To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Daniel Matthew Gordon entitled "'The Road Not Taken': A Phenomenological Investigation of the Experience of Regret." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

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We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

"THE ROAD NOT TAKEN": A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF REGRET

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Daniel Matthew Gordon

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DEDICATION

To my mother and father

and

To Linda

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the human experience of regret in order to discover and describe the essential nature of the experience. A phenomenological approach was taken, employing a dialogical interview method. Twelve participants volunteered for an unstructured, open-ended interview in which they were asked to describe their personal experiences of regret.

Analysis of the interview transcripts by thematizing significant statements revealed three essential themes of the experience of regret. The experience of regret is comprised of opportunities/consequences, blaming oneself, and looking back/looking forward.

Opportunities consist of an awareness of a choice, feelings of uncertainty, and a sense of expectation or hope. Consequences include negative results, missed opportunities, and feelings of finality, loss, and powerlessness.

In blaming oneself, one feels responsible for making the decision, for its consequences, and for avoiding the awareness of a choice or suppressing uncertainty. Participants struggled with taking blame and attempted to avoid it even during the immediate experience of regret.

Participants looked back on their decisions, recognizing they should have done otherwise. They also looked forward down the path of the unchosen alternative.

In doing so, they felt powerless to change the situation and wished they could choose again.

The grounds of the experience of regret were revealed to be those of self and time. Participants also described means of resolving regret, including accepting their decision and their situation, and learning or changing as a result of the experience.

Implications of these findings for cognitive, psychodynamic, and existential perspectives were considered. Some suggestions for future research also were offered.

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CHAPTER I

REVIEW AND EXPLORATION OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE OF REGRET

The human experience of regret is an exceedingly common occurrence. Shimanoff (1984) found expressed feelings of regret to be the second most frequently named emotions, after love, in everyday conversations. Regret has been included in economic utility theories of decision-making (Herrnstein, 1990; Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Sage & White, 1983; Sugden, 1985) as well as in theories of cognitive consistency (Festinger, 1957, 1964; Festinger & Walster, 1964).

Regret has been compared to, and contrasted with, other experiences that often are seen as related semantically or phenomenally, suggesting that its usage is varied and its definition not well-established. For example, Shimanoff (1984) included feeling guilty and feeling sorry in her description of expressions of regret. The American Heritage Dictionary (Morris, 1969) lists as synonyms sorrow, grief, anguish, woe, and heartache, and the psychological literature reveals associations with remorse, guilt, shame, blame, undoing, longing, and disappointment.

In some areas of psychological inquiry, however, regret is only addressed implicitly if at all. It arises in the

psychoanalytic literature, for example, in discussions of neuroticism and narcissism and is related to, or distinguished from, guilt or shame. Finally, regret is discussed in existential clinical theory in the context of more typically existential concerns such as choice, will, and responsibility. Within this context, regret is related to existential conceptualizations of anxiety as well as to an awareness of one's own mortality.

Cognitive Approaches

Regret is frequently treated as a cognitive phenomenon, albeit with substantial affective components. Shimanoff (1984) points out the conspicuous absence of regret in studies dealing with the nonverbal expression of emotion despite its apparent prominence in everyday language. One might infer that language or other "higher" cognitive processes are necessary both to express and to experience the phenomenon of regret. Although Landman (1987a) stresses the interdependence of cognition and affect, she notes that regret is commonly associated with judgmental or evaluative functions. Expressions of regret are seen as stemming from a failure or inability to justify a past choice or decision. Similarly, expressed denials of regret can be construed as justifications of a choice. This evaluation and comparison of options with hindsight suggests that regret is a rational assessment or, at least, entails greater cognitive elaboration than other emotions.

Decision Theories

The significance of regret in influencing preference has led to its incorporation in theories of utility as well as in theories of judgment under conditions of uncertainty. Both sets of theories propose that human preference is rational in that people choose alternatives which tend to maximize utility or reward. At the same time, these theories recognize that people often behave in opposition to rational self-interest (Herrnstein, 1990) as evidenced in such phenomena as regret. Within this context, research results include that people typically experience more regret for outcomes following action rather than inaction (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Landman, 1987b) as well as for nearly obtaining a favorable outcome rather than missing it by a wide margin (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982). These studies, however, are concerned primarily with the influence of expectations of regret on one's preference prior to decision (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Sage & White, 1983; Sugden, 1985) rather than with the phenomenon of regret, which is assumed to take place after a decision. Within the former focus, the assumption is that the possibility of regret is foreseen before a choice is made (Sugden, 1985) thereby affecting the amount of risk perceived in the alternatives (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982).

These contributions to an understanding of regret are incomplete, usually because they use too narrow an

operational definition and tend to lose sight of the experience. Landman (1987b) recognizes that regret is typically a post-decisional phenomenon. She further defines it as a reaction to unfavorable outcomes -- including the consequences of the alternative chosen -- and to the fact that other options were rejected in making that choice. While she recognizes the possible importance of rejected alternatives, she does not consider that, under certain circumstances, these rejected options may be sufficient to establish an experience of regret even in light of an otherwise positive outcome. To put it another way, it seems feasible that if an individual makes an unwise decision -- an impulsive one, for instance, wherein all options are not considered -- he or she may regret the manner in which the decision was made even if the alternative chosen was the best available.

Although Sugden's (1985) initial goal was to quantify the conceivable consequences of one's actions, he is forced to characterize his theory as descriptive and not predictive. His understanding of regret, however, effectively captures its experiential aspects. He states clearly and simply that two central components of regret are the wish that one had chosen differently and the experience of self-recrimination or blame. He recognizes that rather than either component being sufficient for the experience of regret, both may be necessary such that regret will occur

only with the accompanying feeling that one should have known better at the time of the original decision.

Perhaps the most inclusive conclusion that can be reached concerning rational choice theories is that they are based on the assumption that human beings are rational. Inclusion of regret in decision theories necessitates the use of a narrow operational definition; if regret were irrational, decision theorists would not be able to find a place for it in their theories and would be forced to reject it as a valid element in human decision making. Herrnstein (1990) suggests that theories of rational choice are useful as normative theories, telling us how we should behave, but do not accurately describe how we do behave.

Cognitive Dissonance

Many theories of cognitive consistency achieved popularity beginning in the late 1950's, primarily in the context of attitude formation and attitude change. These theories began by assuming that people tend to seek coherence among their own cognitions. Such theories include Heider's (1958) balance theory, Osgood's congruity theory (Freedman, Sears, & Carlsmith, 1978), Bem's (1967) self-perception theory, aspects of Lewin's field theory (Chaplin & Krawiec, 1979), and Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance theory, which was to become the most popular, is based upon the premise that people seek

consistency within themselves (Festinger, 1957). This inclination serves as a plausible explanation for the finding that people tend to experience more regret following action than inaction. There is evidence to suggest that inaction is perceived as more routine and typical (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Sugden, 1985) and, for this reason, the tendency to maintain the status quo with regard to one's own identity may circumvent or defend against subsequent regret. One may more easily find fault with oneself for acting, especially for acting out of character. A related explanation for this tendency is based upon the finding that actions make a greater contribution to one's sense of self than inaction (Landman, 1987b). Therefore, self-recrimination may be more readily experienced under these conditions, while laying blame elsewhere may be easier if one acts routinely, or does not act at all.

The dissonance experienced following a decision is equated with regret in cognitive dissonance theory. In general, however, the theory concerns itself more with dissonance reduction and the motivational function of regret than with regret itself. Festinger (1957) recognized that there must be some resistance to dissonance reduction for the experience of dissonance to be at all durable or persistent. This resistance may be that the actions necessary to reduce dissonance may themselves be unpleasant and entail loss, or that the chosen alternative is otherwise

pleasant or satisfying, or some combination of the two. With regard to the specific type of dissonance known as regret, it may be the case that the chosen alternative is irrevocable. There may be a type of regret, and therefore a type of dissonance, that is not motivating precisely because it pertains to things that may simply be "too late" to change.

Dissonance is the result of conflict between elements of knowledge an individual has about himself or herself (Festinger, 1957). Such knowledge includes "distorted" and "unconscious" self-perceptions. Situations may arise wherein regret is experienced as a function of this knowledge. On the other hand, one may defensively lay blame elsewhere, successfully avoiding an awareness of the conflict as pertaining to oneself, or one may oscillate between laying blame on someone else and accepting blame, experiencing regret. As Sugden (1985) argues, self-recrimination seems to be a necessary feature of regret.

Findings in the study of cognitive dissonance clearly indicate a difference between what happens in making a decision and what happens afterward. Regret, which is defined both operationally and phenomenally as dissonance which occurs after a decision, is a strictly post-decisional phenomenon. It follows, and the evidence indicates this to be the case, that dissonance reduction is also a post-decisional phenomenon (Festinger, 1964; Festinger & Walster,

1964). Making a decision implies that the outcome is definite. If one knows that alternate choices are still available, or that a reversal of the decision is still possible, in some sense the decision has not been made. It may be that the giving up, rejection, or negation of an alternative constitutes a decision and, therefore, is necessary for regret to occur. Although she does not consider the possible necessity of the negated option for experiencing regret -- as does Festinger (1964) -- Landman's (1987a) discussion of possible worlds and possible selves implies that those worlds and selves which are rejected in making a choice are the negated possibilities that we long for when we experience regret.

In his early rendering of the theory, Festinger (1957) argued that one means of reducing post-decisional dissonance is by admitting one's decision was wrong thereby "divorcing [one]self psychologically from the action" (p. 29). It is unclear how this occurs, and whether it occurs at all must be questioned. Admitting a decision was wrong is akin to self-recrimination, which earlier was argued as a defining feature of regret. Festinger (1964) later changed his view, recognizing that regret is more clearly a manifestation of dissonance rather than a defense against it. He proposed another means of avoiding regret altogether, which, like the above supposed cognitive negation of the action, is

presumably done out of fear of dissonance. He states that one might:

> make decisions without making them. This can be done sometimes by assuming a passive role with respect to the environment so that, at least in some instances, decisions get made because the ground, so to speak, has moved under one's feet. Thus the decision is made but the person is not responsible for it. (Festinger, 1957, p. 270)

That people might engage in actions of this type seems entirely feasible; that such a tactic will work seems highly unlikely.

Within a cognitive dissonance model, decision reversal or attitude change are the experimental evidence of regret despite the fact that decision reversal is presumed to reduce or eliminate regret. The central focus of the theory, however, concerns various means of dissonance reduction, including reversal or modification of decisions, actions, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs (Freedman, Sears, & Carlsmith, 1978). In the specific case of post-decisional regret, any of these means of dissonance reduction are seen as having an ameliorative effect. It could be argued that, under certain conditions, decision reversal, and especially other means of regret reduction such as the passivity discussed previously, are defensive maneuvers that do little to reduce the regret although they may serve to suppress it or make it unconscious. Tedeschi (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971) proposed a revision of cognitive dissonance theory in which outward impressions of inconsistency are

reduced for purposes of appearance. In such an impression management explanation, experiences of dissonance or regret may presumably remain.

Other interpretations of dissonance have also been offered. Bem's (1967) self-perception theory provides a purely cognitive explanation without any motivational or affective components. He suggests that we simply observe our own behaviors, and assume that our attitudes are in line with these thus yielding consistency. Although it is difficult to determine whether dissonance has a motivational effect, self-perception theory disregards and devalues the experience of dissonance <u>per se</u>. Compared to Bem, Festinger (1957) allowed for a more phenomenological definition of dissonance such that dissonance is assumed to have been aroused whenever inconsistency exists for the individual. The individual must feel he or she had a free choice and that the consequences could have been foreseen, even if this is neither rational nor true. The individual's beliefs about the situation are central.

In a revision of the theory (1964), Festinger corrects his misunderstanding of regret as defensive, although he fails to consider that reduction of regret may be defensive. Regret is more likely to be defended against than to function as a defense itself, although the association of a defensive function with dissonance reduction rather than with dissonance <u>per se</u> should still maintain a prominent

place for this function in the theory. As Landman (1987a) notes, however, the defensive component goes unconsidered and the purely cognitive aspects are emphasized in the revised theory. To correct this imbalance, Landman begins her analysis by noting that regret has a reliable component of unpleasure and that, even in its evaluative aspects, the focus of that evaluation concerns oneself, one's identity, and whether one is maintaining some consistency of character. She concurs with the commonly held view "that one's self-concept necessarily involves feelings" (Landman, 1987a, p. 143) and therefore views regret as necessarily both a cognitive and an affective phenomenon.

Drive Theories of Regret

William James and the Will

In his discussion of will, William James (1890/1983) describes the phenomenon of indecision as the experiential manifestation of ideas that conflict with regard to their solicitation or blockage of action. The ideas that prevail following a period of indecision can be viewed as reasons for the particular alternative chosen. There might be circumstances, however, which lead one to question the reasons or motives for the period of indecision itself. Although indecision may be experienced as agitating, it entails inaction and may be a manifestation of the passivity Festinger (1957) spoke of when he described avoiding the

responsibility (and subsequent regret) which inheres in making a decision. Such indecision does not involve productive deliberation, for its function seems to be to maintain itself in order to avoid decisive action. This view is captured in James' notion of the "dread of the irrevocable" (1890/1983, p. 1137), which engenders an attempt to forestall decisions and their accompanying regret.

Past actions seem to be more influential in the experience of regret than past inactions. This distinction between action and inaction seems to parallel what James (1890/1983) called the explosive and the obstructed will. When regret is viewed as a consequence of one of these types of "perversity" of will, James saw a number of possible reasons for the decision engendering regret. Firstly, James viewed action as resulting from a favorable ratio of impulsive to inhibitory forces which always coexist in varying degrees. Therefore, "explosive will" may result from either too little inhibition or too much impulse. Regret for action may be found more commonly in those with either variety of explosive will.

Conversely, obstructed will may be due to too much inhibition or not enough impulse. Obstructed will may more typically yield feelings of regret for inaction. James stressed that some combination or ratio is usually the case. This situation may be of central importance, for if either

inhibition or impulse existed in pure form, one could argue that conflict, dissonance, and regret would not be present for that individual. James' notion of the possible futures which inhere in the negated option may be necessary for conflict and regret to ensue. "The consciousness of inward hollowness that accrues from habitually seeing the better only to do the worse, is one of the saddest feelings one can bear with him through this vale of tears" (James, 1890/1983, p. 1154).

James' conceptualization of will is one of competing motives which compel the individual to act in a particular way. The theory of cognitive dissonance and other balance theories (e.g., Heider, 1958; Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971) also can be viewed as drive theories since the conflict experienced leads the individual to an attempt to reduce it. In this case, conflict is the motivational force. Psychoanalytic theory is the most prominent drive theory. While such internal conflict is also central to classical psychoanalytic theory, conflict is not the driving force but a result of the drive and an opposing prohibition.

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalytic theory contains two concepts, guilt and shame, that might be compared and contrasted with regret. Within psychoanalytic theory, guilt and shame are viewed as functioning in antagonism to drives -- as tensions motivating the control or inhibition of impulses (Lewis,

1971; Piers & Singer, 1953/1971). Such a controlling function would lead one to predict that guilt and shame must arise in connection with the superego. While it has been noted that an exploration of shame has been given short shrift in comparison to the prominent place of guilt in theory (Erikson, 1950/1985; Lewis, 1971; Morrison, 1983/1986; Nathanson, 1987; Piers & Singer, 1953/1971), this trend has recently reversed itself. The early preoccupation with guilt was likely due to a traditional emphasis on the critical, prohibiting, and punishing functions of the superego (Freud, 1933/1965) and the focus on intrapsychic, neurotic conflict in classical analysis. Shame, on the other hand, is more closely tied to the ego ideal, narcissistic pathology, and the interpersonal dimension.

Both guilt and shame can be described in psychoanalytic theory as tensions deriving from the superego, although a distinction may be drawn between the two as they pertain to different functions of that agency. As mentioned, guilt for perceived transgressions is more closely associated with the punitive parental images introjected as part of the formation of the superego. On the other hand, shame is associated with the process of identification and with the ego ideal (Lewis, 1971; Piers & Singer, 1953/1971) which represents the "goals, ideals, and valued object representations which the [person] internalized as a check-list against which to compare himself" (Morrison,

1983/1986). Introjection and identification have very specific meanings as used here and seem to clarify the distinction between the restrictive superego and the ego ideal. As Sandler and Rosenblatt (1962) explain, "introjection... means that the child reacts, in the absence of the parents, as if they were present. It does not mean that the child copies the parents -- this would be identification" (p. 138).

The failure to live up to one's ideals, or to be seen as an adequate reflection of one's ego ideal, induces feelings of inferiority and, more broadly, feelings of shame. Shame is closely associated with exposure and hiding. "To feel shame is to feel <u>seen</u> in a painfully diminished sense" (Kaufman, 1985, p. 8). In psychoanalytic thinking, the tendency to compare oneself to others is a derivative of early comparisons to the parental ego ideal. The failure to live up to one's potentialities, to the standards of the loving function of the superego -- the ego ideal -- results in a loss of that love, or abandonment (Kaufman, 1985; Morrison, 1983/1986; Piers & Singer, 1953/1971). Guilt is a result of transgression rather than failure and results in punishment. Shame refers to the whole self (Lewis, 1971) and, as such, is a narcissistic reaction (Morrison, 1983/1986).

Shame and the ideal self are both linked with modern conceptualizations of narcissism (Morrison, 1986) as are the

notion of a defensive facade and the concern with appearances. In this regard, shame is a more interpersonal phenomenon than guilt. Lewis (1971) argues that:

> in the experience of shame, the source of blame or negative valuation of the self is localized as "out there," i.e., originating in the "other." In guilt, the source of negative valuation of the self is localized as originating within the self. (p. 32)

If such is the case, the impression management reformulation of cognitive dissonance theory (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971) and similar conceptualizations of regret as fraudulent display in order to create a favorable impression (Mosak, 1987) may express an attempt to cope with shame. Dissonance reduction here is merely an impression or facade of justification, while regret and even shame may continue unabated or be absent altogether. We are vulnerable to shame because the loving superego is important to us, because we desire the respect of others (Kaufman, 1985).

On the other hand, while shame may be experienced as an interpersonal phenomenon to a greater extent than guilt, from an object relations point of view shame derives more directly from one's identity than guilt (Morrison, 1983/1986). When we identify with the ego ideal we identify with an object we admire. Those characteristics of the ego ideal with which we identify are those that we want, not that others want for us. Those that others want for us are characteristics of the punitive superego. In this sense, in viewing both guilt and shame from the perspective of

internal object representations, shame pertains more to self and to identity.

It should be noted that either shame or guilt may manifest themselves intrapsychically or interpersonally, depending on the degree of internalization of the ego ideal or superego, respectively. Piers (Piers & Singer, 1953/1971) identifies the interpersonal variant of shame as "inferiority feelings," and that of guilt as "fear of punishment" (p. 28).

Shame refers to the self, and guilt to an action, thereby suggesting that one typically experiences guilt for doing, and shame for being. Though both shame and guilt are reactions to self-evaluation that inhere in different aspects of the superego, "the experience of shame is directly about the <u>self</u>, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the <u>thing</u> done or undone is the focus" (Lewis, 1971, p. 30).

This conceptualization reflects the fact that shame has closer ties to identity and self and, therefore, to narcissism. Shame is a response to failure or a "deficiency of the self" whereas "guilt feels as if it were more voluntary" (Lewis, 1971, p. 86). Hiding, flight, denial, and avoidance are narcissistic defenses against external threat and responses to shame. Taking specific ameliorative action does not counter one's identity, one's entire way of

being. One must hide or flee, or deny by constructing a grandiose facade. The experience of transgression as voluntary further suggests that in a psychoanalytic framework there is more of a sense of responsibility with guilt. "Guilt is about things in the real world -- acts or failures to act, events for which one bears responsibility" (Lewis, 1971, p. 43); responsibility seems to adhere more easily to one's specific actions than to how one lives, to who one is. If feeling responsible is necessary for regret, regret must be considered more closely tied to guilt.

Phenomenally, shame is a wordless state (Kaufman, 1985; Lewis, 1971); it is an emotion having little cognitive content. With the commonly seen association between cognition and regret, this further supports a closer tie between regret and guilt. One might also propose gender differences between shame and guilt, especially from a classical analytic perspective. Castration issues, the Oedipal rivalry, and the punitive superego might all be seen as more prominent for the male, while a prominent ego ideal, or a loving superego, is arguably more typical of the female whose identification with the same-sex parent does not involve a switching of allegiances as the child develops. The female presumably feels exposed and inferior simply due to the absence of a penis. Furthermore, the concept of the look or the gaze, and guilt for looking, is typically associated with the male, while the object of that gaze is

the female, who is seen, exposed, ashamed.

As noted, there is evidence indicating that regret is greater for action than inaction, suggesting a closer link between regret and guilt than between regret and shame. Regret for inaction, however, should not be overlooked. Regret may cut across instances of both activity and passivity, both specific action and general identity and, therefore, may be broader conceptually than either guilt or shame. If self-recrimination (or responsibility) is a central feature of regret, it may simply be the case that it is more difficult to feel responsible for inaction than for action -- for a broad deficiency of the self than for a specific transgression. A feeling of responsibility inheres in guilt, but one may or may not be aware of one's responsibility in shame. It may be that when one takes responsibility for one's identity or one's way of being -- when responsibility and shame join forces -- then more profound regret ensues than for some transgression of the superego.

Existential Approaches to Regret

The notion of responsibility that appears to be a necessary feature of regret has an especially prominent place in existential theory. Responsibility is reflected positively in care or concern (Fingarette, 1967; Kaufman, 1985), and conflictually in shame, guilt, remorse, and regret. Without care, and more broadly, without taking

responsibility, there is no genuine shame, guilt, or regret. There can be displays of remorse or regret in the absence of any genuine feelings of regret, for the purpose of avoiding punishment (Fingarette, 1967; Mosak, 1987).

Acceptance of responsibility is implicit in such conflictual feelings, although it may be more evident, though no more important, in guilt and regret than in shame. One might view acceptance of responsibility with regard to regret as a two-phase process. Some degree or aspect of responsibility inheres in the very experience of regret. Full acceptance, however, goes beyond regret, guilt, or shame to expression of caring (Fingarette, 1967; Kaufman, 1985), of forgiveness (Rowe, Halling et al., 1989) or, more broadly, of reparation (Hawthorne, 1988/1989). "A significant part of [any moral] life consists in <u>coming to learn</u> the scope of the responsibility which [one] has already accepted" (Fingarette, 1967, p. 43).

Yalom (1980) notes that "the existential position emphasizes a different kind of basic conflict: neither a conflict with suppressed instinctual strivings nor one with internalized significant adults, but <u>instead a conflict that flows from the individual's confrontation with the givens of existence</u>" (p. 8). The "givens of existence" that are especially relevant to the experience of regret include the irretrievable passage of time, the inevitability of death, and the individual's responsibility for finding or making

meaning in his or her life and world. While the anxiety of classical psychoanalytic theory derives from drives, anxiety, still central to a dynamic existential approach, here emerges purely from an awareness (either conscious or unconscious) of these givens of being. From an existential perspective, anxiety is more fundamental than other emotions because it is related to these ontological givens. "Anxiety is the experience of the threat of imminent non-being" (May, 1958, p. 50).

Anxiety also occurs when we are faced with a possibility. Sartre (1957) contends that every event or object revealed to us presents itself as an opportunity, and every action (or inaction) with regard to such an opportunity is a choice. We experience existential anxiety in the awareness that we are free to choose and responsible for every event and object in our lived world. In addition to the absolute limitation of death, anxiety is related to the freedom inherent in possibility and choice.

According to May (1958), existential guilt is that state following the denial of one's potentialities. We are guilty to the extent that we have failed to fulfill our possibilities (Boss, 1963; Yalom, 1980), and we experience guilt for the life that has gone unlived or wasted (Rank, 1950). For fear of losing the security of the status quo, or for fear of having to choose one possibility, and therefore not choose another, one may passively forego an

opportunity that presents itself. This is not the only way of arriving at existential guilt; potentialities must be denied or rejected in the act of choosing itself (Boss, 1963). For this reason, existential guilt is a fundamental given, and may turn out to lie at the root of the experience of regret.

John Gardner, in his novel Grendel (cited in Yalom, 1980, pp. 317-318), states that "Time is perpetual perishing," and "alternatives exclude." In failing to choose either of two options, we may be trying to forestall the passage of opportunities in the belief that, if we choose neither, both will remain awaiting our decision. There resides in us a potentiality for every alternative available to us. When we actively choose one alternative we forfeit the potentiality inherent in the other alternative. In failing to choose, we may be trying to avoid the experience of death of some part of ourselves that occurs when we make a choice and forfeit the alternative opportunity.

Whatever our motives, the method is unsuccessful since time is perpetual perishing. Opportunities usually do not linger and, even if they do, we may not take advantage of them then, at the time we passed them by, but only now. Regret seems, at first consideration, oriented toward the past because its objects are in the past; however, regret for missed opportunities is also a longing for an

alternative future. In failing to choose, we may be viewed as trying to abrogate responsibility for our decisions. Even if we try to avoid anxiety by blaming our missed opportunity on the passage of time, we still have some awareness of our responsibility and feel guilty, nonetheless.

The other alternative is to choose actively. But, as we have seen, alternatives exclude and existential guilt results. These two ways of responding to possibility seem to offer an important distinction. For example, the experience of shame may be more closely tied to a failure to choose and responsibility may be experienced more directly in choosing actively. Clearly the latter offers the better chance of living near one's potential. It would be desirable to learn to make choices or decisions without experiencing inordinate guilt (Rank, 1950; Yalom; 1980). The main point here, however, is that responsibility inheres in both choosing and failing to choose.

Regret seems to arrive with the dim awareness of personal responsibility for forfeited potentialities. It also seems to diminish with a fuller acceptance of responsibility. This second level of responsibility may be more genuine, or more productive, since it leads to reparation, change, and growth. It is suggested that forgiveness -- with respect to regret, we are concerned with forgiving ourself -- may be part of that movement toward

responsibility (Rowe, Halling et al., 1989). Regret occurs prior to forgiveness and is on a less sound footing regarding the acceptance of responsibility. It is apparently difficult to forgive another if the transgressor has not admitted wrongdoing (Rowe, Halling et al., 1989) or, more to the point, if the transgressor has not genuinely felt regret and taken responsibility. We cannot hold a person responsible, or impose responsibility, if he or she does not first take responsibility (Fingarette, 1967).

Guilt feelings or neurotic guilt may appear "only if one is unwilling to amend" (Dreikurs, cited in Mosak, 1987, p. 290). Neurotic guilt is often distinguished from existential or "real" guilt (Buber, 1957; Boss, 1963; Fingarette, 1967; Mosak, 1987; Winnicott, 1958/1965; Yalom, 1980). The phenomenon of regret may be more closely associated with the construct of neurotic guilt and, therefore, may function as resistance to reparation. On the other hand, it may have closer experiential ties to existential guilt and, therefore, may be a meaningful step toward full acceptance of responsibility for one's being and one's life. A third possibility is that regret is a phenomenon which encompasses both neurotic and existential guilt. Where -- or whether -- regret belongs within this framework of guilts has yet to be determined. It is clear, however, that such an understanding may provide insight into its function and may illuminate the way toward resolution of

such feelings. Regret is a universal and meaningful phenomenon, exploration of which may shed light on many related theoretical constructs and lived phenomena.

CHAPTER II

HUMAN SCIENCE METHODOLOGY: THE DIALOGICAL INTERVIEW

The dialogical interview is one of a number of methods considered to provide a qualitative approach to research deriving from a phenomenological perspective. The phenomenological perspective differs from other more natural science orientations that were adopted by psychology at the time of its inception as a discipline. To make sense of the dialogical interview as a legitimate method of investigation, it is necessary to describe phenomenological methodology more broadly and then to distinguish it from the methodology of more traditional approaches.

Human Science Methodology

Human science psychology has attempted to develop methods intended to obtain a first-person description of experience (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). The lived world, and not some objective assemblage of facts, forms the subject matter of psychology from a human science perspective (Kvale, 1983). Neither the individual nor the particular phenomenon are removed from their context. To study objects and events independent of human experience is not the domain of human science and, arguably, is impossible in any scientific discipline.

The task of a phenomenological approach is to remain faithful to the phenomena (Giorgi, 1967; Hawthorne, 1988/1989; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989) by providing an experience-near description of them. One must guard against moving beyond what is evident. The phenomenological investigator is not interested in explanations or theories, but in the phenomena as lived through (Wertz, 1986).

Churchill (1990) draws a useful distinction between methodology and method. He defines methodology as the theoretical understanding and articulation of a method, and method as the concrete steps or procedures of investigation. While the premises and goals of phenomenological methodology can be elucidated, a description of specific methods is not always appropriate or possible. The use of a particular method must be predicated on the specific phenomenon being studied if one is to maintain fidelity to that phenomenon (Giorgi, 1967; Wertz, 1986). Not only the phenomenon, but the investigation itself, may dictate the method.

These considerations are not meant to imply there are no guiding principles in a phenomenological investigation; such general principles and specific methods will be explicated herein. Phenomenological methods, however, are dynamic and evolve as additional information is gathered and interpreted. The various components of method -- such as collection, bracketing, and interpretation -- are processes of discovery and all are interdependent. As an

investigation evolves, these component processes influence each other, and it is not always possible to mandate guidelines before any component proceeds.

> Good research into the unknown cannot be well designed, in the usual sense of the term....Truly good research means that one allows the investigation to be guided by the experiences of the investigation. And this cannot be predicted. If it can be predicted, then there is little information to be obtained from the research. (Bakan, 1967, p. xiv)

Natural science methods are often equated with science itself, just as operational definitions and measurements come to be equated with the phenomena themselves (Valle et al., 1989). Operational definitions and notions of objectivity serve to exclude experience (Colaizzi, 1978). We do not measure phenomena or objects or behaviors but their attributes; measurement requires abstraction -- a removal or distancing from the phenomenon. Measurement reveals how much, but not what, is being measured (Wertz, 1986). With the goal of traditional psychology that of prediction and control, it is often not the phenomena but the determinants of the phenomena that become the focus of study (Colaizzi, 1978).

From a phenomenological perspective, even the very actuality of a phenomenon is uncertain. Operational definitions, by their nature arbitrary and circular, obscure rather than solve the problem of identifying the phenomenon. Phenomenological research is intended to explore the nature of the lived phenomena in greater depth than traditional

research. It is desirable to have as direct contact with the phenomena as possible. Thus the data will be the phenomena, unmediated by measurement (Giorgi, 1983). Description of any lived phenomena must include such uncertainty, imprecision, and subjectivity if one is to pursue the essential, the actual. Bakan (1967) has argued that methodological purity or precision may be inversely related to the detection of meaningful, substantive findings. Multiple perspectives and deeper exploration yield findings that can be ambiguous and apparently contradictory, but may ultimately be seen as complementary; the genuine complexity of phenomena must be addressed rather than excluded in the pursuit of consistency and a "naive" reliability in terms of operational definitions (Wertz, 1986).

