoing “transition from one worldview to another and from one set of values to another that fits us, not just individually, but as a couple.” Their definition and validation of transformation incorporates a spiritual and philosophical transformation, a change in their relationship as a couple, connection, and reconnection with others. The combination serves to define and validate their transformation.
Validation was also expressed between them as they stated, “it’s a story we take pride in” as they recounted their story to the researcher.

The philosophical aspect of this transformation incorporates letting go of a restrictive spirituality and embracing a “global spirituality” that is based upon careful study, experience among people of many faiths and backgrounds, and intuition. The couple succinctly describes the process as “deprogramming” and “like coming out of a cult.” Years of conditioning within their families and the church had taught them that those who did not believe and act according to church doctrine were essentially evil and condemned to Hell unless they converted. Church doctrine restricted contact with people who were not members. In “turning their backs” upon the church and moving out among people, Gary and Gina gained experience and made discoveries about other people and other belief systems that opened them up to new points of view.

The transformative experience of Gary and Gina illustrates the strengthening of their relationship over the years of transformation. In describing their transformation, Gary stated, “You either fall back on each other, or it drives you apart.” Dedication to transformation was described as resulting in a stronger and more “committed” relationship with each other. In particular, Gina spoke of the changes that have brought them together as an “increased consciousness” and “more caring.” Each partner conveys a knowledge and awareness of the other and a deep appreciation and respect for the individual attributes as well as the qualities they manifest as a couple. Gary is as respectful of Gina’s “intuitive theology” as she is of his formal education in theology.
Overall, in describing their transformation, the couple speaks frequently of viewing themselves as a caring and committed partnership, which is much more intense in part due to making the changes and living authentically in accord with their values. The partnership intensified as they developed their individual strengths and beliefs into a mutual spiritual philosophy.

Transformation means living authentically. In moving away from the dictates of church doctrine, Gary and Gina live according to their mutually developed values. Gina described authentic living as, "doing what your heart tells you to do." Despite pressure from members of their respective families of origin, the couple "refuses to play a role." They are genuine even in the presence of their parents. Gary described them as "differentiated" from their families of origin and having defined themselves on their own terms. Yet authenticity incorporates some values shared with family members. As Gina stated, "We still embrace the Christianity because it's who we are, but there are other religions out there that have value and that have helped people struggle though this journey that everybody is on and we just don't devalue that." Connection with other people is a powerful aspect of this transformation. Gary and Gina are both in professions that allow them to work with people from all walks of life. They value this connection and it fits their concept of a global and inclusive spirituality.

In addition to the above, validation includes a reconnection with members of their family of origin. Gary and Gina have reconnected with the families that disowned them. This was an important aspect of validating their transformation. To some of their siblings they have been a model for making changes, including the pursuit of a meaningful spirituality and a change of church affiliation. Gary said, that for some family members “we kind of turned
out to be the heroes." Other family members and especially their parents apply pressure, but they have gradually become more accepting of the couple's decisions. In turn, Gary and Gina have gained the skills and confidence to deal with these situations in ways that allow them to participate in family activities and maintain a connection with the people they care about while acting in harmony with their own values.

Their affirmation of each other and their pride in the story of their transformation serves as a source of validation that comes from within the relationship. In fact, their decision to participate in the interview was framed as celebrating their twenty-fifth year of marriage, an anniversary that followed within two weeks of the interview. External affirmation has come through a connection with a supportive older cousin who left the church long ago, telling their story to the researcher, and dialogues with the researcher that followed the interview. In a letter to the researcher the couple stated that the interview process allowed them "to hear the heroic aspects of the journey in a way we have not thought about. It was powerfully validating and affirming."

When asked to describe what they considered to be their transformation, Joan and Jay (c. 4) initially spoke in terms of embracing Eastern philosophy in their search for a meaningful spirituality that would satisfy their mutual needs. Yet, analysis of the interview conveys an understanding of the profound changes in their marital relationship that have resulted from this philosophical embrace.

Married 30 years, the couple described their early years together as conflicted around the search for an appropriate means of spiritual expression. Raised in the same community, and as youth who were very involved a mainline Christian church, they had moved away
from the church after marriage and become agnostics. Yet, Joan felt an increasing need for a spiritual approach to life and began to revisit the church. Jay joined her. They explored different expressions of Christianity and found them rather "vague" and without meaning.

The decision to explore Eastern approaches was followed by a slow and progressive embrace of Buddhism. The resulting transformation has created a "newness" that has endured for many years within their relationship. It has also strengthened the partnership. As each describes their experience in this mutual endeavor, the listener gains a sense of partnership and unity.

Joan and Jay reported that the practice of Buddhism changed their orientation to life. They credit Buddhist meditation with affecting the way each of them approaches people and events. The couple described a qualitative difference in their reaction to events and to each other. In essence, meditation teaches a person to take time between experiencing and responding so as to reflect, rather than to immediately react. When applied to the situations of daily life the couple has become "less reactive to each other." In addition, they described their relationship as including "more acts of kindness and more compassion for what the other person is going through." In the past, the couple (especially Jay) was concerned with fitting in and not being different or unique, their transformed attitude is one of less attachment to the way things should be and an increased acceptance of how they are in the moment. There is more patience, more humor, and what Jay described as a good detachment from emotions (i.e., less reactivity), and an increased ability to approach emotionally laden situations calmly. This also seems to translate to the descriptions of how each partner approaches their professional life. In relationship to the loosening of attachment to
conformity, Jay stated that years ago he was annoyed at some changes Joan made (e.g., becoming a vegetarian) because it was "not mainstream". At the time he would do whatever was necessary to fit in and not be different. He wanted his wife to do the same. For both, the former concern with fitting in has changed to acceptance of individual and mutual uniqueness.

The couple describes the accompanying change in time spent together, the quality of their dialogues, and shared interests. They spend an intensive amount of time in study and dialogue. In the past five years, Joan stated the time together is "more that we ever had before." The intensified partnership has also brought an increased appreciation and respect for each other as demonstrated in the following exchange as they were evaluating their experience of the interview. Jay said to Joan, "A couple of times I thought about how nice it is to listen to you." Joan’s reply was, “I liked hearing what you had to say too... that’s kind of fun.”

External validation is provided by the joining of their adult children in aspects of the transformative experience. All have chosen to make various changes based upon those modeled by Joan and Jay. One son joins them in meditation when he visits their home. Their daughter expresses interest in learning aspects of the philosophy they follow, and another son, a university student, is immersed in the study of world religions. The couple also spoke of a strong connection and involvement with other Buddhists in ongoing small groups of people who meditate, study, and converse together, and in their involvement in various retreats emphasizing study and practice. Recently Jay has been involved in developing a “cohousing community,” a cooperative living arrangement focused on Buddhist practice.
Joan and Jay acknowledge their profound changes and express amazement in what they have accomplished. Joan said, “When I look back, it’s amazing the changes we’ve made and where we’ve ended up from where we were and the stress, and the everything we were into. It’s nice to be able to pat yourselves on the back. Hey we did a good job.”

Throughout their descriptions of the validating qualities of co-created transformation, participant couples spoke of increased connection and fulfillment within their partnerships. This finding is supported by the work of Gottman (1999) who found that “couples form happier and more stable marriages [or partnerships] when they find common meaning in their life together” (p. 238). In co-created transformation, couples created meaning together as they examined and defined their preferred ways of being and strove for congruence.

**Looking Ahead**

This final category in the transformative process does not mark an end to transformation. When queried about where they felt they were in the transformative process, all participants responded that they viewed transformation as an ongoing and unfinished process. Looking ahead is simply the mutual anticipation of what comes next. All couples sought to extend and build on their present transformations, one couple anticipated making several transformations in the future (c. 1), one couple has already made another transformation (c. 2), and two couples anticipate maintaining the course of action around which their present transformation was developed (c. 3, c. 4).

It appears that a co-created transformation may not be as much about a specific change as it is coming to terms with incongruity and authenticity. This includes maintaining a strong relationship, maintaining the conditions that support transformation, and developing
the skills and process that will allow them to work through whatever incongruities may
develop in the future. Through creating and recreating the transformative process, the couple
may be able to maintain authenticity, living in harmony with their values and realizing their
mutual goals.
CHAPTER IV: COMPARISON AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to compare and contrast the model of co-created transformation that emerged from this research to an established and empirically validated model that is similar in nature to the emergent model. This chapter answers the question of how the model of co-created transformation fits in with another model of change.

The model of co-created transformation represents a substantive level theory, i.e., a theory one step up from description that has some power to predict and explain behavior. According to Creswell (1998),

A substantive level theory is a low level theory that is applicable to immediate situations. It evolves from the research of a phenomenon situated in one particular situational context. The theory is distinguished from theories of greater abstraction and applicability known as midlevel theories, grand theories, or formal theories (p. 243).

There are many theories and models of change. The model of co-created transformation is unique in its focus on a particular population, couples transforming their lives and relationships, in its emphasis on a mutual process of transformation, and in its strength-based foundation. It seeks to understand couples who have a strong relationship and who are seeking to increase their satisfaction as a partners. There are other studies of couples and change, for example, Gottman's studies of marriage (Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Silver, 1994) and Dym and Glenn's (1993) studies of cycles in relationships. There are also developmental theories, which include marriage or couple relationships. These theories advance factors that contribute to the success and failure of a relationship, and often describe a progression that occurs in the marital relationship as the couple matures. However, the
researcher has been unable to locate a single research study that has as its focus transformation prompted by the mutual desire of a couple in a stable and fulfilling relationship to make profound changes in their lives.

There were six considerations in choosing the transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska, 2000; Prochaska, et al., 1994) for comparison with the model of co-created transformation that emerged from this research.

1. The model of transtheoretical change and the model of co-created transformation view change as a progression through stages.
2. Both models emerged from research of people engaged in self-change.
3. Both models emphasize self-efficacy in those people making change.
4. The transtheoretical model is current, has been researched extensively, is studied in applied settings, and is revised periodically, as new knowledge is gained.
5. The transtheoretical model has broad application. It is utilized to guide treatment and education in clinics, hospitals, business organizations, self-help movements, and educational settings where people study change, promote change, or seek to change on their own.
6. The transtheoretical model has been empirically validated through hundreds of studies involving thousands of people, in diverse settings, and across different cultural groups (Petrocelli, 2002).

The model of transtheoretical change is dissimilar in its focus upon individuals rather than couples and its problem-oriented approach to change. A primary use of the transtheoretical model has been in the promotion of individual health related behaviors within
specific populations. In contrast, the model of co-created transformation addresses couples creating profound changes in their lives from within stable and fulfilling relationships. Transformation is driven by a desire to live according to mutual values instead of a need for problem remediation or resolution.

The second section of this chapter presents an overview of the transtheoretical model of change. The third section of the chapter compares and contrasts the two models, co-created transformation, and transtheoretical change. In the process of comparison, similarities that lend support to the findings in this research are highlighted, as are differences that raise questions and suggest that each model may be worthy of further research.

