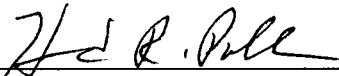
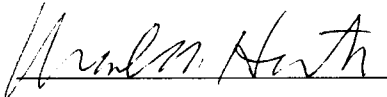
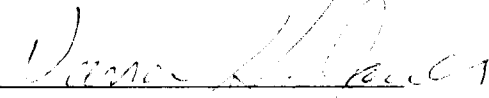
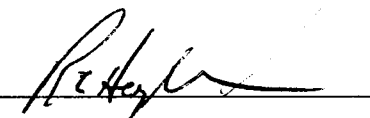
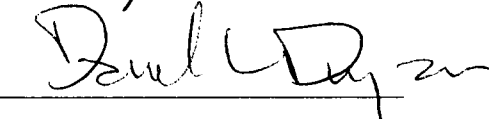


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Bethany Campbell Nowell entitled "The Experience of Interpersonal Connection." 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.

  
Howard R. Pollio, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation  
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

  
Associate Vice Chancellor  
and Dean of The Graduate School

THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERPERSONAL CONNECTION

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Bethany Campbell Nowell

August, 1996

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## DEDICATION

To my mother  
Esther Campbell Nowell  
1930 - 1995



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the many people who have assisted me in the completion of this dissertation. First and foremost, I thank the participants who freely gave their time, interest, and some of their most private thoughts concerning this personal topic.

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the way and also to meet whatever challenges lie ahead; I cannot thank him enough. And finally, I give a special thanks to Dr. Bill Haxton for the compassion and joy, as well as the excitement concerning our future together, which our relationship brings to us more and more everyday. I am so glad our paths finally crossed.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to describe the human experience of interpersonal connection. The dialogical method of existential phenomenology was utilized to arrive at a description of the experience. Twelve participants were recruited from the general population and were interviewed in unstructured interviews regarding their experiences of connection. The interviews were transcribed and the transcripts were interpreted using a hermeneutic approach.

The analysis resulted in a thematic structure comprised of four interrelated themes: Being Present to Each Other, Openness, History and Possibilities, and Feels Good. The experience of interpersonal connection was described as a sense of mutuality, feelings of trust and openness, an awareness of the history and/or future possibilities of the relationship, and a sense of pleasure in the encounter with another person. In addition, some participants described their experiences of connection as being "intense." For some of these participants, pleasurable aspects of connection were heightened by the intensity; for others, intensity of the interpersonal interaction became overwhelming, and these participants felt a need to "dis-connect." Present results were discussed in terms of their relevance for psychoanalytic theory, the existential philosophies of Buber and Merleau-Ponty, and the empirical and theoretical literatures on social cognition in relationships, on love, and on loneliness. Implications for the practice of clinical psychology were also discussed.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen psychoanalytic theory undergo what Kuhn (1962) has called a paradigm shift; the subject matter has changed from the study of the individual "mind" to the "interactive interpersonal field" (Mitchell, 1988). The very name of the field has shifted from "psychoanalytic" to "psychodynamic" to incorporate these new ideas within the existing field.

Along side and contributing to the shift in psychoanalysis has been a shift in our understanding of the world of the infant. Infancy research has demonstrated that even very young infants actively engage and interact with other people (Stern, 1985). Social psychology and sociology have increasingly turned their attention to close human relationships as the world becomes increasingly complex and alienating (Zimbardo, 1992, Jones, 1991).

Modern philosophies, especially those of Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre, have developed insights into relationships between the self and other people. These insights have contributed to modern criticism and to the undermining of that stalwart of Western philosophy, Cartesian dualism (Schroeder, 1984; Pollio, Thompson, and Henley, 1996).

Such changes in philosophy have led to changes in social theory as well; relationships with other people (inherent in language and other social forms) are seen

as the basis for the structure of all human knowledge of the self and of the world (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Schutz, 1962).

Existentialism and phenomenology have joined together to engage in the study and description of experience and behavior (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Pollio, et al., 1996); one of the main tools of this existential phenomenological project is the method of dialogue; a method that clearly involves interpersonal engagement. Existential and phenomenological psychologists such as Keen (1978) and Van den Berg (1972) hold that the human experience of the other is one of several essential aspects of human existence, along with "time," "body," and "world."

While it is true that the human experience of the other is an important topic for many areas of psychology, there is still a need for a general and basic description of this experience as experienced and lived by individuals. The present study employed the research methodology of existential phenomenology to arrive at a description of one aspect of the experience of other people, the experience of connection, as it is lived by people in their everyday lives.

### **A Phenomenology of Connection**

This study was born out of a personal, professional, and academic curiosity concerning the basic nature of human relating. Our experience of other people is one of the most salient aspects of our everyday lives. Family, friends, loved ones and strangers are woven throughout the fabric of our lives, so much so that a world devoid of other humans or of their works would be difficult to imagine.

We live our lives with those around us: doing, wanting, loving, sharing, being. Other people are intrinsic to everything we do, even when alone. What is the nature of this connection that is so omnipresent in daily life? How do other people experience being with other people? Is there some way to describe an experience which is so basic that it seems ineffable? And, are other people's experiences of what it means to be in a relationship different from my own? These are the personal questions fueling this study.

The word "connection" was chosen as a way to begin answering these questions because it is a word used to describe certain types of interpersonal experiences (Nowell, 1992). A dictionary definition of "connect" is "to bind, to link, join, fasten together, usually by means of something intervening" (Webster's, 1981). Thus, "interpersonal connection" must be "that which joins or links people together." So what is the nature of this interpersonal glue? To understand the everyday meaning of interpersonal connection, twelve people in this study were asked to describe their everyday experiences of connection.

As a clinical psychologist, I am keenly aware of the importance of understanding how relationships succeed in contributing to a sense of individual well being, and how sometimes they fail. From my own professional perspective, almost without exception, people come to see a therapist when they want to improve the quality of their interpersonal relationships; for me, clinical psychology is pre-eminently a psychology of interpersonal relationships. For this reason, clinical psychology would seem to be in need of a knowledge base founded on descriptions of

"healthy" and personally satisfying human relations. Past theory and research have tended to be based on the study of individuals whose relationships have failed to provide them with potential for personal satisfaction and growth (Mitchell, 1988). Furthermore, as a clinical psychologist, my work is based on understanding the experience and behavior of the other through dialogue. The methodology of this study has afforded me an opportunity to use one of my strongest assets in research; my ability to engage in meaningful dialogue.

The present project is based on an earlier project entitled "A Phenomenological Description of the Experience of Other People" (Nowell, 1992). In that project, "Connection" was found to be one of the major themes defining the more general experience of other people. The natural progression for me, given my interests, was to proceed further along these lines of inquiry.

Before beginning any interview with the participants of this study, I asked a colleague to interview me concerning my own experiences of interpersonal connection. The purpose of this interview was to understand more fully my own experiences of connection in interpersonal relationships. This interview, formally called a "bracketing interview," has become part of the dialogic method used by the University of Tennessee phenomenology research group. The bracketing interview is designed to help the researcher "hold in abeyance" preconceived notions about the topic by making those notions explicit (Valle, King, and Halling, 1989).

This investigation therefore began with a personal definition of interpersonal connection. For me, "interpersonal connection" refers to a sense of intimacy, a

private feeling of closeness, kinship, attunement, and yearning in a relationship with another person; the feeling of connection for me often carries with it an uncanny sense of importance as well as a range of emotional states, such as joy, delight, serenity, longing, sadness or even anger or fear. The experience seems meaningful, at times in powerful ways, although its meaning often is not immediately apparent. The experience of connection for me also holds a timeless quality: I experience myself and the other person as very near and the world as more distant.

My own interests and knowledge as a clinical psychologist demand that I address the topic of connection in terms of psychoanalytic theory. The changes brought to psychoanalysis by recent research on infancy are so revolutionary as to require a review of this literature. The social psychology literature concerning two areas closest to the experience of connection are presented: love and loneliness. In addition, the social psychology literature on cognition in interpersonal relationships is also presented; interpersonal relationship cognition research was selected for review because, like the present study, it is an example of attempts within the human science literature to understand relationship phenomena occurring across relationship "type." Much of the literature in the human sciences on interpersonal relationships focuses on one or another particular type of relationship, such as the relationship between a parent and a child, marital relationships, friendships, and so on. An additional review of some of the social psychology literature in terms of methodological problems involved in studying interpersonal relationships is presented in the chapter on

methodology. The final section of the literature review presents an existential phenomenological perspective on the topic of connection.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Psychoanalytic Theory

The concept of the other is an important one in psychoanalytic theory.

Mitchell (1988) pointed out that the past several decades of psychoanalytic theory have been characterized by an exploration of a variety of possible answers to questions concerning the nature of personal relatedness. To this end, Mitchell grouped psychoanalytic approaches into three clusters based on the manner in which they establish "relational primacy within human experience." His groupings include: (1) relational by design (2) relational by intent, and (3) relational by implication.

Theories based on a "relational by design" approach assume that people are inherently designed for intense interpersonal involvements. (Mitchell, pp. 21-25) In Bowlby's theory (1969, 1973, 1975), for example, the infant has a "need" for the mother that preempts all other needs, and is mediated by instinctual sequences of behavior such as sucking and clinging. Another example is offered by Sullivan's (1953) interpersonal theory, in which people are comprehensible only as participants in an interactional field.

"Relational by intent" theorists regard the pleasurable and painful aspects of interactions with others as fundamental to a theory of relatedness. (Mitchell, pp. 26-29) Freud's basic theory of libido (1900, 1912, 1924) is based on this assumption.

