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Date **Oct. 5, 1998**
Abstract

This study is aimed at elucidating the meaning of therapeutic change within the context of a person's life story. The author believes that delineation of therapeutic change within this context may help to overcome the incongruence among counselling theory, research, practice, and the experience of counselling clients. After reviewing the traditional literature on therapy outcome and change, the new options coming from narrative approaches were considered. The qualitative method of a multiple-case study was chosen as the most appropriate for the posed question.

Three participants in this project completed either individual (1 woman) or group (1 woman and 1 man) therapy, and believed that they achieved a substantial therapeutic change; all of them had written their autobiography in the beginning of their therapy. In each case study, the autobiography was interpreted, the interpretation refined in the Life story interview, and validated in another interview with the participant. Then the Current life interview and the Interview with a significant other were conducted, and the Portrait of change was construed; again, the product was reviewed and validated with the participant. All interpretations, and the videotapes of interviews were reviewed by two independent judges. The three Portraits of change were mutually compared, and the working delineation of the therapeutic change within the context of a person's life story was abstracted from this comparison. In all 3 cases, the change seemed to be connected with a substantial reinterpretation of the individual's life story. This reinterpretation seemed to be based on the change of the individual's fundamental beliefs about self and others in-the-world, on greater and more flexible acceptance of self and others in their relational complexity, and on positioning one's Self as an agentic hero in his or her own life story. These changes were also reflected in the genre, the formal structure, and the explanatory reasoning of the new stories the participants told about their current lives, and lived by. The limitations of this study, and the implications of the findings for counselling theory, practice, and future research are discussed.
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Chapter 1

The purpose of this study is to investigate the meaning of therapeutic change within the context of a person’s life story. This focus has been chosen to address the following concerns.

There seems to be a gap in the relevance among the counselling theory, practice, and research (Belar & Perry, 1992; Claiborn, 1987; Gelso, 1979; Hoshmand & Polkinghorne, 1992); this incongruence may be equally disconcerting for everybody involved in the field. The stories of lived experience, the meaning of which unravels in counselling as the very hallmark of the endeavour, seem to have difficulty in gaining admission to the realm of science and scientifically acceptable research. More precisely, they do not fit in the prevalent paradigm of science and research as it has been established, accepted, and practised during the past half of the century (Gellner, 1992; Gergen, 1991; Hoshmand & Polkinghorne, 1992; Howard, 1986, 1992; Mahoney, 1991; Mahoney & Lyddon, 1988; Mahrer, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988, 1991).

On the other hand, practitioners who daily listen to the stories of human lives, do not seem to be impressed with what the traditional research has to offer to them. The changes in behavior or perceptions of the almost proverbial "x-hundred of the college freshmen," observed under rigorously controlled laboratory conditions, and analyzed by sophisticated statistical methods, seem to have little relevance to their daily work. To the practitioner, these results may sound like fragmented messages from some distant and improbable worlds. They have often as much relevance to the stories of lived experience, daily dealt with in counselling, as an electronic microscope investigation of biopsied tissues would have for understanding a love-stricken teenager.

The relationship between practitioners and counselling theory has not been an easy one either. Practitioners seemed to get disenchanted with the divisive theoretical wars, with the claims of superiority of the rival theoretical explanations and approaches, and with the demands on a rigid loyalty to one particular school of thought. Moreover, practitioners apparently
recognized that not a single school of thought provided a sufficient theoretical framework to
guide their daily work. A decade ago Norcross (1986) noted that between one-third to half of
practising clinicians classified themselves as eclectic; nowadays this proportion is probably
higher.

Traditional research has also failed to support the claims of superiority of any counselling
type (Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975), but then this research has been criticized, too, and
attempts have been made for methodological revision (e.g., Kazdin, 1985; Persons, 1991; Ryle,
1984). Yet the more radical criticism suggests that the whole traditional concept of research
validation of counselling theories may be an exercise in futility (Mahrer, 1988). This stance
seems to be in some ways close to Bowlby's (1988) call for a change of direction in theory
building, research, and practice. He suggests that observation and understanding of the client and
the client-counsellor relationship should mould the theory and the research rather than the other
way around.

Bowlby's (1988) assertion has another serious implication. In the learned discussions of
researchers, theoreticians, and in its own way in those of practitioners, the client's voice is
conspicuously missing. "In the history of our profession, the views of clients have had little
influence on the development of what we do.... Even now, when we pride ourselves on being
client-focused, co-constructive and conversational, in important ways we're not," maintain
McCollum and Beer (1995, p. 59). In their interesting piece of nontraditional research, they
compared the therapist's views of marital counselling sessions with the couple-client's experience
and understanding of what was going on; the results were illuminating, and in many ways
humbling.

Thus, in fact we have a four-way gap in relevance. That professionals are mainly concerned
with the congruity of theory, research, and practice, and have virtually ignored the voice of the
protagonist-the client, is quite telling in its own right. It may well be that the distance between
the client's lived experience on the one hand, and the counselling theory, research and practice on the other one, is in fact much bigger than that among the theory, research, and practice. And it may well be that this is the major contributing factor to the forementioned lack of congruency in our field.

To address these problems, the research question of this study is: *What is the meaning of therapeutic change within the context of a person's life story?* Mutually relevant counselling theory, research, and practice are inconceivable without their common relevance to the very reason for their existence—the client, and his or her experience and understanding of the problems, pain, and beneficial change in which the counselling theory, research, and practice proclaim their interest. The research question, chosen for this study, seems to be ambitious, but—in the author's opinion—also challenging, fundamental, unavoidable, and long overdue.

However, a brief detour may be necessary here. Why ask about the *meaning* in the first place? A classical behaviorist may dismiss the question as scientifically unsound, and thus, meaningless. Nevertheless, in arriving at this very conclusion, she or he would also have to struggle, explicitly or implicitly, with the questions of meaning (cf. Cramer, 1996, pp. 21-22, or Watzlawick's, 1996, musings about the concepts of "normalcy"). On the other hand, others (e.g., Bruner, 1990) openly welcome and pose the fundamental human "questions about the nature of mind and its processes, questions about how we construct our meanings and our realities..." (p. xi), questions about "meaning-making, and the central place it plays in human action" (p. xii), because this is the road to "the understanding of what man makes of his world, of his fellow beings, and of himself" (p. xiii). Moreover, in these questions the desire to understand is conceived as a meaningful one in its own right, that is, both making sense and being of value.

The contemplation of meaning, which in its ultimate form inevitably leads to the fundamental questions about the meaning of human life, can and does take whole books (e.g., Frankl, 1984, 1997) that yet pose more questions than provide answers. "It seems that if there is any truth, it is
a truth of process" (Carlsen, 1996, p. 352); the very human need and search for meaning seems to be meaningful in itself. The following brief remarks about the meaning of meaning, necessarily limited by the scope of this study, may appear somewhat sketchy. Let these remarks be taken as a statement of the stance from which this study has been conceived.

Meaning itself is a polysemous word. There are two semantic loads most commonly understood in this word in plain English, and interestingly, in many other languages (e.g., the Czech význam, Russian znachenye, or German die Bedeutung). One is referring to our way of making sense out of the world, and out of our experience and position in it; it is a way of ordering or structuring our world and experience, and conveying it to others. Thus, for example, we may answer the question "What does it mean?" with the quasi-normative dictionary definition, or we may decide that some logic-defying claim of causality or sequentiality "does not make sense," and so, "it is meaningless." The other meaning of meaning is valuative; it denotes the attributed significance, importance, or value to things, persons, or actions, and they may be judged meaningful, meaningless, or of dubious meaning.

The search for meaning, that is, both making sense out of ourselves, others, and our world(-s), and attributing to these some value, is perhaps one of the most universal defining features of humans; this is who we are, and we cannot be or do otherwise. Rosen's (1996) quote from Strenger states it succinctly: "To be a human being is to be constantly structuring [one's] world in terms of meaning" (p. 27). And Frankl (1997) concludes: "Because despair is suffering without meaning" (p. 133). No matter how we read the sentence (i.e., "suffering which has no meaning" or "suffering because of the lack of meaning"), it seems to express the universally human existential experience. In extremes, a life which is perceived as making no sense, and which is deemed as having no value, may be (and often is) arbitrarily ended, be it by murder or suicide.

Although usually in less dramatic extremes, the perceived lack or incoherence of meaning seems to be the broadest common denominator of troubled human lives. These are, in their own
turn, the very *raison d'être* of counselling. Thus, the desired counselling change, plausibly seen as alleviating suffering through finding new options and resolutions to a troubled life, is also necessarily connected with meaning, and with the change in meaning. Hence our question about the therapy change inevitably includes the question about the meaning in the context of a person's life story. Moreover, whenever the question about therapy change has been posed differently, for example, asking about its magnitude rather than its meaning, the answer seemed to be unsatisfying. It seemed to miss exactly what it did not ask about. This point will be argued in much closer detail later.

When clients concluding counselling are asked about the changes they have accomplished, they often speak about achieving peace of mind, about feeling freer and in control of their own lives, and about having diminished fears and insecurities. They speak about resolving conflicts with their-live or dead-parents, about learning more rewarding ways of dealing with children, spouses, co-workers or bosses, and generally, about leading more satisfying lives. Even if their presenting problem was originally framed in terms of a diagnostic label like depression or anxiety, at conclusion they usually see these problems in the context of the history of their lives, in which the depression or anxiety made sense, and played a meaningful role in their way of coping with their lives (cf. Coelho, Hamburg, & Adams, 1974). The overarching *changes in the development of the clients' life stories*, although inclusive, are not reducible to alleviation of either singular or manifold symptoms. These changes represent a major shift in the clients' understanding of their position in the world, and in their ways of coping. They are expressed in their cognitions, emotions, and behavior. If these changes occur, clients present them as a desirable outcome of counselling.

Nevertheless, this account of change, as lived and told by the client, has little room within the paradigm of the traditional scientific inquiry. "Eschewing conventional experimental methods," Hill and Corbett (1993) paraphrase Schultz (1972), "Freud did not quantify his observations and
thus was not considered scientific" (p. 3). Traditionally, the researchers, academicians, journal
editors, as well as financial sponsors of counselling practice and research, prevalently ask: "What
type of effect does therapy produce-on anything?" (Smith & Glass, 1977, p. 753). It is implicitly
understood that the "effect" and "anything" are quantitative measurable variables.

To conform with calls for scientifically rigorous data conceived thus, researchers produce
hundreds of studies investigating both the general and differential effects of therapies on a broad
variety of measurable variables, lately suggesting the use of standardized outcome batteries
(Waskow & Parloff, 1975). Sometimes these investigations are done under rigorously controlled
conditions, just vaguely reminiscent of counselling as we usually know it. The account of the
effect is based on sophisticated methods of statistical analysis of changes in chosen variables or,
more lately, on possible interactions between multiple variables.

But even if translated to plain language, these accounts of change and outcome would not
even approach the rich, multifaceted understanding of outcome and change as experienced by the
client, and witnessed by the practising counsellor. In better cases, the client and the counsellor
may agree: "Yes, that has changed, too." In other words, this kind of notion of a scientifically
rigorous inquiry into counselling outcome may be missing something important, perhaps even
crucial for what constitutes a change as a beneficial outcome of counselling.

The motivation for these scientific endeavours may be noble. "Healers all over the world
have tried to understand whether what they are doing is helpful and whether what they do leads
to change" (Hill & Corbett, 1993, p. 3). Sometimes these efforts smack of an embarrassing
defensiveness. But even when these endeavours seem to support the claim that counselling leads
to some beneficial outcomes, as they usually do, they give very limited information about what
the nature of the change is. The client would hardly recognize his or her experience in it, and
probably would not be impressed. The satisfied client not only already knows that something has
worked, but even seems to know what the change was about, in the complexity of real human life
and relations. Unfortunately, this voice does not seem to be heard, except by the counsellor. But even then the client's voice seems to be filtered through the counsellor's unwitting and deliberate interpretations, and if the counsellor wants to publish the case and thus elevate it to "respectable science," the client's voice is usually "smoothed over" even more (Spence, 1982, 1986). Again, the client would hardly recognize it as his or her own account.

In the multiple case study (cf. Rosenwald, 1988; Stoecker, 1991; Yin, 1989) presented here, the participants are people who have completed counselling and, in their own opinion, have achieved desired beneficial changes. They are all clients of a practitioner who has asked them to write an autobiography before or in the early stages of counselling. The autobiographies have been analyzed and interpreted by the author of this study, following the principles of literary criticism (cf. Toolan, 1988), psychological interpretation of narratives, and some other psychological assumptions (see the review of literature in the next chapter). These interpretations have been validated by external judges. Then the series of interviews (cf. Mishler, 1986a, 1986b) with participants have been conducted. In these interviews, the participants have elaborated on their original life stories, validated the author's interpretation of their stories, delineated the changes as seen from their current life perspectives (both changes in the evaluation of their past, and the changes in their present life), outlined their understanding of how these changes have happened, and anticipated how the "next chapter" in their life story may develop. These interviews have been analyzed and interpreted, and the author's interpretation has been validated by the participants, and their significant others. Based on thus elicited material, the portraits of the persons' life story changes have been constructed, and these portraits of individual participants have been mutually compared.

This approach is striving to address the outlined and-in the author's opinion-fundamental concern. In summary, the client's complex but first-hand account does not appear to qualify as a contribution to the scientific knowledge in the field proclaiming to be concerned with human life
and relations. In attempts to gain credibility on a par with the "hard sciences" like physics, psychology and related disciplines seem to have accepted scientific models foreign to their subject matter. Consequently, it is no surprise that we have been losing our relevance, and thus, contrary to the intended aims, our credibility. The efforts to establish a unified scientific language and method had been originally exciting and promising, but one has to wonder to what extent they have been helpful to our field. Unlike in physics, we have to concern ourselves, for example, with human self-reflexiveness, social organization and relationships, goal oriented, teleological thinking and behavior, and with the exquisitely human quest for sense and meaning making out of human experience in this world. Then we have to dare to develop a human science (Howard, 1986) that is relevant to its own subject matter—the human being.

The research question of this study, aiming at eliciting the meaning of therapeutic change within the context of a person's life story, may only be proposed within the framework of such a human science. On the other hand, posing questions like these may be the necessary step in developing a human science that is relevant to human affairs. Even when posing the question, it has been quite obvious that the answer will be necessarily partial, in the best of cases capturing a fragment of what we may call a human truth. Yet let us see whether or not this—however fragmented-answer bears more relevance to the lived human experience than what the traditional research approaches have had to offer.

Chapter 2
The Old Problems, and the New Options
(Review of Literature)

The Problems of Traditional Research on Outcome and Change

In the APA centennial feature, Hill and Corbett (1993) reflect on the history of process and outcome research in counselling psychology. Their attention is admittedly devoted more to process research, which is probably a true reflection of the situation in the field. As if we already
knew not only whether psychotherapy is effective, but also in what way, and what the therapeutic change is all about. As if the only remaining question was "How to get there?"

Krumboltz (1966) suggests that the question "Is psychotherapy effective?" is simplistic. True. But why not challenge the outcome of psychotherapy with more sophisticated questions? For example, what constitutes a beneficial change and outcome in counselling, as lived and experienced by the client as an agent of the change? What does it mean in human life? Asking these questions, instead of trying to scientifically justify our social usefulness, may shed quite a different light on our subject matter.

Hill and Corbett (1993) note that "... the distinction between process and outcome research sometimes becomes blurred" (p. 3). The problem may be more fundamental. Facing the tremendous complexity of psychotherapy research, the effort to break the problem to more manageable categories is understandable. However, is it helpful, or even more confusing?

The events of a journey gain significance or meaning only in relation to the desired or real outcome of the trip. Similarly the counselling process gains meaning only in the context of the outcome. The outcome is inconceivable without the process, and the process is inconceivable without some outcome.

Hill and Corbett (1993) examine Rogers's extraordinary influence on counselling psychology, and observe: "Perhaps because Rogers emphasized the process of change, most of the research generated from nondirective theory involved evaluation of the process rather than of the outcomes of therapy" (p. 5). But the process cannot escape the outcome. For example, the development of the Experiencing scale (Klein, Mathieu, Gendlin, & Kiesler, 1970) to test Rogerian theory in the process also implies that "experiencing" has something to do with the desirable outcome of counselling. Klein, Mathieu-Coughlan, and Kiesler (1986) found that "experiencing" is positively related to self-exploration, insight, absence of resistances, and high-quality free associations, as well as to the outcome of therapy. Again, self-exploration, insight,
and free associations are hardly meant as self-serving variables with the end in themselves; they are assumed to have some bearing on the desired outcome. But the question of how to translate the fully functioning human being of Rogerian theory into an outcome measure, and thus, how to understand "the outcome of therapy" in the quoted study, remains open.

Unfortunately, Hill and Corbett (1993) do not pay attention to this problem. They note that "Carl Rogers's theory led to a proliferation of studies on facilitative conditions and skills" (p. 8), and they quote reviews of research both supporting and questioning the relationship between the Rogerian "necessary and sufficient" conditions and skills, and the therapeutic outcome.

Nevertheless, the stress is again prevalently on the process, on the "conditions and skills", rather than on the delineation of what constitutes the beneficial therapeutic outcome. This angle is perhaps even more obvious in Hill and Corbett's review of other theoretical influences on psychotherapy research, be it behavioral and cognitive theories, psychoanalytic, family systems, interpersonal, or social influence theories. Although every researched concept is intrinsically and inseparably linked to the outcome of therapy (e.g., progressive relaxation, maladaptive learning, irrational thoughts, therapist intentions, working alliance, transference and countertransference, communication patterns, etc.), the reviewed studies have been mainly concerned with the observation and manipulation of these concepts in the therapeutic process, whereas the measurement of the outcome has not been critically questioned. In fact, the outcome has been often delineated in terms of the concept investigated in the process, which may be viewed as the "affirmation of consequent" (cf. Wampold, Davis, & Good, 1990), or by some standardized questionnaire or battery, not tied to a specific theory but deemed to reflect human well-being (or, quite often, pathology). Both approaches are questionable; it is not easy to "win" within this particular paradigm of thought (cf. Mahrer, 1988).

Hill and Corbett's (1993) review of outcome studies is really brief, and mainly linked to justification of the whole psychotherapeutic enterprise. The first impetus for shifting focus from
process to outcome studies has been Eysenck's (1952) stunning claim that about two thirds of all neurotics who enter traditional psychotherapy substantially improve within 2 years, but also an equal proportion of neurotics who never enter therapy improve within the same period.

Naturally, the researchers felt that rather than dissecting the process and establishing efficacy of its components, it was crucially important to establish efficacy of psychotherapy at large in the first place. Another impetus for outcome research came from calls for accountability, that is, "the need to prove (especially to third-party payers) that therapy is worth insurance dollars.... [which] made it imperative that researchers demonstrate the efficacy of counselling to public sources and legislators" (Hill & Corbett, 1993, p. 12; cf. Hill & Gronsky, 1984).

In probably most widely accepted and compelling study, Bergin and Lambert (1978) valiantly defended the field. They pointed out methodological and interpretive insufficiencies in the Eysenck's study, and based on their own analysis of outcome studies conducted between 1953 and 1969, they concluded that psychotherapy was not only more helpful than no therapy, but also brought about change within approximately 2 months, as compared with the 2-year time period for people on waiting lists. Moreover, they questioned the concept of spontaneous remission, given people's tendency to seek alternative forms of help while on the waiting list.

Smith, Glass, and Miller (1980) conducted a meta-analysis of 475 controlled outcome studies and concluded that, at the end of treatment, the average psychotherapy client is better off than 80% of the untreated sample. Other studies (Howard, Kopta, Krause, & Orlinsky, 1986; Lambert, Shapiro, & Bergin, 1986) similarly vindicated the efficacy of psychotherapy as compared with the improvement in untreated clients.

Considering the question of the general effectiveness of psychotherapy sufficiently settled, researchers directed their efforts on comparing the effects of different and often competing types of psychotherapy. Hundreds of comparative outcome studies, and then their reviews (e.g., Lambert et al., 1986; Smith et al., 1980) came to a similar conclusion that (with one exception)
all therapies across different theoretical orientations were equally effective, and that "everyone has won and all must get prizes" (Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975, p. 995).

Further, researchers paid attention to a number of treatment sessions necessary to achieve a measurable improvement in clients (e.g., Howard et al., 1986), and to the durability of treatment gains after termination (e.g., Lambert & Bergin, 1992). Again, these studies confirmed that comparably soon in therapy clients achieved some relatively lasting improvement.

Moreover, Hill and Corbett (1993) note many advances in methodology that increase the sophistication of outcome research. There have been proposals for measuring change with standard outcome batteries (Waskow & Parloff, 1975), with several methods (e.g., self-report, behavioral, physiological), and from several perspectives (e.g., client, therapist, clinical assessor, significant other; Lambert & Hill, 1994). Manuals, specifying the active components and procedures of treatment, have been developed (Lambert & Ogles, 1988; Luborsky & DeRubeis, 1984), as well as methods of testing therapist's adherence to manuals (e.g., Hill, O'Grady, & Elkin, 1992). Researchers have argued that the sample of therapists must be large enough to distinguish between the effects of therapy and the effects of therapists (Beutler & Hill, 1992; Crits-Christoph & Mintz, 1991). Jacobson, Follette, and Revenstorf (1984) advised testing for clinical significance of findings rather than just testing statistical significance. Kraemer and Thiemann (1989) suggested analysis of the growth curve of change during therapy as opposed to the traditional pretreatment-posttreatment designs. Sources of possible investigator's bias have been studied (Berman, 1989).

Thus, Hill and Corbett (1993) consider the question of effectiveness of therapy settled, similarly to Gelso's (1979) earlier conclusion that "... the enterprise is a helpful one to clients-on the whole" (p. 9). In 1979, Gelso urged:

I am further suggesting that the general question has been answered, and the emerging trend is to get on with our business and treat the more specific "who, what, when, where?"
questions.... we still know very little about the factors influencing the outcomes of
counselling. (p. 9)

Gelso referred to Kiesler's (1966) "uniformity myth", and believed that the use of factorial
designs would help to encompass most if not all of the factors or moderators to be accounted for
achievements in studying gender and race factors in psychotherapy, with other variables like age,
ability, social class, and sexual orientation beginning to receive attention. Generally not satisfied
with the status of resolution of the uniformity myths, Hill and Corbett call for researchers "to
start creating more complex models that match clinical reality" (p. 14).

Thus, we may be seemingly satisfied; the utility of our counselling endeavours has been
confirmed. Along the way, as North Americans would say, we have covered many bases, and
made our case fairly tight. But if we do more of the same, equipped with better techniques to
answer a broader spectrum of complex questions, can we one day cover all the bases? Or, to use
another common metaphor, can we keep adding the "missing pieces" to complete the mosaic of a
presumed "body of knowledge"? More importantly, are these metaphors, this way of thinking
about the problem, helpful to our understanding of what we do?

A growing number of theoreticians of science express doubts about the feasibility of the
paradigm of confirmation or disconfirmation of theoretical propositions. To give the whole
argument here is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, our field echoes the theory of
science, and the shift in thinking is nicely and briefly summarized, for example, by Mahrer
(1988). Basically, if the proposition is confirmed, the theory is a little more secure. If the
proposition is disconfirmed or refuted ("falsified", cf. Popper, 1968), the theory is in trouble. But
"No theory can be proven true by empirical data. And, just as it is impossible to prove a theory,
so also is impossible to prove one false" (Greenwald, Pratkanis, Lieppe, & Baumgardner, 1986,
p. 226). Moreover, argues Mahrer (1988), theoretical propositions cannot be refuted for many
reasons inherent to the very paradigm of theory building and theory testing, and if they are not confirmed, they survive it regardless. "My thesis is," Mahrer maintains, "that hypothesis-testing research is an inadequate means of contributing to an essentially nonexistent and mythical body of psychotherapeutic knowledge.... precious little from outside the accepted body of knowledge is granted entry by hypothesis-testing research" (p. 696). He goes on: "On the basis of hypothesis-testing research, we know less and less, but with higher and higher confidence" (p. 696). To study psychotherapy to discover the discoverable, Mahrer proposes a discovery-oriented closer look at psychotherapeutic phenomena, and the relations among psychotherapeutic conditions, operations, and consequences. Specifics of his proposed approach are not important for this study; important is its sharp differentiation across the board from traditional hypothesis-testing research, "... from the opening intent to do the research to the design and methodology of the study, and from the framing of the research question to the sense that is made of the findings" (p. 694).

The psychotherapy outcome is inseparable from the notion of change; in fact, even process study is concerned with in-the-process proximal changes (cf. Gelso, 1979). The concept of change is a basic tenet of any psychotherapeutic theory. Persons (1991) justly laments that psychotherapy outcome studies do not accurately represent current models of psychotherapy; in fact, they may not represent them at all. Her proposed remedy, the idiographic outcome studies using a case formulation model of assessment and treatment, sounds interesting but may be insufficient to solve the problem, even with multidimensional measurements.

Gelso (1979) argues that the use of a standardized core battery of change measures (Waskow & Parloff, 1975) is unfathomable, and would in the last analysis be stultifying. He would like to narrow the range of the currently overwhelming number of change measures to enhance comparability of studies and interpretability of findings. Smith and Glass (1977), who reviewed nearly 400 controlled evaluations of psychotherapy, computed the effect size on any outcome
variable the original researcher chose to measure. Then they bravely defended the importance of
the effect magnitude as compared with the importance of the nature of the outcome variable.

In summary, we maintain that psychotherapy works, and support this stance with alleged
measurements of therapeutic change. Nevertheless, we measure something poorly delineated, and
the measured variables may not even represent such poorly delineated change. If we were to
clearly delineate the change, grounded in theory fully compatible with the client's experience of
change, we would probably not even try to measure it. Instead of trying to "prove" its occurrence,
we would try to understand what it is all about, and then how to help clients to achieve it, and
how to theoretically frame it. This does not seem to be achievable by the traditional hypothesistesting methods. As a post-scriptum to this part of the paper: in their APA centennial feature
review, Hill and Corbett (1993) dedicated exactly one paragraph to qualitative research
approaches.

How to Delineate Therapeutic Change?

Highlen and Hill (1984) maintain that to come to some agreement about therapeutic change,
we would have to be able to agree on the following questions and their combinations: (1) who
assesses change, (2) what constitutes change and at which level, (3) how change affects other
parts of the client, (4) how much change must occur and how long it must persist to be
meaningful, (5) how values influence the change process, and (6) what the measurement goals of
change are and when the change is measured. "Client change, therefore, is a multifaceted,
complex phenomenon whose parameters are intricately related" (p. 339). It is virtually
impossible to give "an operational definition of change"; "... conclusions based on theory and
research vary depending on how change is conceptualized" (p. 339), and we somehow cannot
agree on this conceptualization.

To give a full review of the (often conflicting) opinions relevant to our subject matter could
mean reviewing all existing theories of psychotherapy and counselling; they all have to somehow
address the question of change, and they seldom agree with other theories. It would mean evaluating "intrapsychic" and "interpersonal" theories, system theories, and views of different order-level changes. It would mean reviewing personal and societal values, including cross-cultural differences. It would mean reviewing different research strategies of how and when to observe, and possibly measure the change. The list is far from complete, yet it already raises considerable anxiety, and an educated guess that it would not satisfyingly answer what the therapeutic change is.

The contemporary trend towards convergence and possibly an integration of psychotherapies suggests focusing on commonalities rather than differences across approaches. This trend also encourages paying more attention to what counsellors do rather than what they say they do; in fact, counsellors appear to be closer to each other in their doing than in their proclaimed theoretical stances. Goldfried (1980) has called for counselling to delineate a common set of therapeutic principles across theories, and has expressed the belief that this may lead to creation of a new "meta-theory" of counselling and psychotherapy (Goldfried & Padawer, 1982). Other than that these calls may be surprisingly self-defeating in their consequences—for example, in eliminating the role of counsellor's personal qualities which could be exactly one of the "common factors" influencing change (cf. Highlen & Hill, 1984; Parloff, Waskow, & Wolfe, 1978)—they have been based on some fairly promising previous work.

Frank (1961) identified shared therapeutic components across all forms of counselling and psychotherapy, and spurred a growing interest in understanding fundamental principles and processes of psychological change (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Frank, 1985; Goldfried, 1980, 1982; Highlen & Hill, 1984; Mahoney, 1985; and many others). There seems to be a convergence on a few transtheoretical factors believed to be common to all forms of effective psychotherapy, such as inspiring and maintaining a client's hope and expectations of help, arousing a client's emotions coupled with some form of cognitive learning, providing new learning experiences, enhancing a
client's sense of mastery or self-efficacy, providing opportunities for a client's generalization of therapeutic gains to daily life and maintaining the gains; all this in the context of a good therapeutic relationship as an agent of change (Highlen & Hill, 1984). Moreover, Highlen and Hill thoughtfully analyze client factors affecting change, counsellor factors affecting change, counsellor-client factors, and moderators affecting within-session change. They even provide an in-depth analysis of specific counsellor techniques and procedures for affecting client change.

But what is the change?

The amount of work, wisdom, insight, and food for further thought, contained in the Highlen and Hill's study and in the material reviewed in the study (actually, a book chapter), is breathtaking. Nevertheless, rather than a sense of achievement, it raises a sense of sadness, frustration, and perhaps even despair. And it may be an accurate reflection of the situation in our field as it has developed. For all the amassed knowledge and wisdom, the basic question remains unanswered, and is seemingly unanswerable. We learn about the factors influencing therapeutic change, and how to get there, without saying what the change is, and thus, how to get where. It is reminiscent of a riddle in an old Russian fairy-tale: "Go there, I don't know where; bring me that, I don't know what." Just as an aside, the poor fellow who received this task dealt with it, and thus saved his life, by conceptually reframing his way of thinking about the riddle.

Is the question "What is the change?" naive or unwarranted, in the field which proclaims that it deals with human change? Or is it one of those concepts like an ideal, never to be quite achieved and delineated? Or is it like some taboo god, never to be named by his name and described? It may be true that we will never come up with an "operational definition of change", within the context of thinking where the "operational definition" is proof of existence, worthiness, and admissibility to the realm of scientific knowledge; what does not seem to fit is deemed a "pseudo-problem" (cf. Carnap, 1959). Howard (1986) maintains that "one can consider the currently accepted body of research practices as a body of scientific knowledge about how
one might go about seeking veridical knowledge” (p. 21).

Perhaps it is time to reconsider our understanding of scientific knowledge, and the commitments of counselling psychology in particular. Howard (1992) suggests that .... if there is anything akin to a heart or core of the identity of counselling psychology, it lies in an appreciation of the personal, the subjective, the individual, and the agentic.... But these particular commitments, considered in relation to the essence of human nature, do not rest easily with traditional notions of causality and forms of explanation in science. (p. 419)

Certainly, Howard's assertion has to be taken with some caution. In the world of "the vanishing distinction between subject and object" (Josselson, 1993, p.xi), it is difficult to talk about "the subjective." It is difficult to appreciate "the individual and the personal" without an appreciation of the societal and the cultural (including linguistic) that keep influencing and shaping "the personal" to the extent that these are an indivisible part of the personal (Bruner, 1990; M. M. Gergen & K. J. Gergen, 1993; MacIntyre, 1981; Rosenthal, 1993). And yet, we do recognize the uniqueness of our own face and the faces of others (Alexander, 1988); we all have our own unique history and configuration of contexts, conditions, and circumstances, and we do interpret the world and our position in it in our personally unique way. "My story differs from yours. My story, my past, present, and future, strung out like a plot, is who I am. It is far from incidental. It is central," insists Keen (1986, p. 174). But he goes on: "My personal story is some version of a more general story of how life proceeds in my culture" (p. 175). This problem will be attended to later again; for now it may be sufficient to appreciate the wisdom of McAdams' (1993) conclusion that seems to be an antidote to the more radical "either-or" stances: "Identity is something of a collaboration between the person and the social world" (pp. 94-95).

Regardless of this caution, Howard's (1992) previously quoted position is of tremendous importance for counselling psychology and its future development, as well as for the argument being developed in this study. Howard seems to bring the focus from some "objective truth" out
there, which may (or may not) be the case in physics, back to the phenomenal reality of a living person, that is, the real subject matter of counselling psychology. Importantly, at least in the author's opinion, it does not mean that there is no room in human sciences for the physical reality or the social context. Like it or not, people do live in physical time and space, and people are social creatures. What it does mean is that there is a place in human sciences for phenomenal time and space, and for the uniquely personal interpretation of lived experience in the social context; moreover, this place is a prominent one.

In this context, the question What is the change about? is speakable again. Unlike in physics or chemistry, "in the human sciences the nature of the question itself does indeed change when viewed from different perspectives" (Howard, 1986, p. 18). In our case, this new perspective accepts the stories of clients who experienced the change as important, and probably good-enough evidence. From this perspective, we may discern an understanding of the therapeutic change that has not been accessible when questioned from a different perspective.

New Options

The growing attention paid to "postmodern" ideas about science and its theory opens the door for development of human science, and for more satisfying exploration of questions basic for counselling psychology. To give a full review of "postmodern" views of science is beyond the scope of this study. Besides that it has been done many times elsewhere (e.g., Gellner, 1992; Gergen, 1991; Guidano, 1991; Hoshmand & Polkinghorne, 1992; Mahoney, 1991; and many others), it may be a fruitless exercise. Perhaps "postmodernism" as a consistent and homogeneous school of thought does not exist. Howard (1986) suggests that "postmodernism" is more sure of what it is not than what it is, whereas Gergen (1991) notes that "the term fails to specify an essence (defining itself merely as 'post'), [and] its use has been multiplicitous and highly variable" (p. xi). Hammersley and Atkinson (1992) give a nice summary: "However, it is in the nature of opposition movements that their cohesion is more negative than positive:
everyone agrees, more or less, on what must be opposed, but there is less agreement on the nature of the alternative" (p. 1).

Oppositional or revolutionary movements are commonly marked with extreme or radical stances. Some of these, in fact, do not represent a radical shift to a new way of seeing the problem; they rather represent a radical rearrangement within the limits of the old paradigm of thinking. An example may be Mahoney and Lyddon's (1988) or Guidano's (1991) fascination with "new" physics and "new" biology (cf. Bateson, 1979; Maturana, 1977) as a possible new model for understanding human affairs. The new notions (like the self-evolving or self-organizing, autopoietic, closed-system organism; chaos in terms of quantum physics; or impossibility of interactional learning) are not only peculiar and highly controversial. They seem to be as distant to a better understanding of human experience as any other previous physicalist model.

Much more promising, exciting, and relevant to our subject matter—that is, how to understand human lived experience—seem to be Bruner's (1986, 1987, 1990) musings about the two different ways in which people strive to understand the world. In the "paradigmatic mode" of thought, the means of comprehending experience is a tightly reasoned analysis, a logical proof, and empirical observation. Thought is an instrument of reason; "Good thought is right reason, and its efficacy is measured against the laws of logic or induction" (Bruner, 1987, p. 11). The second, "narrative mode" of thought, is concerned with human wants, needs and goals, seeking "to explain events in terms of human actors striving to do things over time" (McAdams, 1993, p. 30). Bruner (1987) himself speaks about the "narrative mode" of thought as about "the form of thought that goes into the constructing not of logical or inductive arguments but of stories and narratives" (p. 11), with a special attention given to the stories we tell about our own lives—our autobiographies. It is a mode of thought that accepts as worthwhile knowledge the information "that retain the multiple levels of meaning of ordinary language" (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 112).
Shifts in thinking, similar to that of Bruner, brought about legitimization (or, more precisely, re-legitimization; cf. McAdams & Ochberg, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988) of storied human experience as a subject of scholarly interest. Psychology has started reconnecting with traditions and achievements of other human sciences like history, literary criticism, and philosophy; these have already developed procedures and methods that make it possible to enter "the realm of meaning [which] is best captured through the qualitative nuances of its expression in ordinary language" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 10). The renewed interest in narrative has made it possible to ask a vast array of research questions inconceivable within the limitations of the "paradigmatic mode" of thought, namely those about the sense people make out of their lives.

The promising developments in the rapidly expanding narrative field, however, also encounter problems. Some of them are relatively minor; an example may be a difficulty in the "translation" of concepts and understandings among history, literature, and psychology. These problems probably resolve themselves in time. But some problems seem to be fundamental.

Bruner (1987) subscribes to the constructivist view and "its central premise that 'world making' is the principal function of mind, whether in the sciences or in the arts" (p.11). This metaphor summarizes well the view of many thinkers in the field. For many, to use Sarbin's (1986b) expression, it became a "root metaphor." This root metaphor became reified, and apparently lost its "as if" connotation, so important to keep in mind for any metaphor. For many scholars it became a categorical premise for far reaching implications-that play considerable mischief in our field.

For this metaphor, moreover when taken as a categorical statement, is badly flawed. It disregards the fundamental distinction between the physical and phenomenal worlds. In the physical world, we are not endowed with the god-like omnipotent powers of world making (though sometimes we try to tinker with it). Physical time, for example, will go on regardless of how we decide to conceptualize it, frame it, measure it, or interpret it. Our own physical demise
may be an unpleasant reminder and "proof" of this truth. On the other hand, it is only in the phenomenal world of multiple meanings, and corresponding multiple realities, where the time acquires its almost miraculous plasticity, in accord with the meaning personally attributed to it. For example, an hour spent in the arms of a loved one may go by much quicker (and qualitatively differently) than 15 minutes of waiting for a dissertation defense.

Thus, if there were a pressing need to come up with a single unifying metaphor representing a principle function of human mind, it might have been more fitting to say that it is its *sense making* (rather than the "world making") function. But perhaps such a unifying reduction is not necessary.

The point is that in the human experience both worlds, the physical and the phenomenal, are substantially different, and yet tightly interconnected and inconceivable one without the other. Thus, it may be equally misleading to accept and address realities of only one of them while denying the other one, or to disregard the differences between the two of them. Unfortunately, this is exactly what seems to be happening in the field often referred to as narrative psychology; it may be another example of the radicalism which does not represent any revolutionary shift in thinking. In fact, it is very much committed to the old paradigm of "either-or" thinking (only switching which one is "either" and which one is "or"), rather than considering an option of thinking in terms of "that and that." This problem will pervade, in different forms, many points in the discussion to follow in this study; one aspect of this problem may be dealt with immediately.

Polkinghorne (1991) examines two conflicting calls for methodological reform in psychological research. The so-called "new paradigm" proposes to replace the present quantitative methods with qualitative ones, whereas the other call proposes methodological diversity. Polkinghorne notes that "the replacement rhetoric spills over into 'quantitative bashing,' and he remarks: "Extremists assume that there is but one way to know the truth, and they have discovered it" (p. 106). Polkinghorne reviews the two primary interpretive systems to
produce knowledge statements in human sciences: the logical-mathematical language/conceptual system, and the ordinary language/conceptual system. He maintains that: "Each system accepts only particular categorical types and uses a discrete grammar to define the kind of connections that can be made among categories" (p. 108). Nevertheless, he concludes that both systems are valued instruments for increasing our comprehension of the human world, and supports the methodological diversity. "The criterion for accepting knowledge claims is not adherence to a particular method but evidence that the knowledge-generating process (a) coheres to the particular logic used in drawing together its conclusion, (b) passes the muster of public scrutiny, and (c) provides a particular partial display of the phenomenon under study that is useful to the field" (p. 112).

Sells, Smith, and Sprenkle (1995) propose a multi-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach as an option even within one study, "in bridging the current gaps among theory, research, and practice" (p. 199). Cochran and Laub (1994) interestingly combined qualitative investigation of people's stories of agency with an illuminating quantification of Q-sorts concerned with various theoretical concepts of agency.

Thus, there is no need for a conflict expressed in terms of "the polemic dichotomy: new/old, right/wrong, truth/error..." (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 106). The situation is reminiscent of Alice at a crossroad wondering which route to take. The Cheshire Cat, sitting up in the tree, wisely advised her: "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to" (Carroll, 1865/1960a, p. 88). Similarly in our field "it depends a good deal" on what kind of a research question we would like to get answered. Let us count what is countable; there is nothing "wrong" with discerning what is bigger, faster, or whether there is, for example, some correlation between the fear and measurable physiological changes in the human body. Nevertheless, if we would like to know the meaning of that fear and the role it plays in the lived human experience, we would have to approach the question differently. Qualitative research methods, according to Polkinghorne
(1991), are particularly useful in "the generation of categories for understanding human phenomena and the investigation of the interpretation and meaning that people give to events they experience" (p. 112).

Polkinghorne (1988) reasons that human experience is meaningful, and human behavior is generated and informed by this meaningfulness; thus, the study of human behavior needs to include an exploration of the meaning systems that form human experience. The exciting development in the field of counselling psychology seems to be an increasing acceptance of diversity, and inclusion of qualitative studies that may illuminate the hardly measurable yet fundamentally human phenomena, such as the meaning people attribute to their lived experience. The research question posed in this study, concerned with the meaning of therapeutic change, and not quite accessible by the traditional quantitative research, can be addressed within the context of a person's life story that contains the information. To be able to glean that information, we have to consider some basic assumptions about the nature of the story people tell about themselves, and how to understand it.

The Story

It is difficult not to note how the concept of a story is intimately connected with human lives; the story pervades perhaps every aspect of human experience. We try to recapitulate our own life, and make sense out of it, in a story; we try to understand others by their stories, and we convey our experience to others in stories; we dream and fantasize in stories, we plan our future in stories; we conduct our rites of passage, we love and hate, and make our moral choices in stories (cf. Cochran, 1986; Sarbin, 1986b). "There is no serious rival to a story," maintains Cochran (1986). "The most faithful model of life as it is lived is a story. Nothing even approaches a story as a representation of a life, and that is that" (p. 14).

But nothing is simple in a field that strives to grasp complexities of human life; an argument can be made that the story is not a "representative model"; we choose it as such for its
faithfulness, because this is what we are, and the story is our way of existence (Staiger, 1956, 1963). We cannot live in any other way, and the concept of a story reflects this experience. On the other hand, Polkinghorne (1988) maintains that "Life is not merely a story text: life is lived, and the story is told. The life story is a redescription of the lived life and a means to integrate the aspects of the self" (p. 154). The argument may illuminate the fundamental philosophical discrepancies existing in our field. There is a sharp contrast between K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen's (1986) assertion that "The concepts must precede, rather than be derived from, observation" (p.23), and Keen's (1986) stance "Good and evil were surely experiences before they were concepts" (p. 180). Both positions have been, interestingly, published in the same book (Sarbin, 1986a), and they both—from different and mutually exclusive starting points—come to helpful and complementary insights. Again, the lived truth may be an interaction of both polarities, and the story of human life consistently defeats any rigidly set framework. Meanwhile, billions of people daily live their life stories, unaware of these scholarly scrabbles. Thus, our further discussion will be pragmatically limited to some salient points that may help to understand what sense people make out of their own stories, and what sense we can make out of the stories of others.

It is not necessary to posit some "deep structures" within our brains to account for the storied nature of our lives. Since childhood, we get what we want or avoid what we do not want in accordance with how we present our—no matter how rudimentary—story, how it is perceived by others, and how we interpret their stories (cf. Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993; Sarbin, 1986b). As will be argued later, the stories we tell about ourselves, closely connected with others' interpretation and what they say about us, are what we are as a person: it is our identity.

Sarbin (1986b) proposes a "narratory principle: that human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures" (p. 8); the narrative organizes and guides human thought and action. Sarbin delineates the narrative/the story as follows:
... *narrative* is coterminous with *story* as used by ordinary speakers of English. A story is a symbolized account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension. The story has a beginning, a middle, and an ending.... The story is held together by recognizable patterns of events called plots. Central to the plot structure are human predicaments and attempted resolutions. (p.3)

The beauty of this delineation rests in its simplicity. But so does its potentially misleading weakness; every single constituent of this delineation deserves-and often gets to be-the focus of scholarly interest in its own right. Moreover, the same may be said about other aspects of the story this delineation could not encompass. The problem is that all the attributes of a story are closely interconnected, and so, it is not easy to present them in a tightly organized manner. For example, temporality is interlocked with aspects of activity, sequentiality, goals and values, plot, genre, and so on. On the other hand, this problem stemming from the close interconnection of all aspects of the whole, may be another reminder how the fabric of the story is tightly connected with the complexity, and often messiness, of human life; the crafting of a coherent story is like a miracle that keeps continuously happening.

No doubt, the story is a symbolized account of human affairs. But a vast majority of stories (perhaps except those very rudimentary ones) are a system of symbols signifying the individual's stance and meanings attributed to the events. There is no "neutral" story in this sense; the storyteller's possible attempts on neutrality express exactly his or her stance, and are guided by the meaning attached to it. Thus, the stories may be viewed as allegories.

Staiger (1956, 1963) argues that as human existence is inconceivable out of the temporal dimension, so is the story. It is clearly reflected in our basic communicative instrument, the language. Crites (1986) maintains:

For differentiation of tense is not merely a convention of language. Language simply registers, in this respect, a peculiarity of the lived time of human beings. Language is tensed
because the present in which we exist, individually and collectively, is the point of tension that both joins past and future and also places us in fundamentally different relations to them. (p. 155)

This accounts for the indispensable position of verbs in a story, as Orwell (1946/1961) pointed out a long time ago, as Polkinghorne (1988) succinctly restated ("the realm of meaning is not a thing of substance, but an activity.... As an activity the realm of meaning is described by verb forms rather than nouns"; p. 4), and as, for example, Bruner (1987) utilized in his story analysis. Temporality shoulders the basic structure of beginning, middle, and end in life, in a story, and in every episode of the story. The beginning is always pregnant with the end, the end is arrived at from the beginning and the middle, the middle is continuously shifting in time and bridging both poles, and the end is always pregnant with a new beginning, at least while we are alive, and the story goes on. The temporal gestalt (Polkinghorne, 1988) is one source of tension within the story, lending the story a sense of unity, direction, coherence, and identity. Crites (1986) remarks: "The continuity of memory certainly contributes to this self-certainty" (p. 156), which he sees as a constituent of identity. Nevertheless, this is only one possible level of analysis.

People do not live only in a physical world and physical time. They do not move from the beginning to the end just for the sake of it. Endowed with self-reflective minds, in their phenomenal worlds people embark on new beginnings with a sense of purpose, goal, value, and meaning. From this point of view they evaluate their progress or make navigation corrections in the middle of this purposeful journey, and with these terms of purpose and meaning they retroactively evaluate the whole journey at the end, which is often also a new beginning. Keen (1986) describes a narrative as "stretched out on a time line that carries not only sequence but also motives, reasons, expectations and memories in some complex but orderly relation that makes our experience cohere" (p. 176). Polkinghorne (1988) sees this function of the narrative as
an organizational scheme that people employ to give meaning to their experience of temporality, personal actions, actions of others, and events; "... it is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful" (p. 11). It is the attributed and interpreted meaning that makes the plot of the story move forward.

McAdams (1993) describes the plot as a chain starting with some degree of equilibrium in a character situated in a particular setting, time, and place; the destabilizing initiating event brings about attempts or efforts to attain a certain goal; these attempts have consequences and reactions that lead to a face down or a conflict, followed by some, often climactic, resolution, and a solution of the plot. McAdams points to the ethymology of "motivation" (cf. motion, motio), and maintains that it is the character's motivation that moves the plot forward in a meaningful way. He believes that there are two main motives in any character, the desire for power and love; that is, to be a powerful and autonomous agent, and to be a part of loving and intimate community.

Cochran (1986) views the plot of a story as a provisional account of a lived life. It is moved forward by the tension stemming from the gap between the individual's understanding of what was, has been, and is on the one hand, and what "ought to be" on the other hand. The coping struggles of an individual between these two poles create consistency of the plot, expressed in repetitive coping patterns. Similarly Bruner (1990) appreciates the tension-producing gap between how things are and how they (often implicitly) "should be": "This reciprocal relation between perceived states of the world and one's desires, each affecting the other, creates a subtle dramatism about human action" (p. 40). Other scholars (e.g., Sutton-Smith, 1986; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986) also note that the plot structure requires tension or predicament, a conflict, an opposition between characters or between character and some obstacle. Burke's (1945) classical pentad has often been quoted in this connection; it is a relationship between an Actor, an Action, a Goal, a Scene, and an Instrument - plus Trouble. The incongruency between the parts of the pentad lead to trouble, and attempts to solve it leads to the dramatic movement of the plot.
K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen (1986) see as the most essential ingredient of storytelling "its capability to structure events in such a way that they demonstrate, first, a connectedness or coherence, and second, a sense of movement or direction through time" (p. 25). They go on: "To succeed as a narrative the account must first establish a goal state or valued endpoint" (p. 25). The sense of a directionality is a basis for coherence, but only in relation to the (value laden) goal. In this sense they identify three prototypical narrative forms: a progressive, a regressive, or a stability narrative, depending whether it enhances or impedes the progress towards the goal, or no change occurs.

The common denominator, the unifying element in these observations is that in order for a story to be coherent, it needs some stability in its dynamic evolution, some sense of an overarching unity guiding the plot from the beginning to the end. This unity is provided by the storyteller's or protagonist's basic set of beliefs, values and goals, by her or his basic understanding of the I-in-the-world position, be it called a "guiding metaphor" (K. J. Gergen & M. M. Gergen, 1986), a "regnant stance" (Cochran, 1986), or a "theme of a personal myth" (McAdams, 1993). Perhaps the most amazing feature of a story, and of human life, is that this basic stance evolves with the story, moreover it may be a primary mover of the story forward and actually, what the story is about, while at the same time retaining the unmistakable unifying and unique constancy of a thumbprint. The character's basic stance, which will be discussed later, determines how and what kind of a story is told. It determines the choice of events and relationships deemed to be relevant to the story, the themes providing coherence between the events, and the degree and type of narrative closure to the life story (cf. Murray, 1986).

The sequentiality of a story is certainly influenced but not determined by the chronology of physical time. The temporal gestalt of a story is determined by the storyteller's or hero's basic stance which selects, organizes, explains, and justifies how actions and events lead to other actions and events, affect them, and lend them significance and meaning. Thus, the sequentiality
expresses the author's or character's understanding of causality (cf. Crites, 1986; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986), interpreted within the framework of her or his basic stance. The basic stance may be viewed as the hero's theory of what a life is about: "A life history is already a theory in the way experiences are selected, arranged, and connected" (Cochran, 1986, p. 42). The author's or protagonist's "theory of life" secures the thematic unity of the story, necessary to make the story coherent, that is, to convey the point of the story.

However, it is not only important what is said, but also how it is said (cf. Bruner, 1990; Murray, 1986; Spence, 1982); the need for thematic unity goes hand in hand with the need for stylistic unity. Staiger (1956) has argued that the content and form are inseparable; no content can be expressed without some form, and every form bears some content. M. M. Gergen (1992) succinctly revitalizes this argument when she writes about the forms of our life stories: "Their plots are implicated in their structures. A climax is a matter of form as well as content. Though separating form and content may be desirable from an analytic point of view, it is also arbitrary" (p. 129). She concludes: "The content belongs to the forms, and the forms control the content" (p.139). Similarly, Ochberg (1988) maintains that "Individuals have characteristic ways of navigating their lives. What is characteristic-the signature we read across episodes-exists at the level of narrative structure" (p.174). The point is that the narrative structure may be analyzed from many levels of formal or content oriented angles, but it contains both, interlocked in inseparable ways. Thus, for example, it is difficult to imagine how "patients choose genre" (Spence, 1982). In the moment the story to be told is chosen also the genre is chosen, and any chosen genre allows for only certain story to be told.

It may be illuminating to introduce the view of Russian formalists (cf. Shklovskij, 1983) who propose analyzing a text from a perspective of its "sjuzet, fabula, and forma." The "sjuzet" may be roughly translated as a unifying theme or a leading idea of a story, the "fabula" is its plot, and the "forma" represents a genre and other stylistic ways of expressing the sjuzet and fabula. The
problem is that the sjuzet is first conceived by the author, and has to be elaborated in an adequate plot and a corresponding forma; then the sjuzet has to be understood by the reader or listener, discerned from the fabula and genre, and no doubt influenced by her or his particular "reading" of the text. At the very same time, her or his "reading" is determined by her or his understanding of the sjuzet. Moreover, the author's initial idea of a sjuzet could have had many symbolic levels; some levels might not have been accessed by the authors awareness (cf. Spence, 1982, and his fascination with this problem).

Therefore, to understand the main idea, the sjuzet, is not easy; the sjuzet represents a considerable level of abstraction. McAdams (1993) speaks about "the central story behind the various episodes" (p. 20). It is like a zoom: too distant a view is full of distracting elements precluding the discernment of the main unifying message, too close a view cuts off the context, distorts the main theme, and leaves its understanding unsupported and dubious. Nevertheless, the problem of thematic and stylistic unity may be crucial. Shklovskij (1983) gives an interesting example. If the sjuzet of Dostojevsky's "Crime and punishment" is understood as "the greedy crime will be successfully investigated and justly punished," the plot is exceptionally boring, and the form of a "mystery story" is inadequate and failing.

Thus, what is a "good" story? Spence (1982) proposes criteria of "continuity, coherence, and comprehensiveness in narrative explanation" (p. 22), and its aesthetic appeal. Similarly, Mancuso (1986) speaks about sequentiality, coherence, and intellectual cohesion in terms of basic human needs that have to be met by a story. Robinson and Hawpe (1986) stress the explanatory power of a narrative, its driving effort "to find a useful model of probable cause(s)" (p. 120). They maintain: "When it is successful, the outcome of story making is a coherent and plausible account of how and why something happened" (p. 111). This account has to be economical in selection of what is included in a story, and sufficiently familiar to be understood; it has to strike "the right balance between uniqueness and universality" (p. 114). K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen
(1986) view a good narrative as expressing "unity, direction, and coherence of the life course" (p. 31). This depends on how clearly an evaluative end point for the account is specified or implied, and how consistently it is demonstrated in the plot proceeding from beginning to end. A mature or well-developed story manifests "its capacity to tie events together in a dependent or causal fashion" (p. 41), and has a considerable degree of dramatic tension, involvement, and impact on the recipient. In agreement with these proposed criteria, we would like to add another one; the thematic and stylistic unity of the story. In our view, it is closely interconnected with all these criteria, and in many ways can serve as a unifying umbrella. Nevertheless, it also adds a somewhat new and different evaluative viewpoint.

It is important to delineate a "good story" in order to be able to interpret it, and understand why sometimes people find their life stories so uncomfortable that they would like to change them, and how they go about it. But before we can directly address this fundamental question, there are some other concerns that need to be clarified.

The Autobiography, Self-Identity, and the "Narrative Truth"

Rosenthal (1993) prefers using the term "biography" to "autobiography" because "the latter does not account for the social constitution of the subject and the social constitution of his or her life history" (p. 89). This extreme stance seems to give up on the elementary discriminatory function of language based exactly on some form of social agreement or convention. There are differences between the stories we tell about others, and the story we tell about our own life; language reflects a need for this differentiation.

Cochran (1986) delineates the autobiography as follows:

An autobiography or life history is a story, concerned with the kind of person one became and the kind of life one led. But latent within a life story is also an explanation of how one came to be the kind of person one is or—which is much the same—an explanation of how one came to lead the life one has led. An individual story is framed in concrete events, particulars
of time and space. Explanation is embodied in unique experiences and events. (p. 33)

Scheibe (1986) points out that self-narratives must not only be coherent and satisfying, but they also have to justify one's present situation and condition: "The autobiographer must describe a storyline that somehow or other concludes and coincides just exactly with the known present" (p. 146). Bruner (1990) stresses the autobiographic role of justification of personal idiosyncracies, beliefs and desires in front of cultural canons, moreover because "We are not only trying to convince ourselves with our memory reconstruction. Recalling the past also serves dialogic function" (p. 59). In a story we tell about ourselves we are both an author of the story and its main hero (Crites, 1986, or Sarbin, 1986b, talk about "I" as a storyteller and "me" as a narrative figure). The story is aimed both at ourselves and others, incorporates public and private experiences expressed by a public and private means, and is told from a vantage point of an ever changing present, where "the protagonist fuses with the narrator" (Bruner, 1990, p. 121), reconstructing the past in a way that always reflects expectations of the future. This particular status of autobiography has some serious implications.

First, it seems to be necessary to revisit the argument between the social, public, or universal on the one hand, and individual, private, or unique on the other. As suggested before, the problem may be in the perceived mutual exclusiveness of both poles in this, perhaps unnecessary and fallacious, dichotomy.

For example, MacIntyre (1981) maintains that each culture has a "stock of stories" derived from that culture's past. Similarly, K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen (1986) speak about "the commonly available narrative structures in the society" (p. 36), or McAdams (1993) suggests that "Each culture provides its members with a vast but finite catalog of images" (p. 60). According to MacIntyre (1981), people live their lives according to scripts provided by the stock of culturally embedded stories. These stories delineate each individual's role and status within that culture's well-defined and highly determinate system of roles and statuses. This way everybody
knows what is expected of him or her, what he or she owes, and what is owed to him or her by the occupant of every other role status. "A man in heroic society is what he does.... a man and his actions become identical" (p. 115). Nevertheless, the individual's actions have to be within the framework of the culturally available stock of stories; it renders the actions intelligible and meaningful. The individual's identity, thus, is a narrative identity; the unity of a person's life is dependent on being a character in an enacted narrative. In this sense, Maclntyre maintains, "...human life has a determinate form, the form of a certain kind of story. It is not just that poems and sagas narrate what happens to men and women, but that in their narrative form poems and sagas capture a form that was already present in the lives which they relate" (p. 117). He goes on: "What epic and saga then portray is a society which already embodies the form of epic and saga (p. 118). Thus, we cannot choose except within the given framework of culturally existing stories (sagas): "All questions of choice arise within the framework; the framework itself therefore cannot be chosen" (p. 118). We are determined by our culturally formed past, embedded in a historically formed stock of stories that, in fact, are our culture, and scripts of which determine our lives and identity—we cannot live a story (or assume an identity) which does not already exist in the culture. "We are, whether we acknowledge it or not, what the past has made us..." (p. 122).

Widdershoven (1993) reacts with the following position:

I agree with MacIntyre when he says that our actions show a unity that can be expressed in a story. I disagree, however, with his assumption that the unity that is put forward in the story is already present in the action. MacIntyre seems to overlook that the articulation of the implicit unity of life in an explicit story is itself part of the process in which identity is created. (p. 7)

The problem may be that MacIntyre's stance makes a lot of sense—but at the same time only partially so. Many questions beg to be answered. Where did the "stock of stories" come from? If it was created by people, these people could not have been determined by the stories they
created, although they also undoubtedly had some past, and some memory of it. Is the "stock of stories" so ossified that it has become a monolithic static entity that is closed to new stories, to any breaches of old canons, and dynamic developments and enrichments?

Along this path of thinking, we may certainly propose that there is, in fact, one and only universal human story. Its sujet or main theme may be described as "the human plight and a sense of victory and/or defeat in it." All other stories are mere variants of this universal one. Such an assertion may be, at one level of abstraction, true, and at the same time untrue at another, probably more pragmatic, level (cf. Wiersma, 1988, and her Merleau-Ponty-based analysis of general and particular meanings of a symbol). In this sense, it would say everything about human story, and at the same time nothing specific. The "zoom" would be set at too wide an angle, encompassing a broad picture and obscuring—perhaps crucial—details.

Clinicians, although searching for comprehensible universalities, are daily amazed with the individual uniqueness of the stories presented to them. Nevertheless, when it seems that all clients that day have presented the same story, it most likely does not mean that the clinician has grasped the universality of human plight. More likely the clinician should reconsider whether he or she did not take too seriously what he or she read the last night, or what is generally going on in his or her own life. In fact, navigating between the universal and unique in understanding the client's story may be one of the cornerstones of the art of counselling. Because how the client renders the larger, more universal story, is a portrait of who he or she is; it is what in ordinary language we mean by his or her identity, and it is a unique story in its own right.

"If you want to know me," maintains McAdams (1993), "then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story" (p. 11). Self-identity, according to McAdams, is a tacitly composed and continuously revised "heroic story of the self" that we tell ourselves and others about us. It is "an act of imagination that is a patterned integration of our
remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future" (p. 12), experienced as existing "in space and time as a causal, continuous, and independent agent" (p. 44). Thus, "we exist as persons with some control and autonomy" (p. 45). McAdams stresses the uniqueness of a personal myth "that in all its details is like no other story in the world" (p. 50), and concludes: "A subset of personality is the concept of identity, which (from my perspective) is the personal myth you construct to define who you are" (p. 266). But there is no need for the "either-or" dichotomy; one's identity is a result of a collaboration between the person and the social world.

Similar views are held by many other scholars. For example, Crites (1986) frames the uniqueness of personal story poetically: "No other voice but mine babbles with quite that intonation" (p. 156); the continuity of memory contributes to the individual's self-certainty. Furthermore, Crites points to the important function of a shared language: "... it can forge not only a personal identity over time but also a corporate identity with generations of women and men who share the same linguistic tradition. Both kinds of identity are dimension of selfhood" (p. 158). Schafer (1992) keeps a similar position, although he prefers speaking about a Person rather than the Self; however, he holds that "There is nothing mutually exclusive about the concepts of storyline and self-representation" (p. 30). Watson and Watson-Franke (1985) appreciate "how powerfully the individual at any point in life marshals forth personally sedimented meanings, which are in part cultural and in part idiosyncratically worked over in consciousness, to define his ongoing reality and the choices he must make" (p. 125). Funkenstein (1993) maintains that "Acting in the world involves and construes my identity continuously, and my identity is a narrative, my narrative" (p. 22). Widdershoven (1993) sees personal identity as "the result of an interaction between personal experiences and personal stories, entwined with stories of others in ordinary life" (p. 8); personal identity presupposes a felt unity of experiences. Similarly, Robinson and Hawpe (1986) stress how individual's stories and stories of others mutually influence each other; this interplay helps mutual understanding, and "story making is
frequently a collaborative activity" (p. 116). Ochberg (1988) concludes that "life stories are a central feature of who people know themselves to be" (p. 174), but "whatever formal structure life narratives possess is produced jointly by individual personality and culture" (p. 175).

The list may go on, but the point of convergence is most likely quite clear by now. The stories people tell about their lives reflect how people construe and interpret, for themselves and for others, who they are; the story represents what we call in ordinary language the sense of personal identity, unity of I-ness, or Self. This construction, encompassing a person's past, present, and anticipated future, is unique to any individual, it is his or her self-identity, it is his or her way of expressing (and convincing self and others) that this is "I" in contrast to anybody else or to a faceless and nameless crowd.

Nevertheless, the notion of a unique personal identity is not in opposition to notions of universality, society, culture, and so on; these notions are in dialectic unity as surely as every human individual is a social being. One way of our existence is inconceivable without the other one, and even the perceived polarity of concepts would not be linguistically expressible without one concept pointing to another. For example, "identity" implies a comparison or contrast to what or who is different, whereas universality implies the sum of instances. Exactly this dialectic nature of human existence raises serious concerns about the truth value of the self-identity that we construe for ourselves and for others, and which is also construed about us or for us, necessarily becoming a part of our own construction. Some of Bruner's (1990) observations can help to summarize this point, and serve as a useful bridge to our next concern, often referred to as the "narrative truth" (as opposed to the "historical truth"-cf. Spence, 1982).