**An Overview of the Transtheoretical Model of Change**

*Development of the Model*

The transtheoretical model of change grew out of an attempt to identify common components of change among people undergoing psychotherapy. In discussing his initiation of this research, Prochaska (2000) stated, "The grand tie across treatments suggests that there are common pathways to change, regardless of how people are treated in therapy" (p. 227). In his search for commonalities, he learned that less than 25% of people with a DSM IV diagnosis participate in psychotherapy and those who do spend less than 1% of their waking hours in therapy. During a comparative analysis of the major systems of psychotherapy, Prochaska (1979) identified common processes that accounted for change among all psychotherapies. Yet, he also discovered that these processes were also common to people who made change without participating in psychotherapy.
In the years following his initial research, Prochaska, was joined by DiClemente and Norcross and the focus shifted to self-change (Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994). They discovered that (a) people who make change proceed through a series of stages, each of which calls for a different approach to change, (b) people who are successful at change use skills that are appropriate to a particular stage of change, and (c) those who are unsuccessful at change do not know the appropriate skills and can benefit from guidance. In their ongoing research, the trio, joined by other researchers, developed a theoretical model of change that integrates key constructs from many other theories of change.

Described as a model of intentional change, the transtheoretical model focuses upon decisions made by the individual. "The model describes how people modify a problem to acquire a positive behavior" ("Detailed Overview", 2002). The transtheoretical change model is built around an organizing construct of a six-stage process. Into the six stages are integrated nine processes that have been identified through research as common process that account for change across all theories of change (Prochaska, 2000; Prochaska, et al., 1994). These processes are a series of cognitive and behavioral activities that facilitate change. They are emphatically distinguished from techniques; processes are classifications of activities that encompass anywhere from dozens to hundreds of techniques. The transtheoretical model integrates all nine processes into the stages of change. According to Prochaska, et al. (1994), while the existing 400 + approaches to psychotherapy all utilize two or more of the described processes, a common weakness is that most fail to apply the processes to the appropriate stage of change. Further, most approaches tend to focus narrowly upon a very few processes rather than the nine key processes identified.
Throughout its history the transtheoretical model has been used to promote change among individuals and groups in the areas of health, substance abuse, education, psychotherapy, and organizational structures. A predominant feature of the model lies in the targeting of populations, based upon assessment of the stage that people who need or wish to make change are in, and matching varied processes and approaches to the stage (Prochaska, 2000; "Detailed Overview", 2002).

Central Tenets of the Transtheoretical Model of Change

The transtheoretical model is based upon six stages of change to which nine processes are matched in order to motivate a person wishing to change from the stage they are in to the next stage. Prochaska, et al. (1994) suggest that a single move is sufficient to set a change into motion or to restart a stalled process of change. This section discusses the stages of change, the processes as matched to the stages, and some principles of change advanced by Prochaska (2000).

Stages of Change

As a process that unfolds over time, change progresses through six stages. They are: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination. In the descriptions of the model (Prochaska, 2000; Prochaska, et al., 1994) change is described as a recursive process, incorporating a return to previous stages, and altering between advancement and regression. Described as a spiral pattern, (Prochaska, et al., 1994) a linear advance through the stages of change is seen as possible, but rare. Instead, most people
recycle several times through the varied stages of change before they achieve termination. While seen as natural and logical, incidents of recycling are termed "setbacks." Few people complete the change process on the first try. Many people may go through the stages more than once before reaching the maintenance stage. Completion of the change process may occur over a few months while at other times it may require a period of years.

Precontemplation

In this stage of the transtheoretical model of change, people have considered change but do not intend to take any action to make a change within the next six months. It is portrayed as a state where a person is uninformed as to the benefits of change or has underestimated the costs of failing to change. They may have attempted change in the past and become demoralized when they did not succeed. Prochaska (2000) said that "no inherent motivation exists for people to progress from one stage to another" (p. 229). However, he identified two major forces that can motivate people to action. One is a developmental event and the second is an environmental event. An example of a developmental event is attaining middle age and beginning to question how one would like to spend the second half of life. An environmental event might be having an experience (e.g., divorce, health problems) that causes one to reconsider what he or she wants to do in life.

Contemplation

In the contemplation stage, consideration of change is coupled with intent. A person begins to acknowledge a need or desire for change and intends to change within the next six months. At this point people are aware of the potential benefits of making a change but are also acutely aware of any drawbacks. The balance between pros and cons can produce ambivalence, which can leave a person indecisive, sometimes for long periods.
Preparation

During preparation, people begin to plan what they can do to change. They intend to take action within the next month and have often made some significant attempt at change within the past year. They also read about and discuss the intended change.

Action

In the action stage, people are acting upon their intent to change. "People have made specific, overt changes in their lifestyles within the past 6 months" (Prochaska, 2000, p. 231). Action is observable to others. The extent of efforts devoted to preparation in the previous stage affects success in the action stage.

Maintenance

The stage of maintenance is directed at continuing a change that has been realized. Effort is directed at preventing relapse. The progression from action to maintenance requires sustained effort and early relapse may occur if a person has not adequately prepared to sustain the effort. The required period of sustained effort to maintain a change is estimated to be from six months to five years (Prochaska, 2000; Prochaska, et al., 1994).

Termination

This is a point of self-efficacy where people are established in the accomplished change and do not return to old patterns of living. The change holds without continuing effort and the changer is confident that his or her change is permanent. Here, people exit the change cycle.

Principles of Change

Based on a series of twelve studies (Prochaska, et al., 1994), Prochaska (2000) describes six principles that must be combined with the processes of change in order to
promote progress from one stage of change to another. In summary, these principles state that a change in perception must occur in order for a person to be motivated to advance through the stages of change from precontemplation to preparation. In other words people must see advantages to themselves in advancing to one stage of change to the next. Further, they must perceive that the risks associated with making a change have either decreased or that the advantages of progressing in the stages of change outweigh the drawbacks. In principles 5 and 6, Prochaska (1994; 2000) indicated that in order to progress from contemplation to effective action, the advantages of progressing must outweigh the perceived disadvantages by a ratio of two to one. Finally, he indicated that particular processes of change must be matched to specific stages of change (Prochaska 2000). This integration of processes and stages of change is described in the following section of this document.

Processes of Change

During his research Prochaska (1979, 2000) identified nine processes as common to all changes, regardless of the model or theory that change is framed within. In the transtheoretical model, these processes, applied at the different stages of change are key to a successful progression from the initial stage of precontemplation through the termination stage. Each process may apply to more than one stage of change, but no process is considered effective or appropriate for all stages of change. The reader may recall the earlier statement that processes are not techniques, but serve to categorize hundreds of techniques that may assist the person making a change in his or her progression. In the following paragraphs, the
processes are described briefly and matched to the stages of change within which they are considered necessary to the progression of a person from one stage to the next.

**Consciousness Raising**

Consciousness raising involves increasing awareness of a need or desire for change and realizing the benefits and drawbacks of making change. Increased awareness may occur through conversation and feedback; education, particularly reading; or being confronted with an event or incident that heightens awareness. Consciousness raising is effectively applied during the stages of precontemplation and contemplation.

**Emotional Arousal**

Emotional arousal involves concern about the person’s current behavior and an understanding, expectation, or experience that relief can come from changing. It may for example be like the “visceral response” described by Gary and Gina (c. 3) when a church leader told them that people who didn’t believe as the church dictated were condemned to Hell. Dramatic relief is effective during precontemplation and contemplation.

**Environmental Reevaluation**

This process involves the changer’s assessment of how his or her behavior affects his or her social environment. Assessment of current effect is accompanied by an evaluation of the effects that making a change would have on the environment. Environmental reevaluation is effective during precontemplation and contemplation.

**Self-Reevaluation**

Self-reevaluation is the examination of incongruency between one’s personal values and actions. It includes an assessment of self-image in the present and speculation of what it
would be like after making a change. An example might be the examination of how job
demands that pull a husband away from his wife for months at a time conflict with the value
of living and sharing life as a couple. Self-reevaluation is effective during contemplation and
preparation.

**Self-Liberation**

Self-liberation is committing to action based on a person’s belief that she or he can
change. It has two aspects, a private commitment to the self to change, and a public
commitment in which others are made aware of the decision. It is useful during preparation
and action.

**Counter-Conditioning**

This process involves learning new behavior to replace behaviors that are problematic
or no longer desired. It is most useful during the stages of action and maintenance.

**Contingency Management**

Contingency management involves the systematic reinforcement of steps taken
toward change. The reinforcement may be self-administered or come from others in the form
of acknowledgement, praise, or gifts. It is useful during the stages of action and maintenance.

**Stimulus Control**

Stimulus control is the modification of one’s environment to increase the probability
of continuing a desired behavior. It is effective when applied during the stages of change
known as action and maintenance.
Helping Relationships

"Helping relationships combine caring, openness, trust, and acceptance as well as support of changing" (Prochaska, 2000, p. 244). Helping relationships are most useful during the action and maintenance stages of the transtheoretical model.

A Comparison of Co-Created Transformation and Transtheoretical Change

In this section the two models of change are compared and contrasted. The discussion begins with an examination of some basic principles that underlie the stages and processes that are contained within the models. Discussion moves on to compare and contrast the stages of change, and then focuses on the similarities and differences in the processes that are common to both models of change.

Principles of Change

That models of co-created transformation and transtheoretical change share some common principals or beliefs regarding the process of change. These are discussed in the section titled “Similarities in Basic Principles” that immediately follows this introduction. There are also some differences in principles between the two models. The differences are discussed immediately following the discussion of similarities.

Similarities in Basic Principles

The two models of change share a number of similarities in their fundamental perspective on change. These are described as follows.
1. Change progresses through a series of stages. Progression is not necessarily linear. Prochaska, et al. (1994) defined the progression through the stages of change as a spiral pattern in which a person may move back to a previous stage of change, for example, from action to contemplation (thinking about the change) even as they progress. The researcher in this study terms the progression that occurs in co-created transformation as shuttling. For example, Joan and Jay's (c. 4) journey of change was marked by a constant return to reflective dialogue within the stage of generating preferences, even though they had made the commitment to transformation and were making the behavioral and attitudinal changes that mark their transformation.

2. The two models agree that there are basic processes that are common to all change. Six of the nine processes identified by Prochaska, et al. (1994) are common to both models of change. These are consciousness raising, emotional arousal, self-reevaluation, self-liberation, counter-conditioning, and helping relationships. These processes are discussed in a later section of this chapter where they are compared and contrasted according to the respective model.

3. The two models of change are in agreement concerning self-change. Each model adheres to the principle that self-change is possible and is accomplished by intent. Self-change is distinguished from change that is guided, motivated, or imposed by other people. Intent is the purposeful and conscious entry into the process of change with the aspiration of creating a difference in lifestyle, behaviors, and perspective.
4. Change is precipitated by developing an awareness of a need or desire to change, reaching a state of readiness to change, and acquiring information about the change that serves to motivate or to educate changers regarding how to accomplish a change.