Other examples are the theories of Melanie Klein (1957, 1940) and those of Fairbairn (1952). For these theories, life is seen as a continuing struggle between maintaining close relationships with other people and managing to escape potentially painful aspects of relationships, such as those of loss and disappointment.

Theories which focus on the development of a sense of self take the "relational by implication" approach (Mitchell, pp. 29-33). The development of a sense of self is generally viewed as a process of gradual differentiation from a sense of oneness with others -- a process that continues throughout life. The theories of ego psychologists such as Mahler (see Mahler, Pine and Bergman, 1975) and Loewald (1960), as well as those of Kohut (1971) and Winnicott (e.g., 1971) all represent this type of theory.

Mitchell's categorization is useful in understanding various psychoanalytic explanations of **why** and **how** it is that human experience is relational; another way to organize psychoanalytic conceptualizations of the other is to look at clusters of **what** the experience of the other is like from the perspective of an individual in such relationships. In other words, if one follows each theoretical system to its logical conclusion, what general descriptors could be used to articulate the nature of the experience of the other in psychoanalytic theory? What follows is an extension of Mitchell's conceptual framework, presenting the major psychoanalytic theories in terms of the personal experience of other people.

### Experience of the Other in Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalytic theorists have tended to highlight certain types of relationships between an individual and other people in his or her life. Orientation towards particular forms of relationships lead theorists to emphasize aspects of an experience of the other that make sense within each system. The type of relationship discussed in the theory implicitly or explicitly defines the individual's experience of the other. Relationships with early caregivers are usually seen as at least influential, if not fundamental, to the ways in which the other is experienced by the adult individual.

The varieties of ways in which of the other is experienced as described in psychoanalytic theories generally fall into one of six groupings: (1) Other as frustrating or gratifying, (2) Other as facilitating of development and growth, (3) Other as object of destructive wishes, (4) Other as moral standard, (5) Other as "not me," and (6) Other as part of interactional field. These groupings are not meant to be mutually exclusive categories nor do they provide an exhaustive description of all of psychoanalytic theory; rather, they are to be thought of as a conceptual framework for understanding the implications of a psychoanalytic perspectives on the experience of the other.

#### Other as Frustrating or Gratifying

The experience of the other as having the ability to satisfy (or frustrate) needs and desires is a theme common to most psychoanalytic relational theories, although some stress its importance more than others. Freud's libido theory (1900, 1912, 1924), for example, emphasized this aspect of the experience of the other. Following

him, British object relations theorists such as Winnicott (1971), Fairbairn (1952), and Klein (1957) based their theories of development on the vicissitudes of the experience of the other as a reflection of the mother's capability to be experienced as nurturant or destructive.

For Fairbairn, experience is "split" into different relational aspects as a result of early childhood trauma. Other people are seen as "rejecting" and/or "exciting," and the goal of growth and development (or psychotherapy, if necessary) is to bring such splits together into a cohesive unit. Neurosis, in this view, involves a resolution of this conflict that does not reach a "healthy state of ambivalence"; that is, the recognition that others have both "rejecting" and "exciting" aspects.

Psychologists such as Mahler (1967), Hartmann (1939), and Blanck and Blanck (1974) see the experience of the other as basically frustrating, and view the development of an ability to accommodate one's needs to the world as the primary goal of development. Sullivan's interpersonal theory (1953) represents an attempt to demonstrate that the motivational force in establishing relationships with others is based on the need to obtain "safety and security" and to minimize anxiety. Interpersonal relationships are valuable to the extent that they gratify or frustrate such needs.

Erikson (1950) emphasizes the experience of self as basically insecure and needy due to the lengthy period of dependency on the path to adulthood, or, at least, to the sense of inferiority engendered by a sense of smallness carried from childhood throughout life. From this perspective, the other is experienced as in a position of

power over the individual. The other, therefore, may be seen as potentially dangerous and destructive or as merely thwarting the realization of desires. At the other extreme is the experience of others as indulgent, lenient, and as objects of a craving (grasping) desire on the part of the individual.

### Other as Facilitating

The other is frequently portrayed in the psychoanalytic literature as facilitating, a point of view similar in many respects to the experience of other as gratifying. The distinction here is that the other is experienced as providing what is needed rather than what is wanted. For example, in Winnicott's theory, the experience is of reliability, continuity, predictability, and "aliveness"; in short, of providing an emotional and physical space in which the individual can relax in the presence of another person (Winnicott, 1963). In Winnicott's theory, the experience of the other as facilitating protects the infant from feelings of "annihilation" and "primitive anxiety."

In Sullivan's theory (1953) the other also provides relief from anxiety. In the context of an experience of security in relating to some one else, the individual experiences an ability to tolerate "optimal frustrations" (Kohut, 1971), to experience the excitement of trying out new abilities (Hartmann, 1939; Erikson, 1950; Mahler, 1967) and/or of being alone (Winnicott, 1945). Hartmann postulated a need for an "average expectable environment" in which the mother -- and others surrounding her such as the family and society -- respond to the infant's needs. The experience of the other as facilitating is seen to provide a "beacon of light" (Blanck and Blanck, 1974) which the child uses to guide experiences that allow growth and development.

Aspects of the experience of the other in theories that emphasize the other as facilitating concern issues of security, love, faith, predictability, dependence, and constancy as well as those of firmness and containment.

#### Other as Object of Destructive Wishes

In some theories the individual, at some point in his/her development, experiences a sense of destructiveness, or a wish to destroy the other. Freud's oedipal theory is such a theory; the boy's desire to destroy and replace his father leads to feelings of guilt. Klein based most of her theory on the destructive urges of the infant (1935) and attendant feelings of guilt. Winnicott expanded Klein's theory to the idea of "the capacity for concern" (Winnicott, 1971). Following the recognition of an infant's destructive urges toward his or her mother, the infant comes to a state of "concern" in which he feels more able to take responsibility for destructive impulses. Winnicott sees this as the beginning of the development of a capacity to be involved in a constructive life in a "mutuality of ambition and other-directed concerns."

Erikson's (1950) stage "Initiative vs. Guilt" illustrates a healthy aspect of potentially destructive urges. A young child who is eagerly undertaking, planning or "attacking" a task merely for the sake of "being active" is seen by Erikson as taking pleasure in "attack and conquest." The danger is a sense of guilt over jealous and rivalrous feelings in parents and siblings. Another possible outcome is an overly self-righteous attitude towards others. In later stages of Erikson's theory, a sense of responsibility towards others is defined as a mark of maturity and strength. This sense of responsibility is seen to have its roots in earlier stages in the adoption of a moral

code as a reaction to destructive wishes as well as in identification with one's culture. For this theory, the experience of the other involves a sense of one's strength and capacity to attack or destroy. It also involves an experience of others in terms of one's responsibility towards them as individuals or as a society.

### Other as Standard

Theories which address the cultural aspects of moral development feature the experience of the other as a measure against which an individual compares himself or herself to an idealized standard of behavior. Freud's idea of the superego (1923) offers such a theory. In this approach, an individual establishes a sense of the prevailing cultural norms of morality by repeated attempts to please his or her parents. From the superego arises a sense of the ideal which is based directly on cultural parental attitudes.

Erikson (1950) also emphasized the experience of the other as an ideal. Schools and other social institutions offer children contact with ideal adults "recognizable by their uniforms and function" so that children can point themselves toward the goals of an active and productive adult life. If the child is exposed to too many experiences of failure, he will experience himself as painfully inadequate in the context of others who are more successful.

In Sullivan's theory, feelings and attitudes of parents (and of the culture) are mediated by the giving and withholding of approval. Part of the process of development of a sense of self in Kohut's system is an idealization of an important other (1971). Fairbairn (1952) also addressed this type of experience, and his theory

of "split egos" is based on the idea that the neurotic individual establishes relationships with others based on identification with idealized aspects of his or her experience of the other. Fears of omnipotence contribute to an individual's desire to identify with what are seen as powerful others.

In the systems of Kohut and Fairbairn, the flip side of the experience of idealization is what Kohut has called "de-idealization." In this type of theory the other is experienced in terms of difference: other is greater-than or less-than. The experience of the other is usually expressed in terms of strong, polarized feelings of power, love, hatred and envy.

#### Other as "Not Me"

This cluster of psychoanalytic theories includes those that focus on the "self" and issues of separation and individuation -- what Mitchell described as "relational by implication." The basic underlying assumption here is that, in early childhood, the infant's experience is one of unity with the world/environment as represented by its mother. The common aspect of the experience of the other, therefore, has to do with "what is self" and is "what is not self." The world and the other are experienced on the basis of a process termed the "psychological birth of the individual," which is generally thought of as an ongoing life project (Blanck and Blanck, 1986).

The experience of others is described in terms of feeling a profound sense of being detached or apart from them, or, conversely, in terms of being "attached" or "engulfed." Experience moves between these two polarities -- from a sense of self and other as one to a sense of intense isolation and alienation from other people.



Much recent psychoanalytic interest has been concerned with the pathological extremes of alienation or engulfment. (e.g., Kernberg, 1975; Masterson, 1981)

Winnicott's idea of "the use of the object" presents an example of "self" theory that discusses the experience of other people in terms of normal, healthy living.

Winnicott incorporated Klein's theory of the "depressive position" into his theory of "object-usage" (1945). During the period of early dependence, the experience is of oneness. There are times, however, when destructive urges and the attendant anxiety felt by the infant are intolerable and are "projected" onto the mother. In Winnicott's view, the mother transforms these feelings into something more manageable for the infant, who then is able to tolerate the resulting anxiety.