The presence of multiple perspectives is viewed differently in natural science and human science approaches to psychology. Disagreement is undesirable in measurement, and procedural ambiguity is undesirable in hypothesis testing (Valle et al., 1989; Wertz, 1986). Variability in natural science implies inconsistency or error of measurement. A human science definition of accurate description is a comprehensive characterization of the phenomenon as lived rather than simply in terms of internal consistency. Each perspective is limited, and variation is the very means of arriving at a stable description of the

phenomenon. Limiting variation in the name of (statistical) reliability, precludes comprehensive description. Patterns, themes, and the structural invariants of phenomena emerge by investigating the phenomenon from various perspectives (Hawthorne, 1988/1989; Ihde, 1977; Wertz, 1986).

It should be noted that multiple perspectives also are recognized as essential in a natural science framework. The competent natural science researcher employs multiple measures to assess a single construct. These might be as varied as a test, a self-report measure, and an instrument for tabulating behavioral observations. Perhaps the greater distinction is that these instruments yield only attributes of the phenomenon, and typically do so from a third-person perspective. Human science seeks a first-person description of experience. "It is not enough for psychologists to record what [subjects] do from some external, third-person point of view but...we must also attempt to determine what the task looks like from the [subject's] first-person point of view" (Pollio & Henley, 1991, p. 117).

That variability necessarily subverts reliability is specious; perspectivity, in fact, may provide reliability because only by adopting different perspectives can each perspective be revealed as incomplete (Wertz, 1986). "Ultimately, our only proof of objectivity is intersubjectivity" (Babbie, 1986, p. 25). Perspectivity does not confuse understanding but enriches and expands it.

"The 'next' case presents a fundamental threat to the validity of a general-type proposition. General-type propositions are thus critically testable, since they are jeopardized by each new instance" (Bakan, 1967).

Just as we argue here for multiple perspectives on a phenomenon, it might be claimed more broadly that the apparent contradictions between natural science and phenomenological perspectives are better seen as complementary. Disagreement only occurs in communication about the same thing (Wertz, 1986). A balanced, inclusive view, rather than an either/or posture, is perhaps best, allowing a place for both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Hawthorne, 1988/1989), or even suggesting the necessity of both approaches. Though Babbie (1986) argues that data are fundamentally qualitative, he further states that neither approach is intrinsically better. We might best chart a course between the Scylla of "fuzzy verbalism" and the Charybdis of "fake operationalism" (Hogan & Nicholson, 1988, p. 625), or in still more hyperbolic terms, "rigor alone is paralytic death, but imagination alone is insanity" (Bateson, 1979, p. 219).

Some of the strengths of the quantitative approach to psychology are its specificity, its explicit methods, its replicability, and its generalizability. The strengths of a qualitative approach include its flexibility, its depth, its adaptability to new information, and its recognition that

research methods must influence the phenomena being studied. Phenomenology also calls for the recognition of the influence of the investigator (Giorgi, 1983; Rychlak, 1988). Such influence has been noted in psychology with phenomena such as the Hawthorne effect, but is underemphasized when compared to its incorporation into modern physics following Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (Babbie, 1986; Capra, 1982; Rychlak, 1988).

Rather than strive to reduce or eliminate the influence of the investigator and the impact of other demand characteristics of the research process (Babbie, 1986; Orne, 1962), we should understand that elimination of such influence is impossible. Observer effects are inevitable because the human properties of the observer are necessary for the generation of observation and description (Capra, 1982; Keeney, 1983). Rather than provide a source of distortion, such effects are necessary for the identity and identification of the phenomenon (Babbie, 1986; Capra, 1982). Phenomena are co-constituted by the observed and the observer and inclusion of the investigator is not a methodological flaw because observer and observed are inseparable (Babbie, 1986; Hawthorne, 1988/1989; Valle & King, 1978).

A natural science perspective in psychology holds that objects and phenomena exist independent of human experience, and the scientific endeavor is one of discovery (Thompson et

al., 1989). In human science research, we must accept some external referent, some reality in what we observe, while recognizing at the same time that what is discovered also rests on the nature of the investigator and the investigation. To discount the impact of the observer would not be empirical and would disregard rather than reflect the unified nature of subject and object. "The pursuit of unassailable objectivity subordinates the task of discovery to the task of verification" (Stolorow & Atwood, 1979, p. 35). Focusing on technique allows the scientist to deny his influence and his subjectivity (Maslow, 1970). Either perspective is limited, but both are best seen as complementary rather than exclusionary. Scientific investigation, as all human action, falls somewhere between creation and discovery. (Keeney, 1983; Maslow, 1970; Romanyshyn & Whalen, 1989; Valle & King, 1978).

From a natural science perspective, the impact and perspective of the investigator are thought to provide the potential for bias. From a human science approach, however, inclusion of the perspective of the investigator is viewed as advantageous and necessary. Objectivity in the human sciences is, as stated earlier, "fidelity to phenomena" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 52). As we have seen, the observer is never independent of the phenomenon, the phenomenon is never independent of some observer, and objectivity is compromised only if the observer's presence is ignored.

Clarification of one's presuppositions with regard to the phenomenon being studied is accomplished in the process of bracketing. It is not possible to exclude presuppositions and, for this reason, preconceptions about a phenomenon must be addressed as explicitly, fully, and openly as possible. Once in awareness, they must be held in abeyance to allow for openness to differing views. This process of bracketing -- of interrogating one's preconceptions and expectations -- is fundamental to the phenomenological approach. As such, it is a process parallel to and part of the entire research process, beginning with the investigator asking himself why he chose the topic he did (Colaizzi, 1978).

The phenomenological standard of objectivity can only be approached through the use of a bracketing process. One's own values, beliefs, and expectations about a phenomenon must be made explicit in order to understand their influence on one's perception, choice of method, and means of interpretation. Objectivity must include this "decontamination of the known by study of the knower" (Maslow, 1970, p. 7). For both the researcher and the clinician, awareness of one's own point of view facilitates an understanding of the other. Being attuned to countertransference phenomena is the clinical counterpart to bracketing, and is one reason therapy is often advocated for clinicians in training (Bakan, 1967).

Bracketing begins before data collection and must continue throughout the investigative endeavor (Hawthorne, 1988/1989). As with phenomenological methodology in general, it may not be fruitful to delimit the methods or means by which one will bracket. One may become aware of the potential for bias at any phase of the research. It may be useful, however, to view each episode of bracketing rather explicitly as a two-phase process. It is not enough to explicate one's presuppositions; the investigator must also suspend or hold in abeyance those notions, if bias is to be avoided (Hawthorne, 1988/1989; Valle et al., 1989).

Utilizing the Phenomenology Group in the Psychology Department at the University of Tennessee serves a number of purposes, including bracketing. The group facilitates the identification of biases on the part of the investigator in terms of the multiple perspectives of group members (Hawthorne, 1988/1989; Thompson et al., 1989). At various phases of the research, group members provide the investigator with a perspective other than his or her own in order to assure that he or she is successfully suspending expectations and is not influencing the data, either during the interviews, during the interpretive phases, or at any other time.

The most concrete and planned episode of bracketing, however, is the bracketing interview. Casual self-reflection on the phenomenon is often the only initial

bracketing procedure (Colaizzi, 1978; Polkinghorne, 1989). In addition, the investigator participates as the subject in a formal interview on the topic of study before gathering any data from other individuals. The purpose of this interview is to bring to awareness the investigator's presuppositions regarding the topic so that he or she is subsequently better able to suspend such presuppositions and to remain open to unexpected aspects of the phenomenon.

One goal of both clinical work and empirical research is understanding. Failure to recognize the theories or premises underlying one's work, or the possibility of error, bias, suppression or distortion of data, can yield a flawed understanding. By being aware of this potential for error, we have a better chance of precluding them (Bakan, 1967; Keeney, 1983). My own awareness of and attempt to resolve a personal, potentially biasing, investigative tendency will serve as an example of the usefulness of the bracketing process.

Any phenomenological method is oriented to the phenomenon and not to the person providing the data (Kvale, 1983). It has been noted in the Phenomenology Group that many of us, perhaps especially those with clinical training, tend to focus on the person being interviewed and often lose sight of the phenomenon. One means of overcoming this tendency is to be aware of it, to keep it in awareness, and to maintain a focus on the phenomenon rather than on the

individual. One's presuppositions can be viewed as habits, and habits are hard to break. Like a habit, a tendency to be more interested in the co-participant than in the phenomenon may be addressed by first maintaining it in awareness. This is easier said than done. The primary means of keeping one's interview tendencies figural is to return regularly to the texts of the interviews. Another means is to write down each presupposition as it enters awareness. One may keep such a list handy and refer to it so as to check that these presuppositions are not unduly coloring the interpretive process.

Another means of guarding against a tendency to emphasize the idiographic is to complete each phase of the research prior to beginning the next one. For example, the investigator may interview all participants before beginning with transcription and, in turn, may transcribe all interviews before identifying significant statements. In this way, each procedural step, including the collection, transformation, and interpretation of data will proceed in a more parallel fashion for all interviews and transcripts. Alternatively, proceeding through several phases of interpretation on a single interview before transcribing the next could serve to reinforce an idiographic tendency, increasing the risk that one would give greater weight to the first transcript or transcripts. Proceeding in parallel may result in the emergence of themes or structure across

participants somewhat earlier than is typical, for a certain amount of interpretation at the idiographic level is often desirable (Hawthorne, 1988/1989; Wertz, 1983). Since the ultimate goal of phenomenological research is a general, nomothetic structural description of the phenomenon, a more purely nomothetic interpretive process may be adopted to minimize the potentially biasing effects of a substantial idiographic interpretive phase.

The Dialogical Interview

The substance of psychology as a human science lies in human intersubjectivity and interaction. "Since encounter occurs only in dialogue, dialogal research uncovers presuppositions most fruitfully" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 69, author's emphasis). Though Colaizzi here speaks of the investigator's presuppositions, arguing that bracketing is best served by dialogical research, it should hold equally that dialogue will also effectively reveal co-participants' presuppositions about the phenomenon, as well as revealing the phenomenon itself.

Phenomenological methodology entails obtaining comprehensive descriptions of a phenomenon. This is achieved by utilizing methods that remain free from restrictions on such descriptions. One can use any terminology which will serve the description of what one experiences. The desired outcome of phenomenological research is to describe that which is figural (Herrnstein &

Boring, 1965) and to discover or uncover the meanings of the phenomenon of interest (Giorgi, 1983; Kvale, 1983). This goal necessitates, and the interview method facilitates, such freedom of description. Uncovering meanings or noetic references to the phenomenon are best achieved in terms of noematic descriptions, even in the context of experimentation (Giorgi, 1967, 1983), and the most direct and thorough method of obtaining such descriptions is through dialogue. "The face-to-face encounter provides the richest data source for the human science researcher seeking to understand human structures of experience" (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 267).

"Experience with the investigated topic and articulateness suffice as criteria for selecting subjects" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 58). These are the most parsimonious criteria for conducting phenomenological research, though numerous other criteria have been proposed (van Kaam, cited in Polkinghorne, 1989). For instance, spontaneous interest in the topic and openness are desirable qualities of the co-participant. Polkinghorne (1983) suggests that openness can be facilitated if the investigator is self-revealing. On the other hand, openness on the part of the investigator with regard to the phenomenon could be biasing and contrary to the bracketing effort. Polkinghorne (1989) himself notes that the co-participant's attention should be directed to his or her own experiencing of the phenomenon, which could

be compromised by self-revelation on the part of the investigator. A certain degree of openness is implicit in the criteria of spontaneous interest and articulateness, and need not be further encouraged.

The course that the interview follows is obviously co-determined by the investigator and the co-participant, although the co-participant should be allowed to dictate its direction as much as possible. The investigator will obtain greater accuracy of description if he or she adopts a posture of naivete with regard to the phenomenon, for the investigator knows nothing at all about the topic as it is experienced by the specific co-participant (Thompson et al., 1989). The co-participant is considered the expert regarding his or her own experience, and the investigator's efforts are directed solely at understanding (Hawthorne, 1988/1989).

An initial question is all that need be planned in advance. Questions in the interview are restricted to requests for clarification or elaboration (Hawthorne, 1988/1989; Polkinghorne, 1989). Staying with the language of the co-participant is one means of safeguarding the nondirective nature of the interview (Hawthorne, 1988/1989; Thompson et al., 1989). The risk here is akin to that in the game of Telephone, wherein the child whispers a phrase to the next in line, only to discover that the integrity of the words has been destroyed by the time they come full

circle. Wertz (1983) justifies the move to the investigator's words at the point where interpretation moves from the phenomenal to the meaning level because, at this point, it becomes the investigator's reflection.

It should be noted that a semi-structured interview addressing particular themes, though not containing specific questions, is recommended by Kvale (1983) and Wertz (1986). They contend that there is less danger of bias due to leading questions in an interview than in a questionnaire, for, both in the course of the interviews and in studying the transcripts, the investigator has the opportunity to clarify the co-participants' understanding of the questions. Directing co-participant awareness with regard to content, however, necessitates all the more that the interview remain free from bias with regard to meaning. The maintenance of this distinction may place an untenable demand on the interviewer.

Material solicited from the co-participant is to remain at the level of description, at least early in the interview. The investigator pursues not what the co-participant thinks has happened, or why, but what he or she has experienced (Giorgi, 1983; Thompson et al., 1989). Questions are not predetermined, but flow from the course of the dialogue (Thompson et al., 1989). The investigator is presumed to be better able to interpret the meaning of the experience for the co-participant as a consequence of his or

her different perspective, especially since the co-participant is not always aware of all that is communicated. This fact legitimizes the call for noematic descriptions by the co-participant, since the investigator is in a better position to discover noetic references (Giorgi, 1983).

Interviews may not always remain at the experience-near, descriptive level. Despite the investigator's efforts to maintain a descriptive focus -- by asking for and persistently attending to a specific example, time, or situation -- co-participants may reflect on the situation in such a way as to remove them from it, or to move to a greater level of abstraction by considering what constitutes the phenomenon in universal terms. Though this is precisely the goal of the research, it is generally perceived as the role of the investigator to ascertain universal themes or essences, following the interview, during a separate interpretive phase.

The solicitation of several instances of the phenomenon may contribute to a co-participant's tendency to thematize and, thereby, leave an experience-near level of description. The co-participant may be more inclined to pursue the essential structure of the phenomenon if he or she is asked to compare and contrast more than one situation. As mentioned, an effort should be made to remain at the descriptive level early in the interview. It is inevitable, and not undesirable, that interpretation begin during the

interview. First, meanings are created between people; they tend to emerge in relationship. An interview is the method of choice precisely in order to obtain these meanings most directly.

If we truly treat the investigator and the co-participant as equal (Kvale, 1983; Thompson et al., 1989), even if we continue to argue that the investigator is in a better position to arrive at meanings, we should not discourage the interviewee's attempts to explicate themes at the level of content. In addition, the study of psychological methodology from a human science perspective has taught us that distinctions between various phases or components of any methodology are arbitrary. Description and interpretation are not discrete processes, but lie on a continuum (Kvale, 1983). We can clearly see that interpretation is a valid component of data collection, and validation is ongoing, even in the editorial process and beyond. Results are always of an interim nature, and the steps or components of a method are recursive and influence one another.

An additional justification for including the co-participant's efforts at interpretation concerns the question of what constitutes the data in a phenomenological study. Neither the co-participant nor the investigator return to the original lived experience. The data are reconstructed experiences of particular situations as they

emerge in dialogue. The co-participant is instructed to stay close to the lived experience, and subsequent interpretive efforts of the investigator should involve an attempt to remain close to that level of the dialogue. Despite the desirability of these efforts, reflective interpretation is necessary for the investigator to arrive at a meaningful structural description, for the experience is not his or her own, and cannot even be lived again by the co-participant. The transcript of the interview is autonomous (Kvale, 1983; Thompson et al., 1989), and this reflects the "inescapable hermeneutic nature of qualitative research" (Hawthorne, 1988/1989, p.101).

The goal of a phenomenological investigation is to discover and describe the common emergent structures of a phenomenon. The interview and the interpretive process serve to focus on the phenomenon and on those universal structures that characterize the experience, not on individual differences or on a characterization of the co-participant. However, it is typically proposed that there be at least one intermediate phase of the interpretive process which provides an idiographic structure (Kvale, 1983; Thompson et al., 1989; Wertz, 1983), or even a structure at the level of each situation described by each co-participant (Hawthorne, 1988/1989). The limitations of such structures are that they characterize only one individual's experience across several situations or, more

limiting, they reflect only a single instance of the phenomenon. It seems unnecessary, as Wertz (1983) suggests, to move from idiographic to nomothetic only after moving from description to interpretation of meaning. Colaizzi (1978) tends to de-emphasize the idiographic aspects of interpretation, moving more directly from the interpretation of significant statements to the thematizing of these meaning statements across individuals.

The interpretive process invokes a movement from the meaning of statements or components of the interview to a tentative meaning or structure of the phenomenon, and back again (Kvale, 1983). It is continuous, though recursive and self-influencing, rather than a linear process, and any description of components or phases is likely to be arbitrary. Such descriptions, however, can be useful as a heuristic tool, and retaining an idiographic phase of interpretation may serve several purposes. For example, a particular researcher may find that it suits his or her investigative style to engage in a fairly complete idiographic phase, especially if individual differences are of interest for a particular topic. Although the "essential structure" or "general structural description" (Valle & Halling, 1989, p.51) of some phenomenon (e.g., regret) is a desired outcome of phenomenological research, it would be undesirable to lose sight of possible distinctions among different types of a particular phenomenon. Perhaps a

taxonomy of regrets will reveal itself in the data while a more nomothetic structure of the experience would obscure such a finding. Finally, phenomenological inquiry is designed to study experience, and the character of experience is revealed most fully at the level of the individual. Reporting an intermediate stage of thematizing wherein distinctions remain will likely enrich a descriptive definition of any topic.

Churchill (1990) recognizes the danger of becoming stuck at the idiographic level, which he characterizes as "getting lost in the trees." Here one is unable to thematize or to move past pure description to the level of meaning. The opposing risk is what Churchill (1990) describes as reinventing the wheel, wherein one jumps to a global level of interpretation, discovering themes that are merely the general horizons (or grounds) of all experience such as embodiment, relationship, and temporality. When this occurs, a characterization of the specific phenomenon under investigation is lost. Such an eventuality can be avoided by returning regularly to the texts at all phases of the interpretive process, and by constantly keeping in mind the topic of the investigation. The desired result of a phenomenological study -- the essential structure of a particular phenomenon -- lies in between these poles although it does not exclude the idiographic, the contextual, or the general grounds of the experience.

Just as interpretation of the first interview may influence interpretation of the next, the first situation each co-participant describes, along with subsequent reflection and interpretation during the interview, may bias his or her selection of a second situation. In an attempt to circumvent this risk, the investigator may request that each co-participant make brief mention of a few situations at the outset of the interview, prior to embarking on the detailed description of any. The co-participant then is asked to select one situation for thorough description. When exploration of this instance is exhausted, the co-participant proceeds to describe the next instance.

The interviewer should not discourage description of situations that are brought to mind during the interview as examples of the phenomenon. It is recognized that this attempt to reduce bias is not foolproof, for most co-participants reflect on the topic, often quite extensively, prior to the interview. Nonetheless, it seems useful to include this step in the interview procedure to increase the possibility that the situations described by each co-participant will be richly varied and not influenced by prior descriptions.

Variation is the very means by which the themes of a phenomenon are revealed (Hawthorne, 1988/1989; Ihde, 1986). Additionally, variation is the means by which we validate the discovery of themes. Useful variation can be obtained

at the idiographic level, by each participant describing more than one situation, and across individuals, in terms of multiple protocols.

Hawthorne (1988/1989) suggests the investigator obtains "intrasubjective agreement," or validates at the idiographic level. This may be done by returning to the co-participant for a follow-up interview. During this interview, the investigator provides the co-participant with a tentative structure of the phenomenon as applied to that individual in the form of an individual description. Kvale (1987) has proposed a similar concept of validation at the "person-centered" level of interpretation, and notes that such validity must be determined by the co-participant. Hawthorne narrows his interpretive focus further by summarizing at the level of each specific situation, and if he so chose, could seek validation at this level as well. It should be noted that elements of this process may begin during the initial interview. Just as interpretive efforts should be allowed during the interview, Kvale (1983) has noted that a main advantage of the interview method is that verification can be sought a that time. Dialogue itself engenders a recursive or self-correcting process; however, an additional follow-up interview may be important because a more formal proposed structure can be provided at that time.

It is not clear that either Hawthorne (1988/1989) or Kvale (1987) validate their general descriptions with each

co-participant at follow-up sessions. What may be said with more certainty is that they validated progressive versions of their structures in the manner of a hermeneutical circle, by returning to each situation as it presented itself in the transcript, thus confirming or modifying their interpretations. Hawthorne checked each idiographic summary with the relevant co-participant. He also checked the general structure with each summary, but apparently did not formally compare forms of the data across more than a single level of interpretation -- across more than one transformation of the data. There is no reason to leave all nomothetic interpretive work up to the investigator. What is most important at follow-up is to provide each co-participant with his or her own verbatim transcript, and with a tentative general structural description with which to compare it.

This more general goal of the phenomenological interview method complements attainment of the individual structural descriptions. At the nomothetic level, Hawthorne (1988/1989) defines the accuracy of his general structural description in terms of "intersubjective agreement," or to "the extent that others find the interpretation clear and useful" (p. 102). This step parallels the intrasubjective validation of the individual or person-centered description. Kvale's general "content-centered" interpretation is deemed valid if consensus is obtained and if it proves to be

acceptable to ordinary readers (Kvale, 1987). Each proposed theme must be validated by returning to every situation described in every transcript. Though it need not be evident in each description, a given theme must at least reveal itself upon further reflection in every instance (Thompson et al., 1989; Wertz, 1983).

More needs to be said about the possibility of distance between the data -- the interviews or transcripts -- and the findings of the phenomenological investigation -- the essential structure. As noted, there is an inevitable distance between the lived experience and what we must view as the data because the interview is always a reconstruction of past events. There is a real "disjunction of the meaning of the text from the mental intention of the author" (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 75). Though Wertz (1986) denies this disjunction, he recognizes that there is increasing distance at each step, and notes a greater danger of "arbitrary subjectivity" in later interpretive phases than during the interview itself.

It could be argued that the transcription of each interview is an intervening step serving to create distance between the dialogue and the findings. Some phenomenological researchers who utilize an interview method do not produce a transcript, but work directly from audiotape. Even some of those in the Phenomenology Group, who do make transcriptions, report that it may prove easier

to thematize by returning to the tapes. This may be especially true for those with clinical experience and skill, or with greater receptivity to linguistic information via a spoken than a written modality. While this may be so, inclusion of a transcription provides an alternative means for familiarizing oneself with the data as well as a means for editing and making data public (Hawthorne, 1988/1989).

Because both the interviewee's intention and, more notably, the meaning that inheres in the described situation -- in the past events themselves -- are beyond our reach, the very first interpretive step must take the form of a guess (Ricoeur, 1976). This is where phenomenological research is most risky, for there are no rules for making good guesses. The preceding means of validation, including in vivo validation, follow-up interviews, and the hermeneutical circle between guess and validation, tapes and themes, transcripts and essences, participants and structure, still contain a risk of self-fulfilling prophecy (Churchill, 1990) or of self-confirmability (Ricoeur, 1976). As has been noted, however, validation is a continuous and unending process (Wertz, 1986) and critical readings by others may provide a means of falsification and correction. "The basis of truth is agreement" (Babbie, 1986, p. 25); a proposition is shown to be false, and is altered or discarded, when better evidence of an alternative position is acquired (Bakan, 1967; Wertz, 1986). Kvale (1987) argues

that remaining with a multiplicity of interpretations representative of various perspectives enriches the findings, since neither investigator nor reader, nor even the author of the experience, may know the "full meaning" of the data. Final agreement is never reached (Polkinghorne, 1983; Ricoeur, 1976) and alternative interpretations are always possible. While Ricoeur (1976) points out that validation does not provide final confirmation or verification, such procedures do show a given interpretation not only as possible but as more probable than another. There are limits to meaning, and "it is not true that all interpretations are equal" (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 79).

It may be useful to review briefly the procedures of a phenomenological interview. The investigator first chooses a topic of interest and plans an initial question to be asked of co-participants. Pilot interviews and a research group are particularly useful at this early phase in helping the investigator formulate an appropriate question that will facilitate a response without leading the co-participant. A formal bracketing interview is then undertaken so as to interrogate the investigator's specific presuppositions regarding the topic. This step is recommended for all phenomenological research using dialogical interviews and could be easily included in other types of research as well.

Co-participants are selected on the basis of experience with the chosen topic and their ability to articulate their

experiences. Random sampling is not necessary, because the goal is not one of probabilistic generalization to a population. All interviews are unstructured and open-ended, allowing participants to dictate the direction as much as possible. The interviewer's goal is one of understanding, and he or she limits questions to seeking clarification or elaboration. The interviewer also should try to remain with the language of the co-participant, though some reframing is inevitable and necessary.

The interview is focused to concern the phenomenon under study, although at the expense of neither idiographic nor contextual data. Each interview should remain initially at the descriptive level, although reflection and interpretation are not discouraged at this stage. If one maintains a policy of allowing the co-participant to take the lead, and of following that lead, the co-participant inevitably will engage in some reflective pursuit of meaning, at which time a more active interrogation at this level of meaning can begin. Still, the investigator should only seek clarification or elaboration of what the co-participant brings forth.

It is recommended that the investigator solicit multiple situations from each co-participant in order to increase variation and to facilitate thematization. For these same reasons, it is recommended that several individuals be interviewed in any study. The interviews are

then transcribed and the interpretive process may begin. It is at this phase of the research that it seems best not to dictate specific procedures. The investigator moves recursively, in a hermeneutical circle, between whatever levels of data and interpretation prove most fruitful. The research group becomes a particularly vital component during this period and may serve to review individual transcripts and evaluate tentative thematic structures. It also may serve to relieve the tedium of working alone. In addition, working in isolation harbors the risk that the investigator's presuppositions will recede from awareness, thereby resulting in findings that merely confirm prior expectations or hypotheses.

Once the investigator has arrived at a tentative general description of the structure of the experience being studied, follow-up interviews are conducted. At this time each co-participant is presented their verbatim transcript along with a tentative structure. When the investigator incorporates any changes necessitated by criticisms or corrections obtained at follow-up, the thematic structure can be deemed sufficient as a general description of the phenomenon.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The phenomenon of interest in the present investigation was the experience of regret. The method of data collection was the dialogical interview, in which the researcher attempted to evoke first-person descriptions of this experience. The interview, as discussed earlier, would seem to be the most effective means of eliciting such descriptions from co-participants. It might be argued further that the phenomenological interview must be at least one component, if not the initial and foundational component, of any research endeavor.

Pilot Interview

The investigator sought and found an individual who agreed to act as a pilot co-participant in the present study. This interview was conducted to ensure that the initial question -- the only substantive element of structure in the interview -- was an appropriate and effective one for eliciting descriptions without guiding the co-participant unnecessarily.

The pilot interview was conducted in the co-participant's home. The place, date, and time were of the co-participant's choosing. The interview was audiotaped with the co-participant's informed consent. The

investigator transcribed the interview verbatim, editing only to ensure confidentiality.

The Phenomenology Research Group of the University of Tennessee evaluated the transcript in several ways. First of all, group members assisted the investigator in assessing the initial interview question, and deemed it appropriate and effective for present research purposes. Second, they evaluated the investigator's interview technique by checking whether the investigator's questions were directing the dialogue in any way. They also evaluated whether any presuppositions on the part of the investigator concerning the experience of regret were expressed during the interview or during the group meeting. Thirdly, the group began a preliminary thematic analysis of the transcript in the manner that would proceed for all subsequent transcripts. Significant statements were identified within the transcript, and group members offered tentative proposals for developing themes of the experience of regret.

Bracketing Interview

A bracketing interview was next conducted to identify, more explicitly, the investigator's presuppositions. The investigator recruited an experienced member of the Phenomenology Group to conduct the interview. The bracketing interview and all subsequent interviews took place in the investigator's office; all interviews were audiotaped. The investigator transcribed the bracketing

interview and again brought it to the Phenomenology Group for reaction. This time the group was unconcerned with the presuppositions or interview skills of the interviewer, and all efforts of the group went into that of identifying figural statements and suggesting possible themes.

Solicitation of Co-participants

Co-participants were solicited from the university community. Information about the study was distributed by means of a written notice describing the investigation and requesting volunteers (Appendix A, Information to Potential Co-participants). This notice was placed in the mailboxes of graduate students and some faculty in numerous departmental offices at the university. It also was posted in several departmental offices. In addition, the investigator obtained permission from several faculty to present this information personally in their classes and research groups. One instructor was provided notices for distribution and informed her class directly.

Eleven co-participants were obtained by these means, and all who volunteered were interviewed. At least one co-participant was obtained by each of the above means, although not all contacts produced a volunteer. Because the interview process was essentially unchanged following the pilot interview, and because that interview was considered acceptable by the investigator and the Phenomenology Group, the pilot interview also was used in all analyses; thus the

number of co-participants totals twelve.

Demographic data for these participants are presented in Table 1. Co-participants were four white males, one Asian female, and seven white females with a mean age of 28.6 years and a median age of 27 years. All but one of the co-participants were students; educational level in Table 1 reflects the type of program in which they were enrolled at the time of the interview.

Interview Procedures

Each co-participant arranged a time for the interview individually with the investigator. The investigator described the nature and purpose of the research orally and provided a written description as contained in the Information and Consent Form (Appendix B).

Provisions for maintaining confidentiality were reviewed. The investigator assigned a number to each co-participant. This number was affixed to the cassette recording of the corresponding interview as the only means of identification. The investigator kept one master list of co-participant names, addresses, and identification numbers in a locked file, along with the audio cassettes. Transcripts of the interviews contained only these identification numbers. Any identifying information, such as proper names, was edited during the transcription. All cassettes were destroyed upon completion of the data analysis and the master list of names and addresses was

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Co-participant Population.

Category	Number of Co-participants	
	Male	Female
Age		
21-25	2	3
26-30	1	3
31-35	0	2
51-55	1	0
Educational Level		
Undergraduate	2	2
Master's Program	0	2
Doctoral Program	2	3
Doctoral Degree	0	1
Marital Status		
Single	2	4
Married	0	1
Separated	1	1
Divorced	1	2
Number of Children		
0	3	6
1	0	1
2	0	1
3	1	0

destroyed after follow-up interviews.

When co-participants arrived for the interview, the interviewer asked if there were questions. After ensuring that the nature and purpose of the study and the means of providing confidentiality were understood, the investigator asked the co-participant to sign the consent form. A copy of the form was provided for each co-participant to keep.

Each interview began with the same question; specifically, the investigator asked co-participants to think of and mention a few times or situations when they experienced regret. The request that they provide several instances at the outset, as discussed in Chapter 2, was suggested by the pilot co-participant and was intended to reduce the possibility that the selection of subsequent instances would be unduly influenced by the first situation described.

The investigator then directed the co-participant to select one instance and to describe that experience in detail. He attempted to keep follow-up questions focused on what the co-participants were aware of in the particular situation or on requests for clarification.

Occasionally, a co-participant responded to the initial question by offering a more general type of situation, or even an abstract definition, rather than a specific personal experience. When this occurred, the investigator asked if the co-participant could recall a particular time when such

a situation occurred. If unable to think of a specific example, the general situation was taken as the subject of further inquiry. As individual interviews progressed, and participants became more at ease, specific examples were offered even by those who did not do so initially.