*Differences in Basic Principles*

There are differences between the two models regarding the principles held in regard to the processes involved in creating change. These differences in principles are discussed below; differences regarding the stages and process of change will be discussed in the balance of the chapter.

1. In the transtheoretical model, change is portrayed as a goal-oriented activity. In contrast, the model of co-created transformation approaches change from a process orientation with change unfolding step-by-step; change is not always undertaken with a specific goal in mind. In co-created transformation, outcomes emerge and are shaped during the process or journey of creating transformation. This does not mean that the couple in co-created transformation lacks an idea of where they want to go. They are in a process of creating a systemic transformation in which their lifestyle, attitudes, and relationship with each other and with the people around them undergo a profound shift. As an example, Joan and Jay (c. 4) transformed their life through changing their philosophy of life. The goal was non-specific in that the change in philosophy had no endpoint and was perceived from a systemic lens. As they described their transformation, it was evident that their change in philosophy had a profound impact upon their existence. It has resulted in changes in their marital relationship, their relationship with their children, their relationship with co-workers and friends, the environment they live in, the food they eat, their plans for the future, and the
perspective from which they approach everyday living.

In the transtheoretical model, a specific goal is set and the process of change is aimed at achieving a specific outcome. It is a structured approach with a defined endpoint (termination stage). A co-created transformation has no defined end. It is viewed as an ongoing process that will continue indefinitely.

In the transtheoretical model one sets out to change a specific behavior, for example, using sunscreen each time the person goes outdoors in order to prevent skin cancer, or cutting down the number of times in a week that one allows herself or himself to become angered to the point of tears by an overbearing boss. The behavior is measurable through counting, scaling, or observation. The goal is to reduce or cease a behavior or substitute a specific behavior and/or attitude for a problematic behavior or outlook.

2. The transtheoretical model portrays the initial stages of change—precontemplation and contemplation—as periods of time when many people resist making a change. In this model, the potential changer overcomes resistance by assessing the stage of change they are in, and then matching specified processes to the stage (Petrocelli, 2002). One example of this is when a person is in the stage of contemplation and thinking about making a change within the next six months. Then the person would engage in consciousness raising, which may involve increasing his or her awareness of why a change is desirable; the person also calculates the benefits and drawbacks of a contemplated change. According to Prochaska (2000), a person must determine that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks of change before they will make an effort to progress from one stage of change to the next.

The model of co-created transformation does not recognize resistance and therefore
has no mechanism for overcoming or bypassing resistance. This model is one of benevolent change driven by mutual values held by a couple. Since it involves moving from a state of strength in terms of the relationship to a more satisfying relationship between the couple and between the couple and the world in which they live, resistance does not develop because the focus is on cooperation.

3. In a recent description of the transtheoretical model, Prochaska (2000) suggested that there is no inherent motivation for people to progress from one stage of change to another. He said that progress is motivated by external forces (i.e., events over which one has little control). These include environmental events that may alter perspective and prompt movement to the next stage of change, or developmental events in which the progression in age and maturity or stage of life prompts one to reflect upon purpose or what they want to accomplish in their next stage of life. Examples of environmental events include a smoker in precontemplation whose close friend develops lung cancer, a positive or negative change in job status, the onset of an illness, and winning the lottery. Using the smoking example, having a friend who develops lung cancer may prompt the smoker to seriously consider quitting (contemplation). A developmental event might be reaching middle age, having a child go off to college, or retirement. Any of these may precipitate an assessment and prompt movement in the process of change. For example, a person who has been thinking about making a change (contemplation) may be prompted to set a specific goal and develop a timeline (preparation). The other factor that may motivate change is referred to as decisional balance, the balance of pros to cons in deciding to progress to the next stage of change. Prochaska (2000) states that on average, the pros must outnumber the cons by a ratio of two
to one before a person will move from one stage to the next.

In contrast to this view of motivation, the model of co-created transformation does not concern itself with how motivation develops. In the model, motivation is natural. At different stages, motivation results from a combination of awareness, readiness to create change, and transformative progress. During interviews transformative couples spoke of progress as a natural outgrowth the activities in each stage. There are defined points at which people progress, which are motivated by positive events and outcomes of a current stage. For example the progression from stage one (activating awareness) to stage two (generating preferences) is a natural outgrowth of acknowledging incongruities. Once a couple has acknowledged that an incongruity exists between their deeply held values and their lifestyle they naturally begin to talk about it, eventually entering into reflective dialogue, that is the first step of stage two in the process of co-created transformation. There is a point at which progress is in part, dependent upon the couple's awareness of opportunity and readiness to act. This occurs in stage two when the reflective dialogue must be of a quality that heightens the awareness and readiness of a couple to perceive environmental events as transformative openings or opportunities that will assist them to transition into acting upon their values and preferences. The gift of a book to Joan and Jay (c. 4) and their subsequent reading and dialogue, opened their eyes to a new outlook upon life and pointed them towards opportunities to learn more. Thus, they made a decision to pursue new learning, trying it out a step at a time through taking meditation classes, then attending educational and experiential retreats, and gradually embracing the new way of being as it felt right to them. This portrays the unfolding nature of transformation. It is intentional, yet every step is not planned, and one
experience may lead to another, as attitudes and behaviors gradually change.

4. The transtheoretical model views change as a process with a vague beginning (precontemplation) and a defined end (termination). The model of co-created transformation does not begin with anything similar to precontemplation. This aspect of change is assumed and does not appear to serve a purpose other than to acknowledge that people have fleeting thoughts about change before they begin to focus upon doing something different. In addition, co-created transformation, as defined by research participants, does not terminate. Instead, it is either extended or, more likely, dovetailed into a future transformation.

5. Change as viewed from a transtheoretical perspective is defined as the alteration of a specific behavior, for example, to stop smoking. Co-created transformation is variously defined by research participants. For example, Shelly and Scott (c. 2) defined their transformation as leaving a land-based life, and the world of business and work to live on a sailboat for 11 years, “not working for three of those years, and [then with Scott intermittently] working on a consulting basis for the other years.” Yet as they defined the outcomes of their transformative adventure, later in the interview, their transformation was defined in terms of perspective. They discussed their increased respect for each other’s “competence,” and having as a foundation for other transformations, “the fundamental legacy of having worked closely together.” Thus, change viewed through the lens of co-created transformation may encompass a profound shift in a belief system or perspective, as well as some new behaviors. An significant product of creating a successful transformation was each couples’ confidence in their ability to co-create future transformations.

6. The model of co-created transformation demonstrates that in order for a mutual
transformation to be successfully achieved, there are three classifications of preconditions that a couple must bring to the process. These are classified as relational attributes, basic needs, and intellectual resources (see Chapter III). Little will be said here about these because transtheoretical change does not address required conditions for change outside of the stages, principles, and processes being discussed in this chapter. In essence, relational attributes are the characteristics of a relationship that allow it to be high functioning. Attributes include mutual respect and an aptitude for change among other characteristics that mark a couple as having the potential for successful transformation. Intellectual resources refer to the ability to learn comprehensively and quickly. This resource is an important part of the ability to understand, adapt, process information, and recognize opportunities that helps a couple to make a transformation. Basic needs refers to the fact that transformative couples have met their needs for food, health, shelter, belonging, intimacy, and income. This allows them to focus time and energy upon the process of transformation. The process also allows couples to express their creativity and to seek increased meaning and satisfaction in their life together.

There are differences in the two models in terms of the conditions under which the respective changes can occur. The model of co-created transformation allows for successful change only if basic human needs are fulfilled. The transtheoretical model does not specify a context for change. A further difference is that co-created transformation focuses upon a change among a defined group of people, couples in satisfying relationships. In contrast the model of transtheoretical change is applicable to any person, and it covers a broad range of human issues including substance abuse, communication, teaching, family relationships, and
health practices of people. It is a model that has been applied to individuals, small groups, large groups, and populations.

*Stages of Change*

Though the two models of change are stage theories, the transtheoretical model consists of six stages while the co-created transformation is a four-stage model of change. The following is a stage-by-stage discussion of the two models and a contrast of the similarities and differences that exist within each stage. The disparity in the number of stages is addressed.

*Pre-Contemplation*

The transtheoretical model accounts for a period of time when awareness of the need for change and the readiness to make a change are developing. Precontemplation is a vaguely defined period that precedes active thought about change. Prochaska (2000) clarifies the concept of precontemplation when he defines it as a stage in which a person has thought about change, but does not intend to act upon it within the next six months.

At this stage, there is minimal awareness of the need or desire for change, and little motivation to do more than acknowledge the need to “someday” make a change. The purpose that seems to be served in discussing this stage is to acknowledge that people who may be thinking about change must move to a more active and proximate state of thinking about change before they can and will initiate the process of change. The predominant task at this stage is to raise one’s awareness of the benefits of making a change. A person may be pushed into a more active consideration of change by the occurrence of an environmental or
developmental event that causes the person to reassess current lifestyle or behaviors.

The model of co-created transformation does not account for precontemplation in any substantive way. In the analysis of data, accounting for a precontemplative period does not appear to add any useful information to the understanding of transformative change. This period is assumed, however, because the transformative process begins with acknowledging incongruities between values and/or lifestyle. Acknowledgement implies that partners think momentary about incongruity, and perhaps even discuss it, prior to acknowledging it. Contemplation is an ongoing aspect of people's lives.

Prochaska (2000) and Prochaska, et al (1994) spoke of resistance in relationship to precontemplation. They framed precontemplation as a time when a person does not act upon or think about change and proposed four processes, matched to the stage of change, as being effective in overcoming resistance. Co-created transformation does not postulate the concept of resistance. It is not applicable in the process. Transformation is internally driven, in both the individual and interactive sense.

Resistance occurs, according to Prochaska (2000), when an external force (usually another person or a societal institution) demands change of an individual. Yet, co-created transformation is a natural progression in a couple's attempt to create a new level of meaning in their life together. Their efforts are directed toward positive ends. Definition of meaning and transformation is generated within the dyad and expressed in collaborative acts and discussion that are evaluated by the couple. The probability of transformation being forced by external events is small. The self-definition and self-evaluation that are a part of co-created transformation eliminate the external imposition of expectations or standards. This
aspect of the process distinguishes it from change as portrayed by the transtheoretical model, in which change often seems to be a response to external pressures.

Activating Awareness and Contemplation

It is in the concurrence with the contemplation stage of the transtheoretical model, that activating awareness, the initial stage of co-created transformation is entered. While it is not expected that the corresponding stages of the two models will match, there are similarities and differences that distinguish one model from the other and create both interest and alternate lenses through which to view the process of change.