Through these transfers of feeling, the mother is gradually recognized as "not me." Further, over time, the infant realizes that his mother is both the mother that nurtures and the mother he once wanted to destroy. Because the mother tolerates this situation (that is, survives his desires to destroy her) she becomes not only separate from him, but also beyond his omnipotent control. Therefore, she becomes a fully integrated "whole person" available for a relationship based on mutuality. The experience of the other is one of recognition, love, and mutuality.

In Kohut's theory (e.g. 1984) non-traumatic empathic failures, which occur in the context of a genuinely empathic relationship, allow the child to build up both the capacity to manage anxiety and to experience the self as different from the caregiver. Further, empathic "mirroring" of the child's individuality leads to a process of self development that is "stable" and which allows the person to enter into mutually

empathic relationships with others. The experience of the other is thus one of alienation or of empathy.

Ego psychological approaches to the development of the self include theories by Mahler, Blanck and Blanck, and Hartmann (see Blanck and Blanck, 1984, pp. 1-19). The Blancks have followed Mahler in understanding the development of the self as a product of the mother being a "safe anchorage" (Mahler, 1967 p.17): a place of security and comfort, from which the infant can venture out towards the world to explore and test his or her developing physical and cognitive capacities. This stage of exploration follows one of "symbiosis," that is, of a close relationship of union and its concomitant experience of "omnipotent fusion." The child develops a sense of self by exploring new aspects of his or her world and then returning to the mother when overstimulated or afraid. The mother's ability to tolerate the child's growing sense of independence without being angry or withdrawing facilitates self development. The experience of the other is one of providing a place of rest and security from excitement and anxiety.

#### Other as Part of an Interactional Field

Some lines of theory, especially those of Sullivan (1953), posit that individuals are inherently social. Early patterns of behavior with significant people are applied in later interpersonal relations, as in other psychoanalytic theoretical systems, although interactions with people in adulthood have more influence on personality development than in some theories. Emphasis is on relationship, and the dynamic influence of interactions with other people throughout life; the experience of the other thus

concerns issues of connectedness and/or engagement. In Sullivan's system, engagement is experienced as either able or not able to meet the needs of the individual.

Winnicott describes the child's development of a capacity to enter into relationships which are based on a sense of mutuality. In Winnicott's (1971) system, the infant is first in a state of being "merged in" with the mother such that mother and infant "overlap" and together form parts of a unitary whole. To the degree that mother is able to provide the baby with what he or she needs, the infant is able to have an illusion of omnipotence. In other words, the infant feels that he or she has magically produced mother and her nurturance.

As the infant matures, he or she learns to play with this illusion, practicing what is "me" and what is "not me." "Transitional objects," such as teddy bears and other special possessions, are experienced as part "me" and part "not me" and such objects help the child tolerate anxiety during times of insecurity. The mother facilitates this process by gradually introducing herself as a separate person with ideas of her own. Over time, the infant learns to negotiate and use this emerging transitional area to engage in play and, as an adult, in creativity, art, and religion.

### Psychoanalysis and the Other

Psychoanalytic theory has placed increasing importance on the role of "the other" in psychological development throughout the lifespan. In this review, we have seen that there is overlap but not consensus on the nature of the experience of the

other by an individual. Six categories were used to differentiate among the various theories on the basis of the experience of other people within each theory. The categories used in this framework are: (1) Other as frustrating or gratifying (2) Other as facilitating of development and growth (3) Other as object of destructive wishes (4) Other as moral standard (5) Other as "not me," and (6) Other as part of and interactional field.

The results of this review suggest that psychoanalytic theories tend to focus on certain types of relationships, which have led them to emphasize aspects of the experience of other people that fit within the theoretical system. Much of psychoanalytic theory has been built upon the theorist's experiences as an analyst working with people who have problems in living satisfying or productive lives; therefore, psychoanalytic theories tend to reflect a stance that searches for "unhealthy" or "pathological" ways of being with and experiencing other people. This emphasis on certain types of relationships has led to a lack of consensus among the various approaches concerning the general nature of relationships with other people.

Freud's theories, for example, were based on the assumption that other people are inherently experienced as either gratifying or frustrating (1). People provide an external backdrop and other people become known as they gratify or frustrate instinctual wishes. The individual's personality and functioning in the world reflect her or his ability to manage (inherent) anxiety against the backdrop of experiencing other people either as objects of love (gratifying) or frustration. Other people (especially parents) also are experienced as a moral standard (4) by which the

individual models his or her behavior. Through the experience of other people as moral standard, socialization occurs. Freud's oedipal theory reflects the experience of other people (father and father-figures) as objects of destructive wishes (3).

Freud tended not to emphasize the experience of the other as part of an interactional field (6). In general, Freud assumed adult patterns of interacting with other people developed in childhood, as the child learned to satisfy internal drives and anxieties in the face of a inherently frustrating world. He theorized that childhood patterns of managing drives in interactions with significant people (primarily parents) were repeated in relationships throughout life. Object relations theorists, such as Winnicott, emphasized relationships between the caregiver and the child (over internal drives) as influencing adult social experiences. Some theorists -- Sullivan, for example -- theorized that experiences of interactions with other people throughout one's life are at least as important as early childhood relationships in influencing behavior and experience in the adult.

Freud also did not emphasize the experience of other people as facilitating development and growth (2). Psychological growth, in Freud's system, involves a personal experience of learning to master instinctual drives through self-understanding and cognitive control. While Freud would not argue that other people (parents, analysts) perform a significant function in personality development, he did not focus on the role of other people as providing essential emotional and physical support as did later theorists; for example, Winnicott (1945), Mahler (1967), Kohut (1971), Hartmann (1939). In part, this de-emphasis was due to Freud's having very little

knowledge of development in infancy. Later theorists built upon Freud's work by focusing on early childhood. Similarly, Freud did not focus on issues concerning separation, or other as "not me." On the other hand, object relations theorists, as well as developmental and ego psychological theorists (such as Blanck and Blanck, 1974), emphasized the development of a sense of self through increased independence from caretakers.

### **Research on Infancy**

The field of infancy research has produced a wealth of new information leading to some interesting challenges for psychoanalytic theory (Peterfreund, 1978; Lichtenberg, 1983, 1987; Horner, 1985; Mitchell, 1988; Stern, 1985; Westin, 1990, Beebe and Lachman, 1988). These challenges, though calling into question some of the basic assumptions of psychoanalytic theory, hold promise for the enrichment and clarification of psychoanalytic concepts and for the development of innovative research ideas and clinical techniques (Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Lachmann and Beebe, 1989; Lichtenberg, 1983; Pine, 1992; Westin, 1990). This section will attempt to highlight some criticisms of psychoanalytic theory raised by findings from infant research as well as some of the revisions in the practice of therapy that have been suggested (and/or required) to integrate these new findings into the theory.

Infant researchers have developed creative and sophisticated methodologies yielding a profusion of detailed information about the infant's abilities and interactions with the world (See Robertson, 1992 for a review of the major movements in the

field.) Research on early infancy has been pursued at a microanalytic level, focusing on specific aspects of behavioral responses to a wide variety of stimuli; this work generally has proceeded in the absence of theoretical advances within the field of infant research and findings have usually been related to the work of Bowlby and Piaget (1954), according to Ricuitti (1992). In contrast, psychoanalysis has long emphasized theory development over empirical research, although recent years have seen a growing interest in empirical research, especially in the subfield of object relations (Westin, 1991).

Psychoanalysis, historically, has been primarily interested in the subjective experience of adults from which the subjective experience of infancy could be inferred. Infant researchers, on the other hand, have focused on the behavior of infants. Much of the psychoanalytic terminology used to characterize normal infant development is derived from theories about adult psychopathology (Peterfreund, 1978), and differences between the two have led some psychoanalytic theorists to argue that research findings concerning infancy are not important for psychoanalysis (see Lichtenberg, 1987). Despite this minority view, psychoanalytic thinking has begun to integrate information from infancy research, spurred by earlier pioneering work of Spitz and Bowlby, and, more recently, by infant researchers who are also psychoanalytic theorists (e.g., Stern, 1985; Lichtenberg, 1983, 1987; Sander, 1969; Beebe and Stern, 1977; Beebe and Lachmann, 1988; Emde, 1980).

### Self/Other Differentiation

Psychoanalysts have long held that human infant development proceeds from a state of being unaware of distinctions between self and environment (including other people) to an awareness of separateness and individuality (e.g., "undifferentiated", Kernberg, 1984; "normal autism" and "symbiotic phase," Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975; "primary narcissism" Freud, 1914).

As Peterfreund (1978) and Mitchell (1988) have pointed out, this view is a natural development from Freudian structural theory. Freud's psychic theory of development proposed an internal apparatus to explain mental functioning, the structural theory of id, ego, and superego. To account for a mind developing independently from physical functioning, it made sense to think of the neonate as without a mind, and, therefore "undifferentiated." Only after contact with frustrating aspects of the world did Freud's "baby" develop ways to manage tension deriving from ungratified drives. Long-recognized as problematic, this view leads to certain tautological difficulties; to develop an ego, the infant has to already possess ego-like abilities.

The undifferentiated infant of Freud's theory permeates much of current psychoanalytic theory, and the most compelling implications for psychoanalysis from infancy research is that newborns exhibit an array of abilities, allowing them, from birth, to organize, orient, and even control aspects of their environment. Such research also indicates that infants are even able to interact with their caretakers in a mutually influential manner (Stern, 1985; Lichtenberg, 1987; Beebe and Lachmann,



1988; Greenspan, 1991). For instance: newborns respond selectively and actively to sound frequencies within the range of the human voice; the focus of their gaze is the most accurate for objects positioned at the approximate distance from mother's face to infant's face during feeding; neonates attend to line drawings of faces longer than to random dots; at two weeks of age, they look at their mother's face longer than at a stranger's, and they look at her face longer if she is talking; infants actively respond to mother's talking in a respondent manner; by eight weeks they verbalize responsively in a pre-speech manner (Lichtenberg, 1983). Sandler, Stechler, Julia, and Burns (1976) studied altered feeding patterns and found evidence that feeding time patterns are an adaptation established in interactions between infant and caretaker. These studies suggest that neonates respond selectively and differentially to their world.