According to Bruner (1990), story always expresses a person's moral and epistemic stance, conceiving Self not as the pure and enduring nucleus "but as the sum and swarm of participations" (p. 107). Thus, individual's Self is delineated "not in the fastness of immediate private consciousness but in a cultural-historical situation as well" (p. 107). Narrative is a means
of mediating between the universal and the exceptional, between the canonical world of culture and the more idiosyncratic world of beliefs, desires, and hopes. In this peace-making role, narratives render the exceptional comprehensible, exactly because the narrative is "public" and "private" at the same time. Bruner points out that even a "secret" is a public concept. We may add that even the most private diary entry has been written not only by "public" means (e.g., language, semantic structures, cultural conventions, etc.), but has also been heavily censored and influenced by "public" voices (e.g., mother's, father's, that of cultural and societal values, etc.). These "voices," though not usually conscious, are an indivisible part of one's self, and they determine how the writer presents him- or herself, what and how is written—although seemingly "just for oneself."

Bruner (1990) postulates that "introspection is at best 'early retrospection,' and subject to the same kinds of selectivity and construction as any other kind of memory" (p. 99). Elsewhere Bruner (1987) remarks that the autobiography is "a privileged but troubled narrative in the sense that it is reflexive: the narrator and the central figure in the narrative are the same" (p. 13). Thus, retrospective inquiry through autobiography cannot be understood as a record but as "an account of what one thinks one did in what settings in what ways for what felt reasons" (Bruner, 1990, p. 119), and "it is the narrator who usually comes off best" (p. 96). The important role of the self-narrative is to justify why it was necessary (not causally, but morally, socially, psychologically) that the life had gone a particular way: "The self as narrator not only recounts but justifies" (p. 121).

Unfortunately, Bruner (1990) concludes his brilliant analysis with anticlimactic proclamation of no interest in "ontologically obscure issues as whether the account is 'self-deceptive' or 'true.' Our interest, rather, is only in what the person thought he did, what he thought he was doing it for, what kinds of plights he thought he was in, and so on" (p. 120). This conclusion is disappointingly inconsistent with his incisive understanding of the dialectic relationship between
the "public" and "private," and his proclaimed agreement with Polonoff's stance that the objective of self-narrative is its achievement of "external and internal coherence, livability, and adequacy" (p. 112), and thus, self-deception is a failure to achieve this. In human life, which is both physical and phenomenal, both public and private, it is an intriguing question why or how somebody remembers something differently than as it happened or as it is remembered by others, what are the possible consequences of it, and what does that tell, in its own right, about that person's "idiosyncratic world of beliefs, desires, and hopes" (Bruner, 1990, p. 52).

An analysis of self-deception, and of different views of why and how people do it, and to what extent they do it consciously, is beyond the scope of this study. A good review of this phenomenon may be found, for example, in Fischer (1985). Perhaps we may take it for granted that to some degree we all deceive ourselves and others, and the most encompassing explanation of this phenomenon, though originally made in a different context, may be that of White (1974): "No adaptive strategy that is careless of the level of self-esteem is likely to be any good" (p. 61). But we can counter this assertion with another one, equally plausible: Not all adaptive strategies originally meant to protect one's self-esteem are successful in doing so. The concern to be addressed in this study is whether or not we can take a person's autobiography "seriously" and to what extent, whether-because we cannot fully rely on its factual information-we can give up on it entirely, whether we may totally dismiss the question of what happened, and the important contrast with what a person thought had happened; summarily, whether "anything goes" and so, any fabrication and consequently, any interpretation of it, are acceptable.

In his influential book, Spence (1982) comes up with an extreme answer. He introduces a dichotomy of a "historical truth," by which he means a factual account of what has really happened in physical time and space, verifiable by the rules of correspondence, versus a "narrative truth," an interpretative explanation of physical and phenomenal happenings, that has to meet the criteria of a "good story," that is, continuity, coherence, comprehensiveness, and
Spence (1982) astutely analyzes the difficulties connected with expressing thoughts, feelings, or visual memory in language, the difficulty in translating "private" language into "public" one, the imprecision of memory and its reconstructive rather than recollective (recovering or "archeological") function, the ever present projections of meaning at any event, the as much revealing as concealing powers of language, the ubiquitous explicit or implicit interpersonal influencing (the power of "unwitting interpretations")—all interesting and legitimate challenges to our epistemic certainty. In a therapy situation, both the patient and the therapist have to struggle with these challenges; in the therapist's case it may be compounded by his or her theoretical precommitment, in the patient's case by his or her pre-understanding of what is expected from a patient.

Given these circumstances, Spence (1982) maintains, it is impossible to know to what extent or whether at all the patient's "psychic reality" corresponds with what has really happened, that is, with the "historical truth," and to what extent (or whether at all) the therapist's understanding of what has really happened matches the patient's understanding. Spence concludes that there is no correspondence, and that for all intended purposes the question of "historical truth" (or accuracy) is irrelevant, both in the patient's account and the therapist's interpretation. What counts instead is the "adequacy" of a "well-construed story" that explains certain experience with continuity, coherence, and comprehensiveness, with aesthetic finality to our satisfaction. (These criteria of the "narrative truth" are not well elaborated. But we know, for example, that correspondence with the "historical truth" of what has really happened or with opinions of other people is not, in Spence's view, a part of "comprehensiveness." Thus, the narrative truth of Little Red Ridinghood may comfortably pass.) "Once a given construction has acquired narrative truth," Spence maintains, "it becomes just as real as any other kind of truth; this new reality becomes a significant part of the psychoanalytic cure" (p. 31). On the other hand, the therapist's
interpretations (just "a linguistic creation," p. 172) is guided by the criteria of aesthetic and "their power to persuade" (p. 172). The criterion of "persuasive power" is in keeping with Spence's view of the goals of psychotherapy (cf. pp. 167-8), and can help to understand his cavalier approach to "historical truth." Both for the patient's account and the therapist's interpretation, Spence proposes: "Once stated, it becomes partially true; as it is repeated and extended, it becomes familiar; and as its familiarity adds to its plausibility, it becomes completely true" (p. 177). Thus, Spence believes that "something may become true simply by being put into words" (p. 175), "the construction not only shapes the past-it becomes the past" (p. 175), and "a narrative, in short, is almost infinitely elastic, accommodating almost any new evidence that happens to come along" (p. 182).

Besides the questionable morality, connected with equally questionable goals for psychotherapy, Spence's (1982) reasoning is far from persuasive; it shows disturbing insufficiencies. Although beyond the limits of this paper, the question of why his book has become so influential would deserve a special analysis; we may learn something quite interesting about ourselves, and about the state of our profession.

A minor criticism may be the unfortunate choice of the expression "historical truth" as opposed to the interpretative "narrative truth." History, in contrast to a chronicle, is also an interpretation. Nevertheless, language is an imprecise instrument, and we use it imprecisely; here we are in full agreement with Spence. Yet we know fairly well what he has had in mind, that is, a true account of what has happened in the physical time and space. And exactly this understanding, however imprecise and arrived at in spite of semantic traps, is a cornerstone of our fundamental disagreement with Spence.

It is misleading to argue that because there is a limited or difficult to delineate correspondence between what has happened and what people think has happened, between what people think and what they say they think, and between what people say and what is understood
by others, that there is no correspondence at all (cf. Spence, 1982, p. 28). As argued before, in human life physical and phenomenal realities are inconceivable one without the other one; the same may be said about Spence's terms of "historical" and "narrative" truths. The correspondence between both poles varies, but there is always some correspondence between the physical ("historical") reality and phenomenal ("narrative") reality. The degree of correspondence may be seen as a continuum limited by two unachievable and thus, hypothetical extremes. Either the absolute correlation or zero correlation cannot exist simply because neither physical or phenomenal realities in human experience cannot exist "an sich", on their own. We know physical reality through our interpretation, and our interpretation has always some component of physical reality. For example, Widdershoven (1993) holds that the meaning of life cannot be determined outside of the stories told about it, but "neither, however, can the meaning of a story be determined without any reference to human life as it is lived" (p. 2). Between the two extremes, there is enough room for us to be fairly well oriented in person, time, and space. No matter how limited or imprecise, we have some understanding of what has happened to us and what has not, what we have done in our lives and what we have not, and what we can do and what we cannot. Our very personal interpretation of these—however frail—ontological certainties is also not unlimited. As will be argued in a moment, it has to pass "tests" stemming from the dialectic of the universal (or public) and the personal, and to do so, it has to have some correspondence with physical reality. We do not live in a vacuum in our minds; the narrative we construe about our lives has also been construed by physical reality and by others, and thus, it is not "infinitely elastic." In this sense Widdershoven (1993) speaks about "the narrative construed by and the narrative construed about the subject. Such is the making of a "self" (p. 23).

Similarly, the argument that because we never fully understand each other we do not understand at all is indefensible. The demand for identity is not a valid criterion. In our imperfect world perhaps nothing is truly identical. An assertion that A=A (i.e., A is identical with A) holds
only before we allow contextual considerations. For example, the second A has been written a
moment later, the printer head or the ribbon were somewhat more worn out, the position of the
second A is obviously different, the quality of paper at that spot may be different, and so on.
What we are saying is that for our needs, at a given level of analysis, for all intended purposes
the semblance of both A's is good enough, and it helps us to discern them, for example, from the
obvious A ≠ B (i.e., A is not identical with B). Similarly, in human relations there is a lot of room
left between the hypothetical extremes of "total" understanding and not understanding at all.
Moreover, in interpersonal relations there are some powerful checks and tools to assure or
enhance this "good enough" mutual understanding; these will be elaborated on in the discussion
of truth in autobiography to follow:

Summarily, Spence (1982) seems to be caught in what F. Knobloch and J. Knobloch (1979a)
call "Freud's one-man model," and in the connected interpersonal versus intrapsychic dichotomy
that the same authors analyze elsewhere (F. Knobloch & J. Knobloch, 1979b) and consider false
and misleading. Although a detailed analysis of this problem is beyond the scope of this paper, it
will be implicitly present in the following discussion of the truth value of autobiography.

The construction of autobiography is both a private and a public, collaborative act. "Stories...
are especially viable instruments for social negotiation," McAdams (1993, p. 55) holds. This is
why, for example, Mishler (1986) or Watson and Watson-Franke (1985) urge to pay attention to
the circumstances and the relationship in which the life story is told; these may have a crucial
effect on what has been told, and how it has been told. True; a life story aimed at getting
counselling help may substantially differ from that aimed at getting a job. The difference would
most likely encompass both the selection of facts and how the story is told. The questions like
why does the client tell me this particular story, and why in this particular way, are an important
part of counselling. Clients, though they usually do not know the counsellor's story, question
counsellor's remarks similarly.
However, as Bruner (1990) points out, and as has been argued in this study before, the story of one's life, no matter how personal and unique, no matter whether told, written, or simply lived, is also always social, cultural, and public. It is the case even when the story is not explicitly presented to anybody. Implicitly the story is always directed and censored by, for example, parental (or significant other's), cultural, or societal values, canons, habits, conventions, and so on. It is impossible to separate how we see ourselves from how others see us, and vice versa. In this sense a self-deception, willing or unwitting, by omission or commission, is always to a degree an attempt to deceive others, and deception of others is to an extent a self-deception. We want to be acceptable, in our eyes and those of others, whereas our actions, thoughts, and emotions so often do not seem to be so. Thus, we deceive, by a variety of means, with a various degree of awareness.

But we can only deceive that much. The story has to fit between two horizons. On the one hand, it has to take care of our self-esteem, that is, of our need to be acceptable in our own mind and minds of others. On the other hand, the story has to be believable to be accepted by ourselves and others. The narrative self-representations, Ochberg (1988) maintains, powerfully shape "how we conduct our lives, how we come to terms with pain, what we are able to appropriate of our own experience, and what we disown—at the familiar price of neurosis" (p. 174). When the story is not believable, it is self-defeating; although originally construed to gain acceptance, it is rejected.

The believability is connected with the information and experience an individual shares with others. For example, we share some knowledge of physical reality, and what is possible in it, and what is not. We share a language, and the awareness of its revealing and concealing possibilities. We share cultural and societal traditions and values. We share universalities of human conditions; for example, love, hate, anger, happiness or sadness may be such universalities no matter how they are culturally framed, expressed, and dealt with. But it is very difficult to
deceive when the information is shared; it is even more difficult to do so repeatedly over the time (cf. Hofstadter, 1985a, 1985b, and his discussion of the "prisoner's dilemma" problem). For autobiography to be believable, there has to be a discernable coherent pattern leading the story from the beginning to the end. "The autobiographer must describe a storyline that somehow or other concludes and coincides just exactly with the known present" (Scheibe, 1988, p. 146). Again, when the pattern does not hold together, the story is not believable.

Bruner (1990) takes a somewhat more narrow view, focusing only on the correspondence of individual's story and the cultural canon: "The function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical pattern. It is this achievement that gives a story verisimilitude" (pp. 49-50). Breaches of completeness or deviations must be explained by giving reasons that must look logical and life like at the same time. "This is the critical intersection where verifiablility and verisimilitude seem to come together. To bring off a successful convergence is to bring off good rhetoric" (p. 94).

The need for "good rhetoric" goes far beyond the point of its aesthetic qualities or its compliance with some arbitrary moral imperative, as it may first seem to be the case in McAdams' (1993) postulate:

.... the extent to which your personal myth is true to the facts of your life and your world is an important standard of its adequacy. At no point in the life span do we have the psychological or ethical licence to create myths that are willful deceptions or fantastical lies. The good and mature personal myth is grounded in social and personal reality. (p. 273)

But McAdams goes on, beyond the appeal to a moral imperative: "Mature identity does not transcend its resources; it is true to its context. The myth and the mythmaker must be credible if we are to live in a credible world" (p. 273). Thus, neither Spence (1982) nor Humpty Dumpty (Carroll, 1872/1960b) can lay claims on "being masters" of reality or language: "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean-
neither more nor less" (p. 269). More accurately, these claims can be made, but they do not have to be (and usually are not) accepted. Then there is not much good in such a claim. As McAdams (1993) points out, this is exactly why stories of some people seem to be troubled.

Wiener and Rosenwald (1993) suggest:

Rather than ask what life experiences have survived repression, we might accordingly do better to study what the subject has selected for preservation. For the act of remembrance is a choosing, a highlighting, a shaping, an enshrinement (even when it hurts). A life story is not simply that which has escaped forgetting. (p. 31)

No doubt an interesting and valuable view. Watson and Watson-Franke (1985) seem to start from a similar position, but bring the point even farther:

However, the subject could misinterpret himself only so much, even if he chose to do so. There still remains, in spite of possible falsifications in the data, a basic inventory of personal experience... Thus, whatever events he conceals, suppresses, or distorts for a particular audience, they still continue to take their distinctive meaning from larger but stable subjective pattern whose characteristics can be identified." (p. 128)

Thus, the presented story is always somewhat incomplete, and never fully true. But the recipient of the story is not a passive, naively credulous object (cf. Wyatt, 1986). Robinson and Hawpe (1986) stress that "the product of narrative thought, story, is context-bound, concrete, and testable through ordinary interpersonal checking" (p. 114). This interpersonal checking is ever present, goes on even in the individual's head, and has some powerful tools at its disposal, be it the shared information or the need for a consistent and coherent pattern in a story. Whatever the person says about him-or herself, true or false, is a self-representation, his or her identity, what he or she believes, wants to believe, and wants others to believe that he or she is. If the story is unbelievable, the project crashes. But whatever the person says or denies, true or false, has some reason why it is said this way. It is a crucial piece of information about that person's coping
struggles and basic beliefs about his or her position in the world-if we are only willing to listen
critically, question the basic defenses, and ask about their meaning. In other words, if we are
willing to raise and clarify the question of truth in a person's self-narrative. Wiersma (1988) gives
a succinct summary: "... the person being interviewed tells us some sort of truth about himself
when he tells us anything at all—that is, he gives us true data about something if we have but the
wit to interpret it" (p. 205).

A life story of the majority of us fits between the two horizons, and it is a "true enough"
story. Small inconsistencies and a somewhat one-sided presentation and interpretation of facts
are to be expected; in a sense, it is an important map of a person's values, insecurities, and fears.
Paying attention to these, perhaps deceptive, peculiarities of a personal story, clarifying them,
and gleaning some understanding of their meaning—that is exactly a big part of counsellor's job.
But even when the story is grossly distorted and so, unbelievable, it is an important piece of
information, and a true story of that person's problem. The conflict of a person who construes an
unacceptable story in order to be accepted is tremendous. Again, it is a part of counsellor's task to
understand this conflict. In any case, there is hardly any better road to this understanding of what
a person deems acceptable and what not then the very story a person tells about his or her life—the
autobiography.

The Pattern

An individual life, as well as a story told about it, is unique not because of some isolated
extraordinary episode, but because it weaves a unique, consistent pattern of individual's
cognitive, conative, and emotional dealings with the world. This is the unforgable personal
signature, discernable across the episodes, that expresses the individual's characteristic ways of
navigating his or her life (Ochberg, 1988). This is what holds a story together, makes it coherent,
believable, and discriminates my story from yours, or anybody else's. Where does this pattern
come from?
Scholars interested in this question generally agree that there is a strong link between the individual's characteristic pattern and his or her early childhood experiences, his or her early established ways of coping with significant others and the environment. The theoretical framing of this pattern seems to differ among individual scholars. Nevertheless, upon a closer examination there seems to be an interesting convergence and commonality between the frameworks. In different voices, and with different vocabulary, scholars appear to talk about the same phenomenon.

McAdams (1983) stresses the importance of a child's first relationships of love and trust, based on which an infant develops unconscious attitudes about hope and despair. "Babies learn the first unconscious lessons about how the world works and how human beings can be expected to behave. An infant's relationship with mother and father is likely to influence the long-term development of a myth's narrative tone" (p. 35).

The narrative tone, ranging from hopeless pessimism to boundless optimism, pervasively influences the personal myth that is developed later on. McAdams (1983), devoted to the Eriksonian developmental stages approach, postulates that children first collect emotionally charged symbols and images, like that of a home, a school, mother and father, God, devil, and so on. They remember them; when they are capable of grasping the intricacies of the plot, and so, of constructing stories as thematically organized wholes, they incorporate these symbols as significant, central images or representations in their personal myths. These are, according to McAdams, imagoes that populate the individual's myth; they are "internalized complexes of actual or imagined persons" (p. 37). McAdams maintains:

Children unknowingly "incorporate," or take into themselves, such images of their parents as the good mother, the frustrating mother, the seductive mother, the strong father, the threatening father, the helpless father, the witch, the goddess, the ogre, and so on.... Functioning as what some psychologists call "internalized objects," these emotionally
charged images may become parts of the self, continuing to exert an unconscious influence on behavior and experience through one's adult years. (pp. 60-61)

Bruner (1990) draws attention to the participatory nature of the early childhood encounters, in which a child has to negotiate the meanings he or she tries to convey or discern from acts of others. Linguistic patterns of recounting one's actions drastically affect how these actions are judged, and a child has to learn environmental cultural canons in order to satisfyingly explain deviations from these canons in his or her actions or those of others. Narrating is both an expository and a rhetorical act. "To narrate in a way that puts your case convincingly requires not only language but a mastery of canonical forms, for one must make one's actions seem an extension of the canonical, transformed by mitigating circumstances" (p. 87). According to Bruner, here are the roots of deceit, flattery, and of other less attractive tools of the "rhetorical trade," but this is also a child's entry to the patterned way of cultural participation.

Another interesting approach is offered by Tomkins (1987) with his script theory. Metaphorically, he sees a person as a playwright constructing his or her personal drama from the earliest weeks of life. A scene is a basic unit of analysis; it is an affect-laden idealized "happening" that is constructed by the person (as opposed to being passively experienced and objectively recorded). Scenes are a means of telling us "what is happening," and they vary in complexity, elaboration, and completeness. The minimal scene includes at least one affect, and at least one object of that affect.

People link various scenes, based on their similarities and differences (constructing analogs or anti-analogs), to families or sets of related scenes. Tomkins (1987) calls this process of assembling various scenes into a personally meaningful pattern a "psychological magnification." Any facet of human experience may be psychologically magnified when the related scenes are linked by remembering them, imagining them, acting upon them, or feeling about them. Hence the scripts emerge as a person's set of idiographic "rules" for interpreting, creating, or defending
against a family of related scenes. A script prescribes "what to do about" any set of scenes. Initially, scenes dictate scripts. Gradually, script-formation starts affecting an individual's interpretation of experiences and their formation in the scenes; when the scripts are consolidated, they dictate one's scenes.

The process of constructing scenes, and then by psychological magnification constructing personal scripts, is an ongoing one throughout the individual's life; this is how we make sense of our lives. Everybody develops a personal repertoire of scripts. Tomkins (1987) is interested in the individual's dominant script structure, and in delineating the nuclear script that is dominated by an idealized scene promising infinite good and inevitable punishment. The nuclear script is like a master key to understanding other scripts in a person's repertoire. A broader and illuminating review of Tomkins' work has been offered by Carlson (1988).

Just as an aside, Tomkins' (1987) script theory is somewhat reminiscent of Harre and Secord's (1972) concepts of social roles and their rules. Importantly, both McAdams' (1993) and Tomkins' (1987) examples, as well as Harre and Secord's (1972) work, seem to point in the same direction, striving to explain the unifying and individually delineating, pervasive pattern in a person's life story. Bruner (1990) enriches the discussion by linking the pattern with linguistic and broadly cultural considerations. Alexander (1988) speaks about the search for "core identifying units.... under the dynamic umbrella of scripts, themes, messages, expectational sets, important means-end sequences, or schemas" (p. 267); regardless of the framing, the focus remains the same.

The work of F. Knobloch and J. Knobloch (1979a), although not explicitly concerned with narratives, seems to be extremely useful for the purposes of this study. The central constructs of their model are those of role and group schemas. They propose that parallel with development of object constancies, a child develops a sense of self-constancy (cf. Kilpatrick & Cantril, 1961). In other words, a child learns to distinguish objects, and among them an object with unique
qualities, his or her own organism. F. Knobloch and J. Knobloch (1979a) observe: "The child's assessment of reciprocal relationships between object-constancies and self-constancy provides the basis both for goal directed activities and for constructing an assumptive world" (p. 44).

Cantril (1950) suggests that the only world we know is created in terms of and by means of our assumptions, and we strive to maintain this assumptive world intact, because it provides us with some degree of stability and continuity necessary for our value judgments to make sense and our actions to be effective. Cues from the environment are related to assumptions, giving rise to perceptions that are "prognostic directives" for action (cf. Kilpatrick & Cantril, 1961; or Frank, 1961). Similarly, Robinson and Hawpe (1986) hold that "the narrative schema may be regarded as an implicit procedural plan" (p. 115).

In relationship with its environment, a child develops a self-schema, incorporating self-awareness of space identity, time identity, unity, and activity. The self-schema is an expression of the individual's assumed role in relations to his or her environment, represented by significant others. Thus, significant others are also assigned some assumptive relational role-schemas (for example, a role of mother, father, sibling, and so on). These role-schemas are not mere "cognitive maps." They are shaped by classes of relational events that include emotional, cognitive, and behavioral exchanges, or even bodily sensations. These, in turn, shape the nature of relations between different other-roles, and relations between these other-roles and the self-schema (for example, relations of complementarity or identification).

People develop this basic understanding of "I-in-the world" in a relationship with their initial small social group, usually the family. However, when they enter another social group, they tend to perceive this group as composed of the typical role-schemas in their repertoire; they assume a similar relational organization as in their previous group. F. Knobloch and J. Knobloch (1979a) call this relational organization an individual's group schema. According to them,
The following role schemas seem to be sufficient for a description of group schema:

Self-schema, male and female authority schema (father schema, mother schema), male and female peer schema (brother schema, sister schema), male and female subordinate schema, and sexual partner schema. (p. 54)

Thus, the individual's group schema may include in the "male authority schema" father, teacher, boss, physician, military commander, policeman, or God in the Judeo-Christian religious traditions. The female authority schema may include mother, and any other female figure perceived in a position of authority, such as supervisor, professor, physician, policewoman, and so on. Peer schema may include siblings, schoolmates, colleagues, or even the imaginary companions of children. Subordinate schema may include children, younger siblings, subordinates in work, and also pets or dolls.

In F. Knobloch and J. Knobloch's (1979a) view, the group schema serves as (a) a cognitive map, (b) a model for social training, and (c) a system of substitute rewards and costs. The individual's moral standards and consequent norm conflicts, which are dealt with by defense techniques, are based on the group schema. The roles, included in individual's group schema, and their relationship with self-schema, are socially learned, and then, usually unconsciously, utilized in new situations and new groups through self-projection, and transference. The individual's choices of new groups and transactions within these groups, be it a natural or a therapy group, are guided by motivational balance (F. Knobloch, 1985; F. Knobloch & J. Knobloch, 1979a) based on the theory of social exchange (cf. Thibaut & Kelly, 1959).

Thus, people tend to replay in new social groups their own group schema, their own understanding of "I-in-the world", or in Bowlby's (1988) term, their "internal working model". Some individuals have developed their group schemas from harmful social transactions between their early role schemas. These schemas may be viewed as representations or expressions of coping strategies. They have been formed primarily unconsciously, within unhealthy family
circumstances, and may hence be maladaptive under different circumstances. People start organizing their new experiences by projecting their emotions, cognitions, and behavior, based on their schemas, on the new relationships; also, they may have expectancies of the new relationship based on their own schema. Unfortunately, these expectancies tend to become "self-fulfilling prophecies"; a phenomenon also described by Leahy (1991), Leary and Miller (1986), Watzlawick (1996), or by Bandura (1989) in connection with self-efficacy.

For example, a young man with a rigid, demanding father may start reacting to his new boss in a manner similar to the way he did with his father, expecting his father's behavior from the boss. Perhaps the initially welcoming or at least neutral boss eventually responds by getting angry. Thus, the young man's expectations are fulfilled and justified; his male authority schema is reinforced. Whereas this young man may believe in his bad luck or destiny, in fact he has unwittingly contributed to his own unhappiness. Freud (1961a, 1961b) referred to this phenomenon as "repetitive compulsion." Schultz-Hencke (1942) appreciated Freud's observation but rejected his explanation, and talked about a "vicious circle of neurosis." Learning theorist Mowrer (1948) coined the expression "neurotic paradox," that is, the behavior is repeated although it gets a negative reinforcement or punishment.

Nevertheless, there is no need for "pathologizing" this phenomenon, be it called schemas, major themes, core conflicts, scripts, expectational sets, and so on. We all interpret the world and our position in it in accord with our basic sets of beliefs about us, others, and the whole world, established in early childhood and later reinforced by our own cognitions, behavior, and emotions. For many reasons, we tend to be—though not consciously—very "loyal" to these schemas. In this sense we tend to co-create repetitive cognitive, behavioral, and emotional patterns in our lives, that are manifested both at symbolic and sometimes very pragmatic levels, and that are in some way unique to any individual.

Schemas seem to determine our relations to ourselves, others, and circumstances (which we
so often unwittingly co-create) in our lives: Anderson (1988) gives an interesting example in his portrait of early childhood influences on Henry A. Murray, showing how this "basic script" consistently influenced Murray's career interests, love life, and even his psychoanalysis—of Franz Alexander. Murray described his father as a benign but weak and somewhat distant man. Exactly in these terms he described his analyst, claiming that there was never a transferential relationship between him and Franz Alexander, and concluding that transference works only for strong, rival-like fathers.

These scripts or schemas also influence people's career choices and behavior. Osherson (1980) investigated moves people made from a first to a radically different second career at midlife. He concluded that these moves could not be validly isolated from their roots in the broader life histories of these individuals: "Problems at work and the resulting career change were integrally involved with conflicts around who one was as a professional in a career, as a son, as a husband, as a father" (p. 2). Similarly Ochberg (1988) sees in career stories of middle-aged businessmen a symbolic connection between their careers and longings and frustrations of their childhood. Chusid and Cochran (1989) frame and document work problems, leading to career change, as an enactment of individual's family drama.

Elms (1988) analyses Freud's proposed guidelines for interpretation which Freud many times broke himself, but which are still valid today. One of them is "the avoidance both of arguments built upon a single clue and of strong conclusions based upon inadequate data" (p. 19). Cochran (1986) suggests that "repeated instances serve as a criterion for what represents a person" (p. 27). What matters is not an isolated experience, but the internal consistency of a series. "In a plot there is what might be called an intrinsic necessity of pattern in which parts have a necessary function within a whole" (p. 63).

An individual's life is patterned, and so is the story told about it. Even when the story seems to be chaotic, the chaos may be viewed as a leading, repetitive, and thematically unifying pattern
of the story, that plays some role and has some meaning in the story. To discern a meaning of individual episodes is possible only in relations to the overall pattern, understanding their position, function, and meaning within the framework of the pattern. Cochran (1986) maintains that "a life theme is like a proposition or premise that allows a researcher another way to see how a composition coheres and that extends that coherence" (p. 140). In clinical terms, the understanding of the pattern and its meaning in the individual's life may be the first step allowing a person to consider his or her options, to try first risky moves in consciously altering the pattern, and to achieve some beneficial changes in his or her life—the proclaimed hallmark of counselling psychology.

The Change

Because the concepts of therapeutic change seem to be boundless, this study will be limited to the changes in a person's life story. But even within this specific framework the concept needs some further narrowing in order to be grasped. One possible way of doing so is to consider the dimension of profoundness of therapy change. Researchers often wonder what amount or magnitude of change should "count" (cf. Highlen & Hill, 1984).

Certainly, the client is the final judge of satisfaction with the change achieved in counselling. Nevertheless, sometimes even when a quite satisfied client leaves counselling, both client and counsellor know that some important issues have not been addressed. These unresolved issues may come to resolution based on a successful solution of other problems, or may be resolved due to some other life circumstances and influences, or may "haunt" the client in the future, and sometimes bring him or her back to counselling again. At a given time, however, clients usually claim that they do not feel ready to address these problems. Sometimes they deny the problems altogether.

Again, the purpose here is not to address all the intricacies of a person's "readiness" to deal with his or her problems, and to achieve change. However, it is apparent that these "protective
maneuvers" (F. Knobloch & J. Knobloch, 1979a) are closely connected with the previously discussed problems of self-deception and truth. It may be sufficient to say here that an approach that considers the questions of coping and adaptation seems to be the most useful in this regard.

White (1974) suggests:

"... we tend to speak of coping when we have in mind a fairly drastic change or problem that defies familiar ways of behaving, requires the production of new behavior, and very likely gives rise to uncomfortable affects like anxiety, despair, guilt, shame, or grief, the relief of which forms part of needed adaptation. (pp. 48-49)"

Thus, we face a dilemma; a painful problem which needs to be addressed seems to be too painful to be addressed. "When dangers are real and information incomplete, it is in no sense adaptive to march boldly forward," White (1974, p. 50) goes on, and concludes that the only adaptive solution is finding a liveable compromise. In a similar vein, Mechanic (1974) is concerned with "the ability of persons to maintain psychological comfort" (p. 33), and suggests that: "Men pace themselves; they selectively seek information in relation to their needs for developing solutions on the one hand and for protecting their 'selves' on the other" (p. 35). At any case, we may take for granted that people's ability to deal with their problems has some limitations at any given moment in their lives. In a counseling situation, these limitations also depend to a large extent on the quality of the counseling relationship, for example, on its perceived safety. At the same time, these limitations necessarily affect the "depth" of change achieved in counseling.

In this sense Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974), and more recently Lyddon (1990), talk about a first- and second-order change. In a first-order change, there are changes among the components of the system, or in their constellation, that make no difference in the overall definition of the system; the coherence of the system is maintained unchanged. The second-order change represents a discontinuity or a transformation in the definition of the system, based on an introduction of new rules governing the structure. There is a qualitative change in the system
governed by new rules; it has a new "internal order."

Osherson (1980) seems to have something similar in mind when he speaks about a premature or a "foreclosed" resolution of problems on the one hand, and a fuller "sculpted" resolution on the other. Osherson researched life stories of men who changed their careers in their midlives. He observed that some men, regardless of the change, maintained an external locus of control, did not achieve a sense of role-differentiation, were stuck in their images of idealized parents, and their career change bore a generally defensive and reactive quality. This is, according to Osherson, a premature or a foreclosed resolution. Other men achieved a "sculpted" resolution, marked by their sense of internal locus of control, agency, and ability to build on their past but differently, that is, recognizing "what to hold on, and what to let go." In this regard Osherson speaks about the importance of facing the crisis (framed as a "disruption of self"), followed by the process of reorganization of self as an adaptation to crisis, leading to a "reconstituted self" with new, stable roles and opportunities.

Osherson (1980) warns against considering the sculpted resolution "better." Whatever one's self-concept or ego can bear should be respected: "The movement to safeguard a threatened self may in some cases be precisely that: life saving or self-preserving" (p. 124). Moreover, Osherson also warns against indiscriminate and undifferentiated "letting go of the past; but unless one is cautioned to hold on adaptively as well, one wonders about the resulting fate of meaning and purpose" (p. 213). It seems that an achievement of at least some degree of a "sculpted" resolution depends on an individual's ability, at least to some degree, to face his or her life story, to re-evaluate it, and re-structure it in a way that one is able to live with his or her past in the present, and agentically influence his or her future.

Crites' (1986) assertion points in the same direction: "To become self is to appropriate a past" (p. 164), because "a self without a story contracts into the thinness of its personal pronoun" (p. 172). According to Crites, only that which has been incorporated in one's story, owned up to, or
appropriated, may be said to be experienced, and thus, to have built one's present self-identity.

The present is seen as the point of tension between self-identity, based on the appropriation of one's past, and self-transcendence aimed at the future. Only the present positioned this way offers hope. "Despair is the refusal of either self-identity or self-transcendence, or both" (p. 171). But not any story of the past will do. Self based on a false story has a false present that cannot transcend itself in the future; in Crites' words "I make a fairy tale of my past, and become at best an enigma to myself and others, a creature of uncommitted fantasy" (p. 172).

McAdams (1993) notes that "simply writing or performing a story about ourself can prove to be an experience of healing and growth" (p. 32). Somewhat surprisingly, McAdams juxtaposes psychotherapy and autobiography as two common tools to identify one's personal myth. In fact, autobiography as one's life story, in a variety of forms and levels of systematization, is an integral part and a subject matter of many psychotherapy approaches. McAdams points out that construing one's autobiography gives an opportunity for "integrating and making peace among conflicting imagoes in one's personal myth [which] is a hallmark of mature identity" (p. 37). In McAdams' view, a conscious construction of a life story helps to develop a complex (i.e., highly differentiated and integrated) belief system, supports one's search for unity and diversity, affirms both change and continuity, and renders sensible and coherent the seeming chaos of human existence. Thus, the process of construing autobiography itself can help "to discover a more suitable tone, better imagery, and long-forgotten motivational themes" (p. 274) in order to transform one's personal myth into a more liveable one.

But there may be another, fundamental component in the healing effect of "retelling one's life" (cf. Schafer, 1992). It may be exactly the effect of the "ownership" of the story (cf. Crites, 1986), or in Wiersma's (1988) terms of "reclaiming one's experience."

Counsellors know the moment when a client, after sharing a particularly difficult experience, pensively remarks: "I've never told that to anybody before." It is a remarkable and brave moment,
pregnant with change. Taking a tremendous risk, a client speaks about the parts of his or her experience, and thus, about the parts of his or her self, previously—for many reasons—deemed unacceptable and consequently, unspeakable. By doing so, the client tentatively holds the "ownership" of his or her story, and of the previously denied ("unacceptable") parts of his or her self. With at least a basically empathic counsellor, and even more so in an empathic group of peers (cf. Adler, 1995), a client may realize (sometimes for a first time in his or her life) that these assumed "terrible" parts of his or her self are acceptable. That they are speakable (cf. Beavers, 1985, and his criteria of healthy families), that they are human, and that they have made sense and have played an important role in the context of his or her story. This realization often brings about a sense of a freeing relief, and an encouragement to pursue further (perhaps "second-order" or "sculpted") changes.

This is why White and Epston's (1990) concept of "externalization," or Cochran and Laub's (1994) similar but more fortunate concept of "spectatorship," should be taken with some caution. These are certainly very useful strategies or techniques when the client seems to be unable to overcome the guilt or shame and face the story as his or her own, or when the client seeks supportive rather than change-oriented counselling. In its focus on strengths rather than perceived trouble or "weakness," it may be an excellent start for a discouraged client. But for a client with "high therapeutic ambitions" (cf. Adler, 1995), it cannot meet his or her long-term needs. Only some degree of "ownership" of the story seems to be able to open the door to further changes, though for a price of considerable anxiety.

Again, it has to be stressed that only a client can decide how far he or she wants to go with changes. First, there are the previously discussed concerns of client's safety. Second, any imposed decision virtually defies the desired therapy outcome, that is, the client's sense of agency in his or her life. On the other hand, the counsellor and the quality of the counselling relationship do influence the client's decision; in the broadest terms, by sensitively monitoring
and supporting the client's "motivational balance," and thus, the "attractiveness of therapy" (F. Knobloch & J. Knobloch, 1979a). The key to the "necessary and sufficient" conditions for a substantial therapy change seems to be in both client's and counsellor's hands, and in their relationship.

Ochberg (1988), though he believes in some form of self-invention and self-transformation in life, is somewhat skeptical about the role that a told story plays in personal change in therapy. He may be right. Just to tell a story is most likely not enough when a client aims at what we may tentatively (for the lack of better expressions) call "second-order" or "sculpted" changes. Howard's (1991) metaphor of psychotherapy as "exercises in story repair" (also cf. Schafer, 1992, or Spence, 1982) probably refers to this level of change, and has at least two important implications. First, one has to be able to face or "own up to" his or her story in order to consider its repair. Second, he or she has to be able and willing to do something about the story, that is, to substantially re-structure it, and then to take the risk and act on this new understanding of the story. It is difficult to disagree with McAdams (1993) that

.... many of the same problems that plague badly told stories can be discerned in narratives of human identity. In the context of the personal myth, underdeveloped characters, inopportune images, childish themes, or stalled plots are not mere aesthetic concerns-they result in real human malaise. (p. 174)

Unlike Ochberg (1988), who believes that people's ability to understand themselves is constricted due to cultural and psychodynamic/personal reasons for suppression, Bruner (1990) stresses human reflexivity; interestingly, he does so also in connection with human orientation toward culture and the past. Bruner notes our capacity "to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in the light of the present" (p. 109). Due to our reflexivity, which influences both the present and the past, "the 'immense repository' of our past encounters may be rendered salient in different ways as we review them reflexively, or may be changed by
reconceptualization" (pp. 109-110). Bruner further appreciates our universal capacity to envision alternatives, that is, "to conceive of other ways of being, of acting, of striving. So while it may be the case that in some sense we are 'creatures of history,' in another sense we are autonomous agents as well" (p. 110). In a similar spirit, Cochran (1986) holds that "significant events can render formerly meaningful events meaningless, and formerly meaningless events meaningful. The events do not change, but their significance certainly does" (p. 19). Perhaps this is exactly what substantial personal changes in therapy consist of.

F. Knobloch and J. Knobloch (1979a) conceptualize therapy change as a change in a person's group schema, that is, a change in a person's self-schema, other-role-schemas, and in their constellation and mutual relationships. Special techniques and exercises (cf. F. Knobloch & J. Knobloch, 1979a, 1993), that include a presentation of autobiography, are an integral part of the model. These techniques are designed to discern client's schemas as leading repetitive themes of client's life story, illuminating the client's system of values and basic beliefs about self, others, and his or her position in-the-world. Attention is paid to what a client says (or psychodramatically presents) about his or her story, and to major relational themes in it, as well as to what a client does not say (or present), and yet, what seems to be missing in order for the story to "hang together," and for the pattern to make sense. An episode must fit the pattern, and contribute to its plausible explanation; the pattern must encompass related episodes. The "missing pieces" are viewed as a part of the story, and their meaning and function within the story is questioned to achieve some "goodness of fit" with the pattern.

Client's present behavior, cognitions, and emotions, the whole interpretation of the world and his or her position in it, make sense in view of his or her formative experiences, and his or her responses to them that have created the uniquely individual pattern. These responses are viewed as coping strategies a client has, consciously or unconsciously, developed in his or her dealings with the world. They may be considered the best or the only available "solutions" a client could
come to at a given time, and under given circumstances. They may be viewed as a source of a
client's coping strength and survival skills, but many of these coping strategies may also be
conflictual, and contributing to further conflicts in client's life when unwittingly and
indiscriminately used as the only possible coping strategy under perceived analogous
circumstances. For example, it is not easy for a five year old to find a helpful way of dealing with
a raging or emotionally distant parent. It is not easy to find how to deal with peers when one feels
and is perceived different, or moves every year to a new place, and so on. When others, and
under different circumstances, are treated with these conflictual strategies, it usually leads to
further conflicts.

In the comparable safety of counselling, a client can review his or her schemas, find new,
more helpful or liveable solutions and options, and may experiment with them. In classical terms,
he or she may resolve the conflicts that he or she could not resolve in the past (cf. F. Knobloch &
J. Knobloch, 1979a). For example, a client may safely express the anger, and usually the
underlying sadness, towards a parent previously perceived as omnipotent. For the first time, a
client can stand up for him- or herself. Not blocked by the unexpressed anger, a client may gain a
less "black and white" vision of a parent by understanding the parent's circumstances or
motivation, and allowing some positive memories in awareness. In other cases, a client may
decide to put the blame for the suffered injustice where it belongs rather than partly believing
that he or she was a "rotten child" and deserved it. A client may widen his or her schematic
repertoire by recalling positive experiences with, for example, an appreciative grandparent or a
teacher, or even a fantasy image of an "ideal" or "good enough" parent, and may experiment with
new relationships based on this newly incorporated role-schema.

Client's past, present, and envisioned or experimented with life stances are collaboratively
analyzed in view of their perceived benefits and costs. To use Osherson's (1980) fitting terms, it
allows for selective, and this time fully conscious letting go of the costly self-defeating stances,
while holding on to whatever seems to be useful. The line between, for example, stubbornness and persistence, seems to be quite subtle, but what a difference it can play in one's life. Importantly, F. and J. Knobloch's (1979a) model aims not only at an emotional, but also at cognitive and conative corrective experiences. Thus, the attention is paid equally to emotional, cognitive, and tangible behavioral shifts. Whereas emotional or cognitive changes may encourage the seemingly risky behavioral changes, these may in turn prove to be emotionally satisfying and cognitively sensible, and encourage further changes. In a sense this process may be seen as a reversion of the self-defeating self-fulfilling prophecies.

Thus, a client's story remains in many ways consistent and continuous, and at the same time substantially changed. The past events cannot be rewritten, but their interpretative meaning can be changed. Based on these changes, the next chapters may be thematically and stylistically unified with the previous ones, yet far more satisfying, and generally liveable. Moreover, they are consciously and agentically created by a person.

**Summary**

Traditional quantitative research cannot answer research questions that are not quantifiable, and yet are of immense interest to people involved with counselling. Qualitative research approaches that are more suitable to address these questions seem to be regaining acceptance and respect in our field. There is, however, no need for an ideological battle between the "right" and "wrong" research approaches; what we need are meaningful questions addressed by a suitable means (Polkinghorne, 1991).

The research question of this study, which is concerned with the meaning of therapeutic change within the context of a person's life story, seems to be best approached within the framework summarily referred to as narrative psychology (Sarbin, 1986a). This field, building on traditions of other human sciences (Polkinghorne, 1988) and recently expanding, is fairly internally differentiated. Its subject matter, the story of human life, is approached from different
angles, and sometimes with extreme or conflicting assumptions.

This study is not subscribing to any one exclusive conceptualization of a storied human life and the change reflected in that story. Rather, it is interested in commonalities shared by many scholars. Although approaching the topic from different vantage points and utilizing different concepts, these scholars seem to be talking about the same, fascinatingly human phenomena. These commonalities, in their own right, appear to be far from accidental.

There seems to be an agreement that there is no better representation of human life than the story people tell about it (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Cochran, 1986; McAdams, 1993; Schafer, 1992). The person's experience is storied since early childhood as a means of coping with the environment (cf. Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993; Sarbin, 1986b). Although heavily and necessarily influenced by its social and cultural environment (McIntyre, 1981; K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen, 1986), the story people craft about themselves, others, and how the world works is a unique personal version (Schafer, 1992) and expresses an individual's sense of self-identity (cf. Crites, 1986; Funkenstein, 1993; McAdams, 1993; Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985; Widdershoven, 1993; Wiersma, 1988). The story represents the negotiating bridge between the universal or societal on the one hand, and the unique or personal on the other (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993; Ochberg, 1988; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986); it gives a person a sense of unity, direction, and coherence (Crites, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988) within personally symbolized patterns of language, thinking, perceptions, imaginations, and moral choices (Sarbin, 1986b; Wiersma, 1988).

A story, which is a provisional account, has a beginning, a middle, and an end (cf. Cochran, 1986; Sarbin, 1986b; Schafer, 1992); an end pregnant with intentions of new beginnings. A story, as the life the story reflects, is directional and purposeful, striving from what is to what perceivably ought to be (Bruner, 1990; Cochran, 1986), that is, towards a value-laden goal or a valued endpoint (K. J. Gergen & M. M. Gergen, 1986). In this sense the story reflects a person's
system of beliefs and values, and the meaning he or she attributes to his or her own actions and those of others; it reflects a person's motives, expectations, and believed reasons for things happening the way they do (Bruner, 1990; Cochran, 1986; Keen, 1986; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988). Even the selection of episodes to be "remembered" and included in the story, and the sequential arrangements of episodes, expresses the protagonist's theory of causality (Crites, 1986; Cochran, 1986; Murray, 1986; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986). In the story's plot, progressing towards the valued goal, the protagonist has to deal with other people populating the story, and with given circumstances; the conflict in overcoming obstacles gives a plot the tension (Bruner, 1990; Burke, 1945; Cochran, 1986; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986; Sutton-Smith, 1986).

The way people deal with other people, with circumstances, and with the conflicts ensuing from these dealings, and how they later unwittingly co-create their own conflicts, is established in early childhood relationships. In these "procedural plans" (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986) people decide about roles and rules (Hare & Secord, 1972) which govern their relationships with others and the relational interactions among others. People create life scripts (Tomkins, 1987) or relational schemas (F. Knobloch & J. Knobloch, 1979a) that set narrative themes and a narrative tone (McAdams, 1993) which permeate the whole life story; the story's consistency is based on uniquely individual repetitive relational patterns (Cochran, 1986; Chusid & Cochran, 1989; Elms, 1988; F. Knobloch & J. Knobloch, 1979a; Ochberg, 1988; Osherson, 1980). These schemas (similarly described as a "regnant stance" in Cochran, 1986, conceptually close to Kelly's, 1955, "personal constructs," or a "guiding metaphor" in K. J. Gergen & M. M. Gergen, 1986) represent a person's basic values and beliefs about his or her I-in-the-world stance.

People can achieve personal changes on their own (Cochran & Laub, 1994; McAdams, 1993; Ochberg, 1988), or in counselling where the change is a proclaimed goal of the endeavour. In any case, the change may be at a variety of levels (cf. Lyddon, 1990; Osherson, 1980; Watzlawick at al., 1974). A substantial personal change is connected with changes in the individual's relational
schemas or life scripts, changes which involve a re-evaluation of that person's past, present, and anticipated future (Bruner, 1990; Cochran, 1986; Crites, 1986; F. Knobloch & J. Knobloch, 1979a; McAdams, 1993; Osherson, 1980; Wiersma, 1988). In this sense some scholars talk about counselling as "exercises in story repair" (e.g., Howard, 1991; Spence, 1982).

The autobiography is a special story that explains or justifies how we came to the point in life where we are (Bruner, 1990; Cochran, 1986; Scheibe, 1986). As with any story, the autobiography has an explicitly or implicitly dialogical function (Bruner, 1990; Crites, 1986; Sarbin, 1986b; Spence, 1982). It must protect the protagonist's sense of self-esteem or ego (Fischer, 1985; Schafer, 1992; Spence, 1982), yet at the same time it must be believable (Bruner, 1990; Crites, 1986; McAdams, 1993; Ochberg, 1988; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986). Thus, contrary to Spence's (1982) influential stance, the "narrative truth" cannot be seen as opposite to or independent from the "historical truth."

To fulfill its dialogical function, a story also needs thematic and stylistic unity (in what is said and how it is said-cf. Bruner, 1990; M. M. Gergen, 1992; Murray, 1986; Staiger, 1956). It needs continuity, coherence, and comprehensiveness (Spence, 1982), sufficient explanatory power of probable causes, economy in its account (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986), and directional unity (K. J. Gergen & M. M. Gergen, 1986). Often what a story does not say, but what may be gleaned from its context and its dialogical function, is as important as what has been explicitly presented (cf. Spence, 1982; Wiersma, 1988).

The plot of the autobiography may convincingly convey the protagonist's despair. For example, it may be filled with a sense (and actual instances) of perpetual injustice, powerlessness, or a lack of meaning; it may display a consistent pattern of unsatisfying or failed relationships. Or the autobiography may fail its dialogical function if it is poorly crafted, inconsistent, incomprehensible, or unbelievable. In both cases it is a true representation of a malaise in the protagonist's real life (McAdams, 1993; Wiersma, 1988). It is a true picture of how
the protagonist sees him- or herself in the world, and of what does or does not seem to work,
which usually is also the subject matter of counselling. If, after concluding counselling, a client
retells his or her life story differently, it is again a true picture of the client's perceived position
and acting in the world; a client may confirm that the change is connected with the counselling.
Thus, from the contrasts in the client's life story (in which he or she is a protagonist) we may
discern not only whether or not some beneficial changes in counselling have occurred, but also
what these changes have been about.

Chapter 3

The Method

The Multiple-Case Study Approach

This present research was approached as a multiple-case study. The advantages of this
particular design are that it builds on the client's experience, maintains its presence in the
research, and lays ground for theory generating and testing. Yin (1989) appreciates that case
study research "allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of
real-life events" (p. 14). He defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a
contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between
phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are
used" (p. 23).

According to Yin (1989), the hallmark of case studies is "establishing the how and why of a
complex human situation" (p. 24), and the ability "to explain the causal links in real-life
interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies" (p. 25). Due to these
features, a case study does not have inherent problems with its relevance to a lived human
experience (cf. Gelso, 1979, and his analysis of frustrating attempts to balance the rigor and
relevance in traditional experimental designs). In case studies, Cochran and Laub (1994) remark,
"one need not worry about applicability to life" (p. 56). However, the scientific rigor of case
studies has often been a subject of criticism.

The most common criticisms are concerned with N=1, which allegedly makes it difficult to maintain objectivity, meet falsifiability criteria, and also makes it impossible to generalize from case studies to populations. The second charge seems to be self-evident. The first one is usually connected with suggestions of no "scientific distance;" case studies rely on retrospective (and therefore assumed biased) reports, and employ arbitrary interpretations. As Runyan (1982) or Yin (1989) summarize, critics hold that the case study suffers from a lack of rigor, an excess of bias, and gives no assurance of either reliability or internal validity.

Stoecker (1991) observes that the proponents of case studies usually respond to their critics in two different ways. The first one is a criticism of the criticism, that is, pointing out that the claims of quantitative science on objectivity and scientific rigor are not substantiated either. Probability samples and significance tests do not insure accurate explanation, the quantitative method itself does not control for researcher bias, and the preferred survey research is not useful for applied questions. Hence case study research fills the gaps in quantitative science. Issues connected with this, perhaps somewhat defensive, stance have been quite broadly reviewed in the first two chapters of this study.

The second kind of response tends to assess and assert strengths of case studies, and consider possible methodological improvements and tightening. For example, Kazdin (1981) proposes continual rather than sporadic data collection, including the client's historical data, and treating the case as a single case experimental design with pre-test, treatment, and post-test conditions. To shore up the internal validity of case study research, Yin (1989) makes a similar suggestion, though based on different reasoning, and consequently, omitting the proposition of a pre-test, treatment, and post-test design. To overcome the N=1 problem, Platt (1988) or Yin (1989) advocate multiple-case comparisons to assess plausibility of alternative or rival explanations.

Nevertheless, increasing the number of cases does not answer the criticism of insufficient
external validity, at least not in the sense of how we understand the term in population sampling research. Platt (1988) argues that our generalizations may be more confident if we can show that they apply to a diverse array of cases. But the logic of multiple-case studies is different. Even if we include 100 cases, this is exactly what we have: 100 cases, not a population sample (cf. Yin, 1989). At the best—which is not to say that it is not good or important—we may argue that "what is true for one person is apt to be true for some others" (Cochran, 1986, p. 92).

As Stoecker (1991) and Yin (1989) point out, the underlying assumptions for case studies are different from population sampling research strategies. The validity and reliability criteria cannot be blindly transplanted from one approach to another. Not only can case studies not meet the criteria as defined for different research strategy; attempts to do so may result in the loss of the unique advantages not available to other approaches.

Thus, Yin (1989) maintains that case studies have to meet the tests of construct validity, internal validity (in explanatory or causal studies), external validity, and reliability, but in the context of assumptions characteristic for case studies. Yin sees case studies like a single or a sequence of single experiments, and so, they are "generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (p. 21). They do not represent a "sample." The investigator's goal is to expand and generalize theories, which Yin calls an "analytical generalization" in contrast to statistical generalization based on enumerating frequencies. In a similar vein, reliability refers to "reproducibility" within the same case ("experiment"), not another one. That is, the operations of a given case study (e.g., a method of data collection or interpretation) can be repeated with the same results.

The particular strength of multiple-case studies is in their replication (rather than sampling) logic. Yin (1989) suggests: "If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed. The empirical results may be considered yet more potent if two or more cases support the same theory but do not support and equally plausible rival theory" (p.
38). Consistent with the "each case-a separate experiment" analogy, the final analysis is concerned with cross-experiment (cross-cases) rather than within-experiment findings. Then both a literal replication between cases, and contrary results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication), give meaningful answers to the research question. Each case, considered as a "whole study," gives an account of how and why a particular proposition has been—or has not been-demonstrated.

Cochran and Laub (1994) similarly propose a comparison of accounts presented in individual cases with expectations based on theory and research, followed by a mutual comparison of all the cases. If we find extensive commonalities, we may ask a critical question: "Might we be able to develop an abstract plot of change that is faithful to each individual account? This advantage is largely exploratory, as attempt to discover patterns or refinements of patterns that are not present in current theory or research" (p. 57).

Rosenwald (1988) introduces another interesting view; he suggests that multiple-case studies help to overcome the autonomous individual vs. societal split. The multiplicity of cases may be seen as a multiplicity of observers. In quantitative studies the subject's contribution is irretrievably lost in the means of samples. In multiple-case studies each participant is also an observer, and contributes with his or her particular rendition or way of grasping of the socially embedded phenomenon under the study, thus making it possible to appreciate both the uniqueness and commonality, while introducing a variety of views that would usually escape a single observer.

Thus, the charges that case study research is an unsophisticated method (if it can even be called a "method"), or that it "remains a second-best practice" (cf. Stoecker, 1991, p. 90), are not justified. Some researchers even argue that case studies do, or have a potential to do, very well exactly in areas assumed to be their weakness, and a target for criticism. It may be a question of understanding and interpreting the relevant conceptual framework. For example, Mitchell (1983)
holds that the case study can more effectively analyze causation than quantitative cross-sectional research. He suggests: "The inference about the logical relationship between the two characteristics is not based upon the representativeness of the sample and therefore upon its typicality, but rather upon the plausibility or upon the logicality of the nexus between the two characteristics" (p. 198). Consequently, he maintains, a variety of explanations can apply to a statistical association. But a careful research of specific instances, typical for case studies, can actually show the historical causal process, and allow us to see which theoretical perspectives provide the best explanation. Capturing the process is a major strength of a case study, and lends it its explanatory rather than predictive purpose. In Mitchell's view, process is both historical and idiosyncratic, and statistical analysis is unable to capture either of those. Thus, the case study can explain the idiosyncracies that make up the "unexplained variance" in quantitative studies; the case study provides evidence to how both the rule and its exceptions operate. According to Mitchell, the internal and external validity of the case study depends on the "cogency of the theoretical reasoning" (p. 207).

Some scholars (cf. Kazdin, 1981; Runyan, 1982) argue that the large-scale highly formalized surveys, both quantitative and qualitative, not only do not control bias but, in fact, introduce it. They do not consider that the same questions may have vastly different meaning for different respondents (cf. Mishler, 1986a). The more flexible case study, coupled with interactive interviewing procedures, illuminates how different issues hold different significance and meaning for different people. Whereas Runyan (1982) stresses the importance of this feature for clinical purposes, Kazdin (1981) points out that general research often obscures specific factors operating in specific situations, and suggests that it may be more important to develop a theory of the idiosyncratic than a theory of the general. Van Manen (1992), though from a different theoretical position, strongly supports the same view.

There is no need to defensively point out that the supposedly "theory-free" and thus, "bias
free" inductivism ignores that observation is conceptually mediated, and the object of observation can be known only under a particular description. Or that, on the other hand, deductivism tends to confuse the logical relations among statements with the real structures responsible for their occurrence (cf. Stoecker, 1991). In the case study research, "the researcher presents both a narrative of the sequence of action and an explicit analysis of causation within that sequence. These activities not only involve theoretical choices, they also involve recognition of the researcher's inextricable involvement in the research process" (Stoecker, 1991, p. 105). This is what van Manen (1992) calls "the researcher's strong and personal orientation towards the problem." In case studies this stance is made explicit, and thus, it is difficult to see it as a source of the researcher's bias.

Moreover, there are some other ways in which case studies guard against bias, and so, support their internal validity. One of them is an involvement of independent judges, who follow the adherence to procedures, neutrality of interviews, and accuracy of interpretations. Runyan (1988) proposes a quasi-judicial or adversarial format, in which the judges of different theoretical views critique the evidence, inferences, arguments, and conclusions of others, and compare them with competing points of view, until one viewpoint seems to be the most plausible and comprehensive explanation of what has happened.

Finally, Stoecker (1991) suggests that "perhaps the best validity check, however, comes from our 'subjects' themselves" (p. 106). Case studies are open to participatory research approaches in which, unlike in traditional practices, participants are not assumed to be dishonest or not knowledgeable about their own behavior. Thus, the researcher's attribution of meaning to the participant's attribution of meaning of events may be checked directly with the source, the participant, and may be explicitly clarified. Stoecker maintains that: "While your participants may not agree with the theoretical explanation you provide, they must agree that the behaviours, motivations, and meanings we attribute to them are indeed their behaviours, motivations, and
meanings" (p. 107).

In conclusion, we may somewhat freely paraphrase the previously quoted Polkinghorne's (1991) assertion: the quality of research is not a function of a method, but of appropriateness of the method for a given question, and then of quality of its execution. Perhaps like in music or in literature, there are no "wrong" genres; assuming that the genre is a "right" one for the occasion, what is left is only a good or a poor art. The research question of this study, that is, what is the meaning of therapeutic change within the context of a person's life story, seems to be most appropriately approached by the multiple-case study method.

The Participants

The participants in the study, besides the researcher and independent judges, were 3 former counselling clients meeting the following criteria:

(1) They considered their counselling successful, that is, leading to substantial tangible changes in their lives, and in their life satisfaction;

(2) They wrote their autobiography before, or in the early stages of counselling;

(3) They could articulate their life experiences, as well as their experiences in counselling;

(4) To assure both the necessary immediacy and a proper distance or perspective on their counselling experience, participants were chosen that had terminated their counselling about 1 year ago;

(5) None of the participants was a direct client of the author of this study; and

(6) They read and understood the "Letter of information" (Appendix A), outlining the purpose of this study, the expectations from participants, and their rights; they agreed to participate, and signed the "Consent form" (Appendix B).

The Referral Source

Originally, it was planned to have more than one referral source for participants in this project. However, apparently not many of local counselling/psychotherapy practitioners routinely
ask their clients to write their autobiographies before or in the beginning of their therapy. Then one of the two potential referrers, a skilled veteran psychiatrist who conformed with the needs of this project, and was quite enthusiastic about it, died while the project was still at its preparation stage. Thus, we were left with only one, though a particularly suitable, referral source.

Doctor K. is a professor of psychiatry at the local university. He practices both pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, but in both modes he always stresses his clients' personal locus of control. His practice includes individual as well as group psychotherapy. In the latter modality, he believes that the group itself, and the group process recreating the client's social microcosm, are instrumental in the client's beneficial change. Accordingly, he tends to attend more to the within-the-group, and to-the-group transferences than to the individual's transference to therapist. Consequently, the influence of Dr. K's personal style and beliefs on individual group members is relatively limited in comparison to other group approaches, or particularly to individual therapy.

Dr. K. describes his therapeutic beliefs and style as follows:

My training emphasized the dynamic psychotherapy schools, with a focus primarily on intrapsychic function. Fifteen years later I see myself practising as an integrated psychotherapist. I believe that the distress and symptoms people present with can often be seen as their not getting from others what they need. In other words, my emphasis has shifted to a concentration on the inter-personal. I have a tendency to be pragmatic and to use the developmental history only when relevant to the here and now. (personal communication)

Familiar with the research proposal, and quite curious about its potential outcome, Dr. K. strove to achieve a maximum of diversity in his referrals. Thus, he referred 2 women and 1 man; whereas one of these women was his former individual client, the other one and the man completed group therapy. All 3 originally presented themselves with a variety of mutually diverse problems and symptoms. None of them was treated pharmacologically.
After approaching his former clients, and giving them the "Letter of information" about this project, Dr. K. distanced himself from further procedures, making it clear that whatever their decision about participation might be, it will not influence their relationship with him. All 3 participants, however, contacted the author of this project, and agreed to participate. In the screening interview, conducted by the author, all 3 appeared to have met all the inclusion criteria set for this project, and described previously.

**Research Interviews**

Besides the analysis of the participant's autobiography, the following four interviews were conducted:

1. **Screening interview**, concerned with the participant's understanding of the proposed research and the connected commitments, and with the participant's meeting the outlined inclusion criteria. When the interviewee appeared to be a suitable candidate for the project, wished to be included, and signed the Consent form, the autobiography was collected;

2. **Life story interview**, focused on clarification and expansion of the life story material presented in the autobiography;

3. **Current life interview**, which outlined the changes in the participant's present life, in the view of his or her past, and in anticipation of his or her future;

4. **Validation interview**, concerned with accuracy and refinements of the interpretation of the participant's autobiography and information provided in previous interviews, leading to an accurate portrait of the participant's change.

There was an optional 5th interview proposed to participants; all of them decided to use this option:

5. **Interview with a significant other** (optional); a significant other of the participant's choice was asked about changes, deemed to be attributable to therapy, he or she had noticed in the participant, and whether or how they influenced their relationship. These two questions were
preapproved by the participants.

All interviews were, with the participant's permission, videotaped, and presented for review to external judges.

**Procedures**

(1) Screening interview, collection of autobiography;

(2) Preliminary examination of the autobiography for inconsistencies, unclarities, and emerging patterns; first interpretive draft of the autobiography;

(3) Life story interview;

(4) Elaboration of the autobiography interpretation;

(5) First Validation interview;

(6) Current life interview;

(7) Preparation of the portrait of change;

(8) Refinements of the portrait based on critique by external judges;

(9) Second Validation interview; and

(10) Comparison of portraits of change.