When the first instance was thoroughly explored, description of the second instance began. This process continued until all situations noted at the outset were described, unless the co-participant chose not to describe a particular instance. Co-participants occasionally recalled situations descriptive of the experience of regret during the course of the interview; these were explored as well. The interview ended when all instances of regret mentioned were investigated fully and no further situations could be recalled.

Data Analysis

Transcription

Transcription of audiotapes began upon completion of all interviews. The investigator had transcribed both the pilot interview and the bracketing interview prior to conducting the remaining interviews in order for the Phenomenology Research Group to review them.

The transcription process and the resulting transcripts were valuable in a number of ways. The first goal of the investigator was to become familiar with each interview, or

to obtain a "holistic grasp" of the data (Barrell 1988/1989; Hawthorne, 1988/1989). Each exposure to the interview, in whatever form, increased such familiarity. The investigator transcribed all but one interview himself. The audiotape provided the opportunity for repeated listening and the written transcript offered an alternative medium through which to gain such familiarity. In addition to listening and reading, the task of transcription itself provided a third modality for processing the information, that of "writing" the data.

The written transcript also provides a simple means of referring back to the data to increase familiarity and enhance accuracy. Also, a written transcript is more easily edited and significant statements are more easily compiled than from an audiotape. Finally, transcripts are more easily excerpted, reduced, and reproduced, providing a more practicable format for making the data public (Hawthorne, 1988/1989).

After transcribing both the pilot and the bracketing interview, the investigator sent one audiotape to a professional transcriber. Although the transcription process was more arduous and time-consuming than expected, the investigator transcribed the remainder of the interviews himself for all the aforementioned reasons. The completed transcripts ranged in length from over 4,900 words to over 15,400 words, with an average length of about 10,400 words.

Certain brief portions of the audiotapes were inaudible or difficult to understand. If inaudible, these sections were represented in the transcripts by empty brackets ([ ]). (An example of a verbatim transcript appears as Appendix C.) If garbled or unclear, the investigator often included what he understood to be said, enclosing these passages in brackets and adding a question mark. Portions edited to maintain confidentiality were altered and enclosed in brackets.

First Reading

The investigator accomplished several goals upon first reading of each transcript. First, he identified and numbered each major situation or instance of regret that the co-participant described in the interview. He underlined that phrase or sentence which most simply and clearly conveyed the situation, and made a notation in the margin, numbering the situations sequentially through each transcript for later compilation. In several of the transcripts, most or all of these identifying phrases were found in the co-participant's first response. The investigator also did some minor editing during this first reading, noting typographical errors and possible breaches of confidentiality that were overlooked during transcription.

The most important task of this stage of analysis was the identification of significant statements (Colaizzi,

1978). The investigator underlined statements from the transcripts which were seen as useful in rendering a description of the phenomenon or in presenting important aspects of the phenomenon. At this stage, the investigator was conservative rather than selective. He marked all passages that seemed meaningful and pertained to the phenomenon being studied. By bracketing any narrow preconceptions of what constitutes the experience of regret, he passed over only those portions of the transcripts that interfered with comprehension, such as stammering, or that were clearly tangential to the phenomenon. Overall, the careful first reading of all transcripts, including the concurrent enumeration of instances of regret and marking of significant statements, provided the investigator with a substantial and increasing familiarity with the co-participants' experiences of regret.

List of Situations

The investigator next compiled a list of situations which co-participants described in detail during the interview, and which the investigator numbered during his first reading of the transcripts. Direct quotes were used whenever possible in order to remain close to the original language of the description.

This list appears as Appendix D. It was created as an easy means of reference for the investigator's own use, for use during follow-up interviews, and in presentations to the

Phenomenology Group. In addition, the list could be inspected to determine if any means of classifying these situations revealed itself, which might prove useful in the description of the phenomenon.

List of Categorized Significant Statements

Following the procedure offered by Colaizzi (1978), the investigator reviewed the transcripts and grouped into categories the significant statements identified during the first reading. The investigator read each significant statement and considered its meaning in relation to the phenomenon of regret. He bracketed his own presuppositions in an effort to be inclusive or open-minded, and to expect the unexpected in terms of what thematic elements might reveal themselves. He also maintained a focus on the phenomenon under investigation in order to continue the screening of superfluous and irrelevant information, ensuring that each statement was significant.

The investigator generated tentative categories and category titles as he progressed through the significant statements of each transcript. This early attempt to recognize themes or characteristics of the experience actually began even earlier. The investigator jotted brief notes immediately after each interview, during the transcription process, and during the first reading. These notes were reviewed periodically in the process of reducing and refining the data. The investigator kept these early

notions of categories and thematic organization under consideration while remaining open to other possibilities. Some of these earliest ideas were rejected as general themes when it became apparent that they were of only idiographic importance or incidental to the experience.

This stage of the research exemplifies the notion that findings are co-constituted by the investigator and the data, that scientific inquiry is something between creation and discovery. The investigator grouped these statements of the co-participants into superordinate categories of his own design. This initial thematizing -- what Barrell (1988/1989) called the formulation of meanings -- represented varying degrees of departure from the statements themselves. Preliminary category titles always attempted to convey the meaning but sometimes did not use the exact words of the co-participants. This early transformation constituted an initial distancing of the results from the interview data. On the other hand, the investigator's efforts were always directed toward preserving the integrity of the interview in order to represent accurately co-participant experiences. By bracketing and maintaining a stance of openness, the investigator generated categories that emerged from the data to convey the thematic components of the phenomenon. These lower order thematic categories developed out of the continuing dialogue <u>between</u> investigator and data.

The list of significant statements grouped into preliminary thematic categories appears as Appendix E. As items in each category grew in number, the investigator was able to replace those category titles which used his own words with those derived from the language of the participants. The investigator confirmed that the language chosen for each category title was that of a particular co-participant by checking transcripts to ensure that the investigator had not earlier in the interview used that word himself. This was easily accomplished on a word processor. A list of preliminary categories appears as Appendix F.

Higher Order Categorization

Again proceeding in the manner suggested by Colaizzi (1978), thematic categories were condensed into higher order categories until they could be grouped no further. The resulting classification was deemed to contain the primary thematic elements of the phenomenon.

The first step which the investigator undertook toward this goal was to develop a tentative classification scheme for the preliminary categories. The investigator returned to the Phenomenology Group at this time. Group members were provided a copy of this first attempt at a higher order categorization (Appendix G). They also were given the list of preliminary categories (Appendix F) and a partial list of categorized significant statements, using statements from only half the co-participants. The investigator made

successive revisions in these higher order themes based on discussion in the Phenomenology Group. This recursive checking and confirmation of intermediate results involved returning to the data in all its phases of analysis, including original transcripts and preliminary categories. An example of a subsequent version of higher order themes is presented in Appendix H. The Phenomenology Group participated again at a later phase of this process, assisting in further analysis and revision and, as always, serving a bracketing function and relieving the tedium of working alone.

Classification of Triggers

At the same time as the investigator visited the Phenomenology Group with his preliminary categorization of significant statements, he also provided the group members with the complete list of situations (Appendix D). The group attempted to develop a classification scheme for these situations. The intention was to produce a scheme that might shed some light on the experience, thereby facilitating a description of the phenomenon in its context.

More importantly, the effort to develop such a categorization led the investigator to recognize that these instances which supposedly situated the co-participants' experiences in a context were not the "when's" of the experience but the "about which's," if you will. The situations were times of decision for the co-participants.

Co-participants did not necessarily experience regret at such times; the regret often did not arise until much later. These were the situations about which they experienced that subsequent regret. Regret is a transitive verb; it requires an object. These situations were the objects of co-participants' experiences of regret.

The investigator had recognized previously that the thematic category titled "feel regret when.../triggers" was qualitatively different from the other preliminary categories. Unlike other categories, which described qualities of the experience of regret, this category simply located the experience in time. These were the "whens" of the experience. It became clear that it would prove more useful in producing a thematic description if the significant statements in this category were analyzed to reveal a classification of "whens" or triggers of the experience. This classification is presented in Appendix I. These triggers or "proximal whens" locate the moment of the experience of regret. The situations, or "distal whens," pertain to situations to which the experience of regret refers.

Descriptive Statement

The process described above yielded several products. The investigator arrived at a final classification and description of situations (or "distal whens") of the experience of regret. He also was able to devise a

sufficiently descriptive classification of "proximal whens" -- instances that were the immediate precursors (or triggers) of the experience. In addition, he produced what was intended to be a comprehensive structure or categorization of the primary thematic elements of the experience. Finally, he produced in narrative form a descriptive statement intended to characterize the phenomenon of regret in a simple and clear fashion while conveying the totality of the experience.

Follow-up Interviews

The investigator contacted each co-participant by mail with a follow-up letter (Appendix J) and a copy of the verbatim transcript of their interview. He followed this with a phone call and a subsequent mailing which included a tentative version of the thematic structure, a classification of triggers, and a general descriptive statement. He also included a consent form for release of information (Appendix K) authorizing the investigator to print portions of the transcripts as needed. One co-participant signed a similar consent form (Appendix L) granting permission to include her entire transcript as an example of the complete proceedings of a dialogical interview (Appendix C).

The investigator solicited comments on any and all aspects of the interview and the research. He asked co-participants to make notations on the transcripts if they

desired further editing to maintain confidentiality. He also asked for reactions to reading their respective transcripts. Finally, the investigator encouraged co-participants to comment on and confirm or modify the thematic structure provided, the classification of triggers, and the descriptive statement. This step in the process further ensured that present results were accurate and complete reflections of their experience.

It should be noted that, in the pursuit of a general description of a common phenomenon such as regret, much of the flavor of the individual experiences from which such a description derives is lost. This occurs despite the effort to include all essential elements of each individual's experience. It is also difficult for each co-participant to put aside what may be meaningful but peripheral elements of personal experience when assessing the nomothetic features at follow-up. While the investigator's primary goal was to develop a general description of the phenomenon, it is important to keep in mind that this focus necessarily restricts the resulting description.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The primary goal of this investigation was to derive from interviews a comprehensive description of the experience of regret. The present chapter first provides descriptions of the various situations regretted by participants. Such descriptions offer the reader a richer sense of the character of these experiences as lived by participants, and a more comprehensive understanding of the conclusions. Following the description of these situations is a characterization of the more immediate triggers of the experience of regret. Next, an explication of the tripartite structure of the experience will be presented in which the three essential themes of the experience -- the decision, looking back, and blaming oneself -- will be described. This will be followed by a description of the two grounds of the experience of regret, time and self. Finally, two possible pathways for resolving the regret -- acceptance and change -- are noted.

Situations

The first task was to identify all instances participants reported as regrettable situations and which they explored thoroughly during the interviews. These were the events about which the participants spoke when asked if

they could think of some times they had experienced regret. This list of situations is presented in Appendix D.

As discussed in Chapter III, a distinction can be made between the "proximal" and "distal" situation of an experience of regret. These situations are the "distal when's" in that they are the recollections of the past events to which the regret refers. They are temporally distant from a present experience of regret. Participants also spoke of the events that brought the regret to mind, the triggers or "proximal when's." In a sense, these "proximal when's" more accurately answer the question posed to the participants; these are the times when they experienced regret. Interestingly, however, participants initially and most fully reported the events about which they experienced regret -- the situations or "distal when's."

The identification of situations of regret provided a simple means of capturing and referring to the various instances which the participants described as experiences of regret. The complete descriptions were lengthy and complex narratives which often were intertwined with one another and with more reflective discussion. These identifying statements served the investigator as cues for remembering the complexities and contexts of the specific examples to which they referred. What follows are more extensive passages describing many of these situations. These are

offered to provide a richer characterization of the individual experiences that contributed to the development of a general understanding of the phenomenon.

One class of situations that was readily apparent was that pertaining to school or to an educational setting. These included instances of regret related to (a) lack of effort, (b) choice of field of study, and (c) the particular school attended. A second broad class of regrets which participants frequently mentioned pertained to relationships with significant people in their lives. These regrets were related to (a) involvement in a particular relationship, (b) loss of identity while in a relationship, (c) the end of a relationship, (d) communication in relationships, and (e) the loss of a relationship through the death of a loved one. A third category of regrets contained miscellaneous situations.

1.a. Many of the participants regretted situations which were connected with an academic setting and, more specifically, with a lack of effort, attention, or discipline. One participant noted "all the times I should've paid attention in math classes." Another participant stated, "When I don't do real well, then I blame it on quitting high school....I regret quitting high school 'cause it's making me not succeed as well." Another stated, "I regret not studying in high school....I wish I'd paid attention." Still another experienced regret about "school,

during those times I didn't put much into it....not doing my best in classes." A fifth participant shared similar feelings, asking, "Why haven't I put more effort into what I'm doing?...I could know this if I had put forth the effort."

1.b. Numerous other instances of regret related to the school setting but not to the task of learning. Two participants reported regrets that related to their choice of field of study and eventual profession. Consider the following passage:

> my decision to go into journalism....A lot of times I feel like...I should have been an art major with a concentration in photography....I do a lot of times wish that I had gone that way....I regret not going ahead and applying to MFA programs, because I think I could have gotten in. I regret not doing that because I feel like that's what I wanted to do.

The second participant did not state explicitly that he regretted his choice of profession but at least regretted "that I did close my mind to the fact that this is not the only thing that I could do....I just shut myself off."

1.c. Other regrets in an educational setting included not going to a particular school, not getting out of a particular school, and not going away to school. Still another regret was the way in which one participant proceeded through school, "the amount of time doing it." She reported the following:

> One thing was to go through very quickly, and I think I did -- I know I did that for my husband, this real need to get through and not spend any more time than necessary....And I regret that, on many levels, both

professionally and emotionally, personally and all those things. I think it was a real high cost to make that decision.

2.a. The second broad category of regretted situations contained those associated with a significant relationship in the participants' lives. Several participants regretted their involvement in particular love relationships.

> I can remember the day of my wedding ceremony. Here I am with my father, getting ready to walk up the aisle ....I don't think I was really ready to get married. My father said to me, just before we were getting ready to walk up there, "You know, if you don't want to do this, we'll just turn around and walk out," and I regret not having done that.

Another participant described a similar situation:

> It was a period when I had just revolved out of a marriage and was involved with another woman, who subsequently became my second wife, and I had an opportunity...at one stage of this relationship to actually get out of it and I think I did want to. The reason I remember so dramatically is because we were leaving her folks' home and we were heading on the road to another part of the country at the time and she sensed that I was still very much in doubt, and perhaps evidences of wanting to take another course or at least not knowing my own mind and so she asked me point blank, "Do you want out?"....I said "No I don't," but I did have that choice. We were only a couple of miles from her folks' house and she could have easily turned around and gone back....I regret it in retrospect at least, if not at the very time....I think back to that time when I had the opportunity and you always wonder, you know, "The Road Divided," Robert Frost poem, you take a path, and as that poem denotes, way leads on to way...until the point is you just can't go back. But there's always that side of you that wonders if, and in my case the wondering if I've never been able to dismiss. It's turned into a regret.

Another participant recounted the following:

> A relationship that I was in....a guy that I dated who was very much more in love...with me than I was with him....I felt like, because I had stayed in the relationship that I was being responsible for his

> sadness, when I knew full well for quite a while that it was gonna be hurtful for him if I would leave the relationship. Which is why I didn't for a long time, and I think it probably made it worse for him. So I do feel regret that I continued in the relationship.

2.b. Several other participants reported regretting aspects of their involvement in a relationship, but they focused on its effects on their identity or autonomy rather than on qualities of the relationship itself. One participant stated, "One thing I regret is not living alone before I got married....I regret that I never experienced having something completely my own." Another told of "my regret about being financially dependent on him." Another participant regretted "deciding to take someone else's name when I got married." She stated:

> I think the name change is a really simple instance of changing my name because I didn't think my in-laws could handle it if I didn't, and wanting to please them ...and then finding out that the cost was a lot greater than I ever imagined it was, in that you actually become a little bit different....Which sounds absurd on one hand to think that just keeping your name constant could in some way keep your self constant....I think now it's very profound, because now I'm carrying a part of this person in a real permanent kind of way.

Another example of such identity issues is found in the participant who regretted going through her doctoral program quickly for the sake of her husband.

Issues of identity and autonomy inhered in other regretted decisions unrelated to love relationships. "I did not go away to college, even though I wanted to....I did not pursue a particular course that I really wanted to out of deference to another or others." Another regretted "giving

a B+ as a final grade...instead of an A....I've really felt like she deserved an A....What I was doing was conforming to a certain standard that was not my own."

2.c. Several participants experienced regret over the failure or end of a love relationship.

> I was just sorry and kind of regretful that it didn't work out better. Because I thought that we were real well suited for each other, and...he had a lot of qualities that are damned hard to find....So there was a regret that it was over.
>
> I'm flipping through the newspaper...and I see where he's married this girl, and her picture's in the paper ....Something was gone....There's no turning back, look what you've done. He's gone....I thought, oh, I'm such an idiot....I think, I really let something go, that I shouldn't have.
>
> The whole relationship was kind of ambiguous....And I guess I regret that...we never really defined the relationship. We never really talked about it....about what the relationship meant to either one of us. And so, consequently, because of distance and other things it just kind of faded away.

2.d. As the last excerpt exemplifies, several instances of regret pertained still more narrowly to communication in relationships. Others follow:

> I regretted the portion of it that was my fault, for not telling him....I wasn't talkative enough....we weren't communicating really well, so I should take responsibility for some portion of that....I'm saddest about the communication.
>
> It's not sending that card, it's not saying I love you ....When you genuinely develop a relationship or develop an attraction for someone, not saying something that's very true to you to them. I think that's a regretting situation.
>
> I can think of a few times...in relationships with men that I didn't reveal the way that I really felt....I don't regret the relationships but I regret generally

not saying what I felt or not saying what I thought at the time.

Regrets for ineffective communication were not limited to romantic love relationships. Several reported regrets pertaining to parent-child relationships. "I can regret a lot of negative interaction with my parents...saying really terrible things to 'em....I regret I used to give my father a real hard time about being a lousy father." "With my parents, lying to them sometimes is something I really regret. Not honoring my parents like I should." One participant reported the following incident:

> I wrote a letter to my parents telling them about... something that happened at school that was really pretty personal and I sent it to them with the expectation that...they would have a better appreciation of who I really was, and what they did, though, was they really kinda missed the whole point of the letter....So then I regretted having sent the letter.

From the parent's perspective, several examples follow. "A child who, we may have grown somewhat estranged through the years because of lack, what I feel, is communication.... So I think that triggered some regret that we weren't able to establish some kind of rapport." "Some of the stuff that I deal with about my daughter...and some regrets that I have there....When she was real young, I was still doing drugs." "The time you spanked a kid perhaps a little too hard. The times you verbally abused a child, beyond what you should have."

> You have children, they do things...and sometimes you react from the heart, not from the head...then you

> regretted that you handled yourself in that way, or that you communicated this message to that person.... You see like this look on their face like, you don't realize how harsh your voice was or something.

2.e. Two participants experienced regret associated with the death of a loved one. These regrets also were related to issues of communication.

> I've had a friend die recently...and when somebody dies ...you always regret the things that you could have said to that person, that you always thought you would have time to say....How can you sum up all the things that you were hoping to share with that person?...I do have one regret...in particular, in which his wife threw a party for him....I didn't go to that, and in retrospect maybe I should've gone to that. Maybe I should have taken every single opportunity that presented itself to go see this person.

> I stayed with an elderly aunt who was dying of cancer ....I regret that I wasn't more mature at the time....I wasn't as aware and as understanding of her disease process, of her situation as I could have been at the time....I wished I had visited her more often....I wish I had shared more.

3. The above manner of grouping participants' regretted situations is meant to serve as a means of ordering the descriptions in a sensible and informative fashion. Some less easily classified regrets follow. One participant regretted that she "got a puppy" when she "realized that I really didn't have the time to take care of this dog." Another regretted that she "let my gerbils dehydrate." One participant regretted losing a diamond ring her boyfriend gave her, and another regretted buying a car which turned out to be difficult to afford. One participant regretted "being pregnant," which eventuated in an abortion, and another regretted losing his virginity. The above listing

is a fairly exhaustive explication of the regrets enumerated by participants. The list of situations grouped by participant number appears in Appendix D; most will be referred to again in the continuing exposition of results.

Triggers

Identifying and classifying the "when's" of an experience serves to provide a context for understanding that experience. The "when's" that first revealed themselves were the situations detailed above. These situations deserve a place of prominence in explicating the phenomenon of regret because they were figural for co-participants. The primary goal, however, is an experience-near description of the phenomenon. The remembered situations were temporally further from the experience of regret than the settings or moments of the regret itself. This necessitated a review and classification of the triggers of such recollections or of the "proximal when's" of the lived experience. See Appendix H for the classification of triggers.

The triggers of the experience of regret functioned essentially as reminders of the regrettable situations. (1) Negative consequences, whether actual or merely possible, served to initiate such reflection. (2) Newfound awareness of other possibilities or the experience of an alternative with positive consequences also triggered regret for the contrasting, negative alternative chosen in the

past. (3) Evidence of the loss of the unchosen alternative, such as unfulfilled positive consequences of that alternative, also served to remind participants of the earlier situation. (4) Participants repeated the mistakes of the earlier situations, or saw their mistakes repeated by others, reminding them of the mistakes they made and regretted. (5) Not all events preceding experiences of regret were classifiable into one of the above categories of triggers. Sundry other experiences gave rise to the experience of regret. Other aspects of the phenomenon of regret, such as the temporal sequence and pacing of the experience, were revealed through this analysis of the triggers of the experience as well.

1. Participants frequently experienced regret for a particular past situation when faced with a negative consequence of that situation. Participants who regretted not paying attention or putting forth effort in school often experienced those regrets when suffering the perceived consequences later. "I'm taking a biology class this semester, and I regret not studying in high school. I think there's a lot of things I could've done to be better equipped to deal with what's going on now." They spoke of the times they became aware of the regret:

> Probably during the lectures, when she talks about things that most people seem to know....It's a feeling like, shoot, I wish I'd paid attention....Probably not until I went back to school, came back to school. Didn't affect me....
>
> There wasn't anything bad about it up until I came

> back to school....I think, my gosh, I could be graduating right now. I could have already graduated. I feel regret when I think I'm gonna be 29 or 30 years old before I get my undergraduate.
>
> When I don't do real well....Ever since I went back to school...a lot of times it comes up....Sometimes when stuff is talked about in class and, "oh, you remember that from high school." And I don't remember that from high school....There's still that regret, like, gosh, I wish I'd finished high school....
>
> I can remember filling out job applications, where maybe I didn't particularly want the job...but I really wasn't qualified to do anything else maybe, and feeling regret....Or I've had several good jobs, and not been able to go any farther.

One participant regretted the purchase of a car.

> The most vivid recollection that I had of regret...with this car is when it required major major work...and I remember thinking what a fool I had been to buy this car that I cannot afford to keep up....It might not have been any particular crisis but...when I considered how much money I'd spent over the year in insurance for instance.

The woman who regretted never living alone experienced the regret:

> When I have to consult my husband on where to put a piece of furniture, when I have to ask him to pick something up, to put something away, when I can't find a place to study because there are things going on in every room.

Several participants captured in more general terms the idea that a current negative consequence may trigger regret. One woman noted that the regret came to her "at times when...I think that I wouldn't have to be feeling what I'm feeling now if I'd made other decisions." Another stated, "if I hadn't done that, this wouldn't be happening."

Sometimes, however, participants experienced regret when merely imagining possible or future negative

consequences. One woman regretted using drugs when pregnant and when her daughter was very young. "When you have a lot of child psychology classes and all these developmental classes," or "every time she'd get sick," would trigger both the regret and the consideration of such hypothetical consequences as the following:

> If she has an ear infection I'm flipping out thinking, "oh, it's because of...what I did when I was pregnant" ....I'm always in the back of mind thinking, "what if when she turns eight, something comes up and it's a direct result of me doing this?"

2. Participants also regretted past decisions in the midst of encountering alternatives to those decisions and experiencing the favorable consequences of those alternatives. One participant regretted his narrow-mindedness in general, and its relation to his poor performance in a particular academic subject.

> Why could I have such a strong opinion on something I didn't know about?...All of a sudden it hit me....I thought about how much better I was doing, and how bad I was doing before, and why I was doing so bad before ....I saw that I was doing better, and that I could do better. And that there was a different way of thinking about things, being open-minded to any subject....Any time I do something completely new...first there's that regret.

This participant felt regret for his poor performance and close-mindedness in light of his improved performance and newfound open-mindedness. The participant who regretted changing her name recounted that her regrets began when "I started studying a lot of feminist perspectives." She first considered including her maiden name again when a colleague

went through the process of changing hers. "It occurred to me that that was a possibility. I'd never really thought, I mean I always think of things as being permanent. And I realized that I could do that."

One participant regretted not being true to himself, manifest in certain actions such as a decision to get married. These regrets were sometimes triggered by "things that I've wanted to do for a long period of time that I suddenly am doing or am experiencing." This same participant regretted a history of poor communication with his daughter. He indicated that the regret was "triggered most recently by what I felt was one of the first times that I'd heard or read anything from her that...was very direct." Such regret over communication problems extended to romantic relationships, and as the participant reported:

> I have established a few relationships where I haven't found that a problem, where it seems we're talking the same, the language means the same....It's nice to know that happens. And so that in turn has triggered some regrets, "why haven't you found someone like this before? Why didn't you go looking for that before...?

3. Many decisions are final, and alternative choices do not often present themselves once a decision is made. Positive consequences of such an alternative necessarily remain unfulfilled. The third emergent class of occurrences which triggered the experience of regret was a recognition of the lost opportunities inherent in the unchosen alternative. Participants experienced regret when they became aware of what they missed or what they imagined they

might have missed by deciding as they did.

The participant who regretted her decision to pursue journalism disclosed that "there are times I'll admit during the schoolyear that I'll pick up some of my old photography textbooks and flip through....And then I'll feel regret." Another participant regretted not transferring out of her college.

> I think I regretted it when I went out to get a job, because I really wanted to be a journalist, and it just wasn't possible with the kind of degree I had....I could have done that with a degree from the other school.

The participant who quit high school reported the following:

> Ever since then, just the socialization of high school and missing the prom....I still had friends in that situation, and they would talk about high school stuff and I always acted like it wasn't any big deal and I didn't miss it, but there was always a lot of regret that I didn't go on and finish....
>
> I can specifically remember last Christmas there was a whole group of us that got together, and they were talking about spring break, and going to Daytona ...but I didn't experience that with them, so I felt left out....
>
> I went to my ten year class reunion this past summer....I felt real isolated, like I didn't belong there....There just seemed to be a comraderie, that I didn't feel a part of....Talking about Senior Day, and what pranks were played and stuff like that and I wasn't there and didn't experience and everybody was laughing and I was clueless.

The awareness of missed opportunities triggered regrets in the context of relationships. The participant whose former boyfriend married another woman first experienced regret "when I read the write-up about the wedding....It was just like 'oh gosh, this is final.'" Reading his old letters "brought about the regret, because I saw what I

didn't get." The man who regretted having sex with his former girlfriend, in part because it led to their break-up, remarked that "to have other people talk about 'it's a shame you had to let her go' -- it just like rips something out of me when everybody says that."

4. Some participants reported that the repetition of earlier mistakes or observing others making the same bad decisions triggered a recollection of the regretted situation. The participant who regretted living with his parents during college and not having the attendant sense of independence experienced that regret when he returned to school, this time dependent on his wife.

> It began to surface then, 'cause I went back and said, "you once started back this road a long time ago....Now you're kinda doing the same thing again. You're living with someone and they're helping to support you, and you're going to school again." And so I looked back and I never quite had that idea that I was doing it all on my own.

The participant who regretted being "a real crazy adolescent" considered the type of event that may trigger such regret.

> Maybe it's when I see other kids doing that. I regret that I was like that, maybe....I was such a little juvenile delinquent...I regret that whole terrible time. Maybe it's just...certain deviant behavior that I did, and when I see that come up I feel, "I wish I hadn't've done that." Like when I'm watching TV and stuff like that....Like kids stealing and stuff, and I stole. I was doing massive amounts of drugs, I sold drugs....I see stuff like that on TV and I'll go "how could I have done that?"...I did some volunteer work [in recovery program for adolescents] and I see those kids and how they act and what they think about and what they say on the outside, how tough they are, and all that, and I see myself in that and I really regret

that I had to go through all that.

5. The foregoing is not an exhaustive categorization of the various classes of triggers of the experience of regret. There were instances wherein a participant experienced regret simply when it became evident that a certain action was a mistake. For instance, regret for making a particular decision ensued when the participant became aware that the decision was based on a faulty premise. This did not necessarily entail the experience of negative consequences. One participant regrets yelling at her father "usually when he's displaying fatherly type things." Her yelling suddenly seems unjustified -- regrettable -- in light of this evidence that he is an adequate parent.

At times, the mere sight or mention of a particular person or object involved in the regretted situation triggered the recollection of that situation along with the regret. In each instance, however, one of the aforementioned triggers -- the consideration of negative consequences, for example -- accompanied the regret or intervened prior to the regret. Thus the triggers described above predominated as the experience-near settings of the experienced regret.

In addition to describing <u>what</u> triggered the regret, some participants specified <u>when</u> they experienced regret purely in terms of temporal sequence or pacing. This provided a characterization of the "proximal when's" as they

related temporally to the "distal when's." For instance, several participants reported that the regret followed immediately on the heels of the action which was regretted. That is, the "proximal when" was experienced as temporally contiguous with the "distal when." The participant who regretted buying his car stated the regret "might've come right at the moment of purchase." The participant who regretted not walking out at her wedding stated, "I was aware of it immediately, the fact that I was gonna go forward but knowing that I wasn't quite sure, and being given an opportunity out that maybe I should've used." The regretful journalism student felt regret for choosing that field of study "when I decided I was gonna fill out the journalism papers rather than the art papers....I just put away those applications and the journalism papers sat there waiting for me to fill them out." She also reported, "I experienced regret when I told my father...because that is in a way final."

Recognition of the finality of the decision in these cases seems to play a role in triggering the experience of regret. Such recognition often comes immediately after the decision. For others, they "regret those things now looking back." More generally, as one participant expressed it, "It has to be after you've made the decision....The regret always comes after the action." The temporal qualities of

the experience of regret will be discussed in more detail later.

Essential Themes

Analysis of the transcripts by thematizing significant statements revealed that the three essential themes of the experience of regret are opportunities/consequences, blaming oneself, and looking back/looking forward. The analysis thus far suggests that the experience of regret involves two temporally distinct phenomena, the present actuality of the experience and the recollected past event to which the regret refers.

The essential feature of the past event, situation, or "distal when" is a decision on the part of the participant. Specifically, the participant is aware of (1) the opportunities which preceded the decision and (2) its consequences. In the context of regret, opportunity entails (a) both an awareness of a choice and an avoidance of such awareness, (b) a feeling of uncertainty or doubt, and (c) a sense of expectation or hope. Awareness of consequences includes (a) the experience of negative consequences, (b) recognition of missed opportunities, and (c) a feeling of finality, loss, and powerlessness.