In a recent review, Greenspan (1991) summarized these research findings:

It is now well documented that the infant is capable, either at birth or shortly thereafter, of organizing experience in an adaptive fashion. An infant can respond to pleasure and displeasure; change behavior as a function of its consequences; form intimate bonds and make visual discriminations; organize cycles and rhythms such as sleep-wake, alertness states; evidence a variety of affect proclivities; and demonstrate organized social responses in connection with increasing neurophysiologic organization. From the early months, the infant demonstrates a unique capacity to enter into complex social and affective interactions. (p.1371)

These findings have led psychoanalytic infant researchers (e.g., Stern, 1985; Lichtenberg, 1987; Beebe and Lachmann, 1988) to question psychoanalytic discussions of separation and individuation in infancy. These researchers agree that emphasis placed on the role of mother-infant dyads in social and emotional development by

object relations theory and self psychology is supported; however, research has shown that infants actively participate in dyad interactions more than was previously thought. Condon and Sander (1974), for example, analyzed films of mother/child interactions and found that infants at 12-21 days synchronize their movements and gestures with their mothers; recent studies using the same technique and time-series regression methods have shown that infants and mothers match "direction of change" in each other's movements and affective displays (see Beebe and Lachmann, 1988). As Beebe noted, psychoanalytic theory has tended to focus on how mothers respond to their infants rather than on the mutual responsiveness demonstrated by both. Stern (1985) interprets these findings of reciprocal influence to suggest that various senses of "self" exist from birth, and prior to self-awareness and language. Further, he sees no correlate of "merger" experiences in the infant such as those proposed by many object relations theorists (e.g., Guntrip, 1971; Winnicott, 1971).

Stern also questions the more general notion of specific phases of social and emotional development, such as those proposed by Freud, Mahler, and Erikson. He believes that the best approach to development would be to think of many of the tasks heretofore seen as developmental milestones in infancy -- such as orality, attachment, autonomy and independence -- as issues defining important aspects of human experience and behavior throughout the lifespan. These aspects, however, are played out in different ways and in different arenas depending on the maturity of the individual. Stern postulates that the human experience of self in relation to others provides a basic organizing perspective throughout life. More in concert with stage

theory is Lichtenberg's view (1987); he can see no sense of self in the infant until infancy is over and indications of symbolic and self-reflective abilities occur (about 18-24 months). He also concludes, however, that looking at issues such as separation/individuation as life issues represents a more useful approach.

Generally speaking, infant researchers agree that psychoanalytic terms used to describe early experience as undifferentiated, such as "symbiotic state" or "merged", are probably misleading. Stern, for example, believes that what the infant experiences is reality (1985). Pine (1992), however, postulates that "merger moments", such as during feeding, may occur or at least cannot be ruled out by the new view of the infant as a more active participant in the mother/infant dyad. He believes "merger moments" may be the precursors of feelings of one-ness that emerge in relationships later in the lifespan.

Another reinterpretation of the concept "symbiotic state" is offered by Lachmann and Beebe (1989); in their view, a continuum of experiential capabilities develops as a result, in part, from contributions of "mother-infant interactive attunements." The continuum extends from one-ness fantasies to a sense of self as separate. One-ness fantasies seen in adult normal functioning, and in psychopathology, are most likely products of fantasy emerging in later childhood and/or adulthood, although based upon expectancies of interaction patterns developed in infancy.

### Inferring Early Experience from Pathological States

Peterfreund (1978) criticized the tendency of psychoanalytic literature to "adultomorphize" infancy and to characterize it in terms of adult psychopathology. He sees this tendency as being the source of much confusion in psychoanalysis: "superficial resemblances do not justify an equation of states and, in this connexion [sic], I believe that the ideas of fixation and regression must be used with great caution" (p. 439).

Similarly, Westin (1990) notes "clinical observations are far too difficult to untangle from the theories that make them intelligible, and they cannot adjudicate competing theoretical claims, such as alternative stage theories, because competing schools simply marshal separate but equal (and unverifiable) clinical evidence" (p. 675). Infant researcher Emde (1989) has commented that psychodynamic models tend to place "too much emphasis on early experience itself as opposed to the process by which it is modified or made use of by subsequent experience" (1989, p. 219)

Despite these views, psychoanalytic clinical experience has shown that understanding a patient's life and interpersonal difficulties in relating to others in terms of infantile experience can be quite helpful in making sense of and in integrating disparate and/or disturbing aspects of adult experience. To make sense of these discrepancies, however, it is necessary to consider the nature of babies as natural "blank screens" for feelings about powerful and profound issues such as the nature of life, death, regeneration, and vulnerability (Mitchell, 1988).

Freud (1914/1957) recognized that suppositions about infantile experiences are reflections of parental hopes, fears and wishes. He also believed that parents "relived" their own infantile experiences through experiences with their infants. Another view is that infants may be perfect repositories -- due in part to their vulnerability -- for profound adult feelings about basic life issues (Horner, 1985).

Spence's (1982) articulation of distinctions between historical truth and narrative truth distinguishes a need, at least for scientific purposes, to defer to direct observational data (of infancy research) rather than to rely on clinical data concerning past events, even though narrative truth may be more important to understanding the meaning of experience in any given individual's life (Horner, 1985). As Mitchell (1988, pp. 131-133) has pointed out, even though theoretical understandings of infancy still have clinical usefulness, psychoanalytic understandings need to be careful not to be "overly concrete" in using developmental concepts and metaphors in explaining clinical data. In addition, such theories must also be cautious about taking theories of infancy derived from adult clinical work as being "true" of infant experience.

Certain concepts relating pathological states and early infant experience are common throughout many theoretical systems; some have proven themselves to be very useful in clinical work. One example concerns the concept "splitting" used in Kernberg's system of diagnosis, theory, and treatment of borderline personality disorder (1975). Kernberg believes that infants are biologically determined to experience aspects of their environments as either good and pleasurable or as bad and

painful. Healthy development leads to an integration of good and bad experiences; the infant eventually comes to recognize that experience is usually not all-good or all-bad but some shade of feeling in between these two extremes.

This line of theory, developed from clinical work with adult individuals who exhibit extremes of affect and have difficulty tolerating ambivalence, has provided a useful tool for organizing the experience of certain types of patients and has generated a considerable amount of subsequent literature and research (Westin, 1990). Infant observation, however, does not support the notion of infant experience as organized into categories of "all-good" and "all-bad." In fact, there is considerable evidence to support the view that infants experience broad ranges of intensity of several different affects, even in studies with neonates (Lichtenberg, 1983, 1981).

Much of current psychoanalytic theory tends to view psychopathology in terms of a "developmental arrest" model (Mitchell, 1988); that is, psychopathological states in adults can be traced back to parental failures during a particular period of development. For this reason, the goal of treatment is to "unblock" the patient and allow him or her the previously missed opportunity to continue along the path to emotional maturity. There is considerable evidence to show that children from disturbed families continue to experience painful and emotionally harmful experiences well past infancy and into adolescence; these findings support psychoanalytic theories which understand severe adult psychopathology as a failure of the patient's mother to meet the earliest needs of the infant (Mitchell, 1988). Mitchell suggests that thinking more in terms of general parental deprivation without referring to specific phases of

development might be a more useful and appropriate approach to understanding psychopathology:

The earliest experiences are meaningful not because they lay down structural residues which remain fixed, but because they are the earliest representation of patterns of family structure and interactions which will be repeated over and over in different forms at different developmental stages. Understanding the past is crucial, not because the past lies concealed within or beneath the present, but because understanding the past provides clues to deciphering how and why the present is being approached and shaped the way it is (pp. 149-150).

### Drive Theory/Affects

Freud's views of affects as biologically rooted and linked with cognition to serve signalling and motivating functions is generally supported by current infant research. Further support for abandoning drive or tension-reduction models of motivation for social interactions, however, is found in infancy research demonstrations that increased social interaction is not associated with tension-reduction (Emde, 1989). As only one example, "social smiling" at five and nine months is associated with increased rather than decreased heart rate (Emde, Campose, Reich, and Gaensbauer, 1978). Freud's tension-reduction model would seem to predict decreased heart rate with social smiling. Rather than trying to avoid tension, infants seem to seek of excitation and stimulation (Lichtenberg, 1987; Stern, 1985).

Another important question raised by infancy research concerns the psychoanalytic view of emotion as a disorganizer of cognition (Lichtenberg, 1983). Affect expression holds a key function in the organization of the mother-infant dyad; infant communication of internal states to the mother and maternal affective responses

set up interactional patterns within the dyad (Lichtenberg, 1983, p. 26; Beebe and Lachmann, 1988). Affects are seen by Lichtenberg to be an important means of amplifying events and of enhancing their meaning. Observation indicates that infants' days are dominated by periods of low and moderate intensity affects, rather than by moments of high intensity emphasized in psychoanalytic theory (Lichtenberg, p. 190). Also important for psychoanalytic theory is the fact that little evidence for an aggressive drive has been found in infancy studies, unless a general trend toward assertiveness is to be understood as aggressiveness (Lichtenberg, 1987, 1983).