**Interpretation of the Autobiography Text**

The approaches to the interpretation of life stories (or other related texts) broadly differ, ranging from highly structured and formalized ones (e.g., Gee, 1991; Rosenthal, 1993; Winter & Carlson, 1988) to more textual, contextual, holistic, and dynamic (e.g., Alexander, 1988; Bruner, 1987; Cochran & Laub, 1994; Ochberg, 1988). The first ones certainly appear more "scientific," but they often impose on the text units of analysis that are not natural for the text, and that do not take into consideration the importance of the wholeness of the text, and its context (cf. Mishler, 1986a, and his analysis of context and meaning). Consequently, they illuminate parts or details of a picture, but the portraits they present are usually somewhat lifeless. For example, Aanstoos (1985) captures all the "right" utterances of the chess players struggling over the board, but in the
final portraits of "chess thinking" I would not recognize anybody I have befriended during years of playing in chess tournaments, nor would I recognize myself. Because the ambition of this study was to arrive at portraits of change as lifelike as possible, the interpretation of the autobiography was contextual and dynamic, concerned with the role of the parts in the whole story.

On the first few readings we tried to "let the text speak for itself," that is, we tried to understand the overall narrative tone and genre of the text. We strove to assess cohesiveness and comprehensiveness of the story; if the story did not hold together particularly well, the question of what might have been missing was raised. Attention was paid to the obvious dramatic turning points in the story. Even more subtle turning points were discerned when we asked how we would divide the text into chapters. What was our main impression of the hero? That is, how did the author/protagonist of the story see him- or herself, and wanted us to see him or her? Where did the story start (what were the first memories), and when and how did it provisionally end? It was assumed that the end of the story was close to the point of entering counselling; thus, what were the presenting problems and reasons for dissatisfaction? Were they logically connected with the rest of the story, did they make sense in the presented context? If not, what was missing?

The first overall review of the text also paid attention to the author's idiosyncratic stylistic and linguistic features. For example, the prevalent narrative voice was noted, as well as storytelling style (e.g., topic-associating or topic-centered), peculiar or commonly used tropes, use of verbs (e.g., passive or active voice), and so on. Again, the focus was on the overall thematic and stylistic unity of the text.

The next stage was concerned with preliminary delineation of emerging patterns. The major relational themes were analyzed in order to understand the protagonist's basic values and beliefs about self, others, the world, and how his or her self and others function in-the-world. Attention was paid to well described relationships, as well as to those poorly described or peculiarly
missing, though they might have been expected. For example, a missing relationship with mother or no relationships with peers were considered of crucial importance. After tentatively construing the protagonist's system of beliefs about self and his or her important others in different relational roles (e.g., the roles of male/female authorities, intimate partners, subordinates, or peers), the text was examined on whether and how these values, beliefs, and relational patterns have consistently played themselves out throughout the story, and how they could be plausibly connected with the provisional end of the story, that is, with the presented problems.

It is important to stress the provisional nature of the first interpretation. All possible inaccuracies, missing pieces, inconsistencies, misunderstandings, or guesses were clarified in the first life story interview, and in the first validation interview with the participant; the interpretation had been repeatedly reworked and refined in the light of these interviews.

The thematic links of protagonist, antagonists, and events, the protagonist's beliefs about self, others, and his or her position in the world, his or her view of values and perceptions of causality, had to converge in discernable idiographic patterns thematically holding the story together. The pattern was considered to be identified when a class of events (conative, cognitive, or emotional) could be plausibly explained within the same symbolical paradigm. The plausibility of this explanation, and how it was rooted in the presented material, was examined and challenged by the external judges. The problems with which the participant entered counselling (and ended his or her autobiography) had to make sense in the context of the presented and interpreted story. The story was deemed sufficiently interpreted when it plausibly explained how the participant came to the point in life represented by the provisional end of his or her autobiography; the explanation had to be plausible for the participant, the interpreter, and the external judges.

The Role of External Judges

The role of the two external judges was two-fold. They evaluated the videotapes of the research interviews, and judged the interpretation of the autobiography text, in later stages
enriched by the material gleaned from the interviews.

In their reviews of interview videotapes, the judges mainly commented on the neutrality of the interview. They guarded against blatantly or unwittingly leading or prejudiced questions; they had the right to assess admissibility of the evidence collected in the interviews. Also, they had the right to make suggestions for clarifications in the next interviews.

In their evaluation of the autobiography interpretation, and of the emerging portrait of change, the judges were concerned with plausibility of interpretation, and how well it was rooted in the presented material (both in the evidence contained in the written text, and the evidence presented in the interviews). They often offered competing interpretations and explanations. The interpretations that seemed to fit the best with the presented material, and seemed to be the most faithful to the participants' personal patterns and the overall plot of the story, were retained. To retain the "winning" interpretation, at least two people had to come to an agreement: either both external judges, or the author of this study and one of the judges. However, in all cases the participant was the final judge of accuracy and appropriate fit of all interpretations.

Chapter 4
Case Studies

Case Study 1: The Story of Sharon

Sharon is a 41 year old married woman with a 3 year old son. She came for the first screening interview on time, casually dressed, and with the attitude which I would best describe as inquisitive. Good rapport was established soon. She appeared to fully understand both the "Letter of information" and the "Consent form," and she seemed to have met all the inclusion criteria set for participation in this study.

It may be of interest to note her reply to my question intended to probe the "success of her therapy." Somewhat apologetically, acknowledging the difficulty with quantification, I had asked: "On a scale from 0 to 10, where the 0 represents nothing and the 10 everything, how
would you evaluate what you've got out of counselling as compared with what you wanted to get when you started?" She hesitated, and then with a smile explained why she could not answer my question. She got out of counselling much more than what she originally wanted. Counselling expanded her understanding of what she wanted, and helped her to set and achieve goals beyond her original imagination. This, in her opinion, may be one of the most positive outcomes of counselling in its own right.

Similarly interesting was her stated motivation for participation in this project. First, although fully aware of possible uncomfortable feelings connected with reviewing her past, she believed that her participation may both stabilize and enrich her therapeutic gains. The second motive was purely altruistic. She felt grateful for the counselling help she had received, and for its outcomes, and she wanted to "give something back" to the field that helped her to beneficially change her life.

To address the concern expressed in her first motive, I quoted positive responses of participants in similar projects (e.g., Osherson, 1980). Nevertheless, should she experience too much discomfort, I encouraged her to share it with me. I again stressed her right to withdraw at any time, and reminded her that her referral source was available to provide counselling support should the need arise. Sharon signed the Consent form, and I collected her autobiography written in the beginning of her counselling.

**The Autobiography: The Story of Whom Do I Belong To, and Who Belongs To Me**

Sharon's autobiography is an 18-page neatly and accurately typed document. The story revolves around the themes of belonging and competition for it, first in her family, and later in her intimate relationships. The perception of Self as bad, ugly, and generally undesirable may be redeemed by belonging to a desirable man, while beating female competitors. The price for winning may be high, and the prize-being special in the man's eyes-is transitory and thus, never fully won. Men are disloyal, and the competition is fierce. So, Sharon's sense of self as bad, ugly,
and undesirable repetitively encounters a new hope for, and short periods of redemption, just to be again and again disappointed, confirming her original beliefs about herself. The story is punctuated by reappearances of nightmares. The only thing we know is that these nightmares have been frightening and even leading to physical danger and injuries for Sharon, but there is no elaboration on their content, and usually only indirectly on their context. In a sense, they seem to be reappearing like some external uncontrollable power whose function and meaning is not understood or listened to.

By its genre Sharon's autobiography is "literature of facts," perhaps most consistently fitting the genre of reportage. Reportage is typically a somewhat distant, removed, or "objective" account of happenings, achieved by a limited, guarded, or suppressed emotional involvement or value judgment in the speaker's/reporter's stance. Often the coldness of reportage creates a stronger emotional impact on the reader than explicitly emotionally involved text; this is exactly why some skilled writers choose this genre.

In a lived human story the impact of reportage on others may be similar, but we can hardly talk about a conscious or deliberate choice of the genre. The style of relating may be learned as "the way things are, and the way to be" in an emotionally cold and unexpressive family, or as a reaction to an emotionally overbearing family member, or as a coping strategy when expressing emotions leads to unfavourable consequences, and so on. Nevertheless, when the genre is set, only a certain story can be told, and only a certain life can be lived; the change in life would demand a different, more fitting genre.

The reportage genre is consistently reflected in the grammar of Sharon's story. She uses a lot of verbs, that is, expressions of actions and happenings. But the modifiers that go with her actions (verbs), and with the subjects or objects of the action (nouns), that is, the adjectives and adverbs are marked by the prevalence of quantifiers as opposed to qualifiers. For example, in the very first paragraph of her story, Sharon states that her parents came from "very wealthy
families," she was "getting in trouble a lot from [her] mother," she was "overly inquisitive," parents were "having a lot of parties," "Dad used to do many things with us but my mother rarely came," sister was "very good and never cried," "she was so good and I was so bad," "fighting a great deal with my mother," "I felt very isolated," mother and father "began to fight much of the time," and so on (italics added). In the very same first paragraph, when Sharon takes a rare qualitative/evaluative stance, with one exception it goes right to the heart of the basic evaluative dichotomy of good versus bad. The exception is "I clearly remember." The rest is "I was a bad kid," "she was always very good," "she was so good and I was so bad." But even a quantitative description of herself as "overly inquisitive" seems to semantically imply Sharon's perceived deficiency ("badness"). Similarly, her ability to walk at ten months of age, and her overall agility, the features that many parents would be proud of, and would convey this pride to their children, are presented in the context of Sharon's story as something "bad" about her that also bore some very unpleasant consequences for her (having to wear a restrainer).

Thus, the narrative tone, and the set of beliefs about self-in-the-world, are set in the early childhood memories. How that particular constellation, which so decisively shaped Sharon's story, came about is not quite clear. Sharon was the first child of young parents ("Mum was nineteen and Dad was twenty-one") who got married after a brief (6 months) courtship because of the unwanted pregnancy. The parents of the young couple did not approve. Whereas Sharon's father attended law school at university, it has not been clear from the story what Sharon's mother was doing except mothering, or what of her dreams about herself might have been shattered by the unexpected pregnancy and early motherhood.

What seems to be obvious is that the relationship between Sharon and her mother, right from the first memories, was tense, full of fights and disapproval, and the notion of Sharon's "badness" seems to be coming from her mother and their relationship. Interestingly, in her first memories Sharon refers to her mother more often as "mother" whereas to her father more often as "Dad"
(later in the story this difference is less obvious). Sharon does not remember the birth of her 1 year younger sister Wanda, but she does remember the arrival of a 3 years younger sister Cindy to whom she might had been compared; we know for sure that she had memories of comparing herself to Cindy. Sharon envied her because Cindy was "so good and never cried," whereas Sharon was "so bad." Sharon did not say in whose eyes she was originally so bad, and who had introduced this comparison, but both the evaluation of "badness" and the comparative/competitive stance became her belief about herself and her position in the world.

The major polarization in Sharon's family seems to be in her relationship to her mother, to her father, and between these two relationships; in these conflict-ridden relationships Sharon formed her basic beliefs about self and others in-the-world. Sharon repeatedly refers to her fights with her mother. She "felt very isolated because of this as everyone else was close to [her] mother." However, she remembered doing many things with her Dad, while mother usually abstained. Sharon countered her unrewarding relationship with her mother, and her isolation, with "I had Dad, but even he would side with her sometimes." Thus, Dad was not a reliable ally. Moreover, in one of the common fights between the parents Sharon overheard that her father (here she referred to him as "father") had been with another woman. Which may have not only further undermined father's reliability and loyalty as an ally, but could be also plausibly interpreted as a confirmation of Sharon's belief about the danger coming from other women, and the competition for a man who seemed to be her only ally, alas an unreliable one.

Interestingly, exactly at this point in the story (i.e., immediately after mentioning her father's alleged disloyalty) Sharon introduced her "terrible night terrors" that had apparently begun when she was about five. She would wake up in the middle of the night screaming that "someone was trying to get me." She also remembered sleep walking and waking up in different rooms of the house at that time; she did not mention, however, who was coming to her bed, if anyone, when she screamed in terror. Mother took her to the doctor and Sharon was given what she called "my
nightmare pills." She still remembers the feeling of terror she experienced during these nightmares.

In time Sharon's mother's schema, father's schema, and their relations in her group schema (Bowlby's concept of the internal working model of the insecure attachment also keeps coming to mind) grew increasingly complex, ambivalent, and conflictual. For example, when Sharon was nine and her mother was in the hospital giving birth to her sister, Sarah, her father brought home "a blonde woman" and another man. Sharon "screamed at her to get out of the home and to leave my father alone." It may be consistently interpreted as an instance of her competition for her father. Nevertheless, another important motive may be in play here, namely Sharon's family loyalty and her need to keep her family intact, at least at this stage of her development. Perhaps initially the not fully conscious motive of keeping her only (alas unreliable) ally inside the family, and thus, married to her mother, might have been part of this troubled family loyalty. In any case, around that time Sharon's parents "argued constantly," and she would listen from her adjacent bedroom to their common accusations of mutual disloyalty. When they started talking about divorce, Sharon "ran into their room crying and begging them not to get divorced."

The conflict in Sharon's loyalties have been tremendous. Her father's extramarital affairs were not only disloyal to her mother, but also to Sharon—she might have lost her ally and a man whose love she was fighting for, as well. Thus, to keep her father to herself she had to keep him with her mother, that is, with a woman whom she considered her competitor for his alliance and love.

A prime example of this split in loyalty may be an episode when Sharon was 15. Her mother had another baby, Sharon's only brother, Burt. Dad took Sharon, her two girlfriends, and her two younger sisters (Wanda and Cindy) for a camping trip. At night, in the tent trailer, and in the presence of Sharon and other girls, father "started fooling sexually" with one of Sharon's girlfriends. The girls chased them out of the tent, but father and Sharon's 15 year old friend
continued sleeping together outside for the rest of the trip. Sharon writes: "I hated Sally after this and never spoke to her again." Father, however, asked the children "not to tell Mum," and Sharon promised and never did (although a striking accident happened later on). Sharon reflects: "I remember hating Dad for a while after this but the feeling went away. Life went on...;"

Interestingly, Sharon goes on in the same sentence, "...and I continued my relationship with Jerry... he treated me badly. He was often cold and flirted with other girls."

We shall revisit the impact of Sharon's childhood experiences on her relationships with intimate partners later; the point to be made here is to illustrate Sharon's complex position in her relationship with mother and father, and her trouble in learning what love, belonging, alliance, and loyalty mean. With no satisfying solutions to her dilemmas, Sharon will in her story oscillate between emotionally charged anxieties revolving around the desire for belonging and loyalty, and a utilitarian and pragmatic approach to loyalty, seemingly unfeeling, as if she had given up on her desire, demoralized. Nevertheless, for now let us look at some other aspects of Sharon's difficult relations with her parents, and their impact on her.

Without arguing possible causes, we may safely suggest that in our times and in our culture girls especially tend to pay considerable attention to their looks, appearance, and attractiveness. In Sharon's case there may be a special twist coming from the meaning attributed to her attractiveness, or the perceived lack of it. Sharon felt in competition with her siblings (they were on "mother's side") and peers, and she also kept comparing herself to them in terms of physical attractiveness, as probably many girls do. But she also felt in competition with her mother, and she could not compete with her on the grounds of sexually mature femininity, and the attractiveness it holds for men. Whether she was aware of it or not, sexuality was closely connected with father's disloyalties to her mother, to his family—and to her; she could not compete in this area neither with her mother nor any other woman. For example, this may be a plausible, although perhaps only partial, explanation of why her father "sometimes sided with
mother" even though he claimed that she was "wrong." It must have been puzzling for a little girl.

In any case, Sharon blamed her mother for precluding her from being beautiful. For example, as a 5 year old Sharon played with neighbourhood girlfriends. She remembers: "I was very envious of them because they had such long, beautiful hair. Mum would never let me grow my hair long and I felt like a boy." Here, by the way, comes again Sharon's compensation for it; she did what she could to be with her father. In the very next sentence she goes on: "Dad encouraged us to play sports and we used to play football with him in the back yard." However, this compensatory nature of Sharon's relationship to her parents may be the key to understanding her. Because she immediately continues: "By this time I was fighting with everyone in the family. I planned to run away numerous times but never did. I was unhappy, felt isolated and that no one loved me."

This statement seems to be of key importance, regardless of Sharon's seemingly contradictory or somewhat less absolute stance in a second paragraph later. She describes there how her life changed when her younger sister Sarah was born (Sharon was about nine); "suddenly life had a purpose." Sharon loved her very much; she considered Sarah "so beautiful," and not surprisingly she stated: "I took care of her more than my mother did." Sharon concludes the paragraph: "I felt like she was the only person in the world who truly loved me except for my Dad. But he wasn't around a lot of the time and sometimes he wouldn't be on my side. I would feel abandoned and betrayed when this happened." Thus, these loving relationships were unstable, transitory (Sarah is hardly mentioned in the rest of the text), competitive, and apparently compensatory. They could not, however, compensate for what seemed to be missing, that is, a stable loving relationship with her mother. Although the story seems to manifestly revolve around the competition with mother, relations with father, and with other men in Sharon's life, it implicitly points to the missing piece through which the compensatory relationships have to be seen.
The story with mother.

Being refused love from a significant other whose love we need and/or desire has a different dynamic and impact than, for example, if somebody injuriously steps on our toe. We may respond to the denial of love by somebody whose love we care for with pleading, anger, animosity, contempt, revenge, emotional withdrawal, and so on, usually underlaid by not necessarily conscious and acknowledged sadness; we may feel generally unloveable, or at least not loveable where, as we believe, it counts. Nevertheless, it is our love and the desire to be loved which have not been reciprocated that we are reacting to. In other words we may say that we hate because we love and desire to be loved, and our love and desire are frustrated. Then we are bound to live in the considerable conflict of loving and hating simultaneously. It is not easy to live in such a conflict, or to resolve it.

We may only speculate what the unexpected pregnancy meant for Sharon's 19 years old mother, whose parents disapproved, and whose life plans were most likely suddenly, and perhaps perceived as unjustly, altered. But we may plausibly assume that she somehow, wittingly or unwittingly, conveyed to Sharon that she was not desired, that she was trouble. Let us look at Sharon's story with her mother, and how she coped with her conflict-laden predicament of feeling unloved. By its genre it is a tragic story; the more so when it is told in a dispassionate "reportage" voice.

In her early memories Sharon recalls: "I remember getting in trouble a lot from my mother and that I was a bad kid. Mum said I was continually into everything and overly inquisitive." A child asking an adult hundreds of questions may be plausibly understood as attempting to get attention, connection, and closeness; the same may be said about a variety of child's "misbehaviors". But these attempts were labelled as bad, negative, and thus, rejected. Sharon, probably after a few unsuccessful attempts, reacted with something like: "You don't want me, so I don't want you, I don't need you, I have my Dad." However, Dad was an unreliable ally, other
family members, and later on Sharon's siblings, were close to mother, and so, Sharon felt very lonely and isolated. Moreover, she needed her mother. The possible "solution" might have been on the one hand a competition for allies with her perceived adversary as not to be so isolated, and on the other hand accepting mother's necessary help and care, but not accepting her nor granting Sharon's own emotions. That is, assuming a pragmatic stance with emotional distance. For example, when Sharon was about 9-10 years old, she witnessed how her Dad "threw her [mother] across the coffee table and broke her arm. I was really scared of him for awhile after that." There is no empathy for mother; Sharon seems to have already been well armoured against that at that time, and mother was perceived as an enemy. The only problem was, similar to the previously described father's affairs, that the perceived ally (father) while punishing the common enemy (mother) could have harmed Sharon along the way. Moreover, the ally was unreliable, and so, Sharon's animosity had to be carefully measured.

As Sharon grew physically less dependent on her mother, and more secure with her ally, the hostility and even contempt became more open (i.e., the "I don't need you" stance). Sharon remembers that as a teenager she "fought constantly with Mum to the point of physical violence. Mum was always sick and very irritable. She was always in bed and yelled and screamed all the time." As an example of mother's irritability Sharon gives her mother's anger with father's smoking marijuana. She does not miss an opportunity here to mention that she smoked marijuana with her father, and her father would talk to her about how mother was cold and unaffectionate with him, and that he had to side with her sometimes although she was wrong.

It is amazing but not surprising that Sharon, when in Grade 10, played a pivotal role in her parents' divorce. First, she wrote a letter to her girlfriend describing in detail father's affair with Sharon's 15 years old friend on the camping trip. By accident mother found the letter in Sharon's room, read it, and confronted Sharon. She confirmed the facts, and mother threw her husband out of the house. We may refrain from analytical interpretation of this "accident;" facts to come may
speak more persuasively. About this event, however, Sharon writes: "I felt guilty that I had written this letter and that Mum had found it. I was worried that Dad would hate me."

After a few months her parents started dating again, and mother asked the children what they thought about their reconciling. Sharon writes: "I was upset and didn't want them to get back together." Sister Wanda and her girlfriend had stolen from father's office a stack of love letters from the different women he had affairs with. "They gave them to my mother on my suggestion and that was it. Mum wanted a divorce right away."

Sharon stayed with her mother and they "fought more and more. It seemed I couldn't do anything right." At that time Sharon started drinking, experimented with illicit drugs, skipped classes, and finally mother kicked her out of the house. Sharon appeared to welcome it; she moved to a girlfriend's house, with the "I don't need you" message to her mother. Apparently, mother was engaged in the same battle of wills of who needs whom: "Mum said I could stay as long as I liked." Sharon was excited when her father asked her to move in with him, but it was short-lived. After she "messed up" his place having a wild party, he kicked her out, too. Sharon moved back to her girlfriend's place "until Mum called and asked me to come back. I was relieved that she made the first move as my pride would not have let me ask her if I could come back."

This cycle repeated itself, with some interesting variations. Next time mother kicked Sharon out because father told her that Sharon was going out with a drug dealer. Sharon felt betrayed ("I was furious with him"). Nevertheless, she moved in with her father and his 24 year old girlfriend (his secretary) who later became his wife. The pattern is quite obvious from Sharon's own words: "...it was okay until she tried to discipline me. She and Dad would get into huge fights because Dad always took my side. He promised me that I would always come first." Which probably felt like a reassuring victory for a short while. It was Sharon, however, who had to move out and back to her mother.
There have already been many indications in the text that Sharon's mother might have been seriously depressed, and struggling with alcoholism. When Sharon moved back in with her, mother overdosed on valium and alcohol, and consequently was placed in a psychiatric institution. Sharon and her sister Sarah found her. Sharon reflects: "I didn't understand what was happening and felt disgusted at seeing my mother like that." Sharon notes that from this point on her mother steadily deteriorated. Yet in the next paragraph she describes how the following summer was chaotic and wild, filled with parties, alcohol, and drugs. She had no supervision, did nothing around the house, leaving all responsibilities to her younger siblings. In other words, as mother deteriorated, and was removed from the house, Sharon became the master of the house, reactively doing everything otherwise disapproved of by her "enemy," the "demoted" master. It may sound like a glorious victory celebration, but Sharon concludes this paragraph: "I hated everything except Randy [her boyfriend at that time]. He treated me badly and we fought constantly."

Does that sound familiar? Without stretching the text, we may summarize the episode as "Mother was not there [for me] but I had my man though he treated me badly. I was unhappy," presented in this particular sequence. We can recall previous statements like "I felt very isolated because of this [fighting with my mother] as everyone else was close to my mother. I had Dad, but even he would side with her sometimes." Or: "Mum would never let me grow my hair long and I felt like a boy. Dad encouraged us to play sports and we used to play football with him in the back yard. By this time I was fighting with everyone in the family... I was unhappy, felt isolated and that no one loved me." Or: "I took care of her [sister Sarah] more than my mother did. I felt... she was the only person in the world who truly loved me except for my Dad. But he wasn't around a lot of the time and sometimes he wouldn't be on my side. I would feel abandoned and betrayed when this happened." These similarities cannot be dismissed as a mere coincidence; they form a well established pattern that holds the story together, and are what the story is, at
least partly, about. What can be questioned, however, is the presented sequence in the pattern.

Let us remember that Sharon wrote her autobiography as an adult woman. Could it be that the sequence was actually "Mother wasn't there for me, I was unhappy, but I had my man though he treated me badly?" But this sequence could have never been acknowledged if the ego-preserving coping strategy "No, I don't care for you and your love" were to work.

Mother's hospitalization took longer than expected, Sharon's father and his girlfriend moved in the mother's house, and another pattern replayed itself. Sharon could hear her father making love to his girlfriend at nights. "It drove me crazy and made me sick, plus kept me awake. [Father's girlfriend] and I resumed our pattern of fighting. She left a few times, but always came back." Then she got pregnant, and father decided to marry her. "I was so angry, I just couldn't believe it. Dad told us that he didn't want to marry her and he didn't love her, but it was his duty to." Sharon closes the paragraph by mentioning that mother asked father if they could get back together, but father refused and decided to marry his pregnant girlfriend.

As mentioned before, Sharon could not compete with her mother for her father sexually. That mother was losing in sexual competition to other women was of little consolation for Sharon; Sharon could not compete with them either. The sexuality that other women could provide was standing between Sharon and her father, and was taking her father away from her. Apparently, Sharon saw her father as a passive victim of other women's demands or power, and although she felt betrayed by him when he "took their side," sooner or later she forgave him. Her anger was directed at the women who were perceived as interfering, and winning her father over by the means not available to her, be it her mother, her 15 year old girlfriend on the camping trip, or the present father's girlfriend. These women were enemies; they were endangering and forcing Sharon to share her special status with her father.

Sharon moved in with her father and his new wife. Her relationship with her mother seemed to fade in the background of the story. She still fought with father's new wife but "...it wasn't as
bad as before. I rarely saw my mother." Sharon found a "new" way of being special for her
father—or was it that new? Father started having lunches with her, during which "He would
confide in me about his problems with [his new wife] and told me about other women that he
was having affairs with. I felt close to him because he was telling me so much about himself. It
made me feel special." Similarly, when her father contracted a venereal disease from one of his
affairs, he took her along to get his penicillin. "He told me about it and again I felt privileged that
he felt close enough to me to tell me these things."

Thus, again Sharon's main competitor for father's affections and loyalty was double-defeated.
First, by father's affairs, and second by making Sharon his ally, and sharing the secrets with her.
In this sense Sharon might have felt secure and superior to her competitor, but it could not
change the bottom line that father was giving his affections freely to other women, and was
breaking his loyalty with them, not with Sharon. So, she was and was not "special" at the same
time. Her "victory" was in her participation by proxy in his disloyalties. Quite a hollow and
conflict-laden victory. As we shall see, it seriously influenced and corrupted her own intimate
relationships.

We may only guess what she thought about all those women her father had affairs with, in
order to preserve her own self-esteem and the sense of a special status. Nevertheless, her father's
disloyalties had to be tolerated as far as he was willing to grant her that special status, no matter
in how doubtful and double-edged form. Whom else would she get it from? And yet, even that
was a short-lived victory, for Sharon's father was an unreliable ally. His new wife "wouldn't
allow me to live with them as she said it would destroy her marriage to Dad." And Sharon had to
move out; whenever she needed, she lived at her mother's. Her stance is best captured in her own
words: "I didn't have any money and wanted to return to school in the fall... I dreaded the thought
of living with my Mum but felt that I didn't have much choice. I drank a lot that summer."

Thus, mother explicitly re-enters the story, though it may be argued that she has been
implicitly present all along. By now she seems to be truly defeated; a pitiful, perhaps a tragi-comic antagonist. She became a heavy alcoholic, spending her days drinking and sick in her bed, and repeatedly poisoning herself on alcohol so she had to be treated in detoxification centers.

Sharon remembers: "I hated it. I couldn't stand to see her drunk and we would fight about it."

Even more telling may be the story from Sharon's twenty-first birthday. After a dinner with Dad and his wife she came home, went to bed, but heard a crash in the night. "She [Mum] had fallen against the stand up mirror. She was drunk and sobbing. I felt really disgusted. I couldn't bring myself to talk to her and console her. I just felt angry. She kept telling me that it was my twenty-first birthday and that she couldn't even take me out for it. I was frustrated with her and probably made her feel even worse."

There is a glimpse of empathy or regret in the previous paragraph, but barely noticeable. The anger, disgust, contempt, and certain hopelessness are far more pronounced. What to make out of it? Sure, seeing own mother in a drunken stupor may be embarrassing and disgusting, but there seems to be more to it. Generally, we may say that an alcoholic is not much "there" or not much present for anybody, including herself. Mother was certainly not much there for Sharon on her 21st birthday; this may be exactly the reason why Sharon remembered and included this episode in the story. And it is consistent with the previously described pattern of mother not being available, so is Sharon being (having a dinner) with her father, albeit also with his new wife.

As we know, mother took her daughter to the doctor to get her "nightmare pills" when she was small. Mother kept making her place available when the need arose when Sharon was older. But something more important she was unable or unwilling, at least in Sharon's perception, to give. Sharon did not forget and forgive it, and she kept seeking the attachment and the sense of belonging elsewhere. By now, to protect her self-concept, she would not even acknowledge what she wanted from her mother in the first place.

During one of her stays in the detox centre, mother met a man whom she soon allowed to
move in with her. According to Sharon, he was "a really rough character," an alcoholic who had been in prison for robbery. Mother offered that Sharon could stay but she decided to move out; incidentally, father said that he would put her through school the next academic year, so she moved in with her girlfriend. Just prior to moving Sharon had a horrifying night terror. "I dreamt that Mum was trying to strangle me and I jumped right out my window. The dream was so real that to this day I can't say whether or not it really happened or not." In the morning Sharon was all in cuts, and the following night she had another nightmare from which she woke up in the middle of a street. In her biography, Sharon does not pause to reflect on the meaning of these dramatic events. Instead, she concludes laconically: "Mum sent me to her psychologist for a few sessions but nothing came out of it." We might say that again mother did the "right thing," but what has been missing between the two women has never been addressed, and on the surface, Sharon seemed resigned to it.

These are Sharon's last memories of her mother. Since she moved out she rarely saw her again. She writes: "I couldn't believe that my mother had deteriorated to such a level. She looked so old and was living with a complete degenerate. I was disgusted and embarrassed." Yes, this is a picture of a defeated woman, a pitiful antagonist.

Soon afterwards Sharon's aunt called to tell her that her mother had committed suicide. In Sharon's words: "I did not feel a thing and I couldn't believe that I couldn't feel anything but I just couldn't. Life just went on." It is difficult to imagine the complexity of feelings Sharon would have experienced if she allowed herself. Or if some of her feelings, like anger, were socially acceptable under the circumstances. For her story with her mother seems to be a truly tragic story of a mutually denied love, and even denied awareness of what was missing, replaced and lost in the combat. There were no winners, and the finality of death seemed to offer no hope for a resolution.

Unwittingly, in the very next paragraph Sharon gives an epilogue to the story with her
mother. It may be seen as its symbolic summary that, in the old traditions of a tragedy, contains a certain ironic twist. She went to Toronto to see her boyfriend of that time. "He was distant and said he wanted to see other women. I was very hurt. He tried to talk to me about my mother's death but I wouldn't. I felt sick the entire time I was there because I knew that he didn't feel the same way for me any more. I was miserable..."

Let us see whether it is consistent with the story as we know it. Sharon, as many times before when her mother "was not there" for her, went on to seek love and belonging elsewhere, that is, from a man. But her man, perhaps after some period of redemption, proved to be unreliable; he was betraying her with other women, and denying her what she sought. Mother, who was originally denying Sharon what she needed and wanted, was treated to the same denial from Sharon; she was often "forgotten," and to an extent denied her place in the story (that was ostensibly about Dad and other men in Sharon's life). But she could not be denied her place in Sharon's story; explicitly or implicitly she has been present there all along. In the last episode, the unwitting boyfriend did not want Sharon, or at least did not want to grant her special status, but he wanted to talk about her mother. Although unintended, the episode bears a tremendous symbolic load, and a bitter ironic twist. And regardless of whether or not, or to what degree Sharon was aware of it, it is hardly coincidental that she remembered the episode, positioned it in the story, and described it exactly as she did.

The story with father.

By exploring Sharon's relationship with her mother we have, quite naturally, also outlined the complementary relationship with her father. But there are yet many facets in this relationship that need closer attention in order to understand Sharon and her life story.

Sharon's father and desired hero was apparently an active, powerful, ambitious, intelligent, and socially skilled man. He was a doer and achiever; Sharon remembers: "Dad used to do many things with us..." Certainly, these qualities might have been attractive for Sharon in their own
rights. However, in such a polarized family as Sharon perceived hers, where everybody seemed to be on mother's side, only an ally of his status and power would do to achieve some balance. Whatever the reason, or most likely a combination of reasons, Sharon did what she could to win him over, and keep him as an ally. As we shall see later, and similar to her relationship with her mother, also in her relationship with her father Sharon developed an amazing mixture of identification and complementarity.

Let us consider a telling example of Sharon's efforts to accommodate her father. "In Grade seven I was in my glory. My father had always placed a lot of emphasis on achievements in sports. That year I won the sports award for our school. I also came first in the city... championship. Dad had always said that we had to be the best and I was. Life was great." The next year "Dad wanted me to take golf lessons. Much of my free time was spent with extracurricular activities. For the first time in my life someone beat me in sports and I felt devastated. Even though I came in second, it just wasn't good enough. I remember having nightmares again around this time." By this point in our exploration it should not come as a surprise; in Sharon's (conscious or unconscious) mind the stakes were much higher than the sports glory. Her important relationship might have been threatened. The import of the episode may be summarized as "the acceptance by an important man has to be struggled for and won. One has to do what he wants, and try hard, although even then the victory is insecure, transitory, and may be taken away."

There are many other features of her father that Sharon learned and incorporated into her system of beliefs about self in-the-world. For example, Sharon writes about herself: "I had a violent temper." Although she admitted that she feared her father's violent temper and its manifestations (e.g., breaking mother's arm in a violent outburst), she too had physical fights with her younger (and presumably weaker) siblings, and when she grew physically capable of it, with her mother (i.e., an example of identification with her father). Later in her intimate
relationships she often accepted physical beatings (i.e., complementarity with her father, but identification with her mother). Another interesting example may be Sharon's stance towards financial success. "Dad talked incessantly about money. He let us know that he intended on being rich." Later on this aspect also played a role in Sharon's choice of intimate partners.

But the main trouble of their relationship seems to be the father's confusing stance towards Sharon. He treated her as a buddy. Moreover, quite often this buddy-level relationship had a special flavour of conspiracy in which Sharon's role was that of a "silent partner." Father would involve her in the intimate closeness by revealing to her some of his "dark secrets," expecting her to keep secrecy, and thus creating a sense of an exclusive or special relationship. The crucial point seems to be that the exclusiveness of their relationship has often been based on a shared secret, and the secrecy was demanded because of the content of the secret would be generally deemed socially unacceptable.

Why her father chose this approach we do not know. It might have been an expression of socio-cultural beliefs of that time in his particular milieu. It might have been an integral part of his personal story. It might have been his way of gaining a sense of unconditional acceptance from somebody heavily invested in him, for parts of him that might have been rejected even by his rugby team mates. What interests us, however, is the role this relationship played in Sharon's story.

First of all, it may be argued that whenever adults, and especially parents, confuse treating children seriously with treating them as equal adults, it is trouble waiting to happen. Such a relationship is fundamentally deceptive, insincere, and not sustainable. Children are not equal to adults, especially not in their power, rights, and responsibilities. Although children often enjoy being seemingly elevated to the adult status, they may miss the "as if" quality in it, and then they are bound to be disappointed. Sooner or later the adult asserts his or her power, pursues his or her adult interests, and the child feels betrayed. This is exactly how Sharon often felt with her father,
be it when he sided with her mother, or later when, for example, he told on her that she was going out with a drug dealer. Let us remember that it was father who undermined mother's authority and told Sharon how mother was "wrong" in the first place, or who smoked marijuana with Sharon behind mother's back. It must have been quite confusing when he then claimed that he had to side with Sharon's mother "even though she was wrong," not accepting any responsibility for Sharon's confusion and the sense of betrayal. Moreover, he demanded loyalty in keeping his secrets, which Sharon provided, but was not granted herself. Although it is clearly speculative, it is also quite intriguing to ponder about the "accident" through which Sharon broke the secret, and mother learned about her husband's affair, or about Sharon's role in her sister's stealing father's love letters and giving them to mother.

In any case, no wonder Sharon did not quite trust her ally and hero; his words and deeds were too far apart, and too unstable. For example, we know how Sharon doubted her looks. She writes: "Dad always told me how pretty I was though so that would make me feel better."

Another consequence of this buddy-level relationship might have been that Sharon, at least in some ways, matured relatively fast. More accurately, she did "mature" things in "immature" (in fact, in age-appropriate) ways. For example, Sharon herself realized that: "I was going to university but felt very different from the other people there. I was nineteen and living with my boyfriend while nearly all the rest of them were living at home." Instead of the usual student's life Sharon "would always have to get home and cook dinner." Yet, as we shall see later, her relationship was far from a mature and stable one.

But the most confusing and conflictual part of the relationship with her father was most likely the nature of the shared secrets that were often the foundation of perceived intimacy and alliance. These secrets had to be held in secrecy exactly because they were deemed publicly unacceptable, that is, in a child's plain understanding and language "bad" or "wrong." Father pitted her against her mother, told her about the intimate details of his marriage, smoked marijuana with her,
indulged in sexual activities with her teenage friend in front of her, told her about his many sexual affairs and disloyalties, and so on. Although Sharon might have enjoyed her elevation to the adult "equal" status, and for sure she enjoyed the sense of alliance and intimacy brought up by these revelations, she could hardly miss their "badness" if only because they had to be kept in secret.

What a dilemma! The man she cared for, whom she needed, and whom she believed was the only one who cared for her, was a hero of dark and "bad" secrets, that is, a dark hero. How to reconcile the conflict inherently present there? It seems that Sharon has often attributed the "badness" to the women her father was involved with, or who did not approve of his behavior. For example, she never spoke again with her friend who was sexual with her father, but her anger with him "went away." Another example: it was her mother's "irritability" when she was angry with her husband's smoking marijuana. But we all can deny only so much, and Sharon was confronted with reality too many times. Gradually, and most likely not fully consciously, she probably came to the following generalized conclusion: These are men. Unreliable, deceptive, violent, interested only in money and sex. (Incidentally, it was her father who "... had a serious talk with me one night warning me that boys at that age were only interested in one thing: sex." His actions made it clear that this "only interest" was not limited by age.) If you need them, you have to put up with them. This is what it is, this is as good as it gets, and this is as good as I can do to win over and keep my needed ally. Sharon's history of intimate relationships, and her style of describing them, seems to support this summary.

It also makes sense in view of the previously proposed hypothesis that Sharon's relationship to her father has been compensatory (e.g., "I felt very isolated... everyone was close to my mother. I had Dad...). If Sharon had led a conscious monologue, and had made a conscious decision, it could have gone like this: "OK, mother, if you don't want me, I don't want you. I have my Dad, that is, I have something as good or even better than I could have had with you."
The ego-preserving value of this stance seems to be obvious, but it is not so easy to maintain it in the face of not so good realities. As argued in the theoretical part of this study, self-deception may be a way of dealing with this inherent conflict, but we can self-deceive only to some degree. Otherwise this coping strategy becomes self-defeating, and creates more problems and conflicts than it solves.

The relationships with peers.

The relationship with her father substantially influenced Sharon's intimate relationships. But before we move to explore that area, let us briefly consider Sharon's somewhat puzzling relations with her peers. In her autobiography, there are many suggestions of Sharon's competitive/comparative stance towards her peers. The competitive/comparative stance seems to be revolving first around the position towards her mother, and then around "goodness" and "beauty," that is, again around the criteria that have been (as mentioned before) somehow introjected by Sharon's mother, and played a complementary role in her relationship with her father.

Sharon saw herself and Dad on one side, and everybody else on her mother's side (e.g., "I felt very isolated... as everyone else was close to my mother. I had Dad...") Thus, in her eyes it was the "I"-or the unreliable "us"-against "them" constellation. Sharon compared herself to her sisters (e.g., Cindy "was always very good... I envied her because she was so good and I was so bad." Sarah "was so beautiful.") And she fought them: "My sisters and I would continually get into physical fights. It was me that provoked the physical part." Sharon has not mentioned who or what, in her mind, provoked the fights in the first place, but by implication it was not her. We may guess that it had something to do with the assumed "goodness" and "beauty" of sisters, valued and acknowledged by their mother, or generally, with their closeness to mother. The exception was Sharon's loving and caring relations to her sister Sarah when she was an infant. But even there was a strong suggestion of competition with mother (e.g., "I took care of her more
than my mother did"), and the relationship, at least during Sarah's infancy, may be better described in terms of the authority-subordinate schema than the peer schema.

This may be an important lead. Sharon was the oldest one. Perhaps similar to her father, with whom she had a quasi-peer relationship, she also wanted to exercise some dominance, that is, an authority relationship with her siblings. They, however, had an authority-subordinate relationship with their mother; most likely mother and her other children jointly frustrated or at least challenged Sharon's aspirations on an authority position. When mother was in a weak position, and could not assert or defend her authority, Sharon was apparently more successful in asserting her own authority rather than a peer relationship with her siblings. For example, on Sharon's suggestion her sister gave the stolen letters, implicating father in affairs, and leading to the divorce, to mother. Or, when mother was in psychiatric treatment after overdosing on valium and alcohol, Sharon took over the house completely: "My sisters did all the cleaning and looked after my little brother." In summary, unclear and confused roles in Sharon's family also affected her peer relationships in the family, and were a source of tension and conflict.

Outside of her family, however, Sharon's peer relations appeared to be healthier and more satisfying. She was able to get friends, enjoy them, bond with them, and establish long-term relationships. Here is her memory from approximately the age of six: "I made friends with the two girls who lived next door to us. We did everything together and I felt happy around them." Sharon envied them their "long, beautiful hair," but it seemed to be a benign envy that did not spoil their relationship. In fact, the negative feeling was turned against her mother who would not let her grow long hair. Later, at the end of Grade 3, the family had to move because of father's work. Sharon recalls: "I was very upset about this. I was sad at the prospect of leaving my friends and was very unhappy. However, it didn't take me long to adjust after we made the move. I met my girlfriend Kim just a few weeks after we arrived and we are friends to this day." She summarizes that her life was good at that time because she "made lots of friends at school and
did well academically." However, in an unwitting juxtaposition, in the very next sentence that concludes the paragraph she writes about fighting "everyone at home," about her violent temper, and especially about her physical fights with her sisters.

The only problem in Sharon's peer relations outside her family came around puberty, and revolved around the themes of belonging, acceptance, looks, and sexuality. That is, around the themes closely connected in Sharon's family scripts. In Grade 7 she became interested in boys but she was "... a slow developer. I got teased for this so I felt ugly and skinny." Remembering her first year in Junior High, Sharon writes: "I really felt inferior to the other girls and was very shy. I had braces, was skinny and my hair was short." She, nevertheless, became a cheerleader, and after a year of effort she started going out with a popular soccer player she had a crush on.

Certainly, the episode with the girlfriend who was sexual with her father belonged to a different category than the previous one, but the similarities and contrasts between them may be illuminating. Both episodes are positioned back to back in Sharon's story, and it may be not only because of their chronological sequentiality. Sharon and her girlfriend were both 15 at that time. Sharon does not miss mentioning that her girlfriend "was a very tall, well-developed, attractive girl." She concludes: "I hated [the girlfriend] after this and never spoke to her again." (In contrast to "I remember hating Dad for awhile after this but the feeling went away" in the next sentence to follow).

In both cases Sharon alludes to sexual development and attractiveness as the prime motive or the "cause" for the described action. She perceived herself as lacking in these qualities, and thus, felt disadvantaged. She had no control over it, and she suffered because of it. However, when it threatened only her position with her peers outside of her family, she managed to assume control, and found a satisfying solution. When the superiority in sexual development of her peer, similar to her mother's schema, threatened her important relationship with her male hero and needed ally, she could not find a satisfying solution. As we shall see, this script replayed itself many times in
her intimate relationships, marred with insecurities and jealousy.

Throughout her autobiography there are many suggestions that Sharon, outside of her family, was popular with her peers, and managed her peer relations to her satisfaction. She easily created and maintained friendships, she repeatedly lived with roommates, she travelled with friends in Europe, her friends missed her when she withdrew from them with one particular boyfriend, and she missed them. Unfortunately, she did not mention her relations to her co-workers. Her relations with peers seemed to be competitive and troubled only within the family, or when the family scripts seemed to be replaying themselves. That is, when the roles were unclear, her sense of belonging, "goodness," and attractiveness was threatened, and consequently, threatened her important relationship. Interestingly, even the most obvious example of competition, such as competing with peers in sports, Sharon herself links to her father's expectations, and to her desire to meet them.

The men in Sharon's life.

Finally, let us try to understand Sharon's intimate/sexual relationships, that is, the area of her life that manifestly occupies the largest space in her autobiography. We may, however, recognize many themes that we have discussed before. As if, to use the expression of musicians, her love life has been a "variation on a given theme," a theme that goes far back to her complex relationships in her family.

Sharon's love stories are about struggles for belonging and acceptance through winning a "dark" and powerful hero on her side, but there are no winners in these stories. For scripts of these stories are intrinsically self-defeating, revolving around the contest of who is investing emotionally more in a relationship. If Sharon invests more, she is vulnerable and terribly insecure. Understandably so; she knows what dark heroes are capable of, and what happens to vulnerable women. Thus, she has to struggle for her hero's emotional investment, and she has to accept the "costs" in whatever he dishes out to her. She has to mould herself according to his
expectations. If, however, her dark hero falls in love with her, invests in her emotionally, and treats her well, he is not a dark hero anymore, and Sharon loses interest in him. In fact, she becomes a dark hero, and moves on. There is not much peace, fulfilment, and intimacy in these stories. Sexuality seems to be a means to regulate the closeness, that is, attracting it, maintaining it, or breaking it.

According to Sharon, she became interested in boys in Grade 7. But she was a "slow developer," and in Grade 8 she "felt inferior to the other girls and was very shy." She dropped sports, became a cheerleader, tried alcohol and marijuana, and "by the end of the year [she] was going out with Jerry," a popular soccer player she had a crush on. Sharon's statement has a clear flavour of victory; she "showed them," she proved something to them, and to herself. Sharon remembers: "We saw each other all the time and he treated me badly. He was often cold and flirted with other girls. I was devastated when he broke up with me to go out with one of my friends. He later came back to me, but my feelings had changed."

When Sharon was 16, she had her first sexual relationship with a 19 year old drug dealer who lived on his own (thus, a "dark hero" who was, at least financially, more "powerful" than her peers). According to Sharon, "he was very warm, caring, loving, and gentle. He was very handsome and I couldn't believe that he liked me." She was skipping out of school to be with him, and when her mother threw her out of the house, Sharon welcomed it, and stayed with him. He wanted to marry her when she finished school; Sharon writes: "I felt so secure there and just wanted to stay." But when she met his friend Randy, wild and unpredictable, she soon began an affair with him. She explained that life had become too boring and predictable with her first boyfriend, and although he was devastated and begged her to stay with him, she did not.

Later Sharon notes that her relationship with Randy has "changed." She does not say from what, but we may imply it because she says to what it has changed: "He really fell in love with me and was very devoted. I started to do really well in school again and life was pretty good."
But it did not last; in the very next paragraph Sharon reveals: "I started to feel suffocated by my relationship with Randy. He was becoming too dependent on me and I couldn't stand it." Despite Randy's protests, Sharon went on a trip to Europe with her girlfriend, and "had a wonderful time," barely remembering Randy. "When I returned home I didn't have any feelings left for Randy. He was devastated and I felt guilty but relieved." At the same time Sharon experienced some signs of depression: "I felt quite down as I had nothing to do and it was difficult for me to get up in the mornings." Well, by now we know how much belonging to, alliance with, and acceptance by her hero meant for Sharon and her self-concept. Moreover, her depression might also have been the first dim recognition that an unrewarding pattern had been emerging and repeating itself there.

Another variation on the same pattern happened with her next boyfriend, Marv. She "fell madly in love" with him "like with nobody before" him, and she believed that the feeling was mutual. "He was so handsome and I couldn't believe that he liked me." After three months they moved in together. While her peers enjoyed the student's life at the university, she ran home to cook dinner for her man. Thus, although she was a university student like her father used to be (and by the way, admittedly also to meet his expectations), she assumed her mother's role in the relationship. Her own account of her feelings is strikingly inconsistent. She claims: "I loved living with Marv because I felt so secure and safe." But in the very next sentence she continues: "Both of us were extremely jealous of one another. I couldn't stand it if he went out without me and was terrified that he would meet another woman. I wouldn't let him breathe." Soon they started fighting, and Marv became physically violent with her. He threw her across the room (is it reminiscent of her father throwing her mother across the coffee table and breaking her arm?), pulled her hair out, and when he gave her a "huge black eye," she left him for few days but came back: "Despite this I couldn't stand being without him..." Only when at the friend's wedding party, while she was dancing with another man, Marv threw her down and kicked her in the
mouth, she finally left him. She concludes: "I never went back after that although he begged me."

After a period of uncommitted dating Sharon met Henry, who was a few years older than her, had finished his degree, and wanted to go to a law school. She started a relationship with him, but when he went for a ski trip, she started a parallel relationship with another man, Nick. Her reasoning suggests an attempt on a new "solution" to her dilemma: "He was lots of fun and less serious than Henry." Thus, for some time she had at least a potentially "powerful, ambitious" man (incidentally, a future lawyer), and also an easy man to be with, while she was safe because apparently not too emotionally invested in neither of them. She could be the "dark hero" while the two men were competing for her; she told Henry about her other relationship, but he persisted, hoping to win her over. For four months Sharon could not make up her mind, then she finally decided for Henry and broke off with Nick, and the old pattern came to power again: "After this I was extremely insecure and paranoid that Henry would leave me. He felt this and started to back away from me." The more Sharon invested in him and pursued him, the more he grew distant, until he broke off with her. But before that he, most likely unwittingly, struck her in her two most sensitive places. First, he suggested that he might continue seeing her but he also wanted to see other women. Second, he wanted to talk about Sharon's recently deceased mother rather than about their relationship. Sharon remembered both injuries and considered them serious enough to include them in her autobiography, even breaking her emotionally distant "reportage" style: "I was very hurt." After the break-up Sharon struggled with a bout of depression lasting "a few months."

The pattern is perhaps best summarized in Sharon's own account of her next relationship, with Lee. "Lee was from a very wealthy, established family. For a long time I completely controlled the relationship. After about four months I fell in love with him. The feeling was difficult for me to handle. At times I was cold, defensive and distant. This happened whenever I felt particularly vulnerable. I wouldn't talk about it and he found it hard to deal with." This may
be seen as Sharon's attempt to regain some control in the relationship, but this coping strategy also backfired on her. Interestingly, it is also closely reflected in Sharon's own autobiographical account of the story. She became pregnant due to, in her own recollection, failure of her birth control and/or not being "very careful." In other words, she lost control. She decided to have an abortion; thus, she regained some control. She is very matter of fact, unemotional, technical, and brief in describing her getting pregnant and deciding for the abortion. In fact, this is the only information she gives—that she "got pregnant and had to have an abortion." But she recalls that "a few days later [after the procedure] I was quite upset." That is, she was losing control over her emotions. She called Lee, but he was not helpful; he demanded that she regained her control ("He said I had to be strong and to get hold of myself.") The rest of Sharon's account speaks for itself: "I felt let down and unsupported but I did not tell him this. Shortly after I had a brief affair with a man from school."

After a period of "fighting a lot" with Lee, they broke up. The relationships that followed were again quite consistent with the established pattern. "I was upset but started to see someone else almost immediately. His name was Derek and he was very good to me. I broke up with him a few months later because I was bored and met Jim... Jim got too possessive so I broke that relationship off too. I just wanted to have a good time."

Interestingly, a part of that desire for "just having a good time" was connected with Sharon's career choice of becoming an airline stewardess although she was just two courses short of earning her degree. As she later admitted, "having a good time" that her new job offered at least partly consisted of "numerous affairs while on lay-overs in different cities."

Nevertheless, the "good time" did not seem to be happening. After breaking up with Jim her night terrors reappeared. One of them, although Sharon did not remember the dream connected with it, led to a serious injury that put her off work for two months (she walked through a closed window). She was depressed after this, and thought a lot about her life. In her biography Sharon
recalls two themes in her thoughts. First, her mother suddenly reappears in the story; this time with a great deal of empathy: "I felt guilty about my mother's death - why didn't I help her when she was in such pain." Second, Sharon regretted her ending the relationship with Derek. Apparently, she even considered reconciliation with him; she indirectly implied so by mentioning "but he had a new girlfriend."

Perhaps these examples sufficiently illustrate the pattern, and we may stop the chronological account of Sharon's intimate relationships here. For her next relationship, with Tim, she describes as follows: "We fell in love and he was extremely good to me. I could tell him anything and he would not judge me." But a few sentences later she writes: "Tim wanted to get married after about six months. It was soon after this that I started to lose interest in him." The only new development in the pattern was that she first had to force herself, and then found herself unable to make love to him. But he wanted her to stay with him, she did not want to hurt him, and so she did stay while she had "numerous affairs" as the stewardess. The very next relationship followed the same path, and so did many others to come.

Even the only relationship that Sharon herself considered different from others followed the same path. Sharon's unsatisfying relationships seemed to lead to deepening depressions, nightmares, and almost frantic efforts to find a more satisfying solution. From her autobiography it was apparent that she tried to stop, re-think the pattern, and find a better way for herself from what she had to what she wanted to have. She decided that her life as a stewardess "had been much too decadent and meaningless," and she went back to university to finish her degree. She started seeing a psychologist, worked as a volunteer with women coming out of prison and at the Crisis Centre, later on she worked with street kids, she became interested in politics, and she decided that she wanted "to do something to help others." All of these were most likely not in agreement with her father's values; intuitively she seemed to try to shake off her father's schema. Reviewing her past, she realized that "most of the men I had been with previously were young,
aspiring professional types."

Thus, she started a relationship with John, a fellow counsellor with street kids, who had been "kind of a leftover hippy and much different than any of the men I'd ever been with... He had been a monk for three years and was interested in things spiritual." He might had been different, but Sharon was the same. For a long time she felt "extremely insecure with John." She writes: "I was again terrified that he would leave me for another woman and I was very jealous." To accommodate him, she isolated herself from her friends with whom he felt uncomfortable. Then she "began to trust him," and soon afterwards "our differences became apparent to me. I couldn't talk to him very well and we didn't share much of anything in common." She remembers that "I wanted parts of my old lifestyle back. I had a lot of nightmares around this time." First, Sharon was unfaithful to John with a man she just met at a party and "who was totally different than John," and then she broke off with John.

Thus, the attempt at starting a new, different chapter in her intimate relationships did not seem to work; the thematic unity of the whole story seemed to be reclaiming its rights like a merciless destiny. After her experience with John, Sharon stopped dating for a while, afraid that she would hurt another man, and then she "saw a few different men but they all treated [her] badly or had girlfriends." The only outstanding relationship worth of mentioning was that with Don.

According to Sharon, they fell in love, he treated her well (including taking her for a business trip to the Bahamas), and he wanted to marry her after three weeks. Not surprisingly, things then "started falling apart," and "the romance wore off." Sharon muses: "I felt like he was taking me for granted and rejecting me despite the fact that he always treated me very well... if he was not totally immersed in me I would feel abandoned." In the next sentence she gives an answer: "We fought all the time about his mother." Apparently, his father often travelled, and he would sometimes briefly stay with his mother to alleviate her loneliness. Sharon felt that "he was
choosing her over me and felt abandoned and rejected." She would "sometimes become hysterical and even become violent," and finally, they broke off. Sharon went through another serious depression, and for a long time she felt guilty for the break up, and regretted it.

From this point on Sharon's relationships became even less satisfying. She was dating only men who either were interested in "something casual," or were already involved with somebody else. Thus, she was protecting herself from the pain she seemed to inevitably experience when either she or her partner became emotionally invested, but at the same time she was "protecting" herself from what she desired the most—a stable and a reliable relationship in which she would feel intimately special. But this "self-protective strategy" did not seem to work. Sharon's depressions seemed to increase in frequency and intensity. Finally, after another sexual experience with a man who was involved with somebody else, she had her first "panic attack which lasted five hours." She continued having them every day, and she had to stop working. In her own account, "I was more depressed than I'd ever been in my life and didn't want to live." These were apparently Sharon's presenting problems when she decided to seek help in changing her life, and she entered psychotherapy.

To summarize Sharon's story, we may revisit her initial statement: "I felt very isolated... as everyone else was close to my mother. I had Dad, but even he would side with her sometimes." As some theorists believe, in our early childhood relationship with a "good enough" mother we may come as close as humanly possible to ever "having" somebody else. For whatever reasons, Sharon's mother could not establish such a special, "good enough" relationship with her daughter, and so Sharon turned to her Dad. But she could not "have" him; first, it is humanly impossible to "have" anybody in this possessive sense. Second, her father was particularly unsuitable to fulfil, or even approach, this role. But "having" somebody, particularly a man, became within the context of Sharon's beliefs equal to being special, accepted, and belonging, and thus, of tremendous importance. Her life became a continuous effort to achieve this desired
The state of being special, but within the system of her beliefs about self, others, and her position in the world, the mission proved to be frustrating, self-defeating, and impossible. Her coping strategies, and her beliefs about self-in-the-world, acquired in her childhood, not only did not seem to solve her problems, but actually contributed to re-creations of her problems as self-fulfilling prophecies.

The Life Story Interview

In the case studies to follow this first one, the information obtained in the life story interview will be merged with the researcher's interpretation of the autobiographical text, and with the outcomes of the validation interview. While saving both the reader's and the writer's energy, as well as valuable space, this design seems to be fully sufficient for the intended purposes of this study. In the first case study, however, the decision to present the collected material separately has been based chiefly on two motives. First, the explicitness of every step, and its openness to critical inquiry, is of value in its own rights when considering the validity of the presented argument (cf. Spence, 1986). Second, it may be of theoretical and practical interest to manifest the potential, power, and possible limitations of textual analysis, especially in view of theoretical arguments developed in the previous parts of this study. Nevertheless, there seems to be no need for a verbatim transcript of Sharon's answers to my questions; they are presented summarily and descriptively, supported by direct quotations when deemed necessary or helpful. The questions presented to Sharon are in Appendix C.

In response to my first question, Sharon suggested that her mother was more emotionally expressive than her father, but the prevalent emotion she displayed was anger at Sharon: "...I experienced with her a lot of rage... I'd say she was emotionally abusive." The anger would show in mother's screaming, yelling, or hitting Sharon, even when she was already a teenager.

To my question concerning what happened when Sharon showed her own emotions, she replied: "I just know that I was a bad kid, that's what I was told.... that I was difficult, you know,
that I was angry.... hard to handle, rebellious..." When I brought to her attention that she
connected my question with all the "bad" labels placed on her, she confirmed that this was
exactly what happened. When she showed emotions, she was labelled as "bad." She was a
"spunky child," but her emotions "were not allowed;" in her recollection her father was more
accepting of her emotions than her mother.

Sharon could not remember what the fights with her mother were specifically about; in her
mind they were "about anything and everything.... just doing the kid's stuff [would get her in
trouble]. I would be always in trouble." She concluded: "We just didn't have a good relationship,
even when I was a very young child." Mother would scream and yell at her, and Sharon would
fight back by the same means. Here Sharon became tearful, and stated: "I guess it was my only
way of surviving-to fight back." She admitted that even now she had to struggle with her urges to
fight back, and had to be careful in this regard in her adult relationships.

According to Sharon, the fights with her mother were hard for her father; "he wanted to
please everybody." When father came back from work, mother would tell him how Sharon was
"bad," and asked him "to do something about it." But it was "difficult for him," because he "was
accepting more of me and us as children, maybe too much the other way, really." Thus, this is
Sharon's explanation of the parental split the origins of which have not been quite clear from her
autobiography. Father would often "officially" side with his wife but it must have been somehow
apparent that he disagreed with her because of being "more accepting" of the children. Probably
he would try to compensate for his wife's, and for his own "official" stance when being with
Sharon alone; hence the sense of alliance, but also of confusion and betrayal when he "officially"
sided with mother. Sharon's explanation depicts her father from a new angle, not readily
accessible in her autobiography, and allows for a more empathic understanding of her father's
stance and role in family, and in Sharon's life. At the same time it confirms the search for
acceptance as the leading motivation in Sharon's life story, already apparent in her written
In the interview Sharon confirmed that the feeling of her own "badness" came mainly from her mother who, being herself only 19 years old, "didn't have any idea how to handle kids." When Sharon's father or aunts talked about children as "bad," they usually "laughed about it," whereas coming from mother the notion of "badness" sounded serious.

The prevalent mood of her mother, remembered from childhood, Sharon described as "unhappy" and "sad." Interestingly, here Sharon indicated that it was difficult for her to separate what she thought about her mother now from her thoughts and feelings in childhood, or from when she started therapy and wrote her autobiography. Her present stance was much more empathic. However, reflecting on her childhood and pre-therapy feelings about her mother, Sharon maintained that "I had been the one that has born the brunt of so much of her unhappiness" that it was "difficult to be compassionate with her." In other words, for a child there was no understanding of mother's sadness and anger. There was only its bare presence, and its consequences, which might have felt as inexplicable, unjust, and to which Sharon reacted with her own anger, and probably sadness.

When Sharon suffered her presumed childhood injuries, she would "probably" run to her mother because, as she reasoned, mother was more often physically present than her father who worked out of house. But Sharon did not remember what happened then, perhaps "because I didn't get much from her, or maybe I did, I don't know." When her father was around, she assumed that she would go to him, but she could not remember that with any clarity.

Similarly, she could remember both parents coming to her when she had her nightmares, but could not remember what happened then. "I remember that it was something, too, that was... somehow... you know, something wrong with me... I think somehow it must have been interpreted that way, because I felt that way, that there was something wrong with me.... I'm not sure if there was much compassion for me, in that situation."
Sharon could not recall any specific happening in her life around the time when her first nightmare occurred, except that her family moved to another town, but she did not seem to attribute any causal connection to it. She remembered that in her early childhood nightmares it was "definitely a male" figure who was frightening her. Then she added that it was "weird" because later it was "definitely my mother" who haunted her in her nightmares.

Sharon has experienced similar feelings of terror in real life situations; she suggested that she had became aware of what situations triggered that feeling only recently. It usually happens to her when she faces "any kind of separation issues," when she needs something for herself, is dissatisfied either with her work or in her relationship with her husband, and has to assert herself. "It is very overwhelming," Sharon concluded, crying. After a pause, she added: "But I'm getting better." It might have referred to her coping with her terrors, or to her coping with her emotional state at that moment (I had expressed my concern about), or both.

Proud of her mother's looks, Sharon said she was "very pretty, like the ideal." Sharon "idealized her that way," and also other people commented on mother's attractiveness; "it was something that was valued in my family, too." Sharon did compare herself to her mother: "I wanted to be like her," but "I was a kid, so I couldn't be like her. I think that it was very difficult for me... yah, wanting to be an adult like her." In the interview, Sharon repeatedly mentioned that my question brought a new angle in her thinking, and then she spontaneously elaborated that she usually connected the question of her looks with her father. She concluded: "I guess I always wanted my father... to be... I don't know, maybe I wanted him to be my ally, or whatever, and I couldn't... and my mother was in the way of that."