Similarities. The contemplation stage of transtheoretical change is marked by a growing awareness of a need for change accompanied by intent. The potential changer begins to research change, to discuss it with others, and to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of making a change. The potential changer may begin to experience concern around some present behavior. They may evaluate the effect of their current way of being on their social environment and begin to acknowledge any incongruities between their values and their actions. As these subprocesses come into play, the potential changer moves toward a state of readiness to move onto the next stage of change. The transtheoretical model defines this state of readiness as the intent to make a change within the next six months. In co-created transformation, activating awareness is the initial stage of the process. This stage most closely approximates the stage of contemplation in transtheoretical change. Activating awareness initiates the process of co-created transformation. Like contemplation, it is a period of growing awareness regarding the desire to make change, accompanied by a developing readiness to move along in the process; values are weighed against lifestyle and
incongruities between the values held by the potential changers and their current lifestyle are acknowledged. In both models, incongruency is distressing and there is an emotional incentive to make the change and relieve the distress.

*Differences.* At this point where the two theories come together in the initial stages of change, they also exhibit some differences. One difference is that in awakening awareness the acknowledgement of incongruity is based upon five classifications of drivers that are common to couples making a transformative change. Drivers are values that have been mutually developed within the couple's relationship. These deeply held values are primary motivators for the couples' actions. The drivers include adventure and exploration, connection, intention, health, and meaning. They are explained in detail in chapter three. Some of the names used in classifying drivers also serve to point out differences in the two models of change. One example is adventure and exploration. Transformation is driven in part by a desire for adventure and a desire to experience “new ways of living” (Darren, c. 1). The transtheoretical model of change tends to emphasize moving away from unhealthy or destructive behavioral patterns and replacing them with more productive and healthy ways of living. In contrast, co-created transformation is a move toward a desired change that is seen as enhancing a couple's quality of life and relationship.

Contemplation is identified as distinct from precontemplation and the other stages of the transtheoretical model because a person thinking about change intends to act within the next six months. Acting upon change may be a matter of actually initiating change or simply moving into the stage of preparing to make a change. There is no similar timeline to identify the stage of activating awareness in co-created transformation. In co-created transformation,
participant couples indicated that once incongruity was mutually acknowledged they naturally entered the next stage in the process, the generating preferences stage. The initial process in this stage involves entering into a reflective dialogue around their preferred ways of living and being.

Another difference between co-created change and transtheoretical change at this stage is that awareness and the readiness to change are largely determined by external forces in the transtheoretical model of change. In this model, the discomfort of others with certain behaviors that the potential changer is engaged in, or a threat to the health and safety of the potential changer is what moves them to acknowledge the need to change. In co-created transformation, a desire to transform the relationship arises within the relationship, in interaction between the couple. Transformation is not precipitated to satisfy outside influences, it is based instead on enhancing the couples’ quality of life within an already satisfying relationship.

A final difference, as mentioned earlier, is the motivation to move from one stage to the next stage of change. According to Prochaska’s (2000) transtheoretical model, a movement into the next stage of change is motivated by an environmental or developmental event combined with an assessment of the pros and cons of progressing to the next stage in which the pros outweigh the cons. This externally motivated movement seems to give the changer very little control over his or her decisions and contradicts the claim of those who adhere to this model that change is intentional. In co-created transformation, movement from activating awareness to generating preferences is a natural outcome of the self-examination and awareness that results from the mutual acknowledgement of incongruity. There does not
seem to be a notion among participants that this progression must happen within a particular time; however, as reported by participants who successfully made a transformation, the progression was both natural, requiring no external prompts or evaluation, and it was immediate.

**Generating Preferences and Preparation**

As the changers enter the respective stages of these models, they become increasingly active in progressing toward the realization of a desired change. As with the previous stage there are similarities between the models within the respective stages and there are differences.

**Similarities.** In transtheoretical change, a person moves from contemplation into preparation. At this point, a potential changer increases his or her information about the contemplated change and develops a plan upon which they intend to act within the next month.

The stage of generating preferences in the model of co-created transformation is similar in the gathering of information. Information gathering is a primary aspect of reflective dialogue, the first step within the stage of generating preferences. Common to both generating preferences and preparation is the discussion of the change being contemplated. Discussion is supplemented with reading and sometimes observation of others who might have completed similar change. In this research, observation was especially important in the transformation of Darren and Dena (c. 1) who built their own home, having never done anything similar previously, and Shelly and Scott (c. 2) who used observation to educate themselves in terms of size and design of sailboats suitable to long-distance cruising as well
as the lifestyle of people who live aboard boats. Within both models, reading for information was identified as a primary means of education regarding a particular change, and all participants in the research study exerted much effort in increasing the amount of information that was available to them about their respective contemplated changes. This again is similar to the process of preparation.

Much like generating preferences in co-created transformation, preparation incorporates the initial steps of action. Decisions are made and the initial steps are taken to act upon the decision. Generating preferences is a stage in co-created transformation that incorporates making decisions as its final step. A decision is prompted by the transformative couple’s discovery of, or encounter with an opportunity to act upon their desire to create a transformation. The decision to pursue an opportunity is reported to be made quickly through mutual discussion. For the participants in this research, making a decision equated with the couple committing themselves to follow through. As in preparation, the decision follows the research and discussion. Because they are prepared to make the decision, it does not seem to require a great deal of reflection or weighing the benefits and drawbacks.

Differences. In the two models of change being compared, there are four primary differences in the way that people prepare to make changes. Generating preferences is a three-step process of (1) dialogue, (2) perceiving opportunities for change, and (3) making a decision to proceed with the transformation. Progress is unfolding and inevitable as long as the necessary pre-conditions (see Chapter III) for transformation are met. In contrast, the preparation stage of the transtheoretical model of change is goal driven. Its primary outcome is the determination of a specific goal for change and a decision to act or not act, based upon
an assessment of whether the pros of action outweigh the cons.

Preparation for change in the model of co-created transformation begins with a process of dialogue between partners. The dialogue is intended to thoroughly explore and develop ideas regarding the couple’s preferred way of living and being. This is a non-specific exploration and any goals that may emerge tend to be general in nature. As Shelly and Scott (c. 2) described this process, it took place over an extended period of time, and while they do have an established processes for preparing to make a decision and making a decision, they did not follow the routine in the case of their transformative change. As they describe it, things kind of “evolved.”

In contrast, the preparation stage of the transtheoretical model of change is oriented to establishing a goal, usually behavioral, by which a person making change, can determine when the desired change has been accomplished. Included are specifying the change to be made, defining a goal, planning how to accomplish the goal, and determining through research, how best to achieve a set goal.

Reflective dialogue is a distinguishing characteristic of co-created transformation. By its definition, this model of change postulates that transformation is always an interactive and collaborative process. Preparation, however, in the transtheoretical model is an individual act, which does not rule out some dialogue taking place during the process of change, but does decrease the likelihood that a change is somehow mutual. This impression is furthered by the fact that the researcher has been unable to locate any studies or other writing that utilizes or examines the use of the transtheoretical model within a relational dyad.

A third difference between the process of generating preferences and preparation is in
the determination of whether to progress in the process. In transformative change, there is an underlying assumption that change is desirable. Change is motivated by a desire to move toward increased fulfillment. Thus, the stage of generating preferences includes processes that are based on moving closer to expressing and living the couple's ideals and values in everyday life. There is little assessment of benefits and drawbacks of making a transformation. As an unfolding process, progression is a routine, if unhurried, expectation of the couples who co-create transformation. Participants in the research indicated that they saw few if any drawbacks in making this kind of change.

In the transtheoretical stage of preparation however, the changer is assessing the pros and cons of a contemplated change. According to Prochaska (2000), the decisional balance is a two-to-one ratio of pros to cons. Only when the numbers reach this ratio, is a person likely to progress from one stage of change to another. This points to some rigidity in the process of transtheoretical change that is not found in the model of co-created transformation, which has a flow to the process.

Finally, preparation involves developing goals and preparing an action plan. In contrast, generating preferences in co-created transformation prepares a couple to be aware of opportunities when they arise, which may allow a them to progress quite naturally to acting upon their change. It also does not preclude a couple from creating opportunities. Events did occur in the participants' lives that served as an opening to make a decision and pursue an opportunity to acting upon the desired changes that led to transformation. Transformation seems to develop as a couple is ready to progress. There is little chance that the process could be forced or hurried.
Widening the Circle and Action

In the transtheoretical model, the action stage follows preparation. There is an emphasis on specific behaviors. In co-created transformation, the emphasis falls not so much on a specific action as upon the purpose of action and two accompanying processes that contribute to the couple’s ability to implement their decision to proceed with transformation. The stage in co-created transformation that compares to the action stage in transtheoretical change is called “widening the circle”. It consists of two processes, releasing attachments and creating community.

Similarities. In transtheoretical change, action consists of changing target behaviors, restructuring the immediate environment in order to support a change, and seeking out relationships with other people that will provide support for making and continuing the change. Most important, “real, effective action requires commitment” (Prochaska, et. al. 1994, p. 174).

The third stage of co-created transformation, widening the circle, is built upon a sincere commitment to progress in creating change. It also includes changing behaviors and restructuring the environment to support a particular form of transformation.

One aspect of the action stage of transtheoretical change is freeing oneself from rigid thought patterns since they inhibit the flexibility to make and adapt to change. This is also especially important in co-created transformation. Transformational couples are engaged in actions that often do not fit the conventions of the cultures in which they are members before their transformation. Therefore it is important that they are able to release any attachments to beliefs that prescribe a certain way of living, behaving, or working in order to engage in the
adventures and new experiences that they pursue in making a transformation. Examples include the necessity of Darren and Dena (c. 1) to release the socially sanctioned value that says if you are making good money, you should continue to produce a high income so that you can retire as wealthy and financially secure individuals at age 65. Gary and Gina (c. 3) were faced with releasing the fundamentalist Christian belief system ingrained in them since childhood in order to embrace the global and inclusive spirituality that they value.

Differences. In the action stage of the transtheoretical model there is an effort to avoid problematic behaviors or trigger situations that may precipitate a relapse back to an earlier stage of change or back to an undesired behavior. This process of avoidance is a part of environmental restructuring. It includes staying away from certain places or groups of people in order to avoid the temptation to regress in the process of change. In co-created transformation, environmental restructuring is not done for the purpose of avoidance, but to support the transformation. Thus, Darren and Dena (c. 1) changed the location of their home in order to live a simplified lifestyle that was close to nature. They also had to release some friendships that they had enjoyed in their former life as urban business people because those friends wanted them to remain as they were and to continue the friendship on that basis. In the process of making a transformation, Darren and Dena built a new community of friends and support.

The concept of the support found in the helping relationships described under the transtheoretical paradigm and in the concept of community described in co-created transformation also differs. The transtheoretical model refers to support as coming from persons who will provide care, comfort, affirmation, and encouragement to the changer. This
support is seen as vital to the change process. Support in co-created transformation originates and is primarily developed within the partnership. While all of the successful transformative couples developed communities of supportive family members, friends, and acquaintances, they left little doubt that they would have proceeded with the transformations they described whether or not the outside support was available. This is because each couple described their relationships as strong, satisfying, and friendly. Further, the kinds of support communities developed by transformative couples tended to be casual in nature. Many transformative couples described themselves as enjoying each other’s company more and seeking out social situations and activities with other people less. Joan and Jay (c. 4) describe intensive conversations and a great deal of time spent together without other people. Darren and Dena (c. 1) describe their relationships with others as having changed, they see other people less and describe being “24-7” with each other. Both of these couples described their relationships with each other as enjoyable and rewarding. They indicated an eagerness to be together and refer to each other as best friends.