Drive theory has not proven to be a useful tool for studying infants, and drive concepts have generally been discarded or modified in much of current analytic theory (Mitchell, 1988). Stern (1985) has proposed that a theory of motivation, at least in infancy, needs to be conceptualized in terms of "many discrete, but interrelated, motivational systems such as attachment, competence-mastery, curiosity and others," rather than as derivatives of a more unitary motivational system (p.238).

### Mental Representations

Underlying psychoanalytic theory is the concept that children construct internal pictures or images of their experiences; such representations of infantile experiences with caregivers have been thought to form the basis for adult perception and for understanding adult relationships with others. This point of view is generally supported by findings from infant research, although some elaborations and modifications are necessary.



Psychoanalytic conceptions of "mental representation" tend to be based on a conflict model; that is, through conflict -- either with external (empathic failures) or with internal forces (drives) -- the child develops his or her own cognitive basis for perceiving social interactions ("psychic structure"). Infant research findings cast doubt on the notion of psychic structure and/or mental representations developing as a product of conflict or disequilibrium; instead they seem to emphasize the mutual influence of mother and child in the development of "expectations" of "interactional patterns" (Beebe and Lachmann, 1988). Beebe and Lachman found that the interactive process of "mutual mapping with a specific other person" could be represented by the nine month old infant (1988). These researchers de-emphasized instead the role of "empathic failures" in the development of social cognition (e.g., Kohut, 1977, 1984), emphasize instead the function of predictability in the parent/child relationship. For these researchers, the infant's ability to predict the caregiver's responses to him or her is more influential in the development of "healthy" social perception than whether or not these responses are frustrating. Other researchers have come to similar conclusions (e.g., Zelnick and Buchholz, 1990).

Infant social memory, or what psychoanalysis has been calling "representations," is "an individualized, personal expectation of how things are likely to proceed on a moment-to-moment basis" according to Stern. He coined the concept "RIGs," or "representation of interactions that have been generalized," to describe his understanding of how memories produce one generalized expectation of present and future interactions.

Another view, postulated by Westin (1990), is that what is generally referred to in a global fashion as "object relations" is actually a multi-faceted group of abilities and "propensities for action encompassing cognitive, affective, motivational and behavioral processes underlying interpersonal functions" (p. 672). Theories generally assume that "object relations" refers to a unitary phenomenon or developmental line; for example, Kernberg (1975, 1984) and Masterson (1976) have tended to focus on one aspect of experience as an indicator of a "level" of object relations. Developmental research supports a more complicated view of internal representational capacities, or social expectations.

#### Integrations/Implications for Therapy

Stern (1985) has argued that while data from infancy research calls into question some of the basic assumptions of psychoanalytic metapsychology, observations of infants do not necessarily pertain to the validity of clinical theories as therapeutic constructs. Child development past infancy, including the period when symbolic language occurs, may have more applicability to psychoanalytic developmental theories such as object relations theory. As he notes, however, a comparison of the two views is worthwhile and discrepancies between the two may lead to greater precision in both (p. 231).

Lichtenberg's (1983, pp. 30-32) comparison of infant research findings with psychoanalytic views on the nature of the relationship between therapist and patient illustrates some of the difficulties and potential benefits arising from an integration of

the two traditions. As an example, he compared Winnicott's notions of how the baby experiences the mother (1963) with data from infancy research. Winnicott postulates the infant's experiences of the mother are two-fold; he or she experiences the caregiver as an aspect of the background world in which the baby exists ("environmental mother") and as the caregiver with whom the baby interacts ("object mother"). Lichtenberg points to support for the concept "environmental mother" from neonate researchers' references to a background or nonspecific stimulus environment (Wolff, 1969; Sandler et al., 1976); he points to support for the "object mother" in the appearance of the social smile at two months. In Lichtenberg's view, however, while infancy research findings lend support for these two concepts, until the nature of infant experience is better understood a direct comparison of psychoanalytic concepts based on "unconscious" processes (such as Winnicott's "object mother" and "environmental mother") and behavioral responses (such as the appearance of a social smile in response to the mother) will be difficult (pp. 30-32).

In later revision of his observations on the relationship between infant research and psychoanalysis, Lichtenberg (1987) is more willing to make tentative connections between the two. Infant researchers refer to two different aspects of infant/caregiver relationships: the "background" of the relationship between the infant and his or her caregiver, and the "foreground" of the interpersonal interactions between the two. He sees similarities between Stern's concept of the infant's experience of "interpersonal climate" (1985), Sandler's psychoanalytic concept of "background of safety" (1960), and the infant researcher's concept of "background." For Lichtenberg, the verbal

content of psychotherapy sessions between patient and therapist bear resemblance to the "foreground of mother/dyad communications" referred to by infancy researchers. Similarly, in his view, the therapeutic relationship itself resembles the "background of care" described by infancy research. The difference, from Lichtenberg's standpoint, is that progress and growth occur, not by altering the basic pattern of relating as in the mother/infant dyad, but by exploring present patterns of relating between therapist and patient.

Self psychology theorists have attempted to integrate research findings by shifting their emphasis from Kohut's "empathic failure" model to one of "quality of attunement." For example, Demos (1988; Demos and Kaplan, 1987) reports a study of two infant girls, observed in their family settings every two weeks over a period of a year. Comparisons were made between patterns of behavioral/affective interactions between the two mother/infant pairs and between the more generalized behavior of the infants with other family members. Results of this study indicate that one infant, who learned that her mother did not respond to her attempts at mutual interaction, eventually generalized her compensating behaviors (initiating disengagement) to interactions with other family members. Demos inferred from this observation that the infant learned that (1) his/her states of interest and enjoyment do not last very long, (2) she/he has little control over initiating, prolonging, or ending these states, and (3) she/he is not the source of such states. Although both this, and Kohut's, model (1984) note the importance of mutually regulating successful interactions in the role of building psychic structure, the present model changes the emphasis from the

child's efforts to repair breaches in successful ongoing relationship (Kohut) to an emphasis on reliability and predictability in reciprocal interactions of the dyad.

As previously stated, Pine (1992) has attempted to integrate infant research findings by suggesting the stage theory concept be retained but with added emphasis placed on individual differences and variability of affect states within each developmental stage. Symbiotic experiences, or early experiences of oneness, occur during specific encapsulated times in his scheme, such as during feeding periods when mother and infant seem engrossed in each other and are physically close. Intense affect-states may heighten the importance of these times, and such "merger moments" may be the genesis of what is later experienced as feelings of oneness in adulthood.

Lachmann and Beebe (1988) hypothesize that the ability to perceive similarities and differences is the perceptual basis for the infant's capacity to enter into interpersonal exchanges including matching interactions within the mother/infant dyad. Eventually, along with further development and change throughout life, interaction expectancies result in a range of interpersonal experiences in the adult. These experiences range from those of oneness with an other to experiences of a sense of self. The normal cycle of matching, disruption, and repair (observed in mother/infant dyad interactions) is thus better viewed as both an analogy of (and a contribution to) experiences of oneness and self in later life.

Westin (1990) interprets infant research findings as evidence that the developmental timetable of pre-oedipal to oedipal, although useful in the past, must now be reconsidered in terms of a more global theory of object relations. He

underscores the importance of building variability into such models. He also criticized the use of the term "object relations" as a unitary concept, preferring to consider object relations as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, encompassing increasing differentiation, affect-tone, and quality of investment. As a consequence of this modification, he developed a method of diagnosing borderline personality disorder based on measuring each of these factors.

Like Beebe and Lachmann, Lichtenberg (1983) concedes that the best application of infancy research to psychotherapeutic technique may be to provide analogies for therapist/patient relationships (1983). For example, he relates matching behaviors of infant and mother to "relationship strain" between patient and therapist. Searching for configurations of relating in the therapeutic relationship permits the establishment of a common ground from which to observe the relationship. Sharing this common ground creates a context allowing for growth; searching for meaning within the relationship therefore becomes a curative element. Lichtenberg likens the mother's affective engagement with her child (as she imagines, guesses or wishes what he or she will become) to the therapist's alliance with the patient's potential state of being.

One difficulty with using an "infant as metaphor" approach might be, as with "developmental arrest" models of therapeutic technique, that there will be a tendency to condense all of the patient's difficulties into manifestations of relationships with early caregivers (Mitchell, 1988). The goal of therapy would then become, in addition to insight and search for meaning, the replacement of missing parental

functions. Such an approach could lead to distortions in meanings concerning the patient's experiences of the present. It also may run the risk of infantilizing the patient (Mitchell, 1988).

In recent decades the therapeutic relationship has been more and more understood as a real and new relationship (Mitchell, 1988). The past is still important although the emphasis is more on how the past can help make sense of what is going on in the patient's relationships in the present -- both within and outside of therapy. Although there may not be a direct link between pre-symbolic life and adult interpersonal functioning, the meaning of these early interpersonal events as they get transformed throughout life is what may be important for adult psychotherapy.

### **Social Psychology**

A review focusing on some of the methodological issues which have been raised in interpersonal relationship research will be presented in Chapter III. In the present section, three areas of social psychological relationship theory and research will be presented, those concerning the ways in which people think about their interpersonal relationships ("relationship cognition"), love, and loneliness. These three areas have been selected because they seem most closely related to the topic of this dissertation, describing the meanings of interpersonal connection in as it occurs in everyday experience. As will be seen, the approach and some of the goals of relationship cognition bear some resemblances to the approach of the present study. Although the experience of love is likely to be different in many respects from the

experience of connection, it may bear some resemblances as both occur in the context of close relationships; differentiating the two experiences may enrich definitions of the experience of love and well as connection. Perhaps loneliness occurs in the absence of connection; it may be a mirror reversal of the experience of interpersonal connection.