Thematic analysis revealed that the temporally proximal component of the phenomenon contains two emergent themes. The present aspect of the experience is comprised of looking back/looking forward and blaming oneself. The decision is

the referent for both the looking back and the blaming. In blaming oneself, (1) one feels responsible for making the decision, for its consequences, and for the opportunities which were missed. (2) One also feels culpable for avoiding the awareness of alternatives and for suppressing any doubt. (3) Even in the course of regretting, one struggles with taking responsibility and avoids blame at the same time.

In looking back/looking forward, (1) one recognizes that one should have done otherwise. (2) One looks forward down the path of the missed opportunity or unchosen alternative. (3) One feels powerless, wishing to return to the earlier situation in order to alter one's choice and change the outcome.

The lived experience of regret entails looking back on and blaming oneself for a past decision. Each of the three primary thematic elements of the phenomenon of regret will be discussed in turn.

Opportunities/Consequences

As noted previously, the decision is that component of the regret experience upon which the participant reflects. Although the decision is situated in the past, it deserves a place of primacy in describing the present experience of regret, for it is the present remembrance of the past situation that the participant offers. The decision itself can be broken into three components that have their own temporal sequence. The decision and its context include the

choices preceding the decision, the decisive moment, and the aftermath.

1. The first element of a decision which one considers is the array of choices, opportunities, or options which precedes the decision. Regret is a painful experience, and the regretted decision was inevitably experienced as a faulty one. Typically, the participant imagined other alternatives would have been better than the one selected. A second option is often unexpressed in that it is frequently simply the unfulfillment of the chosen action. One participant stated this idea repeatedly. "I look at regret as choosing between two difficult things, and making the wrong choice ....That was a true dilemma....To me regret is a choice, a failed choice of some kind."

Several participants expressed the same idea in terms of the metaphor of the "road." "You have road A, road B, you choose road A." "Someone really has at least two paths to choose from and goes down one that's wrong." One participant, as quoted earlier, noted "wanting to take another course....The road divided, Robert Frost poem, which direction are you going in, you take a path, and as that poem denotes, way leads on to way."

The existence of specific alternatives is evident in the list of situations (Appendix D). Choices are plainly seen in "my decision to go into journalism....I should have been an art major" or in "giving a B+...instead of an A." A

participant who regretted drinking remarked as follows:

> I didn't need to go out and drink. I coulda went out and played football or something....There's some other things I coulda done. I coulda asked someone out. I coulda went home, talked to my parents, I coulda talked to my friends who didn't drink.

1.a. Participants explained their bad decisions in a number of ways. They attributed poor choices to a lack of awareness of other alternatives, denial of or refusal to consider those other options, or fear of choosing another option. The participant who regretted purchasing a car noted the following:

> I had some awareness of the risks involved but chose to minimize them or disregard them when I made the actual decision to buy it....That was deliberate, yeah, deliberately less aware....I guess one is in more control when one is sincerely considering all the possibilities.

The participant who regretted not attending a party for a terminally ill friend reported, "Alls I could think of was reasons not to go....Maybe you ought to at least try to look at things from all angles before you make a decision." Another stated, "I didn't give myself enough options, didn't open enough doors, say 'What is this like? What is this like?'" The participant who regretted not walking out at her wedding recognized that the opportunity "probably was always there but I was so nervous I just couldn't think about it and it was...something I couldn't dare admit to myself." The participant who regretted buying a puppy noted the following:

> Other people who may have been more wise about the

> situation told me that having the puppy was gonna be a problem....I didn't really listen to that or want to listen....I wasn't willing to admit that I had made a wrong choice....that the choice was a mistake even though I knew that deep down.

One participant, in considering what might be the central elements of her experience of regret, noted, "maybe that's what's important...that they had all the knowledge available to them at the time to know it was wrong." Participants consistently argued that knowing their options while failing to consider them fully when making the decision led to the experience of regret. Regret was mitigated if alternative courses of action were not available to a participant's awareness, or if all options were addressed as fully as a participant was able at the time.

1.b. Another element which preceded many of the decisions described was the uncertainty or indecision participants experienced in the face of two or more choices or options. It was often this uncertainty which was pushed from awareness. Having alternatives and the attendant uncertainty set the stage for a difficult decision and subsequent regret. For one participant:

> what seems to be the necessary element is that there was some question in my mind and I went ahead anyway even though I wasn't sure that I was doing the best thing and then later on I'm set up to regret having not paid attention to whatever competing notions I had at the time the decision was made.

Other examples follow. "Regret is...a matter of having not paid attention to my own doubts and hesitations." "I had

some hesitancy going into the purchase." "I'm not really sure what to do....I never really resolve that doubt." "I did not pay attention to the doubt that I had." "It would have been better to have...dealt with all my doubts before so much more was involved." "It's hard for me to decide." "I was trying to weigh....I weighed things." "I was kind of unsure if I was good enough." "She sensed that I was still very much in doubt...or at least not knowing my own mind."

1.c. Along with the uncertainty and doubt, participants frequently reported an expectation or hope that the chosen option would have a particular outcome. A participant whose friend died stated, "You always thought you would have time to say that....all the things you were hoping to share." The participant who regretted buying a dog noted, "I thought that it would be the most wonderful thing....I didn't have the foresight to see that it was gonna be difficult." The participant who regretted sending a letter to his parents captured the relationship between hope, uncertainty, and the denial of such uncertainty.

> I sent it to them with the expectation that it would help them understand me better....I had some hint of awareness that maybe they're really not gonna appreciate this in the way that I mean them to....It was really more of a hope.

2. Although the decision is an essential component of the phenomenon of regret, the decisive moment often passes unrecognized. Participants typically focused greater attention on that which led up to the decision and on that

which followed it. Availability of options and uncertainty about which option to choose preceded the decision. Negative consequences, missed opportunities, and a sense of loss or finality were among the experiences which followed the decision.

2.a. Negative consequences of the chosen alternative are perhaps the most commonly noted outcome of the decisional situation. A regretted situation involves a bad decision; negative evaluation of a decision often is based on such negative consequences. In fact, recognition of such consequences often triggers the regret. Negative consequences were described in the explication of triggers of the experience and will not be further detailed here.

2.b. A second element of the experience commonly perceived as resulting from the decision is the loss of the unchosen alternative. Rather than focus on the bad things that happened as a result of their decisions, participants frequently dwelled on the good things that did not happen. Such missed opportunities also can serve as triggers of the experience of regret, and were described previously.

2.c. The feelings that arise as a result of a bad decision are those of finality and loss. The sense of finality was conveyed by the participant who lost a ring which "was really irreplaceable." She reported "that feeling of you can't go back and change it. It's gone." She identified the focus of her regret as "the mistake and

the loss." Others noted, "There's no turning back," "You just can't go back," "I knew it was final then," and "It was too late then." The participant who quit high school noted the following:

> It's not like something that can be redone. It's done, it's over with and it can never be experienced again. That's what I feel like. It's just gone, it's like losing your virginity or something. You can never go back and experience it like you would if you did it originally.

Loss of the unchosen option and finality of the decision also can be expressed in terms of the permanence of the decision and its results. "I...realize...what happens when people have choices, and when they choose the one that is not the best decision. How much harm that can do, how permanent, how it can set off an entire chain of events." "Now I'm thinking of all the paperwork that would be required to go back to my real name....Now I'm carrying a part of this person in a real permanent kind of way." "The permanency of marriage relationship made me kind of rue that day."

Along with the sense of finality comes a feeling of powerlessness to change one's circumstances. "It is utterly outside of my control....The experience is one of helplessness....Not being able to change the bad decision." "I was not only powerless to take back the letter but I also felt completely helpless in that I was never going to be able to make her understand what the point was." "I'd already made my decision and...it was done....There's

nothing I can do." "There was a regret that it was over. There's a regret at my impotence about the whole thing, the fact I cannot do anything about it."

The loss that comes with deciding was clearly conveyed by one participant who noted, "I had that ready opportunity...and there was a sense of loss in turning it down." Another stated, "I know I'm never gonna get her back." Sometimes participants regretting making a decision based on what others wanted them to choose rather than following their own wishes or judgment. What was lost was the unchosen alternative along with a sense of identity. "All of it was kinds of sacrifice of self....The painful part was that I had lost me in the process....I had to give up a sense of who I was."

Summarizing this theme, it is possible to say that the decision that inheres in an experience of regret includes the setting preceding the decision and the outcome of the decision. Participants described being faced with choices or options. They report uncertainty about which to choose, and a failure to consider fully all possibilities. A bad decision is made. What follows are negative consequences of the chosen option and missed opportunities which could have been provided by the unchosen option. Along with the decision and its consequences comes the experience of finality, a sense of loss, and a feeling of powerlessness to change one's circumstances. "The regret is ...a matter of

whatever specific decision was involved." "If I made a bad decision, then I'd have regret."

Blaming Oneself

The decisions which participants regretted were their own. If they had no choice, or if the choice was not their's to make, participants reported they did not experience regret. "I don't know if it's regret, because I don't feel like that there was really a decision that I made ....It has to be my decision....To feel any regret for something I have to have done it." "I don't feel regret about things that weren't my fault." Blaming oneself and holding oneself accountable for a decision is a figural aspect of the experience of regret.

1. Participants emphasized their own culpability in a variety of ways. "It doesn't have to be this hard but you've sort of made it through your own actions this hard." "If the outcome of the situation was not really what you intended it to be, then you regretted that you handled yourself in that way." "I felt like I had made mistakes ...and I would think of how much of it was my fault." "You have nobody to blame but yourself." The participant who used drugs when pregnant reported the following:

> Sometimes when I see her displaying certain behavior, I feel like...it was all my fault....If anything ever happened to her, whether it was a direct result of that or not, I would always think it was. I really feel that if she ever had any serious physical or mental problems it would be my fault.

Blaming oneself can be a powerful emotional experience. Consider the following statements. "I remember thinking what a fool I had been to buy this car."

> A part of me that ...was wiser than the part that went ahead and signed the bottom line...resents the more impulsive side for having gone ahead and disregarded its wisdom....It's self-directed anger. It's kind of like...an interoffice memo of resentment.

"Look what you've done....I thought, oh, I'm such an idiot ....I knew what I'd done, that it was me....How could I be so stupid?" "That feeling of having fucked up....I was just so angry with myself....I felt like what happened was my fault....I really beat up on myself about it, like, 'Oh, you're a terrible person.'" "I felt like I had done something just terrible, just horrible, that I could never forgive myself for." "I was mad at myself."

2. Participants did not experience regret and did not blame themselves if they did not have a decision to make. They also did not feel regret even when they made a decision as long as they gave full consideration to possible alternatives and consequences. "I went for years...not feeling regretful, because I felt like, 'It's my choice. I'm in control. I made a decision. I did the best I could. Why look back?'" "I don't have the same experience of regret when I went into something believing full well that it was the best thing to do." Participants blamed themselves not merely for the decision but for their failure to make an enlightened one. "I chose to minimize things

that I should have paid attention to." "The regret comes in knowing that at the time it was just really clear what I should do, and I didn't follow that." "I should have known better."

Participants were aware of alternatives but disregarded them. By denying the presence of a choice, they were avoiding the responsibility which inheres in choosing. Subsequently, participants blamed themselves not only for the mistake or the bad decision, but for their avoidant stance toward the available information and toward their own culpability. "I had a responsibility and I evaded it."

> There is a more perfect control when I have really done my best to look at all sides and there are other times when I kinda minimize the sides that are distasteful to me and those times, I guess I relinquish some control in a sense and I'm still the one making the decision. I'm still responsible.

3. A common means of attempting to avoid responsibility and escape blame was to blame others. "I'm trying to blame others but I think I really know the responsibility was on my shoulders." "You could say, 'oh yeah, it was the environment that I was in and it made me do bad,' but basically it was just my attitude." "I felt sort of like the universe had let me down, even though it was partly myself letting myself down." "It's easy to try to put the blame for choices that you made onto other people." "Any time you do bad, you put the blame on other things."

> You start blaming the other person because you made the goof....You regret...and then you try and throw the blame on somebody else....I can blame other people for

> a decision I made, see? "I went [to college] close to home because my parents couldn't afford and I felt sorry for them," but maybe what I really am saying is, "You went close to home 'cause you were afraid to go out on your own."

It is clear, however, that participants remain aware of their own responsibility, and the attempt to blame others is ineffective. "If I were successful in blaming others then I think the regret wouldn't be as great." Many participants seemed to argue even at the time of their interviews that the blame lay elsewhere. This may contribute to their ongoing experience of regret. "If somebody could have made that information more relevant to me...I think I would've paid more attention." "He was one of those people that kind of rushes you." "Because of the people I was working with in the graduate program and their views on teaching and so on, I felt compelled to give a B by their definitions of the grade." "Why did I let them talk me into doing this?" "The only reason why I did it is because I'd had some alcohol in and peer pressure." "No one could give me a straight answer. Of course they always said, 'It's your decision.'" Trying to eliminate the regret by shirking blame may serve to perpetuate the regret. "The regret's not going away maybe because I'm not accepting full responsibility."

In summary, for an individual to experience regret, it seems that the individual must have some awareness that the self is the locus of responsibility, and to that extent the individual must blame himself or herself. It seems,

however, that in the experience of regret blame is taken grudgingly, and the awareness of the locus of blame may be just a glimmer. Some do not see a choice, some see the choice as someone else's, and some see the responsibility as shared or unclear. "It's something that I and multiple others could have done something about." "It wasn't entirely my fault that I couldn't find a job." "I don't really know where I'm really placing the blame."

Participants experience regret after the decision, often in the face of a growing recognition of their own culpability. While it was noted that such awareness may not be crystallized even at the time regret is experienced, the regret frequently arose as participants acknowledged their responsibility with hindsight. "Now I'm thinking that I could have done this or this or...." "The decision I made, I think was probably more selfish than I acknowledged at the time." Blame, like the regret itself, must follow the decision. It is with hindsight that participants experience regret.

Looking Back/Looking Forward

Participants frequently were explicit about the retrospective nature of the phenomenon of regret. Consider the following examples. "I regret those things now looking back." "I would look back on the precise incidents that happened." "At that point in my life when I lost the ring, I started really looking back....I started being real

focused on my past." "I look back and even now regret that." "I look back on it and I think, 'God, where was your brain, why did you do that?'" One's view of the situation is often clearer with hindsight. "I know this is the right thing to do now, because I can look back and I compare the two and I can see which one was better." "I regret it in retrospect at least if not at the very time [of] that decision....I wasn't really rational."

Two participants had a peculiar but unambiguous way of expressing this aspect of the experience. "The regret is very current. It's a looking back kind of regret. It was not a regret at the time." "Regret seems to me to be a looking back type of view of life instead of looking ahead to the possibilities."

1. Recollection of past events is implicit in the phrase I should have done. Participants repeatedly remarked that they "should have known" or "should have done." In this context, should implies obligation or necessity. The syntactic structure of the phrase -- a modal auxiliary such as should, the infinitive form of have, and a past participle -- indicates the duty or need is both past and unmet. This recognition of one's own failure to have been responsible with regard to one's actions constitutes blaming oneself. The phrase also implies hindsight and the (past) presence of an alternative. In this simple and oft-repeated phrase inhere all three essential aspects of the experience

of regret.

Examples are numerous. Every participant uttered such a phrase, and most did so repeatedly. "You could have done something about this." "You always regret the things that you could have said." "It's something I should have done." "Now, if I had it to do over again, I would have done it differently." "Thinking back to that time when I could have changed my mind. You know, could have been's." "I shouldn't have been so rude." "I should have done that five years ago." "There's a lot of things I could've done to be better equipped to deal with what's going on now." "I... didn't do as well as I should've." "I realized the next day I should have never done it."

2. The temporal quality of the phenomenon of regret is often more complex than simply looking back. Both the looking back and the blaming oneself have as their focus the decision, but the decision has its own chronology which looks forward. Participants described a choice and an uncertainty followed by a decision which was followed in turn by its consequences or by unfulfilled opportunities.

Consequences may be past, present, or even future, as in the case of the participant who worries that her child will have problems resulting from her own drug use. Similarly, the missed opportunities or imagined consequences of the unchosen alternative may be situated in any time, as long as that time period follows the decision. Here

especially we see that individuals experiencing regret seem to look back or "return" to the time of the decision, and then look forward down the unchosen path. They focus on what they should have done and on what subsequently could have been. First they look back; then they imagine their present and future circumstances being different. "The future is a hypothetical element of regret....I regret things that could have been, but weren't, and that is looking towards the future."

The notion of lost opportunities captures the same sentiment. Loss connotes something which has passed, while opportunity suggests the future. Those who focus on this aspect of the experience of regret are suffering the loss of an alternative future. "Thinking forward is a real time of regret for me. I have real trouble thinking of a future without regret of the past." "I think back to that time when I had the opportunity and you always wonder."

3. Participants often wondered if things would be different had they taken a different course of action. Regret can be an emotionally charged experience, however, and the more commonly reported experience was not merely wondering but wishing that they had taken a different course, and wishing that things were different. Every participant used the term <u>wish</u> to describe some aspect of their experience. Emotions inhere in all three essential aspects of the experience of regret. Participants

experienced uncertainty, doubt, and hope in making a decision. Self-blame and awareness of one's responsibility are painful experiences and, at times, frightening. The predominant affective aspect of the experience of regret, however, seems to pertain to the wishing and the longing that accompany looking back.

Most participants accepted responsibility in their expressions of wishfulness. "The main sense of experiencing regret...is just wishing perhaps that you did something differently." "I wish I had spent more time with her....I wish I had shared more." "I wish I'd finished high school." "I wish I had paid attention to him." "I wish that I had lived by myself." "I wish I had studied in high school....I wish I'd paid attention." "I wish I would have taken longer to write my dissertation."

As noted earlier, having a positive experience or taking an opportunity in the present that one failed to take in the past commonly triggers regret. Several participants expressed wishes that they had done something sooner than they did. "I wish I had done that much earlier." "It just makes me feel good whenever I do that and it's like I wish I had done this before." "I wished I had taken that opportunity back then when given." "I wish I'd already had this class. I wish I'd taken this five years ago, instead of now."

Implicit in looking back and wishing "that you had made

the other choice" is a wish actually to return to the time of the decision. Sometimes this was made explicit. "The focus [is] on the past....I wished I could have gone back and changed it, done it differently." "Wishing I could go back and fix it, fix it so that that hadn't happened." The experiences of powerlessness and finality are evident also. "I wish that I could change it but acknowledge that it can't be changed."

Wishing some event had never happened sometimes includes taking blame for the event. "I wish I would have never did it." Sometimes, however, there is no indication of the locus of responsibility. "I wish it hadn't happened." Sometimes participants wished precisely for a freedom from such responsibility. "I'm wishing the responsibility was off of me." "I wish I could change that. I wish I could go back, where I would not have to ever make a decision like that."

The wishful character of looking back has a painful affective valence. It is a durable wistfulness or longing, with associated feelings of sadness, guilt, and shame. Its lasting quality is evident in the following passages. "There was this general feeling, always present, that I wish we communicated better." "I think about it a lot." "I thought about that every day." "My whole life dwells on that one turn in the road." "It still causes me some pain." Various participants reported the "nagging sense," the

"longing," a "twinge of regret," "a real sobering feeling," and "the bitterness of it." Several felt sadness, and one participant reported that "you feel so useless, like you've wasted everything." Another described a "feeling of unfreedom...a crippling sense of not being able."

Several reported similar physical sensations. "It was almost like my chest had sunk in....It was like somebody had taken something out of me....like when you get hit in your solar plexus...and you lose your breath." "It almost feels like a stabbing pain in your liver....this gut-wrenching feeling." "It just felt so much like something pulled out of me....It just like rips something out of me."

The phenomenon of regret manifests itself in the confluence of these three essential themes. Figure 1 shows the essential thematic structure of the experience, revealing the interrelated nature of the three themes. Regret is a powerful affective experience and this emotional character is evident in each of the three themes. As one participant noted, however, "It involves an intellectual contribution as well as an emotional one....It does involve kind of an analytical dissection of experience, and choices."

Grounds of the Experience

Any phenomenon, to be encountered and described as a unitary experience, inevitably emerges from a consistent ground. The experience of regret emerges from the grounds

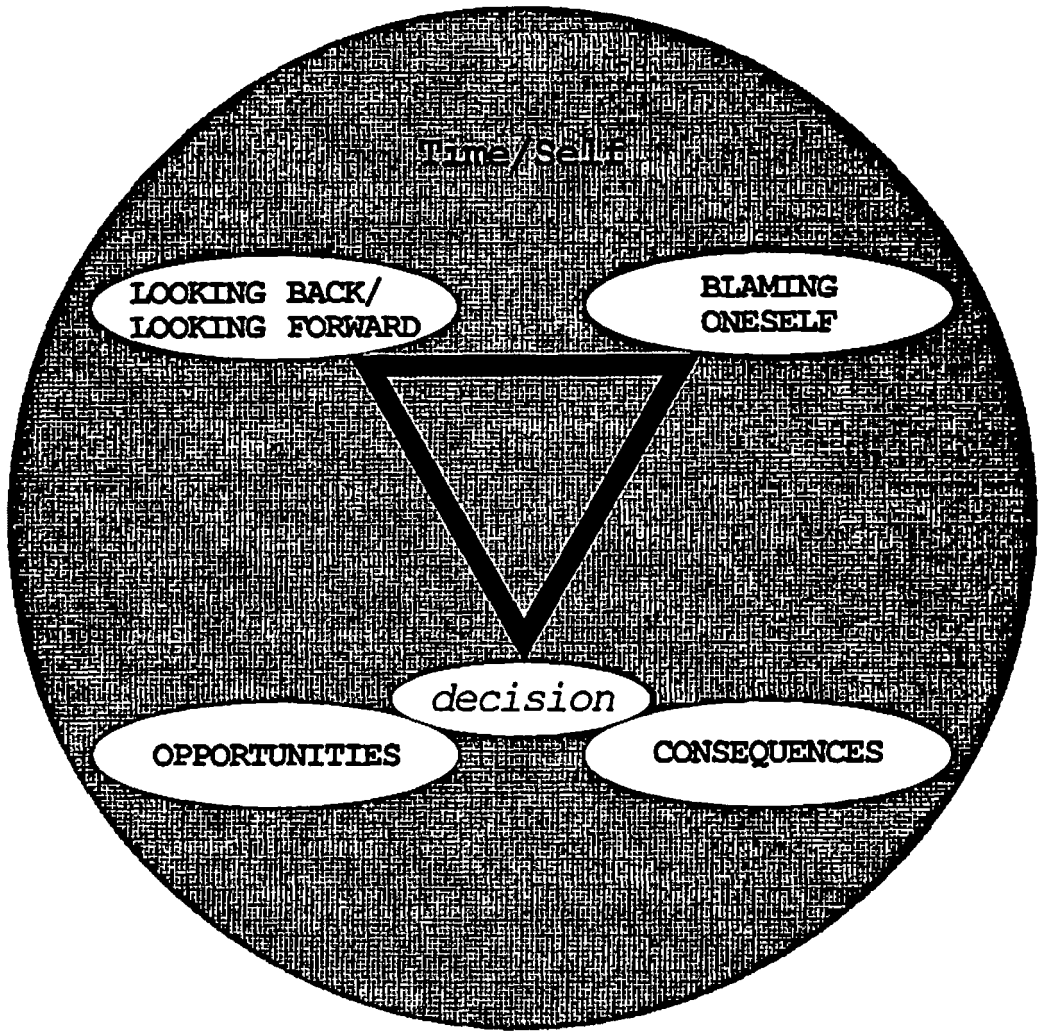

Figure 1. Essential Thematic Structure of the Experience of Regret.

of time and self. These grounds have been noted throughout the preceding explication of results, and need only brief additional clarification.

The ground of time has its own structure within the essential theme of opportunities/consequences. The decision is a boundary moment. Choices precede this moment, along with uncertainty, doubt, and hope. After the decision come consequences and missed opportunities. The essential theme of looking back/looking forward relates most explicitly to the ground of time. Although regret seems to be oriented primarily toward the past, those who experience regret often return in their imagination to the time of their decision and look forward down an alternate path. One might argue that the theme of blaming oneself has an implicit temporal ground as well. In the context of regret, and perhaps in any context, participants blame themselves (or others) only for past events.

The ground of the self inheres primarily in the themes of opportunities/consequences and blaming oneself. Blaming oneself was not typically a clear-cut matter. Participants struggled with where to place the blame. They argued that the locus of responsibility lay elsewhere, or abandoned the issue of responsibility altogether. It was suggested that any continuing wavering in this regard may serve to perpetuate the regret. All participants had at least an inkling of their own culpability. Responsibility inheres in

any decision, and the meaning these regretted decisions had for the participants often related to issues of autonomy and identity -- issues of the self. "It's crucial to be true to yourself."

Resolution of Regret

Participants often went beyond describing their experiences of regret and gave some indication as to how such regret resolved itself. Assuming the regret diminished or disappeared, two primary explanations emerged. Participants reported experiencing a reduction in the intensity of the regret, or its fading or disappearance, as they accepted their decision and their situation. The regret also diminished if they learned from the experience.

In a sense, participants had no choice but to accept their situations, because "nothing can be done about it." The permanence of the decision and the powerlessness to change it contributed to the experience of regret but, paradoxically, also served to mitigate the regret. "I must simply accept the loss." "That's done; no use fretting about it." "That's just the way it's gonna be so you have to accept it....so you can free yourself to proceed." "If you hang on to the regret then it just immobilizes your options." "When I realized that there wasn't anything I could have done about it at that point, then it's a little bit easier to accept." One participant noted that the recognition that nothing can be done may both initiate and

alleviate the regret. The powerlessness or lack of control that inheres in the finality of the decision is "the venom and the serum for this experience."

Participants noted other means of resolving the regret that were associated with acceptance. They suggested that you have to "give up," "forget about it," "forgiv[e] yourself." Another way of coming to terms with the regret and accepting the situation is to recognize that "you did the best you could." "I simply didn't know how to do it better." "I really couldn't have known better." "I did my best." "I did the best I could." "To have done what you thought was best" is a sentiment that was repeated by nearly every participant.

Other means of resolving regret are to learn, change, or grow from the experience. "This experience has really taught a lesson for me." "I've at least learned from that." "I really don't regret that experience that I had because I learned from that." "That ...was the transition for me....Right before then, I was...not real responsible, not real practical, had no thoughts of the future." "A lot of the regrets that I've had before caused me not to do some of the things I would regret now."

Some participants argued that regret may be necessary in order to change. "If you don't experience regret, then you're not gonna change your actions....You have to regret to grow." "You have to have these little points of regret

to be able to think about what you want to do in the future." "I have to regret things I've done in the past, you have to admit that you were wrong. Without it, you won't ever change."

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The essence of the experience of regret is one of looking back and blaming oneself for a bad decision. This experience is initiated by certain occurrences in the present which trigger the memory or awareness of a bad choice one has made. The "bad choice" is experienced as leading to negative consequences and lost opportunities. The experience of regret is a painful one in which the individual dwells on the circumstances of the decision -- the consequences and missed opportunities -- and his or her role in the decision, wishing he or she had done otherwise and feeling he or she should have done otherwise.

Co-participants in the present study experienced regret over a variety of events in their lives. Situations noted by co-participants frequently pertained to an academic setting. Co-participants regretted, among others, a lack of effort or attention in school, their choice of school, and their choice of field. Many of the remaining situations concerned romantic and familial relationships. Such regrets included both involvement in and dissolution of particular love relationships, a loss of identity or autonomy in both family and love relationships, lack of communication in both family and love relationships, and loss of a relationship

through the death of a loved one. Other regrets included buying a pet, causing the death of a pet, losing a ring, buying a car, getting pregnant, and losing one's virginity.

The sorts of events which triggered regret included experiencing the negative consequences of the poor choice and recognizing the opportunities missed as a result of the choice. Repeating earlier mistakes or experiencing positive consequences of an alternate choice also brought regret to mind.

The experience of regret consists of three essential themes: opportunities/consequences, blaming oneself, and looking back/looking forward. While every regretted situation contained at least an implicit decision, participants focused on what preceded the decision -- the opportunities -- and what followed it -- the consequences -- rather than on the moment of the decision itself. Participants experienced uncertainty when faced with opportunities but dismissed (or denied) such doubt or, even, an awareness of alternatives. They also expressed an expectation, or (false) hope, that the alternative they selected would have a favorable outcome.

The consequences included not only the negative results of the decision but the unfulfilled possibilities which inhered in the unchosen alternative. Such missed opportunities are an essential element of a regretted decision for they imply a prior choice, while negative

consequences of an action do not in themselves imply the presence of an alternative. Along with the awareness of the poor choice, the negative consequences, and the missed opportunities, participants experienced a sense of finality or permanence, loss, and powerlessness to change or reverse the situation.

Participants frequently stated, "I should have done" otherwise. In this way they took the blame and the responsibility for the decision. They also blamed themselves for ignoring their uncertainty or for suppressing their awareness of a choice. In the latter case, they took responsibility for earlier avoiding the responsibility of the decision.

Just as the awareness of alternatives and awareness of one's own uncertainty seems somewhat muddled prior to a regretted decision, participants seemed to vacillate in their awareness of personal culpability in the midst of their experiences of regret. The attempt to avoid blame or to suppress an awareness of it seemed to be ongoing, with participants blaming others or sharing the blame with others. A grudging awareness of one's culpability remained, however, and the continued effort to hide from this responsibility seems only to perpetuate the regret.

Blame, like regret itself, follows the decision. Regret entails looking back on that which one regrets. Participants emphasized the centrality of this component of

the experience and its wistful character. They wished they had chosen a different course and longed to return to the time of their decision in order to change or undo the regretted events and their consequences. They are powerless, however, to do so.

Not only did participants look back on their regretted situations but, in returning to such times in their imaginations, they were able to look forward down the path of an alternative opportunity and envision that now-bygone alternative and its potentially more favorable consequences. In dwelling on missed opportunities, participants both looked back on their decisions and looked forward toward an alternative future.

Regret is not a momentary or fleeting feeling, but is more enduring in nature. For some participants, regret remained a painful part of their experience even at the time of their interview. For others, the regret had waned. Regret diminishes in intensity or fades completely by one of two general means. First, an individual may come to accept the situation as it stands. The permanence of the situation, the recognition that nothing can be done, and the subsequent sense of powerlessness may serve to mitigate feelings of regret just as they paradoxically contributed to such feelings previously. In a sense, one can do nothing but accept the situation. As Shakespeare noted, "Things without all remedy should be without regard; what's done is

done." Means of resolving regret associated with acceptance are giving up, forgetting, forgiving oneself, and recognizing one did one's best.

The other general means of resolving regret is to learn from the experience or to change as a result of it. If regret is useful or even necessary as an agent of change, as some participants concluded, regret can be seen as a valuable, positive experience which contributes to transformation and growth.

Implications for Cognitive Approaches

While distinctions between cognition, affect, and behavior are arbitrary, they sometimes serve a useful heuristic purpose and are part of common usage. Participants described regret as containing both cognitive and affective experiential aspects. Affective elements are apparent in each of the essential themes. Hope is present in opportunity or choice, and feelings of loss and powerlessness are reported in the negative consequences and missed opportunities. Participants felt pained, angry with themselves, sorry, and useless in blaming themselves for their suffering. "Wishing," "longing," and "nagging" inhere in the painful look back. Regret can be a bitter, aching, sad experience.