As a child, Sharon found her father's changing loyalty between her and her mother inexplicable and confusing; it left her with a sense of betrayal. Interestingly, even in the interview Sharon appeared somewhat puzzled and confused by these perceived betrayals. She tentatively tried some explanations that did not seem to satisfy her; for example, that mother was
the disciplinarian, and it must have been difficult for her to set some limits whereas father never wanted to do that. Thus, she concluded that "there was a whole pile of stuff there, it was complicated," but the switches in loyalty were still difficult to grasp.

In her childhood, Sharon was ambivalent about her father's disloyalties with other women: "I remember hating my father... but maybe not really... yah, I just hated him for that." When she was older, her father "brought me in on those things... and it was a way for me to have a relationship with him that was close, I guess, and special, and all those things."

The women her father was disloyal with were "always glamorous," and Sharon "hated them, too... because they were intruding on my family, whatever, hurting my mother." In childhood, "they were a threat in terms of our family, or maybe my father... you know, in terms of getting divorced." Later on Sharon became what she called "more compassionate," wondering why these women were going out with her father, and what they were getting out of it. When older, "I didn't have such a strong emotional reaction, I guess, towards them."

Sharon remembered "a lot of sibling rivalry," a lot of fights between the siblings, and especially between her and the second oldest sister, Wanda. The rivalry between the siblings could be framed as a competition between them ("Oh, definitely"), but Sharon did not answer directly my question "What did you compete for?" She answered "Oh, everything," and then she pointed at her father's competitiveness. Because sports were important for him, children competed in sports achievements, and the younger siblings apparently tried to "de-throne" Sharon, out-perform, or at least match her achievements; she was the oldest one. But generally, they competed also in other areas that were deemed to be important in their father's eyes. "Things weren't done so much for the enjoyment of it as to beat the other person, to be better than the other person.... I know it was important for my father." It was apparently Wanda, the second oldest, who was the strongest competitor of Sharon, but yet not quite strong enough. So, she developed "a bag of tricks" that hurt Sharon emotionally, and provoked her to physical fights.
However, Sharon also mentioned having "a lot of fun" and "playing a lot" with her siblings, a point that is nowhere to be found in her written autobiography. On the contrary, the text written in the beginning of her therapy seemed to indicate a considerable split between Sharon and her siblings, the "I against them" stance. Thus, it might have been the case that it was difficult for Sharon to separate her present and her pre-therapy views. Unfortunately, I was not quick enough to inquire. Nevertheless, although Sharon presented a more balanced and differentiated view than that apparently transpiring from her written text, she also indicated that even now she had a somewhat tense relationship with her sister Wanda. Her present relationship with her other siblings she described as "interesting": "You know, we've been through so much together."

Sharon usually got along well with her co-workers; she credited that to her ability to easily assert herself with them. After some hesitation, she suggested that she "probably" got along somewhat better with her male co-workers because they "always paid attention" to her, and she liked that.

When asked about her relationships with authority figures, Sharon first remembered her female teacher who apparently appreciated her, valued her, understood her, and cared for her. Then she went on: "I have always deferred a lot to male authorities.... that I haven't felt... uhm, especially with strong male figures, that what I have to say really counts." So, Sharon often does not assert herself with the "strong male authority figures." When she does, it usually triggers difficult emotions in her, namely anger ("a lot of anger and resentment"), and she has to "temper" herself. She understands that the anger "is coming from somewhere else, too," not only from the situation she deals with at that time. She did not identify where the anger and resentment were coming from, but she added that it influenced her relationship with her husband, and agreed that it was somehow connected with her "deference to strong male authorities." In her understanding, it undermines her self-confidence.

She paused for a while when asked whether the men she had been involved with
anything in common. Then she answered that usually she was attracted to men whom she thought "were somehow above me, in some ways, superior," or to men that "did things I wanted to do, that I wasn't doing." These men had something that Sharon thought was lacking in her, for example, a "drive." Summarily, these were men "that knew things," and Sharon spontaneously connected it with her father whom she imagined as "this person who knew everything, so smart..." She added with laughter that her father was also fostering exactly this image of himself in her, and has been doing that even now.

Thus, Sharon spontaneously answered my follow-up question (i.e., whether these common features reminded her of anybody else in her life). Nevertheless, it prompted her to elaborate on those common characteristics from the previous question. She added that many men in her life, similar to her father, were risk-takers, and generally "not very reliable... not really there, not really committed." She stressed that these would be the men she was "really attracted to." In other words, Sharon was seeking love, belonging, secure attachment, and acceptance from men to whom she was attracted exactly because of their characteristics that, by their very nature, made it difficult to fulfil her expectations and desire. These features, so closely connected with her father's schema, are also characteristic for the broader "male authority schema," that is, for the role with which Sharon has difficulty asserting herself, and if she does, it triggers in her "a lot of anger and resentment."

Whereas all other questions presented to Sharon were carefully worded as non-leading, non-assuming, and open-ended, question 21 (see Appendix C) was somewhat different. Based on the interpretation of her autobiography, I suggested that at one point in her life she made a tremendous effort to change her life. I supported my statement with a number of examples, and proceeded with asking what could have precipitated these efforts. My question triggered an interesting response that might have invited intriguing interpretations and further inquiry. With the very purpose of this interview in mind, and respecting the prosaic but necessary limitations of
this paper, I shall resist this temptation.

Sharon hesitated in responding. Apparently, my question introduced a new interpretation of events, different from her own. First, Sharon did not see the events happening in her life at one particular period of time, and presented sequentially in her autobiography, as a discrete entity that might be clustered together, and understood as an "attempt at change." Instead, she saw these happenings as natural but unrelated steps consistent with the continuum of her life, almost as "non-events." As she was reasoning her point of view, however, she was coming closer and closer to her own recognition that these events were indeed meaningful, and connected by some important commonalities. For example, Sharon always wanted her university degree, and never doubted that she was going to get it. But here she was, "waiting on tables" as a flight attendant, with the life style that she herself framed as "way too decadent." What was first accepted as a summer job, moreover a glamorous one ("a dream for many women"), and thus, meeting Sharon's needs at that time, lasted too long, and became an unfulfilling distraction from what she really wanted. In other words, Sharon started realizing that there was a gap between what she had, and what she wanted to have in her life. So, she concluded that there was an important shift in her life stance at that time in her life: "Yes, you are completely right. Looking at it now... I guess I did want to make changes in my life... I mean I must have. I did. And I remember feeling very passionate about it, too. Really passionate about it. That this is what I wanted to do, that I would pursue that... and I did."

However, it was difficult for Sharon to identify what might have precipitated this desire to make changes in her life. She became pensive, and then, with gradually increasing clarity and persuasion, she came to her answer that seemed to surprise both of us ("Oh, my god..."). She connected her attempt to redirect her life with a powerful nightmare that resulted in serious injuries when she walked through the window. Moreover, she went on with her discovery: "You know, all the decisions I'd made, like when I think about it... When I had the other nightmare it
was after I made a decision to leave my mother's house... Because it was unbearable there...
Thus, Sharon connected her nightmares with difficult decisions in her life, although the
sequentiality reminded somewhat unclear. She went on: "Consciously I didn't feel bad about my
decisions, but unconsciously those things were so deep, it was so deep for me to be able to even
make that kind of decisions... Oh, my god..."

These attempts at changing Sharon's life, however, did not seem to fully work. Sharon
explained that in her present opinion it was because "these were all external changes," that were
"not really dealing with my internal problems." She added that perhaps she was not ready for that
at that time.

To my final question about what seemed to be missing in Sharon's relationship with her
mother, Sharon sadly replied that "There was so much that was missing..." Then she elaborated:
"... acceptance... for me, who I was." She suggested that the lack of acceptance was mutual, but
"I was only a child." Deeply moved, Sharon continued: "People say to me, like my Dad and my
aunts, how my Mom loved me... but I never experienced that... I didn't feel that. I'm sure she
did... uhm, in her own way, the best she could... whatever, but... there was so much, I guess, with
my mother... her own problems, and so much I think was... uhm, I think I did bear the brunt of so
much of my mother's unhappiness... and I was a target, or so much was projected onto me, or
whatever, that it just... [a sigh]... I don't know, I didn't feel the love, that's for sure [almost
whispering]."

The Validation Interview

The purpose of this interview, restated at its beginning, has been to find out to what extent
my interpretation of Sharon's autobiography followed Sharon's life story as she had perceived it,
and presented it when she initiated her counselling. Quite soon in the interview it became
apparent that we were dealing with two issues; although both important, and in many ways
connected, they were of different relevance to the intended purpose of the interview. Whereas the
first issue was concerned with the accuracy of my interpretation, Sharon felt it was important for her to also talk about its impact on her, mainly in connection with its form.

Generally, Sharon agreed that my interpretation of her autobiography was accurate, with one exception. She thought that I somewhat over-stressed her competition with other women for acceptance by, and alliance with the important man in her life. I offered some examples of her relations with her mother, step mother, and sisters, that seemed to suggest her competitive stance. When I asked her for her own interpretation of these relationships, she concluded that competition was indeed an important part of these relationships, but she also suggested that there might have been some other, parallel motivations in play, too. We will come back to this point.

Nevertheless, Sharon maintained that at least on one occasion I "had it wrong." When as a teenager she became a cheerleader, and started going out with the popular soccer player, according to Sharon there was no sense of competition, and consequent victory over her peers, or "showing them" as I suggested. Although there might have been some competitive flavour, expressed mainly stylistically, in the original text, Sharon's contention makes a lot of sense. In fact, it validates and is consistent with another interpretation that has been seen as a pattern in Sharon's autobiography, and with which Sharon agreed. Her competitive stance was typical for her family relations, that is, in the area where the stakes in terms of acceptance and belonging were perceived as extremely high. With her peers Sharon usually enjoyed more relaxed, cooperative relationships. Thus, Sharon pointed out an inconsistency in my own interpretation.

Sharon did not like the reductionism of my interpretation that did not fully reflect the complex motivational plurality of her lived experience. Her critique is understandable and justified. First, the interpretation has been focused on exploring and abstracting patterns in her life story, her leading schemas or scripts, that is, activities and concepts that are discriminatory and reductionistic by their definition. Second, the sheer limitations of a written text necessitate discriminations and reductions. Sharon appreciated these arguments. Although she still did not
like their consequence, she confirmed that the patterns elaborated on in my interpretation were accurate, well grounded in, and representative of her life story.

Sharon gave an interesting example to illustrate her previous point. Certainly there was a competitive motive in taking care of her younger sister "more than my mother did." There was, however, also another component, never even hinted at in the autobiography. Mother used to praise Sharon for taking care of her sister, which was very important for Sharon, and she tried to get more of mother's recognition and praise by taking even better care of her sister. Thus, Sharon here expanded on her story, pointing to a parallel motivation that had been lost in my interpretation (as well as in her original text) in this particular context. Nevertheless, the pattern of Sharon's seeking love and acceptance from her mother as an important motive in her life has been clearly recognized and consistently manifested in the interpretation, although discerned from different contexts.

Further, Sharon did not like the somewhat distant, comparably judgment-free tone of my interpretation, which she saw in stark contrast to the emotionally loaded experience of her life story. She perceived my neutral, uninvolved stance as unempathic, and it caused her considerable distress. Interestingly, she gave as an example the episode in which her father was sexual, in her presence, with her 15 years old girlfriend. As a matter of fact, she even resented my using the literary term "an episode;" for her it was an emotionally loaded happening that substantially influenced her whole life, and an "episode" seemed to suggest something transitory and of a lesser importance. She wanted me to take a clear moral stance; for example, she asked me whether I was aware that what her father did constituted a statutory rape.

Her assertion, and especially the chosen example, came as quite a shock for me, and I decided to share it with her. Throughout the whole interpretation I struggled hard to maintain neutrality in order not to superimpose my feelings and value judgments on her story. This task became particularly difficult when dealing with the story she chose as the example. Sharon did
appreciate my explanation, as well as the difference between the counselling and the researching stances, but she still felt uneasy about the neutrality of my interpretation in comparison with the emotional upheaval of her life.

There is, however, another interesting implication. In her autobiography, Sharon's own description of the father's sexual impropriety is very dry, unemotional, and distant, that is, consistent with the reportage genre of her autobiography. There may be at least two plausible understandings of Sharon's negative reaction to my neutral researcher's tone in my interpretation of the same story. As mentioned before, the suppressed emotional and value load, so typical for a reportage, usually brings up that much stronger an emotional and value response in the reader. In this particular case the genre seemingly failed to achieve its most powerful impact; at least on the surface, judging from the text of interpretation, I seemed to remain emotionally uninvolved. The second explanation may be connected with the positive outcomes of Sharon's psychotherapy. Sharon does not seem to need to suppress her feelings, or distance herself from them any more. She is quite capable of facing them and dealing with them; the very fact of her bringing up these issues with me seems to support this hypothesis.

In summary, Sharon agreed that my interpretation of her autobiography has been accurate and representative of her life story, with the exception of one episode in her relations with her peers. She did not like, however, the reductionism of this interpretation, and its neutral tone.

The Current Life Interview

If Sharon were to write her autobiography today, she would have done it "so differently, there is no question about it" than the first time around, in the beginning of her therapy. She suggested that the difference would be obvious right from the very first sentence. Originally, she started out with herself: "I was born..." Today she would write it "more comprehensively," starting "way back, perhaps even before my parents were born." Sharon had known many details of her family history before, but only now sees them connected in one unified story that makes sense to her.
She believes that her understanding of her family history substantially influences her present life, her views of herself, and her relationships with others.

The change in Sharon's understanding of her past, and its meaning, will be revisited in the next chapter, The portrait of change. In regard to her current life, Sharon maintains: "I just look at them [family members] differently, and I look at everything that happened differently, and I just... just see things differently, in a more complex way." Seeing her past in less black and white terms "... definitely influences how I feel about things." Sharon's life is much less guilt-ridden than before; she does not feel "responsible for everything that went wrong" in her family any more. Consequently, she does not see herself as an essentially and irreparably "bad" person, a theme that has been prominent in her autobiography since her early childhood memories.

Another reason why she does not feel "bad" about herself is that she does not have to hold "bad secrets" for herself any more. She sees this change as connected with her better understanding of her family history and the roles individual members played in it, and with her newly acquired freedom to express her emotions.

Had she written her autobiography now, Sharon maintains, it would be of a different genre than the original, the emotionally restricted and distant reportage. The new genre would reflect both Sharon's present understanding of her past, and her life in the here and now. In sharp contrast to her suppressed emotions, that-in Sharon's childhood memories-"weren't allowed," her new autobiography would include a full range of emotions, not only the anger that had to be suppressed. The new account of her life would explicitly reveal anger when anger was felt, be it in response to the perceived deprivation of mother's love, or to the father's inappropriate sexual behavior. But the new story would also be invested with explicit feelings of sadness, happiness, love, content, fear, and so on. Thus, again the story would be less "black and white," more lively, and it would permit inclusion of new memories and episodes. For example, the story would include some memories of caring moments with mother, or of happy play with siblings.
Living with the acknowledged full range of emotions is more complex but, in Sharon's opinion, "more healthy" and rewarding than her previous detached stance. Moreover, it allows Sharon to "be herself," or who she was in the first place, that is, a "spunky, emotionally expressive child" that had to suppress her emotions because she was reprimanded for expressing them, and had to keep family secrets. Now she feels freer to express her emotions again, and deal with them, regardless whether these emotions are pleasant or uncomfortable ones.

Nevertheless, even today Sharon sometimes feels guilty when she acknowledges her emotions, responds to them, and deals with them. "But I do it... yah, I'm not so afraid of that, of expressing my emotions." Sharon gave as an example her reaction to reading my interpretation of her autobiography, and to the follow-up interviews. "I hadn't thought about that for long, long time. And I think that in some ways it was the first time that really got me to look at it in quite... a certain way... the real, real seriousness of it... You know, it's not forgotten, but it's not something I think about that often... And I think-well, I know that I went to feelings, because it was like... it was like I saw it for what it was, for what it really was, in the whole seriousness, perhaps for the first time... to the degree of seriousness.... I experienced emotions around that, feelings around that... that were hard, really difficult." However, in sharp contrast to the pattern repeatedly shown in her autobiography, Sharon did not distance herself from her emotions, or from me. Dealing openly with her distressing emotions, she found a resolution both to the text presented to her, and to our relationship. I found it particularly valuable that in this specific example Sharon in vivo manifested the change in her dealing with her emotions, and how it has been influencing her present life, her relationships, and her ability to integrate her past into her present life story.

Sharon confirmed that addressing her emotions, even those very difficult ones, in a similar way as she has done it with me, helps her to deal with important others in her life, be it her husband, father, siblings, co-workers, or superiors at work. As a result, she finds her relationships
less stressful, and more rewarding. Sharon reasoned that now she could express her emotions "because now my life, I guess, is very stable, and calm, and I can talk to my husband, or I can talk to friends of mine... When I'm experiencing those things [emotional difficulties] it's safe, I feel safe to do so, it's OK to do that, and I can feel their support in there for me." Sharon knew that this was missing in her childhood, but she could not tell which came first in her present life: her sharing of her emotions with others, or her feeling safer to do so. Regardless of the perceived sequentiality (most likely both parts had to work together), her relationships—for example, with her friends—have been far more intimate than ever before.

This example seems to be a well chosen representation of Sharon's current life. She does not dwell in her past, and does not ruminate over her past injurious relationships: "You know, it's not forgotten, but its not something I think about that often." Instead, she lives in the present relationships of her choice in which she invests her emotions, and thus, achieves intimacy, be it with her husband or with her friends. Moreover, she has managed to re-structure her relationships with her siblings, her father, and even with her deceased mother. This may be exactly what frees her to live in her present rather than in her past; these relationships became much less injurious, and in the case of siblings even prevalently rewarding.

If Sharon were to write her autobiography anew, she would have described her relationship with her mother differently. It would reflect the new role this major formative relationship plays in her current life. After a long, pensive pause, Sharon elaborated on her present thoughts and feelings about her mother: "I think that my mother... tried. You know, really tried in her way... to love me... I think... there was so many problems between my mother and my father, and I was put in the middle of that. In some ways more by my father. But, ah, it's too bad, because... I don't think my Mum and I had a chance... It's really sad." Sharon went on: "She, ah... like I remember... [uhm, ah] I remember things how she did try, her way, and her way was to do things for me." Sharon gave an example of her mother sawing her clothing, or buying a dress as a
Christmas present for her. Sharon was 14, and she did not particularly like the dress: "I saw tears in her eyes."

This example well captures Sharon's present stance towards her mother. She does not blame herself any more: "I was just a 14 year old, who needed to, obviously, choose her own clothing." But she also does not blame her mother: "My Mum got hurt a lot... She was a kid so much herself, and she needed so much, and she didn't get that from her husband..." Thus, although Sharon still understands that she has been deprived, not through her fault, of something very important and special in her early relationship with her mother, she does not see her mother as a malevolent enemy. She empathizes with her, and has finally achieved a sense of peace with her. We may recall the haunting quality and consequences of Sharon's original relationship with her mother.

Presently, Sharon does not remember her mother as only angry, and herself responding to mother's anger with her own anger; she can also recall more intimate moments between them. Similarly, Sharon's memory of her parents "fighting all the time" has changed; presently she believes that they actually "didn't fight enough... my Mum kept a lot inside, all the time, and didn't stand up to my father. Because if you did, there would surely be a big crisis."

Thus, it is not only Sharon's "memory," or selection of memories, that has changed. This change is inseparable from the change in Sharon's perception of causality, attributed values, understood meanings, and the complex interplay between her identification and complementarity with her parents. It brings up a very tangible change in her present life; today Sharon feels that she can stand up for herself, and she does so, be it with her father, her husband, her superiors at work-or, as she has in vivo demonstrated-with me. Although Sharon claims that challenging authorities, especially male authorities, still brings up difficult emotions (namely anger and resentment) in her, she is no more passively deferential. Thus, on the one hand Sharon's difficult relationship with male authority figures became normalized; perhaps many of us experience a
degree of anxiety when standing up for ourselves, and challenging authority. On the other hand, in her dealings with real or perceived authority figures Sharon became insightful in a way that is not quite common for people who have never invested some time and effort in reflecting on their life story, as happens to be the case in therapy. For example, Sharon realized that due to circumstances I fit her male authority schema, and it made it difficult for her to separate me, what I was saying, and how I was saying it, from her original schema. However, instead of angrily running away when she did not feel that I was totally on her side, she brought up her difficulties with me, and resolved our relationship to her satisfaction, accepting me but making sure that her voice was also accepted and respected.

All these changes are closely linked with the changes in Sharon's relationship with her father. Let us recall that he was her hero who could not do any wrong, and if he did, Sharon's anger was usually re-directed at somebody else, while with her father "the feeling went away." Today Sharon maintains: "It's very true, I've idealized my father... and I certainly don't now. I certainly don't, and I have a somewhat more distant relationship with my father... I have a relationship with him, but I'm very cautious with my father."

Sharon's present relationship is not only "more distant" and "cautious," but it also seems more balanced, and definitely more complex. However, judging from Sharon's tone of voice and expressions, the demotion of father from the uncritical and seemingly unproblematic pedestal of idealization still causes Sharon some pain and sorrow: "It's difficult to talk about my father."

Nevertheless, Sharon handles the complexities of her new relationship with her father well. On the one hand she empathizes with him, and appreciates how his, quite unfortunate, life story has contributed to who and how he was, has been, and is. Moreover, she does not repeat the old pattern of reactive extreme stances; she remembers many positive things they have done together, the fun they had together, and what it has meant for her: "I don't want to minimize the things that happened, but also these weren't the only things that happened."
On the other hand, Sharon is not dependant on her father and his approval any more, and thus, she does not have to find excuses for him—and deceive herself. She sees quite clearly what her father's behavior and ways of coping with his problems meant for her, and for the whole family. She says (with a deep sigh): "I am just cautious of him, of being close to my father, because the way my father knows how to be close to people is very... well, for me it was a very unhealthy thing for me, and it was always at the expense of someone else; my mother, my stepmother; at the expense of my relationship with my mother, at the expense of my relationship with my step mother, and my sisters..."

Thus, on the one hand Sharon came to a similar resolution as with her mother: "He also gave in the way, to us, in the way he knew how, the only way that he knew how." She feels compassion for him, for his unfortunate life story, for his heart disease, and even for the impact her distancing has had on him: "I'm really not close to him, and I think it's hard for my Dad." On the other hand she fully realizes how her father's way of being close has been injurious for her, and her whole family: "My father's idea of closeness is not something that I want; it's not good for me.... Now I'd call it something different."

However, there is a sad undertone of something unfinished between Sharon and her father. Most likely Sharon realizes to what degree she outgrew her father, how she managed to free herself and break the vicious circle of the legacy passed on from generation to generation in her family, and how she became an agent in her own life. She would like to see the same effort from her father. When he, for example, talks about feeling guilty in regard to his wife, Sharon discusses with her sisters, "is he really changing?" But then Sharon sees again and again her father as either unable or unwilling to look at himself, and take responsibility for his part in the story. Perhaps at these times Sharon's sense of injustice she has suffered as the consequence of his behavior is most alive. "It's hard with my Dad... Sometimes I feel like... Wow, I wonder if some day he could ever sort of say—not just talk about my mother, but maybe say to me, or to my
sisters—I'm really sorry.... But it's too big for him." Sharon would like to hear his apology at least once in her life, "but I don't know that that will ever happen, and I'm certainly not... [a sigh]... I'm certainly not... I guess expending energy trying to get it happen." Thus, in this sense Sharon emancipated herself from her old injurious relationship with her father, and achieved some, though a somewhat sad, peace.

Also Sharon's relationships with her siblings have substantially changed. Instead of competition, there is much more co-operation among the sisters. Thus, the natural potential of a sibship to provide a lasting and rewarding alliance seems to materialize here. For example, when Sharon experienced emotional distress after re-reading her autobiography and my interpretation of it, she called one of her sisters, and felt free to discuss the problem with her. The sister provided not only the emotional support Sharon needed. In fact, her sister's memory of a particular event for which Sharon felt guilty was very different from, and more plausible than Sharon's own recollection. It brought her a great deal of relief. But also Sharon's memory of her past with her sisters dramatically changed. Whereas in her original autobiography she mainly remembered the fights, animosity, and competition, now her recollections include, perhaps even prevalently, memories of play and fun.

Sharon came to realize that under difficult conditions in her family each sister had to cope in her own way, and thus, the responsibility for animosity and unhealthy competition belongs to her parents, and to what was happening between them, not to her sisters. Today Sharon believes that they were on the same ship going through the same storm, and it brings her closer to her siblings: "You know, we've been through so much together."

According to Sharon, even her relationship with her former main competitor, 11 months younger Wanda, is "much better." Sharon empathizes with Wanda's past animosity: "When I was rebelling, she was looking after things. She was looking upon me as... abandoning her in some way, that she was left with everything, and her anger was directed towards me, when it was
really my parents who were responsible to do that... But I was the eldest... there was a lot of animosity." Moreover, it was father's competitiveness that put the sisters in the position of adversaries, be it in athletic endeavours or in piano playing. Interestingly, Sharon brought up that recently both she and Wanda started playing piano again. But now rather than competition it creates a point of common interest between the two of them. "I think that what we're doing is getting to know each other again, what we are today, not who we were then. It's not easy, because it's so easy to hold on to this thing, and to see the person as you did then..." Perhaps this is the best summary of Sharon's present relationship with all of her sisters; the past seems to be resolved enough so it does not interfere with appreciation of their current relationships that are, according to Sharon, supportive and rewarding.

The presenting problems with which Sharon entered therapy, that is, depression and panic attacks, seem to be resolved, too. Sharon maintains: "I suffer from a depression sometimes, but I don't know that it's... more so than the most people do at times... but never to the extent that I couldn't get out of the bed, or that my life is really affected, or the people in my life are really affected by it." In other words, Sharon feels sad when there is a reason to feel sad, but it is very different from the crippling depressions that used to affect her life. By addressing her sadness, and reasons for it, Sharon usually finds a resolution, and goes on with her life. Nowadays, Sharon may have an occasional "bad dream," but never a dramatic nightmare, accompanied by sleep-walking, as she used to have.

Similarly, Sharon stated: "I never had panic attacks again [after concluding therapy]." She admits that sometimes she experiences strong feelings that are somewhat reminiscent of her panic attacks, because in the past they have led to panic attacks. It usually happens when she faces "any kind of separation issues," when she needs something for herself, is dissatisfied either with her work or in her relationship with her husband, and has to assert herself. "But it's nothing like I did before," Sharon suggests, remembering her terrifying attacks with fully blown clinical
symptoms, sometimes lasting 5 hours. Today Sharon recognizes these feelings as an important warning that something is off in her relationships. Although she still fears separation from important others as a possible consequence, she deals with these feelings, and usually finds a satisfying resolution of her relational problems. She explains: "Because I let everything for so many years accumulate, and I suppressed so many things, especially my emotions, I think, and I just... and I was on a really destructive path... in every way, I mean in terms of my relationships with men... yah, I think it was probably the biggest, really the dominating problem, how it has manifested."

Now Sharon is married, and the mother of a 3 year old son. She has been in a relationship with her husband for 10 years, and for the last 6 years they have been married. Thus, it is the longest intimate relationship of Sharon's life.

We may recall that Sharon's past intimate relationships were usually marred by disturbing feelings of insecurity and jealousy; as a consequence, either Sharon or her partner often felt suffocated in the relationship. It does not seem to be the case in her present relationship: "Sometimes I might feel a little bit something like that [insecurity, jealousy] but... ah... it does not overcome me, or overwhelm me." So, "it's nothing like that," meaning like her past dramatic insecurities. Moreover, when Sharon occasionally feels insecure in her relationship, she speaks to her friends first, and only then, if it is still relevant, to her husband. It helps her to discern what is her role in these insecurities, and what is his contribution. "Otherwise it's too hard on him."

Sharon explains: "That's complicated... I guess I feel secure, for one thing, that my husband loves me, and that... I also, too, I feel secure in myself, much more... I guess my self-esteem isn't based on so much in terms of... on attractiveness or lack thereof, or some ways of comparing myself..." In a sense the perceived stakes seem to be lower now, and so is the anxiety. Sharon believes that in her past "everything I had was focused on my relationships, it was not in balance." As if the love and acceptance by a man in her life was the only and ultimate source of
her acceptance of herself. Having found other sources of self-esteem, and thus, not being exclusively dependent on confirmation of herself by her man, Sharon maintains that "that sort of thing doesn't threaten me any more," or at least not to the previous extent.

When I mentioned Sharon's past pattern of struggling for love but when she achieved it, wanting out of the relationship, she laughed, almost with a flavour of disbelief. "It's different for me, there is no question. I don't feel like I used to in terms of... I don't feel that anxiety, I guess, around when somebody actually... I'm in a stable relationship, I don't feel that anxiety in terms of 'I wanna get out'.... I craved it, but I couldn't handle it." She goes on: "I wasn't comfortable with that kind of closeness, I was afraid of it, really afraid of it." Now she enjoys the stability of her relationship, in which she feels loved, even to the point of sometimes wondering whether it is not too good to be true: "Sometimes I don't believe it. There are times when I think... I can't sort of comprehend that my life is like this. And there is a fear that... it will all... [disappear?]"

Sometimes Sharon addresses these insecurities by talking to her family, or to her husband. Occasionally, she "tests" her husband's love by finding "something wrong," or bringing up some past injury. She is aware that also this is not a helpful response to her insecurities: "It's hard for me at times, but I can't live my life like that, too." She ends up talking about her fears to her friends, or to her husband, and it helps. So, she does not run away from the closeness and intimacy that she, in her past, ambivalently wanted and feared at the same time. Now she enjoys and wants the intimate stability, and occasionally fears losing it. "It's still not... it's somewhat foreign to me, sometimes, to be in this calm, stable life-but I like it [laughing]. Yes, I do, I really do."

Naturally, Sharon and her husband have occasional arguments and disagreements, for example, about money, upbringing of their son, whether or not to move to another house, and so on. Sharon does not believe that the subjects or the form of their arguments are different from those in any other healthy family.
It is interesting to note, however, that Sharon sees herself as more conservative and cautious in financial matters, whereas her husband is more of a risk-taker. With their son she sees herself as more struggling with questions of discipline, what to take seriously, and what to let go, whereas her husband is more easy-going and relaxed. Also, he tends to avoid confronting problems. Unlike her mother, it is Sharon who often initiates the discussion ("Now I deal with things. Actually, more than my husband, because he has a tendency... [to avoid]"). Moreover, sometimes Sharon sees in her husband a male authority figure, and then she struggles to gain some confidence that "what I have to say has some validity," that is, to get her opinion accepted, recognized, and respected. As has been mentioned earlier, something similar happened between her and I during this research project, and as we shall see shortly, it sometimes influences Sharon's relationships with male authority figures at her work. Thus, the powerful schemas, established and learned in her childhood, still play a role in Sharon's life. But she responds to them, or re-enacts them, very differently. She does not distance herself from the problem that is stressful, or from the person whom she perceives in the injurious role; it would not cross her mind to seek a "solution" in a new relationship ("I was very impulsive, and I acted on my impulses.")

First, Sharon is quite sensitive to these situations, and relatively soon recognizes what is going on for her. It helps her to deal with the here and now of the tense situation, undistorted by her previous experiences. With her husband, they usually find a liveable compromise acceptable for both of them.

Sometimes Sharon questions to what extent she has been successful in dealing with her old patterns, to what extent she transfers her old relationships on the present ones, or projects her own thoughts and feelings on present relationships and situations. These doubts are apparently related both to her dealings with her husband, and with male authorities at work. It happens especially when Sharon feels that her point of view has not been accepted or respected: "That's
hard for me, and it was like that with my father... he has a great need to feel superior, and a need for control.... There are situations that somehow mirror that in my life in many ways, whether it's there or not there, whatever, it's hard for me to distinguish, I guess, what exactly... how much of it I'm projecting on the situation, I don't know."

Sharon recognizes that when she has these doubts, she also has "a tendency to assign too much pathology to things that are just normal"; "I think 'Oh, my God, I need more help,' or something." She has been aware that in her past this doubting of her own sanity was a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading her to "give up [on herself] that way." Today she knows how to contain these disturbing self-doubts: "I know that, too, that so much of now what I feel, what I go through is normal, that it's not always something pathological [laughing]." Moreover, "in some ways my husband helped me... Because when I talk to him, he says 'Well, I also feel like that... You don't need to..." Openly sharing her feelings with her siblings and friends has also been helpful in this regard, that is, in recognizing that her concerns have been reassuringly just human.

Regardless of Sharon's self-doubts, it speaks for itself that her relationship with her husband remains, after 10 years together, strong, emotionally invested, and vibrant. Seemingly paradoxically so, because although this relationship is of tremendous importance for Sharon, it is not the only life-important thing for her. She also pursues other interests, and she knows and acknowledges that if, for whatever reason, this relationship could not continue, she would survive it. "I'm happy, and I'm doing things, and, you know, the energy that I have I'm spending in different ways, more creative ways."

Sharon credits her husband for many good things in her marriage. For example, she maintains that when they argue, "he's much more understanding than any other man that I've known." I asked her whether he may be more understanding also because she lets him understand her, lets him know much more of herself, what she thinks and feels, than she let any other man she has known. Sharon conceded that it might well be the case.
One of the most important of Sharon's present relationships is with her son, Brian; Sharon seems to be a loving and devoted mother, and apparently enjoys it. Naturally, she also encounters problems in this relationship. "He is very much as I was-emotional, physical, active, assertive... I see where my mother got caught with me." She maintains: "I have no problem playing with him and loving him; the discipline part is difficult." This awareness, however, also helps her to avoid the repetition of her own relationship with her mother. She pauses before she reacts, and tries to avoid power-struggles and emotional retaliations with her son. When, for example, Brian gives her his 3 year old's "I hate you" when he does not get his way, Sharon is aware that it hurts but she does not feel "devastated." She takes it for what it is-a frustrated response of a 3 year old-and does not respond in kind. Moreover, Sharon is also aware of differences between her own, and her mother's situations. She feels supported by her husband, and in a co-operative rather than competitive relationship with him. Thus, when he sometimes points out to her that she "perhaps over-reacted," she accepts it from him, and it usually calms her down. She believes that their son actually benefits from the complementarity in their parental approaches. Finally, Sharon recognizes that her parenting doubts and problems are normal for any parent, and so, she does not deprecate herself or panic in difficult situations. Thus, also in her relationship with her son Sharon has successfully interrupted the vicious circle of her family legacy.

For years now Sharon has been working with youths in trouble with the law. As mentioned before, occasionally she encounters problems with male authority figures, namely when she feels controlled or disregarded. She is, however, aware of the pattern, and instead of blindly reacting she is able to pause, consider her own as well as the other person's contribution to the problem, and then talk it through. Again, she believes that her sense of support and stability in her family is also helpful in this regard. She is apparently successful in resolving these occasional problems; the length of her service with the same organization, and her promotions seem to be the best evidence. However, her promotion may also have some unexpected destabilizing effect; Sharon
likes her field of work, but does not like the administrative part of her position. Thus, she feels that she is presently in transition, deciding what to do next. She has been considering going back to school for master's degree either in social work or in counselling psychology.

This transitional period (it happens to coincide with some other changes in her life, like moving to a new home) also brings up some problems. Sharon finds it difficult to make a final decision about her next career path. Moreover, she apparently feels considerable loyalty to her employer, co-workers, and her work, and so, she sometimes feels guilty that she considers "abandoning all that": "They are the same, nothing changed, it's me who has changed, and my goals and needs are different now." It is not easy for her to acknowledge and pursue her own needs and goals because of guilt. Yet she recognizes that her difficulties with career transition are "normal," and that they make sense; she believes that she is inching her way to a decision that will meet her desires and needs.

Although it may also be a part of a normal maturation process, the way Sharon deals with her career decisions today is very different from her past patterns. For example, in her past Sharon "got stuck" in a summer job (as a flight attendant) much longer than she intended to, and than she considered "healthy" for her. Today she addresses her dissatisfaction, and deals with it, although it is not easy. Let us also appreciate how qualitatively different her present struggles are as compared to her previous ones. Some old questions and problems, consistent with her schemas, keep reemerging (for example, what is she entitled to, where is the boundary between her responsibility to herself and to others), but she approaches them differently, and seems to be finding more satisfying solutions.

Sharon feels generally quite optimistic about her future, but it is not an unqualified or naive optimism. "There are things that happen in life that you can't control. I can't control other people's behavior, or what other people choose to do, or not to... I see my future positively." However, "if something happens, for whatever reason, if something happens in my life that
would be really difficult... I sometimes think like if something happens with my husband and I, or if something happens with my child, I... that I would be able to handle it, that I would... that I could go on... but... maybe I wouldn't feel like that would necessarily be all my fault, too [laughing]. Or I may feel like that for a period of time, but I think I'd be able to... feel differently." In other words, Sharon believes in herself, and her ability to overcome obstacles no matter how difficult they might be. At the same time Sharon claims that her relationships with her husband and son are the most important in her current life, and she sees as the biggest challenge for her future to be able to sustain these relationships, and to keep them as rewarding as they are.

Sharon is aware that in the future she will still have to keep in check her "tendency to feel responsible for everything," that leads to her feeling guilty, and to doubting her sanity ("blaming myself that I'm crazy"): "There are periods when I still fall into that, in certain situations." Also, Sharon maintains, "I'm prone to fall into certain kinds of relationships that are unhealthy for me." For example, Sharon's relationship with her sister-in-law "is very reminiscent of my relationship with my Mum... because she needs a lot... I have a hard time saying no; it ends up in fights." "I end up many times in the situations when I think that I should," Sharon continues. "At work I have the same situations, too, that I start feeling guilty that I'm not doing enough. But it's time-limited." Thus, although Sharon resents that sometimes it takes her a while "to determine what's going on," for example, feeling "not able to say no, not able to set limits," she recognizes her patterns and understands them, and usually takes corrective action: "I'm much better at that." She sees these problems as reminders of her past that she would like to let go of.

However, perhaps even more interesting is what Sharon would like to "hold on to." She maintains that her self-critical attitude "serves me well in the right context." It provides her with certain humbleness, it is a strong ally for her curiosity, and a motivator to learn and discover more, and it allows her to see and absorb points of view different from her own. Similarly, her
ability to distance herself is quite useful, for example, in her relationship with her father. She is quite satisfied that in complex situations she is capable of separating her thoughts from her emotions, and instead of feeling overwhelmed, to process each before trying to find some harmonized solutions. These personality features and coping strategies were in the past, when taken to extremes, self-defeating for her. However, today Sharon sees them as her strength, and uses them to her benefit.

But the main feature she would like to fully restore and hold on to is "the feistiness I had as a little girl;" "I was an explorer, creative and gutsy.... When I got onto something, I was really determined, focused... there is still that drive there in me." It is interesting that these are exactly the features that she believed were the source of her troubles when she was a little girl. These were the features for which she was labelled as "bad," mainly by her mother, and she came to believe in her "badness." Yet, today she sees them as her major strength that, in some way, truly define her as who she was, has been, is, and would like to be in her future. As a matter of fact, the gutsiness, inquisitiveness, and perseverance of her very participation in this project may be the best example of this strength, and evidence that she holds it.

Finally, Sharon commented on what she thought was helpful in her therapy. She acknowledged that an important factor was her own motivation: "I know I wanted to change, I know I did, I had a real desire to change." Then Sharon commented, repeatedly and in a variety of forms, on beneficial effects of consistency, stability, and the focused structure of the process: "... just going there and dealing with things, on the week-to-week basis," "being forced to deal with what was going on rather than sweeping under the table," "not being able to run away," "it was something consistent; there was someone who every week listened to me." Finally, Sharon commented on her therapist, his therapeutic stance, and her relationship with him: "... somebody listening to me and caring... that somebody objective, I suppose... and didn't see me as, you know, as bad.... believing in me, that my life didn't have to stay the same, and repeat itself. That
The Interview with Significant Other

Sharon suggested for this interview to meet with her childhood friend, Kim. They have known each other since they were both 8 years old; at different times Sharon used to live with Kim and her mother in their house, and they have remained close friends. Sharon pre-approved the following two questions for Kim: (1) You have known Sharon for a long time. Have you noticed in her any changes that, in your mind, may be connected with her therapy? If yes, how would you describe these changes?, and (2) Have these changes influenced your relationship?

Kim maintained that it was "difficult to pinpoint what's maturity and age," and what has clearly been the influence of counselling. Nevertheless, she immediately went on: "I've definitely noticed she was, I'd say, the most relaxed that I've ever seen her [after counselling]. Less frantic about things, not so tightly wound in general, and probably, I guess, she'd learned to sort of... really identify where her own boundaries were in her relationships."

Kim remembered the turbulent times in Sharon's twenties; especially during her difficult times Sharon often lived with Kim, and they shared a lot, and knew a lot about each other: "It used to be hard to watch, you know, unhealthy things to go on, when you knew that she wasn't happy, and she threw herself in to these situations, like abusive relationships..." Kim tried to help, or even stop Sharon's self-destructive actions, but found herself powerless to do so. "So, these were things very hard to watch, as a friend; somebody you really love to do these things. So, there was a definite change when she realized, I think, what was better for her to do. To stop these kind of things, and consciously make a decision that this is good or not good for me to be doing." Kim mainly referred here to Sharon's relationships with men, and she thought that Sharon's change in this regard has been self-evident.

Kim elaborated on her observation that Sharon became "more relaxed, probably more focused on the moment, like less distracted, I guess, with other things. So, when you're with her,
she seems to be more focused on what you are talking about, and things like that. So, sort of more subtle changes as well."

Kim also saw some changes in Sharon's "way of thinking": "Her thinking back then was very much sort of a pleasing kind of thing, with men in general, and I think she had a very inappropriate information-sharing with her father, and that really skewed her own relationships, and how she, maybe, shared her information with them." Kim believes that "there was a definite difference when she realized, you know, again, that you can draw your boundaries in relationships, and you can certainly... should be able to say when something is hurting you, or is not working for you, and you don't have to be pleasing. See, she is now much more vocal in a constructive way, not in an underhanded way of showing if something isn't working. Actually, she knows how to express that in a more direct manner." So, Kim believes that instead of "acting out" dissatisfaction and anger Sharon uses constructive dialogue, in which she acknowledges her feelings, to address her needs. "The dialogue is much more important in her communication... and the anger is not coming out in some other strange behavior... She is much more direct, and not afraid of it."

Kim maintains that this is a "definite change" not only in Sharon's relationship with men, but with people in general. She is "less people pleasing... and more honest and direct."

Kim considered her relationship with Sharon being "always very open." During her therapy, Sharon shared many of her thoughts and feelings with Kim, and it "sort of deepened our relationship, having that sort of honesty, and probably allowed me to see things, from my own perspective, more clearly." Thus, Kim believes that Sharon's therapy in some ways helped her, too. Sharon's "being relaxed and more in touch with her own feelings" makes their relationship more open, and also Kim feels freer to openly discuss with Sharon her own problems or doubts. For example, unlike in the past, they can discuss with each other their "ways of relating to other people." It brings a new dimension of intimacy into their relationship, and it stimulates "new
ways of thinking" about important matters in their lives. Another example: Sharon's resolution of
guilt, related to her family history, according to Kim also helped her to come to her own
resolution of similar feelings. It happened thanks to Sharon's (to a degree newly found) ability
and willingness to share her own experience. "There are a lot of different new communication
lines that opened up from her own experience in therapy." Kim goes on: "It's interesting how one
person's own sort of path, and looking for solutions, in their life, obviously does affect everybody
around them... It's that sort of holistic thing... as I say, in the end her experience benefitted me,
you know, at a personal level as well as in our relationship."

Altogether, Kim's observations are consistent and in agreement with Sharon's own view of
her changes. The self-defeating relationships with men have stopped, her relationships with
people in general have changed, Sharon resolved her haunting feelings about her past, became
more relaxed, open, and able to share her feelings, thoughts, and experiences with others, became
more capable of asserting her needs, wishes, or dissatisfactions directly with others, became
more focused, and so on. Also, other people started relating to Sharon differently.

During the interview I was aware that I wanted to ask many other questions, but one in
particular was "burning." Because of our prior agreement, I resisted the temptation. However, it
would be curious to know what it means for Kim, and for her relationship with Sharon, that she
does not have to hurt any more when intimately sharing Sharon's life.

The Portrait of Change

Sharon's change is a story of transformation from patiency to agency in her life, in the
context of a new, maturely complex interpretation of her world, and the recognition and
acceptance of herself. She reviewed her whole life story, that is, who she was, her relationships
with significant others that formed her sense of herself, and her fundamental view of her position
in-the-world, leading to the given point in her life.

First, her story appeared to be scripted by powers independent of her, over which she had no
control. The story did not seem to make sense to her; she could not grasp its meaning. The plot seemed to be propelled forward on its own, creating repetitive patterns in which she felt repetitively and unjustly injured, and she seemed to have no choices or options in its development. The only thing she could do was to react to this imposed plot, by the means available to her at the time, and under the circumstances. But even her reactions seemed to be predetermined by the plot in which she had no authorship, and the meaning of which she could not grasp.

Her own reactions, however, became inseparably woven into the plot, and helped to maintain her story exactly as it was. Thus, Sharon unwittingly contributed to her injurious and self-defeating life story, and unwittingly maintained the vicious circle of its plot. Nevertheless, this unconscious reactive contribution could hardly be seen as Sharon's deliberate, agentic authorship; for her the story was "happening to her," as if predetermined and already decided by some merciless fate whose intentions and meaning were impossible to discern, and against which she was defenceless.

In contrast, Sharon's recognition of her dissatisfaction, and her decision to do something about it, that is, to seek counselling help, was an active, agentic step to change her life in its own right. True to her original belief system, however, she started counselling as a patient. She would credit counselling with externally interrupting her self-defeating life patterns, that is, imposing rather than providing the structure, stability, and consistency (for example, "being forced to deal with what was going on rather than sweeping under the table," or "not being able to run away"). Nevertheless, it was Sharon's decision to stay and persist with the counselling regimen; gradually she recognized counselling conditions as a viable option to her own habitual coping patterns. She chose this option as beneficial, and started adopting it in her life.

Certainly, Sharon's change was more complex and substantial than that; her behavioral changes were an indivisible part of that more fundamental change. The substantial change in her
life seemed to have a common denominator, reflected in every particular instance of change in her daily life as well as in her approach to counselling, which may be a good example to illuminate the point. Sharon started her life, as well as her counselling, as a powerless victim of circumstances, a patient, that is, as a person to whom things were done or happened, and she could only react to it by the means available to her at that time, and under the circumstances. Both in counselling and in her daily life she was gradually becoming, and then became, an agent in her own life, that is, a person who creates and directs her life, and who substantially influences what and how things happen in her life. The transformation from patiency to agency may be seen as both the cause and the effect of Sharon's change, and at the same time its very substance.

In counselling, Sharon was both challenged and safely free to explore the meaning of her life story, and examine her basic beliefs about herself, others, mutual relationships, and generally, about her position in and the functioning of the world. These beliefs, formed in her early childhood, under particular circumstances, and later becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, constituted Sharon's sense of her personal identity, of her Self; up until now they were taken for granted. This is who she was, and how her world was.

In the new and helpful conditions of counselling, incompatible with her old coping patterns and with her old interpretation of the world, Sharon attained a new, maturely complex interpretation of herself and her world. This complex understanding was naturally not available to her in her childhood, and later in her life could not have developed exactly because she was trapped in her simplistic interpretation of her life story. In the original version of her story she saw herself, others, and the world in terms of childhood (and later on child-like) simplistic, highly polarized, rigid, absolute, and by its nature extreme dichotomies, like good versus bad, pretty versus ugly, distant versus close, happy versus unhappy, and so on. These dichotomies reduce description and evaluation of human experience to two opposite and mutually exclusive poles, that exclude the complexities and possibilities in the vast space between them; in terms of
these dichotomies this very space seems to cease to exist. Even a radical change of evaluation from one extreme pole to another one leaves the evaluation extreme. Sharon lived in an extreme world, her relationships were extreme, and so was she, with extreme emotions and behavior.

Under beneficial circumstances Sharon fulfilled her adult potential, and reinterpreted her life story within the framework of mature complexity which, simultaneously, was a cause and an effect, and the very substance of achieving her own mature complexity. In her interpretation of her story, and thus, in her life, she moved from absolute to relative, from simple to complex, from extreme to moderate, from imbalanced to balanced, and so on. In her actions, and in her interpretation of her actions, she moved from passive to active voice (as pointed before, from patiency to agency), that is, from being authored by circumstances to authoring her circumstances, from scripted to scripting, from being composed and locked in unconscious reactive repetitions to meaningfully composing her life. These dichotomies, as well as the polarity between the passive and active voice, are very different from the previous ones. In fact, only one side represents a pole, an extreme, a point that is given and rigid, and limits the field. The antonym here does not represent a singular pole, but a vast space of creative and flexible choices, options, variations, combinations, and possibilities, in which the creative author or interpreter has a decisive say.

Interpreted from the maturely complex point of view, Sharon’s story changed its meaning. In the broadest terms, it lost its malevolent intent of an inescapable and merciless destiny. Instead, Sharon saw herself and important others in her life as complex individuals with their own complex stories, in complex interactions, with complex but prevalently benevolent motivations, even if those may have had, in this complex context, very unfortunate consequences. In other words, Sharon saw and accepted herself and others in much more true human dimensions; she let go of her previous extreme and limiting stances, for example, of idealization or vilification. Her very memory of herself, others, and of her relationships changed, too; her memory became
broader and more complex. For example, she could remember, and include in her story, some loving moments with her mother or sisters, less than ideal experiences with her father, and so on. Thus, her whole story obtained more human dimensions, its meaning became understandable, and its relationships, to herself or to others, became more acceptable and balanced. Instead of a story that produced the vicious circles of her dissatisfaction, Sharon reconstructed her story so she could meaningfully live with it. With its new meaning, she could live with her past, and so she could live with her present, and with the anticipated future.

In this process Sharon recovered or rediscovered herself. She remembered herself being a spunky, curious, adventurous, feisty, physically active, and emotionally expressive child in the beginning of her story. In the circumstances of her childhood, these qualities were not accepted, and often got her in trouble. But these personality features were who she was, and thus, in her mind, she was not accepted, she was trouble. Sharon dealt with it by either suppressing these characteristics, or reactively pushing them to extremes; neither seemed to work to her benefit, and so, who she was did not seem to work.

In counselling, Sharon realized the complexity of the stories of her significant others, and the complexity of the particular configuration and interactions of their stories. She realized that their stories were troubled in their own way, and their configuration was troubled, too. There was nothing inherently and irreparably "wrong" in who she was, a feeling that for years used to haunt her. Trouble was in her circumstances, and later on in how she learned to view herself and deal with herself, that is, in how her own story became troubled.

Sharon started actively creating new circumstances and relationships in which she could be herself, or who she was in the first place, and feel accepted. Most likely, the counselling conditions and relationship could have served as a good model for it. On the other hand, exactly who she was, that is, her personal characteristics that she had doubted for so long and now felt freer to display, allowed her and helped her to create these more accepting relationships and
circumstances. Thus, she discovered that what she had thought to be her crucial flaws or shortcomings were in fact her major strengths, when used differently, and under different circumstances. She could live with herself.

Figuratively speaking, we have been allowed to visit Sharon's life twice, at two very different points in her life. Let us draw two contrasting portraits depicting what we saw in these visits, and how we understood it. Besides providing a summary of this case study, the portraits may support our previous, somewhat abstract, claims of Sharon's change, and ground them in specific instances and examples of the change in her life story.

The first visit presented Sharon as a young, intelligent, physically healthy, attractive woman, who was very dissatisfied with her life. She was seriously depressed, and suffered from panic attacks; she felt that she could not cope with her life. She resented her past, detested her present, and did not have much hope for her future.

She believed that her mother had never loved her, and somehow it was her own fault. First, simply because she was, and second, because of how she was: an active, emotional, curious child. So, she felt bad, ugly, unloved, and unloveable; the personal features she had started with, and that had constituted who she had been and was, were also "bad" and not helpful. The only emotion coming from her mother that she could recall was anger, to which she had responded with her own anger. Thus, the only "allowable" emotion seemed to be anger, expressed in destructive ways. Now her mother was dead. The relationship seemed to be forever irreparable, and Sharon believed that her mother's death had also somehow been her fault.

Her father was more capable of accepting her as she was, and so she loved him, idealized him, and strived to be his loyal ally. But his personal style of relating to others was self-indulgent and self-serving, breaking culturally and morally accepted interpersonal boundaries; he could not have been a loyal ally to her, nor to any woman. His relationships with women were messy and disastrous; women who loved him usually paid dearly. So did Sharon. In her-inappropriately
sexualized-relationship with him she learned-again, inappropriately early-perhaps the most troubled version of human sexual relationships; remember, he was her needed ally, and her admired male authority figure. She could not blindly miss all the pain his way of relating visited on other women, and on her; it took her a lot of pleasing, denial, deception, and self-deception to be and remain his loyal ally. But he did not reciprocate; the unrestricted self-serving disloyalty was the substantial part of his relationships. His behavior played havoc in the family, and finally heavily contributed to its breakup. Sharon, perhaps as his ally (although peculiarly used in the one-sided alliance), felt somehow responsible for all that went wrong in her family.

The family circumstances pitted siblings against each other. All Sharon could remember were fights, and a competition for acceptance and belonging between her and her siblings. They all struggled with problems that were beyond their control and their comprehension. They, however, somehow blamed themselves and each other for their failure to shoulder and resolve the family problems. So, Sharon could not talk to them about her problems, pain, and dissatisfaction. In its own turn, that was also a part of her problems, her sense of isolation and not belonging.

She tried almost frantically to find some sense of belonging, acceptance, and confirmation of her worthiness as a woman and a human being, in sexual relationships. As if it were the only and the last chance to find what she so desperately wanted and needed. But, like a vicious circle, the more desperately she tried, the less it seemed to work. Moreover, she repeated in her relationships attitudes that she learned from her unfortunate hero and teacher, mixed with equally unfortunate coping strategies of her female role model, and so, her relationships had little chance of succeeding either. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, it confirmed her feelings of worthlessness, inadequacy, and unloveable loneliness. She questioned whether she, like her father, brought to her partners only pain and disaster. Then, she believed, there must have been something terribly wrong with her.

She found herself a summer job that had often been publicly perceived as a confirmation of
successful femininity, and had been enveloped in sexual fantasies. She stayed in that job far too long for her curious intellect to be satisfied, while the confirmation of self did not seem to be happening. After some time she was so depressed that it was difficult to get up in the morning. She suffered from nightmares, and after a particularly terrifying one she, in panic, injured herself so badly that it put her off her work for a long time.

She felt that she could not go on like that. She tried a relationship with a man who seemed to be very different from all of her previous partners, but she was the same. The relationship did not work out, and she was back to her old unrewarding patterns. She finished her university degree, broadened her interests, found a new career path, but she was still dissatisfied with her life. Her beliefs about self, others, and her position in the world remained virtually the same.

Since childhood she had been suffering from terrifying nightmares that she had never quite understood. In her mind, it was just another instance of something being wrong with her. She was deeply depressed. Her past seemed to be so bad that she could not dare to even think about it. Her present was unrewarding and very disturbing; she had developed panic attacks that both petrified her and functionally crippled her. There seemed to be nobody she could really talk to about her predicament. She could not believe that she might ever feel better. And she felt tremendously guilty, as if it all were her fault, because she was, has been, and is somehow fundamentally and irremediably defective.

The second visit offered a very different picture. Sharon is still young, intelligent, physically healthy, and attractive, although obviously older and more mature. Her maturity, however, does not seem to be just a function of her chronological age and experience, naturally flowing from her previous story, and consistently developing its plot. Her story of her past has changed, and so has her present, and her anticipated future.

She is herself a wife and a mother now, and holds a responsible job. She also pursues a variety of hobbies and interests. She struggles with the mature problems and responsibilities of
her daily life; sometimes to her satisfaction, sometimes not. Upsets, however, do not have the same debilitating effect on her as before. She seems to be satisfied with her life, although she still strives for change, improvement, and further achievements in her life.

She does not think that often about her past; she is quite busy with taking care of her daily problems, and with planning her future which, to a large extent, depends on her resolution of her present problems. When she does think about her past, it can still bring up powerful emotions in her. But they do not have the haunting effect on her as before. So, she returns to her present that builds her future.

She has achieved some sense of peace with her parents and siblings. She still knows that in her relationship with her mother she was deprived of something very important, namely of the sense of mother's love. She does not deny it, but she does not see her mother as malevolent, and thus, "bad," or herself as "bad," and thus, not deserving the love. She has developed a great deal of empathy for her mother, and her circumstances, and she has developed empathy for herself, and her own circumstances. So, instead of the raging anger with the "infinite badness," a deep sense of sadness has emerged; in her own words, because their relationship "didn't have a chance." The latter feeling, virtually a life stance, is somehow easier to live with, despite its profound complexity as compared with the previous rage.

Achieving peace with her father followed a similar path, although in an opposite direction. She still appreciates how his more supportive, tolerant, playful, and relaxed approach has been important for her, especially in view of the tense relationship with her mother. However, she does not idealize him any more; she does not see him the source of some "infinite good." She is fully aware of the price many women, including her mother and herself, have had to pay for his self-serving ways of relating to them. And, most importantly, she is capable of facing, holding, and integrating both views, in its considerable complexity, whereas falling into angry outrage, and seeing him as "infinitely bad," could have been a seemingly "simpler solution." Thus, she
visits him periodically, lets him enjoy his grandson, empathizes with his unfortunate life story, and with his current health problems. In some ways she feels sorry for what he has done with his life, and how he has influenced the lives of others. But she does not deceive herself any more, she does not defer to him, and does not try to please him and mould herself to achieve his approval, acceptance, and loyalty. She keeps a cautious distance from him, aware of the disastrous qualities in his ways of being close, and of her own inability to change him. It is not a happy-ending story, and the relationship is far from picture-ideal. She knows it, and there is sadness in her voice when she talks about her father, and their relationship. Yet it seems to be more liveable than before.

Also her relationships with her siblings are very different, and more rewarding. She came to understand that all of them were engaged in competitive, mutually adversarial relationships not due to some inherent "badness" in them, but because of troubled family circumstances and the parental relationship; each sibling had to cope with these difficult circumstances in her own way. Thus, she does not hold bitterness towards them, and this letting go of their past stances seems to be mutual. There is a sense of building their relationships anew, this time not based on predetermined circumstances they found themselves in, but on who they are at the present, and what they want to have. The common past seems to be more of a unifying than dividing influence. So, she can enjoy her siblings company as well as their support when it is needed.

She is married now, and has her own family. Curiously, her husband has some features reminiscent of her father, and her previous boyfriends. For example, she describes him as a somewhat easy-going risk-taker. No doubt, in many important ways he is also different; for example, he is loyal. But most importantly, she seems to be different. Not in a sense that she would never experience some of her old self-doubts and insecurities. But they never reach extremes that would suffocate their relationship, and she never runs to another relationship to "solve" her problems. She talks to her husband, and resolves her—or, more accurately, their-
problems with him. The same may be said about their normal marital arguments and
disagreements. She is not desperate when her husband is of a different opinion or approaches
things differently; she does not need his total agreement to feel accepted, supported, and
validated, and she does not run to another man for confirmation of herself. It is important to her
that he respects her different opinion, but also she can handle the complexity of his different
truths. They talk, and usually they find a liveable compromise. Thus, it is by no means a fairy­
tale "happily ever after" relationship. There is the tension between two partners who do not
merge with each other, and there is the risk of a huge mutual emotional investment. She can take
the separateness, and the risk. She is satisfied in this relationship, it means a lot for her, and she
strives to keep it intact. However, she claims that should this relationship, the best she has ever
experienced, dissolve, for whatever reason, she will survive it. It is not the only and vital source
of her self-esteem. In its own turn, it may be a substantial reason why this relationship works to
her satisfaction; she does not fear being close to her husband, and she enjoys the stability of her
relationship.

She has a 3 year old son whom she loves very much. In a sense it is a new type of a
relationship for her. She is very aware that her own parents have not been a good model to
follow, but she consciously strives to use what she has learned in a helpful way, trying to avoid
an automatic repetition of her parents' mistakes. Her son in many ways reminds her of herself; he
is a spunky, curious, emotional, and physically active child. She admits that she learns from him
about herself, her mother, and their relationship. Sometimes she wonders whether, due to her
own past, she struggles more than other parents to find just the "right" balance in her parenting.
Then she talks to her husband and friends, looks around, and sees that her struggles are normal,
and she is doing just fine. She seems to be a loving, devoted, and "good enough" mother.
Regardless of her parental fears, anxieties, and unavoidable trials and errors, she is happy that
she has this relationship, and she is fully emotionally invested in it.
Relationships with her friends also seem to be more rewarding than ever before. She feels far more sure about what she is doing in her life, there is not much to hide, and she feels free to be open with her friends; it includes sharing her emotions with them. She has become more focused, more settled, and thus, has more concerns in common with her friends. Moreover, they do not have to worry about her being self-destructive, and if there are some mutual concerns to be addressed, they seem to be speakable. She enjoys this new level of intimacy with her friends, the closeness, sharing, and mutual support in good or not so good times.

She is very interested in her career field. Although she encounters usual problems at her work, she believes in what she is doing, and she is willing to invest herself in it. Once a wayward kid herself, now she is helping children who are in trouble with the law. She plans to go back to university for her graduate degree. But again, she does not seem to pursue a one-sided, extreme over-investment. She also plans changes in her work so she can spend more time with her son, husband, and in pursuit of her creative hobbies, such as music and painting.

Unlike in her past, she feels free to experience a full range of sometimes very complex emotions, and she feels free to share them with those who are close to her. Naturally, it includes anger or sadness, but she does not experience the debilitating depressions as before. So are gone her frightening nightmares and panic attacks. Her life seems to be a mixture of satisfying and less satisfying, challenging experiences, victories and losses, peaks and valleys, and everything in between; she can take it, and handle it. She can live with it.

These two contrasting portraits give many and various specific examples of profound changes in Sharon’s life story. The specificity reveals the emotional, cognitive, and conative unity and congruence of her changes. All of these specific instances seem to be linked with Sharon’s agency, maturely complex interpretation of her world, and rediscovery of herself and her needs.

For example, she reinterpreted her role and role of others in all of her major relationships. In
case of her parents, and her relationship with them, Sharon did not move from de-vilification to idealization, or from de-idealization to demonization, as we could have expected within her old childlike interpretive framework. This, by its nature reactive, change would have still left her relationships in the domain of polarized extremes. Instead, her new interpretive framework moves her story, people that populate it, and their relationships far beyond the limiting, rigid and absolute polarities; her story becomes a story of human complexities that the previous framework could not address.

Sharon has emancipated herself from her parents. She understands the complexity of their individual stories, and the complexity of their interactions. She does not see her parents as an absolute-"good" or "bad"-authority any more; she does not need to react to them, either by defeating them or deferring to them. Instead, she is free to pursue her own needs in her relationships with them. At the same time she accepts her own complex story, and thus, she knows who she was, has been, and is, and what her needs are. With her deceased mother, it is easier for Sharon to remember her mother's often troubled and unfortunate love than not being loved at all. In its human dimensions this version of the story seems to be closer to a plausible truth, acceptable, and understandable. On the other hand, Sharon does not need the unfortunate consequences of her father's love, and so, although she still loves him, she distances from him. Interestingly, the coping strategy of distancing, which has been self-defeating when used reactively and indiscriminately, now serves her as her strength, and protects her from repetitions of destructive patterns previously so typical in this relationship.