Finally, the action stage of transtheoretical change places emphasis on control and reward. The environment is monitored and changed to prevent relapse to a prior stage of change or to undesired behaviors. Self-rewards are developed to affirm the changes made. The model of co-created transformation addresses neither. Transformational couples did not speak of either the need to exert control or to reward themselves. Transformation embraces a lifestyle that matches the couple’s values and this appears to be sufficiently rewarding on its own merits to encourage a natural progression through the stages of transformation. Relapse is not a concern; the view of participants in the research who were successful at creating a
transformation and as well as those who struggled was toward achieving their ideal lifestyle.

Continuing the Journey, and Maintenance and Termination

The final stages of change in the transtheoretical model are maintenance and termination. They are combined here for comparison with the final stage of co-created transformation, which is titled continuing the journey.

Similarities. There is a single similarity between the final stage in the model of co-created transformation and the final two stages of the model of transtheoretical change. This is the effort directed at continuing a change. The intent to maintain a change is a shared characteristic; however it is approached from different viewpoints as described in the following section on differences.

Differences. In the transtheoretical model of change, the maintenance stage is the prevention of regression. So great is this concern that the maintenance stage is estimated to last from six months to five years (Prochaska, 2000; Prochaska et al, 1994, "Detailed Overview", 2002), after which one can be assured that the change will endure. Maintenance is accompanied by vigilant monitoring and practice of the changed behaviors or attitudes, which gradually tapers off as the person making the change becomes increasingly confident that the change has become a habit.

In the research of co-created transformation, participant couples did not discuss maintenance in the same terms as they are considered in the transtheoretical model. Instead, maintenance was discussed more in terms of extending the transformation in a way such that mini-transformations in relationships, knowledge, confidence, skill development, and other abilities continue to result from the transformation described to the researcher. Further
transformation itself, though spoken of as a physical act or a philosophical shift, was also spoken of in terms such as the "ability to work tightly together" (c. 2), "knowing each other better (c. 1)," and the confidence to make other transformations in the future. No concern about relapse or regression to a prior stage was expressed. Further, all of the interviewed couples in this research, who were successful in co-creating a transformation, indicated on a demographic form and in the interview itself that they did not consider themselves to have completed a transformation. Instead, they indicated that transformation is an ongoing process. Shelly and Scott (c. 2) who have created another transformation in lifestyle and relationship since the one discussed in the interview stated, "We are always transforming." Darren and Dena (c. 1) spoke eagerly of the possibility of several more transformations. Darren stated, "The opportunity to try out new lifestyles, not taken, is a waste."

As illustrated in the preceding discussion, the stage of termination in the transtheoretical model does not have a similar component in the model of co-created transformation. The final stage of co-created transformation incorporates validating and affirming the change and considering next steps in the journey. The literature regarding the transtheoretical model does not address the issue of validation; however, termination is defined as a point of self-efficacy, a point at which people are established in the change they have accomplished. Perhaps this serves as sufficient validation for the people who are involved in the kinds of changes addressed by that model.
Processes of Change

The transtheoretical theory of change includes processes that are matched to stages of change. In research preceding the development of the transtheoretical model, Prochaska (1979, 2000) identified nine processes that are common to all change. They are consciousness raising, emotional intensity, environmental reevaluation, self-reevaluation, self-liberation, helping relationships, counter-conditioning, contingency management, and stimulus control. Each process is a categorical label for various techniques used by self-changers, self-help groups, and psychotherapists to promote change.

These common processes were incorporated into the transtheoretical model (Prochaska, 2000) by matching certain processes to specific stages of change. According to the theory, progress occurs when processes are matched to a stage of change. The introduction of a process that is unmatched to a particular stage inhibits progress and may result in regression to a prior stage of change.

Data analysis revealed that processes identified by Prochaska are also infused in co-created transformation. Yet, the emphasis upon the use of these processes differs from that of the transtheoretical model. Transformational couples use these processes throughout the transformation as needed, in a natural manner. The processes were evident in interview analysis. However, they were not specifically identified, with the exception of the process termed helping relationships, and none were matched to a particular stage. While the data indicates that the application of certain processes may predominate during particular steps of the transformation, there was no indication that the strict matching of process to stage was necessary or desirable.
Of the nine common processes described in the transtheoretical model, seven are common to the model of co-created transformation. Two have little relevance. A discussion of each process follows.

**Conscious Raising**

This process consists of increasing the awareness of the desirability of a change as well as the evaluating the benefits and drawbacks involved in a contemplated action. Conscious rising is common to both models and takes the form of discussion, research, and education. There is also an evaluation of the contemplated change, but this differs in the way it is approached. In the transtheoretical model a potential changer weighs the pros and cons of change carefully before progressing. In co-created transformation, evaluation is a part of dialogue and reflection that tends to focus upon perceived benefits and evaluates the fit between a contemplated change and the couple’s values.

**Emotional Arousal**

Both models of change incorporate awareness and acknowledgement of incongruity between how one’s lifestyle and behavior, and their values. Incongruity is uncomfortable, even distressing. A disconnect between lifestyle and values may arouse emotions to the point where relief is sought through making change. In the model of co-created transformation this discomfort is largely self-induced, through a gradual process of becoming aware of incongruities. In the transtheoretical model, discomfort may be self-induced but is more often introduced through an external source such as social pressure or other environmental events.
Environmental Reevaluation

Environmental reevaluation is the examination of how a person's behavior effects people and environment, which may include the worksite, the home, and the natural environment in which people live, work, and play. Environmental reevaluation is a part of both models of change. Though not specifically addressed in the model of co-created transformation, environmental evaluation played a prominent role in the lives of the couples studied. Transformation incorporates an examination of the couple’s current living situation and the relationships they have with other people. In all cases, successful transformation included a change in relationships and a couple’s community of support. The changes impacted friendships, family relationships, and the couple's relationship with each other.

There are differences in the perception of environmental reevaluation. In the transtheoretical model the changer evaluates and restructures the environment in order to avoid undesired behaviors and associations that bring on those behaviors, and to create an context for himself or herself where change is accommodated and encouraged. Transformational couples utilize environmental reevaluation to compare their current lifestyle and experience with the changes that must occur to allow them to realize their ideals.

Self-Reevaluation

Self-reevaluation focuses on the awareness and remedy of incongruity between behaviors and values. Co-created transformation includes an evaluation by the transformative couple during the process of reflective dialogue. While this self-reevaluation is prominent in this stage of the transformation, it is an ongoing aspect of the transformative process and becomes prominent again in the final stage in the step of validating the transformation.
**Self-Liberation**

This process involves the development of confidence. It is a process of developing the belief that change is possible and then acting upon that belief. This is an important aspect of co-created transformation and the transtheoretical model.

**Helping Relationships**

Helping relationships are a natural product of creating a supportive community which occurs in the model of co-created transformation. In the transtheoretical model, helping relationships are developed to assist the self-changer to progress from one stage to another, to continue the changes made, and to avoid regression to an earlier stage of the process or to old behaviors. While helping is a benevolent act, Prochaska (2000) cautioned against building a dependency in the process. Thus, helping, in a sense carries a sense of one person doing something *for* another rather than doing *with* another or providing guidance.

Helping within a co-created transformation is different. Rather than cast as helping, the transformative model views those who might help as a community of support. Within this community, the primary supportive relationship is within the dyad of the couple. Through collaboration and shared leadership, a couple determines their path and evaluates steps taken on the transformative journey, as well as steps yet to take. This kind of relationship was well illustrated in the interview of Shelly and Scott (c. 2), when they discussed their collaborative learning about all aspects of long-distance sailing and their collaboration on decisions. Yet, they also shared leadership in situations where weather or other conditions posed a potential threat and made immediate decisions and cooperative action necessary. Such situations demanded that they “work tightly together as a team.”
A secondary source of support came to the transformative couple from friends, family, and interested acquaintances. This support tended to be in the form of encouragement and affirmation. In one case, it involved allowing a couple to store their belongings in a parent’s attic while they were involved in a transformation (c. 2). In another, it involved the sponsorship of one partner’s education (c. 3). However, there were no indications from any of the couples interviewed that they would not have been able to begin or complete their transformations if the community of support had not been available to them. In fact, a streak of independence tends to run through transformative couples, which often leads the couples to reach into themselves and their relationship for support and helping and to limit the involvement of other people being a part of the transformation (c. 1, c. 2, c. 4).

**Counter-Conditioning**

There is less commonality in this process as it is applied in the two models. The commonality lies in the definition of counter-conditioning as learning new behaviors, attitudes, and outlooks. In transtheoretical change this is applied to replace old ways of being in order to promote change and prevent relapse. In co-created transformation the emphasis is on embracing new ways. The avoidance of past behaviors is not a concern.

**Contingency Management**

Contingency management is reinforcement of change. In the transtheoretical view, reinforcement is planned and in part focused upon keeping certain behaviors and attitudes in the past. In co-created transformation, reinforcement is a natural aspect of the transformation. For example, Joan and Jay (c. 4) described relational benefits gained in transformation that they value and take pleasure in. Among these are, more time together, deep and meaningful
discussions with each other, a sense of calm, and a close relationship with their children. These unplanned reinforcements that are a natural outcome of their transformation.

*Stimulus Control*

Described as a modification of the environment (Prochaska, 2000), stimulus control is an attempt to avoid situations that cue undesired behavior. While co-created transformation requires environmental modification, it is done because it furthers the transformation, for example, moving onto a sailboat (c. 2) or seeking out a new church to attend (c.3).
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The model of co-created transformation fits the experience of a unique group of people. This group consists of couples who create a profound change in their lives and relationships based upon a mutual determination that significant change is desirable and growth enhancing. When compared with the widely used and empirically validated transtheoretical model of change, as was done in the last chapter, co-created transformation shows many similarities to transtheoretical change, which tend to affirm it and raise some interesting possibilities and ideas regarding how change is viewed.

It is anticipated that the model resulting from this research may stimulate new perspectives among marriage and family therapists and scholars who study change processes. There are contributions to scholarly knowledge, guidelines for couples who may wish to co-create a transformation, therapeutic implications for human service professionals who may study and guide transformation, and implications for possible directions that future research may take. Yet the research has limitations which are expected to affect the application of this model and prompt follow-up studies targeted at validating the model and expanding upon the findings of this research. Accordingly, this chapter addresses the implications, limitations, and directions for future research that are introduced within the model of co-created transformation.
Implications

* A New Perspective on Change*

The model of co-created transformation presents a new lens through which to view change within a dyadic relationship. It views a previously unstudied change that is specific to couples, originates from a position of strength, and adds to the quality of life. Co-created transformation is an intentional process in which couples, who enjoy a fulfilling relationship, mutually seek to enhance the quality of their life experience. Because the focus was upon change that is mutual and profound in nature, the researcher chose to label it co-created transformation.