The cognitive character of regret is evident in participant descriptions of the pensive or obsessional quality of the experience. Participants reported

"obsessing," "dwelling," and "ruminating" about the events which they regretted. The affective and ideational characteristics of the experience, however, are difficult to tease apart. One participant stated, "I almost feel like my obsessing on my regret triggered the depression." Another argued that regret "involves an intellectual contribution as well as an emotional one. It's not purely an emotional feeling, because for me it does involve kind of an analytical dissection of experience, and choices....When it's sadness it's just an emotion."

There are aspects of the experience of regret which relate to judgment or to an evaluative function. Participants reported "competing notions," "doubting your own judgment," and "trying to weigh" options prior to making a decision. Unlike Landman's (1987a) proposal, however, it is not the regret itself which serves such an evaluative function. It is not simply that a failure to justify past actions leads to regret which, in turn, leads one to evaluate those actions as inferior to some alternative. Participants did try to "comfort," "soothe," "humor," and "distance" themselves and "justify" their actions. It does not seem, however, that failure to justify leads to regret; rather, the attempt to justify such actions often seems to be a response to the regret. Regret seems to promote an attempt to justify one's actions; such an attempt is destined to fail because one's actions were destined to

fail. Such attempts seem to perpetuate the regret since they are experienced as reducing the likelihood one will come to accept or learn from one's situation.

In a sense, blaming others is an attempt to justify one's own actions. As we have seen, such avoidance of responsibility is destined to fail as a resolution of the regret. In forestalling the recognition of one's own culpability, one delays the possibility of acceptance and hinders resolution of the regret.

Decision theories concern themselves with whether expectations of regret are a factor in decision making. The premise is that an individual will choose another alternative if he or she expects to regret choosing the option in question. In such a scenario, expectation of regret precludes the experience of regret. In the current investigation, participants reported they had an awareness of choices and an uncertainty about those choices prior to the decision. Resistance to such awareness and suppression or dismissal of any doubt or ambivalence contributed to the regret. Participants "should have known better." In a sense, denial of expectations of regret and failure to give full consideration to such expectations in making the decision is a factor in experiencing regret. Regret is experienced precisely when one does not utilize expectations of regret as a factor in making decisions. Only Herrnstein (1990) recognizes that decision theorists' understanding of

regret is normative but not descriptively accurate.

According to cognitive dissonance theory, any means of dissonance reduction should serve to reduce post-decisional regret. Justifying one's actions and avoiding blame are two means that should prove effective. As we have seen, however, this is not the case; such efforts seem instead to cause the regret to linger. This suggests that dissonance reduction is something of a misnomer. This component of cognitive dissonance theory is a model of what individuals attempt but fail to do in response to dissonance or regret.

Tedeschi's (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971) reformulation of cognitive dissonance theory gains some credibility from present findings, for he recognizes that the regret may still be present despite what amounts to "protestations to the contrary." That regret persists despite such efforts to reduce it is evident. Tedeschi's explanation for these efforts, however, may be too narrow: it seems unlikely that individuals attempt to justify their actions only to manage the impressions of others. Presumably, individuals have some self-interest in reducing or resolving the unpleasant experience of regret. Participants were aware of their own self-deception, as evidenced by such statements as, "I was trying to comfort myself."

The distinction between regret for action and regret for inaction, which some researchers have investigated,

seems to disappear from an experiential point of view. While such research (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1982) suggests that regret is more intense for action than for inaction, most of the regrets reported in the present investigation may be cast as regrets for inaction. Each participant stated that he or she "should have done" otherwise -- that he or she regretted not taking some alternative action.

Perhaps more significant is the fact that many of the reported regrets could be expressed in either form. The participant who regretted <u>not</u> turning around when driving off from his in-laws with his future wife also regretted driving off and eventually getting married. The participant who regretted quitting high school also regretted <u>not</u> finishing high school. It is unclear whether "giving a B" or "not giving an A" was more figural in one experience of regret.

What seems important is that aspects of both action and inaction are present in the experience, even when one or the other is clearly figural. Regretting the purchase of a car is less ambiguously a regret for action, but only in the face of an unchosen alternative. In the many cases where the experience was primarily one of regret for inaction, participants seemed to feel they were taking the easier way out or the path of least resistance. "Way leads on to way." For instance, the participant who walked down the aisle

rather than call off the wedding clearly felt that turning and walking out presented the more difficult and more active option. Typically, however, getting married is seen as a momentous decision and an action of great significance.

Festinger (1957) may be correct that people sometimes passively or "inactively" follow the easier course in an attempt to avert the regret they expect to feel as the result of a particular action. They may believe that their regret for such action will be more painful than any regret for inaction. Clearly this is not the way present participants described regret, since participants reported that they eventually did feel culpable for their inaction as well. It may suggest, however, that people do expect regret for action to be greater than that for inaction. While the expectation of regret for action may be greater than the expectation of regret for inaction, such a distinction is not an accurate description of the post-decisional experience of regret itself.

Implications for a Psychodynamic Perspective

Freud captured many of the qualities of the experience of regret in the course of his explanation of ambivalence (1923/1961) and in his description of mourning (1917/1957). He recognized that ambivalence may inhere in the act of deciding. He was aware of the experience of pain which accompanies the ambivalence-induced post-decisional conflict and was sensitive to other phenomenal qualities such as

self-blame, grief for loss, and difficulty in letting go of the unselected object choice. He found such qualities evident in depression, obsessional neurosis, and ordinary grief.

Many participants mentioned feeling either guilt or shame in describing their experiences of regret; these concepts are most closely associated with psychoanalytic theory. They compared and contrasted such feelings with that of regret, but often in the course of more abstract discussion. For this reason a word of caution is in order. Since such reports were removed from experience, they are less useful in describing the experience (and not the concept) of regret.

Several participants drew distinctions between guilt and regret. One participant noted, "The guilt in my own mind is more of me making a judgment on my behavior, of me saying...it was not a good thing." In a sense, she moved outside herself and observed herself critically. "The regret part of me doesn't place that harsh judgment on it. The regret simply says, 'Gee, I wish that I had been different'....So the regret I guess inside of me is not so harsh as the guilt." A psychoanalytic perspective might suggest that the external judgmental quality of guilt is a manifestation of superego rules and prohibitions.

One participant gave a sense of the internalization

process in the course of attempting to distinguish between guilt and regret.

> I think guilt is when you violate your own code or a code that you've come to believe in because of others' either example or what they've told you or what you were led to believe as a kid....I suddenly began to think things through on my own...but you can't erase some of those earlier codes that are indelibly stamped I think. So that's what I consider guilt, when you violate those earlier codes, some of which you've bought hook, line, and sinker and may forever be part of your value system....Regret I don't see as necessarily something that violates your own beliefs or value system; it's just a point in time where you made a decision and that decision has created some dissonance in your life, and if you can't erase the dissonance through the years, it's a major regret.

Although this participant spoke of guilt and not regret in association with his own codes or values, the predominant view, implicit in the statement, is that guilt inheres in the violation of values instilled by others. Regret, on the other hand, ensues when one violates beliefs that are more purely one's own, that are tied more closely to one's identity or sense of self, or that perhaps are more fully "internalized" than those of guilt. This same participant later described his guilt in terms of being judged by God (an external value system), "but as far as the regrets, I think I'm following a course now which is truer to something I've wanted to do [emphasis added]." This also supports the proposition that the self is a ground for the experience of regret, as distinct from guilt.

Some participants reported transgressions against outside rules; others reported concerns with compromising

their own standards. The former represent, in psychoanalytic terms, less internalized superego prohibitions than do the latter. The participant above, who spoke of being raised in the Catholic church and being "led to believe" certain dogma, is a clear example of the former. Another participant who explicitly reported significant outside influences was the woman who regretted not pursuing an MFA.

> My father had other ideas....My parents were very vocal when I decided I wanted to switch majors, and they were looking out for my best interests....I think that had a lot of influence on it. You always want to please your parents.

Transgression against such external influences is not germane to regret, but to guilt. The first participant stated that his transgression against doctrine instilled in childhood by the church (and others) was experienced as guilt to the exclusion of regret. The latter participant did not transgress against the wishes or views of her parents, and regretted her failure to do so since her actions did not conform to her own beliefs and values. If guilt is experienced for transgression against another, regret was contrary to guilt in this instance.

A common theme in the reported experiences of guilt was one of transgression against another. Participants experienced guilt for actions which transgressed against the values of others, as seen in the examples above. Participants also felt guilty for actions which directly

harmed others. These included not taking care of a pet, "verbally abusing" one's father, and "saying something hurtful about my husband."

A few participants reported experiencing shame in association with regret. Shame most commonly arose in the context of reports of hiding or keeping secret their regretted deed. "I was so upset about it that I couldn't even talk to anybody about it....So it's not just regret; it's regret and shame." "I guess maybe it's astigmatism [sic]....Maybe I feel ashamed, that I don't want to tell people that."

A psychoanalytic understanding of the distinction between shame and guilt holds that shame refers to the self and guilt refers to an action. The present study proposes that the self is one of the two primary grounds of the experience of regret, suggesting a close tie between regret and shame. On the other hand, both guilt and regret refer to an action taken or not taken. The foregoing discussion of guilt and shame confirms that many of the psychoanalytic descriptions of these two experiences/concepts are phenomenally accurate. The findings do not shed a great deal of light, however, on the nature of their association with regret. Some distinctions have been drawn, but the frequency with which they were reported as experienced together suggests a significant kinship.

Implications for an Existential Perspective

Fundamental concepts of existential theory are easily found in the essential structure of the experience of regret. From an existential perspective, conflict arises when faced with "the givens of existence." A search for such fundamental elements of existence in a phenomenological description of an experience naturally leads to the grounds of such an experience. In the case of regret, the primary grounds are time and self.

The unremitting progression of time is an existential given uniquely pertinent to the experience of regret. One cannot return but only look back, which is precisely the experience of those who feel regret. The passage of time is that which provides the sufferer of regret with missed opportunities, experienced as a longing and a wish to turn back the clock in order to change the situation. From an existential perspective, it might be argued that the sense of loss reflects a confrontation not only with the passage of time but also with the inevitability of death.

Regret seems to be a phenomenon exemplary of the existential perspective, for the pain of regret is both the anxiety of the threat of death and the anxiety of the freedom of possibility. The freedom to choose entails the rejection of possibilities. When participants described guilt as distinct from regret, their descriptions seemed to fit a psychoanalytic definition. Existential theorists

argue that existential guilt is more fundamental and more significant. We feel this guilt when we fail to fulfill our possibilities. This is precisely the experience of missed opportunities which inheres in regret.

Responsibility, which is so important in existential theory, is present at many levels in the experience of regret. Regret entails conflict over such responsibility, as seen in the theme "blaming oneself." In this sense, responsibility implies culpability or accountability for one's actions. Additionally, it is existential theory (e.g., Sartre, 1957; Yalom, 1980) which recognizes that responsibility inheres in the act of choosing. Here, responsibility not only suggests accountability for one's actions, but also the burdensome recognition that one is responsible for oneself and one's life in more fundamental -- more existential -- terms.

Awareness of responsibility is always present but often clouded in the experience of regret. In an attempt to expunge the painful experience of regret, one fights such awareness. It is only through increasing acceptance of responsibility, however, that regret eventually diminishes. The awareness of responsibility may be painful but is perhaps necessary for resolution of regret.

While at least a degree of responsibility inheres in the struggle with awareness which is a part of regret, it has been suggested that a deeper responsibility and full

acceptance goes beyond regret to caring (Fingarette, 1967; Kaufman, 1985), forgiveness (Rowe, Halling, et al., 1989), or reparation (Hawthorne, 1988/1989). These terms, however, have an interpersonal connotation. Regret seems to pertain more to the self and resolution of regret seems to entail caring for oneself and forgiving oneself even if over actions done (or not done) in the interpersonal domain.

As noted previously, guilt refers to an action and shame refers to the self; one feels guilt for doing and shame for being. Both are central to the experience of regret, yet shame of self seems to be at its existential foundation. This is seen in its presence as a ground of the experience of regret. If we go beyond the clouded responsibility of regret to take responsibility for who we are, we can then either accept who we are or change. In experiencing regret, we are not yet fully accepting of who we are, nor are we able to change; we are, however, embarked on the road toward acceptance or change.

Suggestions for Future Research

One may characterize the experience of regret in part as re-experiencing a past decision-making process. It may be enlightening to study the process of making a decision as it is lived, prospectively, rather than as relived. Using a phenomenological approach similar to that used in the present investigation, one might ask participants to describe decisions they are currently facing. Comparing and

contrasting these two experiential perspectives on the decision-making process may increase our understanding both of that process and of regret. As we have seen, expectations of regret are not always in accordance with the experience of regret.

The expressed intent of the present investigation was to discover the general thematic qualities of the experience of regret. Themes common to all participants were sought. It may prove fruitful, however, to consider individual differences with regard to regret. Many distinctions have been noted herein and are worthy of further study.

The distinction between regret for action and regret for inaction is one example. Certain individuals may experience one to the exclusion of the other, reflecting a particular personality or character style. On the other hand, such a distinction may reflect the nature of the regretted situation. While it was noted that this distinction relates more notably to expectations of regret, one might focus one's questions in an investigation of the present type to reveal whether individuals experience this difference in the midst of an experience of regret.

Other, related distinctions include that between negative consequences and missed opportunities. Both seem to be necessary for an experience of regret, but participants may have a tendency to dwell on one more than the other. An individual who is prone to focus on regrets

for action and on negative consequences may be impulsive, while one who dwells on inaction and missed opportunities may be passive and obsessive.

Other individual differences in the experience of regret include the means by which (or the degree to which) one seeks to avoid blame. Blaming others and denying responsibility do not seem to reduce regret and may even perpetuate it. Understanding of those who are able to get beyond this struggle with responsibility may offer insight into the process of resolving regret.

The study of such individual differences has clear clinical implications. Regret is a universal and painful experience. It is a feeling which tends to linger and is not quickly or easily resolved. An increased understanding of the experience and of the various pathways toward resolution may lead to a better understanding of the foremost clinical goals, that of accepting oneself and that of change.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INFORMATION TO POTENTIAL CO-PARTICIPANTS

A Phenomenological Investigation Of The Experience Of Regret

I am seeking volunteers for participation as interviewees in my doctoral dissertation research. The purpose of this study is to obtain first-hand descriptions of the experience of regret. Via thematic analysis of interviews with co-participants, it is expected that an integrated description of the experience of regret will emerge. Regret is a common, and likely a universal, experience. Attempts have been made to define regret, but often only as distinct from other experiences. Factors affecting the intensity of the experience have been explored in an attempt to quantify the experience. But a characterization of the experience itself, addressing the content and the quality of the experience, and the meaning regret has for the individual, has not been rendered. The goal of this study is to provide an experience-near description of the phenomenon of regret, derived from dialogues with the co-participants.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked about some times you have experienced regret. The interview will last 1 to 2 hours, and will be tape recorded.

After the interview, and after some preliminary analysis, you will be contacted for a brief follow-up interview. At this time, you will receive feedback about these preliminary results, and will be asked if you have anything to change or add.

The information obtained will be held in strictest confidence. All audiotapes, transcripts, and any other data will be coded by number, and will be identifiable only through a master list. This list will be kept in a secure place to which only the researcher will have access until the follow-up interview. Tapes will be destroyed once transcribed, and the master list and any other identifying data will be destroyed after completion of the research project.

If you agree to participate in this study, please understand that you are free to withdraw at any time without question. Hopefully you will find the topic an interesting one to think about and discuss.

If you have any questions at any time, please do not hesitate to ask. Please contact me at your earliest

convenience if you wish to participate, or if you have any preliminary questions about the research.

Dan Gordon
401E Austin Peay Building
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37916

Telephone: 974-6060
558-7886

APPENDIX B

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this research project is to obtain first-hand descriptions of the experience of regret. Regret is a common, and likely a universal, experience. While attempts have been made to define regret, or to address factors affecting the intensity of the experience, the quality of the experience itself often seems to get lost. With this study I hope to provide an experience-near description of regret, and to convey a sense of the meaning regret has for the individual, or the function it serves.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked about some times you have experienced regret. The interview will last 1 to 2 hours, and will be tape recorded.

After the interview, and after some preliminary analysis, you will be contacted at a later date for a brief follow-up interview. At this time, you will receive feedback about these preliminary results, and will be asked if you have any thing to change or add.

The information obtained will be held in strictest confidence. All audiotapes, transcripts, and any other data will be coded by number, and will be identifiable only through a master list. This list will be kept in a secure place to which only the researcher will have access until the follow-up interview. Tapes will be destroyed once transcribed, and the master list and any other identifying data will be destroyed after completion of the research project.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please understand that you are free to withdraw at any time without question. Hopefully you will find the topic an interesting one to think about and discuss.

If you have any questions at any time, please do not hesitate to ask. You will be given a copy of this form to keep, should you wish to contact me at any time about the research.

Daniel M. Gordon
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University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37916

Telephone: 974-6060
558-7886
(215) 664-9993

I have read the above information and consent form and agree to participate in this project.
Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

REGRET #7 29F

Q: What I'd like you to do is to very briefly, in a word or so, mention a few times or situations where you have experienced [ ] of regret.

A: Ok, I've thought of three. One is um, deciding to take someone else's name when I got married. One was giving a B+ as a final grade to a student in a freshman [subject] class instead of an A. And the third was the way in which I got my Ph.D., the amount of time doing it.

Q: Ok, great. Why don't you pick one of those, and uh, if you could describe it, the experience of regret in as much detail as possible.

A: Well the easiest one for me to talk about is giving the B+, 'cause I've thought about that a long time. Um, this student came in to the the freshman [subject] class having a lot of trouble, and really, um, in her perspec--in her perception anyway. And a real difficult time writing and we work through--I work on a portfolio method so that they revise and revise and revise as often as they want--and she had um, by the end of the semester, we'd worked so closely together, and she'd worked so hard that I felt that her writing, if writing can be quantified at all, was probably a B. I mean I had much better writers in the class. I was new to teaching and didn't have a lot of sense of what was good writing from a freshman. And um, but I felt then, even in the process of giving the B grade, um, that she deserved the A for effort, that I--I don't understand why the system doesn't reward that kind of effort. I mean students often tell me, "but I spent so much time on this," and they're so frustrated when that time doesn't count towards anything that helps them quantifiably. But because of um, the people I was working with in the graduate program and their views of teaching and so on, I, I mean I felt compelled to give a B by their definitions of the grade. And I look back and even now regret that. I mean I've really felt like she deserved an A. Everything about what she had done that semester I think deserved that reward.

Q: Um, you say even now you regret that. (mhm) You also regretted it at the time. When was it that you first regretted it?

A: The moment I turned the grade in, and I felt like it was

impossible, or it would be a major effort to change the grade. And I think at the time I realized that I, what I was doing was conforming to a certain standard that was not my own, and felt on one hand this real need to support, um, the department's standards and views of grading--'cause I think that's a real difficult thing to decide--and and my own personal desire. I think the reason I still think about it and regret it, 'cause I think it's an instance of when I did something for somebody else, and lived by their standard rather than my own. And I think that was wrong. I think I should have done what I felt was best. I think I was hired to do what I felt was best and should have done it, (mhm) at the risk of disagreeing with people I respected.

Q: Mhm. Um, what brings it to mind, as you say, even now? The regret comes to mind.

A: I think because I'm at a turning point in my life where I'm really deciding--I get real emotional talking about these things so--um, I've come to a real turning point deciding uh, to live life the way I want to, and accepting a different kind of loss, and that is that people may not approve or like decisions that I've made. And I wish I had done that much earlier. I think once you learn to do that then it becomes a little easier to make such decisions. I mean it's things as superficial and things that affect you as little as giving a grade to a student. And I think that um, that's really important later on. I think those kinds of things pay off.

Q: Later on it's important--

A: To have done what you thought was best, because you learn to really clearly identify what's, what is your choice in a situation, and learn to follow on it. And I think it's kind of a behavior that once you do once, and establish a pattern of doing it, that it's easier in other more complicated situations to say that this is what I want, as distinct from what someone else wants. And it's ok to suffer that person's disapproval because I've learned the positive fee--you know, the positive situation of, of doing what I want. (mhm) And that satisfaction.

Q: Um, um, I'm wondering if, in regretting it--I mean, certainly as you talk it seems that you have identified what you feel should have been done. Um, you know you say there are important payoffs for doing what you think is right. Um, um, and it seems that you have, in this situation, but it's not, somehow there's a feel--a sense of sadness or dissatisfaction, um, that comes with that, although you say that identifying those things is important and has important payoffs. Uh, it seems that in this case, um, you've

identified it after the fact, um, which I guess is what provides for the dissatisfaction.

A: Well I think there's dissatisfaction anyway because in preparing for this and thinking about this, you know I told you on the phone that I looked up the definition of regret and was really surprised to see that it was just defined as as kind of a grief, a sense of sadness or loss, period. Because that's not how I define regret. I look at regret as choosing between two difficult things, and making the wrong choice essentially, or wishing that you had made the other choice. In other words, I think regret is something that there's gonna be a sense of loss one way or the other.

Q: Ok. Earlier you had said um, you had mentioned loss, a different kind of loss. In what way is there a loss here?

A: I think there's a loss of self or a loss of--a sense of being true to self, or even of knowing self, in making a decision just to give her the B. There's a loss there for her, uh, although probably not nearly as [ ] as it's been for me, ironically enough, since it was her life, (mhm) that [name] didn't leave knowing that I felt that she had really achieved what I wanted her to. And so there was all that loss there. I think the loss on the other end is doing something that you feel is right, and suffering disapproval, which for me is very painful, to think that people I respect could be wrong, and also in turn think that that I would be wrong in a situation. Even though that's not a very important situation. I mean I don't think that's on my level regret that's not real high, although it's been, you know it's been six years since that happened so it's been there a long time, but it's not something that I suffer over a lot, (mhm) you know? But it's it's, I think it's loss either way.

Q: So if you had acted otherwise, more true to yourself, uh, you would still experience loss?

A: Loss but not regret, because what I'm saying is that if I had made that decision that would have taken me somewhere, it would have built up something, whereas the other, it would have gone towards a positive end, (mhm) towards a kind of strength, towards a kind of self-knowledge and a building of self, whereas the other one went the other direction, so there was regret there. And I think you can have loss and not have regret.

Q: Ok, uh, w--a--uh, and what would constitute the loss had you made the other decision?

A: I think there would have been distance created between

me and my mentors, the people I was working with. I think possibly [may not even have?] the same opportunities. I mean it could have been profound. I mean it could have set up a set of responses in me to say that I'm--in other words I think, you know, part of the approval process was, it was a huge payoff, and I think I essentially have the job I have because of the relationship I have with professors. I mean, because of a a belief they had [have?] in me. I think people have a hard time supporting and believing you, if they don't approve of you. You can only do a certain number of things, uh, that disagree. I mean they could have been a real practical sense of loss, a let's, you know, kinda going down the slippery slope there but. I think there would have been some distance. I would have had a different kind of relationship, not as close.

Q: Uh huh. But you would never have regretted the decision had you made that alternative decision.

A: I don't think so. (ok) I mean, from where I stand now, no because that was self-sacrifice, and I think that's--it's, I think there are rare times in life when you should sacrifice yourself. And only if it's for some good, and in this case it certainly was not for a good, except to make someone feel better or to have a sense of security in my own [ ] things that were not very real, lasting.

Q: Though you say that I mean, uh, it could have had profound

A: Well it could have had circumstantial effects, yeah. I mean I think we overrate where we are as being good places. I mean I could have been perhaps a lot happier, uh, in the long run at this point in my life and not be in this job. I mean I don't think that it's a job that's equal to happiness. I mean it's a good job. It's the best job of anyone, heh, who's ever gone to [college], I think. (heh) I mean it's it's a nice, it's a nice opportunity, and I've a gotten a lot of, you know, financial rewards and situational rewards and all of that, but I don't think that's a, that's not a price that I found worth paying. I mean, you know I don't think it's this horrible experience either. I mean I think it's difficult to know, really. I don't know. I really don't know what would have happened. But a lesser job would have been worth having a real sense of who I am, and of having integrity in being that person. I mean I think that would be a much higher payoff personally.

Q: These um, ideas what what would have been the situation had you made the alternative decision. I asked you that, but it seems that--and correct me if I'm wrong--that you've thought about that, the, um, what what would have been

different had you made the alternative decision. Um, when you're experiencing regret are you inevitably doing that, imagining what would have been different? Um, I guess I'm trying to get a sense of what what specifically constitutes the regret.

A: The re--no, I don't think so. I think that's more of a--try to think through it, attempt to intellectualize the experience and try to keep it from being an emotional one or just a responsive one. Try to think through, is this really--what would have been, you know, the cost had I taken the other option instead. I mean that's more of a distancing thing, a way of being objective about it or trying to see it in a new light, or trying to find out why I made the decisions I made. No, I think the regret comes in knowing that at the time it was just really clear what I should do, and I didn't follow that. (at the time) Yeah, I really knew that I should not do that. I didn't want to do it, I didn't think I should do it, not for me, not inside, not in my gut, you know. I knew that was not right. I mean it was very very clear, and I chose to do something for intellectual reasons.

Q: Uh, what was that like? You say that you first felt it actually after the grade was turned in, or as the grade was turned in. Um, maybe you realized it wasn't right before that, but the regret came in as you turned the grade in. What, what was it that you were feeling?

A: Well, in kind of an odd way, it's that thing of having to drink your milk when you're a kid. I mean, you're glad that you've done it because you think it's right because your parents have told you it's right, but yet you really don't like milk, and as an adult you look forward to the time when you don't have to do that. But yet there's this odd sense of satisfaction that you've been an adult in the process. Well I felt like I was doing the right thing by these adult standards, by these mentor standards, by these people who were so well-educated and knew so much. Um, so in a sense I felt like I was kind of taking my licks or drinking my milk or eating my spinach or whatever. It was a hard thing, and life is hard, and doing the right thing means feeling not good about it, in some sort of odd way. (uh huh) So in a sense I felt like "oh, I'm growing up" or, you know, I'm I'm learning. But in this other sense, this real in one sense regret that that I would ever have to do that, that that would be a definition of life experience, and now looking back on it, a regret that I ever felt that way.

Q: Felt what way?

A: That that was the right thing to do, that these people, because they had more degrees than I had or because they were older than I was or because they were better read than I was, knew what they were doing, (uh huh) that I could allow someone to make a decision for me, and when they really didn't know, they weren't in that situation, they didn't know her. Um, it was just kind of a, an assumption on my part, of the right thing to do and--I mean I think it was a little screwed up in in the perspective that I held, and in the light of regret that somehow I internalized that the right thing hurt, or you don't feel good. And

Q: And yet, the sense I have is that that hurt, or that not feeling good-- that being an adult doesn't always feel good--that's not the regret, that hurtful feeling. (un uh) 'Kay. Um, you also mentioned um, uh, that you regret having that perspective or that outlook. Um, can you tell me more about that?

A: Well, somehow I learned that to grow up, to be an adult, to be a woman, is to be something that doesn't seem right. That the right thing to do costs, always, and if it's not cos--I was raised in a real religious background, and always I think, this idea that what God wants you to do is not what you naturally want to do. It's something that's hard to do, or the opposite of what you really want to do. And that the right thing is withholding whatever it is that feels good or seems good or whatever at the time. And a lot of I think has to do with not only religion but also this kind of view of women that women are the ones who tend to stay home and take care of, whether they meet their own needs, meet other people's needs. And I think in a real exaggerated sense, that that meant for me, doing what other people thought I should do, even if it was hard. And learning to set these goals and prove that I could do them. Even though that's not really what I wanted to do. I mean to the point of listening to music because I should, you know all these shoulds, instead of just waking up and saying, "I feel like doing X," and then doing it, because it, you know, seemed right at the time. Doing what, you know, is the thing that one should do, or what God told you to, or what the adults told you to or whatever. And that's a real, you know, I think I understand a little bit why I came up with this idea. I regret that I bought into that, because I don't think I always did. I think there was a time when I lived a lot freer, as a as, when I was much younger. And and resisted, um, these things, and actually thought through them, thought, "ok, this person wants me to do this. Do I want to?" and really tried to get in touch with what I wanted and what I felt about it. I think in the process of really internalizing this need for acceptance of authority figures, I really lost track of even what I wanted, at

times. I mean I wouldn't even be able to tell.

Q: And you say you lost track. There was a time earlier where you did have more of a sense of those things. (mhm) Um, you say you lost track of what you had before. You bought into it, which means that there was some point beforehand where you weren't buying into it. Um, 'kay. Uh, maybe you could tell me a little bit about that, that whatever it was, that transition, that buying into it, that losing track.

A: Well, I moved twelve, or my family moved twelve times, um, by the time I was a senior in high school. So one of the experiences that I had growing up was being new, being the new kid. And part of being the new kid is learning how to belong and learn to be accepted. But also part of doing that is maintaining some sense of self that you can take from one school to the other, away from all these peer groups that usually define you. Or at least it's been my experience that they define children very often. So it was kind of an odd split personality kind of situation. There were some things that were true and constant, because they had to be I think in order to not be completely fragmented. Real strong relationship with family, and with my brother and all of that and, who I love and I always listen to classical music and [ ] some things that were really kind of odd for a small child. On the other hand really denying those things in public, and learning how to fit in, so that you could become accepted by these these groups. So I think there was always this kind of toss-up. I think once I moved to where I went to high school, um, I felt pretty sure that we were gonna stay there and I think I also got pretty tired of trying to do both. And because it was a really divul--diverse culture and a really odd culture, not your typical American town, I think I was able to feed that side of myself that was that was ok and that was real. And I got to be around people who were more like that. So for a period of two or three years I think I was, I really had the, the chance to indulge, and just be me, and not have to make excuses, not have to do things to fit in, but rather to choose people because they were more like me. I mean it was a lot more natural. (mhm) That meant I think a lot--it did mean a lot of denial of some some other values, but I was able to handle that. I mean it was was confusing, because adolescence is, I think, but there was a time when I really dressed the way I wanted to, listened to the music I wanted to, spent time with people when I wanted to and didn't when I didn't want to. I mean it was just a real kind of nice time, you know. There was no one that I felt I needed to impress or, in any case, if I did, I was able to impress those people by being me. It wasn't necessary to become someone else. Then for some reason, and God only knows why,

I decided to go to a Baptist college, which is just an insane choice given that I at 16 and 17 had renounced all these values really, and had acted out a life that said I didn't believe in it. You know God doesn't talk to me, never did. And yet I went to this place where these people thought he did and they lived by this kind of unknown creature that determined their lives. And--during that time there was only one way to be accepted. You were not accepted for who you were. And even early on I was really working against that culture and fighting fighting against it, but I think it gets back to that loss situation--I found that there's a really high price to pay for going into a culture and critiquing it. I mean, I wrote editorials in the school newspaper and all of this kind of stuff, and started getting hate mail and, in some real threatening situations. I mean just this very public--and I got a letter from a professor telling me how wrong I was, letters telling me I would go to hell, you know. Real big things I think. I mean at the time seemed incredibly overwhelming and real as if someone could really harm me. And I think that that threat seemed so high, and it was just so easy to become accepted, and I think that I started switching at that point. I mean it just became, I just could not maintain--there was just no one there to build me up. And in order to do it, I mean, at one time I I considered transferring to another school and I think, looking back on it maybe I regret that, not getting out of this Baptist school and going into an area that I--that that would have allowed me that. I mean I think for survival I had to learn acceptance or else get out. And my choice was to learn how to be accepted.