The change in her relationship to her siblings, intimate partner, and to herself seems to reflect the same pattern. Moreover, her new relationship with her son follows the same common path. It may be illuminating to take a brief closer look at her present most important relationship of her choice, that is, with her husband.

Sharon found in her marriage what she had been, quite desperately, seeking all her life, and at
the same time, what she had been running away from. That is, she achieved the sense of love, acceptance, belonging, and secure stability. However, she does not see in her husband some sort of higher authority who is the only and ultimate source of meeting her needs, and who may arbitrarily dispense their satisfaction or deprive her of it. She does not have to defer to him, nor to defeat him. She is not a passive patient in this relationship, a person to whom things are done or happen. Instead, she actively creates the conditions for her stability, acceptance, and belonging. For example, she shares and resolves her problems with him rather than reactively running away. She accepts the complexity of his story, and makes her story acceptable to him by revealing and sharing it with him. He does not have to be "absolutely on her side" by agreeing with everything, or instantly granting any of her wishes. As an agent in her own life, she knows that even if this very important relationship would, for any reason, dissolve, she would survive it. The satisfaction of her needs is not entirely in somebody else's hands; she has co-created her own stability and intimacy, and she may do it again. So, she feels free being herself with her husband, in all of her human complexity. She recognizes her needs, and feels free to pursue them. At the same time, circularly, Sharon's acceptance of herself, and her willingness to take the perceived risk of sharing herself with him as she is, has been her agentic contribution to their shared intimacy and stability. In its own turn, the sense of stabile intimacy in her marriage frees Sharon to pursue her other needs and interest, be it professional endeavours, relationships with siblings and friends, or her hobbies. It lessens the burden on her marriage, and enriches it. The relationship is not the only and absolute source of her satisfaction, and the confirmation of her worthiness and "goodness." She returns home to her husband as to her secure base of her own choice, and there is plenty to talk about and share between the two of them.

It may also be illuminating to look at another of Sharon's present relationships, this time to her career that is very important for her. Originally, her decision to start helping others, namely the street kids and women released from a prison, came up in a reactive context. It was the time
when Sharon tried to change her life by switching to something opposite from that which did not seem to work for her, that is, by switching polarities in her old extreme dichotomies. She started going out with a man who was very different from all of her previous partners, she stopped drifting in her life and finished her degree, she moved from her self-cantered stance to public interest and political activism, and she left her "decadent" job in order to do something that she would consider useful and meaningful. All of these changes have the strong undertone of an effort to emancipate herself from her father by rebellious reaction; her father was prevalently interested in money, power, women, and social status, with clearly self-serving attitudes, especially towards women and children. But a reactive change could be hardly agentic; in deferring to or defying the authority, one is still dependent on it, and his or her choices only react to it. At that time, Sharon's changes did not bring her the expected relief; she, in her vision of herself, others, and her position in-the-world, remained the same.

Yet, she had a memory of herself, what she was, and what she wanted to be. She had a desire to be agentic, and she wanted to emancipate herself. Her choice of her new career path was far from accidental, though first somewhat reactive. She, however, created an opportunity to become an agent, and she became one during the process. Due to her circumstances, she used to be herself a wayward child, on the brink of trouble with the law. Now she actively helps other children who are in trouble with the law, and shows them that they, too, can overcome their circumstances. Sharon's career path reflects her personal development, and is an indivisible part of it. Naturally, her work has a deep personal meaning for her, and she finds it rewarding.

Curiously, even Sharon's memory of herself, others, and her relationships with them has changed. In other words, she re-interpreted her life story, and her life story obtained a new meaning for her. The re-interpretation seems to follow the same pattern; from the extreme polarities in the narrative voice to human complexities beyond adherence to either pole, or utilizing simplistic dichotomies to box her experience in between. Her new memories do not
switch from "bad" to "good," or the other way around, nor do they simply include the opposite polarity; they create a new, far more complex story, with very different meaning.

This change does not represent some sort of cognitive manipulation, nor is it limited to cognitive functioning. It goes hand in hand with a substantial change in Sharon's emotional life, and the pattern of this change seems to be consistent with the previously described one. Sharon does not live in a world of "bad" and "good" emotions any more; those "bad" ones to be avoided, and those "good" ones to be pursued, both for any price. While her emotions seem to be less extreme, they are much richer in their spectrum; we may say that she experiences and lives with a full range of emotions. Certainly, she experiences uncomfortable or disturbing emotions, as well as those pleasurable ones, and they are all important to her, have some meaning, and she responds to them and deals with them. Moreover, she believes that her emotions, in their full range and complexity, are normal, and so, shareable with others.

Sharon has re-created her past so she can hold it and live with it in her present, and actively co-create her future. She changed the meaning of her life story, in its whole continuity, and its thematic and stylistic unity. This endeavour is fundamentally different from fabricating or falsifying, by commission or omission, one's life story.

Sharon's new story is actually more humanly plausible and understandable than its previous version, and it can withstand interpersonal checking by its protagonists, uninvolved listeners, or the hero-Sharon-herself. The new meaning encompasses complex human motivations of all the characters, based on their individual complex stories, and their equally complex interactions. So, Sharon's story is not driven by some dark, unintelligible external forces beyond human control. This is a story where particular people do particular things, based on a particular and humanly understandable motivation, with particular consequences. They can also change their motivations and deeds, and expect different consequences. It is uniquely Sharon's story which, at the same time, includes and addresses universal human conditions; it is Sharon's unique version and
constellation of universal human conditions. It makes sense to her, and to others. The story still coherently and exactly accounts for who Sharon has become and is at the present, but her present is very different from what would have been consistent and congruent with the previous version of her story, endowed with its previous meaning. This version, with its new meaning, much broader, richer, and of more human dimensions, is shareable and understandable, both for Sharon and others. Thus, the story reaches its desired goal; from its beginning it has been a story of search for love, acceptance, and belonging.

Case Study 2: The Story of Sam

Sam is a 47 year old, divorced father of 3 children. He is university educated with a postgraduate degree, and for many years has been working as a senior administrator in public service.

He came for the first, screening interview casually dressed, and exactly on time. He seemed to fully understand the "Letter of information;" his clarifying questions were mainly concerned with technical arrangements and details of our future meetings. He read and signed the "Consent form."

Sam appeared to be meeting all the inclusion criteria set for participation in this research project. However, although he believed that his counselling was beneficial, and in this sense successful, he found it difficult to more closely delineate his success. He maintained that "it was the richest experience in my life," and that "it has changed the way of how I see myself, and how I see others in my life." As a matter of fact, he suggested that his motivation to participate in this project has been mainly based on his desire to review, to better understand, and to consolidate in his life the changes he achieved in counselling.

Importantly, almost all of Sam's counselling experience was in group therapy, with the exception of 3-4 initial individual sessions, and a few follow-up individual sessions. In his 3rd week of group therapy he wrote and presented to the group his autobiography. However, shortly after this he wrote and published a booklet depicting the life story of his father, and their
relationship; the booklet was intended for Sam's children. To a large extent it contains the information included in the autobiography, but it also brings up some additional information and new points of view. Sam gave permission to use the booklet as a source along with his autobiography. In the text to follow, the information gleaned from the booklet will be marked as such (i.e., "booklet") to distinguish it from the material obtained from the autobiography.

Unlike in the first case study, the interpretation of Sam's autobiography (and the booklet) will be merged with the information obtained in the Life Story Interview, and with the outcome of the Validation Interview, into one chapter. However, to differentiate the presented material, the information collected in the Life Story Interview will be marked as such, that is, "interview."

The Autobiography and The Life Story Interview: The Family Saga, and its Meaning

Sam's autobiography is a 9-page hand-written document that displays, at many levels, a considerable economy and compression of time and space, sometimes to the point of giving the impression of austerity. The physical economy of space in Sam's handwriting seems to be self-evident. But the compression of Sam's phenomenal time is also difficult to miss. His autobiography is compressed to 8 and a half pages, and many presumably important periods or turning points in his life are treated with a paragraph, a sentence, or seem to be altogether missing. Many important facts, how they happened for him, seem to be missing, and thus, it is often difficult to understand and appreciate how he has gotten from point X to point Y in his life. For example, it is difficult to construe in the reader's mind a coherent picture of his entire childhood. We can put together some bits and pieces of information, and indirectly derive some larger picture of how things were for Sam mainly from the information about the lives of his significant others.

For example, Sam writes: "I always felt a distance from my parents. My father worked hard, was an honest, decent man, though unfulfilled in some respects, and nagged to death by my mother. As I broke away from the bosomy comfort of mother, I began to regard her as a bitter,
insecure woman. She constantly criticised my father..." Sam mentions that "the role model presented to me by my parents' relationship was not good," but he does not say how it has been for him to grow up in this particular constellation, how he has felt about his distance from both parents, or about the distance between them, and how he has reacted to it. Instead, he goes on describing how his father "was unhappy, unfulfilled, and unable to enjoy his life," and his mother "was nagging, interfering and unhappy. She always wanted to control others..."

The pattern is consistent throughout Sam's autobiography, but it is particularly apparent in the memories of his childhood. His significant others, if they are mentioned, seem to come more alive than Sam himself. Importantly, many presumably important others (e.g., friends, peers, children) seem to be also missing in the story. But most importantly, Sam himself seems to be conspicuously missing in his own story.

The genre of Sam's story may explain a lot. Regardless of its brevity and compression, Sam's story is a saga; it is the saga of his family.

By its nature, saga is a narrative account of a heroic pursuit of an idea, a goal, or a mission deemed of supra-individual importance, and often noble. The pursuit may span over extended periods of time, and over generations of heroes. The goal may be developing, refining itself, or changing its outward appearance, but its supra-individual meaning remains constant, creating the thematic unity of the saga. The striving for the goal is what the dramatic plot of a saga is about, and what moves the plot forward.

The heroes, the characters, the episodes, and the circumstances are all judged on whether and how they contribute to the achievement or approximation of the goal, or whether they represent an obstacle or a hindrance in this pursuit. The hero is judged on his loyalty to the supra-individual goal, not necessarily to others; the hero is expected to sacrifice self or others in the name of the goal. The importance of the hero is in the thesis the hero identifies with, carries, and executes. Saga is ideological, and there is not much middle ground in it. The characters and
circumstances that do not contribute to the goal, and thus, to the saga's development, have no room in it. The characters and circumstances that hinder the goal have to be actively fought, overcome, or abandoned. These are the hero's, and the saga's, antithesis; they lend the saga its dramatic tension. Fighting and overcoming the obstacles to the hero's thesis is a subject of the saga's usual multiplicity of episodes; these episodes are, however, prevalently a variation on the same theme. The saga, that is, the hero's thesis, and how to go about its victory, represents a particular view of the world, and how to be in it.

A story can be told only within a certain genre, and the genre allows the telling of only a certain story. Sam lived, understood, and told his life story in the ways of a saga. This is the key in which his life story has been composed.

The saga starts with positioning Sam's father in his (i.e., Sam grandparents') family, and goes on to describe the grandparents. Two sentences appear to be of key importance, with a heavy symbolical load. First, "His father [the grandfather] appeared from nowhere in to a small village in Western England." And then: "[Grandfather] and [Grandmother] moved to R. to look for work, and better prospects." The grandfather was a "farm labourer, and married the daughter of another." The dramatic plot of the grandparents' story may be summarized: A man who appears from nowhere marries a woman of a low status, but they go on to work and struggle hard for better prospects."

Sam father's story appears to repeat this plot right from the beginning, although considerably expanding on it, and adding new dimensions. He faced and fought many obstacles and handicaps; not only those common to the whole family, but also the personal ones. He was "the runt of the family, the nerd. The books he read were knocked from his hands by his older brothers, and he was tormented for his flat-footed, unathletic, intellectual characteristics." He repeatedly won the entrance exams to a prestigious school, only to be prevented from pursuing his goals by his family; they could not afford the financial loss, and they did not attribute much
value to the higher education anyhow. He went on and started working as a gas fitter, thus ensuring financially "better prospects" by hard physical work, that is, in keeping with family tradition. But he did not give up on his dreams, even when challenged with further, in a way supra-human, obstacles. When the war broke out, he became a RAF flight engineer: "His academic and mechanical prowess was recognized" [the booklet]. When his bomber was shot down over Germany, he ended up, wounded, in the POW camp. Not only that "there he met educated men," but under extreme conditions he studied for his envisioned college entrance exams. Upon the end of the war and his return to England, he completed his education, became a teacher, and later the head of Mathematics in a large and respectable school. Besides, he was known for his appreciation of good literature, theatre, and classical music. Sam writes: "Two children were raised with none of the hardship my father had endured, and he lived long enough to see me off to university, which was a first for anyone in the H. family" [the booklet].

Thus, a man from economical, social, intellectual-academic, and cultural "nowhere" has, due to his abilities and persistence, beaten all the odds of social and historical obstacles, and achieved a considerable degree of mastery, recognition, and status in all of these areas. Moreover, he secured "better prospects" for himself and his family even in the areas his own family of origin would not think about, or outright scorned. At a certain point in Sam's life his father became his hero. However, Sam also remembered him as "unhappy, unfulfilled, and unable to enjoy his life." Regardless of his achievements, something seemed to be missing in his life.

At the beginning of the war he married Sam's mother. She was also from a "working class family," and "as was typical, her father drank, and was a tyrant." She followed in the footsteps of her older brother "who turned his back on his family." Sam writes with a certain respect that she "also left home at the age of 20, and travelled to R. to seek a better life." But she apparently never fully transcended the legacy of her origin, and thus, in Sam's memory she is somewhat crude, nagging, critical, and an unhappy woman who always has to get her way. Moreover, he
writes about the time when his father was back to school: "I often forget (or perhaps I am suspicious of) her contribution during this time." And later on: "My mother worked regularly in low-level technical jobs in local factories." She never became Sam's hero.

The point may be further illuminated by Sam's relationship to his only sibling, an 18 months older adoptive sister. He writes: "The only emotion I can remember related to my sister is embarrassment for her coarse, uneducated ways, and how they might appear to my more educated friends. I care little for my sister..." She reminds him of "the vacuum that exists when my family has nothing to offer me, nor me to them."

So, what is the main theme of Sam's saga, its thesis? The proud and capable people who have been put "down" by unjust fate-like forces, will make it "up" through their own hard work and abilities, and will secure better prospects for themselves, their families, and the next generation. With their abilities, determination, and stamina they will overcome all the obstacles raised in their way by society, history, or even their own physical constitution. The characters or circumstances that are not consistent with this theme or hinder it either do not even gain entrance to the story, deemed irrelevant, or have to be overcome, and thus, rendered irrelevant. Even one's own family, when it becomes an obstacle, has to be overcome, and left behind. Whereas the basic theme, and the overall goal, remain constant, the meaning of "better prospects" has been developing and broadening.

Thus, this is Sam's heritage. For the saga to go on, he also has to deal with its major theme, be consistent with it, contribute to it, and develop it. The characters in his part of the saga have to be consistent with the major theme, and contribute to its development. If they are not, or if they even represent an obstacle or a hindrance to its development, they have to be overcome, left behind, or separated from. Then no wonder that so many presumably important others seem to be missing in Sam's life story. Moreover, Sam uses the same yardstick for himself, and for his presence in his own life story. Again, no wonder that so much of Sam is missing in his own
story. Now Sam's leaving out virtually his entire childhood from his autobiography may start making sense; moreover, a notion of a carefree and playful childhood is hardly conceivable within the context of his story. Importantly, the real Sam's story—that is, when Sam appears to be more present himself—seems to start in his late teenage years and early adulthood, when he started appreciating his father's story, and his contribution to the major theme of their family saga. It was approximately the same time when Sam entered university, and started going out with a young woman from a "good"—or should we say a "better"—family. In other words, at the same time when Sam could start personally and actively contributing to the thematic development of his family saga.

At the end of his autobiography, it is apparent that Sam has been consistent with the major theme, and his contribution to its development has been spectacular. He was the very first one in his family to graduate from university. He started a relationship with a young woman from a "higher status" family, but then he turned his back at the status-conscious, and often status-predetermined, England altogether, and moved to Canada. Also, he left behind his family. He was looking for "better prospects," doing what had to be done in the context of his story. "I was following in the footsteps of my uncle G. [mother's brother], my mother, and [the Grandfather]. I was putting real distance between myself and my family, and the friends I met in London. My time in London had been wonderful—academically successful, lots of theatre, and immersion in the best music, drama and art that may to be had. In Vancouver though I was free, I bought a car, shared a house with some weird people, did lots more theatre, met a quiet but interesting woman..." 

In Canada, he completed his PhD, and built his social, economical, and cultural status based on his own abilities and hard work. He got prestigious and rewarding jobs, and achieved top-ranking positions. Most likely, it also entailed a reasonable degree of financial security and wellbeing for himself and his family. He got married, had 4 children, and was "outwardly a
model husband and father." When his marriage did not work out (and as we shall see, it had been consistent with his story, too), he had no problem meeting other women who apparently loved him. He further cultivated his cultural and artistic interests, and had been actively involved in theatre. He had many other successes. Thus, the journey of a "man from nowhere" who set out to seek "better prospects" seemed to be completed, and the quest had been brought to new, spectacular levels.

And yet, at the end of his autobiography, Sam seems to be "unhappy, unfulfilled, and unable to enjoy his life." Incidentally, this is Sam's own description of how he has remembered his father in the beginning of his autobiography. It seems to be a fitting description of Sam's state and experience as well. Thus, there is another common theme. A theme closely linked to the very nature of the story that has been told. A theme Sam is consistent with, and unable to overcome. He is a lonely hero of his saga; he has served its thesis well and with devotion, but at a high personal cost. Nevertheless, paying this cost in the name of a higher goal is expected from the saga's hero.

Many self-doubts, at least symbolically identical with those of his childhood, seem to haunt him. Everything he has achieved seems to be not good enough. His father died long time ago, and Sam "left behind" his mother, sister, and his wife. But even in his new relationship he feels torn, threatened, and dissatisfied. He suspects that he is unable to commit himself; a book titled "Men who can't love" has struck a chord with him. He sees himself as "very insecure, as shown by my jealousy," and he is "getting pretty depressed about this." In conclusion to his reasons for seeking counselling, he states: "I think I have a lot of anger that has yet to be resolved; towards my father, my mother, and Karen [his ex-wife], and women in general."

There seems to be a lot missing, both in Sam's life, and in the story he has told about it. The missing parts may be equally, or even more important than what has been presented. In the context of Sam's story the missing parts make sense; they may equally contribute to the success
of his story, as well as to his deep dissatisfaction with it.

The missing childhood, and the early relationships.

The information Sam gives about his childhood is very limited and restricted, but this, in its own right, may be a very telling piece of information. It may be a true picture of his childhood as he has seen it; limited and restricted. Moreover, his childhood story seems to be prevalently a story of others; it is the story of his parents, of what they did, thought, and believed, but not what they felt. Nor what he felt about them, or what he did and thought in response. As if he were hidden in or behind their story. But it may be an equally telling and true picture of who and what were limiting and restricting his childhood, and how he felt limited and restricted. Sam writes: "As a child, I was always aware of a constant level of disapproval of anything that I did or wanted that was outside my parents' pre-determined mould of what their 'young man' should be." Interestingly, later he writes about his adult self: "I work hard, both professionally and in relationships. I seek constant external validation, so I am driven to do a lot and to do it well."

Here is the initial and perhaps the most direct reference to Sam himself in his childhood: "I was a cute baby and a good boy—good in school, with no weird tricks or problems." In the very next sentence comes a switch or a bridge introducing others while Sam is still present: "However, I always felt distance from my parents." And in the next sentence the important other takes over: "My father worked hard, was an honest, decent man, though unfulfilled in some respects, and nagged to death by my mother." The rest of the paragraph is concerned with quite a critical description of his mother ("a bitter, insecure woman," who was "nagging, interfering," and also very critical and controlling); then comes a brief summary of both parents in which transpires their commonality. They are both described as "unhappy and unfulfilled," but Sam seems to have a differentiated stance to their lack of "happiness and fulfillment."

Sam seems to understand his father better, and he seems to be more on his side, though he did not feel close to him. Or, as Sam puts it in the beginning of the next paragraph: "I wasn't
close to either of them, but for different reasons." Thus, again, he goes on describing his father: "My father was somewhat temperamental, and not a warm man. He could be fun, and was talented." The very next sentence seems to be of special importance: "For years he would get home early and cook supper while I cleaned the house before my mother got home."

This is the only mention of Sam's common activity with his father, or at least what may resemble it. In the interview, Sam also recalled once swimming with his father in the ocean; he was surprised by finding out that his father, deemed hopelessly unathletic, was an accomplished swimmer. There is no suggestion of any common activity with his mother at all in his autobiography. But even then the activity described with his father is more of a parallel than a common one; the father cooking while Sam cleaning the house. What may be in common is the purpose of their activity. One way of interpreting it may be "taking care of, and pleasing their wife and mother." Another plausible, and not necessarily exclusive with the first one, interpretation may be "appeasing her, trying to avoid her nagging and criticism." In the interview Sam explains: "My mother certainly would have been very critical, I think, if that [the supper not cooked, and the house not cleaned] had happened very often. I'd always got a sense that she was going to be... when she came home she would be tired... and I'm just guessing that had that occurred she would be very critical." As we shall see, the theme of pleasing significant women, and avoiding their criticism, has become an important theme in Sam's life.

There were qualities and values Sam could appreciate in his father. Besides being "temperamental, and not a warm man," Sam also remembered that he "could be fun, and was talented." Also, "he loved classical music, good literature, and educated people. But he was not a snob, and hated racism..." In other words, Sam could see redeeming qualities and values in his father; qualities, values, and redemption he had never granted to his mother. Sam learned these qualities and values from his father, appreciated them, and accepted them as his own.

Why Sam identified himself with his father is not quite clear, but the identification itself is
very important. Through this identification he became a carrier of the main thesis of his family saga. Sam believes that it happened when he was about 11 years old, and his mother could not keep up with him intellectually and academically; so, she became somewhat an embarrassment for him, and he turned more to his father (the interview). But then the academic and intellectual excellence or superiority must have already been a valued quality in Sam's mind. Thus, we can only speculate that it might have been a gender identification. Or that his father, though stingy with praise ("No, I don't remember any particular praise from my father" - the interview), was still less critical than Sam's mother. Perhaps distant, but not "nagging and interfering" as the mother was. And Sam shared with his father a similar position; both had to face the nagging, interference, and criticism of an important woman of presumably lower intellectual status, and they had to cope and deal with it. Also, the identification was most likely a gradual and complex process. In any case, Sam did identify himself with his father, but this identification was not based on mutual closeness, nor did it create much closeness between the two of them. Moreover, because Sam valued his father, his father's praise and recognition would have meant a lot for him. But it rarely, if ever, came. Quite sadly, only when Sam started attending university, and both men appeared ready to start a closer relationship, the father died of cancer. Consequently, Sam idealized him, but never fully resolved his relationship with him.

Interestingly, the very first two words in Sam's autobiography are: "My father..." And the very beginning of the booklet, Sam's homage to his father, enlists "Dad's step-by-step guide to personal happiness and self-fulfillment:" the set of rules, values, and qualities his father lived by, and Sam learned from him, accepted, and identified with. They seem to be of crucial importance for Sam's life story, and for our understanding of it; so, let us present them in their entirety, how Sam has seen them, and presented them.

* If you want to be rich and successful, work hard.

* If you want to fall madly in love and live happily ever after, wear nice clothes, wash
regularly, and learn the words to the latest songs.

* Read a lot, and write a lot. In the push-button information age we are now settling into, these skills might gather dust. For anyone to learn the skills in the first place is a miracle, so don't throw them away.

* And when you have children, read a lot to them as well.

* Don't watch too much T.V., or you'll catch that dreaded modern disease-loneliness.

* To build up your resistance to loneliness, you must **do** things. Music, theatre, art, sports, clubs, organisations, just sitting around with your friends—what you do outside of your formal education or your job is just as important as what you do to make money or to earn good grades.

A happy life requires hard work: professionally, socially and spiritually.

Because you see, there is a simple equation of life.

What goes up, must come down.

What you put into life is what you get out of it.

(The booklet)

These are good, noble rules, and they are most likely to be useful in achieving good and noble goals. But their wholesome pragmatism may also be their curse. They come down like a hammer, with a thump of the judges gavel. To listen to Bach just to experience the sheer extasy of elation—it does not seem to agree with these rules. Or to ski to experience the wind in one's hair. The experience itself does not seem to mean that much in the realm of these rules, and even less so the experience of ecstasy. Or that of the wind in one's hair. Thus, if one decides to listen to Bach, or to ski, it may be to learn the counterpoint, or to improve one's short-radius turns.

"Just sitting around with your friends" also has a serious purpose: "To build up your resistance to loneliness." Yes, "you must **do** things" [stress in original] to achieve something in your life, to overcome obstacles, and to secure "better prospects."
These are serious rules, not easy to live by, and impossible to quite fulfill; there is always something more to learn, to improve, or to achieve. Thus, it is not surprising that Sam was "a good boy—good in school, with no weird tricks or problems." And that he was "always aware of a constant level of disapproval" from his parents, and later on became aware of seeking "constant external validation," and being "driven to do a lot and do it well." And that the only mention of friends in his childhood was connected to his step-sister whom he rejected for her coarseness; he felt embarrassed in front of his "more educated friends." The outcome counts here, not the process, and the outcome—with the distant and not praising father, and the outright critical mother—never seems good enough.

In the interview Sam remembers his childhood with "a lot of longing, and sadness... a lot of sadness about it": "I've been always as a child, I think, wishing for something... different. Looking around, and looking at people who are happier, who are wealthier, seem to love and enjoy life, and are more engaged with life than my family, or than I was in my family." When asked to give a few adjectives that would best describe his childhood, Sam replied: "Sad... alienated, I felt alienated... relatively safe, there are no particular... my parents were not bad in any way, but I felt a certain emptiness" (the interview).

Sam considers his childhood empty at least in two, mutually contradicting, senses; in the sense of a playful and careful childhood, and in the sense of a child's limited abilities to contribute to the development of the family saga. So, he leaves his childhood behind, and virtually omits it in his autobiography. Yet, when he revisits it, either mentally or actually going back to England, he feels "very, very deeply emotionally stirred up... I have tears in my eyes" (the interview). Thus, the "emptiness" is packed with meaning in its own right, and the themes developed from this meaning have been, as we shall see, consistently influencing Sam's life. Yet, it is a difficult problem to grasp; what is present is easier to understand that what is, and has been, missing. Sam maintains: "I'm still not clear on what an impact my childhood had" (the
Let us look at other important circumstances that formed Sam, and substantially influenced his life. One of them was the relationship between his parents, as he could see it, understand it, and later has been reenacting it in his own relationships. Sam concludes that "the role model presented to me by my parents' relationship was not good." In regard to his father, he admits that "I probably idolise him now." But if he were angry at him, as others (yes, curiously, others) suggested to him, it would be "for leaving me like that [i.e., dying]. For failing to give me companionship when I needed it as a boy and a teenager, and for not giving me a role model as a husband."

There was the emotional coldness and distance between the parents, and the palpable lack of "happiness and fulfillment" for both of them, and between them. Then there were the mother's nagging and criticisms, often expressing "some sense that my father did not pay enough attention to her. Did not take her out often enough, whether to be romantic, or just being an engaged companion" (the interview). She would criticize his working on math assignments, in the garden, or on the car—and not paying attention to her. Father rarely confronted his wife ("once or twice it did explode"); usually "my father would sort of grumble back, but there wouldn't be a resolution. I guess he wouldn't be silent, but he wouldn't stay up and say 'That's enough, you're wrong, this is my job, this is what I have to do, this is what I choose to do' [in angry, resolute voice]. He would just take it. Just take it, and maybe make a few comments back. I mean he wouldn't say 'Sorry,' or he wouldn't grovel, but he wouldn't stick up for himself" (the interview). But from the context it seems apparent that he would do more of the same, that is, seek a refuge from his critical wife in his solitary activities, exactly for which he has been criticized. Needless to say, we shall encounter this pattern again in Sam's own marriage.

But most importantly, and with a great impact on Sam, mother's criticisms of father "often.... implied a lack of manliness." A "real man" would pay more attention to her and would be more
romantic, would stand up and fight for her when she felt offended by another man, would not waste time in academic or cultural pursuits, or in correcting math assignments, and would earn a better income, presumably thus protecting her from having to work in tiring and unrewarding "low-level technical jobs" (all examples are from the interview). Father, an accomplished mechanic, would install a heating system in the car, purportedly for his wife's comfort. Yet his wife would criticize him that "a real man" would have done it much faster.

What is the import of the story? A man tries to please his woman, in a way he sees fit, which happens to be a tangible, wholesome, pragmatic, materialistic, and a skilled deed. But the woman is not pleased and criticizes him, invoking some dark, intangible, presumably skill- and effort-defeating, unwholesome forces over which the man has no control; she is the ultimate judge of his "manliness." The man is hurt, and goes quietly back to his ways he believes in, and is tangibly good at. In fact, it may appear the only way of defending his self-esteem; to see his way as morally superior and the "right" one, whereas her way as a low, uneducated, and the wrong one. After all, has she not just "proved it" with her remark? And yet the remark hits the core, and the man hurts, doubts himself, and fears the woman and her injustice. And he tries to overcome it by persisting in doing what he believes in, and what is "right." Let us keep this pattern in mind when dealing with Sam's own marriage.

In this interpretation, all depends on whose "truth" we will accept as "true." Sam accepted his father's truth, and naturally, a similar pattern repeated itself in his relationship with his mother, with his wife, and in some form with other important women in his life. For in father's and Sam's view, the mother has not quite made it in the development of the family saga, or at least not in the area where, in their opinion, it counts. She did not achieve their intellectual and academic excellence, and their level of acculturation. She also came from the social, intellectual, cultural and economic "nowhere," but she did not quite overcome her heritage. Importantly, she perhaps even did not try hard enough. Remember, Sam did not see his mother as much of a contributor.
And most likely both men, directly or indirectly, wittingly or unwittingly, let her know that. But these were not the rules the woman chose to live by, or to be judged on. Perhaps according to her own rules, and/or preserving her own self-esteem, she found these imposed criteria and judgments stultifying, and simply not much fun. And she, as other women in Sam life, struck back hard, where it hurt, and at what she deemed to be missing in her partner.

Sam's own relationship with his mother seems to have two stages, and its complexity does not seem to be addressed in his autobiography. The first, presumably at least somewhat rewarding stage, is forgotten, discounted, and taken care of by a single sentence which is, in fact, only a leader, a subordinate clause introducing the second stage: "As I broke away from the bosomy comfort of my mother,...," The second stage is presented as an accepted reality Sam remembers, and if or when he refers to his mother in his autobiography, it is only within the context of this accepted and remembered reality. Whereas the subordinate clause, the only reference to the first stage, represents Sam's direct relationship to his mother, the second stage seems to represent his father's relationship to his mother. The continuation, the principal clause, reads: "... I began to regard her as a bitter, insecure woman. She constantly criticized my father for the work he did, and for not paying her enough attention. Often her criticism of him implied a lack of manliness." There is no redeeming quality in her to be found in Sam's autobiography, and-as compared to father-there is only very limited room left for her in the text, and in Sam's memory.

In his *autobiography* Sam concludes: "My mother? She's still alive. I call her periodically.... [She occasionally comes to Canada, and has a good relationship with Sam's children]... I wouldn't give her much of a grade in how she brought me up. I was clothed, fed, given opportunities, but shown none of the love or behaviour, or given the positive self-image that could see me through my later years, and so here I am. Clearly, she and my father came a long way relative to their experiences. I too have come a long way with my kids. I really should be
more thankful and respectful of my parents (especially my mother), but I'm not." What happened here?

In the interview (conducted after his counselling), Sam hesitantly remembers the first stage of his relationship with his mother: First, he claims that "I'm told...," and then he recalls that "when I was very young, she would actually be the sports coach, so she taught me cricket.... I can remember some aspects of that, yes. And my mother and I being... sharing an interest in sports that my father did not share. Generally, watching the television, or watching the soccer...."

Actually, this interest in sports, which he clearly inherited from his mother (as opposed to his putatively "unathletic" father), substantially influenced his role and position with his school peers, and consequently his professional career choice. Interestingly, he also became an amateur soccer coach to the teams his children played on. But there was no room for this memory of his mother in the saga of his autobiography.

In the interview, Sam would not hesitate for a second when asked whom did he run to when he skinned his knee, or had a similar mishap: "My mother. Certainly, when I was very young, it was my mother, and she was very much the person who would heal, and cuddle, and console... My father... not so, it just didn't occur to me to go to my father then...." Yet, Sam immediately continues: "... but later on, when I became a teenager, I seemed to grow very much farther away from my mother."

Again, the warmer memory of mother is completely missing in the autobiography, whereas the second stage-turning away from mother-seems to be overrepresented; it has even been deemed necessary to stress in the interview. It functions like a principal clause.

As mentioned before, Sam's causal or at least sequential explanation of intellectually outgrowing his mother, and thus, turning to his father, has not sounded too persuasive. Other factors might have been of importance here, too. The timing of his conversion is curious; it happened close to the beginning of his puberty, the time of not only intellectual but also
anatomical and psycho-sexual changes. Also quite telling may be the immediate continuation of
the paragraph previously quoted from his autobiography ("My mother? She is still alive..."); the
paragraph which may represent Sam's (far from resolved) good-bye to his mother. The very next
sentence reads: "For as long as I can remember, my life has been driven by 3 forces."

The first one is "self doubt-I have never quite been sure of myself, or what I do." No success
of achievement seem to be good enough, Sam does not like his own feelings and behaviour, and
does not trust himself or anyone else. If people say they love him, or that he is a good person, "I
don't believe it. They must be after something (as I always am)." These feelings, reportedly well-
known to Sam since his childhood ("for as long as I can remember"), seem to make sense in the
context of his story as we have understood it until now. And so does their outcome: "At the end
of the day when I lie in bed, I am alone and scared and depressed." But Sam connects these
feelings to another "driving force" (the interview) in his life.

In his autobiography, he goes on: "Either as a result of, or it is a cause of my self-doubt, is
my view of myself as being sexually inadequate and unmanly. Even as a small boy, I was aware
of having a small penis. As I grew up, this feeling was reinforced over and over again. Even my
mother remarked on it! I was ridiculed at school by other boys, and my ability to be close to
other men has always been limited by this."

The "third force" is very much connected with the previous one; in fact, it is a reaction to it,
and it is consistent with Sam's story as we know it. "A positive side to my self-doubt and 'cock-
shyness' have [sic] generated some fighting spirit in me. I work hard, both professionally and in
relationships." Besides other areas like work, sports, theater, and so on, Sam, based on his
insecurity, also works hard to please women sexually. So, he overcomes (perceived) obstacles,
and succeeds; his partners are pleased. But it is a "hard work," a compensatory and a task- or an
achievement-oriented activity. And not surprisingly, it is difficult for Sam to allow them to
please him; he receives it with a certain suspicion, wondering what they would expect getting
back from him (the interview). This theme, again, seems to be consistently influencing Sam's relationships, from his childhood to his adult years.

Clearly, in Sam's mind the concern about the size of his penis is the major one, a "possible cause" and a "sure cause" for those other two concerns. It is a problem that has, reportedly, haunted him since his early childhood. And he clearly connects it to his mother, though in his autobiography the connection is presented in a particular sequence. How the concern originated has not been explained; let us remember that one's anatomical size is comparative by its nature, and thus, the concern has to be introduced in some relationship. Then Sam's fears were reinforced by the teasing of his peers, and "Even [his] mother remarked on it!" Interestingly, this is the only exclamation mark to be found in his autobiography.

But the sequence might have been different. The peers might have picked on Sam's insecurity, and teased him. It is highly probable that there has been nothing anatomically or pathologically "wrong" with Sam's penis; later on he has led a rich and satisfying sexual life, with rather appreciative comments from his partners. It is equally probable that the concern had been introduced by Sam's mother.

In the interview, Sam suggests that his mother has always been preoccupied with his penis, namely always wondering-in front of him-whether or not she should have had him circumcised. For Sam it meant that there was something wrong with him, that he was inadequate. This message is deeply and personally injurious, more so because it concerns the loaded, sensitive, and mysterious attributes of gender and sexuality. And especially so when it comes from one's own mother. Also from a mother who doubts and attacks the manliness of her own husband, the boy's father.

Consciously or not, Sam felt injured by his mother. And he reacted to it like his father did, consistent with the family's saga. He was obliging and pleasing, but with a fear, and a cold and distant mistrust. Outwardly, when the circumstances permitted, he overcame his mother
intellectually and academically, thus rendering her injury seemingly irrelevant in this hierarchy of values. Personally, he set out to overcome the perceived constitutional shortcoming or an obstacle, and he successfully managed to do so. But in his memory, and in his life story, no room has been left to remember the fun of playing or watching sports with his mother, or the warmth of her "healing, cuddling, and consoling."

This is, most likely, at least a part of the emptiness Sam keeps referring to; the emptiness or the lack of a warm, positive memory. Later in his life, Sam would resent his own basically critical stance that would preclude him from enjoying whatever other people could enjoy. Most likely, he has not been aware of how his own critical stance resembles that of his mother; her constant criticism he had resented, and found injurious. And he has hardly been aware that his injurious relationship with his mother has been, in various forms, reenacted in relationships with other important women in his life.

The relationship with his father, his mother, and the relationship between the parents, had an essential influence on Sam, forming his basic beliefs about the meaning of male and female authority, intimate partner, and subordinates. Let us briefly consider his relations to peers.

In the autobiography, the description of Sam's relationship with his 18 months older adoptive sister is at the very best sketchy. It may be another example of his "empty" relationships. As a child, he constantly fought with her. Then he distanced himself from her; he became embarrassed "for her coarse, uneducated ways" in front of his "more educated friends." Now he "wishes her well," but has "minimal contact" with her: "I care little for my sister." In his mind, she is the epitome of "the vacuum that exists when my family has nothing to offer me, nor me to them."

In the interview, however, some interesting details came up. She was, for example, somewhat closer to father than Sam when they were young. Although he "didn't perceive that to be a particular difference," "she had a little bit..., she and my father had a fairly nice relationship. My mother again was very critical..." Sam was sure that his sister "certainly helped out some times,"
but he did not remember her regularly *contributing* to the family chores; she was "engaged in
things" somewhere else. "She seems to be absent from that picture when father and I... [cooked
the supper, and cleaned the house]." Sam accepted that to be the "man's role" (the interview), but
let us remember his criticism and "suspicions of her [the mother's] contribution" when father was
back to school. Also curious may be Sam's understanding, though it is not clear where it has
come from, of his parents' initial childlessness which led to the adoption of his sister. According
to Sam, and probably to the family tradition, it was because of his father who came back from the
POW camp badly emaciated. Thus, could she have symbolically represented the father's lack of
manliness, whereas Sam would be its confirmation, another instance of the father's success in
overcoming obstacles?

But let us resist any over-interpretation of this potentially rich material. Because the
important point here is exactly Sam's complete lack of awareness of any possible symbolical
value of his constant fights with his sister. In his mind, it was only about "just being first
somewhere, getting the first choice, getting the most; if there was a candy to divide up, who
would get the most..." (the interview). Needless to say, we shall see some of this pattern again in
Sam's adult relationships with his colleagues.

Through his school days, Sam "always seemed to have 1 or 2 very good male friends, and
enjoyed their company very much" (the interview). But they did not make it to his
autobiography, and understandably so. As transpired in the interview, his strength was
somewhere else, namely in getting along very well with everybody, even with mutually opposing
groups. "I seemed to be able to adapt my approach to the kind of people that they were. So, if
they were highly intellectual, I'd adapt to them. If they were highly athletic, and sort of jocks, I'd
fit with them. Actually, I'd think I had some skill in fitting with both... So, I'd enjoy their
company, and contribute something." Equipped by his father with intellectual abilities and
respect for intellectual pursuit, and by his mother with physical abilities and understanding of
sports, Sam was, metaphorically speaking, "bi-lingual." He not only enjoyed both groups, but he was apparently capable of bridging them, and pulling them together. In this sense he was contributing; this was his role or function among his peers. The same skill seemed to play an important role in his later professional development. Like a bridge, however, he was not exactly on neither shore, in neither group; he was connecting them. In this context the individual friendships, bonds, and commitments play a lesser role; it is already the position of the hero in a saga.

Interestingly, as Sam grew older, "it went much, much more towards the intellectual friends; those who enjoyed music, theater, et cetera. I was engaged much more with them. So, there was a shift, right from athletics, and the physical side..." (the interview). Indeed, in his autobiography, when Sam recounts what he left behind in London when he went to Canada, he includes his friends.

*The contributor.*

Thus, the stage has been set for the next chapter in Sam's story. A chapter in which Sam himself seems to be more present; it is as if he were starting real life, his life, only now. It is, however, consistent with the beliefs and values about self, others, his position in-the-world, and about the world itself that Sam learned, absorbed, and accepted in the initial chapter. Now he feels he is an independent contributor to the development of the family saga. Moreover, a spectacular contributor, and this is what-at least within the context of the given beliefs and values-counts. This is a chapter that for Sam, judging from its presentation in his autobiography, really counts. And yet, it is a chapter of reenactments and thematic developments of the initial, discounted chapter of Sam's "missing" childhood.

In other words, Sam believes that he is freeing himself by separating and distancing himself from his family, their values, their social, economic, and cultural environment, that is, from all that has dominated the initial chapter of his story. In fact, he is loyal to the family saga. The
overcoming, separation, and distance, its meaning and how it is done, are the very leading theme of the saga, and Sam carries it on. Generally speaking, he is seeking "better prospects": "My distance from my family grew. I had several girlfriends, and developed a taste for girls and a lifestyle that was a class above my own. Again, I turned my back on my family-they were an embarrassment, and sought a more cultured and secure and loving environment."

Sam went to study at London University; the first university student in his family history. He was hungrily developing his cultural side, "immersed in the best music, drama and art there was to be had," and making friends in the circles with similar interests. Here he met his first serious girlfriend, Susan; she was studying at Oxford, and was from a "better" family. "I overwhelmed her at first, and then became jealous and distrusting of her. I was especially jealous of her twin sister and her ties to her family. I wanted to be the centre of attention, and anything else was a threat." He was her "first boyfriend," and in this sense at least initially a leader; however, he-in many ways-could not sustain and defend this position. The relationship with Susan was both consistent and conflictual with the major themes of Sam's family saga.

Sam's father approved of Susan, and here we have to make a small but important detour. Sam's father seemed to be satisfied seeing his son off to university, and going out with a girl from a "better family;" that is, seeing his son on his way "up," and securing for himself "better prospects" (the booklet; the interview). This is where Sam came as close as possible to his father's approval and praise; this is when he was becoming closer to his father, having an occasional pint of beer with him, and sharing some of their common interests. It is sad that at that time his father came down with cancer, and eventually died of it, leaving Sam with unfinished business that he tried to resolve by idealizing him. Sam believes, and most likely justly so, that his achievements, or at least his promising start, have been a solace to his dying father, a crown in his father's achievements. But now Sam was out for his own achievements, which brings us back to his relationship with Susan.
Susan was a very nice young woman; Sam lists her qualities that include "even" liking his family, and her family accepting him. In the context of his saga, she might be seen as an achievement, a step "up." However, she was also incongruent with the saga; she was in conflict with its thematic unity. She was not of low status, "from nowhere," who would alongside with Sam, and perhaps under his leadership, fight and struggle for the "better prospects." She has already had them, and in this sense she would not be Sam's achievement, at least not in the spirit of heroes reaching their goals through their abilities and hard work, while overcoming the obstacles along the way.

After graduating, Susan decided to spend a year in Africa, and Sam followed "in the footsteps of my uncle G., my mother, and [the grandfather]. I was putting real distance between myself and my family..." He went to Canada, the country of "better prospects," where it was "an assumption that I'll buy a car," where he could "enjoy vegetables for the first time in my life, not cooked like in England," where he could "explore new types of food, new types of culture. There was a certain freedom to secure freedom; you know, nobody looking over your shoulder... The freedom to be myself. To choose whom I wanted to be with, to choose the kind of activity I wanted to do and I wasn't forced to do... and even my graduate studies, it was up to me" (the interview). One would also guess that Sam found here a freedom from the limiting barricades of the British social-class status establishment.

Moreover, here Sam met Karen, his "woman from nowhere," "a quiet but interesting woman who was nuts about me and also became pregnant with my child." Sam did not want to settle down and commit himself to Karen; so, she asked him to leave. Upon completion of his Master's degree, he went back to England to see Susan. However, he "decided I didn't want to stay with her, that Britain was in the dumps, and that I'd rather be with Karen and [the first-born daughter]." So, he married Karen, and settled in Canada for good.

His career development and achievements were impressive. He completed a PhD, got a
college teaching position, then switched to the administrative field, and steadily climbed up to
the high ranks. Besides, he actively pursued his interests in theatre, music, literature, sports
coaching, and so on. Whereas Karen had "Grade 12, plus 1 semester of arts school, that's it" (the
interview). In terms that Sam used for his mother, she held "low-level technical jobs;" she was
and has been a library technician, with no ambitions for something "higher" or more prestigious.
She was somewhat passive, or at least not active in a way or in areas that were so important for
Sam. She was no contributor, or at least not within the context of Sam's saga. She was both
Sam's choice and his disappointment, in a way even becoming his burden, an obstacle to
overcome. And yet, she-and her relationship with Sam-were consistent with the overall story as it
has been set in the initial chapter.

In the interview Sam reveals: "Karen has very few interests... To establish friendships she
seems to rely a lot on me [but then she spoils them]. She is very devoted to children, it seems to
be all consuming, but it seems as though... she sits and expects everybody to kind of create life
around her." Sam appreciates her creative and artistic abilities (e.g., as a highland dancer, or in
sewing), but she "never does anything about it.... Seems as though when she half attempts to do
something, it's quite good, but she never pursues it, never completes." And perhaps the most
revealing criticism: "She had things to say, things to contribute-but she didn't!" Certainly, these
criticisms reveal perhaps even more about Sam and his values than about Karen.

There were substantial differences between Sam and Karen, and their views of the world; the
following episode may be the best illustration. They went out "somewhere where people were
enjoying themselves, and had a wonderful time, and were making a lot of noise. And I'd probably
on my way home comment 'You know, these people were making fools of themselves.' And she
would say 'No, they were just enjoying themselves.' Sam admits: "I was jealous, presumably, I
was envious of their ability to let go and enjoy, enjoy life..." (the interview).

Sam, whose idea of "fun" was apparently quite different from Karen's, saw her as "a very
quiet, reserved person in many ways" (the interview; similar in autobiography). However, his interpretation is interesting: "A lot of still, deep water..." (the interview). Or in the autobiography: "I interpreted her quietness as a dark, deep unhappiness and dissatisfaction with me. I felt threatened by this and tried to cover it."

Sam felt "shut out for days" by Karen who could not or would not participate in (or contribute to) his interests, and who felt neglected and not appreciated; a theme we have already encountered in Sam's initial chapter. Consistently with this pattern, Sam would perceive it as a criticism, as a suggestion of his inadequacy as a husband, and as a man. Parallel to his father's "grumbling" (and then doing more of the same), Sam would "try hard at first to get her to talk and to resolve the issues, but then gave up." And he would immerse himself even deeper in activities that could "prove" his adequacy. Unfortunately, the "proof" was again within his, not her system of values and needs; the gap between them grew. Naturally, it also affected their sexual relations which "became boring." In Sam words: "I was a coward. Instead of challenging her and demanding more communication and intimacy, I did all I could to cover the problem. I immersed myself in chores, renovations, gardening, theatre, and the children. I was outwardly a model husband and father." Perhaps in everybody else's eyes but Karen's.

Karen dealt with her loneliness by increasing drinking, which helped her to free herself from her inhibitions, but with unfortunate consequences. At home she would either crash, or become "overly sentimental or sexually aggressive;" "...at parties and dances... her behaviour was embarrassing and flirty and threatening; I despaired. Karen's drinking removed her barriers, and I saw a repressed woman who was very dissatisfied with me, and who wanted more-a big man, a real man who could make love all night and then work all day. Her behaviour increased my feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy."

Sam felt again inadequate and threatened in his manliness, although in the interview he admitted that Karen had never criticised him in this regard, that it was solely his perception and
interpretation. Retrospectively, in the interview Sam again resented his "cowardice," not telling her "Look, I'm not, I'm not accepting this behaviour.' So I felt very cowardly because I didn't deal with it."

Thus, Karen was no contributor, and Sam "was starting to withdraw. I was starting to think 'Well, I'm not getting much back,' and maybe also 'I don't want to give much... I don't want to deepen this relationship" (the interview). Moreover, he felt (again) threatened in his manliness. And he went out to seek "better prospect," to overcome obstacles, leave them behind, and "prove" his adequacy. He had "a few affairs;" in two of them he apparently did not invest very much, but then he became close to Dona. Interestingly, at least two out of the three women Sam had an affair with were, in some ways, of subordinate status (e.g., academically, or in their social position). Dona was Karen's co-worker, and perhaps a friend. After one "drinking binge" Sam confronted Karen, but she would not answer or discuss it. Instead, "she ridiculed me publicly about it...," although in the interview Sam could not recall how; "...and three months later, I left. Dona was very much a factor in this also."

The end of Sam's marriage was prolonged and painful; in his words, "the separation has been messy." For two years he felt "torn between the two" women, had sex with both of them, but kept the affair secret out of guilt ("I have been wrecked with guilt"), and out of fear ("for fear of hurting Karen, and because I feared retaliation"). And, as he added in the interview, out of fear of hurting and/or losing his children. Karen did not want a divorce, and they had even attempted marriage counselling. Interestingly, at that time Sam "found there was no underlying dark side [in Karen], but there was nothing much else either." Sadly and ironically, also at that time Sam probably experienced the fullest emotional life with Karen: "We talked, cried, and made love."

Karen, however, discovered his affair with Dona, and swiftly retaliated by "an illicit fling with one of [Sam's] most special friends." Sam felt "... devastated. My manhood had been threatened." Again, they "fought, cried, made love until we dropped and communicated until we
were sick of it." But that was the end of their marriage ("Then we split again"); however, not the end of Sam's relationship with her. Sam writes: "Karen and I still have a lot between us. I dream about her a lot, especially recently. I would like her to forgive me, to let me go and to relieve my guilt."

The relationship with Dona, however, did not bring Sam the desired resolution and satisfaction. In his opinion, "she was everything Karen wasn't: open, bright, happy, sunny, outgoing, no hang-ups, and also crazy about me." But Sam was the same. They would "struggle and argue and laugh and cry with an intensity that I never had with Karen until it was too late. But Dona's strength is also a threat—her opinions and ideas are wonderful and threatening."

In the interview Sam expanded: "[She had] interesting intellectual opinions.... She had things to say which disagreed with the things that I said. I felt threatened I guess in my manliness, my opinions were threatened. That she knew better, that she disagreed with me, that she felt that I was wrong, again, I felt that my arguments perhaps were petty, envious and jealous, whereas hers were more tolerant.... [They both had strong opinions] but hers were better... in a sense that she would accept and enjoy more of life. And mine were always to criticize... She was more able to enjoy things, simple things, to accept things...."

So, Sam could not "win;" perhaps exactly because of the inherent competitiveness of his relationships, based on his fundamental uncertainty in himself. Curiously, after the acknowledgment of being threatened by Dona's opinions and ideas, the very next sentence reads: "Karen never had such opinions and ideas (unless she drank) and so was not a threat." And so, when with Dona, Sam "would dream about her [Karen] a lot."

Moreover, Dona wanted Sam to move in with her; she wanted him, and his commitment. Thus, he was facing another conflict. In his interpretation Dona, whom he originally saw as "self-assured and strong," was becoming "very depressed." He certainly enjoyed being wanted, but it was also loaded with fears. As we may recall, in his experience when he was wanted there was
also something wanted from him, usually something he did not want to give. Being wanted or pleased was a "trap," with a high price to be consequently paid (the interview). Besides, in his autobiography he writes: "I still have feelings for Karen and the lovely family I left behind, and worked for. I don't want my kids to know about Dona yet." Thus, this is Sam's conflictual story with women: he very much desires to be loved and wanted by them, and intimately close to them, and at the same time he fears it, and he fears them. In the most general terms, he fears being taken over by them, and found inadequate.

He enters therapy stating: "I can't commit myself to anyone unless these feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem are dealt with. Meanwhile, my indecision and changing feelings are causing me pain and more self-doubt, and are hurting others." He professes love to both Karen and Dona, though for different reasons. And yet he already thinks about "better prospects," and new achievements: "I now meet other women who intrigue me, and to whom I must appear to be quite a catch." But he concludes: "I don't like this situation, my behaviour, my feelings nor myself." Curiously, during his stay in the group his 3rd child is born; the boy's mother is neither Karen nor Dona, but another woman.

It is interesting to consider how Sam's basic beliefs and assumptions, formed in his childhood, consistently influenced his "contributing period," namely in his career. Sam achieved his PhD in physics, but he realized that he "reached my limits.... I wasn't to be a research physicist" (the interview, as well as all other quotations regarding his career). However, rather than accepting mediocrity, he strove for "better prospects." His childhood ability to bridge and draw together disparate groups of athletic and intellectual children (that is, negotiating his father's and mother's schemas) came in handy here. "I seem to be able [when teaching at the college] to engage with lots of different groups, and deal with them on their own terms, and then draw the results together. Being able to deal with people and their issues in a variety of different contexts seemed to be something I was skilled at; I don't know why, but it just happened... I
contributed a lot."

Thus, he became an administrator, did remarkably well, and steadily climbed up the ladder. His ability to distance himself from others, that is, "bridging" different groups while not quite belonging to any of them, also proved to be helpful. With his competitiveness and goal-oriented approach things were certainly done, and done well. But it also had its flip side.

According to Sam, "things seemed to be going wonderfully at work, although there were hints that my inability to connect was going to limit me sometimes. There comes the point when people have to know you and trust you." But Sam knew the remedy: "Although, actually, as you go higher up, that becomes less important" [with a laughter].

And then there was Sam's jealousy: "Sometimes at work... it looked like somebody whom I saw as competitive was getting a leg up, ahead, some special attention. I would feel probably resentful about that..." He would try quietly to undermine that person's progress, and he did not like that about himself.

He was in the centre where he always wanted to be, the bridge, the saga's hero, but he was alone. He could not quite trust others, projecting his own feelings; if they treated him well, they certainly wanted something from him. He could not enjoy a colleague's promotion, nor he could enjoy himself and relax; he had to be on constant alert, and striving forward. As if "getting a bigger piece of a candy" (remember his fights with his sister? Or jealousy at Susan's sister?) could somehow confirm him, and bring some self-assurance to his self-doubts. It did not. And there was always some bigger and better candy to chase that just might do the trick. It has not.

Finally, let us look at Sam's relationship with his children (in the beginning of therapy 2 daughters. The 3rd child, a boy, was born when Sam was in the group). By now it should not be surprising that this relationship, similar to his own childhood, is entirely missing in his autobiography. When he, quite rarely, mentions his children, it resembles his description of his own childhood; they seem to be hidden behind something or somebody. For example, the first-
born was mentioned as a reason for his marriage with Karen, and that she had a good relationship with Sam's mother. When he felt "shut out" by Karen, he immersed himself-among other activities-with children, and he was "outwardly a model father." Or that he wanted to keep his affair with Dona a secret from the children. Thus, the history seemed to be repeating itself in a rondo-like form; Sam's relationship with his children seemed to be consistent with his family saga.

When (in the interview) asked how his children would describe him, Sam suggested: "They would be very confused about me. They would see me as being a wonderful Dad, they loved me very much, but I could be very hard on them." Sam gave as an example his coaching soccer: "I yell a lot... but they also like it because they are very successful, too." He agreed that it was a familiar theme in his life, and in his family: through the hardship to success. And he explained that it has been nothing "personal, I'm trying to get the job done. And it's usually, almost always, very successful; the results, and everybody feels good." Some parents even came and thanked him "for pushing [their] kids."

Yet, when his oldest daughter visited Sam's therapy group, she apparently said: "You always know with my Dad when you've done something wrong. You don't necessarily know that you've done something right." Sam knew this pattern so well from his own life experience, but it was still surprising to hear it out loud, from his own daughter: "That was the first time I've heard it, and it was a very striking comment, and very revealing, and it certainly changed my... it started me thinking about that. I felt very sad about that. Because, you know, they've done some theatre with me, they've done soccer with me, and each time I'd be... I'm pretty aggressive when I'm in control..." Sadly, when Sam claims as one of his main reasons for entering therapy the "emptiness of my relationships," he includes in it "with my children, too" (the interview).

The provisional epilogue.

Sam is alone. Many things between him and his father remained unsaid, but his father has
been long dead. His mother and his sister, as well as his native country, have been left far behind him. Yet, they-and the relationships he had developed with them-in a peculiar way stay with him. He "left behind" his wife, and another important woman in his life has apparently been on her way out. He longs for intimacy, and at the same time fears it. He fears women; they seem to have a threatening dark side, and they are injurious to his manhood.

He is pragmatic, and this is how he sees the world, and his relationships. Thus, when somebody treats him well, he is suspicious, wondering what price he would have to pay for it. He is very competitive, and it is difficult for him to join in a celebration of the successes of others. When others are having fun, he pragmatically criticizes them for wasting their time. But secretly he envies them their ability to enjoy themselves, and enjoy the life.

Sam has been, and is, tremendously insecure in himself, full of self-doubts. His pragmatic, goal oriented approach to life was supposed to bring him some relief, some proof of his adequacy, or in his own words-"external validation." He has had spectacular, tangible successes in his life. But no achievement seems to be good enough, and so, Sam still has his self-doubts and insecurities. Moreover, in his pursuit of new achievements he has not had much joy on his way there. For him, only the outcome seems to count, not the process.

Sam, regardless of his successes, felt overwhelmed by the perceived "emptiness" of his relationships, and his joyless life. When he stopped to reflect on it, he did not like what he saw. He did not like himself in that picture. Loyal to himself, he decided to do something about it, and he entered therapy.

Sam has read this entire document which provisionally ends in the beginning of his therapy. He agreed that my interpretation of his autobiography, and of the material from the Life Story Interview, was accurate and representative of his life story.

The Current Life Interview

Sam lives alone in a small, fairly isolated northern community. He holds a post of senior
administrator in public service. Apparently well respected both professionally and in his community, he seems to be satisfied with the position he has achieved.

If he were to write his autobiography today, it would be "more balanced" than the first text written in the beginning of his therapy. He would write much more extensively, and quite differently, about his mother, and about his childhood. In terms of his childhood, "I'd just have more to say, and more to think, and more to feel; also [there would be] a lot of nostalgia, fond nostalgia." Thus, in his mind his childhood has become a meaningful part of his life, not something to be dismissed as a "non-contributory" period to the development of his family saga. His childhood experiences, longings, victories and disappointments seem to count now, and they deserve to be explored and remembered. In this sense Sam is not a "man from nowhere" any more. Later in the interview, Sam connected this integration of his childhood into his life story with his quest to be able to "stop and enjoy the present, to enjoy the moment for what it is": "I think that the growing nostalgia about my childhood is... because I missed it at the time. I was too busy at the time to actually enjoy it; the thrill, the... childhood."

Let us remember that at least in Sam's early childhood it was his mother who "was very much the person who would heal, and cuddle, and console" (the Life Story Interview). Not suggesting causality or sequentiality, we may note that together with his childhood memories his mother also has gained an admission to, and a meaningful place in Sam's memory. If Sam were to write his autobiography anew, he "probably would try to balance my feelings about, and expand on my feelings about my mother.... Partly intellectually and partly emotionally I had come to accept her role, and I feel a lot better about her." He would be "more respectful of her," and of her role in the family; "I tended to focus always on her negative points, and not give her credit for the positive points."

Unfortunately, Sam's mother died when he was in the group. He has, however, achieved some sense of peace with her, and acceptance of her. He remembers that "in fact, she was a rather
strange person.... and I have some of her characteristics." Elsewhere in the interview Sam stresses his own "strangeness" and uniqueriness which he accepts and values; so he has come to accept and value it in his mother. Interestingly, he originally learned his sharp criticism from his mother, and he became very critical of her "constant criticisms, nagging, and interferences" (the Autobiography). Now he is much less critical of her, and thus, probably of himself, too. In other words, he is less critical of her criticism, and probably also of his own. Sam's resolution of his relationship with his mother seems to be freeing: "In some respects I can laugh at her a lot more, rather than being embarrassed and negative... it's actually funny." He concludes: "It's not that dark; it's much lighter and accepting, and generous approach towards her" (stress is Sam's). Incidentally, we may recall how big a role the attributed "darkness" used to play also in Sam's relationship with his wife, Karen.

Notably, Sam does not credit the group, and his group experience, with the changes in the relationship with his mother. He explains it by the passage of time "which allowed me to come to terms with her," and by his repeated trips to England and talks with relatives in which he "got a bit more rounded picture of her." Nevertheless, elsewhere in the interview Sam admitted that the group often dealt with, and was quite emotionally involved in his relationships and treatment of women in his life, to the point of group members getting angry with him.

In any case, Sam's relationship with his adoptive sister has also changed; the change seems to be similar to that which he has achieved in his relationship with his mother. In Sam's own words, it is "probably a little bit more accepting. Not quite so embarrassed. Again, a lot lighter, a lot of... more ability to laugh." In the past he had actively avoided her. For example, when she wanted to visit him in Canada, he refused under false pretences. Now he still does not actively seek her company, but he "would be happy to see her," and he "would try to make the most of it." They phone each other, and he visits her when he goes to England, although "we don't have very much to say." He is a godfather to one of her daughters. Recently his sister phoned him and asked for
advice about her planned holiday trip to Florida. Sam is thinking about going there, too, to meet and join her and her family. His motivation sounds benevolent, helpful, and compassionate: "You know, it's their first time on this side [of the Atlantic]." He feels "positive about it;" it seems that this relationship is still developing, based on Sam's subtly yet substantially different attitude to it.

In contrast, Sam's relationship with his father is quite ossified, and has not changed that much. Sam recognizes that he used to idealize his father ("I probably put him on a little bit of a pedestal," or "[the booklet] was somewhat idealistic"). The idealized picture, however, seems to remain in many important respects intact even today.

This point needs some clarification. There is no problem in Sam's still loving his father, and holding him in high esteem: "I still think very fondly of him. I think he was a very fine person." However, in Sam's mind his father remains to a large extent the "supreme judge," the highest authority whose expectations should be met, and whose values and beliefs must be indiscriminately accepted, in order to be accepted himself, and thus, to be acceptable. That is, Sam's acceptance of himself is still determined and measured by the imaginary acceptance from his-long deceased-father. Let us recall Sam's dissatisfaction with his need for "constant external validation" (the autobiography); he still has good reason to feel that way.

Sam maintains: "I worry sometimes how he would judge me... Obviously, I think he'd be very impressed with what I've achieved professionally. But I think he would be upset... and... I don't know how he would accept the family issues..." Sam summarizes his loyalty to his father's basic beliefs and values: "Yes, I always get the feeling.... that he saw certainly family life and professional life as something of a duty... and... the enjoyment of it would come through hard work and dedication and sticking with it, and not letting people down, contributing. And what you contribute you'll get back.... I still use it as one of my touchstones."