In this research, a tentative definition of co-created transformation was expanded as participant couples defined it in their own terms. As originally conceptualized, co-created transformation occurs when a relationship changes in external form, inner nature, and function. This transformation is a collaborative alteration of relationship and lifestyle. These characteristics alone distinguish co-created transformation from other types of change. Yet, there are other characteristics that transformative couples indicated were fundamental. They include the finding that transformation is internally determined and driven by a desire for congruence between the couple’s lifestyle and values. Fundamental characteristics also include self-reliance, reciprocal openness to a partner’s ideas, respect, and balance in leadership. The research produced a model of how couples go about making such change along with a description of the fundamental attitudes and behaviors that make such change possible.
A Guide for Couples

The new understanding of change offered by the theory of co-created transformation may serve to inspire and guide couples who wish to make a similar change in their lives and relationships. As baby boomers begin to approach retirement, it is highly probable that some couples in this group will initiate a period of mutual self-evaluation. This demographic group founded a counter-cultural movement in the 1960s and 1970s that sought meaning beyond the prevailing norms of the time and created profound changes in social awareness and practices. In time, many of these same idealists became integrated into the institutions and organizations that they attempted to change in their youth.

Upon retirement, it is expected that some baby boomers may revisit the ideals of their youth and seek meaning through attempts to increase the congruence between their values and lifestyles. The model of co-created transformation may be informative regarding how to create a transformation and what to expect in the process.

The model of co-created transformation describes the necessary conditions of transformation. It facilitates understanding of the process and may affirm couples who are contemplating or in the process of making transformation. In a sense, the model identifies and validates co-created transformation, thus making it more realistic and achievable.

The data shows that co-created transformation occurs within the context of a fulfilling relationship. Though the terminology used by participant couples differs from that of Gottman's (1999) portrayal of stable and happy relationships, the relationship qualities described by transformative couples tend to support and be supported by Gottman's studies of marriage. Gottman (1999) and Gottman and Silver (1994; 2000) described stable and
happy relationships as characterized by (1) friendship, (2) the reciprocal exchange and acceptance of influence, (3) rituals that maintain and strengthen connection, (4) a mutual creation of meaning that supports each partner's life dreams, (5) development of effective ways to regulate conflict, (6) frequent expression of appreciation and affection between partners, and (7) a high ratio of positive to negative interaction. Each characteristic may be found within the exemplary couples in this study; numerous examples are cited in chapter 3. Through his studies regarding marital improvement or restoration, Gottman has developed effective and scientifically sound interventions to help couples achieve and maintain stable and happy relationships (Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Silver, 1994, 2000). This suggests that couples who struggle with transformation may be helped to achieve the relational attributes discussed in chapter 3. Transformative success may still be possible for struggling couples.

A Guide for Counselors and Human Service Professionals

Counselors and human service professionals may utilize the model as a map for guiding couples who seek out assistance in creating a transformation. In its description of the preconditions, stages, and the processes that occur within the various stages, the model of co-created transformation offers a potential basis for evaluating relationships and for identifying and teaching the skills and attitudes that are stepping stones to co-created transformation.

Though the successful couples in this research were self-changers, it may be that struggling couples can also transform their relationships with professional assistance. Therefore, if helping professionals are knowledgeable about the qualities and processes of successful transformative couples, they may be able to develop interventions that address
impasses and assist couples to move to the next stage. This would be similar to the use of the
model of transtheoretical change in which understanding the process allows a counselor to
match interventions to the stages of change according to the processes that are appropriate to
that stage (Prochaska, 2000; Prochaska, et al, 1994). Thus, in understanding the change
process a counselor or human service professional is enabled to assist clients to achieve the
awareness of the benefits of change and reach the accompanying state of readiness to move
from one stage to the next.

For the researcher, the model and the findings of this research inspire speculation and
a certain amount of excitement. This study was motivated by the researcher’s interest in
solution-focused approaches to change and a desire to learn how couples in fulfilling
relationships add to their life satisfaction, rather than exploring ways to remediate problems.

Like the technique of reframing used in solution-focused counseling, the researcher
anticipates that with further study the lessons learned and meanings made from the study of
coco-created transformation will be utilized (1) to teach couples how to succeed at
relationships, (2) to develop interventions for use in counseling couples who struggle, and (3)
to provide a map for couples who wish to enhance a fulfilling relationship or add adventure
and new experiences to their lives. As Gary (c. 3) said in his written response to the interview
summary that was used as a member check,

This both honored and humbled us as we heard the story [the researcher’s summation]
told from the perspective of one looking for the value in it...we were able to hear the
heroic aspects of the journey in ways that we have not thought about. It was
powerfully validating and encouraging.
Applicability

The model of co-created transformation describes a process that specifically addresses the experience of couples who are contemplating, in the process of, or have achieved a transformation. As such, it is unique and adds to the literature regarding change, not only in its presentation of a theory, but also in naming and defining the complexities of an unstudied, but remarkable change process by couples.

Limitations

This research produced a promising model, created new awareness, and developed understanding about a type of change that does not appear in the current literature on change. Though promising in its potential to provide guidance and inspiration for the creation of co-created transformation, the model requires testing, empirical validation, and development. As Creswell (1998) stated in a discussion of grounded theory methodology, “The result of this process of data collection and analysis is a theory, a substantive level theory, written by the researcher, close to a specific problem or population of people” (p. 57).

Given the above considerations, the model of co-created transformation is intriguing. However, its transferability to other couples, contexts, or processes of change is limited at this point. In this research, a limited transferability was established by using peer debriefings, progressive subjectivity, member checks, alternate case analysis, and purposive sampling. These were discussed in chapter two.

This research suggests that a stage-by-stage progression with certain processes that occur in each stage may be common to all couples who successfully co-create transformation
in their lives. In addition, it suggests conditions that are necessary for an attempt at co-created transformation to be successful. Any generalization of the results beyond the immediate research must be done with caution at this point.

The substantive level theory represented here as a model of co-created transformation has achieved the purpose of grounded theory research. A model was developed; it may be tested, developed, and subjected to the challenges of further research.

Directions for Future Research

As a substantive level theory, the model of co-created transformation immediately lends itself to testing, empirical validation, and refinement. This is in accord with the purpose of grounded theory research, which according to Creswell (1994, 1998), Glaser (1992), and Strauss and Corbin (1998) is to develop a substantive level theory.

As Creswell (1998) stated, “The centerpiece of grounded theory research is the development or generation of a theory closely related to the context of the phenomenon being studied” (p. 56). In discussing how the theory may be utilized he described the next steps in utilization. He stated that development of a theory allows for “empirical testing, because now we know the variables or categories from field-based data.” He also indicated that the grounded theory research “may end at this point because the generation of a theory is a legitimate outcome of the research.” (p. 58).

Given that theory development is, as Creswell indicates, closely related to the context in which it occurs, it stands to reason that the further development of the model of co-created transformation will demand that it be tested in other contexts. In this case, it will be
interesting to the researcher to take the theory back into the group of those couples who are motivated to co-create a transformation, and determine if it can be modified to accommodate struggling couples. Further exploration may suggest interventions or process modifications that can allow struggling couples to move beyond the behaviors and attitudes that prevent successful transformation. The researcher’s questions include the following.

- Have some couples attempted to co-create transformation, failed, and later completed a successful transformation? If so, what was their experience like?
- Should the definition of successful transformation be broadened or narrowed? How else might the definition be refined in order to distinguish it from other forms of change?
- What can we learn from the research of co-created transformation that may allow us to develop, refine, or add to current approaches in and relationship counseling?
- What systemic impact may result from the co-created transformation of a couple?

The model of co-created transformation pertains to a small and possibly unique group of people. A direction for future research will be to investigate the model in other contexts. For instance, it will be interesting to determine if the model applies to transformations made as a family or as a group. The model may also have potential in organizational settings. In the researcher’s work setting, it may be interesting to see if and how co-created transformation occurs among couples within isolated villages of indigenous people.

Transformations in attitude and behavior are currently being explored at the population level through the Public Conversations Project in Boston (Anderson, personal correspondence, February 14, 2001; Gergen, 2000), and Imagine Chicago (Brown, personal
correspondence, September 29, 2000). In both projects, groups of people representing diverse views agree that incongruity exists between the values of their community and the behaviors of individual or groups within the community. Community members are brought together into diverse groupings for discussion and dialogue, where incongruities may be addressed and perhaps remedied. These intriguing projects are potentially transformative at the community level. In thinking about transformation from an ecological standpoint, as implied in the above projects, the researcher is prompted to ask, "How might the knowledge of co-created transformation be applied to research on group transformation? Potential questions that might initially guide such research are as follows.

- What kinds of transformative openings develop in the course of public conversation, and how do the groups respond to them?
- What effort is devoted to widening the circle of participants in these projects?
- How are attachments to old ways, restrictive beliefs, and restrictive relationships, released or dealt with?
- How is a community of support developed in the conduct of these projects?

There are many possibilities for further research that may be inspired by the results of the research on co-created transformation. The foregoing are a few ideas to fuel the imagination.

Summary

The research study offers a new perspective on change. The researcher expects to expand upon this model and test it in varied contexts to learn how it is supported and what modifications may be necessary or useful. For the researcher, the participants in the research,
and the professor who guided the research, this study opens up another view of change and creates a sense of inspiration and possibility. It is hoped that it may do the same for the reader. The accomplishments of this research are summed up in the following description by Keoughan and Joanning (1997). They described the research process as generating "a context for new meaning and new ideas to grow and develop into new actions that benefit a system of people seeking change" (p. 36).

"To widen the circle" describes an encompassing and inclusive view of co-created transformation. Transformation extends beyond a couple to affect the systems within which they exist. Their transformations touch people with whom they interact, the cultures in which they live, and the ecological and spiritual contexts that frame existence. At the relationship level, transformation strengthens a couple's interactions with others, intensifies fulfillment in life, and profoundly changes the couple's relationship. It is a realistic and hopeful lens for us all.
APPENDIX A: HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

Last name of Principal Investigator: Zincck

Checklist for Attachments and Time Schedule

The following are attached (please check):

12. a. Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
   a) the purpose of the research
   b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see item 17)
   c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research
   d) if applicable, the location of the research activity
   e) how you will ensure confidentiality
   f) in a longitudinal study, when and how you will contact subjects later
   g) that participation is voluntary: non-participation will not affect evaluations of the subject

13. [ ] Signed consent form (if applicable)

14. [ ] Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)

15. [ ] Data-gathering instruments

16. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First contact</th>
<th>Last contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 10, 2000</td>
<td>April 10, 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/Day/Year</th>
<th>Month/Day/Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2000</td>
<td>April 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and or audio or visual tapes will be erased:
   May 10, 2002
   | Month/Day/Year |
   |---------------|-------------|
   | May 2002      | May 2003    |

18. Signature of Departmental Executive Officer

   [Signature]

   Date: 5/24/02

   Department or Administrative Unit: M.E.