### Research on Relationships

The role of interpersonal relationships in our everyday existence is so pervasive that their importance could hardly be overstated. Satisfactory relationships have been shown to be important for many areas of human functioning; overall adjustment and sense of well-being, for example, have been related to the level of social support an individual receives from friends, family members, colleagues, neighbors, and other members of the person's "social network" (Sarason and Sarason, 1985). Another example is the strong association found across many different types of studies between low social support and increased risk for cardiovascular disease (Atkins, Kaplan, and Toshima, 1991). Demonstrations that the quality of our interpersonal relationships, especially close relationships, is related to different aspects of human development throughout the lifespan have been evidenced by research findings from clinical, developmental and social psychology (Jones, 1991).

Individuals, furthermore, have become more focused on intimacy in the face of an increasingly complex and alienating world; social norms concerning close relationships have become increasingly diffuse, even as community support systems



have decreased across a more mobile population. Such social changes have led to greater emphasis on the functioning of intimate relationships as individuals become increasingly dependent upon family, marriage, and other close relationships for support (Levinger and Raush, 1977). Most of an individual's important and lasting personal goals are closely related to his or her relationships with other people (Cantor and Malley, 1991). For all of these reasons, the past few decades have seen a phenomenal growth in research on interpersonal relationships. Berscheid (1994) recently reviewed the field of interpersonal relationship research; her summary of this field will serve as the basis for the present section.

The field of research on relationships is vast and multi-disciplinary. In psychology, such research has taken many different directions and has used many different methodologies; clinical psychology, developmental psychology, and social psychology are the largest contributors to the field from the discipline of psychology. There also are literatures on interpersonal relationships in sociology, marital and family therapy, and communication studies. Another body of writings exists in the feminist tradition and, as already presented, in the psychoanalytic literature.

To review empirical research on relationships, therefore, requires very broad strokes. Much information about relationships has been accumulated by researchers in these fields and, although interdisciplinary collaboration and influence is increasingly evident, an integrated knowledge base of personal relationships is only in its beginning stages (Brehm, 1992; Berscheid, 1994). One of the reasons research on interpersonal relationships is so diverse is that each discipline has tended to address only a certain

type of relationship. Marital and family therapy researchers, for example, have focused primarily on discerning difficulties within distressed marital relationships and with finding intervention strategies to treat those difficulties (O'Leary and Smith, 1991); developmental psychologists have addressed relationships between parents and children and between children and their peers (Hartrup, 1989); and so on.

One result of this varied attention in the field of relationship research, Berscheid asserts, is that the body of knowledge on relationships is fractured along lines of relationship type. In addition, there is considerable confounding of relationship type with (1) methodological approaches typical of each discipline, (2) characteristics of the individuals customarily found within each type of relationship, and (3) characteristics of the particular phenomena of interest. For these reasons, a conceptual integration of relationship research is difficult.

A review of the social psychology literature on close interpersonal relationships, in itself, is also quite broad. Social psychology researchers have also tended to focus primarily on various relationship types and a complete review must address studies on friendships (Fischer and Phillips, 1982), marital satisfaction (Bradbury and Finchum, 1990), divorce and separation (Hetherington, 1988), alienation (Dean, 1969), interpersonal attraction (Berscheid, 1985; Hendrick and Hendrick, 1983), commitment (Surra, 1987), social support (Vaux, 1988) and self-disclosure (Collins and Miller, 1994; Darlega and Berg, 1987) -- to name only a few.

Berscheid points out that although there have been some attempts (e.g., Wilmot and Baxter 1983; Ross and Sicol, 1979), it is still fairly rare for relationship

phenomena to be studied across relationship type. She states that by understanding relationship phenomena which occur across a variety of relationships, a more parsimonious approach to studying relationships could be utilized. Even though investigations concerning specific relationship types are necessary because certain phenomena are relevant only to those types, a "superordinate" understanding of relationship phenomena, however, has potential for moving the field ahead more quickly by studying elements common to all types of relationships at once.

One way researchers have addressed the need to increase understanding of the general nature of relationships has been to define the term "relationship", although there have been many debates even there. Relationship researchers have, however, come to accept that "interdependence" of behaviors, emotions and thoughts (Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Levinger, McClintock, Peplau, and Peterson, 1983) is a commonality among different types of close relationships; that is, when two people influence each others' ways of being in the world, interdependence - - and therefore a relationship -- is said to exist between them. Another example is the distinction between the terms "close relationship" and "intimate relationship."

"Intimate relationship" has been, at least theoretically, differentiated from "close relationship" (Reis and Shaver, 1988). Brehm (1992) summarized various definitions researchers have found useful in describing intimate relationships and concluded that there are three significant characteristics emphasized in the literature: (1) behavioral interdependence, (2) need fulfillment, and (3) emotional attachment. As Brehm points out these definitions lack generalizability since many "intimate" relationships are based

on only one or two of these characteristics; for example, one-sided love affairs, marital relationships in which emotional attachment has faded, brief romances, and so on.

Another attempt to understand relationships from a more general perspective -- by focusing on phenomena which occur across many types of relationships -- is that of a group of researchers who have been interested in the ways in which people organize, remember and recall information about interpersonal relationships. This line of research, termed "relationship cognition," is an extension of the fields of social cognition and interpersonal relationship research.

### Relationship Cognition Research

Relationship cognition research attempts to understand the cognitive processes within relationships and their association with a variety of relationship phenomena; as such, it attempts to understand phenomena underlying all relationship types (Berscheid, 1994). The following section presents a summary of Berscheid's (1994) review of this research.

Researchers in the fields of social cognition and interpersonal cognition have made use of the construct "social schema" to gain knowledge about how people organize (e.g., Berscheid, Grazaiano, Monson, and Dermer, 1976), recall from memory (e.g., Trafimow and Wyer, 1993) and use (Zadney and Gerard, 1974) information about other people. A schema is thought of as a model or representation that each person uses when he or she perceives social information; each person's

model determines the particular social stimuli to which a person will attend as well as to how that person will understand that stimuli. As one example, schemas have been found to guide a person's expectations about his or her own behaviors, as well as those of other people; expectations have been found to lead to behaviors which confirm those expectations (e.g., Snyder, 1984). Researchers in the field of interpersonal cognition have made use of the construct of schema, or mental model, to describe how people think about interpersonal relationships.

For example, Fiske, Haslam, and Fiske (1991) found that people tended to confuse characteristics of those who were in the same relationship category; these results, contrary to previous findings, imply that information about other people tends to be organized according relationship categories rather than person categories. In another study, attributes of spouses were more frequently confused with each other, implying that knowledge of the existence of a personal relationship between other people influences how information about those people is organized (Sedikides, 1993). Another example concerns research demonstrating that "significant others" is a category much richer, more organized and accessible than any other type of "person categories" (Anderson and Cole, 1990). Findings from this line of research imply that when people are aware of information about other people, such information about others is often categorized in terms of "individual-in-relationship" rather than in terms of "individual".

The study of cognitions concerning human relationships has influenced researchers to rediscover the importance of personal meanings in interactions,

according to Berscheid. Previous approaches in marital interaction research, for example, have tended to use behavioral methods; when exploring the relationships between attributions and relationship behaviors, however, researchers found discrepancies between the researcher's interpretations of the interactions and the participant's interpretations, leading to methods that better accounted for the meanings placed on interactions by the research participants (Weiss and Heyman, 1990).

Relationship cognition researchers have increasingly recognized the importance of the personal meanings people place on their interactions with others; they also hold the view that these meanings are based on contextual factors and attempt to account for these factors in their models (Berscheid, 1994). As an example of the increasing interest in contextual aspects of relationship phenomena, Fiske (1992) states:

People make meaning and think about each other in the service of interaction; their interactions depend on their goals, which in turn depend on their immediate roles and the larger culture. People's interpersonal thinking is embedded in a practical context. (p. 878)

Berscheid notes that relationship cognition researchers are beginning to recognize the importance of studying relationships in the context of ongoing relationships rather than in highly structured laboratory experiments concerning interactions between strangers or with hypothetical others. These latter, until recently, have been the primary methods utilized by social cognition researchers to study how we think about human relationships.

### Theories and Research Concerning Love

The social psychological literature on love falls into two categories: typologies (or theories) of love and individual differences in the experience and behavior of love. The present section will focus on some of the approaches social psychology has taken to develop theories and typologies of love relationships. Although "love" and "connection" are not synonymous in their everyday meanings, it seems likely there will be some overlap between the descriptions of interpersonal connection and love as described in this literature.

Theorists have taken several approaches to defining love; some have attempted to differentiate love from other types of relationships; other approaches have developed taxonomies of love types. Few of these have led to vigorous research programs, due in part to the lack of behavioral definitions for each type (Berscheid, 1994). Attempts have been made to define love by differentiating it from "liking" (Rubin, 1973). Some researchers have found "love" and "liking" to be distinct categories (Rubin, 1973; Pam, Plutchik, and Conte, 1975). Other researchers, however, have found these categories to be less discrete (Steck, Levitan, McLane, and Kelly, 1982). Another line of theory holds the view that love can be broken down into two types, "companionate" and "passionate" (Hatfield, 1988; Peele, 1988). In this conception, companionate love involves trust and a sense of security; passionate love involves not only pleasure but also intense emotional states such as anxiety and obsession (Hindy, Schwarz, and Brodsky, 1989).