Yet it is intriguing to think about Sam's response when asked whether his father would be
critical of Sam's handling of his family affairs: "I don't know... I think about it. I'd imagine that he would be at first disapproving, but I always hope that he would come around and accept..."

Notably, Sam credits the assumed change in his father's attitude to the passage of time and connected changes in social norms: "Times have changed, anyway," and so, if his father "had lived through the times, he would be more open." It may well be the case, but it also most likely represents the change in Sam's own level of criticism and acceptance, towards others and himself. He projects on his imaginary father, who is still firmly in the judging position, his own more tolerant and open attitude, and the father-judge seems to be issuing a less harsh judgment.

This may be a subtle but important and consistent change, and we shall encounter it again when considering other areas of Sam's present life. It may be best described as a gradual shift towards more openness, acceptance, empathy, and compassion, and less criticism in Sam's attitude to others, himself, and life in general. This attitude is not quite consistent with the unbridled pragmatism Sam still claims loyalty to. However, his relationship with his father, seemingly the less problematic one, does not seem to be quite resolved. And this lack of full resolution also seems to be influencing other areas of Sam's life.

The understanding of Sam's relationship with his father may help us to understand his present relationship with Karen, his former wife. Karen and Sam are both "very polite," cooperative, mutually helpful, and quite aware of their common interest in the wellbeing of their children. They do not seem to harbour ill feelings towards each other, and they seem to show a degree of personal interest in each other's wellbeing; this is what Sam means when he says that they are "sometimes affectionate."

However, it is still a very tense relationship for Sam: "Karen did always seem to have me on a string;" she apparently still has. Sam remembers that when she was angry with him he "didn't have time for anything else.... I was consumed by pleasing her... [there is] still a lot of that."

Sam gives two interesting examples of how Karen "still has a big impact on me." When he
was leaving for his present job in a remote area, he came to say good-bye to Karen, and she gave him a big hug. "it was very significant to me, and she really wished me well, and she thought I was doing the right thing..." Recently Karen sent through her daughter a message to Sam that there should be an opening for a very good position in the community where she lives ("Make sure that you'll apply"). Sam was surprised, and pleased that "Karen would be very comfortable" with him living in the same community. "Certainly, it makes an impact on me;" however, Sam is "not sure about its meaning": "I don't know... [almost whispering]. I don't know whether I'm still harbouring a lot of guilt, wondering whether or not..."

Well, in his father's terms of reference Sam did not quite fulfill his "duty," did not "stick" with Karen, and "let her down." Let us also remember how in his original autobiography Sam wished for Karen to "release" him from the relationship although, actually, he left her. It is as if were she not angry at him, and agreed with his leaving, his guilt would be relieved. But let us also remember the meaning Sam, in the context of his life story, attributed to Karen's anger; it seemed to be an attack at the very core of his masculinity. In any case, Sam still appears to be afraid of Karen's anger, whereas being on good terms with her feels not only safer, but also relieves his guilt. Thus, he still somewhat anxiously watches what has been happening between them, and Karen's every move is important and loaded with potentially perhaps frightening consequence.

The relationship between Sam and his children is apparently very good and mutually rewarding (cf. the Interview with Significant Other). Sam sees them as often as he can; in his words, they are "very good friends. We argue as we, I guess, should, but there is lots of love and affection." There is one "unspeakable" territory between Sam and his children; they "don't like talking about the divorce" between him and their mother, and Sam accepts and respects that without much questioning. Instead, he maintains that "They have their own lives, and they want to talk about their lives." Sam seems to enjoy participating in their lives, and he appears to be an
attentive listener to his children. Moreover, he became generally less critical, which makes it easier for his children to openly share with him (regardless of some obvious exceptions). And unlike his father, he is more generous with praise and credit when its called for (cf. the Interview with Significant Other).

Sam's present relationship with Dona, the woman who played an important role in his divorce, is an interesting example of what has changed in Sam's life, and what remains the same. The initial agreement was that after Sam settled in his new job in the northern community, Dona would follow and join him there to live with him. But after "a couple of months" Sam came back to Dona and directly asked her not to join him. Besides the climatic harshness and remoteness of his new home, and the time and energy demands of his new job, Sam was clear about his main reason: "I realized I felt very comfortable."

Sam keeps in touch with her via the phone and the e-mail, occasionally ("not very often") visits her, stays overnight, and in the end of the week-end he is honestly looking forward to coming back to his home and work, although-or perhaps because-he is "alone most of the time there." Last summer they took a week of holiday together; "but... that was enough for me. [If they stayed longer] I would get bored, anxious, I would like to do something else, I would like to have time by myself."

Sam admits that Dona "is lonely, and she is quite open about it." They even "talked about what if something better comes up for her or for me..." Although Sam sometimes misses her company, he does not miss a closely involved intimate relationship; elsewhere in the interview he suggested that for him having an intimate relationship is not a high priority right now. Thus, he concludes that "I like to see her when I see her;" he still enjoys her company and lively sharing of ideas. But he maintains: "I am quite happy as it is."

Most importantly, he is open and honest with Dona about his stance. He is open in a way he could not bring himself to be in his relationship with Karen, in his efforts to please her, and to
avoid her anger and dissatisfaction with him. This effort to please and avoid angry conflict, so consistent with Sam's original story, in fact led to a lot of pain and conflict, both for Sam and Karen; in Sam's recollection, it was quite strongly challenged in his therapy group. It does not seem to have the same hold on him any more, at least not in his relationship with Dona, and thus, he is freer to organize his life congruently with his feelings, needs, and desires. It also leaves a fair chance to Dona to make her own decisions.

On the other hand, Sam mentions in passing that he has been supporting Dona financially and, for example, he is paying off the mortgage on her house. Thus, the notions of a relationship as a duty, or of having to deserve something (in this case the love and acceptance) through the hard work and tangible, pragmatic contributions, seem to be still playing an important role in Sam's mind, and influencing his behavior. The opposite notion, which would be based on Sam's acceptance of himself, that he may be loved and accepted by others simply for who he is, that he is good enough, seems to be still somewhat foreign to him. It is also reflected in his persistent self-doubts, and it also most likely influences his distressing lack of friendships.

But even in these areas Sam achieved some changes. His self-doubts, often expressed in his need to please, prove himself, and seek "external validation," are "still there. I think all the self-doubts are basically still there, but I have found a way to put them in perspective. So, I can have the doubt, but I can also have... see myself in much more holistic way. So, the self-doubt is still there, but there are other things as well." Sam gives as an example a recent episode in which his work superior suggested some unwelcome changes in his job. Sam assertively stood up for himself, and successfully defended his position. "It seems to me a step forward. Because before I would be eager to please, and eager to cover any suggestion.... Sometimes one fears being badly thought of when not going along all the time..." But the "external validation" became somewhat less important. The group experience helped Sam to appreciate that others could stand up for themselves, and so could he. "I think before I didn't even allow.... there wasn't even room with all
that self-doubt for that suggestion that I could assert and state clearly what I want. Now it's in there. It may not win every time, but I'm more likely to say what I want." In his original autobiography Sam repeatedly referred to himself in this context as a "coward;" most likely he would not see himself as such today.

When Sam mentioned that having an intimate relationship was not a high priority for him now, he implied that having a good friendship would be more important. He is not satisfied in this area, and he is concerned about remaining friendless in his future. He explains his situation partly by the remoteness and limited social opportunities of the community he lives in. Another part seems to be connected with his top-ranking position; he is afraid that a friendship with a colleague would endanger the perception of his impartiality. However, he decided to do something about it. Very recently he sublet an apartment in the nearest bigger town, with an idea to spend his week-ends there, to enjoy its richer social and cultural opportunities, and to meet new, preferably not work-related, people with whom he may eventually develop friendships.

This interview was conducted during Sam's first week-end spent in this town; it is too early to draw any conclusion about the viability of his plan. However, Sam was concerned. He visited the art exhibition of his former group co-member, and struck an interesting conversation with the director of the gallery. But besides that he spent his week-end in hard work on papers which he took with him. He is afraid that he may end up simply working hard and being isolated here instead of there. This concern seems to be connected with a larger one, with his ability to enjoy his life in general; this concern will be addressed later.

In his interpersonal relationships Sam seems to remain in his position of a bridge that connects others but does not feel connected, committed, invested in, or belonging to either side. In the group the problem was framed as "having a compartmentalized life," and in Sam's opinion, "that's pretty much the same." In the past he was involved in different activities and with different people with "almost no connection between them;" in fact, "sometimes quite
deliberately they were secrets from each other." Now "work is work, then Dona and her son, then a little bit of connection with my old friends in theatre, [the mother of my son and my son] are quite separate, I do have some connection with Karen and the girls... but it's polite, it's nothing family-like about it... So, it's exactly the same as it was." Thus, so many relationships, and so many people populating Sam's life, and yet they do not seem to be somehow integrated in one meaningful whole in his life, and nowhere he feels the right closeness and belonging ("nothing family-like about it"). Sam's concern may be quite justified. He may be doing more of the same by disqualifying his colleagues from his friendship, separating himself and seeking better opportunities (or should we say "better prospects?") for his friendships somewhere else, and then isolating himself there again, shielding himself from others by his work.

Based on Sam's life story, reports from the group, and my personal experience with him, it seems he has never had any problem in attracting people to him. His difficulty has apparently been in letting people in on his territory, and/or joining them in their territories and investing himself in them. The latter variant may have been connected with his critical approach to others, which has been changing. And Sam claims that his real gain from the group has been "some self-knowledge... as a result of that self-acceptance, some opening, I suppose, willingness to look at other aspects of my behaviour." Thus, his lack of friends and a certain social isolation remain his problems. It is as if he invested himself too much in somebody, he would be giving too much of himself. For example, he may accept somebody much easier now, but actively-and honestly-giving him or her credit would be going too far, it would be like taking it away from himself. Metaphorically using his childhood experience with his sister, it would be like the other person "getting a bigger piece of a candy," whereas he would be left with a smaller one. When he gives credit to somebody who is potentially in a competitive position with him, it is "just a cover" to be socially acceptable.

Sam is aware of his persistent difficulty in feeling close to others, and in building satisfying
and rewarding friendships. He actively tries to do something about it. But, as he stresses himself, it is a process, and its outcomes remain to be seen.

Sam's relationship with his colleagues may be illuminating his present situation. Yes, he still feels somewhat competitive ("it usually works to my advantage"), and he, as mentioned before, disqualifies his colleagues from potential friendship, shielding himself with the demands of his top ranking position. He also credits his position with becoming more mellow, tactful, and compassionate: "[In this position] you can't just explode, you can't just ridicule people, you have to be careful even with your sense of humour because people take offense..." Thus, he finds it important to attribute his softer approach to others to some external power or circumstances, and he indirectly implies that it may be just another cover to satisfy the norms of social acceptability. However, Sam maintains: "I do try to kind of step back in my mind and look at... [a broader picture]." At the same time he gave examples of how it became easier for him to accept criticism of others. This degree of tolerance, compassion, consideration of feelings of others, and generally less critical stance towards others seems to manifest itself in other areas of Sam's life, too, and seems to be coming from Sam, and from his sense of positioning (or how he would like to position) himself in-the-world.

Sam sees himself "still fairly critical, but I do try... I try to see people more as a whole." In the past "the person's idiosyncracy or something I didn't like about him just clouded out all my perceptions of him." In contrast, Sam maintains that "I think I'm able to see them in a much more holistic way now, as good and bad, and that's life."

Unwittingly, Sam gave a good example of his diminished criticism (and increased tolerance) by the very way he accepted my interpretation of his autobiography, that is, graciously, generously, and with benevolent humour. He was quite aware that this would not be the case in his past, and he insightfully explained what his critical stance would have represented. "I would be upset by it, and I would criticize absurd connections. There were elements of
unreasonableness in my approach towards my mother... and probably it would hurt to hear that. I might have intellectually thought 'OK, he has a point there,' but I wouldn't like it, I'd be upset, and I probably would have tried to criticize it being far-fetched and fanciful." In other words, Sam would have defended himself against the hurt from perceived criticism (i.e., "invalidation") by criticising (i.e., "invalidating") the perceived injurer. With his increased acceptance of himself and others this defense became less important. Sam mentioned that "In fact, in the group these insights did come through from the members of the group."

Sam is also less critical of other people enjoying themselves and having fun, although he still strongly dislikes when it involves drinking. "Sometimes they look foolish.... they let themselves go, and of course, I'm sober..." His dislike may be understandable considering his experience with his heavy drinking wife, and the meaning he attributed to it. However, what really concerns him is his own persistent limited ability to "let go," enjoy himself, and have fun.

For example, the night before this interview there was a football game on approximately 10 minutes away from the apartment he sublet for himself with the clear intention to meet more people in a new environment, and to have more fun. He had never seen a football game live, and he was quite curious. But "I didn't go, there was no reason, I just sat there by myself and watched television... and tonight I'll just probably work and watch television and go to bed... In fact, I should probably call somebody up, or... there are plenty of colleagues around, or if not, just go and do something, to see a movie, who knows... just to go and do something what's intended, anyway, to be enjoyable and fun, not work." To my question "What do you think stops you?" he replied sadly, almost whispering: "I don't know... there is an inertia..."

In a curious juxtaposition, Sam went on: "A funny thing; when I'm in a theatre, when I'm performing, I'm pretty good. I mean I can, I can probably invest a lot more energy in a performance, in a rehearsed performance; I can pretend having fun extremely well!" He explains: "It's a script, it's rehearsed, and it's very safe. I know what the next line is gonna be, and I know
the end of the story. In that context I can really let go! Probably more than most people! But it's a performance." He concludes: "Maybe that's why I do that so much; it's a very good release, it's a safe release, it's very safe." And in regard to my example (cf. the interpretation of his autobiography) of skiing just for the sheer joy of it he briefly comments: "Yah, what would you achieve, just up and down."

Nevertheless, at least partly yet exactly because of his persistent difficulty in spontaneously enjoying himself and his life, Sam evaluates his therapeutic gains very cautiously. Another reason for his very cautious assessment is the perceived lack of visible, tangible behavioral changes expressed, for example, in his social isolation, and his still present self-doubts. Thus, Sam suggests that "anything can't be ticked off, or crossed out. I guess all that stuff is still there. I still have a potential for being very depressed and very unhappy." And it is more than just a "potential;" it "still goes on in [my] real life."

Sam is quite ambivalent about his change: "... there is a change, but the change is not visible. If you looked at my life, and looked at my diary, it's not visible." He goes on: "If you look at what constitutes my life, it's very similar to what it was. But I think the way I behave, and the way I feel, and the way I deal... I treat people is different." Yet later he states again: "I don't want to overestimate." The group was "a very powerful, most significant sort of... intimate experience in my life, it was very intimate. And it opened me up to a whole bunch of things, but-it didn't cure anything. I feel better equipped to deal with it, and I'm optimistic... I guess I just don't want to, in a very scientific way, I just don't want to come up with some result, or suggest a result that's not without its uncertainty, you know, plus or minus..." He suggests that this cautious stance "maybe still reflects some of my self-doubts;" however, elsewhere he expresses his legitimate concern that "the evidence is there that I still have very compartmentalized life, I don't have friends and friends around me, I worry that I'm actually spiralling into a kind of solitude..." And he is still searching to "find some peace of mind."
On the one hand, Sam is aware of his different relationship with his deceased mother, with his adoptive sister, and with people in general. In the broadest terms, he is more accepting of others, and of himself. For example, he states: "I'm a pretty complicated person, I'm somewhat unusual, I have many admirable qualities, I have some not very admirable qualities, and that's the way it is. I mean, that's who I am." He recognizes that "there is no advantage in trying to please people if you are not comfortable and happy yourself." So, he became more direct and assertive; he feels freer to be himself. And he admits that it most likely influences his relationships. When asked whether his significant others would observe any difference in him, he—though first somewhat tentatively—replies: "I don't know. I'd hope they would say 'Yes,' that I've changed, that I'm more open and... accepting, and less critical, more generous... perhaps more assertive. It's easier to figure out what I'm talking about, what I really want rather than having to guess, or just to deal with [my] anger."

On the other hand, Sam's persistent dissatisfaction, and his cautious or ambivalent assessment of his changes and gains, is probably best reflected in his response to my question about what he would like to let go of, and what he would like to hold on to in his life. His reply cannot be underestimated; for example, if it is attributed "only" to his high criticism and self-criticism, or to his self-doubts, it would be exactly the very evidence of the persistence of his old problems. Thus, some of Sam's old problems do not seem to be resolved, or at least not fully resolved, and they still seem to negatively influence his life: "I'd like to let go of... the constant self-doubt, and... the constant need to... validate myself by doing things and achieving things. I would like to gain the ability to stop and enjoy the present. To enjoy the moment for what it is rather than worrying about it as a future item..." Sam would like to hold on to his mind, his intellectual abilities and curiosity, and the ability to appreciate and enjoy the culture, music, literature, and so on.

Sam's present situation is also reflected in his vision of his future. He feels "positive about
it." He is satisfied that his career is "on a good track." He anticipates some financial improvement when his children complete university, and he envisions himself "buying some property, and leading more of a pastoral life when I retire." However, "in terms of relationships... I don't have any answer to that; I worry about that." He concludes: "I feel positive about my future in some respects, but that issue of whether I will be solitary, or solitary completely, or with a circle of good friends, or with a companion-it weighs on my mind."

Sam appreciates what he got out of his group therapy. He found particularly helpful its "very safe environment," the sense of intimacy, the encouragement and the freedom to openly speak out, the caring mutual challenges, and the benefits of "visitor's nights" where significant others came to the group, and were supported and encouraged to openly speak up. But he adds: "I didn't find god."

He sees himself in the middle of his journey. He admits that his life is more liveable than before ("Yes, definitely!"). But he also suggests: "I'd like to keep building on what I experienced in the group, or, perhaps, what came from getting older." (Again, it may be curious to note the attributed credit). He is aware that there is still something painfully missing in his life (here he brings up again his lack of friendship as an example), and thus, he concludes: "I still need to keep going down that road, I'm not there yet. I certainly have a lot more insight, skills, and tools to do it, but it's a long way to go, I think."

The Interview with Significant Other

Emma, Sam's first-born daughter, is a 23 year old university student. Let us recall that it was she who came to the group's "visitor's night," and made a statement that substantially influenced Sam: "You always know with my Dad when you've done something wrong. You don't necessarily know that you've done something right" (cf. the Life Story Interview). As in the case of her visit to Sam's group, Emma was not very enthusiastic about this interview ("Well, it's not my favourite kind of activity"); perhaps, she decided to do it for her father. I asked her two
questions, pre-approved by Sam: (1) You have known your father before and after his group experience. Have you observed any changes in him that you may attribute to his therapy? If yes, how would you describe them?; and (2) Have these changes influenced your relationship with your father? How?

Emma believes that her father, and her relationship with him, have changed, but she is not sure what to attribute to his group experience, and what to her own development, growing older and more mature. In fact, in the beginning of his therapy she was still a teenager. Thus, I asked her to simply describe whatever she thinks has changed.

In Emma's opinion, her "Dad is quicker to let us know things about his life than he was.... He shares more with us what's happening in his life." He is more open, immediate, and direct in his sharing, and Emma seems to appreciate it.

Emma does not "argue with him very often," but she observes a change in his-apparently more frequent-arguments with her younger sister. "He seems to be more willing to work the argument through, until it's concluded, you know, instead of just yelling and leaving." Although she believes that all sisters have matured and so, they are more "willing to go part way," she also sees willingness on her father's side to make concessions, and find a reasonable compromise. "He is a very strong-willed person," and thus, "it's not easy for him." Yet, he manages to do so, and leaves fewer arguments between him and his children unresolved.

Emma sees her father as "still very demanding, with a lot of stress on performance, but somehow better about that now." It appears that he is less inclined to impose his own values on his daughter, or-to use his own expression linked to his mother-he is less interfering with Emma's life. "At least he realizes now that it's my schooling, my grades.... If I wanna run, I'm gonna run, if not, I don't-at least he knows that." Again, Emma is not sure to what extent it is a result of her own emancipation, but she believes that also "he backed off a bit" here.

In the past, Sam would let Emma know that "she has done something wrong" by getting
angry at her. "Now it's not so much; it's more... mellow." Emma maintains: "He is not uncritical-he is less critical." Moreover, he is able to praise and give credit when it is due.

Emma thinks that her relationship with her father "is better," namely because these changes "made it a more equal relationship than it was." She feels that her father leaves her more room for more responsibility in this relationship now; she states "I'm not angry now [with him]," and "I don't feel criticised." His openness, willingness to share, and decreased criticism also make it easier for Emma to share more willingly, and to be more open with him. By the end of the interview Emma resolved her dilemma regarding the degree to which she or her father had contributed towards the change in their relationship: "It's been probably both."

The Portrait of Change

Sam feels that his life is "definitely more liveable" now, but he also knows that he has still been struggling with many of his old problems. He claims being more aware of them, and having "better tools and skills" to deal with them. But these old problems remain unresolved, and they keep negatively influencing his life. Sam believes that he still has "a long way to go" to reach who, how, and where he would like to be in his life.

Sam's assessment of his therapy gains and changes seems to be accurate, and congruent with all the material he has presented. It seems that in some areas he has achieved substantial changes; other important areas of his life have not changed that much. In Sam's story this outcome may have a particular meaning. He complains that his life has been, and still is, quite "compartmentalized," not quite integrated into one meaningful whole. And true enough, also his changes seem to be "compartmentalized," well contained within the not very permeable bounds of separate areas of his life.

The uneven or "compartmentalized" changes in Sam's life may be very instructive with regard to the research question of this study. Contrasting the areas of substantial change with those of less or no change may illuminate what the change has been about in the context of his
life story.

Sam substantially reinterpreted his relationship with his mother. In this process he moved from the simplicity of the absolute to the complexity of the relative stance. Appreciating (and being able to hold) the complexity of his mother's story, of her motivations, of her role in the family, and so on, Sam gained a new depth of understanding, empathy, compassion, and acceptance for her. Moreover, in this more complex picture of his mother he could also recognize himself; he could grant himself at least some of the acceptance he had granted her. Instead of angrily, and often unconsciously reacting to her, he emancipated himself from her, and gained a sense of agency in this relationship. Sam's previous rigid but not necessarily conscious adherence to his "mother's schema" had been to a large extent orchestrating his life. So his reinterpreted, more flexible and accepting relationship with his mother has been influencing many other areas of his life.

In the beginning of his therapy, Sam perceived his mother almost as an absolute embodiment of negativity. In his memory she was hypercritical, nagging, and constantly interfering with his life (as well as those of others). She was embarrassingly crude and intellectually inadequate. Moreover, she was "dark" and threatening; she could bring to doubt his very sense of manliness, as well as his father's. This powerful woman had to be feared-and outwardly pleased, whereas the real safety seemed to be in emotionally armouring himself, and gaining distance from her. Yet more, she was not seen as a contributor; she was a threat and an obstacle to the beliefs and values vital for the development of the family saga, that is, to his father's values and beliefs which he accepted. She had to be overcome, and left behind. There seemed to be no redeeming quality in her. Sam pushed her out of his life, and to a large extent out from his memory; in his autobiography she was granted very limited, and entirely negative, space. Not a single positive memory of her, and hardly accidentally, not a single positive memory of his entire childhood could be found in Sam's original autobiography.
However, he could not really ban her from his life story. In the interesting interplay of identification and complementarity, he had carried her within himself, and consequently in his relationships to others, particularly to women. He became himself hypercritical; he was critical of her, of himself, his wife, his daughters and probably their soccer team-mates, of his colleagues, of people having fun, and so on. He also became a "man from nowhere" with no childhood worth remembering or speaking about. He saw his wife, Karen, as a "dark" and threatening woman who could also endanger his sense of manliness, whose anger had to be avoided, and who had to be outwardly pleased whereas the safest coping strategy seemed to be in emotional distancing from her. Also she was found wanting intellectually, culturally, in her drive for achievement, and as a contributor. She had to be overcome, and left behind.

If Sam were to write his autobiography today, his mother would play a very different, much larger, and more important role in his life story. Importantly, in Sam's own words, it would be a "much more balanced" role.

However, the following description of Sam's change in his relationship with his mother, and of connected changes in other areas of his life, does not suggest a particular linear causality or sequentiality of the change itself. The following text is not suggesting that Sam had resolved his relationship with his mother, and then, consequently, went on to change his other relationships. On the other hand, it does suggest certain common themes in these changes, linked to Sam's relationship with his mother.

In fact, Sam's group apparently dealt extensively and intensively with his relations to women, but prevalently other than his mother. Sam most likely came to a sense of an emerging common pattern. When on his trips to England he started asking his relatives about his mother, he already had some reason to do so; he was ready to do so, and ready to interpret the information in a certain way. This interpretation became a part of the new meaning the relationship with mother has had for Sam. This new meaning, the reconstruction of which might have started by dealing
with Sam's other relationships, in its own turn started influencing these other relationships, but the common denominator seems to be Sam's resolution of the relationship with his mother.

The information Sam learned from his relatives helped him to have a new memory of his mother, and of his relationship with her. A memory he first could not have as a child, and later on would not have exactly because of the old portrait of his mother being seemingly definitely established in his mind, finished and unchangeable.

However, the new portrait of mother Sam started-and was ready-to compose seemed to be much broader, more flexible, plausible, compassionate, and easier to live with. He could see his mother as a young woman struggling through the war years alone, not sure of her husband's fate, and later nursing him to health upon his return from the POW camp. Most likely she had helped him through his schooling, and deserved credit for sustaining the family by working in "low-level technical jobs." She coped with her husband's peculiarities the best way she could.

In this new picture she was a woman with her own story, her own struggles, her own friends, and her own interests. For example, she was accomplished in sports, and Sam could remember how she taught him cricket, and how they used to watch soccer together. Moreover, he could also recall her as a caring, compassionate mother, "very much the person who would heal, and cuddle, and console." Thus, Sam's memory of his childhood, and of his early relationship with his mother, became more balanced. He could also see where his interest in sports, and particularly in soccer, came from, and what it meant in his life.

He could also see other areas of his identification with his mother. For example, he learned a lot of his criticism from her, and he became as unyieldingly critical of her as she was rigidly critical in his eyes.

However, as Sam was discovering and rediscovering his mother’s story, it made sense to him; it was not a story of some "dark" malevolent intent, coming down at him with the power of inexplicably angry gods. He could understand her, and be more generous, compassionate, and
forgiving with her. He became more accepting of her in her complexity, and less critical of her idiosyncracies, including less critical of her criticism. In this process he was also becoming more accepting of himself, and of his relationship with his mother. He could see his mother as a unique, rather "strange" person, and he came to value this "strangeness" in her, as well as in himself.

Importantly, to accept his mother, Sam did not need to idealize her. He has truly emancipated himself from her, and rather than distance it created much more closeness between the two of them. He did not need to create some idealized picture of her which would be equally unidimensional as the previous negative one, which would defy his experience as well as the experience of universal humanity, and which would be most likely as difficult to live with as the previous one. Instead of being caught in the reactive vicious circle of mutual criticism, of who is "right" and who is "wrong," of who is intellectually superior, of who is a better contributor, and consequently, caught in a mutual denial of affection, Sam was able to step back, and from that distance he was able to see a much broader picture of his mother. This complex picture encompasses her admirable as well as those less admirable or less pleasant features, her beauty and her blemishes, and it seems to be good enough. This picture is composed in the larger context of his mother's story, and in this context whatever is in the picture seems to make sense, and seems to be acceptable. This is a complex but a human picture of a complex human being.

For Sam, this picture is "not that dark; it's much lighter and accepting, and generous approach towards her." Instead of anger, frustration, embarrassment, fears, pleasing, and the seemingly unbridgeable cold distance, Sam can "in some respects.... laugh at her a lot more, rather than being embarrassed and negative... it's actually funny." It seems to be a benevolent laughter, a laughter of understanding and acceptance. And this benevolent laughter seems to reverberate in Sam's relationships with other people, and with himself.

As noted before, many problems in Sam's life have not been resolved to his satisfaction, and
some of them keep influencing and interfering with Sam's resolution of his relationship with his mother. And yet, the new meaning he discovered here is clearly echoed in his perception of who he is. "I see myself in a much more holistic way," Sam maintains. Regardless of his self-doubts, he is accepting the complex picture of himself as he can see it now, with the same tolerance and generosity he has granted to his mother: "I'm a pretty complicated person, I'm somewhat unusual, I have many admirable qualities, I have some not very admirable qualities, and that's the way it is. I mean, that's who I am." This acceptance frees him, at least in some areas of his life, to do more of what he would truly like to do, and how he would like to do it. In other areas he is at least more aware of who he is, and what he would truly like to have in his life.

With this increased self-acceptance, Sam can even entertain the idea that "there is no advantage in trying to please people if you are not comfortable and happy yourself." His need for the "constant external validation" became somewhat less important. Sam feels freer to be assertive: "It may not win every time, but I'm more likely to say what I want." He is much more direct and open in his relationships, and it eliminates many unexpressed yet consuming grudges. For example, he was able to stand up to his superior, and successfully defend his position at work. Perhaps even more telling is his relationship with Dona. He can appreciate her loneliness, and feels compassion for her, but he would not move in with her just to please her, while being aware that this is not what he wants. He is frank about it, and it most likely prevents a much more substantial dissatisfaction in this relationship. Similarly, Sam's daughter, Emma, comments on his greater openness with her; she knows where she stands with him, and she appreciates it.

All of Emma's comments seem to be congruent with Sam's changes in his "mother's schema." She sees him as less critical, less demanding, and more open and willing to share himself. Even his willingness to bring their arguments to a closure points to his greater sense of comfort or acceptance of himself, and others.

Something similar may be observed in his relationship with his first wife, Karen. Sam
appreciates that she "would be very comfortable" with him living in the same community. His satisfaction implies that he would also be more comfortable in her presence. As he pointed out elsewhere, although she still has a lot of influence on him, he does not see her as "dark" a woman as before. He does not see her as irrationally malevolent. To a much larger extent he appreciates and understands her story; it makes sense to him. And in his more benevolent (in Sam's terms "generous") understanding she has also become more benevolent ("generous"), complex, and multidimensional person.

A similar pattern transpires in the relationship with his adoptive sister. Interestingly, Sam himself described it in similar words, and in reference to the change in his relationship to his mother: "Probably a little bit more accepting. Not quite so embarrassed. Again, a lot lighter, a lot of... more ability to laugh." He still does not have many interests in common with her, and he would not be able to hold an intellectual or artistic discussion with her (the very reason he felt embarrassed for her in front of his "more educated friends" in his childhood). He was, however, able to accept his mother with her admirable and less admirable qualities, and he was able to accept himself with his admirable and less admirable qualities: "And that's the way it is. I mean, that's who I am." Today he would most likely be able to say the same about his sister, to himself or to real or imaginary "more educated friends": "That's the way she is. That's who she is"-and it seems to be good enough.

This more benevolent, generous, and understanding attitude seems to be evident in Sam's relationships with his colleagues, and with people in general. Although Sam admits that he is "still fairly critical," he also believes that he "treats people differently": "I do try to kind of step back in my mind and look at a broader picture.... I try to see people more as a whole.... I think I'm able to see them in a much more holistic way now, as good and bad, and that's life."

The thematic unity in Sam's change in his "mother's schema" seems to be evident; in the broadest terms it may be described as an increased acceptance of human complexity in others,
and in himself. This acceptance also seems to make his life story more acceptable, and his life more liveable, with himself and with others.

On the other hand, Sam still idealizes his father. In Sam's mind the picture of his father, and the memory of his beliefs and values, have obtained a sort of larger-than-life quality. This memory represents the struggles of generations of brave people in his family. And, within the very context of these values and beliefs, these struggles have been successful. For example, his family progressed from the uneducated and underprivileged farm labourers to Sam's father, the acculturated Head of Mathematics in a respectable school, and then to Sam's own PhD, to his influential and respected professional position, and to his appreciation of and personal involvement in arts. Now Sam takes for granted that his own children will be university graduates. How not to be loyal to these values and beliefs, which he learned from his father, and did his best to pass them on to the next generation? As we may remember, he even codified these values and beliefs in a booklet addressed to his children.

His father's beliefs and values were described in detail elsewhere (cf. the interpretation of Sam's autobiography). Sam himself gives perhaps the best summary in the Current Life Interview: "He saw family life and professional life as something of a duty... and... the enjoyment of it would come through hard work and dedication and sticking with it, and not letting people down, contributing. And what you contribute you'll get back.... I still use it as one of my touchstones."

In a world governed by these beliefs and values, the goal itself is not chosen for its anticipated joyful rewards; it is a duty. Nor there is much room for enjoyment in the process of getting there; it is a duty. Life itself seems to be one deadly serious duty. And the putative enjoyment is supposed to come from loyally sticking to this duty, no matter how unpleasant or unrewarding it may be. This approach to life seems to bring many tangible achievements and rewards, but the less tangible sense of enjoyment seems to never quite come.
Moreover, as noted in the beginning of Sam's story, the hero of the saga is on a mission to achieve a supra-individual goal, and this is where his loyalty is. In the name of the higher goal individuals may be sacrificed, and let down. Apparently, there are many people in Sam's saga who felt let down by the heroes, be it the father or Sam. Even a seemingly innocent example is quite revealing. Sam knew that he was very hard on the children in the soccer practice, but he believed that the consequent success justified it. "I'm trying to get the job done. And it's usually, almost always, very successful; the results, and everybody feels good." Some parents even came and thanked him "for pushing [their] kids." However, at least some of those pushed and yelled at children, if asked, might have given quite a different story. Similarly, many of Sam's women would most likely tell a story in which they felt let down. Sam still does not seem to be fully aware of the incongruity between the heroic pursuit of the higher goal, putatively of success and joy, and the misery experienced in the process, often imposed on others, and on the hero himself.

Interestingly, in his autobiography Sam described his father as "unhappy, unfulfilled, and unable to enjoy his life." He used the same words to describe his own state when he was entering counselling. Then in the booklet, addressed to his children, Sam introduces his list of values and beliefs that is also very much his father's system of values and beliefs, as "Dad's step-by-step guide to personal happiness and self-fulfillment." The inconsistency is striking; it would be curious to know to what extent Sam has been consciously aware of it. (I did not have the intellectual agility, nor later the courage to ask). In lived experience, this "guide" has led both the father and the son to many successes and achievements, but not to a sense of a personal fulfillment and enjoyment of life. The personal fulfillment and joy are not even a true part of these values and beliefs; they are rather a possible byproduct, or a possible reward for adhering to them.

Sam not only adheres to these values and beliefs. Metaphorically speaking, his father still watches over his shoulder, and judges how well he adheres to them. True, in connection with
Sam's increased tolerance, flexibility, and acceptance of his father's judgments also seem to be more flexible and accepting. But they put Sam in a serious double-bind. All of these values and beliefs sound like a battle call for personal agency in overcoming an unjust socio-economic, cultural, historical, or even personally constitutional destiny. However, how to be truly agentic when following somebody else's rules to agency?

Thus, Sam still lives in a serious conflict, and his assessment that he may be only half-way through to its solution makes a lot of sense. For example, he is very much aware that he would like to have his life populated by good friends, that he would like to meet new stimulating people, and have some simple fun unrelated to his work. For these expressed purposes he has sublet an apartment in the nearest bigger town that could offer better opportunities to meet his wishes. Moreover, one of Sam's very likeable features seems to be his keen sense of curiosity. Thus, he would truly like to go to a football game, just for the heck of it, just to satisfy his curiosity. But he does not go out to meet people, meet acquaintances and perhaps make friends, nor does he go to a football game. Instead, he loyally and dutifully works on papers he has taken with him, then he watches television, and goes to bed, dissatisfied. It is confusing. On the one hand, he has not done what he would have truly liked to do. On the other hand, is not that "truly him," too? A man who fulfills his duty, and does not waste his time just because it may be fun; these are the principles he adheres to. But satisfied he is not.

Perhaps even more telling is Sam's theatrical experience. He loves "letting go" of his inhibitions, he enjoys being emotional, and "in the flow" of his performance; he finds it a great and freeing release. But he can do it only in the prescribed, scripted, and rehearsed safety of the theatre. It is a task, a prescribed duty, and he can fulfill it exceptionally well. He can play "spontaneously," but he knows that it is just that-a played spontaneity, not the "real thing." The dramatic emotions are his, and at the same time very safely not his. The real spontaneity, and even a less dramatic display of his emotions, would not feel safe in his daily life; they would
contradict his basic beliefs and assumptions about self, others, and the world. The beliefs that are, in fact, also only partly his. Yet he also knows the freeing release the theatrical performance gives him, and that it touches and fulfills—even in this "as if" form—some of his basic needs which are also truly a part of him. But he does not feel free to be that part of himself in his life.

The conflict Sam still lives in reverberates in many areas of his life. Regardless of his undeniable changes, he still somewhat anxiously watches his first wife, Karen, and wonders what she thinks about him, and whether she approves of him. Although he rationally knows that she equally contributed to the failure of their marriage, he still feels guilty for the things long past. According to his father's rules, he did not fulfill his duty, and he did not "stick with it" no matter what. And the disapproving eye of his father still watches him. So he fulfills his duty, and pays the mortgage on Dona's house; a house he rarely visits or sleeps in, and he never intends to live in.

Sam himself admits that he is still quite critical of others. His daughter, Emma, corroborates, although she also welcomes a substantial change in his level and way of criticism. But many of his relationships, other than with his children, seem to remain quite competitive. It is difficult for Sam to give a sincere credit to somebody else's performance, and thus, to sincerely admire and invest himself in somebody else. It is still like a competition for "a bigger piece of a candy;" if Sam gives credit, it is as if it were taken from him. It is difficult to form an intimate friendship under these conditions. Sam indeed seems to be caught in the middle here. His tolerance of others has dramatically increased, but the next step—actively extending himself to others and investing in them—seems to be still very difficult for him, and perhaps frightening. Yet he knows that this is exactly what he misses in his life, and this is also his major concern for his future. He often feels lonely.

Sam did not emancipate himself from his father, and from his father's beliefs and values (which, by the way, would not mean rejecting him). In this sense Sam's life story is a
thematically unified continuation of the family saga; within the context of its rules a very successful continuation. However, it leaves only limited room for Sam to develop his own story, the way it would please him, and give him a sense of full authorship.

Nevertheless, Sam's saga also became less rigid, less strongly dedicated to its stylistic purity, and to the rules of the genre. This loosening seems to offer some important new options and possibilities. For example, with the less rigid adherence to the saga's thesis many other characters do not have to be treated as a dangerous, subversive antithesis, and do not have to be defeated, overcome, or "left behind" abandoned. They may be treated as voices of parallel truths, and assume important roles in the story on their own merit, not only as objects or obstacles on the hero's journey.

Thus, today Sam can laugh at his mother's peculiarities, and laugh with her, while recognizing and respecting her personal story, and incorporating it in his own. He can be civil with his ex-wife, even warmly interested in her present life story, and enjoy her interest in him. He can have a heated argument with his daughter, and instead of angrily withdrawing from her, he can stay with her, achieve a resolution, and appreciate her truth. Not having to sacrifice others or himself in the name of a higher goal, in the name of the hero's duty, he can be more honest with his present partner and himself, and not to move in with her when he does not want to. He can at least entertain the idea of going to a football game for no other purpose than to have fun, and to satisfy his curiosity. Sam seems to experiment with these new possibilities and options, and often finds them rewarding. If he fully realizes them, and fully incorporates them in his story, it will not be a heroic saga any more. Yet, it may be a more liveable and satisfying story.

In summary, Sam's therapy changes seem to be connected with his reinterpretation of his relationships with some of his major significant others. That is, relationships in which he formed his basic assumptions about self, others, the world, and his position in-the-world. The reinterpretation seems to involve abandoning of a rigid, absolute, extreme and simplistic stance
in the relationship, and creating of a more flexible, relative and moderate stance that can accept
the other person in his or her human complexity. This tolerance and acceptance of complexity in
others seems to be connected with the same acceptance and tolerance of self. Thus, for example,
Sam not only rediscovered his mother in more plausibly human dimensions that made sense to
him, and were acceptable to him, but he also rediscovered himself in his more human and
acceptable dimensions. The rediscovery and acceptance of himself seems to be connected with
the increased sense of agency at least in some areas of Sam's life.

In a circular way, the changes in Sam's major relationship, and in Sam's perceived position in
it, seem to influence many other relationships in his life, and the changes in these relationships
seem to influence the changes in his major constituting relationship, and in his perception of
himself. These changes are reflected in many areas of Sam's life story, that is, how he interprets
his past, lives his present, and anticipates his future.

On the other hand, Sam did not reinterpret all of his major constituting relationships, and his
position there. The areas of his life, dominated by the unchanged beliefs and values also show
only limited or no changes. Sam feels that his life is "compartmentalized." Actually, the changed
and unchanged areas of Sam's life do interact; sometimes they interfere with each other, and
perhaps sometimes they create new conflicts. Nevertheless, the changes—or the lack of them—in
Sam's life seem to have persuasive thematic unity, consistent with the genre of the story Sam
tells about himself, and lives.

Case Study 3: The Story of Katherine

Katherine is 45 years old, lives in a common-law relationship, and has no children. She does
free lance work on casual projects such as fund-rising drives. On the first screening interview,
she came casually dressed, and approximately 5-10 minutes ahead of our meeting time. She
appeared to be relaxed, open, curious, warmly friendly, and with a notable social grace and skill;
a good working rapport seemed to be established quite soon.
She read and apparently understood the Letter of Information. Her clarifying questions, prepared in writing beforehand, were mainly concerned with technical procedures. At my invitation she asked an impromptu question about my professional background.

Katherine appeared to have met all the inclusion criteria set for the participation in this research project. She attempted individual counselling twice; each time it turned out to be only a brief encounter. She felt that she was confronted with issues she was "not ready to deal with," and so, after a few sessions she withdrew. She was referred to group psychotherapy, and it became her major and virtually her only mode of counselling. She stayed in the group until she felt ready to leave. She had one follow-up individual session, with an option to use more of them should the need arise. She has not felt that need.

In Katherine's opinion, the counselling was very helpful. It changed her relationships with others, and with herself: "My relationships are much more honest. I'm not in pursuit of everybody liking me." And also, "I feel more me.... I'm more confident in myself." Although Katherine appeared aware that this project may be emotionally difficult for her, she decided to go ahead. As her main motivation for participation she gave her curiosity to learn more about herself. Thus, she signed the Consent Form.

The Autobiography and The Life Story Interview: The Life Story as a Chronicle; the Denial of Meaning has its Own Meaning

Katherine's autobiography is a 20 page, neatly typed document. Let us remember that it is a representation of her life story as she had seen it at a certain time in her life. However, it is not really a story. In its genre it oscillates between a history and a chronicle of what has happened to her. The episodes that may qualify as a history usually do not interpret the events in terms of perceived causality or attributed meaning within or for the whole story, but they contain some degree of Katherine's valuative stance. Thus, we learn what she perceived as good or bad for her, what made her happy or sad, or at least-but quite often-what events surprised her. However,
when events are described as in a chronicle, they do not contain any interpretive stance; they simply happen to her.

In this way Katherine's history appears to be very fragmented, that is, flooded by episodes that simply happened to her, and overpopulated by characters that enter and leave. The presented text might have been shorter or longer, there might have been more or less episodes and people included in it, but the overall meaning of the history would likely not have changed that much. It is not clear why some characters and episodes were included, and presumably others were not; there seems to be no story plot with its structural logic, no desired goal or common purpose the characters and episodes would pursue or hinder, and move the story from its beginning to its provisional end with a meaningful direction. The only direction, the only unifying theme, and seemingly the only inclusion criterion for the story's characters and episodes appears to be their chronology, their order in physical time in which they have happened to Katherine, or in which they entered or left her life. The characters and episodes seem to be of equal importance. Or, from the viewpoint of story development, equally lacking it. There seems to be no agentic hero through whose eyes the characters and episodes would come alive with importance and meaning, a hero who would weave a story from these characters and episodes by lending them a sense of purpose and direction.

Instead, Katherine's account seems to be hero-less. It is as if Katherine, the anticipated hero, was threading the beads of life events that happened to her on the chronological string of her life line, sometimes saddened, sometimes satisfied, and sometimes surprised by what had come her way. But she does not seem to have much say in what comes her way, or how and when. By her passivity she creates a vacuum that circumstances and other people fill in, do things to her, or outright tell her what to do. She does not like it, and quietly responds in her own ways that, in their own turn, often catch other people by surprise.

Katherine's passive stance is expressed equally and persistently in the grammar, the syntax,
and the stylistic composition of her autobiography. The very first paragraph may well illustrate the point; it is like a key in which the whole text has been composed. It starts with the classical "I was born...," and continues with snippets of recollections of what has happened to her since then. For example, she fell asleep with a chewing gum in her mouth and woke up with it stuck in her hair; a girlfriend locked her up in the bathroom and threatened to cut off her hair with a butcher knife; she fell head first into a cement hole at a construction site; she was bumped by a car when crossing a busy street she was told not to; there was a surprise visit from her Aunt and Uncle; she had whooping cough; and so on. The memory that ends the paragraph, in which the first grade teacher embarrassed her by ordering her to change her clothes, fits this list only partially.

People generally tend to have discontinuous memories of their childhood experiences, especially of those frightening ones, and they quite justifiably and understandably feel that things had happened to them. Katherine's recollections seem to be different. First, she remembers those presumably frightening experiences not because she was frightened and thus, they had some importance for her; they were manifestly included simply because they happened. For example, in the "cement hole" incident Katherine stresses that it was her older sister who was unnecessarily frightened and "hysterical." In the car accident she "only remembers [her] parents' concern." Second, Katherine's stance of somebody to whom things happen remains unchanged throughout her history. It is not the understandable childhood position any more; it has become her life stance. People did things to her and made her do things, they "made her feel" a certain way, boys "took a liking" to her, and so on. Even her first encounter with counselling happened because of her friend: "Something she said made me realize I was out of control and needed to get help."

The last example points to another salient feature of Katherine's autobiography; there is a distinct flavour of secrecy veiled in uncertainty. As pointed out before, her account is overflowing with characters and episodes that usually did something to her, but what they did (or
said) is often veiled in fuzzy, uncertain expressions (e.g., "something she said"). As if she herself was uncertain about what happened. The result is something like a half-secret; we know that something has happened but we do not know exactly what, and Katherine appears both open and secretive at the same time.

Moreover, Katherine treats her own awareness of her deeds, thoughts, and feelings with the same veil of fuzziness and uncertainty, as if she were trying to keep secrets from herself. This feature is particularly prominent in her accounts of her relationships with men. For example, with many of her boyfriends Katherine claims not being aware that they were interested in her sexually; moreover, she consistently refers to it as that they "wanted more than a friendship." With her very first steady teenage boyfriend she was surprised that he was angry when she went to a party without telling him, and he found out. She chalked it up to "I was pretty naive..." Then "his friend C. began taking an interest in me and I guess I must have reciprocated." It is not a "guess;" actually, she invited him to a school play. Only much later, after some desperate actions of her boyfriend, and serious fights with him, "I began to realize just how serious he was about the relationship." Later with her future husband she "didn't really clue into the fact then that he was jealous." Then the marriage "came about, I believe, from my giving [him] an ultimatum..." Katherine recalls a row with her father: "Actually I don't know if he wouldn't speak to me or if it was just me that wouldn't speak to him." With another man Katherine was "not sure why I spent more time with him," and with another one she "sensed that he was becoming more interested in me than just a friend but I wasn't feeling the same way or if I was, [I] wasn't aware of my feelings."

Katherine's stance gives an impression that she has no sense of Self in her own life story. However, it may be exactly the best depiction of her sense of Self: insecure about her position with others and in the world, full of doubts, and frightened to admit many things not only to others, but even to herself. Admissions that could not have been avoided had to be at least
softened by indefinite modifiers such as "I guess," "I believe," and so on. Knowing something for sure would open the door to personal responsibility and agency that Katherine did not seem to believe she could bear.

In the end of Katherine's autobiography it is not quite clear why she sought counselling; she never says so directly. Nevertheless, it implicitly transpires from the text of the last two paragraphs. She seems to be dissatisfied with the intimate relationship she had at that time; she wonders whether there has been some pattern in her relationships, and what that may say about her self-esteem. In the very last paragraph Katherine suggests her dissatisfaction with the distant relationship with her father. In fact, she ends up the autobiography with a profound sentence: "I guess I've always wanted to hear from him that he likes me as a person, though I've never just asked him this."

Both insights, and especially their connection, are impressive, but they do not seem to be directly connected with the rest of the text. These insights seemingly appear from nowhere, incongruent with the rest of the text, and in a strange way they seem to be both present and absent at the same time. It is confusing, but perhaps it makes it easier to understand why Katherine in her autobiography often repeated that she was "confused."

It is not easy to interpret such a fragmented, hero-less, directionless, passive, uncertain, revealing and concealing, seemingly self-less, confusing text; it is like interpreting a shadow. However, once again, let us remember that it is a representation of Katherine's life story as she had seen it at a certain time in her life. And we may only guess how difficult it might have been to live with a life story, or to live the life story that barely even qualifies as a story: fragmented, hero-less, directionless, and so on. We may guess how it is to live such a crowded life, with relentlessly yet seemingly randomly changing cast and scenery in a stream of seemingly disconnected episodes. However, to make some sense out of it, and perhaps to understand how it came about, Katherine's history has to be retold as a story.
Katherine was born the youngest one in a sibship of 4; 9 years older sister Pam, 6 years older mentally handicapped brother Alex, and 4 years older sister Jill preceded her. So, right from the beginning her story was somewhat crowded, and there were many people in a position to tell her what to do, or how. Judging from her autobiography, her parents—for a variety of reasons—did not seem much present; thus, a lot of this telling what to do had been done by her older siblings, which also might not have helped. Apparently, Katherine did not like it, and as she grew older, she became more and more aware of it: "I was becoming more and more stubborn and didn't like being told I couldn't do things...;" or "Again, I was very angry at my brother-in-law for deciding what was to happen in my life;" or "It seemed like everyone was trying to tell me what my behaviour should be." Katherine's story is full of instances of people telling her what to do. Many are simply presented or implicit, without Katherine's comment, although they substantially influenced her life (e.g., the imposed decision about her career path).

Even though Katherine played the most in her early childhood with her older sister, Jill, once she felt strong enough, she rebelled and competed against her. Somewhat "bookish" Jill criticised her younger sister for her interest in boys and appearance. Katherine struck back with "She had only two boyfriends, both being very short in duration, and only two close girlfriends. I on the other hand had many friends, male and female, and spent most of my time going out."

Importantly, the quantity was supposed to "prove" the point. On another occasion Katherine was to teach Jill how to drive a car with a manual transmission; she derided her so badly that Jill "stomped off in utter frustration." It was not Jill who could tell Katherine what to do any more.

However, in Katherine's story there were not many people she would feel strong enough to stand up to. Thus, her prevalent pattern of coping with "being told to..." would be different than that with Jill. The pattern of her coping with authorities may be best expressed by "my mother was the one who made the decisions about whether or not we were allowed to do things," and
"you didn't argue with my mother." Katherine would not argue; she would seemingly obediently and obligingly listen, and then, if possible, quietly do things her way. There is a consistent thematic unity among Katherine's crossing "a busy street we had been told not to," and much later quietly going to a party with a boy other than her "possessive" boyfriend, or against her mother's strong ban necking with her boyfriend in a car parked a block away from her house, and many other similar instances. Sometimes Katherine would get caught, and then the authority figures would be surprised. They did not expect such behavior from such an obedient and obliging girl, and they would punish Katherine unjustly harsher than others. Katherine explicitly describes this pattern with at least two teachers, and later with a boss, but there are many implicit instances of the same pattern throughout her autobiography.

However, more often than not there was not even room for such a quiet rebellion, and Katherine had to do what she was told to. From her autobiography it is not clear how she felt about it (or about the mentioned perceived injustice), nor what she did with or about her feelings. From the context it appears that she passively went along, accepting the inevitable, and believing that she did not have much say in her own life.

Katherine's crowded basic family constellation, and the particular hierarchy of power in it, had some other serious implications for her life. First of all, she rarely if ever felt special in that crowd, and at the bottom of that power hierarchy. The quest to feel special seems to permeate Katherine's life story; it seems to be an implicit, ubiquitous universal motivator. But she went about her quest by the means familiar, and thus available to her, that is, by crowding her story even more. As if in the quantity of her friends and male admirers or companions rested her assurance of a special status. She tried to be special to everyone, but apparently the more she tried to expand, the more she did not feel special to anyone. It is by definition a self-defeating quest; "special" naturally refers to singularity, to uniqueness.

Connected seems to be Katherine's substantial attention to, and a deep emotional investment
in characters that in her life story were subordinate to her. She apparently had important, special relationships with all of her dogs (3 are mentioned in her autobiography), and with the biological and adoptive children of her older sister, Pam ("I became a very big part of my nieces' lives..."). These relationships seemed to be promising Katherine both a special status, and some sense of autonomous power. However, the promise has never fully materialized, or did not last; there has always been some superordinate power, bigger than Katherine's, that interferes with relationships with her subordinates, and thus, "dethrones" her even here. For example, the first dog was run over by a car when Katherine was too young to really take care of it. The second one was taken away from her by her parents, and given to SPCA. "I begged and pleaded with my parents not to take him away but they weren't listening to me.... I was very angry with my parents because I felt like they didn't listen to me and give me a chance..." The third one could not live with her in an apartment she rented, and later had to be euthanized because of an incurable illness ("The decision to have her put to sleep was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do").

A strikingly similar situation developed in Katherine's relationship with the children of her older sister. For example, Pam adopted a child with special needs that she felt she could not meet, and decided to give him up. Katherine comments: "I was very sad to see R. go as I had become very attached to him..." Later Pam's husband disapproved of Katherine's moving in with her future husband: "[He] said I wasn't allowed in their home and my sister was not to take the kids to see me. I was very hurt and angry..." In this case Katherine was able to use her previously described "quiet rebellion;" she moved in with her man, and kept secretly visiting her nieces when her brother-in-law was away working. Nevertheless, these examples illustrate how the pattern of powerlessness kept reenacting itself in Katherine's life, even in relationships with her assumed subordinates.

Katherine's sense of not being special had most likely something to do with her parents not being much present in her childhood. It might be that her parents were already too old, tired, or
used to having children to grant the special attention to the youngest one, the fourth one. Or that they were too preoccupied with making a living at that stage in their lives. Or, especially in the mother's case, that she was too busy trying to meet the special needs of Katherine's older, mentally handicapped brother. Generally, her parents appeared to be good providers, and capable of keeping the family together and going, but not with much manifested love and warmth, nor with much loving attention for Katherine, much admiration or expectations of her, or much listening to her, or taking her seriously.

In any case, in Katherine's autobiography there are no warm memories connected to the home of her childhood, and to the family life lived inside it. Apparently, in her memories she mostly played outside, or visited the homes of her friends. Interestingly, she remembers playing in the house of her neighbours which somewhat eerily mirrored her own house in every respect, including an identical floor plan, the same number of children, and an overweight mother and a slim father like her own, but there is no direct reference to playing, or to family life, inside her own home. Similarly, she remembers happy times at her uncle's place in the country during summer visits there.

One memory of Katherine about playing with outside friends warrants a small detour here. At one point she was involved with a group of friends where one child had always been temporarily scapegoated and shunned; this unenviable role somehow inexplicably rotated among the children. In her autobiography, Katherine does not admit directly that she also spent her turn as an "outcast," but she remembers that "it was a very awful feeling being the outcast and I know I shed a lot of tears because of it." In contrast, being "in" meant being "special," a feeling Katherine did not readily experience at home. Later in her life, be it with friends or at work, Katherine always tried hard to be "in," and apparently was quite successful in it. Although it did not necessarily grant her the "special" position, it did avoid the painful "outcast" position.

When Katherine muses why she "spent a lot of time out of doors when the weather permitted
or seemed to play at [her] friend's homes," the answer indirectly reveals the atmosphere at home. "I don't know if this was because my mother didn't like having kids around or because I didn't like having kids in because my parents fought a lot and didn't seem to care that there were strangers in the house." Katherine speculates that another reason for being discouraged from inviting children to her house may be that her mother "found it a big job taking care of my brother who is mentally handicapped and also my parents ran their business from the home." In any case, Katherine seemed to have many reasons to avoid her home.

Katherine's musings contain themes that have become important in her life. She was somewhat embarrassed of her family, both because of her parents uninhibited arguments, and because of her brother's mental handicap that she (as she repeatedly mentions) did not quite understand. At one point Katherine reveals: "Although the people in the neighbourhood seemed friendly our family felt a bit shunned." On the one hand Katherine developed superb social skills in dealing with her friends and peers outside of her home, and also most likely with their parents. On the other hand she learned how to keep a certain level of secrecy mainly by omission rather than commission, that is, by avoidance. Finally, she never seemed to have developed a sense of private intimacy and connectedness inside her home, and within her family.

It seems as though Katherine was very much left to her own devices; her parents would do "their things," and Katherine would do her own things, preferably out of their busy way. In many ways Katherine managed remarkably well (e.g., in her social life). In other ways she did not do that well. She remembers: "My parents didn't seem to monitor the amount of time I spent going out and therefore I didn't spend much time doing homework and my grades were not very good. At report card time this was a source of annoyance for my parents but again I don't remember receiving any assistance from them." Or on another occasion: "My parents were becoming quite lax about how I spent my free time..." This approach unfortunately influenced Katherine's career options and choices; this aspect will be discussed later. The point to be made here is to illustrate
a certain separateness, noninvolvement, or isolation within Katherine's family.

"The only outing as a whole family," Katherine remembers, "was a picnic we had in Stanley Park." Her memory contains the separation in her family: "Dad being fun and playing with us but Mom sort of was in the background and stayed on the blanket. She also didn't go to the beach with us and I think some of this was because she was fat and felt self-conscious." Thus, let us also look at Katherine's relationships with her respective parents separately.

The formative relationships with father and mother.

Katherine's father was apparently slim (an important positive feature in Katherine's eyes), active, fun to be with, and more tolerant than her mother. Katherine remembers that in her early childhood "once in a while my father would gather the kids in the neighbourhood and take us to the beach. I enjoyed being with my father and so did my friends." This memory, however, implicitly contains an important theme that will later reverberate in her intimate relationships. Katherine was not special in these outings; she had to share her father with her friends, and she accepted it as a given. Unfortunately, even this shared fun with her father was rare: "My Dad worked a lot of hours so I don't remember him being around too much..." Thus, there are no other childhood memories of her father, except once more mentioning that "Dad worked a lot so we never saw much of him." And then a small episode inconspicuously tucked away in the text, yet apparently worthy of being remembered.

Katherine was hungry before her bed time, and mother offered her a peanut butter sandwich. Katherine remembers "my father getting upset with my mother and saying that she would make me fat like her." Interestingly, much later in her life the struggle to be slim and fit, even becoming an aerobic instructor and training for a marathon, became perhaps the most pronounced of Katherine's active, agentic actions. In her own words, "...it was my way of saying I will not be like my mother and die of a heart attack."

Katherine's father was apparently quietly supportive, but rarely got involved actively. For
example, he would be relaxed about Katherine's physical involvement with boys in her puberty. When mother caught Katherine kissing her boyfriend, and complained about it, "his response was kind of well they are only normal and what harm was it." But he would not sit down and have a helpful talk with her. Because her mother usually limited herself to forbidding and telling her "that boys only wanted one thing," Katherine was left to her own devices also in this regard.

Pity. Her father meant a lot to her, and whenever he got more actively involved in her life, she cherished it. For example, when as a young woman she was leaving for Montreal, on the way to the airport "...my father started to cry and said he felt like he was losing me for good and wondered if I would come back. While I was away my father wrote to me and I was very touched by his words..."

However, this open emotional display of love was quite rare. Katherine knew that her father would support her by his actions. When she wanted to move in with her future husband, "Dad said he didn't condone what we were going to do but that I was their daughter and I would always be welcome." At her mother's funeral, father supported her by his action-"he held my hand as we walked in"-but at the same time he said "we won't cry." Katherine comments: "My father, like [my husband], couldn't handle tears and I always felt like this was not appropriate behaviour after this."

Father's impact on Katherine, including the impact of his absence in her childhood, was substantial, although never fully acknowledged, addressed, and understood in her autobiography. At one point in her early adulthood she moved in to live with her parents again. After a unspecified "fight with Dad," the very next day she moved out to live with her sister. Her parents would come to visit, but "my dad and I would not speak to one another. Actually I don't know if he wouldn't speak to me or if it was just me that wouldn't speak to him." Instead, Katherine remembers having a recurring anxious dream at that time: her father driving a dangerous road and heading for a fatal crash. She never attempted to understand her dream, nor the meaning of
her argument: "Time passed and eventually things were back to normal even though we never discussed our fight and still have never discussed it."

This episode might perhaps be the best example of how Katherine functioned in the world. She would claim, and somehow, at least partially, persuade herself that "things were back to normal," although she would also know that "things" were not "normal," that she hurt, and the argument between her and her father remained unfinished. But in her frame of reference this state of affairs was, in fact, "normal." As if Katherine, feeling powerless to find a more satisfying solution, accepted what appeared inevitable to her, and moved on to another episode in her life, or to another relationship. This is perhaps a useful survival strategy, but with a cost.

Generally, Katherine's father would be there for her for "big things;" if she were in trouble and came to him for help, he would invariably support her. But he was not so available for "little things" such as emotional closeness, daily interactions, or actively involving himself in her life. Actually, Katherine concludes her autobiography with thoughts about her father, and their relationship, which she is "trying to make better": "To me he seems very self-absorbed and not very interested in what goes on in my life and I wonder if I'm not dealing with many years of feeling this way. I have tried to talk to him about this but again get the feeling that he's not really listening. I try to tell myself that I have to accept him the way he is and not take it personally but for whatever reason I want him to understand me and I want us to be close. I guess I've always wanted to hear from him that he likes me as a person, though I've never just asked him this." This conclusion seems to be the most, and very rare, self-reflective part of Katherine's autobiography.

Even this level of self-reflection seems to be absent in Katherine's memories of her mother. Also, Katherine's recollections are virtually emotionless; there are no memories of any warm closeness, nor of angry fights. "Mom spent her time watching T.V., cutting out recipes, baking, and taking care of the clerical end of the business." Besides, "she found it a big job taking care of my [mentally handicapped] brother;" Katherine never reflected on her feelings about her brother.
getting mother's "special attention." However, "my mother was the one who made the decisions about whether or not we were allowed to do things," and "you didn't argue with my mother." So, Katherine accepted it; this is how things were.

Thus, Katherine knew her mother wanted her to play outside, or at her friends' homes, and so she did. On the one hand, as mentioned before, she had developed excellent social skills with her peers. On the other hand, she could not develop a close relationship with her mother, she could not do and share activities with her, and she could not learn from her that a home may be a warm, fun, and secure place to be, and how to make it so. In fact, what Katherine did learn about the meaning of "home" seems exactly opposite, and as we shall see, it influenced her own marriage.

Her mother had apparently taken basic care of Katherine, but would rarely, if ever, go that crucial step beyond. For example, she took a frightened Katherine to school on her first day, and then left her there. Katherine does not recall being prepared for her first day at school, nor how or whether at all her mother dealt with her fears. Similarly, Katherine remembers her parents' disappointment with her report cards, but she does not remember her mother, who was at home, helping her with or supervising her school work. The traditional mother-daughter talk was apparently limited to mother's warning that "boys only wanted one thing," and the insistence that Katherine "shouldn't be alone with them." The latter one may be a good example of how the busy mother tried, unfortunately, to delegate her responsibility (i.e., the peers would, in fact, "supervise" her daughter's behavior). Although Katherine learned how to quietly do her own things out of mother's sight, many of mother's superficial and unhelpful injunctions regarding the opposite sex stayed with her. And sometimes she simply could not quietly and independently do her own things.