Q: Right. You say you, you um, ok now there's a choice and so you're saying that you regret that you didn't make the other choice, getting out. You um, earlier, in, what brought this up was, uh, talking about, uh, regretting adopting that perspective, regretting that shift, that um, buying into. Um, and now you're sorta saying that maybe, uh, you're regretting that you didn't get out. Um, is that where it turns, is that where that regret turns? Regretting adopting that perspective, is it, is the the the neg--the negative side of that regretting that you didn't get out of that school?

A: Yeah, I mean I think that, you know I--in some ways I do and don't, and I was really young and I don't--I think I tend to be harder on myself the older I get because I I've taken on more responsibility and I'm a more responsible person. At 19 I'm not sure that I can really blame myself for being unable to get out of that situation. I needed some security. You know I'd moved every other year, sometimes more frequently than that, all my life, and that

that incredible level of threat that I felt, that incredible energy that was expended in moving and becoming a part of another culture was was really hard so in some ways, I mean I think it would have cost me an awful lot. And I think I I probably could not have handled it as--the way I look back, so in a sense I regret that that I couldn't have, but I don't feel a real profound sense about that, because I just don't know that, I don't know that I could have dealt with it. (uh huh) It would have been an incredible--I mean I

Q: Dealt with--?

A: With moving, (ok) to another place, and [ ] so much a human being can handle. And I just don't know if I could have. Maybe maybe I could, I don't know. (mhm) Um, I just don't know if it would have broken me down too much. On the other ha--I mean, to me that was a true dilemma. I don't think either option was a very positive one. I think that I did the best I could at that point, but once I got out of school, I didn't have to buy into that, and I was back into a culture, and so you know it's that old phrase, be careful what you pretend to be because you end up--you may become it, and I think that that's really what happened. There's a sense where I, I mean I I it was not fake. I really did start believing, um that this religion stuff is true and, and all of that. But um, I don't know, I regret--that's not really what I feel about that. I think it was unfortunate. (uh huh) I mean, that seems like something outside of myself, that I couldn't control, wasn't my fault. (uh huh, uh huh) And so I don't feel regret about things that weren't my fault. To me regret is a choice, I mean there is a failed choice of some kind.

Q: So when you say that you regret adopting that perspective or, you know, um, buying into that, um, are you saying that um, the regret is less so in that case? (mhm) Ok. Uh, but you do--there is still some regret tied into that, or--?

A: Yes, to the point that I realized there was another option, and I could, I could have done that, I mean physically could have done the other choice.

Q: When when did you realize there was another option?

A: Well I think I--again, I think I knew at the time because I applied to another school. I was accepted at the University of [state], I was accepted into the journalism school, all of that kind of stuff. I mean I had that ready opportunity, I even had money. Um, and there was a sense of loss in turning it down. And I don't, I don't even know why, at the time I don't think I was even able to

articulate. And I was routinely receiving hate mail in my dorm room, and I chose to stay at this stupid school, that was not even up to my standards of any kind. I mean, I don't know why I stayed, I really do not understand that. Have no comprehension of what went on in my little mind and, you there were some some people there that were really good to me, and maybe that was what I stayed for. You know my roommate was a real source of strength to me, and so maybe it was because of her, I don't know. I really have no idea. I look back and think, what happened? You know, you have this ticket out of this horrible situation, why didn't you take it, and I really don't know. But yet I don't feel culpable for it either.

Q: And in not feeling culpable you say that you don't feel

A: The regret's a lot less. To me regret is something that comes out of taking responsibility for having done the wrong thing. (uh huh) I mean I just can't get away from that definition.

Q: Um, let's see. I lost my train of thought. Um, when was it--well it's hard to say I mean in a way you're saying that there there wasn't much of an experience of regret with regard to this, taking on that perspective. Uh, so I don't know that I should pursue this, but what little regret there was with regard to that, uh, when, do you have a sense of when you might have first experienced it?...Or most intensely experienced it?

A: I think it's only been really recently that I've been able to have the distance on that time period. Because um, I ended up marrying someone from that school, at--because I made this huge decision, it would have been very difficult to see that as a as a bad decision to stay, 'cause that would have called into question a whole chain of events. And that was very, you know, that would be a very threatening thing to consider, I think. And now because I'm, you know, I'm making that decision, and getting out of that decision, I look back and think, and wonder more than feel a sense of loss. It's really more a sense of wondering how that would have been different. Wondering if it would have saved me some, some trouble, you know, later on.

Q: The wondering is where the regret comes in?

A: Well yeah, just--and and in that case I I regret a little bit, [you know?], the whole thing--heh, I regret my entire life, heh heh. Believe me, up to that point I really, you know, I'm really pissed off that my dad moved us so much. I mean that really makes me mad. But I don't regret that because that was not my responsibility. But I

regret that he made those choices, because I think if he hadn't, you know, but who knows. I mean that's a huge difference in a life. (mhm) But, you know, I wished, I wish I would have had what it took to leave that school. I mean now I think that. I don't think it would have been the right decision. It would have been a different decision, and I think it would have made it easier for me to be where I am now a little earlier, in terms of my view of sense of self. And go through some of these things at an age where I I think it's a little easier to go through them. These these experiences. So yeah, I mean, there there is regret that there's not um, at the time I felt like I was doing the right thing. It didn't occur to me I was doing anything wrong.

Q: Uh huh. Now you say that when you--you actually did apply to another school and get in, and you turned them down, you said that you experienced a sense of loss but, at that time, perhaps no regret.

A: No, I don't think so. I think I regretted it when I went out to get a job, because I really wanted to be a journalist, and uh, well it just wasn't possible with the kind of degree that I had, to do that. I mean I could have done that with a degree from the other school. So at that point I think I started actually considering the possibilities, but again I think even to consider feeling regret about that would have been so threatening, would have called into question so much, the life I was living, that I don't think I would have been capable of it. And again, I don't feel a real strong sense there. I have trouble imagining what my life would be like at all, if I had made that decision. I don't, I have no concept of what that would mean.

Q: Mhm mhm. Um, you do speak of regret, you know, you regret that your father moved you around so much. Um, and certainly you're not culpable in that regard, um, but you do use that word, regret, in that context. Can you tell me a little bit about what that's like?

A: That kind of regret?

Q: Yeah, what you're aware of, [when you hear that?].

A: I guess I just really realize, more now than ever, what happens when people have choices, and when they choose the one that is not the best decision. How much harm that can do, how permanent, how it can set off an entire chain of events. And I think he had some choices and just didn't take them. I just don't think he did the right thing. I think he knows he didn't do the right thing. I think it

would be nice for him to say "I did the I did the wrong thing, and I'm sorry." That would make the regret a little different.

Q: That would make your regret a little different?

A: Mhm. I'd feel different about what he did. I mean at least see that he was taking responsibility for it, and owning up, doing something about it, you know?

Q: Uh, how would that make your regret different, like what's, what would your re--what's your regret about it now versus what it would be if he were to take responsibility?

A: Well, I think he would then be owning and taking responsibility for the fact that he's irresponsible, that he he makes decisions based on his own needs, and not on everybody else's, and when you have children I just think that's wrong. I think you've got to consider everyone in the family and do what's right for them, even if it means not achieving what it is you want to achieve. I mean I just think that's capricious and horrible. [I think it's just?] bad behavior. And so it wouldn't change the way my life was, but it would change the way I felt about him. And I wouldn't have this real sense that he's selfish, and is gonna make decisions based on his needs only. So I would feel a little bit better--ok, there's been a cost here, but in the end he's realized, and has grown from it. Like to me I guess maybe that's something that can redeem regret is learning from it, and growing from it. If there's no way of ever getting past it, I mean that's a real sad feeling. If it's just a loss that you've just got to count as a loss, (ok) there's nothing good that can come of it. It's just a bad thing, (mhm) that's a real, that's a real sad kind of regret.

Q: So in your first example, with your student and the grade, I mean, as I had said, it seems that you really have come to an understanding about what what was the right thing. Um, this situation's I guess different in a couple ways. One I guess you feel that, um there hasn't been that redemption, and two, um, that it--your--s--um, coming to an understanding would be something your father would need to do, rather than you. You seem to have come to that understanding. Uh, and yet your regret isn't changed by that understanding. Um,

A: Well, I mean you can look at the regret go in kind of two directions though. You--I can regret that that's the kind of life I had to leave--lead, as a child--heh, and leave. Um, but regretting that he was the kind of person, or he made some choices that he made, and then became a

certain kind of person, is a little different. And I think he can redeem that. He can change that, and I can allow him to grow and be different. I can't allow the past to change [when?] the past is just there. So maybe that has something to do with it. I mean, again, I mean I just had to count childhood--I mean not childhood, but the experience of moving--I just have to count it as a loss. I mean I I, you know I could go back and think up hokey things I've learned, (mhm) from having to move but, I mean it's just because I think we try to justify our lives and bring some good out of it, and I don't think it was good. I think it was bad. And I can't change that. I can't change that it was bad. I just have to go on now and learn ho--learn from it. You know, that kind of thing, but I mean, there's no changing that, that's just, that's just there.

Q: And you think that's part of the experience of regret? (yeah) Ok, that there's no changing it. Um,

A: Right, and I mean I c--I I guess I could go back and change that B+, you know, or that B. I have that power. I could--I think, I don't know, I'm not employed by that university any more. I don't know if that's a possibility. (mhm) But for all practical purposes no. Tha--that was a momentary kind of possibility that cannot come [go?] back and relive the experience. So yeah, I think regret is [ ]. That's what's so sad about it. It's not just that you made a mistake, but that it's somehow this, you know, it's in your history. It's there, it's in the history book of your life and it's just there. People screw up, people make mistakes.

Q: So there's a sadness about it. (oh yeah) Um, and yet there's also, um, as you say, a way of, um, redeeming it to some extent, by arriving at some understanding?

A: I think understanding, yeah.

Q: Um, you also talk about responsibility, your own, your own culpability, um, and yet in this other case, um, you experience regret, uh, but it's not your own responsibility, it's somebody else's. The notion of responsibility still arises, but it's your father's responsibility. I'm uh, puzzled by that.

A: Heh. (heh) Well I'm puzzled by that too. And I tried to work this all out before I got here, (heh) because--I thought about that. It doesn't follow. Except that, as a child--and I was talking to someone else about this; we both have the same experience, we just died laughing--we were picked up from piano lessons, sitting in the back seat, and Dad and Mom are in the front seat and Dad says, "guess what

[participant's name], I've got some good news." And I'm going, "oh, good, what is it?" "We're moving." Heh heh. The other was picked up from piano lessons, having our parents tell us something that--there's something really good's gonna happen, it turns out it's this very big disaster, it's this horrible--

Q: You immediately felt that felt that it was a--

A: Oh immediately, oh yes, immediately burst into tears, horrified. And I think it, you know, looking back on it I was probably more horrified that he tried to make it out to be a good thing, and tried to be manipulative, even than when he had to tell me it was bad. I mean if he would just would have made it sound like a crisis in my life and it meant that it was a very difficult thing, I mean the most difficult thing, then maybe I would have, you know, felt less sad about it, I don't know. But I think partly feeling like that was your responsibility, 'cause my father always phrased things in terms of: this is a family decision, heh. (heh heh) And [ ] decision, you know, you start believing, oh yes, I decided to pick up and move, leave all my friends behind and all this kind of stuff. And I think--and we--and this friend and I talked about this, the sense of responsibility we have for these moves, is somehow, we had caused them or, if only we didn't get too comfortable where we were, then maybe we would get to stay there. Or, this, it's just kind of a game, like being a rat in a cage and trying to figure out how to get the food, and and not being able to do it. I mean this kind of childlike version of taking responsibility for everything.

Q: Now, um, I mean, initially you agreed or said you agreed that it's sort of puzzling. I'm wondering, your arrival at feeling like in some way you were responsible, or felt you were responsible, is that a way of, um, reconciling these two apparently different views of regret, or or did did you really at some point believe you were responsible in some way?

A: I think that it's a little bit of both. It's a way of making it complete but, I think the way I felt responsible in that situation is I didn't respond very well to the moves. Always been shy, painfully shy. And I think I took responsibility for that as a young child. If I weren't shy, this wouldn't be as hard on me. (mmm) That kind of sense, and I regret, because my brother had a much different experience with moving than I did. I mean he didn't like it, but it was not this, you know, not this incredible spectre in his past the way it is for me. And I felt at the time a real sense of regret of being unable. I, you know, feeling language leave me when I walk into where there are

people I don't know. And just being unable to retrieve simple basic English words. And I regret that, and I do feel responsible for that. I don't think that anything anyone did to me, that's just who I am, that's just something, you know, I have to learn to do. So in that sense maybe it maybe it's related to that, but part of it's just trying to make this make sense. (mhm) Because I don't understand why I would have regret for someone else's behavior.

Q: Mhm mhm. Well you speak of um, uh, you seem to speak of uh, a lot of sadness when you speak of regret, um, though in this situation where you're speaking of your father you um, and you me--you mention being pissed off, heh, (heh) which is something else, and I, um

A: That that's not related to the regret. That is something else. I mean that's that's anger, that's different. (uh huh) It really is.

Q: Ok, and that's not related to the regret.

A: Not really. I mean it's probably, w--no, I don't think it i--that's a different experience altogether, I think, for me. I mean, when I think of him, I have anger. When I think of moving, I have a whole [real?] sense of sadness or loss. I don't have sadness when I think of him. (uh) When I think of his life I might, (uh huh) and some of his decisions, [when I'm?] objective.

Q: And what about, um, hmm. I don't how to ask this. So um, what what do you regret in that instance? Do you regret that you moved? Do you regret your father's decision to move? Or I could also ask, what are you pissed off about? You're pissed off at him, for making the decision?

A: Yeah, I'm really angry with him, in the way he made decisions and that he made decisions. But the sadness is [ ] that we had, that we had to [ ], that we did that, that I had to go through those experiences, that I was put through those experiences, that I had to learn how to be new over and over and over, when it was such a difficult thing and would have been anyway I think. And then I had to, I mean I felt I was torture, I mean that was just a horrible experience, and I regret, I mean I, I feel so sad thinking about some of those things that I, I mean those first fewer--few weeks at every new school were just these awful experiences. And I think childhood would have been a very different experience for me. I don't think I would have nearly as much sadness, if not for having to be new for two months or three months or however long it takes you to fit in at all these different schools. And that was such a

horrible experience. And I think I--I would be different. I would be a different person. I really feel that strongly.

Q: You feel really sad about that, um. What what do you regret in all this?

A: Well maybe regret's not even the word to use for it...Um, but it still, the phrase still keeps coming out. Regret that my father made the decisions that he made. And I don't I don't know why. I don't--I mean it's--And I think maybe because it's getting down to he had some choices and he made the wrong one, and maybe that's what's important, rather than the, that I made them but that someone really has at least one path, at least at least two paths to choose from and and goes down one that's wrong, (mhm) and that they had all the knowledge available to them at the time to know it was wrong.

Q: Right. What--it it seems to um, parallel the other situation very very well. Um, the only anomaly is that you also s--initially seem to feel that, you know, yourself being responsible was an important or a necessary feature of it, and here it doesn't seem quite to be. But what, we don't, we don't need to sort these things out, heh, perfectly right here. Um, I mean that's what's, what's fun in all this.

A: Well, I guess you don't normally regret other people's actions that don't affect you. Maybe, and maybe it's just that because that action affected me so directly, it seemed as if, I mean there was an I involved, but it wasn't it wasn't, I wasn't the one making the wrong choices, or making the poor choices. So, I mean, I'm important in the experience of regret. I don't regret the Vols losing a football game, or somebody else making the wrong decision, uh, unless I know them and feel sadness for them. And then I might be able to vicariously feel regret for them. But if they do something and they choose something that harms my life or that affects my life then yeah, I think I am capable of feeling regret for someone else's action. So it's not just my choice, just choice.

Q: Though we're not quite sure about um, you know, why it came up, your notion is that you may at one time have felt some responsibility about it or felt like there's something that you could have done to make it less unpleasant for you. May, may not be an important

A: Well it's one of those things that I--I don't know if that is, how true that it is. I mean I don't [END OF TAPE #7, SIDE 1]...handle certain situations. And, you know, I think that um, there's a point where I was, you know it was

just, it's more of a transference I think. It was just a-- I think this only occurred to me recently to be angry at him. I don't think it did at all when I was a child, to think that someone else had put me in this position. The way I took on the responsibility was thinking it was my fault because I was unable to meet the demands of the situation, in a graceful way. I [ ] smooth transitions. (uh huh) I wasn't happy making these transitions, and all of that. So in that sense, yeah, I think I did take responsibility for, but not, not for actually making the choice, because he didn't ask us, heh. (heh) He told us that we had helped, but I mean, that was not true and I knew that to not be true.

Q: Ok. Um, we'll probably end up coming back to these to some extent, but maybe you could uh, talk about one of the other times.

A: Well, you can tell I've thought about these, 'cause, heh, [they all follow?] real similar patterns, I think. Um, again, I mean I think the name change is a really simple instance of changing my name, because I didn't think my in-laws could handle it if I didn't, and wanting to please them, wanting to fit in, not wanting to make everything a big deal, and just doing it, and then finding out that the cost, heh, was a lot greater than I ever imagined it was, in that you actually become a little bit different. I mean that [ ], I mean I think language is really important in defining us and I don't even relate to being the other person any more. That's been a real--someone the other day called me Ms. [name], and I'm used to being called [first name] or Dr. [name]. When people use my last name it's very rarely with, you know, private title, Mrs. or Ms. And it really, I didn't know who they were talking to, and then I realized that's me, that's who I've become is this person and, you know, just all this this dissonance with that, and I don't think I would have had to face that. Which sounds absurd on one hand to think that just keeping your name constant could in some way keep your self constant. But I think that, changing that name was really emblematic of how I viewed marriage, and I think I--I think that was not a a good way to view it. I mean I regret, heh, that I saw it that way. 'Cause I think it cost me some things I didn't have to, that it didn't have to cost me.

Q: Uh, when are you aware of that, that regret?

A: I started being aware of that, um, when I went to go get a passport, about three years ago, to go overseas, and really stumbling over what name I wanted in there, and realizing that I really wasn't comfortable, and then I I went through, I went through this major ordeal, this major

process. My name was [first middle last], and I went through and changed everything to [first maiden last] to get my other last back in there. I felt that was really important and let me tell you it was a major ordeal. I mean, you've gotta have a reason to do these things, and I couldn't think of one. Heh, I just want to. You know, and you have to find documents that prove that you're that person and it's just this really weird experience. I went through all of that effort, I mean an incredible amount of paperwork and photocopying and mail and all of that. And in the a--you know, my husband and I are separated now, and now I'm thinking of all the paperwork that would be required to go back to my my real name, heh. Uh, and I think now it's very profound, because now I'm carrying a part of this person in a real permanent kind of way, that I I deal with every day, and people call me that every day. And you can only escape that esperi--experience to a certain degree. I mean you got that, I mean it's like having the picture in front of you, and you're walking down the street, I mean that name's there. And so he's there partly, you know? (mhm) And um, so I think it's been over the past two or three years.

Q: Uh, why over the past two or three years or

A: Probably because of the experience like with the B+ I've realized that I--I mean it's just suddenly occurred to me that the process of graduate school for me was uh, kind of a sacrificing of my self on the altar of scholarly endeavor. And I think it just all of a sudden occurred to me why the graduate school experience was such a tough one. I mean I got a Master's degree and a Ph.D. in four years, wrote a thesis and a dissertation all, you know, did it the slow way but in four years' time. And I look back on it and I think, "God, where was your brain, why did you do that?" you know I mean it's just this constant, I didn't want to do it that way, I chose projects I didn't necessarily want to work on, I mean all of it was kinds of sacrifice of self. Again, this [getting at me?], so I can become this better person, and because these people should know what the right thing to do is. And I think that it just occurred to me during the last, final stages of graduate school that the reason that was painful--and I obviously had a lot of success or I couldn't have done it that quickly--but the painful part was that I had lost me in the process, and that wasn't a fair exchange. I'd rather not have the Ph.D. You know, and yet it's been very good to me, I like having that degree, but, what I had to give up for it was this incredibly high price. And I think I had to give up a sense of who I was. And I think that's part of, with the name, it started to occur to me. You know, I don't want to be [first and last name]. That's not who I am. Um, I mean all my friends from college

or people that have known me before I got married and even my husband refer to me as [first and maiden name]. And I feel like that name is true.

Q: Who refers to you as [first and last name]?

A: My husband, all my friends, everyone who knew me as that person continues to think of me as that person. They continually stumble, um, and I even sign my name on checks sometimes incorrectly, and have to destroy the check and, heh, explain to--watch their faces as you sign the wrong name, and that really calls into question your validity. (heh heh) You really shouldn't sign the check at all, you know. Um, but I mean just out of the blue, I started signing checks, you know, [first and maiden name]. Which is a weird experience, you know. But I think that, I mean all my friends from college, men, women--these are very conservative people, you know, Christian, Baptist people who, you know, believe it's right to take the name and everything--that I was obviously a very strong essence in the way that [first and last name] was not. And I think that it occurred to me that was important. I don't know exactly what happened to make me feel like it was. Maybe the sense of impending doom, heh, the feeling that the marriage is falling apart, it occurred to me, I didn't want to have that name all through my life. (uh,) In the [house?].

Q: How long ago was that? You speak of first feeling the regret three years ago, the passport is when you--

A: Over about 18 months, I think is when I really started realizing that I was

Q: But prior to your, prior to that happening, you felt regret about (the name) adopting the name.

A: Yeah and I don't know. I don't know what took place. It was--I don't, I really don't. I know that I started signing checks wrong, (mhm) and I think maybe some of it was, I don't know, subconscious or whatever, I don't know.

Q: What--would you experience regret when you signed a check wrong, at a time like that?

A: No, it was just more shock, you know. And I tried out the name, uh, over and over and over to see how I wanted things changed, and practiced signing it and, I've never been able to make R's, and if I keep [first and maiden name] then I have four R's, heh, that I'd have to sign, which is, you know, one of those absurd things you think about. Um, I don't know, I really don't know what started me thinki--

well, a--probably I do. I started studying a lot of feminist perspectives. And again, I mean part of it, [ ] probably goes back to a lot of the shoulds that feminism--I mean everyone has their shoulds. You know, and I felt like a real traitor. You don't fit in in a feminist group when you've taken your husband's name, and your family name doesn't appear anywhere in your name. You have essentially erased

Q: Now you said that you had essentially erased it and then you went back to reinclude your maiden name.

A: And that's officially part of my name now.

Q: Ok. That was done following or in the process of getting the passport? (yeah) That's when you be--began init--initiating that. Uh, can you tell me again or a little more about, um, what that was like, uh, when it first occurred to you to do that, to reinclude your maiden name.

A: I remember someone at school had been, um, divorced, or not divorced. She had been divorced and then remarried and so she had this child with one name and, you know, her family had another name and, she just decided that one thing she wanted to be constant was her name, no matter what happened in all these other situations. So she went through the process of changing her name. And I think--(back?) Back to her original name. And just decided she wanted that to stay the same, 'cause she'd had all these different names. And several people were going through divorces and various things in which they were doing that, and I think it occurred to me that that was a possibility. I'd never really thought, I mean I always think of things as being permanent, you know. And I realized that I could do that, particularly when I went down to get a passport and realized I had to provide all of this paperwork anyway. Because on one document they insisted that I keep my maiden name, on the driver's license, so that they could, I guess, trace back to other states and stuff, I don't know. I think because I realized it was possible. And I thought that uh, I mean I thought about it a long time, I mean I'm really, I--it, and it was a big deal, for people in my family and for my husband and for my husband's family. It was a, it was a--I mean it sounds like such a silly simple thing, to change your name and be called what you want to be called but it was a really big deal for people. People didn't like it basically. And in fact my parents still refuse to include that name. They just don't do it.

Q: Include their name.

A: [maiden name], right. (ok) Just deleted the--I don't

know exactly, I mean I really can't remember. I just remember I started that process. And I I regretted having to even do it. It should have stayed the same. It should have, I should have made that decision.

Q: Uh, stayed the same, not even adopting

A: Yeah, I should have just stayed [first middle maiden]. That's who I am, heh, yeah.

Q: Ok. So you--even though you went back and you reincluded your maiden name, you still regret.

A: Yeah, I I had--(ok) there was no possibility for me to go all the way back. I wouldn't have been able to do that. And maybe there was some regret at being unable to do that too. You know I mean that that would've required more strength than I had. I mean it would be very--it will be very hard for me to do that in the future too. I mean that will take a lot of effort on my part emotionally and every other way.

Q: What will?

A: Changing back to my name, to my real name, my original name, my first name. And I think I probably will eventually do that no matter what happens, and probably will always keep that name, but getting there is going to be a very difficult process. I mean again, I mean there's a lot of regret about not having done it. On the other hand there's this real cost in doing things. And I think that's--it's hard either way, but I think, um, the payoff can be very good on one side, and the other side is not. I think it's--I think it's kind of short-term easy. Um, a lot of the decisions I make, and the long term not.

Q: Um, do you have anything to add about that particular instance? (un uh) Ok. Um, you had a third, but I guess you've touched on it. (mhm) Uh, do you, can you tell me more about that third instance?

A: It's a it's a more difficult one to talk about because it's not a one moment kind of thing. It's not a choice in the same way as choosing one thing or choosing another, in a real simplistic situation. Um, it's just a more a general feeling or experience that I had in school, in that I think, I mean I really wanted to go to school, but I think once I got into it I started doing things because other people wanted them done. One thing was to go through very quickly, and I think I did--I know I did that for my husband, this real need to get through and not spend any more time than necessary. And I reg--I really, and I regret that, on many

levels, both professionally and emotionally, personally and all those things. I think it was a real high cost to make that decision. I regret, um, working on some projects that I worked on, which is again, not a vereal--not a real emotional kind of regret. I just regret that I didn't say, "no, this is what I want to do. That's what--that's your project. If you like it, do it, you know. I want to do my own." I regret not speaking up about some things that I felt very deeply, because I was kind of a leader of my group, and I could have been heard on some issues, you know. I was told over and over and over the Ph.D. is a research degree, and you're going out to do research. Teaching is not the important part, and feeling very strongly that if I were to teach, that that would be the the focal point for me. That the research would always be secondary, in reality, in how I felt about it. And not standing up for that and questioning that, that you know we teach in these institutions and, that we can put a book before a person is just absurd to me, and I I never expressed that, uh, very strongly. And I think I should have. You know, I think I should have worked against that. Um, because I think I took on and accepted some values, even temporarily, that I don't think were were right. And I think that is just one example of several things that went on. You know, some choices, um, that I made in that respect and the amount of time I spent making those choices and, I just think it was re--it was really sad time. And I think part of the sadness was that I had a lot of success doing it. It's very easy to do what other people want for me. I'm very good at that. I can achieve unbelievable levels if you just tell me what you want. I can do it, you know, and I'm very good at that and that's sad to me that that's very is--very easy and yet to even know what I want is very difficult. I assume I could achieve as well for myself if I knew, if I were able to even know what those things were. But I don't know, maybe I wouldn't, maybe I wouldn't be such a high achiever. Maybe I would be more content to just be, to embrace the fact that I'm just a normal person, heh, and I don't have to things any differently from anybody else if I don't want to. You know, that that kind of other option, you don't have to be a star all the time. So that's more complicated. I mean that's not so, I'm not even sure that I can make concrete some of those decisions.

Q: Right, and it's, it's more difficult to identify--although you have to some degree--identify the object of the regret, what it is that you regret. Um...hmm...When is it that you're aware of regretting that, regretting the way you went through your graduate degrees.

A: I think I started regretting it, um, I graduated on a Friday night, packed up and moved to Tennessee the next, the

Sunday morning following that. I think when I started unloading the truck here, heh, I started regretting that. And when I got into the job--I mean it's a great job, there are wonderful people, um, it's a real opportunity. But finding all this sense of emptiness in the job. You know you work for four years like a dog, and have all this incredible success and are this golden child and you get there and you're just, heh, anybody else. I mean, and they, I think the [discipline] department does a really good job of making you feel special. But you're just one star among 40 others. You know, everyone there is if not better equipped than I was, um, equal, you know. I'm just in another, another pool. And feeling as if, I mean I, then you have some choices. I can either learn to achieve the way--by these people's standards, you know, or--like I always have, which seemed an incredibly depressing thought, to have to take on those accomplished individuals and to achieve to their standards--or I could start dealing with what it is I wanted. And I think it started when I, you know, first came to work. Started thinking about tenure and those kind of things.

Q: You--uh huh. You earlier spoke of, you know, being able to just feel normal, and here you speak of, you you were first aware of regretting this, you spoke of, you speak of a contrast between being very special where you came from to being just one of 40 here. (mhm) Um, is it in being aware of that contrast or being faced with that contrast that you began to

A: Yeah. I think so, because I think I could become more than just one of 40. I think I could become a star, and a golden child and make everyone happy, and I think, you know, there are several ways of doing that, and I'm very good at figuring those out. Um, because there are some who stand out in the department as stars. You know, the good kids and all that, because they've done the right thing for the department, and I think it was faced with the thought of not wanting to do that again. That's just incredibly tiring to do--to live other people's lives or to live other people's expectations. Um, and I just found that at that point I just was kind of at a breaking point. There was just a point to where I was I mean completely losing sight of of me and and all of that. And I think since that time and for the past year I've really been working towards accepting the possibility of just being a normal person. Not not having to feel exceptional or special in some way. That it's ok to do that.

Q: Ok, so you got here, [ ] you graduated, you got your Ph.D., and two days later you're driving to Tennessee, you're unloading the truck, and, or or you become aware of

this contrast, um, and you first feel regret. What is it that you were regretting?

A: Getting on the treadmill that led me to this spot, because I don't think I belong here. I don't think I fit in with the mission of the university or the mission of the department. And I regret making the decision to take this on.

Q: Ok, so you, at that point you were regretting coming here. Or--

A: No, not so simplistically, (uh huh) because...it's more regretting in how I ended up here than being here. 'Cause being here's--has been a very positive experience. I mean in terms of the job part of it, very rewarding, and different from other experiences. Um, no, it's not so much that. I mean it's really difficult to explain. It's just, in the end it would it would mean that I wouldn't have ended up here, and I think that's why it appears that I regret coming here. (ok) But that's not the part that I regret. The part that I regret is doing things in the time period that I did it, the kinds of things that I did, the way in which I did it, that--the inevitable conclusion was ending up in Tennessee. But this is fine. Of all the places to end up this one was alright.

Q: Ok. So, in this situation, uh, you know, when you speak of regret, um, you speak of choices, and so there are two, maybe more. But there are these alternatives, there's a decision. Uh, and then, in some instances you, um, imagine how things would have been had you followed the other route. Um, um, that you can imagine the means, or you can imagine the ends, the outcome of of those decisions. Um, in this case you're saying that what you regret was the means. Um, what was the alternative means that would have been more favorable, that would have been the right one. Or or do you not imagine a scenario?