19. Decision of the University Human Subjects Review Committee:

   [ ] Project approved
   [ ] Project not approved
   [ ] No action required

   Name of Human Subjects in Research Committee Chair
   Patricia M. Keith
   Date: 4/11/00

   Signature of Committee Chair
   [Signature]
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Couples Making Transformative Change Project: Informed Consent

**Purpose.** The purpose of the Transformative Change Project is to investigate how couples make major qualitative and transformative changes in their lives. Changes may relate to relationships, work, family life, lifestyle, etc. This research differs from studies such as *Passages* or *Seasons of a Man's/Woman's Life* in that it focuses on the processes, not stages, of major life changes, and examines transformative change that is represented by a discontinuous yet enduring shift in values, perspective, and way of being. Emphasis is upon changes made as a relational unit, something not evident in most current literature regarding change and transformation. It is expected that this study will result in a theory or model of transformative change among couples, that will serve as a guide to others who wish to make similar changes. It may also guide those who research and write about the process of change.

**Participants.** Participants will be couples who are either engaged in a process of transformation or who have completed a transformative change.

**Interviews and Forms.** Participants in the Transformative Change Project will complete a demographic data form and participate in an interview lasting from 1-2 hours with Kirk Zinck, a doctoral candidate in Marriage and Family Therapy at Iowa State University. Brief follow-up interviews may be requested. Questions at any time about the procedures in this study will be answered by Kirk Zinck [Phone: 907-234-7655] or Dr. John Littrell [Phone: 515-294-5746]. Dr. Littrell, a professor in Counselor Education at Iowa State University, is guiding this research.

**Benefits.** Couples may reasonably expect several benefits from participating in this study. First, it provides couples the opportunity to explore in depth, interesting aspects of their lives with a skilled interviewer. Second, couples may develop a greater understanding of their own transformative change. Third, participation may reaffirm a couple's relationship. Finally, with a focus on positive aspects of transformative change, including solutions developed in the process to deal with problems and roadblocks, this examination of change may celebrate and affirm the transformation.

**Risk.** As with any type of interview, some participants may experience slight discomfort as they increase their awareness about the issues related to their transformative change. The interviews are not intended to be, or to substitute for, professional counseling.

**Confidentiality.** Interviews are confidential. Interviews will be audiotaped and the tapes erased after they are transcribed. Transcripts will be edited to insure anonymity. Participants may, at any time, refuse to answer specific questions, request that their responses not be recorded, or withdraw from this project without prejudice to themselves. Participants' names will not be revealed in the study; any direct quotations, paraphrases, or identifying data will
be altered to preserve privacy. Participants give their permission for Kirk Zinck and Dr. John Littrell to use quotations, edited to preserve the participant’s anonymity, for professional presentations and publications.

I have read and understand the above description of the purpose and procedures of the Transformative Change Project, and I freely agree to participate. I have received a copy of this agreement.

Participant Signature:  

Date:
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

An account by participants of their transformative change.

- Tell me about your transformative change.
- What about this change especially stands out for each of you?

A look at where participants are now in their transformative change.

- How is your life different from before your initiation of the transformative change?
- What resources do you draw upon in this process?

A look back to when participants began their transformative change.

- What precipitated your TC? Please describe the process of creating change.
- Who or what has been your most significant source of support through this process?
- What roadblocks, plateaus or setbacks, if any, have you experienced in your TC?

A look ahead to where participants are headed with their transformative change.

- What indicates (or will indicate) you have achieved your transformative change?
- What might happen to test your change and how might you handle the tests?

A focus on the outcomes associated with the transformative change.

- What other aspects of your life have been especially affected because of the TC?
- Whom, if anyone, has your transformative change affected?
• What changes have occurred in your relationship with each other?

• How have your values changed during your TC? Does your relationship reflect these values? In what way?

• How successful has your TC been? How do significant others view your change?

• What did you discover about yourselves in the process of transformative change?

A check on the interview process.

8. Is there anything we haven’t discussed that is important to my understanding of your transformation?

9. What has this interview experience been like for you?
APPENDIX D: COUPLES MAKING TRANSFORMATION: INFORMATION

Transformation - A change in form, nature, or function.

This study provides couples the opportunity to tell their story of making important and affirming changes in their relationship and lifestyle. By participating in this study, couples may reaffirm their journey of change, fulfillment, and redefinition in sharing their experience of transformative change. Participation incorporates agreeing to be interviewed, a process that will take from one to two hours. A brief follow-up interview may be requested. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to discover the nature and process of transformative change. The theory and model of transformative change, resulting from this groundbreaking research, may serve to guide other couples who wish to transform their lives.

Existing studies of change among couples tend to focus on changes initiated by adversity. This research is unique. It focuses on change triggered by a mutual desire for enrichment. The research will explore how couples choose and pursue fulfilling and enriching change. It stresses the transformation of a couple's relationship, through an emphasis upon a change in values, perception (i.e. how couple views their role in the world), and lifestyle.

An important distinction of this research is in the focus on theory development. While most research seeks to examine a pre-developed theory or hypothesis, in this study theory will be generated through inquiry, comparison, and analysis. The method is called grounded theory.

Potential characteristics of transformative change within couples are given below. It is unlikely that such change incorporates all characteristics listed. It is anticipated that some participants will describe experiences of change that the researcher has not considered. The variety will help generate new ideas and enrich this study.

Each partner in any relationship may hold a unique view of a mutual change; individuals often experience the same event differently. Variation will enhance the collaborative and creative nature of this research. In variety lies intrigue, which makes social science research an adventure.

Potential Indicators of Transformative Change Within Couples

- The manifestation of a significant change in values.
  Adopting new values, returning to old values with new understanding, or prioritizing current values in new and different ways.
- Mutual change in perspectives on life, work, and relationships.
- Change within the relationship.
- Mutual change in relationships with family, friends, and community.

Thank you for joining me in this study.
Kirk Zinck, Doctoral Candidate.
Marriage and Family Therapy Program. Iowa State University
E-mailed Letter to Participants

Dear Gary and Gina,

After I interviewed the two of you, it was a real pleasure to analyze the interview transcript. As you can see in the enclosed summary, I found the interview rich in ideas and inspiration, and satisfying in terms of adding to my understanding of transformative change.

As a part of interview analysis, I have summarized our interview. The summary is intended to reflect the essence of the transformative process that you described. The purpose of this summary is to provide me what is called a member check, that is a check with you regarding how my interpretation and analysis fit with what you intended to convey during the interview.

In studying any interview, I unavoidably introduce my own interpretation. Thus, in the process of analysis and summarization, and throughout research process, a certain amount of bias develops based upon the researcher’s life experience, background, and purpose. In an effort to maintain the essence of what was said and to counter bias, this summary includes many quotes of what each of you said during the interview. Brackets [ ] following quoted words and phrases enclose the line number indicating where quoted material occurs in the interview transcript.

I am asking a favor. Would you please read through the summary and comment upon it? To facilitate this process, a copy of the interview transcript is included so you may refer to
it as you wish. I realize that the examination and commentary could be time consuming, and so while whatever level of detail you wish to provide is welcomed, brevity is okay.

In your examination, I invite you to comment, add, delete, or change wording. If you wish to print out the summary and write notes or comments upon it that would be useful. Even better, if you wish to add notes to the summary electronically and e-mail your remarks back to me this would be welcomed. Should you choose the electronic route, I think in-text commentary is most useful. Your comments can be distinguished by "bolding" them or coloring them through the use of editing software in Microsoft Word [go to "Tools" then to "track changes"; "highlight changes"; "options" where you can choose a highlighting color under "inserted text"]. It would be helpful, if each of you would distinguish your comments, so I know who is making the commentary (for example, if coloring your comments, each use a different color). Should you wish to make comments on the interview transcript instead of, or in addition to the summary, please feel free.

Whatever feedback you choose to provide will be helpful as I proceed in the ongoing analysis of our interview. The amount of commentary you each choose to provide is entirely up to your discretion, as is the choice to provide any commentary. Should you not have the time to provide feedback, please let me know and I will move to other aspects of the analysis. Thank you for your assistance.

With Warm Regards,

Kirk Zinck
Interview Summary E-Mailed to Gary and Gina

"To Widen The Circle"

"We came together out of a need to widen the circle" [152], "to define ourselves, find ourselves on our own terms" [549] and "to embrace the bigger picture" [735].

Mutual transformation, began early in the marriage of Gina and Gary. While marriage itself is a transformative event, their spiritual transformation reaches beyond the experience of creating a marital bond. The roots of this transformation predate the marriage. In reference to their collective efforts at expanding their world Gary states, "we came together out of a need to widen the circle" [152]. "Pushed over the edge" by religious doctrine "they started to talk" [77-78]. In shared conversation and mutual action the couple created a unique spiritual path. They left their fundamentalist church, a radical move, and "turned their backs" [684] upon a fixed truth to embrace an ongoing process of discovery and definition, and to chart a spiritual path that continues to evolve, based on curiosity, life experience, and ever emergent philosophies.

As "potential leaders in the church" [20], each individual occupied familiar and culturally sanctioned roles that brought them the respect of family and congregation. Gina describes herself as especially devoted, and both recall dedicating themselves as young adults to "campaigns" [25], intended to recruit others into the congregation of the church.

The couple describe themselves as deeply "socialized" [115] into church culture. Their training "runs so deep that you never really get all that stuff cleaned out" [115] and continues to challenge their discoveries and beliefs. They describe their emergence into broader, intellectually and emotionally satisfying worldviews as "deprogramming" [15].
During their immersion in campaigns devoted to leading others to the "truth", each began to realize emerging doubts regarding doctrine that decreed a fixed and unchanging truth and prescribed a "right" approach God and spirituality. Together, they began to discuss and challenge the unforgiving and punitive doctrine that relegated those who did not belong and believe to condemnation. In interaction with people of other faiths, who church leaders labeled enemies of truth [p. 17], they found interesting qualities and many questions. Church doctrine ignored a wealth of views, ideas, and human experience regarding spirituality. The condemnation of human intellect and people's capacity to consider multiple realities created discomfort for this couple, as their ongoing learning and experience increased their exposure to and awareness of the variations among people, context, and culture that challenged church doctrine [p. 8].

Hurdles

At times making this transformation was "agonizing" [82]. The change affects primary relationships today, even as the couple continues to open new and interesting doors to the world. In their sincere effort to "define themselves and find themselves on their own terms" [549], they endured disenfranchisement from the culture in which they were raised. In "transition from one worldview to another, one set of values to another" [423-23], they "crossed bridges together", [429] absent the spiritual guarantees offered by the fundamentalist church. Those metaphorical bridges linked them to a perspective that both accepts and forgives the qualities that create and maintain both spiritual imperfection and striving; a broader, less exclusionary understanding of people.
Perhaps, as the daughter of a minister in their fundamentalist church, and a long-time earnest adherent, Gina found transformation particularly painful. Yet, she describes herself today, as a "global person" who looks at the world through multiple lenses and sees goodness and possibility. The transformation from a culture that considers its devotees as "exclusive owners of the truth"[10] fostered much emotional turmoil. Gary’s description of leaving in terms of coming out of a cult" [7] and "deprogramming" hints at their collective struggles.