Because Katherine received from her mother little or no guidance in important developmental matters, she coped on her own as well as she could. When she ran into difficulties, and parental involvement was unavoidable, her mother would step in and impose a "solution" that would have
little to do with helping Katherine. It would be more an attempt to make the trouble go away, and free the mother to do whatever seemed to be more pressing or important. However, some of these "solutions" had unfortunate and lasting consequences for Katherine.

For example, Katherine was unsupervised, never led to appreciate the importance of her school work or helped with it, and always tacitly encouraged to stay outside of her home. So, she spent a lot of time as a teenager with her friends and boyfriends, and did not do very well at school. Mother, instead of helping her to improve her grades, met with a school counsellor, and "it was decided" that Katherine should change over to the secretarial program to finish her high school. "[Mother] saw me going to work in an office much the same as she did. I don't know that this was so much my decision or my mother's but you didn't argue with my mother." And that was it, "it was decided." The passive voice, describing the superbly active human ability to decide, speaks for itself.

Most likely Katherine felt angry, and unjustly wronged. In the same paragraph she writes that the counsellor "was a major bag in my opinion, [and] didn't have much confidence in my ability." And she remembers that this counsellor, together with her homeroom teacher, had once before wrongly accused her of smoking and punished her for it: "This wasn't true but again nobody would listen to our side." The teacher told her "how disappointed he was with me when he heard, again because he had not expected this kind of behaviour from me." Katherine concludes: "It seemed like everyone was trying to tell me what my behaviour should be."

At many levels, this is an important, loaded paragraph. First and obviously, it describes how a major life decision, influencing Katherine's career, had happened to her. Just like that, with Katherine having no say in it, oblivious to her own role in it, and thus, feeling unjustly wronged, and powerless. The paragraph also suggests that at some level Katherine has been aware of a repetitive pattern in her life which she has generalized. The pattern may be described as people, namely in an authority position, telling her what to do and how to be, for their own purposes,
without understanding her, trusting her, or being curious about her own desires. Thus, these decisions seemed to be very removed from her; she did not seem to understand them, and they felt arbitrarily imposed on her, and unjust. Sometimes she managed to quietly get around them, sometimes not.

Importantly, it seemed to be Katherine's relationship with her mother where this pattern had originated, and also in the presented episode her mother played an instrumental role. She started the episode, but then she disappeared. Katherine's anger was not even directed at her, but at the teacher and the counsellor who only played their predetermined roles in the predetermined pattern. But there is not much of an explicit story between Katherine and her mother, though implicitly the mother is undeniably present, and this lack of a common story is, in its own right, a story of Katherine and her mother. It may be described as a story of great distance and denial; denial of mutual closeness and emotional involvement, and—at least for Katherine—denial that it matters.

Then, not surprisingly, from the teenage memories on, mother is almost entirely missing in Katherine's history, until her untimely death. The few exceptions are consistent with the previously described pattern. Mother briefly appears to express, indirectly, her disapproval; for example, when Katherine wanted to move in with her future husband, "my mother wouldn't talk directly to us, she sat in the dining room which was adjacent to the living room where we sat with my father." Perhaps it was another embarrassing encounter for Katherine; her future husband was present. However, by now Katherine did not need mother's permission, and it was her father who gave her the reassurance that regardless of his disagreement she would always be accepted as their daughter. Yet, she credited her future husband for "how well he got on with my mom and how readily he accepted my brother," that is, the family members Katherine was, for different reasons, embarrassed of.

When Katherine was 31, her mother died of a heart attack. Thus, she explicitly and forcefully
reentered Katherine's history. Although her mother's death was obviously an important event in Katherine's life, it is difficult to understand how it impacted her and why, that is, what it meant for her. Katherine, as on many other occasions, refused to acknowledge its importance and meaning. The text of her autobiography is quite telling in itself; mother's death is introduced as just another event that hit Katherine hard, but it is not clear why; as well, its relative significance to other events remains unclear. Katherine recounts her difficulties around her divorce, and with her boyfriend at that time; then she goes on: "It was about this time that I felt myself shut down emotionally and with my mother's death in March of .... I became more like a robot just going through the motions. I couldn't accept my mother's death. I don't remember crying and definitely could not say 'my mother is dead.' The only time I felt like I might cry was the day of her service but... [her father had asked her not to]."

Three months after her mother's death Katherine started training for a marathon. In her recollections, the race was of tremendous importance for her; "somehow I felt like it was my way of saying I will not be like my mother and die of a heart attack." Katherine did not want to be "like her mother" in many other ways, for example, fat, held back by men, children, and household chores, and often negative. In other words, Katherine had something to prove to herself, and to her mother, but she would not directly acknowledge it. In fact, in the career decision episode, it was not only the counsellor who "didn't have much confidence in my ability;" more importantly, it also was her mother, but that would be too painful to admit.

The last epilogue came about two years later. Katherine writes: "I think I also came to grips with my mother's death and found myself thinking of her often and how much I wished she could be seeing and experiencing things with me." She would not say what she thought about her mother. But it seems that the wish that "she would be seeing and experiencing things with me" was a sad wish for something Katherine had never experienced with her mother when she was alive. It was a wish for something what could have been, and Katherine longed for, but never
Katherine's career.

As noted before, Katherine's mother substantially influenced her career path. Let us take a closer look at it; Katherine's career reflects the interplay of identification and complementarity with her mother, as well as reenactments of the generalized patterns established in Katherine's childhood.

Katherine held a succession of clerical jobs, as a receptionist and a secretary (cf. "she [the mother] saw me going to work in an office much the same as she had"). Katherine apparently never had any problems in getting a job when she wanted one, and due to her excellent social skills she "made friends very quickly with a few of the people in our department and was quite happy." Or, on another job, "I seemed to fit in quite easily and enjoyed my work." In fact, Katherine's social interactions, and the sense of being accepted, seemed to be the main source of her job satisfaction. Moreover, Katherine's skills in achieving the "in-crowd" position, and striking friendships and alliances with people helpful and important in this regard, also proved to be generally useful, although occasionally they misfired.

However, unlike her mother, Katherine was more ambitious. For example, after working for some time, she "went to business college for some refresher courses so I could get a more interesting position." Not only did she succeed in getting a job with a major company, but she was steadily promoted from a receptionist to a secretary, and then was considered for a promotion to the sales desk.

However, an old pattern from her life is reenacted here. The company's head office turned her promotion down because of her gender: "Up to this point in time only men got into sales with this company and they hadn't even considered a female, so I was turned down and remained at reception and secretary to the sales staff." There is not a single word on how Katherine felt about this blatant injustice; again, a powerful authority was limiting her, and telling her what and how
she should be. She seemingly accepted it, and feeling powerless, decided to stay with the company. However, when a new branch manager came from the head office, according to Katherine "[after a while] he began to find fault with me and eventually fired me." In Katherine's understanding it was because she "was still friends with the old branch manager and a couple of the other guys who had worked on the sales desk..." One could wonder to what extent Katherine's unresolved resentment unwittingly played a role in it.

While Katherine stayed with that company, another curious pattern reenacted itself; a pattern closely connected with the previous one, although less consequential. Katherine and her male co-worker, Mel, invited their younger female co-worker to celebrate her birthday during the lunch hour. They got drunk, and the young co-worker was unable, whereas Katherine and Mel were barely able, to return to work. "Once again I was told [by the branch manager] that he was very disappointed in me and that he had expected better behaviour from me." Also, Katherine believed that the branch manager dealt with her much harsher than with Mel.

Being fired, especially when perceived as unjustly, stirred some powerful feelings, but typically for Katherine, only retroactively in her autobiography she admitted "I don't think I fully realized the impact it had on me." However, even then, when writing her autobiography, she would not reflect on her feelings. Apparently, she was depressed at that time, and in her typical way she would both indirectly admit it, and directly deny it. Thus, in the same paragraph we may read that she was looking for a job, but "I didn't look very hard and in retrospect don't think my heart was in it." She also remembers "having spells where I would become very despondent and not talk [to my roommate] at all..." Katherine, always very social, started isolating herself, and for the first time needed "long periods of time to be by myself." And yet, in the same paragraph, we also read: "All was well, I thought, but I had been out of work for some time now."

As noted before, this coping strategy came with a cost. For example, Katherine would not understand the meaning of her depression, of her unwitting contributions to the "things
happening to her," and so, "things" would continue happening to her, rendering her feeling powerless and unjustly wronged. She would fight the discomfort by trying to persuade herself, and others, that "all was well," or "things were back to normal" (as in the unresolved incident with her father), but her self-defeating patterns would not change. Moreover, this coping strategy of self-deception may become a self-defeating pattern in its own right.

On the other hand, this coping style had always helped Katherine to bounce back and move on, though leaving behind a host of unresolved issues. She might have learned this coping style from her busy mother, but in many ways she did not want to be like her mother. Katherine's career ambitions, and her attention to physical fitness, were possible ways of differentiating herself (which may be viewed as a complementary response to her mother, and an identification response to her father).

Katherine found again some clerical jobs that apparently did not mean much to her. However, later she was asked to teach a fitness class for a group she had been attending, which she "considered to be a major honor." She enjoyed this part-time teaching position, and was willing to make personal sacrifices to keep it. Interestingly, around that time Katherine also believed that she "came to grips with my mother's death."

Besides that, while working part-time both her clerical and the fitness-teaching jobs, she attended and successfully completed a school for travel agents. Not surprisingly, considering her strengths and abilities, shortly after graduation she found a job as a travel agent; there was no mother or a counsellor telling her what and how to be, or doubting her abilities. In a way, Katherine had "proved" her point.

When she was, after about a year, disappointed with her travel agent's job (it was less exciting and less financially rewarding than she expected), she moved on to another job with a commercial production company. This was the job she had when she started her therapy, and according to Katherine, she was very satisfied there.
The moral of Katherine's career development history is, consistent with other aspects of her history, double-edged. On the one hand, she was not like her mother; she ambitiously tried to improve her position, she kept herself fit, and when she could direct her career choices, she "proved" her mother (and the counsellor), who did not believe in her abilities, wrong. On the other hand, she-like her mother-never stopped to reflect on the nature of the problem; instead she pragmatically strove to make the problem go away, and to move on. She was quite unaware how she unwittingly contributed to her own problems. Thus, her career kept changing and improving, but she remained herself, reenacting the same patterns. Although at the time of seeking counselling she held a position which she considered satisfying, she was sufficiently dissatisfied with her life to seek help. And yet, she did not quite understand why. She never really reflected on what was hurting her; in fact, she chased thoughts like that away.

The pattern in intimate relationships.

Finally, let us take a closer look at Katherine's intimate relationships. Their most striking common denominator seems to be that they have been, in many ways, not very intimate at all. First, they seemed to be crowded or overpopulated both within each relationship, usually best suited for two people, and in their total number. As if Katherine did not know how to create a sense of a private intimacy and exclusive, special bonding and belonging, or as if she feared it, but at the same time longed for it, and tried to achieve it through quantity.

Second, and very much connected with the first point, Katherine's relationships did not seem to be focused on the other person, her partner, whom she would-justly or not, or at least temporarily-admire and perceive as a unique, extraordinary, and a special person, singularly and almost miraculously fitted to meet her desires and needs; a trustworthy person with whom she would also feel comfortable enough to be "emotionally naked," and thus, intimate. People often mean something like this when they use that nebulous yet ubiquitous and universally understood word-love. Interestingly, Katherine's very first steady boyfriend "would get angry when I
wouldn't say I loved him." Katherine explains: "My reason for not saying it was because I wasn't sure that I did in the true meaning of the word-or at least what I thought was the true meaning."

Certainly, Katherine's not telling him what he desired to hear might have had many secondary gains; for example, she would be in a more powerful position, an issue of substantial importance to her (i.e., he would not be in a position to tell her how or what to be). However, most likely she truly did not love him, and the reason for going out with him for about two years was apparently not that she could admire him, long for him, and enjoy his particular company.

Katherine wanted to be "in" with her peers or, conversely, she was afraid of feeling unliked and unaccepted. Having a boyfriend took care both of her social status with the peers, and it confirmed her sense of attractiveness, lovability, and belonging. Having a date appeared to be more important than with whom. Even though Katherine repeatedly admitted that she was quite frightened by all of the attributes of adult femininity and sexuality, she was also curious, and above all, she wanted to fit in. Still in grade school, she befriended two girls who "were a little more mature than I was and would sneak lipstick and nylons out of the house and wear them on weekends and hang out with boys. They frightened me at times but I was also curious as to what they did and their involvement with boys." A paragraph later Katherine writes: "My 12th and 13th years were emotionally difficult for me, I wanted to be grown up but still enjoyed playing with dolls." In other words, Katherine was not quite ready for intimate relationships. Her involvement with boys was not based on her sexual desires, or on the particular qualities of a particular boy, and her attraction to him. Boys, and relationships with them, seemed to be a means for satisfying her need for-what is often broadly termed-external validation.

Let us appreciate that this is exactly the case for many young girls struggling with pubescent insecurities, when the need for external validation, coupled with social pressures, far outweighs sexual desires, and the pubescent narcissism precludes seeing one's partner as a goal in himself. However, for whatever reasons, Katherine became as if frozen at this developmental stage, and
this style of relationship became a prevalent pattern also in her adult intimate relationships. One can only guess that her persistent unresolved insecurities, expressed in her need for external validation, were reflected in her persistent style of relating to men.

Usually, be it with her first steady boyfriend or later with her husband, she met her partners through her circle of friends, and the relationship usually remained closely tied to her friends. Judging from her autobiography, Katherine preferred double-dating. We may speculate about the influence of her experience of having to share her father, or of her mother's injunction not to be alone with boys; however, it most likely reflected Katherine's own discomfort with intimacy. When working, Katherine quite often got involved with a male co-worker. Regardless whether her partners came from her circle of friends or from the pool of her co-workers, Katherine had never commented on their personal qualities that, presumably, made them attractive to her. In Katherine's description it appeared as though those men were simply there, at the right time for her, they were attracted to her and she was not unattracted to them, and the relationship somehow "happened." Almost all of her relationships have a distinct flavour of being born more out of an opportunity than out of Katherine's active interest in those men.

Interestingly, there was one exception to this pattern. When she was in Montreal, that is, away from her friends and very much on her own, she not only "made friends very quickly" with her co-workers, but she also met "my first true love, Clint." Apparently, Clint was a partner of her own active choice. Although there is still passive voice present in Katherine's description ("he made me feel good"), she pays attention to his personal qualities: "Clint was very romantic and emotional and seemed to know his way around matters of the heart. He paid very special attention to me..." Katherine did not explain how this relationship ended, but when it was over, she was back to her usual pattern: "We didn't last too long and I mainly spent my time with [my friend and a roommate] and had the occasional date." The laconic tone here is consistent with Katherine's previously described style of dealing with hurt, yet it is curious. Katherine not only
describes Clint as her "first true love," but in fact he is the only man in her autobiography she admits that she loved. Besides her refusal to tell her first boyfriend that she loved him, the memory of her involvement with Clint is the only occasion in her autobiography where Katherine uses the word "love."

There was one more man in Katherine's history, a guitar player, she was apparently actively attracted to, but he did not reciprocate. All of her other partners did not seem to be the goal of her strivings in themselves, and this approach had another serious consequence. Often her expectations were quite different from those of her partners, and often she was not even aware of it. Then she was repeatedly surprised when her partners started making, in her perception, unreasonable and unjust demands on her. She was often surprised that her partners, for example, took the relationship much more seriously than she did, or sometimes, especially in later stages of her history, the other way around.

The pattern of Katherine's relationships with men has been so consistent that it may be sufficient to give only two specific examples to illustrate the generalized tendencies. Let us take a closer look at her relationships with her first steady boyfriend, Danny, and with her husband, Tim.

A friend introduced Katherine to Danny, who was 2 years older than she, and so she "began going out with him to dances and his friend's parties, but still continued to socialize with my new circle of friends." With whose friends they would socialize apparently became a control issue between the two of them, and a subject of arguments. Whereas Katherine saw Danny basically (but implicitly) as a social partner, he "had a different view on what going out together meant and was very jealous and possessive." Naturally he appeared to her "very jealous and possessive" because she seemed to be unaware of his different expectations, and different feelings for her. Certainly, this denial of awareness might have been quite connected with her resentment of his different expectations, and with her resistance to the perceived control (i.e., being told what to do
or not to do). Thus, she would go to her friends' party without telling him. He discovered it, appeared at the party demanding that she would leave with him, which she resisted. The next day Danny told her that if she "were going to wear his bracelet then [she] was not to go out with other people. He mentioned something about us going steady..." Katherine reasons: "I didn't realize what all of this meant-wearing the bracelet, going steady and what was expected. I was pretty naive..." However, after some arguments-Katherine does not remember their content, but recalls their frequency-she seemingly gave in: "Before too long I was seeing him exclusively."

Somewhere here fits the episode of Katherine's passive resistance to her mother: "It wasn't until I had been going out with Danny for about a year that I started thinking that if I was going to be accused of doing things that I might as well do them, such as parking a block away from home and necking." Importantly, in Katherine's own manifest account it was not Danny himself and/or her own sexual desire that motivated her.

Thus, Katherine seemingly "gave in," was "seeing him exclusively," but she reenacted the same pattern of passive resistance, in which her claimed passive position was enabled by her claimed lack of awareness: "...Things were going pretty good until his friend Kent began taking an interest in me and I guess I must have reciprocated. A lot of the details are a little fuzzy..." However, Katherine also remembers that Danny found out, was angry, and "said it was not to happen again. I was becoming more and more stubborn and didn't like being told I couldn't do things, so deliberately went out.... with Kent.... [it was] obvious that I invited him and of course Danny found out and was furious." Thus, Katherine was not that passive (or naive) after all, but we may learn only indirectly what she actually liked about Kent. When Danny confronted him, "Kent's reaction was that it was up to me to decide what I wanted." But it was Kent, not Katherine, who had to say so out loud. Katherine concludes: "I went back and forth between Danny and Kent for what seems like several months. I don't know if I liked the attention or just wanted to have it all or was just confused."
There were some other "infidelities" which will be mentioned just to manifest the pattern of Katherine's striving for attention, rather than the man himself, and not to be alone in general. For example, during her summer vacations out of town her brother-in-law's younger brother "took a liking in me." The brother-in-law interfered, and Katherine was "very angry at [him] for deciding what was to happen in my life." She "went out by the pool to pout. While I was out there I met a guy named Richard who I went out with while I was [on summer vacations]."

However, generally Katherine found it tremendously difficult to let go of her relationships, no matter how disparate her expectations and those of her partner might have been. In other words, some of her expectations (for example, to be loved, to have the attention, and not to be alone) had been met. Thus, Katherine remembers that "Danny and I continued to fight a lot and I think we have the world's record for the number of times we broke up over the next year. Danny was getting very serious and would get angry when I wouldn't say I loved him." After one of their arguments that ended up in another of their break-ups, Katherine received a phone call from his best friend who told her that Danny had driven off in the car and had taken a gun with him. "This really frightened me," Katherine remembers, and as if surprised, she goes on: "I began to realize just how serious he was about the relationship."

The epilogue is consistent with the story, which in a rondo-like form comes back to where it started-with friends. After more and increasing fighting they "eventually broke up for good."

Although it was "uncomfortable for awhile," they "continued to hang out with the same crowd," until after graduation Danny went to university and "we saw less of each other." Katherine "had a few short-term relationships and usually seemed to have a date on the weekend."

Many themes from this teenage relationship repeated themselves in Katherine's relationship with her husband, Tim. He was the best friend of Katherine's boyfriend at that time, Jim, had his own girlfriend, and "the four of us would double-date often." Katherine and Tim broke up with their respective partners approximately at the same time, and "so Tim and I began spending time
together but only as friends." Katherine got involved with a married man, Glen. He left his wife ("his marriage wasn't working out"), for a while they "saw a fair amount of one another," but "then he began spending more time with his pals.... I was still seeing Glen occasionally and Tim and I were still friends and would hang out together."

In Katherine's assessment "life was pretty good at this stage." Besides being satisfied with her apartment, her job, a good circle of friends, and with getting along with her family, she was "still seeing Jim, Glen, Tim and a few new ones so wasn't suffering from a lack of male attention." Thus, it was a crowded life that provided her with a lot of attention, and did not leave much room for a reflective moment alone, with herself. Also, her multiple involvements could hardly provide some sense of exclusive intimacy. However, "life was pretty good...," apparently, it had been meeting Katherine's expectations.

Katherine started going out with her previous boyfriend, Jim, again. It somehow happened: Jim was coming to visit Tim, Katherine "started to become friends" with him, and "soon though our friendship started to develop into more and we were seeing one another again." But Tim was also interested in her; after one party which she left with Jim he gave her an angry phone call: "I didn't really clue into the fact then that he was jealous. I just thought he was being unfair." When Katherine "found out how he was feeling towards me," things again somehow happened; Katherine's own description may give the best picture (of what has been missing in the picture): "Jim and I weren't really going out on a steady basis and slowly Tim and I started getting closer. We talked about moving in together and finally decided to do it." They started living together although her parents and her sister's family disapproved of it, and Katherine "was very hurt and angry with all this [disapproval]." It also made it more difficult for Katherine to see her nieces and nephew who were important to her.

Then the marriage happened. In Katherine's words "this came about, I believe, from my giving Tim an ultimatum, either we get married or we don't live together. I think my motivation
to do this was caused by the increasing pressure I felt from both sets of parents and the situation with my sister and her children." As if Katherine herself felt that something was missing in her account, in the next paragraph she explains her "decision to start dating Tim." When she was recuperating after an illness in her parents' home, "he came to visit me and I watched how well he got on with my mom and how readily he accepted my brother and felt that I might not find someone who fit in and accepted my family as well." One may say that even in this explanation something crucial is still missing.

The difference in expectations, never explicitly expressed and cleared, was apparent even in the approach to the wedding. Katherine felt hurt because "it seemed to me like he thought it was just another party." However, she admits that "I never really told him I was hurt [...] instead I would get mad at him for things like inviting people without checking with me first."

In fact, crowding their marriage with other people in general, and in particular arguing about whose set of friends would crowd their relationship, became a contentious issue between the two of them: "Once we were married we continued to have people at our place a lot." Katherine, manifestly desiring some privacy and intimacy, "would ask Tim if we couldn't spend just one Saturday or Sunday alone once in awhile." However, Tim continued spending time with his friends, inviting Katherine to join them. Consistent with the previously described pattern, Katherine "still wanted the time alone or to spend time with my friends," whom Tim did not seem to like.

Thus, they led parallel, mutually distant lives, overinvolved with their respective sets of friends, but not enjoying much intimacy with each other. The picture of Katherine's "shared" father, and of the mother who did not manage to create a sense of intimacy at home, comes to mind here. Katherine grew dissatisfied: "I began feeling more and more like our relationship was going nowhere and that how we lived and what we did was very one-sided." They fought "all the time" about seemingly inconsequential "little things," but were unable to talk about their real
problems. "Tim didn't like to talk about us and future plans and when we did get into a
corneration it usually ended up with us yelling, my crying and him calling me a baby. Then one
of us would leave and nothing would get ever resolved." They both "seemed to have our
flirtations;" Katherine did not know whether Tim had actually been unfaithful to her, but she
knew that "I came very close a couple of times." Consistent with her history, on both occasions it
was with men who were not only Katherine's but also Tim's close friends.

Finally, Katherine suggested separation. Tim agreed, but then they "did go back and forth for
another four years," making up and then separating again, "until I finally couldn't take being in
limbo anymore." During that time Katherine "had a few brief encounters with men," followed by
two involvements with married men. In Katherine's words, "they were brief encounters and not
very satisfying." Katherine filed for a divorce, then because of Tim father's illness she postponed
it, but later she reinitiated the proceedings, and got divorced.

In a somewhat ironical epilogue, 5 years later Katherine visited Tim, manifestly out of
compassion because his brother had died: "I was genuinely concerned about him but one of my
main motives for the meeting was to talk about us and what had happened for me. I felt like I had
been carrying around a lot of guilt..." They did talk, they were intimate, but it was too late for
this relationship. Most likely, they both just got a taste of "what could have been."

After her divorce, Katherine got involved with many other men; in all of these relationships
the same patterns seemed to get reenacted. Chiefly, these relationships were not aimed at a
particular man of particular qualities, but at defeating Katherine's loneliness or, from a different
angle, at Katherine's desire to be loved and to have somebody's attention. (Metaphorically
speaking, to have her Saturday night date). Moreover, the majority of these men were either
married or seriously involved with somebody else. As if Katherine purposefully, but not
necessarily consciously, was precluding intimacy which she both wanted and feared. Katherine
herself remembers one of the relationships from that time: "He informed me that he had always
been attracted to me and again this frightened me and I seemed to unconsciously do things to hinder any kind of closeness and I returned home feeling confused and frustrated." All of these relationships were rather brief, seemingly meaningless, and unsatisfying. Needless to say, in many of them the theme of Katherine's surprise by the man's feelings for her transpired again.

Katherine's last relationship before entering therapy was with a co-worker "who once again [was] living with someone and about to be married." This involvement started from a circumstantial opportunity (the man's girlfriend was ill and could not attend the office Christmas party with him). They made love, then they agreed not to repeat it, yet two years later they seemed to be still occasionally involved. Katherine concludes: "our situation at the moment is at a point where I feel very sad, hurt, and angry. Mainly I'm angry at myself for carrying this on so long and wondering if it isn't because there is no one else in my life. Because this seems to be becoming a pattern in my life I wonder what this says about my self-esteem."

**Summary: What Katherine came with to counselling.**

When Katherine entered therapy, she was dissatisfied with her life but it seemed to be difficult for her to identify or specify her dissatisfaction. Actually, this difficulty was exactly part of her trouble. For years she had been coping with the problems in her life by either denying them, or "moving on" to other relationships and environments, that is, by not dealing with them, and not resolving them. Many of her constitutive significant relationships remained unresolved, for example, with her deceased mother, and with her father. She had had many unsatisfying intimate relationships in which the same patterns seemed to be reenacting themselves again and again. She wanted intimacy, but at the same time feared it, and perhaps did not know how to create it. Her "solution" in overpopulating her life, and trying to be loved by everybody, did not seem to work.

Katherine's coping style rendered her life fragmented to a point that it was difficult to retell it as a coherent story; her life story is reminiscent of a chronicle of loosely connected episodes.
Without a coherent past it was difficult to live a meaningful present, and to anticipate a meaningful and satisfying future. Consistent with the only moral that could connect the episodes of her fragmented life, Katherine felt that things, and her whole life were happening to her. Katherine believed that she did not have much say in her own life.

The Current Life Interview

If Katherine were to write her autobiography today, she would be "more specific about the relationships with the people close to me, around me, more specific about what was good there and what was bad there, what I learned.... It would be more explicit.... It would be more revealing.... Because I know more about me now... it would be more insightful." At the same time, it would contain much less of what she calls "the fill-in stuff."

This new, in Katherine's words, more "revealing" as opposed to the previous "disjointed," autobiography would be more understandable to others, and to herself. Because she would say what she wanted to say, and what has been important to her, it would be much less open to misinterpretation by others. What she would have to say would reflect her present understanding of "why I did the things I did," and "how much I played a part in why these things happened, or the same patterns kept repeating." In contrast, let us remember how often Katherine and others were "surprised" by what happened to her in the original version of her autobiography.

Katherine's envisioned new version reflects very closely where she stands in her life today. Her life story seems to make sense to her, she feels freer to share it with others and reveal herself to others, and others understand her better. In Katherine's words, "I have a better sense of who I am, and I'm also more aware that I have a say in how my life goes; that I have choices, that I can guide my life to a certain extent."

If Katherine were to write her autobiography anew, she would not change much in her original description of her relationship with her father. However, she would give a much broader picture of the relationship with her mother. She would include memories "of the positive aspects,
the closeness" between the two of them. She would "explain better... why it was so difficult for me to deal with her death... At that time I wasn't aware of the full implications of my mother's death on me." Katherine maintains that her mother "would take on a different personality; it would be more rounded. It wouldn't be just that sort of powerful... uh, controller. There would also be the softer side, the nurturing side."

In her mind, Katherine still sometimes "talks" to her mother. "I think of her, I think of what... what she might feel, you know, of what I'm doing, who I am, of my relationship with [my present partner]; I think she would like him." Generally, mother would like seeing what her daughter has been doing with her life; mother's presence seems to be benevolent, confirming and accepting rather than critical. Katherine would describe this relationship as peaceful, friendly, helpful, and supportive.

Katherine's father passed away 2 years ago, and because of the recency, "he is probably more present with me than my mother. I still have very vivid memories of my last times with him. It's still somewhat sad for me... because he's gone." However, Katherine believes that her relationship with him substantially improved while he was still alive. Because of his ailments he was becoming dependent on her, and it showed her that he really trusted her, and trusted in her. "He completely gave over control to me, and trusted me that I was only doing things to help him, that I was really there for him.... I think that our relationship became very strong; we got to talk about who we were, and how we cared for each other." Also his coming to the group "visitor's night" proved to be helpful. Not only was his willingness to come to help her a tangible show of his caring and support, but he-usually not an emotionally expressive man-was able to publicly say there that he cared and wanted to know her better, and be closer to her.

In fact, Katherine believes that her father's visit to the group was the most powerful and memorable event of her therapy. Even in the original autobiography it seemed apparent that her father had always been willing to help her when she needed him. And yet she was surprised
when she invited him, and he without hesitation replied "Of course. Of course that I'll come if it'll help you.' And that was just something that I had never anticipated." Katherine explains: "Because I think there were just words that I needed to hear [quite touched]... I needed to hear the words... somehow that he liked me. That I was OK. That I measured up in his eyes.... Just that he accepted me as a person, an individual person. No, I am not like my sister; no, I'm not like so and so, I am me. And please like me for who I am." Apparently, Katherine made it clear to him what she wanted, and he quite willingly gave it to her. Thus, this is how Katherine remembers her father today; as a man who cared for her, and she cared for him.

Katherine's present relationship with her mentally handicapped brother, whose problems she could not understand and found embarrassing in the past, seems to be closer now: "It's one of mutual caring... again, I think he trusts me that I'm not gonna try to run his life.... And I very much admire him.... I think because I'm more secure, I'm not... I'm not as... I have no difficulty saying 'I have a mentally handicapped brother, and here he is.'"

The relationship with her two sisters seems to be less satisfying, but Katherine is not dissatisfied with herself, and with her handling of the problems. She is friendly with her oldest sister, Pam, who lives in another town, "but it's not really intimate, close." The middle sister, Jill, does not talk to Katherine, manifestly because of a misunderstanding in settling their father's will. However, Katherine believes that this is a consequence and an expression of years of differences between the two of them, which they have never openly addressed and dealt with. She offers Pam the opportunity to talk about more personal issues, and she keeps offering Jill the opportunity to try to talk about their problems, though she is aware she cannot make them do so. "With my middle sister there isn't anything more I can do. I tried to say 'We need to talk about this,' but until we do I can't just pretend that hasn't happened.... She won't talk to me about it, and I just can't have a... nicey relationship with her knowing that this is still sitting there... It just doesn't work for me, doesn't work any more."
Katherine does not deny that there is a problem, that she is not happy about it, and that she cares. Thus, she broke the family tradition of dealing with problems by not dealing with them, and if possible, ignoring them, denying them, and moving on (or, as she puts it, the family's "kiss and make up" pattern). It is a considerable achievement, though it causes problems particularly with family members who still subscribe to the old pattern. However, Katherine finds her new approach rewarding.

Although Katherine still maintains a wide circle of friends, and highly values her friendships, the most important seems to be her present intimate relationship with her common-law partner, Neil. She has been with him for 7 years now, and thus, it is the longest (uninterrupted) intimate relationship of her life. She considers this relationship "very satisfying. I feel very accepted, supported... It's an honest relationship." She likes that "he is very comfortable with himself; he is very well respected; he is funny, he is compassionate, he is strong, which sometimes can be good and bad." Importantly, though he is willing to share his ideas and opinions, he does not "tell [her] what to do."

They do not gloss over their disagreements. However, when they feel that the atmosphere is too heated for a rational solution (e.g., they raise their voices), they have made it a habit to take some "time out," think about it, and resume talks when they are calmer, and then they "own what's ours. What did I bring in this disagreement or argument, what did he bring, and we can talk about it rationally." Katherine credits her group experience both for the willingness and the technique to bring the arguments to closure; she sees this approach as something new in her life ("Oh, definitely"), and very helpful. Usually they find some acceptable compromise or solution, but Katherine also values the process, "the discussion. At least admitting; admitting that something went on. And that we don't like where we're now, that we want to move through it and beyond it."

Although both partners maintain their friends, both mutual and separate, it does not seem to
be a problem. Their outside friends leave enough room for the intimacy inside of their relationship, and their friendships are not used as an instrument of control. "Neil and I very much enjoy each other's company. So we do tend to spend quite a bit of time together. So, it's not an issue for me that I don't have separate time with him. We have intimate time, I have time just with my girlfriends, he has time with his male friends, and then [we have mutual friends].... and it's OK, it's fine." Apparently, Katherine has found the comfortable and sustainable distance in her relationship with Neil. "I get to spend some time just solely with me, and he gets some time solely... yes, there is a real balance, I think.... I think we are both individuals, with our individual lives, but also enjoy being with one another."

Katherine considers her ability to deal with problems and conflicts, rather than denying or ignoring them as in her past, a major change and an improvement in her life. She believes that it does not only positively influence her relationship with Neil, but also all of her other relationships, be it with friends or at work. From her experience of resolving conflicts in the group she learned how to address her own feelings, assume personal responsibility, and stop blaming others. "I can look inside and say 'What did I... What was going on for me....' I'm more in touch with my feelings... Rather than pointing my finger and saying 'You made this, you made me feel,' I can say [how I felt]." She finds this approach much more rewarding: "Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Because you carry less stuff. It's lighter."

Katherine's past enormous desire and pursuit of being loved, loveable, and attractive, which expressed all of her insecurities in this area, also substantially changed. She believes that occasionally it may still cause her some problems, but to a much lesser extent, and with a different quality in it; she is aware of it, and keeps it in check. First of all, the physical attractiveness "is not so much an issue for me any more. I think because I am in a relationship where... that need is taken care of.... I feel special, I feel attractive." Katherine maintains that "it's still an issue for me, that great need to be liked; it could be still a little excessive." Thus, she
sometimes stops herself and questions whether she is doing things she believes in, or just to know that "people would say 'Oh, wasn't she nice.' This ability to self-reflect was virtually missing in her original life story. Moreover, besides her "feeling more comfortable with herself," which she partly attributes to her more mature age, she thinks that "the longer I am in a healthy relationship, and my friendships around me are on longer term, and I see that people do like me, I don't have to go outside these boundaries and do things that... that are not satisfying, that are not rewarding for me, that I maybe really don't want to do, don't need to do to be liked." Finally, enough love from one man, and from a special chosen circle of friends, seems to be more satisfying than the elusive pursuit of love from everybody: "It's probably now more important for me that the people that I care about, that are the core of my life, [care for me]-those are the ones that count, not everybody."

Connected seems to be the change in Katherine's approach to her physical health, which in her past was heavily focused on physical attractiveness and slimness, with a strong flavour of narcissistic preoccupation. "I think it changed. It's taken on a newer look that... physical looks come from inside, from being satisfied and happy with yourself. And as far as health issues go, I'm still very much involved in that. But it's more from a standpoint of quality of life. I want to take care of myself physically because it will only enhance my health, my ability to enjoy life, to take care of my mental status; I think they go hand in hand.... It's not just an outward appearance."

In many respects, where Katherine stands today could perhaps be best gleaned from her own account of her past. For example, she recounts her group experience as a true mirror of her past difficulties: "My early time in group was quite a struggle, because it was like having a circle that you can't quite break into, and you didn't know why you couldn't break into it... Often I felt like I was the scapegoat." Katherine thought that she was "revealing and vulnerable," that is, doing what she thought others wanted from her, "but I want." She could not understand what others
wanted from her, that is, just to be herself, and others could not understand her. "They couldn't quite get why I was there, and I thought I was telling them. And then there would be times when I was really telling them but because this pattern had been set they weren't hearing it."

Katherine believes that the group members had the same problem as I had in understanding her autobiography, and in fact, perhaps everybody had in understanding her. But today she sees it as her problem. "Absolutely. And, I'm sure, with a lot of my friends I presented this picture, but what was really going on behind the scenes was quite different, like who I was, what I was feeling, and what I really wanted to do, show, or be... ["So nobody knew you..."] No. Because I thought I had to be liked. So, I had to show... but really, there was a whole other person in there.... So, it was difficult for people to grab a hold of something."

In Katherine's opinion, "there are still instances... when I feel overpowered, overruled, I may still fall into that 'OK, I just tell you so that I'll please you.' And sometimes I'd do that, and just walk away." When I checked whether something like that, to any extent, might have been happening between us in this interview, or in her validation of my interpretation of her autobiography, she reflected, and quietly but resolutely said "No." She went on: "I don't want these situations to happen. I don't want to be false. I want to feel comfortable enough that if I genuinely... I'm having difficulty with somebody, unless it's a business relationship that you can't avoid, that I would let that person know that 'You know, this is not going anywhere...'" Today, in a majority of instances, Katherine seems to be able to do exactly that, that is, to speak her mind.

Katherine's changes are tangibly expressed in her career development, although she maintains that "it's probably the one area that I think is still a bit lacking, or weak for me." However, since our initial (screening) interview, she has landed a full-time promising job in the field of her interest, that is, in commercial design advertising. Interestingly, it is a new position which Katherine herself created. Because of its newness, the future of this position is not fully clear. Katherine has many options there (e.g., to go into production, into account management, or stay
In administration), and she finds it "exciting." Katherine is aware of her markedly active stance, which is in sharp contrast to the passivity of her original life story: "It feels good. And it feels good to be productive."

In the future she would like to achieve a position in which she would be able to take 2-3 months of holidays with Neil every winter. "But what I want, in the meantime, from now until that point, I want to be somewhere where I can feel good about getting up and going to every day." That, Katherine maintains, is more important for her than "having a title." Again, she is actively doing something to achieve her goal; for example, she has just finished a course on project management. "I've done project coordinating, but I thought this would give me... just that sort of next level, next step." Besides pragmatic reasons, Katherine admits to taking this course also to satisfy her curiosity.

In the past, Katherine experienced her share of on-the-job gender discrimination. It was consistent with the struggles in her life story, and thus, no wonder she found it easier to work for female superiors: "I didn't feel the real power struggle [with females].... That undertone of 'You're the woman and I'm the man, and so, of course, I have more say, and I can be freer, and don't have to toe the line as you do." Today Katherine gets along with her male superiors just fine, but she screens her prospective employers and bosses, and does not accept positions that she deems unsatisfying in regard to gender equality. She explains: "I don't know that I would get myself in that situation.... I think the way I feel today is I have a choice. Again, it goes back to choices. I have a choice whether I want to work for you or not, it's not just whether you want to hire me. It's do I want to come and work with you."

Katherine thinks that the most significant difference in her present life is "a better awareness of myself. I feel more comfortable that I can be an honest Katherine, that I don't have to be... I don't have to try and be somebody to please each individual, which is a very difficult [burden]." Thus, she used to have many people in her life, but nobody really knew her; they were as
confused with her as she was confused with herself, nobody could help her, and she could not enjoy intimate closeness. She did not believe that she was acceptable as she was, and she kept presenting to others a false picture of herself that she assumed would be more acceptable.

Looking back at her past, and comparing it with her present, Katherine would like to keep her sense that "I am a good person. I think I am a loyal, trustworthy, dependable... lovable, kindhearted, [with] good sense of humour, adventuresome individual. I like those things about me, and I'd like to stay that way. On the other hand, she would like to let go of "sometimes [being] very critical, a little impatient with people, if they don't quite keep up with me.... I still would like to be a little bit more self-confident; a little bit more sure of the fact that... I can say that I'm intelligent, and not feel like I'm boasting; that I can say 'I deserve this' without feeling like I have to overembellish it or explain why." Thus, for example, Katherine would like to let go of the indirectness that was such a marked feature of her original autobiography. This interview suggests that she has been doing quite well in this regard. But she would like to feel more sure "that it's OK to say good things about myself... That it's OK to be direct. To ask for things; I think it's another difficult one for me..." True enough; even in this interview, for example, it was difficult for Katherine to give herself full and unconditional credit for her career achievements (cf. "it's probably the one area.... still a bit lacking, or weak for me").

Regardless of the things Katherine would like to still achieve or improve in her life, her overall satisfaction with her present life "is getting pretty close to 10, most of the time." She is particularly satisfied with "my relationship, my intimate relationship. My friends, my current relationship with my friends. The fact that I have a full-time job, and that feels good. My career." On the other hand, "I guess the only down side for me would be the situation with my 2 sisters. I would somehow like that to be stronger and better." With this exception, her expectations and wishes for her future are "much the same as now. You know, I'd like to have very close friends that care about me and I care about them; to know and keep that security. Good health. My
relationship with Neil to go on as long as we are both alive, to be as good as it is, and to continue to grow."

Finally, it is difficult to resist adding the interviewer's observation. This very interview, in its self-reflective, insightful, self-revealing and honest specificity, engaging and connecting with others, seems to suggest that Katherine is doing very well in what she wants to do, and who she wants to be.

The Interview with Significant Other

Susan, Katherine's long-term close friend, graciously agreed to give this interview. I asked her 2 questions, pre-approved by Katherine: (1) You have known Katherine for 17 years. Have you noticed in her any changes that you may attribute to her therapy? If yes, how would you describe them?; and (2) Have those changes influenced your relationship with Katherine?

To the first question Susan immediately replied: "Definitely there are changes." During Katherine's therapy Susan lived abroad; upon her return the changes in Katherine appeared quite contrasting. In Susan's opinion, "besides [Katherine's] being older and wiser," the "chunk of it is related to therapy": "... being more comfortable in her skin, you know, being able to... maybe stand up more for what she believes in or thinks, instead of following along with what someone else is expressing." Susan observes that this change transpires even in Katherine's "general appearance.... She holds herself much differently." There is "just more of a calmness about her; more... sort of present, being present in a situation, instead of being withheld or held back. She takes part more.... Even just the way she walks into a room.... standing taller, and looking light. She feels more comfortable with who she is, and proud of who she is."

Susan believes that Katherine is "more willing to look at.... the positives and the negatives.... and look at both sides of it, instead of being judgmental, or being afraid of it, or being intimidated by it." For example, Susan used to be involved in EST, and invited Katherine to an information meeting. Katherine immediately refused; Susan thinks that her own "pushiness" may
have played a role in it, too. However, she believes that today Katherine would refuse participation in EST again, but only after attending the meeting, and having full information about it. "She was just afraid to even look at it, it was too intimidating for her to even come..." In contrast, "now she is more willing, and more interested in different things that I'm doing, and wants to glean information for herself, and how she can use it.... and [she is] able to stand up to say 'I don't think that would work for me.' Whereas before I don't think she was even willing to look.... I guess that maybe she was just afraid to look at herself."

Susan sees another change in Katherine's relationships with other people, and particularly with men. "Katherine was always searching... The relationships she often was in then were with men that weren't available.... Now she is in what I think is a very good relationship.... They have their ups and downs.... but she works through them, and she takes a stand for how she feels.... and she is committed to this relationship." Susan compares that favourably with the past when Katherine had "several men friends in her life, and that worked well for her," and several often unavailable boyfriends, but the intimacy "just wasn't happening [for her] at that time." Susan attributes the change to Katherine's "feeling better about herself, that she deserves to be in a relationship.... Being able to be in a healthy relationship, and choosing someone who wants to be in a relationship with her, or who is really available to be in a relationship.... I think she chose men before that were unavailable because she herself couldn't be in a relationship."

Susan also noted that in the past Katherine often tried to please others; she was afraid to say "no" and thus "reject them," and consequently be "rejected" herself, and "lose my friendship." According to Susan, this could have been why Katherine avoided even considering or exploring some options, just so she would not have to say "no." Katherine's past stance seemed to be "what should I do to please somebody else. She was afraid of losing friendships, or whatever, if she said the wrong thing, or didn't agree."

Katherine's present ability to stand up for herself, and say what is on her mind, positively
influenced her relationship with Susan. "She challenges me more, she's not afraid to say [when we discuss personal matters] 'Maybe you should look at it this way,' or 'I don't necessarily agree.' In that way she brings more to the relationship. Katherine's one of my best friends, and I can always count on her, you know, that she'll always be there, and she always has been in the past. But I think now there is more of a give and take in the relationship than there was before."

Katherine does not try to please Susan at any cost, and Susan feels "far more challenged by her, and so, for me it's a better relationship.... It's an insight for me, when I'm having trouble in my relationship [or at work].... she gives me another perspective, whereas before she would have mostly just agree with me." In Susan's opinion, the present relationship is more open and honest; many previously unspeakable things are speakable, and it works both ways: "I can say what I feel to her, whereas before she would sometimes go away. And to be fair to Katherine, again, I used to push more.... So, we both had grown that way. But for her, I think, she is much more willing... or stronger; if I say something that doesn't fit for her she won't go away." Thus, when Katherine and Susan have occasional disagreements, they always find a mutually satisfying resolution.

The Portrait of Change

Katherine substantially re-interpreted her life story. In this process she established new relationships with her significant others, as well as with others in general, with her whole world, and importantly, with herself. She re-discovered herself, and found this Self acceptable both to herself, and to others. It freed her to become an agent in her own life.

Interestingly, the autobiography she wrote at a certain point in her life was conspicuous by its lack of interpretation, in its genre being a chronicle or, at its best, a history of Katherine's life. This lack of interpretation, however, was a kind of interpretation in its own right; it expressed exactly Katherine's perceived and lived stance in-the-world. This stance could be described as "no stance", which is, nevertheless, a very particular stance. Katherine's role in her own life story appeared to be of no significance, the roles of other characters in relation to her were unclear, and
events somehow happened to her, following no intrinsic logic of a developing plot. Thus, it was a self-less, hero-less, direction-less history, confusing and incomprehensible both for Katherine and for others. Katherine lent no meaning to herself nor to her own history; the meaning had to be filled by others, often to Katherine's surprise or chagrin.

Katherine's new interpretation is in fact a first true and conscious interpretation of herself, and of her own life story. She endowed this interpretation with her own meaning, explicitly taking a strong and specific stance in her life. She came alive as the hero of her story, she breathed life into other characters in her story, and she developed a plot which plausibly explains and unifies all that has happened, and how; how she has come to a certain point in her life, and what may be anticipated in the future development. In other words, her life story became a full-fledged, well developed, comprehensible story. It is a meaningful story; it is of value, and it makes sense both for Katherine, and for others.

In this new story Katherine also has new, meaningful, and far more satisfying relationships. She feels at peace with both of her deceased parents, though with each parent she achieved it differently. Her father died recently, during her therapy. Katherine is very pleased that she managed to talk to him about important issues while he was still alive; previously these issues haunted her but seemed to be unspeakable. She does not idealize him; she is quite aware of what had been missing in their relationship, and how they both had contributed to their dissatisfaction in the relationship. However, today she knows that he loved her, that she was special for him, and that he accepted her for who she was. And this is exactly what she has always wanted to know, and be sure of. The "secure base" of this mutually caring relationship stays with Katherine, and helps her even after her father's death.

Katherine's mother had died many years ago, at a time when Katherine was still avoiding any self-reflection, any dealing with her feelings, or taking a stance in her life, and making it explicit. Retroactively, Katherine believes that her relationship with her mother has always been good,
although her original autobiography seems to suggest that there were some problems that had not been acknowledged or dealt with at that time. We may only speculate about the meaning of this discrepancy. However, what really counts is Katherine's relationship with her mother today.

If Katherine were to write her autobiography anew, she would give a much broader picture of her mother, a picture that would include memories "of the positive aspects, the closeness": "My mother would take on a different personality; it would be more rounded. It wouldn't be just that sort of powerful... uh, controller. There would also be the softer side, the nurturing side." For example, Katherine remembers, and includes in her current story, memories of cooking and baking with her mother, or of "wonderful Christmas times" her mother gave to the family. Thus, in her current life story Katherine gives a new interpretation of her mother, and of their relationship.

Again, Katherine does not idealize her mother. Instead, she empathizes with her, with her heavy load of raising four children, one of them with very special needs. She empathizes with the burden of taking care both of the family and the family business, while experiencing gender inequality, and facing unjust expectations. Thus, Katherine accepts her mother in her human complexity and context, and feels equally accepted by her. She feels that her mother, as she remembers her now, supports and confirms her.

The self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-assurance or, perhaps, self-security, and the consequent ability to take an explicit and active stance in her life, transpires in all of Katherine's important relationships. For example, she is not embarrassed of her mentally handicapped brother; she feels proud of him, and close to him. At the same time, Katherine's present stance complicates her relationships with her sisters. They are apparently at a different level of awareness; most likely, they have still been coping with problems the same way Katherine used to, that is, by ignoring or denying them. Katherine does not shy away from this complexity, and the resulting discomfort. She seems to know what she wants, what she does not want, and how
she wants to be. Thus, although she is not satisfied with these relationships as they are, she is satisfied with herself, with her ability to face the problems, and deal with them. She actively tries to improve her relationships in a way that would allow her to remain true to herself, that is, not avoiding or denying problems in order to be liked.

The same approach seems to be present in Katherine's relationships with her friends, with her work colleagues, or in her most important intimate relationship with her partner. She seems to know what she wants, and how she feels, and freely and explicitly expresses her wishes and feelings. Rather than "being chosen" she actively chooses her important others. She even created her own work position.

Her partner is definitely a man of her choice; she admires him for who he is, and he gives her back the same admiration, acceptance, and support. Not any longer does Katherine pursue love and acceptance by everyone, at any price. She is sure in her love for him, and in his love for her. She is sure in herself, and she believes that she may be loved exactly for who she is. She loves him exactly for who he is. He is a unique goal of her striving in himself. This exclusive intimacy is satisfying enough.

In her safety and security she does not have to please him at any cost. Thus, when Katherine feels that there is a problem in their relationship, she feels free to address it, and deal with it. Apparently, it is more satisfying than her past pattern of conflict avoidance and denial, which often left her resentful. Usually, they find a reasonable solution, or a mutually acceptable compromise, and they experience a sense of closure before moving on. Unlike in her past, there are no old unresolved problems to poison Katherine's present or future. Moreover, Katherine feels that she has some say in her life, and her past struggle for control does not seem to be an issue in this relationship. Katherine does not feel controlled by, and does not want to control him.

Paying attention to her feelings and wishes, Katherine found a comfortable distance in her relationship. She enjoys intimate time with her partner, and believes that she gets enough of it,
but there is also enough room for her to pursue her other interests, friendships, and her career. In Katherine words, "there is a real balance.... we are both individuals, with our individual lives, but also enjoy being with one another."

Most important seems to be the change in Katherine's stance. Both the intimacy, which she feared and sabotaged in her past, and being an independent individual, which she even did not dare acknowledge to herself, let alone to others, became of important value to her. She explicitly acknowledges this value to herself and to others, and actively creates conditions to live congruently with this value.

Katherine's self-awareness, and her courage to make her choices and pursue her goals, are also reflected in her career development. She chooses the work she likes doing and believes in, and she chooses with whom or for whom she works in accord with her beliefs and values. Then it seems only natural that she enjoys her work, and it means to her much more than simply making her living and socializing, as was the case in her past. Let us remember that in the beginning of her story Katherine was, by her mother and the school counsellor, "predestined" to spend her working life as a subordinate secretary. Today the work is one of Katherine's arenas for self-realization. She achieved a responsible and rewarding position which she herself created within a company of her choice and interest. She keeps many options open for her further development, and she makes these options quite realistic by taking courses relevant to her work, and her envisioned prospects. Moreover, she admits that both her work and her studies are also a means to satisfy her curiosity. Katherine's career development is in a stark contrast with the passivity with which she began her story; it is a persuasive example of the agentic stance she has taken in her life.

Katherine's change may be described as movement from denial and avoidance to personal and social awareness, from passivity to creative activity, from being closed, and deceiving herself and others, to openness and honesty with self and others, from a boundless indefiniteness
to a well delineated personal stance, from victimhood to assumption of personal responsibility, from puzzlement to understanding, and so on. The descriptors of her change may vary depending on the chosen evaluative viewpoint; all are interconnected, and many of the descriptions given here, as well as those omitted, may be mutual derivatives. However, they all point to a very different way of being in the world. This is what we mean when we say that Katherine re-discovered herself. Because in many ways she is still the same; in many important ways she is not. For a lack of a better expression, we may say that she is, that she exists, that she is being differently in the world. That she attributes a very different meaning to herself, to others, and to the world in which she lives. Perhaps a good, although a partial, illustration of this point may be gleaned from Katherine's account of her group experience.

In the social microcosm of the group Katherine reenacted her usual personal and interpersonal problems. In her desire to please and be liked, Katherine was telling others what she thought they wanted to hear from her. She believed that she was open and honest with them, and in a way she was. This is how she was at that time; having no other sense of self except how well she managed to please and be liked, and adapt to the assumed expectations of others. However, these were her own assumed expectations. At that time, she was fully focused on her own self-confirmation through confirmation by others. Others were not the goal of her striving in themselves, and she had difficulty in understanding them, and what they really wanted.

However, others did not understand her either. They could not understand even why she joined the group, why she was dissatisfied in her life, what she would have liked changed, and what she wanted from them (except, perhaps, being liked). They challenged her to start talking about herself; Katherine thought that she did so, and was not aware of any other self that she could have offered. Thus, the self-defeating nature of her coping style became clear; intended to bring her acceptance, it was bringing her rejection. Moreover, Katherine was in a powerful double-bind; she could please the group only by not pleasing them.
Although a group usually mirrors, and even amplifies the individual's relational patterns in his or her daily life outside of the group, it also differs in many important ways. For example, in a supportive, benevolently motivated environment in which the consequences of self-defeating behavior are much less ominous than in daily life, it is safer to seek new resolutions to conflicts, and to experiment with them.

Katherine gradually became more self-reflective, and started sharing these self-reflections with others. Because of the set pattern, initially she was not trusted; she had to become a judge of her own veracity, which reinforced her self-reflectiveness. She shared with others how it was for her not to be trusted, not to be understood, not to be able to please and be liked in her customary way, not to understand what was expected of her, and so on. She could see the repetitiveness of this position in her life. She started understanding its meaning, and again, she shared it with others. Thus, she was re-discovering herself; she was re-discovering something she, at some level, always knew about herself, but did not dare acknowledge it to herself or others, or to examine its meaning. And yet, this was who she was, and when she shared it with others, it was easily trusted, understood, and accepted. She was trusted and accepted; it was all right to be herself, to be understood and trusted as such, to be empathized with, and surprisingly, to be liked even without trying.

This sketch illuminates only a beginning of Katherine's journey in which she re-discovered her self-identity and self-certainty, and found this Self acceptable, to herself and to others. Certain in herself, she realized that she always played a role in her life, that she always had some choices, be it a choice of passivity or creative activity. This time she consciously chose to be an agent in her own life. In Katherine's words, "I have a better sense of who I am, and I'm also more aware that I have a say in how my life goes; that I have choices, that I can guide my life to a certain extent."

Katherine's life story, which in the beginning was reminiscent of a chronicle-like account of
what has happened to her, became a meaningful, well developed story of an agentic hero who knows herself, knows what she wants, and is willing and ready to overcome obstacles to get there. Other characters in this story seem to be the hero’s equal partners, collaboratively developing the plot, rather than its powerful determinants. From each provisional end such a story has a meaningful, agentic continuation; it is a story of Katherine's own authorship. This story seems to be far more interesting, rewarding, and liveable than the previous passive, plotless chronicle.

Chapter 5

The Comparison of the Portraits of Change

All 3 participants in this study substantially reinterpreted their life stories. In the reinterpreted stories, the authors rediscovered themselves, formed new relationships with themselves and with others, and positioned this rediscovered Self as an agentic hero of the new story. The reinterpretation itself seems to be the central concept in these changes.

In all 3 case studies, the reinterpretation appeared to follow a common path with similar features. However, the level of reinterpretation among the individuals varied, and so did the level of experienced and reported personal change. In the case studies 1 and 3, Sharon's and Katherine's reinterpretations were so profound that they virtually created new stories about self, others, and the worlds they lived in. Sam, in the case study 2, substantially reinterpreted, and came up with a new story, only about certain areas in his life; other areas remained loyal to his original story.

In these new stories, the original "historical facts" were not denied; they were in a particular way broadened, and endowed with new meaning. Although the new stories described the same lives, they substantially differed from the original ones in their form and content, in their genre, the grammar, the plot and the methods of its development, in the roles and rules of protagonists and antagonists, in perceived causalities, in the position of the hero, and the narrator of the story,
in the goals and the morals of the story, and so on. By all means, these were truly new stories.

Each of the original life stories represented, often implicitly, its author's set of assumptions, beliefs, and values about self, others, the world, and how the Self and others act and relate in-the-world. We may say the story expressed its author's personal theory of life, of being-in-the-world. So did the new stories, but the personal theory, and the way of its creation, substantially changed. Originally, the author's personal theory seemed to be, not necessarily consciously, abstracted and generalized from the world, and others in this world, that appeared to be given, unchangeable, "out there" and independent of the individual's will; the sense of the individual Self was moulded to fit this world. It was a theory of coping with this unchangeable, often perceived as unjustly hostile, world, and surviving it. And it was a theory lived by, adhered to, unquestioned, as if it were given and unchangeable, too.

The personal theory expressed in the new stories is both based on the rediscovery of the author's Self, and permitting it. In reinterpreting the old story, and creating a new one, the individuals consciously accepted and appreciated their own authorship. Not any more was it just a question of coping with, and surviving the relationships and the world perceived as imposed on them, unpredictable, unchangeable, driven by external forces, and often as unjust as destiny itself. They started creating and co-creating their own relationships, and their own worlds, in which they would have a say, and their Self would count. They positioned themselves as agentic heroes in their own life stories. This agentic stance seems to be the premise, the outcome, and the very substance of the author's new theory of the world, and of life in it. In this new theory the acceptance of one's Self, and of its active role in-the-world, plays a central role.

Even in the original stories the participants, at least at some level, knew themselves in terms of what they liked and disliked, what they wanted and desired, what they feared, who and how they wanted to be in relation to themselves and to others, what were their strengths and their self-doubts; in short, what constituted their sense of Self. However, in their experience with their
environment they came to believe that this Self was not acceptable, and so, they could not accept it either. Each of the original stories may be seen as a search for an assumed "better self," punctuated by reactive rebellions against this, perceived as imposed, incongruence and inadequacy of the Self. The supposedly inadequate Self might have been connected with the genres of the stories individuals told about themselves. The factual authors renounced, denied, or distanced themselves from the active authorship of the story's action; they positioned themselves as its describers. This phenomenon will be revisited later. In the reinterpreted life stories the authors rediscovered their own sense of Self, and found it adequate, acceptable to themselves and to others, serving them well, and deserving to be lived congruently with it. They also proudly assumed and announced their full authorship of their own life stories.

The participants reinterpreted and changed their relationships with their significant others. Namely, they achieved some sense of peace in their most important formative relationships with their-live or dead-parents. In all cases, the individuals moved from a rigid, absolute, extreme but simplistic stance to a more flexible, relative, moderate but more complex stance towards the parent.

For example, Sharon stopped vilifying her mother, and idealizing her father. However, she did not move from de-vilification to idealization, or from idealization to demonization, that is, from one extreme to another one. Instead, she seems to accept her parents in more of their human complexity. She still knows that her mother was far from a good one for her, but she also understands her mother's story, and deeply empathizes with her. The mother's story makes sense to her, and so do her behavior and emotions. The mother does not represent some evil, incomprehensible, rejecting force implying some "indefinite badness" in Sharon, which was the role she played in Sharon's original life story. In her present story, some warm memories of her mother reemerged, and the raging anger has been replaced with sadness that their "relationship didn't have a chance."
On the other hand, today Sharon is fully aware of the disastrous consequences of her father's self-serving relationships with women, including his relationship with her. She takes a strongly critical stance towards him in this regard, and she protects herself from further damage by keeping a physical and a certain emotional distance from him. At the same time, she tries to understand his quite unfortunate life story, and still gives him full credit for the fun, the sense of belonging, camaraderie, safety, understanding and tolerance he gave her in her childhood.

Similarly, Katherine is still aware that her father's emotional and often physical absence, his inability to express his love and thus, grant her a special status in their relationship, negatively affected her childhood, and her adult life. She managed to address her pain with him before his death. Today she knows that he has always loved her, and it is equally true as the negative impact of his previous inaccessibility. Katherine understands the trouble in their relationship in the context of his, and their family's story, not any more as a "proof" of her being inadequate, unloveable, and unable to please her father by simply being who she is.

Her mother died a long time ago, when Katherine still dealt with problems in keeping with her family tradition, that is, by ignoring and denying them. Thus, she tends to believe that her relationship with her mother has always been good. However, in her original life story, in her autobiography, there is no single warm memory of her mother. She is portrayed as a busy, controlling, and somewhat embarrassing woman, preoccupied with many worries except those for Katherine, and dealing with Katherine by basically keeping her out of her way. Today Katherine empathizes with her mother's story. If she were to write her autobiography anew, it would include memories "of the positive aspects, the closeness." In the new story, the mother "would take on a different personality; it would be more rounded. It wouldn't be just that sort of a powerful... uh, controller. There would also be the softer side, the nurturing side." In her mind, Katherine still talks to her deceased mother, and the mother appears to be more involved, confirming, accepting and approving of Katherine than ever before.
In his original story, Sam shunned his mother. She was the embodiment of the antithesis to his, and his father's, life thesis. She was a dark force threatening his (and his father's) sense of manliness. He was embarrassed of her low education, presumed lower intelligence, low social status, "low-level technical jobs," of her knack for fun, and interest in social life and sports rather than in intellectual, artistic, and social status pursuits. He doubted whether she had ever contributed to the betterment of his family, and when he could, he put as much physical and emotional distance between the two of them as possible. However, today he laughs at her "peculiarities," at her little criticisms and interferences, and finds them endearing. He laughs with her. He appreciates her life story of struggles, and sees how her "low-level technical jobs" helped to sustain the family financially, and put his father through his schooling. He remembers how they watched soccer together, how she taught him cricket, and what it meant for him. He remembers her, besides her nagging, criticisms, and interferences, also as a caring, compassionate mother, "very much the person who would heal, and cuddle, and console." He still cannot have a sophisticated, highly intellectual, artistic or professional discussion with her; nevertheless, he seeks her company, and enjoys it.

All these changes seem to lead in the same direction; from a somewhat childlike, absolutistic, rigid, and simplistic attribution of "infinite good" or "infinite bad" qualities, to the acceptance of the parent as a complex human being. The ensuing new relationships are much more balanced, more rewarding, and easier to live with. Moreover, the same pattern of change is manifested in individual's relationships with others in general, and importantly, with themselves. The point may perhaps be best illuminated on the only example deviating from the rest, where this pattern did not take place, and the change did not occur.