A: I'm not sure I have that figured out yet. I mean one thing was, that's tangible, is I wish I would have taken longer to write my dissertation, no matter where I ended up and I [forgot?] all the other choices.

Q: And and why is that? You spoke of costs, um, you can identify costs. What were--

A: Well, part of the cost of writing it fast was my husband went through a very traumatic experience that year, and so on one hand I have this voice saying get through it as fast as you can so we can get out of this situation. And on the other hand feeling like I should probably just not be

writing the dissertation or taking it a lot slower so that I could help meet his needs. So in--on a personal level, I think it, I mean, it was just so time-consuming, and so emotionally consuming and all those things, that I was unable to be there for him. And that's a real regret. I think I could have been, had I chosen to be. On the--

Q: That strikes me as ironic because you also say that you went quickly also for him.

A: Right. It was kind of a lose-lose, heh heh, (heh heh) [ ], as compared to the win-win. Uh, yeah, I mean I felt that. I mean I didn't feel like there was a--and I'd look back on it I'm not sure that there would have been a right choice there. I don't know. I really am unsure.

Q: And yet you do regret

A: I regret that I didn't take the time. (mhm) And I--[ ] we probably would still be getting separated, um, but it would be for different--that experience would would not be--I would have done the right thing. I would have been there for a person instead of making a decision for myself, which ironically enough wasn't for myself. I mean it gets very confusing. On the other hand, professionally, I think the decision to take two years to write it would have been very rewarding as well, because I would have had a manuscript that was more--more useful to me, more worthwhile, in the job I'm in now or even in any other job. 'Cause I enjoyed writing it, I enjoyed what I was working with, and I would have really enjoyed having another year. Uh, not that I can't work on it now but it would be a better document than--I would feel better about it. I would have been better--I mean it just would have been a rewarding experience professionally, as well as giving me some time to be a human being, and deal with the other dimensions of my life. Because that's one thing I really gave up in graduate school is this whole other personal side. I just think I suspended it. I don't even think I thought about wants, needs, desires, any of those things, on a personal level. And that that's just unacceptable. But I didn't know that at the time. This is something I've just realized.

Q: Um, it's something you just realized though the though the regret was has been there for a long time. Um, does the regret arise again in realizing that? (heh heh) Uh, you know, I'm just trying to think of at what times you experience the regret about anything in particular [ ]--

A: On that situation the regret is very current. It's a looking back kind of regret. It was not a regret at the time. I mean I don't recall thinking I'm suspending my

personal life (right) for this degree. I don't ever recall thinking of it that way.

Q: Ok. Um, you mention one time, perhaps the first time that regret arose about that was when you first moved here. Um, and you say very recently you've begun to recognize certain other sacrifices or losses that you had in going through it in that way. (mhm) When you, as you became aware of those very recently, did that also bring to mind the regret? Or is the regret, you know, just like a constant pervasive thing or, when does, when did the regret come to you?...I mean, there may not be particular triggers of it, but

A: At times when I'm really feeling the loss, when I think that it--I wouldn't have to be feeling what I'm feeling now if I'd made other decisions. Um, and the other time--and this is in a less sad way and a more intellectual kind of experience of regret--when I realize that I'm gonna have to take on some responsibilities or take responsibility for having made those changes. Um, for instance, in having to move to a new apartment, having to buy a new car or a new used car, or buying furniture or whatever, you know, the abs--the mundane aspects of being separated. In those moments a real sense of intellectual regret. I mean it's really punctuated by having to do these things, and realizing that, I mean it really brings it home to you in a real tangible, physical way. (mhm) Um, thinking forward is a real time of regret for me. I have real trouble thinking of a future without regret of the past.

Q: Can you give me an example of that? ([sigh])...If you'd (I can, no [tearful]) rather not. Ok. Perhaps now we should stop, ok? (thanks) Alright. Um, I really appreciate your time, and uh, I I found it really valuable, and uh, you know, these interviews can be challenging, uh, and uh, I hope, I hope that uh, it was uh, interesting, maybe enriching too in some way. Um

A: Yeah, it is. I mean it's an interesting word, I think. An interesting set of emotions, and um, 'cause it seems to me the--one of the kind of unique things about regret is that it involves an intellectual contribution as well as an emotional one. It's not purely an emotional feeling. Because for me it does involve kind of an analytical dissection of experience, and choices and all of that kind of stuff. So it's kind of this, um, an interesting thing. And when it's sadness it's just an emotion. (uh huh, uh huh) Or whatever. So I think it's a, an interesting [ ].

Q: Well um, uh, I appreciate it.

APPENDIX D

SITUATIONS

#1
1.(1,2) "should've paid attention in math classes"
2.(4,3) "when somebody dies...the things you could have said," "that you would've liked to have shared"(4,4)
3.(4,3) "you have children...sometimes you react from the heart, not from the head," get angry
2b.(5t) "should've gone to" a party for dying friend, "would have made more of an effort to see him"(4,4)
4.(13,1) "not having done that" "turn[ed] around and walk[ed] out" at own wedding

#2
1.(1,1) "wasn't more mature...understanding of the cancer process," "able to understand her perspective"(1,2)
1b.(2t) "wish that I had spent more time with her [aunt]," "wish I had shared more"(4,1)
2.(6,1) "in relationships with men...not saying what I felt"

#3
1.(1,1) "got a puppy"
2.(7,3) "having let the relationship continue"

#4
1.(1,2) "my decision to go into journalism" "should have been an art major with a concentration in photography"(1,3)
1b.(2,1) "not going ahead and applying to MFA programs"
2.(10) not going to Ohio State
3.(16) ending relationship with, letting go of, boyfriend who married another woman

#5
1.(1,4) "let my gerbils dehydrate"
2.(1,4) "boyfriend gave me a diamond ring and I lost it"
3.(1,4) "general feeling about the relationship" "sorry...that it didn't work out better"(6,1) "that all the mistakes had been made"(13,9) "that it was over"(13,9)
3b.(4,4) "not telling him, 'don't buy the truck'" "I wasn't talkative enough"(5,6) "we weren't communicating really well"(12t)
3c.(11,4) "being financially dependent on him"

#6
1.(1,2) "my whole adolescent stage"
1b.(1,2) "quitting high school"
2.(1,3) "interactions between parents and myself"
3.(15,2) "my daughter...when she was real young, I was still doing drugs...even when I was pregnant"

#7 1.(1,1) "deciding to take someone else's name when I got married"
2.(1,1) "giving a B+ as a final grade..instead of an A"
3.(1,1) "the way in which I got my Ph.D., the amount of time doing it"
4.(6t) "not getting out of this Baptist school"
5.(8) that father moved family around so much

#8 1.(1) making the decision to trust roommate
2.() closed-mindedness of the past; "didn't give myself enough options"(5,2)
2b.() deciding on major
2c.() not knowing or understanding more about major field; "why haven't I put more effort into what I'm doing"(4,2)
2d.(20b) why didn't I think of the more active, independent approach to studying before

#9 1.(1,1) "not living alone before I got married"
2.(1,1) "not studying in high school"
3.(1,1) "getting pregnant in 19--" "being pregnant"(4,7) "having to make that decision"(5t)
3b.(4,6) "had an abortion"

#10 1.(1,1) "we both lost our virginity together"
2.(1,1) "started to drink"
3.(1,1) "one time I smoked pot"
4.(1,1) "my parents...lying to them...not honoring them"
5.(1,1) "school, during those times I didn't put much into it"
6.(13,2) "should have talked to someone" after missing class before exam

#11 1.(1,1) "marriage, first or second"
1b.(1) not getting out of, or delaying, second marriage
2.(1,1) "did not go away to college"
3.(12,1) "that I didn't communicate"
3b.(13,2) "we [daughter] weren't able to establish some kind of rapport"
4.(15,2) "spanked a kid perhaps a little too hard" "verbally abused a child"
3c.(15,2) "not sending that card, it's not saying I love you"
5.(16,1) not "helping someone who needs some help"

PIL 1.(1,3) "buying that [color car]" "having bought that car"(1,4)
2.(6,6) "wrote a letter...to my parents" "having sent that letter"

APPENDIX E

SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

*defines/captures/exemplifies regret
**context of nonregret or reducing regret

UNCERTAINTY/INDECISION

I had some hesitancy going into the purchase (PIL,1,5)
*I probably had some second thoughts (PIL,1,5)
there was some question in my mind and I went ahead anyway even though I wasn't sure that I was doing the best thing (PIL,4,4)
competing notions I had at the time the decision was made (PIL,4,4)(decision)
I'm not really sure what to do (PIL,5t)
maybe that's not such a wise thing to do...I never really resolve that doubt (PIL,5t)
an interoffice memo of resentment (PIL,6,5)(blame self)
I chose to..kinda..disavow what..hesitation I had (PIL,7t)
*having not paid attention to my own doubts and hesitations (PIL,8,1)
I did not pay attention to the doubt that I had (PIL,8,2)
it would have been better to have...dealt with all my doubts before so much more was involved (1,13,1) I wasn't quite sure (1,13,2) if I'd stopped and addressed the issues that I was having questions about (1,13,2)
a lot of fear on my part and probably on his part of what might happen if we really did talk about these things ...an unreadiness (2,8,2)
it's hard for me to decide (4,1,3) I was trying to weigh (4,3b)(alternative/choice) I weighed things (4,11,1) (alt/choice)
I was kind of unsure if..I was good enough (4,2,3)
you start to wonder...is there something wrong with the way I'm doing this (6,7,3)
felt on one hand this real need to support..the department's ...views of grading--'cause...that's a real difficult thing to decide--and my own desire (7,1,3)(decision) (what I want)
part of being the new kid is learning how to belong and learn to be accepted. But also part of doing that is maintaining some sense of self...an odd split personality kind of situation...always this kind of toss-up (7,5b)
it's hard either way...it's kind of short-term easy..a lot of the decisions I make, and the long term not (7,16,3)
on one hand I have this voice saying get through it as fast as you can...and on the other hand (7,18b)(choice) it was kind of a lose-lose (7,19,1)
doubting your own judgment (8,1,1)
if I had..a strong attitude about something in the past, and

now I'm questioning the strong attitude...then I get the regret that..I was that I was that strongly for or against something (8,13b)
she sensed that I was still very much in doubt (11,1,2)
not knowing my own mind (11,1,2)(know/aware)

CONSEQUENCES
then had to invest a lot of money in upkeep and wound up having almost no equity built up in it (PIL,1,4)
it was gonna stretch me financially (PIL,1,5)
had I not bought the car I wouldn't've had all these subsequent expenditures (PIL,2,3)
when I considered how much money I'd spent over the year in insurance (PIL,3,1)
the continual outgo of money (PIL,2t)
the monthly payment was too high, the insurance was too high, or it would've been nice to have money for other little things (PIL,2,4)
for that money I could've...paid off a lot of other bills or I could have..had this in addition to a..less expensive car (PIL,3,1)
the extra effort that I have to make that I know I wouldn't have had to make if I had been more on the ball earlier in my life (1,2,4) you're having to work twice as hard (1,3,2)
if I had done that, maybe things would have turned out better for us (1,13,2)
and so, consequently...it just kind of faded away (2,6,2) might have meant an even better friendship between us (2,11,2)
you dummy...you could be doing that (4,2,2)(blame self) you could be..shooting slides (4,6,1) this could be me (4,7t) I could be coming here every day (4,8,1)
I saw what I didn't get (4,20b)(know/aware)
if I hadn't done that, this wouldn't be happening (6,1,5)
it has affected my life..up until now...even in the present (6,2t)
if I'd gone on, would I have changed...become a different person (6,4t) maybe it woulda been..a phase that I woulda gotten over, instead of...running around with older people and getting more involved in drugs...maybe I just would have..snapped out of it...maybe I could have been productive (6,5b) maybe at 28 years old I would have been in a career instead of struggling to get through college (6,6,1)
life would be easier if I was at home and going through high school (6,6b) things would be different now (6,7,1) my whole life would be different. I wouldn't have got married, no doubt...especially the person that I married (6,7,1)
I wouldn't be doing this right now (6,9,4)
how in the world can I go to college when I..didn't even

finish the tenth grade (6,9,5)
what if when she turns eight (6,15,2) in two years from now am I gonna learn she has a learning disability...am I gonna find out that she can't read? (6,16,2)
am I doing this right? And if you don't, what are the consequences (6,16b) what effect does that have on her now (6,17,2)
that's really important later on...those kinds of things pay off (7,2t)
wondering if it would have saved me some..trouble..later on (7,8,1)
how it can set off an entire chain of events (7,9,2)
I think childhood would have been a very different experience for me...I would be a different person (7,12t)
I wouldn't have to be feeling what I'm feeling now if I'd made other decisions (7,19b)(decision;choice)
I could know this if I had put forth the effort (8,4,3)
if I had thought about the things that I'm thinking about now for the past 19 years, where would I be right now? (8,17,2)
I wish I'd taken more complicated things. I would've known more now (9,7b) I could be graduating right now. I could have already graduated (9,8,5)
we thought it was something we needed...but...that's what broke our relationship up (10,1b) about a week later I..started really regretting it 'cause I knew it was a problem in our relationship...we didn't act the same around each other (10,2,3)(when it hit) it changed our feelings after that moment (10,4,4)
how could we go to church knowing we did something like this (10,3,1) now if I have a relationship with someone... how am I gonna tell her that I've already lost it (10,3,2)
I think if we'd have waited..we could have waited till we got married, and that would just made it all much better (10,5,2)
how am I gonna go back and...talk to them and invite 'em to Campus Crusade...when they know "hey man, you were out there smoking pot" (10,7,1)
I'm gonna get killed one day (10,10t)
that was a class I could have made an A in, and now I probably got a D in (10,13,2)
be different if something happened...nothing really bad ever happened out of that (10,16,1)
I tend to look too much to the past and it clouds an awful lot of what I do in the present (11,4t)
I look back and say "gee, if I hadn't gone that route maybe I would have done some these things back then...and not have some of the pain I'm currently bearing around as a result (11,5b)(look back)(alt/choice)
every time an experience comes along where you open..up to

new experiences that seem beneficial to you or that you like, you look back on that moment and say "gee, I should've done this then" (11,6t)(should have done) (look back) going back to school is one of 'em...some personal relationships that I've become..involved with ...has opened me up (11,6,1)

if I weren't here I wouldn't have to put up with this turmoil in the house (11,10t)(when it hit) I wouldn't have to worry about checking..in at midnight...I could just do whatever I felt like doing and see what I would do (11,10,1)

FEEL REGRET WHEN.../TRIGGERS

might've come right at the moment of purchase (PIL,1,5)

when..it required major major work (PIL,1,5) when I considered how much money I'd spent over the year in insurance (PIL,3,1) whenever I thought about my finances (PIL,3,3)

it was just a spontaneous type thing (1,6,2) probably it was instantaneous (1,7,2) I was aware of it immediately (1,13,2)

It has to be after you've made the decision (1,15,2) the regret always comes after the action (1,16,3)

when I saw the look on my oldest daughter's face (1,17,3)

even when I was staying with her...I think it struck me then (2,3b) came after I got some insight (2,5,2)

I made the choice thinking that I could fulfill a responsibility, realized later that I couldn't and at that point I felt the regret (3,1,3) (alternative/choice)(expect/hope)(know/aware)

when I decided I was gonna fill out the journalism papers rather than the art papers (4,3,4)(alternative/choice) (decision) I'll pick up some of my old photography textbooks (4,8,3) when I told my father (4,13,1)

when I read the write-up about the wedding (4,18,3)

when I don't do real well (6,1,5) they would talk about.. high school stuff (6,1,6) the fun part of high school (6,2t) there was a lot of seeing him do these things (6,2t) ever since I went back to school...a lot of times it comes up (6,2,2) when stuff is talked about in class...(6,2,3)

they were talking about spring break, and going to Daytona ...but I didn't experience that with them, so I felt left out (6,3t) I went to my ten year class reunion ...I felt real isolated..like..I didn't belong there (6,3,1)

I see 14-year-olds now (6,4t)

filling out job applications...or..I've had several good jobs, and not been able to go any farther (6,9,4)

I have my own child, I find myself doing these terrible things that my father did (6,10b)

sometimes I can just be in the same room with my dad

(6,11,1) it's usually when he's displaying fatherly type things (6,12,1)
when you have lots of..child psychology classes...I leave those classes feeling oh so bad...if she has an ear infection..I'm flipping out thinking "oh, it's because of that" (6,15,2) when she makes her D's backwards (6,16,2)
the moment I turned the grade in (7,1,3)
when I went out to get a job, because I really wanted to be a journalist, and..it just wasn't possible with the kind of degree I had (7,8b)(post-decisional implications)
when I went to go get a passport...and really stumbling over what name I wanted in there (7,13,2)
I started studying a lot of feminist perspectives (7,15,1)
when I started unloading the truck here...it started when I..first came to work (7,17,1)
at times when I'm really feeling the loss (7,19b)
in having to move to a new apartment, having to buy a new car...or buying furniture (7,20t)(post-decision)
whenever trust is broken (8,1,3)
all of a sudden it hit me (8,10b) I thought about how much better I was doing, and how bad I was doing before, and why I was doing so bad before...it was halfway through and then I saw that I was doing better, and that I could do better (8,11,1)(know/aware)
when I have to consult my husband (9,1,7)
I'm taking a biology class this..semester (9,7,5) probably during the lectures, when she talks about things that most people seem to know (9,7b)
when I think I'm gonna be..29 or 30 years old before I get my undergraduate (9,8,5)
probably not until I went back to school...didn't affect me...up until I came back to school (9,9,2)
when anybody says anything about her..if I see her (10,4,1) I go back and look at a lot of things that she gave me (10,5,4)
after I really stopped..drinking, I started regretting it more (10,9,1) the key element was..when I got back with the group (10,10,1)
**it's starting to go away because I've done forgot about it. No one says anything about it any more...it doesn't ever even come up any more (10,12,2)
I suppose it was the normal or abnormal disagreements perhaps that come about in any relationship (11,3,1)
things that I've wanted to do for a long period of time that I suddenly am doing (11,5b)
it began to surface then, 'cause I went back and said..you once started back this road a long time ago...and..now you're kinda doing the same thing again (11,8,2)
particularly when things at home got a little..unnerving (11,9b)

regret that we weren't able to establish some kind of rapport...triggered most recently by what I felt was one of the first times that I'd heard or read anything from her that...was very direct (11,13,2)
we understand one another. It's nice to know that happens. And so that in turn has triggered some regrets (11,14b)
that triggers regret. Why can't we talk the way we do in class? (11,15,1)

BLAME SELF/RESPONSIBILITY
*what a fool I had been to buy this car (PIL,1,5)(decision)
**maybe I could've made a better business deal (PIL,2,5)
why did I put myself in a position (PIL,4,1)
why did I ever buy the car (PIL,4,2)
self-directed anger (PIL,6,5)(bracket?)
I..relinquish some control in a sense and I'm still the one making the decision. I'm still responsible(PIL,9,1)
you've...made it through your own actions this hard (1,3,2)
regretted that you handled yourself in that way (1,4,3)
no one else was responsible, and knowing that I had made a mistake, and no one else was gonna get me out of it (3,3t) I was responsible for the way things were (3,6,1) that you have control ultimately over the decision (3,6,3)
I was in some part responsible for the feelings...of another person (3,7,3)
the regret's not going away..maybe because I'm not accepting full responsibility (3,11,3)
look what you've done (4,17b) I'm such an idiot (4,17b) how could you be so stupid (4,19,1)
that feeling of having fucked up...so angry with myself (5,1,5)
I felt like what happened was my fault (5,2,1) I really beat up on myself about it...you're a terrible person(5,2,2)
the feeling of having screwed up (5,4,2) I was irresponsible enough to lose it the way I did (5,4,3) the feeling of having failed him somehow (5,4,3) I feel responsible for the mistake (5,4,5) I had a responsibility and I evaded it (5,5,2) I felt like I had made mistakes...how much of it was my fault (5,13t)
I didn't stop him...I wasn't talkative enough (5,5,6)
I should take responsibility for some portion of that (5,12t) I still forgive myself...I'm not...blaming myself any more (5,12,5)
**I felt like, "it's my choice, I'm in control, I made a decision (5,15t)(choice, decision)
it was all my fault (6,15b) if anything ever happened to her, whether it was a direct result of that or not I would always think it was (6,16,3)
**I don't feel culpable for it (7,7,3) the regret's a lot less. (7,7,3)
*To me regret is something that comes out of taking

responsibility for having done the wrong thing(7,7b)
the way I took on the responsibility was thinking it was my fault because I was unable to meet the demands of the situation (7,12b-13t)
when I realize that I'm gonna have to...take responsibility for having made those changes (7,20)(when it hit)
regret in setting myself up...that I let myself get into that kind of situation (8,1,5)
you could..say "oh yeah, it was the environment that I was in and it made me do bad," but..basically it was my attitude (8,11b)
I felt like..I had done something just terrible...and I could never forgive myself for (9,4b) the reason I regretted it was because I felt shame and guilt..that I'd done a horrible thing (9,7,3)
some mistakes I shouldn't have made (10,8t)(should have done)
my standards had changed when they didn't need to change (10,9t)
I failed the group, and I failed the Lord..except I didn't need to (10,10,1)
I was mad at myself (10,15,1)
it wasn't the point of I...got a D...I regretted more the fact that I didn't get to study (10,15,2) it's like I never worried about the outcome..I worried about what caused it (10,15b)
you have nobody to blame but yourself (11,3,1)
I'm trying to blame others but I think I really know the responsibility was on my shoulders (11,8b)(blame others)
why haven't you found someone like this before? Why didn't you go looking for that before (11,14b)(should have done)

KNEW/SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER

especially after having one already...I'd had another [car] before this and...I knew that it...required a great deal of upkeep (PIL,1,5)
in some way I did have an awareness that something like this would have been possible (PIL,4,2)(knowledge/awareness)
why didn't I listen to that side of the internal argument (PIL,4,2)(ambivalence/doubt)
why didn't I listen to those other voices (PIL,5t) (ambiv/doubt)
chose to minimize things that I should have paid attention to (PIL,9,1)(decision)
I had some awareness of the risks involved but chose to... disregard them when I made the actual decision to buy it (PIL,6,1)(knowledge/awareness)(decision)
when I wrote the letter I had some hint of awareness that... maybe they're really not gonna appreciate this (PIL,7t) (know/aware)

why didn't you listen to the...competing voice (PIL,7t) (ambiv/doubt)
it wouldn't have been the first time that I had..tried to communicate with them and had my point..completely misunderstood (PIL,7,2)
I should have know better by listening to the other people (3,2b)
I had even thought about that, and I just didn't do it (5,9,6) failed to listen to that (5,10t)(know/aware)
he should have known better (5,11,5)(blame others)
the regret comes in knowing that at the time it was just really clear what I should do...it was very very clear (7,4,1)
to the point that I realized there was another option, and I...physically could have done the other choice (7,7,2)(know/aware)(choice) I knew at the time (7,7,3)
we both believed that we should wait till we get married (10,2,3)
everybody makes mistakes..but there's some mistakes you really didn't need to make (10,7,3)
before that Thursday I talked and I thought some of 'em had like copies of test from..old people from last semester ...and I didn't really think much about it (10,13,2) (know/aware)
I should've avoided the same type of thing (11,7,1)

NOTHING I COULD DO
the continual outgo of money that I...couldn't control (PIL,2t) being able to do nothing about; the bad move ...was made in the past and there's no way to..do anything about that, it is utterly outside of..my control, I'm helpless (PIL,2t)
*not being able to change the bad decision (PIL,2,1) (decision)
I now have no other option (PIL,4,1)
I was...powerless to take back the letter (PIL,7,4)
**the regret doesn't seem to be quite as bad, if you knew that..there was really nothing you could do (1,3,2) (know/aware)
acknowledge that it can't be changed (1,4,2) now you can't do that (1,4b)
there's no turning back...everything's prescribed (4,3,2)
I knew it was final (4,5t) it was too late then (4,5b)
I told my father so that made it more or less final (4,13,3)
oh gosh this is final (4,18,3)
wasn't my decision now. It was out of my control (4,20,3) it was just something I was gonna have to deal with... there's nothing I can do (4,24,2)
looking back...you can't go back and change it (5,1,5) (looking back)
it was really irreplaceable (5,1,7)
it couldn't be helped (5,6,1)

regret at my impotence about the whole thing, the fact that I cannot do anything about it...it's just something that cannot be helped (5,13,9)
you can't recapture what was good (5,14,3)
hopeless, 'cause..you never can do that. It's not like something that can be redone. It's done, it's over with, and it can never be experienced again...you can never go back and..experience it like you would if you did it originally (6,2,4)(opportunities lost)
I felt like it was impossible, or it would be a major effort to change the grade (7,1,3)
how permanent (7,9,2) the past is just there (7,9b) I can't change that (7,10t)
now I'm thinking of all the paperwork that would be required to go back to my..real name...because now I'm carrying a part of this person in a real permanent kind of way (7,13b)
there was no possibility for me to go all the way back... regret at being unable to do that (7,16,2)
#sometimes I think that I may have to do that some time. I may have to go back, not go back but..live..alone for a little while (9,1,4)
there was nothing I could do to change the, that's the way it was (9,4,1) there's nothing I can do..to work through how I feel about it (9,6b) there's..no answer to that, for me (9,7,1)
I don't know what else other than..to accept the sadness...I don't think I can change the sadness (9,7,3)(accept)
I know I'm never gonna get her back (10,5,4)(when it hit)
I've got all the copies to the test now..but I regret it so bad that I didn't get that (10,15,2)
you just can't go back (11,1,2)
#at this point in time I'm kinda doing the very same that I..would have done then. Or should--might have done then (11,1b)
the permanency of marriage relationship made me kind of rue that day (11,2,2)
#now I'm doing that very thing (11,7,2)
I've wasted too much time...trying to go back...you can't undo the past. Way leads on to way (11,18)

**ACCEPTANCE
*I must simply accept the loss (PIL,2,2)(loss)
that's done, no use fretting about it (PIL,3,3)
it's done and...nothing can be done about it (PIL,3,4)
writing it off as something not worth fretting about since..there was nothing I could do about it (PIL,3,6)
that's just the way my parents are (PIL,8b) no control (PIL,8b)
I don't regret things that can't be changed (1,2,2) that's just the way it's gonna be so you have to accept it (1,10,1) you have to...either put those feelings...in

the back of your mind or toss 'em completely just so you can free yourself to..proceed (1,10,4)
you gotta forget about it (4,17b)
this is just part of life...of being human (5,8,3) the closure is forgiving yourself...accepting...that this is part of life (5,8,7)
I've given up now...took me a long time to give up (5,12b)
accepting a different kind of loss...that people may not approve or like decisions that I've made (7,1b-2t)
there's nothing I can do about it...it's something I've just had to accept...it doesn't mean that I don't regret it ...there's just no options with that (9,4,4)
when I realized that there wasn't anything I could have done about it at that point, then it's a little bit easier to accept (9,9t)(know/aware)

FEELINGS
vivid recollection (PIL,1,5); dramatic (PIL,1,6); intense, acute (PIL,3,1); nagged at me (PIL,3,1); twinge of regret (PIL,3,3)
when I think of regret I think of pain (1,3,1) longing... sorry (1,3,1) nagging sense (1,3,2) sad feelings (1,12b) panic (1,13b) longing, aching (1,14,3)
general feeling, sort of always present that I wish we communicated better (2,8,1)(wishing)
feeling of unfreedom, of not...being able to do it (2,9,1) crippling sense of not being able (2,9,2)
I think about it a lot (4,2,3) sometimes I wonder...if I made the right decision (4,11b)
the oddest feeling I ever had, it was almost like my chest had sunk in (4,17b) somebody had taken something out of me..having trouble breathing (4,18,3) get hit in your solar plexus...lose your breath (4,20t)
a happy time that quickly got sad...like being in the clouds and then suddenly ground (5,1,5)
I thought about that every day (5,2,2)
a real sobering feeling (5,3,2)
that experience of <u>shame</u>, it almost feels like a stabbing pain in your liver...a hara-kiri feeling...I would get all worked up...this..gut-wrenching feeling (5,6,4) you just want to rip your guts out, you feel so bad (5,6,5)
the bitterness of it...rue (5,7,4) it had lent a bitter taste to my life (5,7,5)
the regret kind of fueled me (5,12b)
involves an intellectual contribution as well as an emotional one...an analytical dissection of experience, and choices...when it's sadness it's just an emotion (7,20,1)
you just feel so useless..like you've wasted everything (8,16,3)
I feel sad about that (9,3b)

it just felt so much like something pulled out of me (10,2,2) it just like rips something out of me (10,4t)
the regret made me so mad (10,14,3) I could just kick myself on the rear end..I moped around all day (10,15,1)
it still causes me some pain (11,1,2)
there's always that side of you that wonders if, and in my case the wondering if I've never been able to dismiss. It's turned into a regret (11,1b)
my whole life dwells on that..one turn in the road (11,11,2)
something nagged me as I passed him by, kept nagging me (11,16b)

KNOWLEDGE
**when I went into something believing full well that it was the best thing to do...even if it turns out poorly (PIL,4,4)(done my best)
**if when I go into it I know I've considered as much information as is available to me and I'm doing the best I can in making the decision (PIL,5t)(decision)
**went into it with my eyes open (PIL,5,2)
**I knew there would probably be times when I might wish I hadn't bought it (PIL,5,2)(wishing)
**bought it knowing that, yes, it was going to be something of a burden (PIL,9,1)
**I knew this going into it...I understood from the front end there was gonna be a good side and a bad side (PIL,5,2)
deliberately less aware (PIL,6,4)(should have known better)
**I knew that the funeral was more than I could deal with (1,8b)
was I listening, or was I prepared to hear (1,3b)
knowing that I was walking into that of my own free will (1,13b)(blame self) if I'd a known that his time in this world was so short (1,4b)(expect/hope) we all knew he was dying (1,5t) the decision I made...was probably more selfish than I acknowledged at the time (1,6,3) I think part of me knew I should have been going to this (1,7b)(should have known better)(should have done) especially when I knew that he was going to die (1,8t) (blame self)
something I couldn't dare admit to myself (1,14b)
I know better than to yell at them all the time (1,17,2) (blame self)
it was obvious that there was all this other tension underneath (2,6,2)
I knew that intellectually but...I couldn't act on that knowledge. I didn't know how to act on the knowledge (2,12,1)
when I got here I realized that I really didn't have the time (3,1,1)
I didn't really listen to that or want to listen (3,2b)
I wasn't willing to admit that I had made a..wrong choice