Relationship researchers have utilized the distinction between passionate and companionate love to explore some of the thoughts and emotions experienced in passionate love (Brehm, 1992). Some researchers, for example, have investigated passionate love in terms of the relationship between the intense feelings of passionate love and physiological arousal (e.g., Berscheid and Walster, 1974); these studies have led to a debate concerning the role of misattribution in attraction (e.g., White and Kight, 1984). In another line of analysis, research by Tesser and Paulus (1976) investigated the role of cognition in passionate feelings of love in an attempt to account for the obsessive quality sometimes found in passionate love.

Of the theories of love which utilize a taxonomy approach there are three theories which have received the most attention in the literature: (1) those relating love to "attachment style" (e.g., Shaver, Hazan, and Bradshaw, 1988); (2) Lee's "love styles" (Lee, 1988); and (3) Sternberg's "triangular theory of love" (1987). Of these taxonomies, love as "attachment style" has proven to be the most useful as a research tool for gaining knowledge on the experience and behavior of love.

Shaver, Hazan, and Bradshaw (1988), for example, have postulated that since "attachment style" -- a concept developed to study parent-child relationships -- is understood to be relatively constant throughout life, adult experiences of close relationships should resemble those attachment styles. These attachment styles are "secure," "avoidant," and "anxious/ambivalent" (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall, 1978). In a study by Hazan and Shaver (1987), for example, adult participants were asked to select their own attachment style from a description of each style, and



then to describe the nature and quality of their romantic relationships. Those with an avoidant style reported a fear of closeness; anxious/ambivalent participants emphasized emotional extremes; those with the secure style described their romantic relationships as involving happiness, trust and friendship.

Lee's (1988) typology is based on the idea that like color, love is comprised of three primary and three secondary types, with many other shadings and combinations possible in his system. The six basic types are: (1) Eros - a quest for physical attractiveness and intensity, (2) Ludus - playful and uncommitted, (3) Storge - developing from long, slow attachment and commitment, (4) Mania - demanding and possessive love which feels out of control, (5) Agape - altruistic and unselfish, and (6) Pragma - pragmatic love, love based on utility. Research by Hendrick, Hendrick, and Adler (1988) suggests that Storge bears some resemblance to companionate love, and mania to passionate love; Eros was found to be like both companionate and passionate love -- that is, passionate and also secure.

Sternberg's (1987) approach to the theory of love blends three primary components -- intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment -- to arrive at eight major types of loving relationships (Sternberg, 1988). In his view, love involves emotion (feelings of closeness and intimacy), motivation (passionate feelings, romantic, sexual attraction), and cognition (decision/commitment to the relationship).

In general, attempts to integrate these theories have yielded inconsistent results (Hendrick and Hendrick, 1989; Levy and Davis, 1988). Hendrick and Hendrick (1992) have concluded that love has many different meanings, even for the same

person within a certain relationship type; the particular meanings depend on the person, the relationship, and the particular point in time. The only love theories which have been shown to be generally useful in research are the "attachment styles" theories and the distinction between companionate and passionate love (Brehm, 1992). It would seem that although some progress has been made in terms of understanding various aspects of love, a description of love which captures its essences across various love relationships is yet to be found.

### Loneliness

The literatures on love and on loneliness have grappled with definitions of what it means to be in a close relationship, albeit from two different points of view. Research on love has sought to understand interpersonal connection in its most celebrated form; the literature on loneliness has addressed the experience of what may be viewed, perhaps, as a lack of interpersonal connection. Loneliness, a common experience, has been shown to be associated with a variety of interpersonal difficulties throughout the life span (Jones, 1991), and the topic of loneliness has received a considerable amount of interest from interpersonal relationship researchers. The following section presents a selective review of this literature as it relates to the topic of interpersonal connection, based on summaries by Jones (1991) and Brehm (1992).

Loneliness has been addressed from several different approaches. Loneliness researchers have sought (summarized from Brehm, 1992) to describe the experience of loneliness (e.g., Lapota, 1969); to differentiate it from other constructs such as

depression and shyness (e.g., Solan and Koesster, 1989); to define and measure loneliness as a trait (Rubenstein and Shaver, 1982) and as a situational state (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980); to determine individual characteristics of lonely people (e.g., Rubenstein and Shaver, 1982); to explain the causes and effects of loneliness (e.g., Cutrona, 1982); and to describe the interpersonal behaviors of lonely people (e.g., Jones, 1990). Those research findings concerning the experiential aspects of loneliness and the interpersonal behaviors of lonely people are the most relevant for present purposes and will be the main focus in this section.

Perlman and Peplau (1981) have described loneliness as "a feeling of deprivation and dissatisfaction produced by a discrepancy between the kind of social relations we want and the kind of social relations we have" (from Brehm, 1992).

Weiss (1973) has attempted to differentiate between "social isolation" (experiencing a lack of friends and acquaintances), and "emotional isolation" (experiencing a lack of an intense emotional relationship). Other theorists and researchers have not found this to be a clear distinction (e.g., Vaux, 1988).

In another approach to studying the experience of loneliness, Lapota (1969) studied loneliness and widowhood and found that, for widows, loneliness is associated with the following events: desiring to be with the husband, wanting to be loved by someone, wanting to love and take care of someone, wanting to share daily experiences with someone, wanting to have someone around the house, needing someone to share the work, longing for a previous form of life, experiencing loss of status, experiencing loss of other people as a result of having lost a husband, and

fearing an inability to make new friends. This study suggests that the experience of loneliness is complex, even when considered in the context of a particular type of situation.

Rubenstein, Shaver, and Peplau (1979) found that four different sets of feelings were reported to be significant to the experience of loneliness in a sample survey of the general population: desperation, self-depreciation, impatient boredom, and depression. Included in these four major categories were such feeling states as "helpless," "afraid," "without hope," "abandoned," "vulnerable", "angry," "impatient," "ashamed," "insecure," "empty," and "alienated." Loneliness has also been shown to be associated with negative states such as anxiety, depression, hostility, and poor self-regard (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980). When considering these findings on the experience of loneliness, it clearly seems to be quite an unpleasant and uncomfortable experience.

The negative thoughts and emotions experienced by lonely people appear to be associated with behaviors that are likely to perpetuate the lonely state of the lonely individual. In a series of investigations involving the interactions of strangers in conversations with each other (summarized by Jones, 1991), lonely people were found to exhibit a variety of negative thoughts and behaviors which would seem to inhibit opportunities for establishing new relationships (Bell, 1985; Jones, Freemon, and Goswick, 1981; Jones, Sansome and Helm, 1983).

In these experiments, college students (who were strangers to each other) were asked to engage in brief conversations and then asked to rate themselves and their

partners. Jones summarized the implications of these findings as follows: (1) Lonely people tend to view themselves more negatively following conversations with strangers than non-lonely people; specifically, they perceive themselves as having been less honest, less open, less warm and less friendly than people who are not lonely (Jones, et al., 1981; Jones, et al., 1983). (2) Lonely people tend to expect, following a conversation with a stranger, that the other person will also view the lonely person negatively. (3) Lonely people expect strangers to be less interested in continuing interactions with them than do people who are not lonely (Bell, 1985). (4) Lonely people tend to rate their conversation partners more negatively than do people who are not lonely, sometimes having less interest in continuing interactions with the other person and less interest in establishing a friendship with the other person (Bell, 1985; Jones et al., 1981; Jones et al., 1983). In short, these studies suggest that lonely people tend to believe that strangers do not want to be involved with them, and also that lonely people tend to view strangers negatively and do not want to be involved with them. One study also demonstrated that negative ratings were stable over a two-month period of continued interactions (Jones et al., 1981)

In addition to these negative attitudes about their conversations with strangers, lonely participants behaved differently from non-lonely people in these studies. Following Jones' summary, the implications of these studies in regard to the negative behaviors of lonely people (as compared to non-lonely people) are that in conversations lonely people tend to talk less, ask fewer questions, obtain less information, change the topic more frequently, and attend less to their interaction

partners (Bell, 1985; Jones, Hobbs, and Hockenbury, 1982). The findings from these studies describe the ways in which lonely people approach interactions with strangers and suggest that the behaviors and experiences of lonely people may be leading to increases in their loneliness.

Further support for a strong relationship between negative interactional behaviors and the experience of loneliness is that social skills training and interventions designed to reduce social anxiety have been found to reduce the reported level of loneliness (Jones, Hobbs, and Hackenbury, 1982). Apparently, loneliness can be treated with interventions structured to address the experiential and behavioral components of loneliness.

The research on loneliness demonstrates that loneliness is an extremely negative experience and is associated with thoughts and behaviors that seem to perpetuate the interpersonal difficulties and unhappiness of the lonely individual. Loneliness has been shown, however, to be amenable to interventions designed to improve social interactions. Loneliness and the topic of the present study, interpersonal connection, may bear some resemblance in that loneliness may be negative reflection of connection; if so, the findings of the present study may add to the literature on loneliness and to the development of treatment strategies for relationship difficulties.

## Existential and Phenomenological Perspectives

### Heidegger and Sartre

Existential approaches to relations with other people, with the exception of the one proposed by Buber (1987/1958), begin on the assumption that inauthentic living and alienation are basic aspects of contemporary human existence. For Heidegger, other people are always an aspect of human experience; so much so that the typical state of humans is to live an impersonal, inauthentic life, precisely because others are at the very core of one's self, often seeming to define that "self" (Schroeder, 1984). Impersonal feelings about people as "Them" (Das Man) serve to alienate human existence from itself. Heidegger believed that there are two modes of existence, inauthentic and authentic: by being in the presence of an authentic other, one is drawn to authentic living; by being in the presence of an inauthentic other, one is drawn to inauthentic living. Thus, according to Heidegger, other people have the potential to distract from the essential project of personal existence. The implication here is that authentic existence is achieved alone (Pollio, et al., 1996, Schroeder, 1984). May (1983) has attempted to soften Heidegger's view by pointing out that the task and the destiny of being-to-death is shared with other people, implying that there is a sense in which humans are not alone in the quest for authentic living (Pollio, et al., 1996).