There have been other hurdles in this transformation. The couple report that they "caught the same rejection and shame" [504] from church members "as if we had done something really bad"[505]. A predominant roadblock was parental reaction. Gary speaks of the "atomic explosion"[106] of parents upon learning of this departure. Gina describes her mother’s intense grief and her fear for their souls.

The couple also grieves losses. Gary’s eventual ordination as a minister [in another denomination] is an example. Because, family members would not accept the change they could not embrace and acknowledge the accomplishment. The people to whom Gary and Gina grew close during their transformation also grieved, for the loss of family support for this couple endured. Both Gary and Gina describe the powerful reactions and incomprehension of such profound rejection that was expressed by the "family" of friends and mentors developed during this transformation.

Early conditioning continues to punctuate their life path. Gina describes the concrete definition of right vs. wrong as "an old goat that still raises its ugly head" [270-71]. She is adamant about "not doing judgment" [274], following her heart and intuition in human interaction, yet she sometimes struggles to be true to herself. Emotional roadblocks still arise
on occasion. The couple speaks of anxiety, depression, stress, and the perceived risks in creating change. Throughout the interview they both express emotional pain; this has been a profound and difficult transformation. Yet, they also speak with a sense of joy, wonder, and adventure at the strength of their transformation.

**Support**

Upon entering the transformative process, doors began to open. In their efforts to explore and create a new spiritual path, they became acquainted with a minister who introduced Gary to "some very powerful, well placed people"[120]. In what I have chosen to (tentatively) call a transformative opening, Gary states "they plugged me in"; they sponsored his education as a minister, in a setting of academicians who on an ongoing basis challenged theological perspectives and considered and debated many points of view. Gary describes this as his "first exposure to theology". As an "intuitive theologian" [150], Gina was able to move along with Gary; together they did "widen the circle"[152], their circle of belief, spirituality, adventure, and possibility.

Transformation incorporated a" rediscovery and redefinition of the concept of family" [359]. The transformative support groups that the couple associated with often developed into the approximation of family [p. 17]. This family changed over time as the transforming groups "changed shape or disbanded" [58], and other sources of support developed. The support of theologians and gatekeepers, networks of people, and alternate families, helped the couple construct a transformational bridge. Like any bridge, the metaphorical bridge referenced here allows people to progress, it also allows a return to reclaim or renew old relationships. This is what Gina and Gary have done in regard to their respective families of
origin. They maintain contact with parents and siblings. A bridge allows access and departure. They visit family and depart as needed; the pressure to conform still exists, though it has moderated. The ability to both reclaim relationships and maintain their unique spiritual and life journey allows them multiple levels of support, and keeps them relationally strong and supportive of each other and committed to their mutual path.

Relationship strengths that have nurtured Gary and Gina throughout this transition include "falling back on each other" [219], a mutual "determination to make it work" [230], and approaching change as "adventure and experimentation" [p745]. Both participants are articulate, highly educated, and reasonably centered; the sense of adventure and experimentation describes the willingness and ability to embrace change and enjoy a mutual sense of curiosity at what new paths might reveal. Gary's personal motto "encouraging hope, creativity, adventure" [250] states it well. Mutual admiration for each other and an active exchange of ideas as a couple is further source of support and strength. Gina is described by Gary as an intuitive theologian who is spiritually devout. These qualities contribute to the evolution and maintenance of the ongoing mutual transformation. Gina expresses pride and interest in Gary's theological devotion and in his pursuit of a comprehensive formal education. New learning is shared and examined together.

There are also sources of support from within their respective families of origin. Gary and Gina have become acquainted with Gary's cousin, who left their fundamentalist church long ago, and functions independently and happily. They have become close to this woman who provides inspiration, guidance, and support. Some of their siblings view Gary and Gina as "heroes". The transformation seems to have inspired some to allow themselves a broader
worldview and to make certain changes. The couple describes these sibling breaks as generally covert in nature.

Internal Struggle

Similar to other couples interviewed for this research, Gina and Gary did not transform without some internal struggle. As Gary succinctly states regarding their early marriage and transformation, "I could be a serious asshole in those days" [233]. Gina describes the conflict between being a young mother wanting to attend closely to her child and having to work in order to support the transformative effort. These struggles placed strains upon the relationship. Yet, in each individual changes occurred, even in struggle, that contributed to the mutual nature of the transformation. Terms like affirmation, strength, loyalty, nurture, enrichment, and forgiveness occur throughout the account of the outcomes of this transformation.

Decisions

Decisions in this transformation have been primarily mutual, with the character of the mutuality ever shifting. At different times each partner has assumed a leading role in their transformation. Such shifts typify most partnerships. What stands out here is the balance that has seems been struck. Leadership is complimentary and combines the individual strengths of each partner, in the creation of mutual strength. For example, Gary's formal theology is complimented and enhanced by Gina's intuitive theology. In sharing their respective learning, discoveries, and ever developing philosophies the couple has managed to maintain strength in two ways; they are each self-starters who think and act independently, and they have combined their respective experiences and intellect to create a mutual philosophy.
Conversation is valued; communication is open, frequent, and respectful. Decisions are based on mutual input, and the conversations serve to enhance mutuality and create new perspectives. Thus, decisions evolve from the openness to alternative viewpoints and adventure that typifies the couple's conversational process. Enhancing the decision making process is shared curiosity, complimented by a mutual passion for learning and growth.

Outcomes

Gina and Gary continue ongoing efforts to define and discover themselves. While Gary completes his doctorate in theology, Gina has been exploring varied expressions of spirituality, approaching it from a global perspective. As they continue to explore their individual and mutual spirituality, they accept, encourage, and inspire exploration in people around them. They fully expect that their children will continue to discover and pursue paths that differ from theirs; they would not be surprised if a child returned to the family roots in the fundamentalist church.

Through ongoing reflection, experience, and education, this couple has learned that reality is created by people in interaction, that is influenced by events occurring in a particular time and place. Thus, reality is ever changing. If any part of their philosophy approximates something fixed, it is that they embrace people with caring and acceptance, they prize the same qualities within their partnership and in the relationship with their children, and they embrace discovery, variety, and philosophical challenge.

Through years of combined struggle, exultation, and redefinition, the couple has continued to build their relationship and compliment each other's individual development.
They have discovered and strengthened the shared qualities of intellectual passion, competence, affirmation, strength, loyalty, nurturing, spiritual enrichment, and forgiveness.
Kirk,

Gina and I genuinely appreciated the work you did with our rambling interview. It was meaningful to us to spend time reviewing and discussing the transcript and the summary. We especially valued the summary. It confirmed the value of the struggle for self-definition. Hearing someone else summarize one’s personal journey is a humbling experience. It allowed us to hear some things that we have not thought about in years. We have enjoyed a renewed closeness and appreciation for each other as a result of reading and talking about both documents, but especially the summary.

Introduction

We noted the precision of the thematic phrases used to summarize our transformative journey. The whole introduction elegantly captures the spirit of the journey. We were both impressed with the skillful respect with which you describe the outline of our personal experience of the change process. It validates our experience and honors the courage of two young people who, ironically, valued the truth of their own experience reminiscent of the way a repressive church demanded the valuing of its own definition of truth. We were touched to realize that perhaps we had accomplished something worthwhile and worthy of admiration. I do not think we have thought about that in a long time.

Hurdles

The word “agonizing” reminds me of the meaning of the Greek root word, agonizo, which indicates striving and struggle toward a goal, like a runner in a race. Since we could
not know the outcome of our history, our experience was one day at a time. Many of those
days were filled with anxiety and a sense of risk-filled excitement. Again, the careful
attention to the details of our personal account of the journey impressed each of us. We
struggled, for example, to accept the fact that we were creating a life that could not be shared
with our families. The church in a little town became our family at a time when we came
perilously close to feeling we had none. The summary confirmed for us the sense of sadness
and loss that accompanied the positive experiences that gave meaning to our new journey.
Indeed, it was a mixed bag of emotions and longings. Gina’s use of the phrase, “an old goat
that still raises its ugly head,” points to an interesting dimension of our commitment to
openness. The goat has been used to symbolize evil in the world. The traumatic aspects of
our experience have made us sensitive to the possibility of evil in the guise of religious good
(witness the terrorist bombings in the name of God). We are ever vigilant to detect the
proverbial wolves in sheep’s clothing. By the way, it was Gina’s mother-in-law, not her
mother, who most openly feared for our souls.

Support

The process began with our mutual determination to pursue our own vision of truth.
Those conversations laid the groundwork for plans to introduce ourselves to other
possibilities in the world of organized religion. Those were scary days for us. It is hard to
imagine now just how vulnerable we felt then. After some time of visiting other churches, we
decided to visit the -- Christian Church (another denomination) where we found a home
among folks who otherwise comprised, we learned later, a very dysfunctional church family.
The minister was a renegade even among his own colleagues. He nevertheless put me in
touch with Dr. Jones who helped us get to [a large city] and [a prominent] Divinity School. It still seems like a dream to hear someone else describe that part of the journey. We supported each other unconditionally. Another couple might have found the same experience fragmenting and destructive. We found it challenging, yet therapeutic as a whole.

**Internal Struggle**

I [Gary] was helped to remember how I handled the stress of those times in ways that were not particularly helpful to Gina and Ray [child]. We struggled and sacrificed, but we did it. We did it together. I doubt if we could have done it without the kind of mutual commitment to each other as well as our mutual commitment to the significance of the spiritual adventure before us.

**Decisions**

We made decisions together, but that covers over the hours of conversation, debate, and even conflict that went into hammering out a mutually satisfying plan. We both found it meaningful to hear the language, “Gary’s formal theology” and “Gina’s intuitive theology.” That was an interesting reframe that made for interesting conversation. We have supported each other in personal growth and development (self-differentiation) while valuing the unitive aspects of our relationship. Our “mutual philosophy” is still very much under construction. It is a conversation that continues to make sense of new input and new challenges. Once again, we found the words used to describe our decision-making process to be validating and confirming of our experience.
Outcomes

This concluding section both honored and humbled us as we heard the story told from the perspective of one looking for the value in it. While we struggled our way through as two fearful young people, we were able to hear the heroic aspects of the journey in ways that we have not thought about. It was powerfully validating and encouraging.
REFERENCES


dissertation, The Florida State University.

understanding human phenomena and constructing interventions to produce change.*


consulting: A training manual for organizational consultants*. Ankeny IA: Human
Systems Consultants.

King, W. (2000). The intertwined relationship between depression and marital distress:
Elements of marital therapy conducive to effective treatment outcome. *Journal of
Marital and Family Therapy, 26*(1), 51-64.

Longman.


Random House.