Sam still idealizes his father, and uncritically adheres to his father's values and beliefs. Without any revision, he uses them as a "touchstone" of truth in his life. His father still critically watches over his shoulder, and Sam loyally composes his life story, in its content and its form, to
meet his father's expectations, and to continue in his father's story. Regardless of his intelligence, he is unaware of the striking incongruence between the father's-and his own-noble ideals, and the less than noble deeds done in their name. He is unaware of the inconsistency in his own beliefs about his father's beliefs; he calls them "Dad's step-by-step guide to personal happiness and self-fulfillment," and yet describes his father as "unhappy, unfulfilled, and unable to enjoy his life." He boldly and faithfully marches under his father's banner, unaware that it may be a troubled one in its own rights, and that his blind loyalty may be a trouble in itself.

Sam appreciates the changes in some areas of his life, but complains that his life has been compartmentalized, and so have been the changes. He observes, with regret and sadness, that in some areas he did not change that much, if at all. Not surprisingly, these are exactly the areas governed by the rules of the father's beliefs and values, the putative "guide to personal happiness and self-fulfillment," to which Sam rigidly and uncritically adheres.

Thus, for example, Sam still jealously watches successes and promotions of his colleagues and friends, unable to enjoy them, as if they were taken away from him. Although mitigated by the changes in his relationship with his mother, he still drives his daughters, colleagues, subordinates, and himself very hard. He still does not trust others, and their benevolent motivations. He is alone, and he feels lonely. In his family saga he has been a loyal servant of supra-individual goals and ideals. He has also become a public servant, and he serves loyally, and with great dedication. However, he sees a solution to his interpersonal problems, to his social isolation, in climbing even higher on the institutional ladder of power hierarchy, that is, to even bigger loneliness and isolation, but as he believes, it would not count that much there. He still feels guilty that he "didn't stick to his duties" with his first wife, and he still seeks her approval. Although he resisted moving in with another woman just to please her, he is paying off her mortgage on her house; a house he rarely sleeps in, and never intends to make his home. He feels unable to commit himself to a woman, or to a friend; they are distractions, and potential
obstacles to the fulfillment of his higher duties. And yet he misses their companionship. At the present stage of his life, he has started considering basic existential questions; he wonders whether he will be a lonely old man, and die alone. He does not like this prospect.

In the face of the unresolved relationship with his father, even the areas of the beneficial change, connected with his resolved relationship with his mother, create some new conflicts for Sam. For example, he sublets an apartment in another town to have some adventure in his life, and to create new friendships, as his adventurous and social mother would do. He even considers going to the nearby football game, just for the heck of it, as his sports-minded mother would do. Instead, he spends the entire week-end inside his apartment, alone, performing his work duties; incidentally, it is not only what his father would do, but also what he would be criticized for by Sam's mother. Sam is dissatisfied with himself, and he is aware that he lives in a conflict.

And this is the crux of it. Sam still lives in a conflict with himself; he has not really freely decided who and how he wants to be in the world. In many ways he lives his father's story, according to his father's rules, beliefs, and values which he uncritically accepted. In many ways he is still not sure of himself, not certain in his self-identity, having his old self-doubts, and not feeling in reasonable control of his own life. There is a cruel irony in it. He follows the father's story that seems to be a call to agency in one's life, and he does many things, and has many achievements that appear to be agentic. But he does not feel as an agent in his own life; it is his father's call and his father's, not his own, definition of, and decision to agency. This dilemma is perhaps best, though metaphorically, reflected in Sam's theatrical experience, and in his search and wondering there which voice is actually his own.

On the other hand, many relationships and areas of Sam's life have changed to his satisfaction. Interestingly, they seem to reflect the same pattern we could observe in the resolution of his relationship with his mother. Thus, he is not embarrassed of his adoptive sister any more; instead of shunning her, he plans to join her and her family on their North America
holiday trip, and show them around. His daughter believes that he is still critical but much less so, and importantly, instead of angrily leaving, he is staying with her until they resolve their conflicts. Sam does not see his first wife, and the mother of his daughters, as a "dark" and "threatening" woman; he appreciates her multidimensional human complexity, and tries to develop a reasonable relationship with her. He believes that he is much less critical with his colleagues and subordinates, although he credits his higher position with it. He also believes that his need for the "constant external validation" has become somewhat less important, and so, he feels freer to be assertive. He successfully stood up to his superior, and he did not move in with his female friend just to please her. He observes that generally he is "more likely to say what I want," and although it does not always get him what he wants, it also does not leave him with unresolved, unexpressed, but consuming grudges which was often the case before.

As Sam became less critical and more accepting of his (critical) mother, he also became less critical and more accepting not only of others, but also of himself. Thus, in some areas of his life he has found a degree of self-certainty, or certainty in his Self-identity, which again allows him to accept others, to be more aware of who he is and what he wants, to say so out loud, and to start considering what he would truly like to do, and how, with his life. In other words, in some areas he is becoming, or considers becoming, an agent in his own life. These are areas that seem to be governed by the accepted new roles and rules of his reinterpreted relationship with his mother. In the same interview, in which Sam presents his lingering and disturbing self-doubts, he also expresses his acceptance of his own complexity, with the same tolerance and generosity he has granted his mother: "I'm a pretty complicated person, I'm somewhat unusual, I have many admirable qualities, I have some not very admirable qualities, and that's the way it is. I mean, that's who I am." This statement is quite close to the core of how Sam presently sees his mother, sister, ex-wife, or his daughter; it may be paraphrased, with equal validity, as "they are quite complicated people.... and that's the way it is, that's who they are."
However, this self-certainty, this necessary basis for his life-agency, is limited only to certain relationships and areas of Sam's life. It is "compartmentalized," and so is, in Sam's words, his life. This change is not fully integrated into Sam's life story, and so his life story has been maintained, lived, and told within the bounds and limitations of its original genre. Although weakened, and overall less rigidly adhered to, it prevalently remains a saga, governed by its particular rules of the plot development and assigned roles. It is still the genre which best expresses Sam's prevalent world view.

In contrast, Sharon's and Katherine's changes seem to be more encompassing, and better integrated into their life stories. However, the pattern of change itself seems to be the same as in the areas where Sam has achieved change, and at the same time, in sharp contrast with these areas which in Sam's story remain unchanged. Sharon's and Katherine's changes in their formative relationships with parents seem to be reflected in all of their relationships with others in general, and most importantly, with themselves.

Sharon, for example, does not see her sisters as enemies from the "mother's camp," and she does not compete with them for father's attention either. In her present understanding, all of them had to cope with the difficult family circumstances the best way they could; the common past is more of a unifying than dividing influence. Her sisters reciprocate, and so, Sharon has built with them new, warm, and mutually supportive relationships. Sharon is not extreme in her life stance, in her behavior, and emotions any more; it makes her friendships easier, more honest, and rewarding. Her friends do not have to constantly worry about her, and many previously unspeakable topics became speakable; Sharon has nothing to hide, and friends can speak openly without a fear of seriously wounding her. Instead of Sharon's previous isolating extremes, they have many problems and interests in common to share.

Once a wayward kid herself, now Sharon is professionally helping children who are in trouble with the law. In her job she is much less reactive to-particularly male-authorities. She
believes in what she is doing, she plans to pursue a graduate degree, but she is not over-invested. She strives to harmonize her professional duties and interest with her family life, and with her creative hobbies, such as painting and music.

Sharon is a loving and devoted mother. Very much aware of the disastrous consequences of the unbridled, self-serving, and uninhibited extremism in her family of origin, she is moderate in her relationship with her son, providing him and herself with a sense of love, belonging, stability, and security. When in doubt, she feels secure enough to consult with her husband or friends. In her son's physical activity, curiosity, and emotionality she recognizes herself in her childhood. As she is accepting of herself, she accepts these features in her son, and she is patient and compassionate with him.

Sharon is married now. In her opinion, it is the best and the most meaningful relationship she has ever had. It provides her with a sense of intimacy, belonging, security and stability which she always wanted, but in her past always sabotaged. However, she believes that if this relationship, for whatever reason, dissolves, she will survive it. Her man, and pleasing him, are not her only purpose in life; he is not her only and vital source of validation as a person, and as a woman. Certain in herself, she has found and maintains a comfortable distance between them. She does not suffocate him, nor does she feel suffocated in this relationship. She can tolerate his differences, and she does not need his total agreement to feel accepted, supported, and validated. She does not run to another man to find this validation either; she resolves her conflicts with him, capable of holding and handling the complexity of relative truths, and yet feeling sure and intact in her sense of Self.

Sharon is sure in her Self, in who she is, and who she wants to be. She remembers herself being a spunky, curious, emotional, and physically active child. However, she believed that she was rejected for these qualities, and thus, for years she had been trying to be somebody else, or differently, in the world. Now she rediscovered these qualities in herself, accepted them, and they
seem to serve her well. Even her ability to emotionally distance herself, developed under certain circumstances, seems to be a helpful feature when used differently, and under different circumstances.

Thus, Sharon accepted herself, in all of her human complexity, and found herself good enough. There is not much reason to deceive herself, or others. She is quite sure of what she can control, and what or whom she cannot. She truly emancipated herself, and so, she does not have to blindly obey to please, nor to angrily rebel.

Sharon became an acknowledged author of her own life story. She reinterpreted her past so her story became meaningful to her, and to others; unlike a story presumably authored by some cruel and incomprehensible destiny, her story both makes sense, and is of value. She authors her present life congruently with who she is, and who she wants to be. Thus, she influences and co-creates her future. She is aware and accepts that many things in her life may be unpredictable and not fully in her control (e.g., the future of her intimate relationship); however, she knows how she wants to deal with it. She became an agent in her life.

The development of Katherine's new story exhibits similar features. The way she resolved her formative relationships with significant others seems to reverberate in all of her relationships, with others in general, and with herself. Perhaps the best example may be Katherine's relationship with her mentally handicapped brother. Once a source of her embarrassment, puzzlement, and denial, today he is her close friend, and she is openly proud of him. In the Current Life Interview she concludes: "I think because I'm more secure.... I have no difficulty saying 'I have a mentally handicapped brother, and here he is.' Similar to Sam when he speaks about himself but might as well have spoken about his mother, sister, or ex-wife ("I'm a pretty complicated person.... and that's the way it is.... that's who I am"), Katherine might as well have spoken about herself: "And here I am." Because her stance towards her brother in fact says more about her than about him (and Sam's stance towards himself is reflected in his relationships with
Katherine's change in her relationships with her sisters follows the same pattern as in Sharon's or Sam's cases, or as in other relationships in her own story, but with different consequences. As she felt better, stronger, and more secure in herself, her relationship with her sisters actually worsened. It is a phenomenon well known in counselling practice, and described in literature (e.g., Schafer, 1992). In fact, it is rather surprising that this phenomenon has not transpired in Sharon's or Sam's cases, or in Katherine's other relationships. Her sisters have apparently been still loyal to the family tradition they shared with Katherine, that is, the tradition of somewhat superficial, personally unrevealing relationships in which the problems were avoided, ignored, or denied. When Katherine wanted to address a distressing problem with her middle sister, or deepen the relationship beyond social superficialities with her older sister, she was disturbing the established equilibrium, and her sisters resisted her. Katherine does not deny that she is dissatisfied with these relationships as they presently are, but she is satisfied with herself, and with her dealing with this situation. She does not vilify her sisters, nor does she reject or avoid them in return. She empathizes with them; based on her own experience she understands their confusion. She is aware of what she can control, and what she cannot. In her self-security she is not afraid of being vulnerable, and thus, she makes it clear to them that she misses them, and she keeps offering them opportunities to talk. But she is not willing to come back to her old pattern of pretending that nothing happened, that is, to self- and other-deception.

In other relationships Katherine's new stance towards herself and others brought her more unambiguous favourable results. Instead of pleasing friends at any cost, she feels free to speak up her mind, reveal herself, and share her thoughts and emotions with them. Friends seem to appreciate what she has to say. They value her and her friendship, understand her, and trust her. Moreover, Katherine herself seems to be aware of her own value, and of the value of her friendship. She does not need to be "popular" to support her self-esteem, and indiscriminately
crowd her life with friends, which in her original story meant almost anyone who could accept her. She carefully chooses her friends for their particular qualities, and intimacy seems to come easier than in her previous pursuit of quantity. Her "choosing" is more important to her than "being chosen."

This shift is particularly prominent in her career development, and in her intimate relationship. She does not follow a career path (of a secretary) chosen for her; she chooses her own, based on her wishes and beliefs. She explicitly maintains that being offered any job is not enough; she actively searches and chooses what she will do, for whom or with whom, according to her values and beliefs.

The importance of her common-law partner is not in his choosing her, and thus, confirming her as a woman, and as a unique person (a confirmation she always wanted from her father). Feeling sufficiently certain in herself, she chooses him, for his unique qualities that meet her wishes; he is the goal of her striving in himself. She loves him, and she freely admits it; this feeling was conspicuously missing in her original life story. Katherine finds this relationship much more fulfilling than all of her previous ones, which were supposed to fill something that appeared to be missing in her.

As in Sharon's or Sam's stories, the common theme in Katherine's relational changes is that she has found and assumed a stance in her life. A stance which does not insist on what and how others, and the world should be, but it clearly delineates who and how Katherine is, and wants to be, with others and in-the-world. She rediscovered herself, that is, who she is, and who she wants to be, and she found her Self, and her certainty in her Self, good enough. She does not hide her identity from herself, nor from others. She reinterpreted her life story in a way that it became a meaningful story, that is, both making sense and being of value to herself, and to others. She became an acknowledged author of her life story, in which she is an agentic hero. Her agentic position helps her to make sense of her past, craft her present, and anticipate her future; she
believes that she has a lot of say in it.

It is curious but hardly accidental that unlike in Sam's case, Sharon and Katherine have substantially changed the genre of the story they tell about their lives; perhaps with a degree of a poetic license, we may say that they changed the genre of their lives, closely reflected in their stories. Sharon's original life story was by its genre a reportage, that is, in its narrative voice an emotionally void, opinionless, objectified account of what has happened (in this case to her), presented by a manifestly personally uninvolved and distant reporter-observer. The plot of a reportage develops independently of its reporter.

Katherine's original life story would not, by its genre, even qualify as a story. It was prevalently a chronicle of events that happened to her and to others in her life, occasionally elevated to a historical account, when she added to the chronicled events some interpretive value by expressing her emotional response. A chronicle is, by its nature, a plot-less, hero-less, and with an exception of chronology, a direction-less account.

Thus, in both original life stories, the factual authors used a genre that precluded them from a heroic position in their own story, and from personally building, or at least influencing, the development of the plot, in a direction of their choice. They manifestly gave up on the authorship of the story development; they positioned themselves as powerless observers, reporters, and often the victims of events and of others who were in charge of, and responsible for the action. Actually, the genre of Sam's original life story was similar in this regard; the hero of the saga pursues a supra-individual, often generational goals, and individuals, including the hero, may be sacrificed in the name of this higher goal. Sam has been loyally, somewhat blindly, and successfully pursuing and forwarding the main thesis of the family saga, but at a cost to himself, and to others. The thesis was not truly his.

The genre of Sam's story, though less strongly dedicated, and in some areas of his life already inconsistent, still remains prevalently a saga. The genre of Sharon's and Katherine's new life
stories radically departed from their originals. Interestingly, in both cases their new life stories strongly remind of a novel. The novel, a genre representing a particular world-view in its own right, is a complex story of an agentic hero searching for his or her meaningful identity in-the-world, and striving to live congruently with it, that is, congruently with the Self, and the world. The complexity of the novel stems from its multiplicity of characters, their stories and their voices, that represent parallel, often conflicting truths about the meaning of the world, and the meaning of the personal identity in-the-world. To achieve his or her personal identity, the hero has to come to a conscious, well delineated, and coherent personal position in relation to self, and others; he or she has to make a conscious decision about how he or she wants to have his or her world, who and how he or she wants to be in this world, and then agentically pursue this personally created and chosen goal. This is what the hero's personal identity is all about, and the process of its creation, and its tests in action, is what the novel is about. And this seems to be exactly Sharon's and Katherine's position, and what they have been doing, in their new life stories. From the describers of the story's action, they became its originators or co-creators. These new stories are far more complex, personally demanding, and existentially responsible than the old ones, but also much more meaningful, and more rewarding to live.

The meaning of therapeutic change within the context of a person's life story, abstracted from the analysis and comparison of the three cases that have been the subject of this study, and valid for them, may be delineated as follows. A person, dissatisfied with his or her life story, substantially reinterprets it. The reinterpretation involves a particular change in relations to him-or herself, to others, to the world, and to how the person and others function in-the-world. The emerging new personal theory of the Self and others in-the-world, based on this reinterpretation, is broad and flexible enough to plausibly and coherently encompass the multifaceted uniqueness and universality of human conditions. In this theory the validity of one's Self, as well as others', is confirmed; one's Self can and does influence what happens in-the-world. The new theory is
reflected in the new story about the Self the person tells to him- or herself, and to others, and which he or she lives; the new story seems to validate the theory it is based on in lived experience. The person becomes an author, and the central agentic hero in his or her new and comprehensive story. The hero, and his or her story, plausibly explain how the hero came to this point in life; the hero crafts his or her present story, and influences the anticipated future. It is a meaningful story; in its true human complexity it both makes sense and is of value to its central hero-the author, and to others. It may be said that the hero, and his or her story, found the meaning through and in the search of meaning. The reinterpretation of relations to self and to others, in their mutuality and complexity, and endowing them with new meaning, which allows the person to assume an agentic position in his or her life, seems to be the essential feature of the changes observed in the three case studies presented here.

Chapter 6
Discussion

Based on the analysis of 3 case studies, I constructed 3 portraits-stories of change. Then I compared these portraits, in an effort to discern the commonalities and the differences in the pattern of change among them. Based upon commonalities I developed a common story, clarifying the meaning of therapeutic change within the context of life stories of the three persons participating in this study. From this comparison, I proposed a working delineation of therapeutic change.

The similarities in the pattern of change among the compared stories have been so extensive and consistent that they could hardly be considered accidental. Even case study 2, which in some areas obviously deviated from the other 2 cases, has in fact pointed in the same direction, and has been consistent with the common pattern of change. In the deviating areas the change either did not occur, or only to a limited degree, in contrast to other areas within the same case that followed the common pattern, and substantially changed in a way similar to the other 2 cases.
In all 3 cases, whenever the change occurred, it seemed to be connected with the reinterpretation of the individual’s life story. Importantly, this reinterpretation had nothing to do with falsification of the story. Actually, the new reinterpreted stories exhibited notably less or none of the deceptions of self and others, observed in the original stories, and expressed in their inconsistencies. The new stories became much more plausible, coherent, and comprehensive than the original ones. Again in contrast, in case study 2, Sam did not reinterpret some areas of his life, and exactly in these areas he kept peculiarly deceiving himself.

With this exception, the participants reinterpreted all of their formative relationships with significant others, with others in general, and with themselves, as well as the corresponding relational events. The reinterpretation itself also seemed to follow a common pattern in all of the 3 case studies.

The individuals consciously and openly assumed responsibility for the reinterpretation of their life stories, and thus, for their authorship. Originally, these stories appeared to be authored by some external, incomprehensible, rigid, and absolute forces to which individuals could only react, rigidly and absolutely. These stories happened to them, and they could only record them. These were their given, and perceived as unchangeable, phenomenal worlds.

In the new stories of their own authorship, the participants assumed a new interpretive stance. From a rigid, absolute, extreme but simplistic stance they moved to a more flexible, relative, moderate but more complex interpretations of self, others, and of the world in which these relate. This new stance, actually a personal theory of life, is in its complexity and flexibility capable of encompassing and reflecting a much broader spectrum of complexities of human conditions, in their intricate dialectics of the uniquely personal and the universally human. It is a new personal theory of causality, intentionality, interdependence, action, and so on. In this framework, a person does not only passively record his or her story; he or she co-creates it. From this new interpretive stance one’s Self, others, and the world appear to be perhaps sometimes unfortunate,
but acceptable, comprehensible, and generally, liveable. The new story, which reflects the uniquely personal experience in the context of a multifaceted universal humanity, is a meaningful story; it is plausible, comprehensive, comprehensible, and of value both to its author, and to others.

The genre of the story people tell about their lives, to themselves and to others, and which they live by, seems to express the narrator's basic stance in and towards his or her story, in and towards his or her life, and in and towards his or her personal theory of life. The genres of the original stories, particularly in case studies 1 and 3, expressed a stance in which the narrator was not a central active hero of her own story, an originator or at least an active participant in the story's action. She was a removed, passive describer of what happened to her. Or, in case study 2, he was a carrier of a life thesis which, in fact, was not his own; it was uncritically accepted from his father. Within this, not necessarily consciously, selected genre only a certain story could be told; based on the given basic life stance, only a certain way of life could be lived. A person who fundamentally believes that she or he cannot be an active hero in her or his own life story, and influence her or his life, unwittingly creates a vicious circle of a self-fulfilling prophecy, and the genre confirms itself by a life story lived in accord with its rules. Such a life may be experienced and understood as a cruel joke of an incomprehensible destiny; which is, incidentally, one of the prominent features of a classical tragedy.

In the reinterpreted relationships, others ceased to be a source of, or motivated by, some incomprehensible "infinite bad" or "infinite good" qualities. They had their own complex stories which plausibly explained how they came to a certain point in their lives. In the same way the individuals reevaluated and reinterpreted their relationship with themselves, and thus they emancipated themselves. For example, a problem-ridden mother did not imply something incurably "wrong" in her daughter any more, and an idealized father did not have to be pleased at any cost. The significant other did not have to be angrily rebelled against, or uncritically
followed; there were some new, though more complex, relational options and choices available.

Similarly, the individuals reinterpreted their own stories, which again comprehensibly and plausibly explained how they came to a certain point in their lives. In these new reinterpreted stories they rediscovered themselves, that is, who and how they wanted to be in-the-world, and this Self seemed to be good enough, acceptable and understandable to themselves, and to others. Again, there was no need to either angrily rebel against, and reject one's Self, or to narcissistically insist on the absolute truth of their interpretive versions of themselves, others, and the world. This rediscovered Self was good enough to become an active, agentic hero in its own story about the Self in-the-world. They could and did influence the meaning of their past, they were crafting their present, congruently with their own values and beliefs, and they could, to a reasonable extent, anticipate their future in which they had some say. They endowed their new stories with new meaning, and the stories started making sense, and became valuable, to them and to others. Thus, they could publicly stand behind the authorship of their own stories, and to paraphrase the participants, they could say, to themselves and to others, "This is who I am, and this is my story."

The genre of their stories changed. Instead of a removed, objectified narrative voice describing what happened to them, they became fully invested in their stories, and as the story's central agentic heroes, they were creating and co-creating what had been happening in their stories. Again, the genre seemed to be reflecting their basic personal theory of life, which could be summarized as "I have some say in my own life." And yet again, the genre of this new story seemed to be consistent with itself, and confirming itself in the hero's lived experience.

Thus, the therapeutic change in the 3 case studies presented here may be summarized: The change consisted of the reinterpretation of one's life story that allowed an individual to become an agent in his or her life. This person, the agentic hero in his or her story, substantially changed the meaning of his or her story, that is, attributed new meaning that reflects truly human
complexity to him- or herself, to others, and to how one's Self and others function in-the-world.

Limitations of this Study

Some limitations of this study were already anticipated in its preparatory stages, and to the best of the author's abilities checked on in the process; although these are often intrinsic limitations of the study's very design, they deserve to be acknowledged. However, there were also some limitations which transpired unexpectedly during the process of this, by its nature exploratory, study.

The obvious limitation is having only 3 cases in this multiple-case study; moreover, these 3 cases came from the same referral source. The decision to analyze only 3 cases has been based on striking a balance between pragmatic considerations, such as volume and time constraints of the study, and meeting the purpose of this study. However, even if this study had included a much greater number of cases, it would still be, in its process and outcome, a multiple-case study, governed by its replication logic, and its rules of generalization. On the other hand, exactly due to the replication logic, our argument would be much tighter, and the outcome more persuasive, had the study included more participants.

The single referral source was not planned for. However, it proved to be difficult to find practitioners who routinely ask their clients to write autobiographies in the beginning of therapy, and who would be willing to participate in this research. Only two practitioners were found, but one of them died during the preparatory stages of this project. The remaining referral source tried to compensate by referring clients of both genders, with different presenting problems, and who completed different modes of therapy; one woman came from individual, and the other woman and the man from group psychotherapy. Due to this practitioner's group-centered approach, it was assumed that his personal influence on group psychotherapy clients would be less extensive than in individual therapy. Nevertheless, these limitations could be truly addressed only in a replication study with a bigger number of cases, and from different sources.
Another area of concern may be the interpretive nature of this study. On the one hand, this is exactly what I set out to do, and what I came up with: the exploration of the power and the limitations of interpretation, and its role in changing a person's world in the context of a story he or she tells about it. However, this study should not have been about the exploration, and changes in the author's-researcher's interpretive worlds. Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to fully separate these two. But acknowledging the impossibility of the researcher's removed, neutral, "objective observer-recorder" position still does not give the researcher a license to submerge into wayward, unbridled, projective interpretations that are not grounded in the presented material, and do not reveal much more than his or her state of mind and system of beliefs. Thus, the balance between the validity and limitations of this study may to a large extent rest on a careful assessment of where it falls on the continuum between these two-one impossible, and the other one unacceptable-poles. Moreover, the role of culture in meaning-making and interpretation must be considered.

To assure the interpretive integrity of this study, I have followed Freud's rule (cf. Elms, 1988) of not interpreting singular incidences, but only repetitive, pattern-forming events. Moreover, interpretations were reassessed on their congruence with the whole story, and often refined until they achieved a congruent and coherent fit with other interpretations, and the whole story, while supported by specific events or participant's pronouncements.

Invaluable help in this regard came from the two independent judges who read every partial write-up before the participants did, and before the next interview with the participants had been conducted. Thus, without unduly influencing the participants, the judges contributed to the refinements of the most plausible interpretations, grounded in the text, and congruent with the whole story. They also contributed to the creation of clarifying questions for the upcoming interviews with participants, especially in the areas where plausibility of rival interpretations was difficult to decide. They assessed the neutrality of questions prepared for interviews, and
reviewed videotapes of the interviews for possible nonverbal leading and influencing of the participants.

Another important check was provided by the participants themselves, and the validation interviews conducted with them. The participants assessed both the accuracy of presented events, and the plausibility of their interpretations. In occasional disagreements they were encouraged to give their own version, congruent with the material they presented, and with the meaning of the whole story. Also, collecting evidence from a variety of sources, that is, from the autobiography, from the series of interviews with the participants, and from the interview with participants' significant others, proved to be helpful in this regard. Again, the congruence of interpretations with the evidence from different sources was considered an important criterion of the interpretive fit, accuracy, and appropriateness. However, the role of power imbalance between the interviewer and interpreter on one side, and the interviewee on the other, and its possible consequences must be acknowledged in the method used here.

Regardless of all of these checks, a replication study, preferably conducted by a team of researchers of different theoretical approaches, would not only be interesting, but also necessary to tighten the argument. On the other hand, other interpretive studies have already been done, and although arriving at their conclusions by partly similar and partly different means, they seemed to point in a curiously similar direction as this study (e.g., Cochran & Laub, 1994; M. M. Gergen & K. J. Gergen, 1993; Osherson, 1980).

Interestingly, the participants' interpretive memory might have, to a certain degree, also placed some limitations on this study. The problem has not been in their idiosyncratic and selective interpretations of their lives in the stories they told about them; that was, in fact, the focus of this study. The problem rested in procedural sequentiality, when in the Life story interview, conducted after therapy, the participants were asked to clarify their Autobiography, written in the beginning of therapy. Many of their views and memories had changed in their
therapy. Although the participants were asked to answer "as if then," how they would most likely have answered these questions before their therapy, they often found it quite difficult. Some of these inconsistencies were noted, and then clarified either during the interview, or shortly after.

Finally, during this research we encountered another problem, which may point to an ethical limitation in the design of this project. Particularly Sharon, in case study 1, experienced considerable emotional turmoil after re-reading her Autobiography, and reading its interpretation; Katherine, in case study 3, was also uncomfortable, but to a lesser extent. The autobiography is personally very revealing, and potentially a powerful tool in the relative safety of a solid, trusting, and caring therapeutic relationship. It takes on a different meaning when presented to a stranger who, moreover, consciously tries to maintain a neutral and somewhat personally removed position, and cannot provide the help in the immediacy of a counselling relationship; the concepts of therapeutic neutrality and researcher's neutrality are different. Thus, particularly in view of our calls for replication studies, we would like to caution in this regard, and stress the importance of a careful selection and screening of participants.

On the other hand, be it noted that none of the participants sought counselling help from the referral source, although it was readily available, nor did they choose to opt out from this project, although they were fully aware of this option. Instead, they took some time out to resolve the problems by their own means, and when ready, they suggested to proceed with the project. Their courageous persistence, their trust in themselves, and their ability to achieve a satisfying resolution may be seen as evidence of their therapeutic change in its own right, and is consistent with the findings of this study. It also reflects on the excellent clinical judgment of the referring psychiatrist. Moreover, all three individuals evaluated their participation in this project as personally very helpful and beneficial. Katherine, similarly to the other two participants, summarized it: "In a way I knew all of this... but it was very helpful to have it validated and organized.... It was good to revisit it all.... There is a new side to what I know now... it's more
Implication for Theory

I started my inquiry contemplating the gap in relevance among the counselling theory, practice, research (cf. Bellar & Perry, 1992; Claiborn, 1987; Gelso, 1979; Hoshmand & Polkinghorne, 1992), and the experience of counselling clients. I linked this gap to the lack of agreement, and the alleged impossibility to agree, even on the most basic and common concept, and the proclaimed purpose of counselling, the concept of therapeutic change (cf. Highlen & Hill, 1984). I argued that this conceptual insufficiency may be the cause, the product, and the perpetuator of the considerable incongruence in counselling psychology, and among all those who participate in this field. Moreover, we came to doubt that the problem may be resolved within the same paradigm of thought that gave it rise, and maintained it. In agreement with Howard (1986) that "in the human sciences the nature of the question itself does indeed change when viewed from different perspectives" (p. 18), I asked about the meaning of therapeutic change within the context of a person's life story.

At the end of my inquiry I came up with a proposal of a working delineation of therapeutic change. No matter if this delineation may be crude, partial, and in need of further refinements, it is well informed by, and grounded in counselling theory, research, practice, and in the lived experience of counselling clients. At least to some extent, it is relevant to each and all of these aspects of the field, and thus, at least to some degree, integrates them into one, mutually relevant and meaningful, whole.

Certainly, the end of my present inquiry is only a provisional end; let us hope that it is also a tentative beginning. To pursue further integration, which is in my opinion of crucial importance to our field, more theoretical research from this integrative point of view will be needed. The simple questions may be who out of counselling theoreticians, researchers, practitioners, and clients may subscribe to the presented delineation of therapeutic change, who would refine it, and
how, and who would reject it and why, and come up with an alternative proposition. However, the challenge for the rival delineations would be to at least equally, if not more rigorously, strive for the relevance to the counselling theory, research, practice, and the lived experience of the counselling client.

I arrived at my conclusions through the inquiry about the meaning within the context of storied human experience, that is, within the conceptual framework of narrative psychology (cf. Sarbin, 1986a, 1986b). Bruner (1990), one of the fathers of what later became known as the cognitive revolution, maintains that the questions about how we construct our meanings and our realities have originally been at the very heart of the movement which assumed that meaning-making played the central role in human action. He laments that the movement alienated itself from its original intentions in pursuit of others, prevalently cybernetic, models of thought. I agree with Bruner's calls for re-legitimization and revitalization of questions about the meaning of human experience, and about the processes of meaning-making; my study seems to fully support this stance.

In all of the 3 case studies, the meaning the individual attributed to his or her position and experience in-the-world played a crucial role in how he or she kept positioning and experiencing him- or herself in-the-world, that is, how he or she had been living. The changes the individuals achieved in their lives were inseparably connected with the changes of meaning they attributed to themselves, others, and their worlds. As in human life and experience in the broadest terms, so in the specific instance of therapeutic change meaning plays the central and pivotal role; meaning in its sense-making and evaluative attributes. If we truly want to keep our relevance to human experience in the field that manifestly proclaims so, we had better try to understand human meaning-making, and its meaning. With all of its insufficiencies and limitations, this is what this study aimed at, and tried to contribute to.

In agreement with many researchers and theoreticians in the field (e.g., Bruner, 1987, 1990;
Cochran, 1986; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986b), I found that the realm of meaning is best captured in the narrative accounts of human experience, concerned with human wants, needs, and goals, and "seeking to explain events in terms of human actors striving to do things over time" (McAdams, 1993, p. 30). Cochran (1986) holds that "There is no serious rival to a story. The most faithful model of life as it is lived is a story. Nothing even approaches a story as a representation of a life, and that is that" (p. 14). If in the beginning of my inquiry I considered this stance perhaps too categorical, then with each analyzed story in this study the claim seemed to be more and more legitimate. However, the fundamental question remained how to discern the meaning of the stories people tell about self, others, and the world, to themselves and to others. Are the meanings attributed to the story by its author, and the interpreter of his or her own life, shareable and compatible with the meanings attributed to the story by its recipient and interpreter? And then what to do with Polkinghorne's (1988) remark that "Life is not merely a story text: life is lived, and the story is told. The life story is a redescription of the lived life and a means to integrate the aspects of the self" (p. 154). A remark that makes intuitive sense, but has not been sufficiently elaborated on either by Polkinghorne himself, or, to our best knowledge, by others.

Spence (1982) asserts that because of the interpretive problems inherent both to the storyteller and the recipient, and because of the impossibility to assure and verify full correspondence between these two, virtually any interpretation goes, as far as it contains aesthetic quality and persuasive power. My work points in a sharply different direction; it seems to fully support Wiersma's (1988) position that "the person.... tells us some sort of truth about himself when he tells us anything at all-that is, he gives us true data about something if we have but the wit to interpret it" (p. 205). The verisimilitude of the information, and its interpretation, are "testable through ordinary interpersonal checking" (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986, p. 114). The more so if the information is conveyed in a form of a story which has to meet certain formal
requirements. However, if the story does not meet them, it is a meaningful information in its own right. For example, a chaotic story may very much be a true representation of a chaotic life.

I have investigated a particular kind of story-the story told about one's self, the autobiography. The broadest formal requirement and expectation of the autobiography is that the protagonist fuses with the narrator, that a person is both the author of the story, and its main hero (cf. Bruner, 1990; Crites, 1986; Sarbin, 1986b). As many theoreticians and researchers have noted (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Crites, 1986; Funkenstein, 1993; McAdams, 1993; Ochberg, 1988; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986; Schafer, 1992; Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985; Widdershoven, 1993), and as could be clearly seen in this study, the autobiography as a "self-story" powerfully reveals a person's sense of self-identity or self-certainty, the unity of I-ness, that is, the person's Self, in its social and cultural grounding, in its participations, and collaborations.

The story people tell about themselves is the best representation of who and how they think they are in-the-world, and who and how they would like to be. However, in this study I also contend that what people do not tell about themselves, and what might have been socially and culturally expected to be told, is equally important information about how the person sees him-or herself in-the-world, and how he or she would like to be seen. We ask What is the meaning of a person's remembering and telling exactly this story about her- or himself, instead of another version socially and culturally implicitly contained in the story? What is the meaning of a person's not meeting the socially and culturally deeply meaningful (cf. Bruner, 1990; MacIntyre, 1981) formal requirements and expectations of the autobiography, and, for example, although being its undisputable author, not positioning him- or herself as its central protagonist and hero? What does it mean when a person's self-certainty prevalently consists of his or her self-doubt? I maintain that it is still the most faithful representation of the person's Self in-the-world, if only, to paraphrase Wiersma (1988) we have the wit to interpret it, and understand it. The question to be understood is "How is it to live in-the-world with a story like this?"
Connected was my proposal that to some degree we all, wittingly or unwittingly, deceive ourselves and others, in order to protect our self-esteem, and to maintain our concept of Self as meaningful, that is, making sense and being of value, to us and to others. However, being both physical and phenomenal beings, and living in the intricate dialectics between societal and individual, humanly universal and personally unique, cultural and idiosyncratic, we can deceive self and others only so much (cf. Crites, 1986; McAdams, 1993). Otherwise the story "doesn't hang together," loses its meaning to ourselves and to others, and the coping strategy becomes self-defeating. Each of the analyzed stories, to a various extent, seemed to illustrate and support this stance. However, each analysis also seemed to support the viability of questioning the meaning of the self- and other-deception, and the role it plays in a person's life.

Regardless of some limitations, which I shall address later, the considerable integration of literary-theoretical and literary-critical views into the field of counselling psychology proved to be helpful in my efforts to discern the meaning of the life stories people presented to me. Besides the standard observations about the story structure, the plot, and plot development, particularly helpful to my purposes have been the considerations of the goal-oriented position of the protagonist in a story, and the origins and the common meaning of this position (e.g. Bruner, 1990; Cochran, 1986; K. J. Gergen & M. M. Gergen, 1986; Hawpe, 1986; McAdams, 1993; Sarbin, 1986b; Sutton-Smith, 1986). In each of the stories, understanding of the person's/storyteller's "I-in-the-world" position was the fundamental key to understanding the whole story, and vice versa; from the cohesiveness of the whole story the person's "I-in-the-world" position could be discerned and verified. No matter whether I prefer Cochran's (1986) concept of a "regnant stance," K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen's (1986) "guiding metaphor," or McAdams' (1993) "a theme of personal myth," both in the lived experience and in its storied account, this is what seems to move the plot forward in a specific direction, forge its unity, and create its unmistakable and irreplaceable pattern of organization and reenactments of episodal
instances (cf. Anderson, 1988; Bruner, 1990; Chusid & Cochran, 1989; Cochran, 1986; McAdams, 1983; Ochberg, 1988; Osherson, 1980; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986). Very much connected, the concepts of the unity of the content and form, or thematic and stylistic unity (Bruner, 1990; M. M. Gergen, 1992; Murray, 1986), or the unity of the story's "sjuzet, fabula, and forma" (Shklovkij, 1983), seem to serve the same function. The protagonist's-storyteller's basic life stance, reflected in a recognizable and a signature-like stable pattern of interpreting, dealing with, and thus creating his or her world, and expressed in thematic and stylistic unity, renders his or her story cohesive and comprehensible, and thus, interpretable.

In this research, I have utilized the concept of a story genre which seems to usefully encompass all of these concepts in their dynamic and dialectic unity. Unlike in literature, and unlike in Spence's (1982) literal understanding of the term, in lived experience a person does not choose the genre of his or her life story consciously. However, as could be seen in the case study analyses, the genre faithfully reflects the person's basic stance in-the-world which patterns his or her way of interpreting and dealing with the world, and lends a cohesive thematic and stylistic unity to his or her life story, making it coherent, and interpretable.

A particular feature of the concept of genre made it helpful to my understanding of presented stories in their whole, that is, in discerning what their overall meaning held for the storyteller, and intended to hold for others, me included. Certain lived experience seems to be best recaptured within a certain genre, but then a certain, not necessarily consciously chosen, genre permits to tell-and live-only a certain kind of story. In my opinion, the concept of genre would deserve further theoretical attention and elaboration. It may be an interesting conceptual framework for considerations of the integration of the social and the cultural into individual's Self, which is of key importance to narrative psychology (cf. Bruner, 1990; MacIntyre, 1981), and, as I believe, one of its refreshingly challenging contributions to the psychological field in general. At the same time, the encompassing concept of a genre seems to point particularly
clearly to the connection between a variety of related narrative concepts on the one hand, and some other important concepts established in other areas of psychology. Moreover, it seems to point to an interesting convergence among them.

As I noted in the theoretical part of this study, the convergence appears to revolve around the search for "core identifying units... under the dynamic umbrella of scripts, themes, messages, expectational sets, important means-end sequences, or schemas" (Alexander, 1988, p. 267). In other words, the interest of many theoretical approaches seems to focus on delineation of a person's Self in his or her social and cultural context; the Self which takes a particular stance in-the-world, and acts in-the-world in a pattern which is in agreement with this stance, stable, repetitive, and recognizable in its thematic and stylistic unity. I believe that this shared interest is not accidental, and may provide a fruitful common ground for the theoretical integrational efforts in our field. This study seems to confirm that the narrative approach is very well suited for investigation of these common questions, and for contributing to the integrative common ground by applied theory testing.

In this research, F. Knobloch's and J. Knobloch's (1979a; also F. Knobloch, 1985, 1996) conceptual framework of individual's group schema, described in detail in the theoretical part of this study, proved to be very useful. Although not explicitly concerned with narratives, it addresses the majority of previously described focal concerns of narrative approach, also shared in some other theoretical approaches, and it firmly frames the individual's Self within his or her social and cultural context.

In all of the 3 case studies, this conceptual framework was consistently relevant to the presented material, and manifested a meaningful explanatory power, particularly in the areas of the individual's interpersonal relationships, and the basic values and beliefs about Self, others, and the world. Moreover, I have appreciated the pragmatic utility of the model, which permits a systematic organization of the complex interpersonal relationships, and consequently, helps to
discern the complex relational patterns, and their attributed meanings. However, this research also illuminates a comparable weakness of this model; it does not seem to integrate a person's career choices into his or her pattern of interpersonal relationships, and his or her system of basic values and beliefs about him- or herself in-the-world. In this regard the views expressed by Chusid and Cochran (1989); Cochran (1986); Ochberg (1988) or Osherson (1980) were more helpful, and again, consistently relevant to the presented material. Interestingly, although based on somewhat different assumptions, and using different terminology, these views appeared to be a good complementary match to F. Knobloch's and J. Knobloch's (1979a) conceptual framework of the individual's group schema.

F. Knobloch and J. Knobloch (1979a) see therapeutic change as a relational change in the individual's group schema (cf. the theoretical part of this study). This view is very compatible with many narrative concepts, and as could be seen, particularly well addresses the interpretive meaning the individual attributes to his or her relationships, and carries with him or her, usually unconsciously and unchallenged, through his or her life, and through relationships perceived or assumed as similar, whereas in fact they are co-created as similar by the individual. My study seems to fully support this conceptual framework, though, hopefully, it takes it somewhat farther, and frames it within the context of a person's whole life story. It seems to well compensate for the concept's somewhat mechanical and reductionistic connotations.

However, the concept of relational changes in the individual's group schema, firmly framed within the context of the person's whole life story, proved to be helpful also in another regard. Although unexpectedly, the concepts of first- and second-order change (Lyddon, 1990; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974), or similar concept of "foreclosed" and "sculpted" resolutions (Osherson, 1980), have been quite clearly manifested and illustrated in this study. The concept of the changes in the individual's group schema seemed to provide the most plausible, comprehensive, and practical understanding and explanation of the phenomenon of
different-order changes. In my opinion, this connection deserves further theoretical attention.

Finally, I would like to explore possible limitations of narrative theory; the basic question seems to be to what extent its guiding metaphor of a life as a story holds. In other words, I am coming back to the Polkinghorne's (1988) remark quoted previously in the discussion: "Life is not merely a story text: life is lived, and the story is told" (p. 154). This research seems to have some interesting implications in this regard.

Based on the previously described assumptions about a story, many theoreticians tried to come up with criteria for a "good" story, with a few exceptions shying away from a delineation of a "bad" story. Crites (1986) believes that a troubled story is inevitable when the hero would not accept his or her past and incorporate it in the present, does not live in the present, and cannot self-transcend in the future. A similar view is held by Ochberg (1988). McAdams (1993) maintains that the problems that plague badly told stories also plague the narratives of human identity: "... underdeveloped characters, inopportune images, childish themes, or stalled plots are not mere aesthetic concerns-they result in real human malaise" (p. 174). All 3 troubled stories in my study support these observations, but these criteria seem to account only for a part of the trouble.

On the other hand, there is an interesting agreement among many theoreticians in delineation of a "good" story (e.g., Bruner, 1990; K. J. Gergen & M. M. Gergen, 1986; Manusco, 1986; McAdams, 1993; Robinson & Hawpe, 1986; Scheibe, 1986; Spence, 1982). They propose that a good story shows continuity and sequentiality, coherence, comprehensiveness, intellectual cohesion, aesthetic appeal and impact, direction, unity of probable causes, and the ability to justify in narrative explanation why things happened exactly as they did, and the past came exactly to this point in the provisional present. These criteria appeared to be fully relevant to the life stories I have analyzed in this study, but again, they could not account for all of the trouble or successes of the stories presented here.
In the broadest terms, it may be satisfying to read a well written horror story; however, it may be far less satisfying to live one, no matter how well crafted it may be as a story. More specifically, Katherine's life story (in case study 3) was a poor one; it barely qualified as a story, and it was certainly reflected in "real human malaise" in her life. On the other hand, Sharon's and Sam's stories (case studies 1 and 2) were well crafted, a moving reportage and an intriguing saga respectively, yet it was extremely difficult, painful, and unrewarding to live these stories. According to my findings, which transpired from the comparison of troubled stories with those much more liveable ones, in all 3 cases something else has been missing, above and beyond meeting the criteria derived from literary criticism. The trouble seemed to be in not accepting one's Self, not accepting the authorship of one's own story, and not being able to assume agency in one's own life.

Thus, the integration of literary knowledge to our field is very helpful, and opens many new possibilities for psychology relevant to its subject matter, that is, to the ways of human coping in-the-world. However, the identification of both fields may be more obfuscating than clarifying. It may be an important task for counselling theoreticians, interested in the storied nature of human experience, to also elaborate on differences, and specifics of lived experience that need different evaluative criteria than a literary story. Are there some patterns of the plot and character development, of the author's basic stance in-the-world, and of the ways of interpreting the world, are there some genres, and so on, perfectly acceptable, satisfying, and enjoyable in the literary story, yet inherently self-defeating, and painful to live with, in the story of lived experience? Is it possible, at least to some extent, to map and systematically describe them? It may bring us somewhat closer to understanding the elusive term of human well-being, or the lack of it.

Howard's (1991) vision of psychotherapy as "exercises in story repair" seems to hold, but we have to know more about what exactly may need to be repaired. Only then would we better understand what the therapeutic change is about, and perhaps how to get there. Our research
strives to contribute in this direction, though it may be posing more questions than providing answers.

Implications for Practice

McAdams (1993) asserts that "simply writing or performing a story about oneself can prove to be an experience of healing and growth" (p. 32). He believes that a conscious construction of a life story helps to develop a complex (i.e., highly differentiated and integrated) belief system, supports one's search for unity and diversity, affirms both change and continuity, and renders sensible and coherent the seeming chaos of human existence. In my own clinical experience, as well as in the apparent experience of the participants in this study, McAdams speaks more about the potential than an accomplished feat of the autobiography; the outcome may be possible, but it is far from guaranteed by simply writing it. Nevertheless, the potential of the autobiography points very much in the direction delineated by McAdams; it may be a first and fruitful step on this journey. Also, the healing effect of retelling one's life (cf. Schafer, 1992) in organized and committed way may affect the sense of "ownership" of one's own story (cf. Crites, 1986), or in Wiersma's (1988) terms the "reclaiming of one's experience." Moreover, the counsellor gains an insight into the client's life story in its entirety, which makes it possible to discern its important features normally hidden when the story is gradually pieced together (e.g., the overall genre or a narrative tone of the story, the idiosyncratic grammar and structure of the story, the hero's basic stance in life, reenacted in repetitive and recognizable patterns, and so on). The counsellor may study the autobiography at his or her leisure, and come back to consult it at any time. It is a highly economical tool in terms of time, and connected financial costs of counselling. Last but not least, it may be a test of the client's commitment to counselling, and to achieving changes in his or her life as an agent of the change.

Yet, to my best knowledge, the autobiography is seldom used in clinical practice. I can speculate about the reasons for this underutilization, but what I really only know is that we do
not ask our clients to write their autobiographies. It might be curious to survey counsellors for their reasons; however, the survey would reveal our assumptions, beliefs, inhibitions, and the fragments of our stories, not those of our clients. If we did ask, even a flat out refusal could be meaningful information about the client, interesting to work with. But what proportion of clients would embrace the idea or refuse, and for what stated reasons, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, based on my research experience, and comparing it with my clinical experience in working with autobiographies, I would recommend to start collaborative interpretive work on the autobiography only after securing an empathic working alliance with the client.

Naturally, there are some other comparably fast and efficient techniques of gaining insight into the client’s story in relative entirety. I would like to mention two of them, with which I have had particularly satisfying results in years of counselling practice. The psychodramatic reenactment of a client’s group schema (F. Knobloch & J. Knobloch, 1993), that is, of his or her self-schema in relationships with his or her role-schemas, seems to be a viable way to see, and help the client to see, the life story as a meaningful, cohesive, and comprehensible whole. The technique works well both in individual and group counselling. My research seems to contribute to the theoretical grounding of this technique, and to its refinements. For example, it seems to be helpful to pay closer attention to the client’s sometimes forgotten, and often not fully appreciated or even deprecated positive relationships, including the imagined and idealized relationships. Also helpful is an integration of the client’s career choices into his or her group schema, and into the entire life story.

In its rationale and outcome, a similar technique is a psychodramatic presentation of the client’s life line. It has been very helpful in integrating new members into an ongoing psychotherapy group. Interestingly, the group members spontaneously refer to this technique as a "life story," and in their questions and reflections they consistently try to discern coherent identifying patterns, and the overall meaning of the story.
My research, as well as my clinical experience, seem to support the clinical wisdom of importance of the whole story, which is far more than the sum of particular instances or episodes. How the whole story is put together, its genre, its overall cohesiveness, plausibility, coherence, and so on, reveal the meaning a person attributes to his or her life story, and his or her life. Listening to the story, and discerning its meaning seems to be a skillful art; I hope that this study has contributed to its development. Bringing closer together the client's attributed, and the counsellor's understood horizons of meaning may not be a sufficient, but seems to be a necessary condition for bringing about beneficial counselling change. In this study, therapeutic change appears to be inseparably connected with the change of meaning of a person's life story.

Implications for Future Research

As pointed out before, this study needs further validation in replication studies, preferably with a higher number of participants. However, besides a straight replication, the arguments put forward in this study may be strengthened by variations that would introduce and consider new factors. Perhaps the most illuminating may be the replication with former clients of counsellors proclaiming allegiance to different schools of thought and approaches. Also, it may be helpful to vary the method of collecting the life stories, for example, by using structured and unstructured interviews instead of autobiographies only.

Moreover, this purely qualitative study may be further strengthened by combining it with quantitative methods. For example, the client's change may be manifested on a pre- and post-counselling administered, simple yet well researched and validated instrument, such as the Symptom Check List (SCL-90R; cf. Derogatis & Cleary, 1977). Its philosophical irrelevance to the subject matter of this study may be its major advantage. One could expect, and my research seems to support this expectation, that a change in a client's life story, connected with the change of its meaning, will be reflected in client's symptomatic relief, too.

I would suggest a simultaneous use of the Self-defeating Traits Inventory (SELFDEF, F.
Knobloch, 1996), an instrument which is not well validated, but is closely related to the area of our interest. It is a 10-factor solution of interpersonal tendencies. Usually, the Inventory is completed by the client, his or her significant other(s), and in group situation, by other group members; the differences in thus produced assessments are also measured. The instrument's bi-directional scale reflects and quantifies the basic assumption that there are perhaps no inherently "wrong" interpersonal styles in their own right, but any can become self-defeating in its extremes. This assumption transpired in all of the 3 case studies; besides the support for my findings, it may be quite illuminating to take a closer look at this particular aspect of therapeutic change also in quantitative terms.

Cochran & Laub (1994) interestingly combined qualitative investigation of people's stories of agency with quantification of Q-sorts concerned with various theoretical concepts of agency. In my work, the individual's sense of agency transpired as one of the central, pivotal points in therapeutic change, reflected in the change of a person's life story. The use of Cochran and Laub's quantifying method may replicatively strengthen their findings, support my findings, and position them within a larger and more general theoretical frame.

And Where Is My Story In It?

Some 30 years ago, as a young student of Charles University in Prague, I was fascinated by the phenomenon of literature. That is, not only by its intriguing beauty, elaborate structure, and communicative properties, but by the very fact that people find it important, even necessary to tell stories about themselves and others, or find it irresistible to capture their feeling, and express it in a stanza. People of diverse cultures seem to do it, and under a variety of circumstances, sometimes in extreme adversity. People may tell their stories in the face of imminent death, their own and of their audience, assured that they will not survive even in their story-and they will still do it. What does it mean; what does it say about us as human beings? It is far beyond some doctrines about the economic base and the superstructure of the culture and arts, the doctrines we
were force fed at that time, in that part of the world. The stultifying but then compulsory marxism, capable of "explaining" everything (and most surprisingly, itself), could not even pose the question beyond its own narrow limits, let alone attempt to answer it.

But I was lucky; my personal influence was definitely not an agentic factor in the global and local political changes of those times. In the years leading up to the Prague Spring, communists seemed to be losing grip on the paradise of soul of their own creation, and many previously unspeakable things became speakable again. Former prisoners of labour camps could tell their strange and moving stories. Works of past and contemporary banned authors reappeared. Philosophical and literary-theoretical treaties of "subversive" schools of thought were published, or available from foreign sources. Professor Patocka could read his famous lectures on Husserl and Heidegger as a part of an official university curriculum. Even my youthful, somewhat brooding questions about the existential meaning of literature, and the stories people tell about themselves and others, seemed to be acceptable; moreover, they were encouraged, challenged, and enriched by my unforgettable professor Drozda, himself a renowned structuralist. I soaked it all in, and took it for granted, blissfully unaware that it was meant to be just a temporary privilege.

My luck seemed to run out with the Soviet tanks rolling in the streets of Prague; again, it had nothing to do with my personal agency, or the agency of millions of my fellow countrymen. Before the communists could reestablish their chokehold on virtually every aspect of public life, I barely managed to squeeze in a dissertation on Dostoyevsky; as I believed then, it was my last opportunity to address the questions of existential meaning of human stories.

I was wrong; the inept powerful ones of those times could not even meted out their punishments "right." In the year I spent driving trucks in uranium mines, courtesy of them, I had heard stories of such fundamental existential relevance I could not have even dreamed about. Then I was allowed to teach again, but under the watchful eye of the regime it soon became a
drudgery, for me, and most likely for my students, too. It did not seem to be a meaningful way of
being in-the-world.

Nevertheless, the oppression also bore some unexpected results; the communists
unintentionally managed to forge a strange but very real communal life. We had studied, taught
each other, and discussed the topics of real interest privately in circles of trusted friends, which
was very much different from what we did publicly. This very situation appeared to me as a
reenactment of what really interested me; I saw it as a parallel to a slavish formal analysis of a
story, as opposed to searching for what really matters, that is, its meaning in human existence.
Thus, we all did something else than we publicly said we did, we thought something else than we
said we thought, and something else seemed to count in the matters we believed in, and
something else was important for a decent public survival. It worked, but it was not exactly easy
to live in this incongruence.

When the opportunity arose, I switched my interest to counselling psychology. It was meant
to be an escape from the regimentation and censorship of teaching, but it proved to be an escape
right to the heart of the area that really mattered to me. The stories people told me were very
similar to the stories of my previous literary interests, and yet very different and more powerful;
these were stories of lived experience. What seemed to connect these two was the fundamental
role a story plays in human existence, and thus, has to be told in agreement with some universal
rules to reveal its unique meaning; however, here I was privileged to hear these stories in their
existential nakedness, or as close as one can come to it. And it was difficult to miss that when
people had changed their stories, also their lives changed, and vice versa; the changed lives were
reflected in different stories. But the sense of incongruence was also present in my newly found
field. What I did, that is, tried to make sense of the stories people told me, and tried to help to
change them, was one thing. Whereas psychology seemed to be quite another one; it was about
tests, controlled experiments, and statistical analyses of variables that often had none or only
marginal connection with what I really did, and what mattered both to my clients, and to me. However, this incongruence was very much congruent with my other experiences, and so, I did not think much of it.

When I thought I could not breathe in my country any more, and believed I could not do anything about it, I made perhaps the biggest decision in my life, left, and came to Canada. After some interesting intermezzos, I managed to reenter the field of counselling psychology, and do what mattered to me. Two things that I should have expected still surprised me. In their essence, people in Canada were telling the same stories as the Czechs used to tell me. And their stories, so important to them and to me, did not seem to count that much in the field of official, scientific psychology. However, I was lucky again. A few pioneers, one of them my Canadian teacher, challenged the status quo, laid the groundwork for a serious search for the meaning of the stories people live and tell, and thus made it possible for me to come back, this time "officially," to the questions that really matter for me.

Thus, in the beginning of this study I felt strangely like in the beginning of this brief self-story. Now, by its end, I-perhaps even more strangely-feel the same, very much like in its beginnings. So, where did those 30 years go; do I have anything to show for them? Am I any wiser? Perhaps; I hope my clients will be able to tell the difference. But what is the meaning of my story, particularly when I try to discern the meaning of my clients' stories? What is its genre? Where do our stories meet, and where do they depart? What do we have in common, and what is our unique version of it? How much say do we have in our lives? How can we use this say so our lives would be rewarding and meaningful, that is, make sense and be of value, to us and to others?

Kundera (1995), Czech novelist and essayist, holds that "the meaning of the history of the novel is the very search for that meaning, its perpetual creation and re-creation, which always retroactively encompasses the whole past of the novel" (p. 17). Could something similar be said
about the meaning of our lives, and the meaning of the stories we tell about it? "The meaning of a human life story is the very search for that meaning, its perpetual creation and re-creation..."

Yes, it does sound like a formal tautology. But what if we really cannot go any further, and explain the meaning but from its meaning? What if this is who we really are, and what our stories are really about—the perpetual search for meaning, its creation and re-creation? And what if, in the last instance, this perpetual search for meaning, and its creation and re-creation, is what really counts, what makes sense, and is of value, for your story, mine, ours?
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Appendix A

Letter of Information

Department of Counselling Psychology
University of British Columbia
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, BC V5T 1Z4

Date: 
To: 

This letter is to invite you to participate in a research project entitled: The meaning of therapeutic change within the context of a person's life story. This study, intended as a doctoral thesis, aims at an understanding of your account of what has happened for you due to counselling, and whether or how it changed your views of self, others, and the world, your relationships, your views of your past, present, and anticipated future, and so on. In other words, as the title suggests, whether or how your life story has changed in connection with your experience in counselling.

This research is important; counselling practitioners, theoreticians, and researchers, as well as financial funders, often wonder whether or how their work and money spent have been helpful. The same question is often asked by prospective counselling clients. Finding an answer is not easy. Professionals in the field cannot quite agree on what the therapeutic change (the fundamental concept and the very reason for the whole endeavour) is, and how to delineate it. People who have benefited from counselling often understand what has changed for them in their lives. However, their ideas are usually informal, not publicized, and therefore, not accessible to others to learn from.

Your participation in this project is requested because you have recently completed counselling in which you had been asked to write your life story in the early stages of therapy. In your own opinion, the counselling has been successful, that is, you believe that you have achieved some beneficial changes that have been reflected in your life story as you see it and live it now. Therefore, you are an authority on your personal experience with this transition.

If you are interested in participating in this project, I will meet you for a brief (approx. 30 minutes) screening interview in which we will clarify questions of mutual importance. Upon your agreement to participate, and your signing a consent form, I will collect your previously written autobiography. We will meet again for another interview (1-2 hours) in which we will expand on or clarify some aspects of your life story. The next interview (1-2 hours) will be concerned with your current life. Based on the information from your autobiography and the interviews, I will construct as true as possible, yet formalized portrait of change. I will present this portrait to you for your validation, and discuss it with you in our last interview (1-2 hours). If you agree to it, there will be an optional brief interview with your "significant other" of your choice; the questions presented to that person will be discussed with you and authorized by you beforehand. Finally, I will compare the portrait of your change with those of other participants in this project; as is the case with any of my write-ups regarding your life story in this study, this comparison will be accessible to you, too.

The second, third, and fourth (i.e., the life story, current life, and validation) interviews will be videotaped; all tapes will be erased upon completion of this project. Your autobiography will be returned; all written materials not included in the final copy of this study will be shredded. Your name and nonessential identifying features will be changed or disguised. Access to the
Appendix C

Life Story Interview Questions (Case Study 1)

Thank you for meeting me for this interview. I would like to remind you that this is not a counselling but a research interview. The questions I would like to ask you are intended to either expand on your autobiography, or clarify some details in your life story. Thus, because of severe time constrains, I may sometimes interrupt you when I think that the question has been answered sufficiently for the intended purposes. Please do not feel offended if it happens. However, if you find any of the following questions too stressful or in any way inappropriate, please let me know. I would also like to remind you that you may choose not to answer any or all of these questions.

Please try to answer my questions as you might have answered them in the beginning of your therapy, that is, when you had written your autobiography. I realize that it is quite a difficult task. If you become aware that you cannot in your answer separate your past understanding from your present position, please mention it. May I proceed with the questions?

1. Who do you think was more emotionally expressive in your family: your mother or your father?
   (a) How did it show?
   (b) You wrote that you were quite a lively child. What happened when you showed emotions, for example, when you cried, laughed, wanted affections, gave affections, and so on?

2. In your childhood, what were the fights with your mother about?
   (a) How did your mother fight?
   (b) How did you fight?
   (c) What did your father do when you fought with your mother?

3. When your parents fought, did you side with one of them?

4. In your early childhood memories you have repeatedly mentioned that you were "bad." Do you have any idea where that notion of "badness" came from?

5. When you were a child,
   (a) how would you describe your mother's prevalent mood in terms of happiness or unhappiness?
   (b) In your opinion, did she have any reason to feel this way?

6. When you bruised or skinned your knee or an elbow as a child, whom did you run to? What happened?

7. When you had your nightmares and, as you wrote, you "screamed in terror," did anybody come to you? Who? What happened?

8. You wrote that you had your first nightmare when you were about 5 years old. Did anything happen in your life at that time that might had been connected with it?

9. In your nightmares "somebody was trying to get you." Can you recall, or even just guess, whether it was more likely a male or a female character?

10. You have mentioned that you still "remember the feelings of terror I had during these nightmares." Has the same or similar feeling of terror reemerged in your real life on some occasions?

11. As a child, what did you think about your mother's looks? Did you compare yourself to her?

12. In your mind, did you have any explanation for your father being on your side, and then sometimes siding with your mother?

13. What did you think, as a child, about your father's alleged disloyalties?

14. What did you think about the women your father had affairs with, both as a child, and then later on in your life?
15. In your biography, you rarely mentioned your siblings. How would you describe your relationship with them, in your childhood, and then later in your life?

16. You wrote that you had physical fights with your sisters, and that it was you who provoked the physical part. In your opinion, who or what provoked those fights in the first place? What were those fights about?

17. How did you get along with your co-workers? Was there any difference in your relationships with female and male co-workers?

18. How did you get along with your superiors, either in school or at work? Was there any difference between your relationships with female and male superiors?

19. In your opinion, did the men you were involved with have any common features? If yes, how would you describe them?

20. Do these features remind you of anybody else in your life?

21. It seems that at one point in your life you made a tremendous effort to change your life; you quit the airline job, returned to university and finished your degree, tried to go out with a very different man than your previous boyfriends were; you became interested in politics, started working in the Crisis Centre, with street kids, and so on, intending to "do something to help others."

(a) What do you think precipitated this effort?

(b) Any idea about what did not work in your effort, and why?

22. Looking back at your relationship with your mother,

(a) Was there anything missing between the two of you?

(b) If yes, how would you describe what you felt that was missing?