(3,4,1) even though I knew that deep down (3,4,2)
I knew full well...that it was gonna be hurtful for him (3,7,3)
as much as I'd want to put the blame on the other person..I knew that I had still responsibility there, and I was accepting my part (3,11,3)(blame self)
I tried not to think about it (4,5t)
I knew what I'd done (4,19,1)
now I can see that when I was growing up there weren't adolescent treatment centers...I didn't understand that (6,10b)
he doesn't know how to do anything different (6,11t) I truly don't think that he does it intentionally (6,13,3)
realizing..he's doing the best he can (6,11,1)
a loss of...knowing self, in making a decision (7,2,3)
it didn't occur to me I was doing anything wrong (7,8,2)
I have trouble imagining what my life would be like at all, if I had made that decision..I have no concept of what that would mean (7,8b)(post-decisional implications)
they had all the knowledge available to them at the time to know it was wrong (7,12,1)
I didn't know that at the time. This is something I've just realized (7,19,2)
I did close my mind to the fact that this is not the only thing that I could do that I could do differently than anybody else (8,8,2)(alt/choice) I could have at least been open...if I had known there was a different way. I just shut myself off (8,8b)(blame unclear)
you have ways of getting around the cognitive dissonance.. one, discarding the information...that's what I used to do all the time but now I'm saying no (8,13,2)
**enough wisdom...came with a new attitude to know that I could not have...reached the new attitude without having the old attitude (8,14,3)(acceptance)
any time I do something completely new...first there's that regret (8,16,3)
the process of working through the feelings, of...not being ok with what I did, took a long time. But..the actual awareness, hey, that's ok, was quick (9,6,5)
afterwards realized it's not something that we needed (10,1b) we just knew it wasn't right (10,2,2)
I started to realize this is something I..don't need to do (10,9b-10t)
when I got married, I realized I was in this a lot deeper than I..wanted to be (11,2,2)(what I want)
did I know I was getting into this? (11,3,1)

DID MY BEST

**I took my best shot and I did the best thing that I could think of at the time (PIL,4,4)
**done my best to look at all the sides(PIL,9,1)(know/aware)
**I did my best (1,3,2) when I push myself to the limit..

when I know that I've done the best that I can do, then I don't really regret it (1,9,1)
you did the best you could (1,10,1)
(NOT) when I know I could have done better, then there are some regrets (1,9,1) there was a better way to have done it, and a better way that I knew about (1,16,3) (know/aware) you're too tired to give it your best all the time (1,17,2)
sometimes you regret that even your best is sadly lacking (1,16,3)
I simply didn't know how to do it better (2,8,1)
simply did not know how to address the issue (2,6,3)
it wasn't something that I could handle (3,1,1) this puppy needed more attention than I could give her...I wasn't able to fulfill the responsibility (3,2,1) I really couldn't have known better because I had never experienced a situation like that before (3,3t)
I did my best, but I still regret it..that it didn't work (5,2,1)
(NOT) me not doing a very good job pulling my life together (5,2b)
**I did the best I could (5,15t)
I know that he's doing the best that he could (6,11t) your parents are doing the best they can (6,11t)
to have done what you thought was best (7,2,1)
at 19 I'm not sure that I can really blame myself (7,6b) (blame self) I did the best I could at that point (7,7,1)
I wasn't capable at that point in my life of going to college. I know that (9,8,5)(know/aware)

DECISION
I'm facing a decision (PIL,4,5)
impulsive decision (PIL,7t)
*?the regret is...a matter of...whatever specific decision was involved (PIL,8,1)
it was a selfish decision that I made (1,6,3)
my decision to come to graduate school (4,1,1) my decision to go into journalism...I decided that I wanted to be an art major (4,1,2)
I don't know if it's regret, because..I don't feel like that there was really a decision that I made (4,16,1) it has to be my decision (4,16,2)
it was partly my decision (5,5,2)
deciding to take someone else's name when I got married (7,1,1)
it was a real high cost to make that decision (7,16b) I regret making the decision to take this on (7,18,1)
if I made a bad decision, then I'd have regret (8,1,1)
what I regret is having to make that decision (9,5t)
**I accepted the fact that..I had an abortion, that that was the decision I made, there was nothing wrong with that

...there was no reason to condemn myself for the rest of my life. That's when I stopped regretting what I had done (9,6t)(accept)(responsible)

I feel sad that I had to make that decision...and I regret that it happened (9,7,3)

so at the time it wasn't much of a regret at all but it was an important decision (11,2,1) I regret that particular decision (11,3t)

it's just a point in time where you made a decision and that decision..has created some dissonance in your life, and if you can't erase the dissonance through the years, it's a major regret (11,4,1)

LEARNING

**that was a learning experience (PIL,4,4)(learning)

I've at least learned from that (1,2,2)

if you don't experience regret, then you're not gonna change your actions (1,10b) you have to have regret to grow (1,11,1)

if you hang on to the regret then it just immobilizes your options (1,14,1)([non]acceptance)

[the regret is] just a product of my own growth (2,4,4) if I had never gone through this growth period and examined myself, and become more self-aware, I don't even know if I would have regretted the way I behaved (2,5,2)

this experience has really..taught a lesson for me (3,3t)

I really don't regret that experience...because I learned from that..even though while I was in it I regretted it (3,4,1)

that...was the transition for me (5,3,1) right before then, I was...not real responsible...had no thoughts of the future (5,3,2)

it gives you a soberness that is kind of helpful (5,16,1) it just really brings out my human fallibility (acceptance?) and it keeps me from being quite so judgmental (5,16,2)

once you learn to do that then it becomes a little easier to make such decisions (7,2t) you learn to really clearly identify..what is your choice in a situation, and learn to follow on it (7,1,2)(choice)(what I want) I've learned the positive...situation of..doing what I want (7,2,1)

you have to have these little points of regret to be able to think about what you want to do in the future (8,14,3) if I hadn't've done it, it wouldn't have hit me right now...so I wouldn't have this experience to be able to use in the future (8,16,3)

I have to regret things I've done in the past, you have to admit that you were wrong..without it, you won't ever change (8,17,2)

all of a sudden it hit me that I was learning this stuff and why didn't I know it before (8,19b)

a lot of the regrets that I've had before caused me not to do some of the things I would regret now (10,16,2)
I just try and make this..communication business the touchstone for future endeavors in establishing contacts with people now (11,13,1)
that's the type of thing that now..I think I'm doing more of ...because I don't wanna pass that way...again..and say "gee, this is where I ignored someone one time who might've used my help (11,16,1)(when it hit)

CHOICES/POSSIBILITIES/OPTIONS
one is more in control when one is..sincerely considering all the...possibilities (PIL,6,4)
weighed the option (PIL,7t)
don't think it really had to be that way (1,2,2) something that could've been avoided (1,12b)
alls I could think of was reasons not to go (1,8t) maybe you ought to at least try to look at things from all angles before you make a decision (1,11,2)(decision) you have road A, road B, you choose road A (1,11,2)(decision) I regret that I didn't choose a mate that I could live with for the rest of my life (1,12,4)
that's really bothered me that I made the choice (3,1,1) regret that I had made a choice (3,2,4)
I was more afraid of taking a path like journalism (4,2,2)
on the other hand...I could have done both (4,2,3)(could've done)
if I had finished high school I would have taken a different route (6,7,1)
giving a B+...instead of an A (7,1,1)
*choosing between two difficult things, and making the wrong choice (7,2,2)
that was a true dilemma. I don't think either option was a very positive one (7,7,1)
*regret is a choice...a failed choice of some kind (7,7,1)
I could have done that with a degree from the other school. So at that point I think I started actually considering the possibilities (7,8b)
someone..has...at least two paths to choose from..and goes down one that's wrong (7,12,1)
it occurred to me that that was a possibility...I realized it was possible (7,15,3)
you have some choices. I can either learn to achieve...by these people's standards...or I could start dealing with what it is I wanted (7,17,1)(what I want)
I didn't give myself enough options, didn't open enough doors (8,5b)
now I'm thinking that..I could have done this or this or (8,8b)
there was a different way of thinking about things (8,11,1)
when I saw that the class was actually fun, or...that people new more about [profession] than I did...is saying...

there is a different way of doing it, that I have not looked at everything (8,18,1)(awareness)
**I've accepted that that's what I did, that's what I chose to do. I don't regret that (9,4,6)(acceptance)
we didn't even have to do it at that time (10,2,2)
I didn't need to go out and drink..I coulda went out and played football or something (10,7b) there's some other things I coulda done. I coulda asked someone out..I coulda went home, talked to my parents..I coulda tried to talk to my friends who didn't drink (10,8t) I chose the wrong decision (10,8b)
wanting to take another course (11,1,2) the road divided, Robert Frost poem...you take a path, and as the poem denotes, way leads on to way (11,1,2)
I did have that choice...she could have easily turned around and gone back...I probably should have waited a little longer (11,1,2)(should have done)
*that moment when I had an opportunity..presented itself, it's so dramatic because I can still see the road I'm coming to as I'm driving the car (11,2,2)
trying to...go back to that point and...speculate on what the other avenue might have led (11,18t)(post-decision)

EXPECTATION/HOPE
unexpected (PIL,1,5)
expectation that it would help them understand me better and that...they would have a better appreciation of who I really was (PIL,6b)
it was really more of a hope (PIL,7t)
you always thought you would have time to say (1,4,3) all the things that you were hoping to share (1,4b)
I thought that it would be the most wonderful thing (3,1,1) didn't have the foresight to see that it was gonna be.. difficult (3,2,4)
things didn't seem so hopeful any more...it was partly the hopefulness or the sunny outlook that I had (5,3,5)
I tried probably too hard to get it to work out...we tried to work it out again...there was still some hope that things would work out (5,12b) I've given up now...took me a long time to give up (5,12b)(acceptance) it's partly been hard because I haven't [?] let go of him (5,16,1)
I thought it was gonna be working a bunch of problems...I never thought it was gonna be definitions (10,13,2)

GROWING UP
a matter of whether or not I am competent to..make decisions for myself...am I a person who..is a big boy now and I can make wise decisions (PIL,8,3)
I regret that I wasn't more mature at the time (2,1,1) in the sense of being able to understand her perspective (2,1,2) that I didn't have that insight (2,2,2) we were

both so emotionally immature (2,6,3)(blame both)
you know how high school..is..and you want to do stuff that is really silly...I thought..you're such a fuddy-duddy ...he was always responsible..and at the time I wasn't (4,16b-17t)
my immaturity and my foolishness let it go (4,20,2)
it's like age or like experience (5,3,2)
this is just part of being a grown-up (5,8,3)
he was older. He could have given me a little more space (5,11,5)
I felt like I had become an adult when I felt regret (5,16,2) thrown out of the nest (5,16,5) you're on your own (5,16b) being on my own two feet (5,17t)
now that I'm older and I look back (6,11t)
there's this odd sense of satisfaction that you've been an adult in the process...doing the right thing by these adult standards...I'm growing up or..I'm learning (7,4,2) I learned that to grow up, to be an adult...is to be something that doesn't seem right (7,4b)
it's part of growing up (11,12t)

WISHING
*wishing perhaps that you did something differently (1,1,1)
wishing...that you did something differently (1,1,1) longing for something to be different (1,2,2) I wish that I could change it (1,4,2) if I had it to do all over again (1,6,2)
you can't sit there and wish things to be different (1,11,3)
wish that I had spent more time with her (2,2t) wish I had shared more (2,4,1)
I wished that things...that the situation was different (3,5,5)
wishing the responsibility was off of me (3,9,2)(blame others)
wish that I had gone that way (4,1,3)
sorry it happened..wish it didn't happen that way...wish it could have been different...easier...sorry...that it didn't work out better (5,6,1)
wishing I could go back and fix it...so that it hadn't happened (5,9,6) sorry that that relationship ended, and I didn't want it to (5,12,6)(what I wanted) wish I could go back and change (5,13,4) done it differently (5,18,6)
I wish I'd finished high school. I wish I'd gone ahead and ...experienced all those things (6,2,3)
wish I had paid attention to him or respected him enough to listen (6,13,2)
I wish I had done that much earlier (7,2t)
*wishing that you had made the other choice (7,2,2)
I wish I would have taken longer to write my dissertation (7,18,3)(should have done)
it just makes me feel good whenever I do that and it's like

I wish I had done this before (8,19,1)
I wish that I had lived by myself (9,2,5) I wish I didn't have to ask somebody where to put my furniture (9,2b)
I wish it hadn't happened (9,3b)
I wish I could change that. I wish I could go back, where I would not have to ever make a decision like that(9,7,1)
I wish I had studied in high school (9,7,5) I wish I'd paid attention, I wish I..hadn't taken such..easy courses... I wish I remembered this stuff (9,7b)(blame self)
I wish I'd already had this class...five years ago...instead of now (9,8,2)
I wish I would have never did it (10,1,1)
I wished I had..taken that opportunity back then when given (11,2,1)
I wished I'd gone away (11,9b)
questions you wished you had asked...the first time out and that you're now asking (11,12b)(s.t. can be done)
you wished you had a second chance not to do again (11,15b) (nothing can be done)

SHOULD HAVE DONE

should've paid attention in math classes (1,1,2) you could have done something about this (1,3,2) the things that you could have said (1,4,3) it's something I should have done and I know that (1,8,1)(know/aware) being given an opportunity out that..maybe I should've used (1,13,2)
now, if I had it to do over again, I would have done differently (2,1,1)
I regret...not saying what I felt or...thought (2,6,1)
that's what I should have done (4,1,2) I knew that that wasn't the path I should take (4,4,1) (know/aware) (alt/choice)
thinking back to that time when I could have changed my mind (4,8,5)(alt/choice?)(decision)
shouldn't have been so rude (4,19,4)
I should have done what I felt was best (7,1,3)(what I want)
I think I should have worked against that (7,17t)
why haven't I put more effort into..what I'm doing (8,4,2)
I should have done this my first year (8,6,1)
maybe I should...what a waste though..I should have done that five years ago (8,19,1)
I feel like I should have done (9,4,4)
there's a lot of things I could've done to be better equipped to deal with what's going on now (9,7,5)(blame self)(alt/choice)(post-decisional)
not honoring my parents like I should (10,1,1)
didn't do as well as I should've (10,1,1)
it wasn't something we shoulda done at the time (10,2,1) something we did not need to do (10,2,2) I would go out and get drunk when I didn't need to (10,6b)
I realize the next day I should have never done it (10,7t)

(aware)
I still regret that I should study a little more (10,13t)
I could have talked to people (10,13,2)(blame self)
things that you should have asked the first time that you never did (11,12b)
why didn't we work this route before (11,13b)(alt/choice)
not doing something you think you should do (11,15b) "why didn't I tell them that" or even...helping someone who needs some help (11,16,1)

BLAME OTHERS
if somebody could have made that information more relevant to me (1,1,2) I'm blaming the teacher (1,1,6) I regret that...society has...made it difficult for..women to.. excel professionally (1,2,2) I was brought up to think (1,2,3) it was never really pointed out to me (1,2,3)
I don't really know where I'm really placing the blame(1,3b)
it's something that..I and multiple others could have done something about (1,3b)(should have done)
it's easy to try to..put..the blame for choices that you made onto other people (3,8t) if the other person had presented the opportunity (3,8,3)
**I'm not responsible for another person's feelings (3,11,2) I think of wanting to blame someone else (3,11,2) I would want to put the responsibility...elsewhere(3,12t)
my father had..other ideas..He decided (4,1,2) put his foot down (4,1,3) I didn't do that...because mainly...my father (4,1,3)
no one could give me a straight answer...they always said "it's your decision (4,3,2)
he was one of those people that kind of rushes you (5,1,7)
I felt sort of like the universe had let me down, even though it was partly myself letting myself down (5,3,2) if I could only please the divine powers (5,10,1)
it wasn't entirely my fault that I couldn't find a job (5,11,4)
that was more his responsibility (5,12t)
I blame it on quitting high school (6,1,5)
because of..the people I was working with in the graduate program and their views of teaching...I felt compelled (7,1,2)
that I could allow someone to make a decision for me (7,4,3)
**that seems like something outside of myself, that I couldn't control, wasn't my fault. And so I don't feel regret (7,7,1)
**I'm really pissed off that my dad moved us so much...but I don't regret that because that was not my responsibility (7,8,2)
I think I did take responsibility..but..not for actually making the choice (7,13t)
any time you do bad, you put the blame on other things (8,11,2)

why did I let them talk me into doing this (9,5,3)
us breaking up caused me to..kinda change my..role...and a lot of my friends like to go out and so I began to... but then the peer pressure was just coming in (10,6,2) (justifications)
the only reason why I did it is because I'd had some alcohol in and peer pressure (10,7,1)(justification)
there's the things that I didn't need to do, but I think it's due to the fact that I was breaking up...that was the biggest thing that caused it (10,8b)
you start blaming the other person because you made the goof (11,6b) you regret...and then you try and throw the blame on somebody else (11,7t)
once again I can blame other people for a decision I made..I went close to home because my parents coldn't afford it ...but maybe what I really am saying is "you went close to home 'cause you were afraid to go out on your own (11,8,3)
if I were successful in blaming others..then I think the regret wouldn't be as great (11,9,2)

OPPORTUNITIES LOST
*pertains more to the opportunities...opportunities lost (1,5,4)(loss) a lost opportunity (1,8,1) missed opportunities (1,12b)
an opportunity missed (2,3,4)
I had that ready opportunity...and there was a sense of loss in turning it down (7,7,3)
I figure I would never feel the same for anybody else(10,4t)
I had an opportunity...at one stage of this relationship to actually get out of it and I think I did want to (11,1,2)(what I want)
you know you had the opportunity (11,3,1)
a sadness that I may never have this opportunity again (sense)...you're only going around this place once in life (11,16b)

LOOKING BACK
I regret my past (1,2,2) I regret things that could have been, but weren't, and that is looking towards the future (1,5,3)
I regret those things now looking back (2,6,1)
I would look back on the precise incidents (5,10,1)
**why look back (5,15)
I started really looking back (5,15t) looking at the past (5,15,2)
then I can go back and regret that (6,7,1)
now I look back on it and I go "God, [name], how could you have done that?" (6,11t)
I look back and even now regret that (7,1,2) and now looking back on it (7,4,2)
I look back on it and I think...why did you do that (7,14,1)

the regret is very current. It's a looking back kind of regret. It was not a regret at the time (7,19,3)
thinking forward is a real time of regret for me. I have real trouble thinking of a future without regret of the past (7,20t)(post-decisional implications)
I can look back and I can compare the two and I can see which one was better...but why did I feel so strongly about it then? And then you have regret that you stood up for that kind of thing back then (8,17,1) (alternatives)
I look back on that (9,1,1)
when I look back I felt like I didn't have a whole lot of choice (9,5,1)(choice)
I regret it in retrospect at least if not at the very time that decision (11,1,2)(when it hit)(decision)
*I think back to that time when I had the opportunity and you always wonder (11,1,2)
I look back on that moment and say yeah, that's a moment in my life when I had the opportunity and I blew it(11,3t) (lost opportunity) you look back and say yeah, that you had the chance...and you didn't take it (11,3,1)
regret and guilt...both...seem to me to be looking back type of..views of life instead of looking ahead to the possibilities (11,4t)
I keep thinking back, "gee, you might've met someone like this back then" (11,7,1) you look back and say "gee, what if" (11,11,1)

WHAT I WANTED
that's what I wanted to do (4,2,1)
I really wanted to go (4,10b)
conforming to a certain standard that was not my own (7,1,3) I did something for somebody else, and lived by their standard rather than my own (7,1,3)
I've come to a real turning point deciding..to live life the way I want to (7,1b)(learning/change)(when the regret hit) this is what I want (7,2,1) women...whether they meet their own needs, meet other people's needs (7,5t)
what God wants you to do is not what you naturally want to do...the opposite of what you really want to do...I really lost track of even what I wanted (7,5t)
changing my name, because I didn't think my in-laws could handle it if I didn't, and wanting to please them (7,13,1)
I didn't want to do it that way...all of it was kinds of sacrifice of self (7,14,1)
doing things because other people wanted them done (7,16b)
to even know what I want is very difficult (7,17t) (know/aware)
I feel more like I fit..into my own schedule instead of having to fit..into everybody else's little environment (8,1b-2t)

I regret that I never experienced having something completely my own...something that..I didn't have to share with anybody, I didn't have to consult anybody about (9,1,4) I think about what..I want to do..what I want the room to look like (9,2,4) the regret comes in when I'm thinking... this is what I want to do (9,2,6)(when it hit) I didn't have to do anything I did not want to do (9,3,2)
something that...I needed to do for myself (9,4,4)
I did not go away to college, even though I wanted to (11,1,1)
I did not pursue a particular course that I really wanted to out of deference to another or others (11,1,1)
I...gave up myself...I didn't know who I was, but I felt if I could please someone else I might be doing a right thing (11,2,1)
I think I'm following a course now which is truer to something I've wanted to do for a long period of time (11,5,1)
I go..back to that moment when I had the chance to maybe get to know [co-participant] better, and didn't take it out of deference to someone else (11,6b)
I wanted to...go away to college. And again, out of deference to my parents...I went to a commuter school (11,7,2)
I think it's crucial to be true to yourself (11,18t)

JUSTIFICATIONS

I didn't have enough prints...I didn't have the background (4,2,3) I was trying to comfort myself (4,5,1) humoring myself (4,6,2)
I don't know how much of that..I mean, kids are so resilient (6,17,1)
I was new to teaching (7,1,2)
**what would have been..the cost had I taken the other option instead...that's more of a distancing thing (7,4,1)
I could go back and think up hokey things I've learned from having to move but..it's just because I think we try to justify our lives (7,10t)
I'm trying to tell myself that where I am now is good (8,12,1) I was having to justify why I had the old attitude (8,13,1)
there's a little peer pressure (10,2,1)(blame others)
**oh well, somebody else will pass (11,16,1)
**you can make a blanket rule, don't pick up hitchhikers.. you don't live with any regrets (11,16b) somebody else does the thinking for me...somebody else is responsible ...you create less doubt (11,17,2)(blame others) (ambiv/doubt)

LOSS

something was gone...I really let something go, that I shouldn't have (4,17b)
it's gone (5,1,5)
the mistake and the loss (5,3,3)
that was one of the losses involved, was a loss of my hopefulness, my optimism (5,4t)(expect/hope)
it's just gone, it's like losing your virginity (6,2,4)
there's gonna be a sense of loss one way or the other(7,2,2)
I just have to count it as a loss (7,10t)
the painful part was that I had lost me in the process...I had to give up a sense of who I was (7,14,1)
that's one thing I really gave up in graduate school is this whole other personal side (7,19,2)(choice)(post-decision)

APPENDIX F

PRELIMINARY THEMATIC CATEGORIES

UNCERTAINTY/INDECISION

CONSEQUENCES

***FEEL REGRET WHEN.../TRIGGERS**

BLAME SELF/RESPONSIBILITY

KNEW/SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER

NOTHING I COULD DO

ACCEPTANCE

FEELINGS

KNOWLEDGE

DID MY BEST

DECISION

LEARNING

CHOICES/POSSIBILITIES/OPTIONS

EXPECTATION/HOPE

GROWING UP

WISHING

SHOULD HAVE DONE

BLAME OTHERS

OPPORTUNITIES LOST

LOOKING BACK

WHAT I WANTED

JUSTIFICATIONS

LOSS

APPENDIX G

HIGHER ORDER THEMATIZATION -- VERSION A

blame/responsibility
- BLAME (SELF)
- BLAME (OTHERS)
- BLAME (unclear or divided)
- SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER
- SHOULD HAVE DONE

choice/decision **free/unfree** finality/permanence
- CHOICES/POSSIBILITIES — CONSEQUENCES
- DECISION — NOTHING I COULD DO
- SHOULD HAVE DONE — ACCEPTANCE
- UNCERTAINTY/INDECISION — LOSS

?
- KNOWLEDGE
- SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER
- LEARNING
- EXPECTATION/HOPE

growth
- GROWING UP
- LEARNING

time
- CONSEQUENCES
- *FEEL REGRET WHEN.../TRIGGERS
- WISHING
- GROWTH
- OPPORTUNITIES LOST
- EXPECTATION/HOPE
- LOOKING BACK

guilt

shame

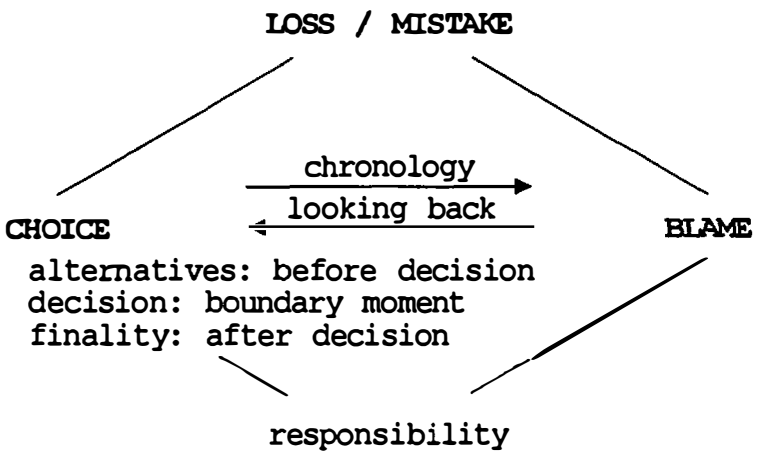
possibility

blame & responsibility
hope vs. finality
what I wanted & should have done
wishing, looking back, to change
did my best vs. should have known better
reduce regret: blame others, justify decision
nothing I could do vs. choices:
- choice in past, no choice now

should've known better & knowledge
did my best or not able/possible at the time

APPENDIX H

HIGHER ORDER THEMATIZATION - VERSION B



CHANGE
- acceptance
- awareness

TRIGGER
- the decision itself, the finality
- implications, negative consequences
- increased awareness, new opportunities or possibilities
- evidence of mistake
- evidence of loss
- mistakes repeated

APPENDIX I

TRIGGERS
(categorized significant statements from the preliminary thematic category "feel regret when.../triggers")

IMMEDIATE (post-decision, the decision itself, the finality)
might've come right at the moment of purchase (PIL,1,5)
it was just a spontaneous type thing (1,6,2) probably it was instantaneous (1,7,2) I was aware of it immediately (1,13,2)
It has to be after you've made the decision (1,15,2) the regret always comes after the action (1,16,3)
when I decided I was gonna fill out the journalism papers rather than the art papers (4,3,4)(alternative/choice) (decision)
when I told my father (4,13,1)
the moment I turned the grade in (7,1,3)

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES (of chosen alternative)
when..it required major major work (PIL,1,5) when I considered how much money I'd spent over the year in insurance (PIL,3,1) whenever I thought about my finances (PIL,3,3)
when I saw the look on my oldest daughter's face (1,17,3)
when I don't do real well (6,1,5) ever since I went back to school...a lot of times it comes up (6,2,2) when stuff is talked about in class...(6,2,3)
filling out job applications...or..I've had several good jobs, and not been able to go any farther (6,9,4)
when I started unloading the truck here...it started when I ..first came to work (7,17,1)
in having to move to a new apartment, having to buy a new car...or buying furniture (7,20t)(post-decision)
when I have to consult my husband (9,1,7)
I'm taking a biology class this..semester (9,7,5) probably during the lectures, when she talks about things that most people seem to know (9,7b)
probably not until I went back to school...didn't affect me ...up until I came back to school (9,9,2)
I suppose it was the normal or abnormal disagreements perhaps that come about in any relationship (11,3,1)
particularly when things at home got a little..unnerving (11,9b)
the key element was..when I got back with the group (10,10,1)
when you have lots of..child psychology classes...I leave those classes feeling oh so bad...if she has an ear infection..I'm flipping out thinking "oh, it's because of that" (6,15,2) when she makes her D's backwards (6,16,2)
when I went to go get a passport...and really stumbling over

what name I wanted in there (7,13,2)
when I think I'm gonna be..29 or 30 years old before I get my undergraduate (9,8,5)

ALTERNATIVE WITH POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES
even when I was staying with her...I think it struck me then (2,3b) came after I got some insight (2,5,2)
I started studying a lot of feminist perspectives (7,15,1)
all of a sudden it hit me (8,10b) I thought about how much better I was doing, and how bad I was doing before, and why I was doing so bad before...it was halfway through and then I saw that I was doing better, and that I could do better (8,11,1)(know/aware)
things that I've wanted to do for a long period of time that I suddenly am doing (11,5b)
regret that we weren't able to establish some kind of rapport...triggered most recently by what I felt was one of the first times that I'd heard or read anything from her that...was very direct (11,13,2)
we understand one another. It's nice to know that happens. And so that in turn has triggered some regrets (11,14b)
that triggers regret. Why can't we talk the way we do in class? (11,15,1)
after I really stopped..drinking, I started regretting it more (10,9,1)

MISTAKE
I made the choice thinking that I could fulfill a responsibility, realized later that I couldn't and at that point I felt the regret (3,1,3) (alternative/choice)(expect/hope)(know/aware)
sometimes I can just be in the same room with my dad (6,11,1) it's usually when he's displaying fatherly type things (6,12,1)
whenever trust is broken (8,1,3)

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES (of unchosen alternative)
I'll pick up some of my old photography textbooks (4,8,3)
when I read the write-up about the wedding (4,18,3)
when I went out to get a job, because I really wanted to be a journalist, and..it just wasn't possible with the kind of degree I had (7,8b)(post-decisional implications)
at times when I'm really feeling the loss (7,19b)
when anybody says anything about her..if I see her (10,4,1) I go back and look at a lot of things that she gave me (10,5,4)
**it's starting to go away because I've done forgot about it. No one says anything about it any more...it doesn't ever even come up any more (10,12,2)

there was a lot of seeing him do these things (6,2t)
they would talk about..high school stuff (6,1,6) the fun part of high school (6,2t)
they were talking about spring break, and going to Daytona ...but I didn't experience that with them, so I felt left out (6,3t) I went to my ten year class reunion...I felt real isolated..like..I didn't belong there (6,3,1)

MISTAKES REPEATED
I see 14-year-olds now (6,4t)
I have my own child, I find myself doing these terrible things that my father did (6,10b)
it began to surface then, 'cause I went back and said..you once started back this road a long time ago...and..now you're kinda doing the same thing again (11,8,2)

APPENDIX J

FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Daniel M. Gordon
1334 Montgomery Ave., F1
Narberth, PA 19072
(215) 664-9993

July 14, 1991

[name of co-participant]
[address]

Dear [name]:

On the basis of our interview a few months ago, I have formed some tentative impressions about your experiences of regret and I would like to get some feedback from you to see if you think these impressions are accurate. I have enclosed a typed transcript of our interview so that you can refamiliarize yourself with what was said. Also, although I have deleted some potentially identifying information, please make a note of any words or sections that you prefer to be omitted if published in my dissertation.

I will contact you by phone within a week to arrange a brief follow-up interview. I hope to schedule the interview in early August. Please feel free to call me collect if you foresee a scheduling problem or if you have any questions. If necessary, I will send you another mailing containing my tentative results rather than presenting them in person and we can conduct the interview by phone.

Thank you for your assistance and participation in this study. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Dan Gordon

VITA

Daniel Matthew Gordon was born in Glen Cove, New York, on June 11, 1960. He grew up in Loudonville, New York and Morristown, New Jersey, and graduated from Morristown High School in 1978. He attended the University of Pennsylvania, graduating in 1982 with a Bachelor of Arts in the Biological Basis of Behavior. He was employed at The Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital before entering the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1986. He married Linda Cohen Gordon in July, 1990. He is currently a psychology intern at Eastern State School and Hospital in Trevose, Pennsylvania, and will receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in December, 1992.