Sartre's view of human relating is also quite bleak. In his view, as in Heidegger's, one's sense of self derives from interactions with other people. For Sartre, every human encounter involves trying to gain control of aspects of the self

that were created by others; for this reason all relationships ultimately must fail.

Sartre's contribution to any analysis of human relationship is that he explored specific types of relationships based on power and control, such as occur in sadism and masochism, love and hate, desire and indifference (Schroeder, 1984).

As one of Sartre's analyses, consider his approach to what he terms "the Look": that is, a gaze from someone else which makes the self feel vulnerable, as in the case where someone spies on someone else through a keyhole. In this example, one person catches someone else in a compromising position and thus objectifies the person "looked at". If yet another person sees this person staring through the keyhole, then the person who was staring through the keyhole would now be objectified. The personal experience, in both cases, is of shame.

In describing the implications of this scenario (and of Sartre's view of human relating), Pollio et al. (1996) state:

In terms of my experience of other people, it seems clear that I have only two possibilities: I can attempt to turn him or her into an object (i.e., rob the person of freedom) or I can accept domination by the other and accept being an object for him or her. [...] The generalization of this experience is that the existence of even one other person always yields the possibility of my (or the other's) reduction to a thing. We are both always at risk, and this risk is not accidental; it is an essential aspect of social being. (p. 205)

### Merleau-Ponty

Human relations comprise one of the fundamental themes in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (1962). Unlike Heidegger and Sartre, existence is not viewed as an isolated existence. In his work on perception, for example, Merleau-Ponty views



human relations as an essential aspect of the world, perceived holistically in terms of the body. The human being comes to the world already relating to other people as part of his/her "awareness" of the social world. Merleau-Ponty presupposes an inter-relatedness in all human activity: there is no object independent of a subject and no subject independent of an object.

For Merleau-Ponty (1962) there is the possibility of genuine personal encounter between persons, as opposed to Sartre, for whom there cannot be encounters between two people where both do not objectify one another.

This recognition goes deeper than a psychological experience: each responds to the personal value, to the being of the other in a unique way; each recognizes the subjectivity of the other and the other's freedom. (Barral, 1986, p. 160)

That humans have a sense of history and can share perspectives on their "situatedness" in the world, allows for each to have subjectivity while not losing freedom. Because humans communicate, their respective situations can become intermingled. Merleau-Ponty maintains that even the most genuine and perfect love does not fuse the partners into one another; each perceives his own identity, while through their intimate communication, both share a common world. To love is to participate in a shared project; to love is an act of commitment freely entered.

### Buber

Martin Buber, in I and Thou (1958/1987) states "In the beginning is the relation." Buber, a philosopher and theologian, views existence as purely relational; that is, human beings always exist in relation to their world, including other people,

the natural world, and God. For Buber, the type of relationship between an individual and his or her world defines that individual at any given moment in life. Further, the nature of existence for humans is in this "between"; there is no individual, there is only individual-in-relation.

For Buber, there are two basic types of relationships, which correspond to two ways of being in the world: (1) the relationship of objectivity and subjectivity, "I-It," and (2) the relationship of "pure relation," "I-Thou." In each case, the "I" is shaped by the nature of the relationship. These two forms of being in the world shift from one to the other. When relating to a "Thou," one is relating with one's whole being. The basic experiential mode of the I-Thou is "dialogue" in which those who enter into it together have the joint intention of establishing a mutual presentness to each other (Yalom, 1965).

I-It is a relationship based on functionality, quantification, measurement, objectivity. I-It relationships lack mutuality and presentness. Since most of our lives are spent in the I-It mode of relating, Buber did not see it as inherently bad. Rather, he believed that our modern focus on science and quantification have led us away from the truest and most fulfilling mode of relating: "I-Thou" (Silberstein, 1989). When relating to an "It," whether the "it" is a person, an object, or God, one is relating to something separate, observable, useful. The I of the I-It relationship stands back and breaks relationships down into component parts. The paradigm of I-It is scientific, objectivistic thinking.

I-Thou forms of relating are immediate, authentic, and present-centered. I-Thou is noncontrolling, nonpurposeful, and nonutilitarian. It is selfless in nature, since the relationship is "unmediated" by concepts, ideas, or purposes. In the I-Thou, one can hear from the other person, "not your It, but your Thou is what is essential, though not surveyable" (Buber, 1958 p.100). Thou opens up the possibility for humans opening up to each other, really seeing each other, and realizing each other's potential God-like nature.

When relating in an I-Thou mode, Buber believed each person sees the other "with one's whole being" (1958). By this he meant that being fully open and present to the other, one is able to see the other in his or her fullness. Rather than seeing with categories, ideas, beliefs, the I of I-Thou accepts and confirms the existence of the Thou at the most basic human level. In I-It, the I relates only with part of the self and is able only to see aspects, rather than the totality of the other.

Buber's approach to philosophy and religion depends upon a clarification of the meanings of human experience as revealed in everyday existence. To this end, Buber, following Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, was wary of positivistic, objectifying methods of enquiry. Instead, he adopted the approach of existential phenomenology:

Buber rejected the notion that rational conceptual frameworks give us access to concrete reality. The task of philosophers is to clarify concepts by repeatedly testing them against our own existential experience to determine whether or not they conform to that experience. (Silverstein, 1989, p. 118)

Buber went so far as to say that the reduction of human beings to objects to be manipulated is the "primal evil of modern man, which is already planning to

annihilate him and his world" (1967a). His vision for society was a new form of community based on "total connectedness." From Silverstein (1989):

Acknowledging that a return to premodern social forms is impossible, Buber advocated a new, organic model of community. The basis of this new form of community was to be the belief in the total connectedness and relatedness of all existing beings, an idea derived from the teachings of Buddhism and Hasidism. In the new community, this cosmic connectedness was to find its social actualization through helping relationships. (p.115)

Buber's idea of the "helping relationship" is that there are relationships that help us in "becoming"; that is, which foster self-understanding and the realization of our creative God-like natures. Helping relationships are examples of an I-Thou relationship which are "reciprocal," but not "mutual." In mutuality, both partners experience the relationship in the same way. In reciprocal (I-Thou) relationships both are present to the other, although mutuality is not required.

Buber posits that I-Thou relationships are the ideal toward which we should strive, although we achieve it only in rare moments. "The Thou encounters me by grace -- it cannot be found by seeking" (1958, p. 62). In his view, life is an innate striving for relation, through which we become more wholly human.

The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require you to become; becoming I, I say you. All life is actually encounter. (1958, p.62)

Another important concept in Buber's thought concerns his notion of "dialogue." In dialogue, humans move back and forth between different stages of pure relation. One is "addressed" by an other and responds and addresses back. Dialogue, however, does not require spoken language. Two people passing on the

street can open up their relational natures to each other without saying a word.

Someone can miss the "sign" that he or she has been addressed, and miss an opportunity for becoming more wholly human and authentic. Moments of I-Thou occur may occur between strangers and between opponents, as well as between people who are familiar with one another.

Buber's view is that human beings are creatures of the "in-between"; that existence is always relational. As such, Buber's stance is very different from the standard existentialist view that isolation is the primary way humans exist in the world.

Since Buber held that the human being's basic mode of existence is relational, he would accord no place in his system for existential isolation. He would protest at my positing that isolation is a fundamental aspect of our existential situation. (Yalom, 1980, p. 367)

Existential/humanistic psychological theorists, such as Maslow (1968) and Fromm (1941), would agree with Yalom that "our existence begins [not with relation, but] with a solitary, lonely cry, anxiously awaiting a response." Maslow's relational theory posits that individuals are motivated to relate to others from one of two standpoints: (1) from a sense of independence and of being able to relate without needing something from the other, or (2) from a sense of dependence and need. For Fromm, human relation, especially love, is the salve for coping with the pain of separateness. Both of these theories, like Buber, incorporate the idea that mutuality and presentness to the other are important aspects of our most valued types of relating. Despite this, they all begin with the proposition that man's basic way of being in the

world is to be alone. Buber, of course, does not agree with this and sees our primary mode of existence as being essentially relational in nature.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

This chapter has three sections: (1) the first describes the problem of perspective, (2) the second, the conceptual underpinnings of the methodology used in this research project, and (3) the third, the particular method used in this study, the dialogic interview.

#### **The Problem of Perspective**

One of the most important methodological issues for anyone attempting to study interpersonal relationships is the question of perspective (Jones, 1991). Interpersonal relationships can be comprehended from several different points of view: each brings to view a past, a present, and a future filled with assumptions, attitudes, needs, desires. For example, societal perspectives view interpersonal relationships in terms of how smaller groups and dyads fit (also, have fit and will fit) into the broader contexts of community, nation, and world. Individuals within the relationship each view the relationship with hopes, dreams, fears and opinions about themselves, about the other, and about the relationship.

An observer of interpersonal relationships (such as a researcher) also understands relationships from a particular stance which includes theories, past observations, and research assumptions about the topic. It will, also, involve his or

her own personal history, present relationships, and possibilities for the future. Further, all perspectives are surrounded by larger cultural influences and assumptions. Finally, the relationship itself has its own stance from which to view itself. The group (or dyad) develops a "shared identity" of intersubjectivity, including its own set of assumptions greater than, or at least possibly different from, the total of its individual members (Raush, 1977).

Close interpersonal relationships are always in a state of change that is more descriptive of an ongoing process than a static entity. As such, interpersonal relationships are extremely varied and complex, making the choice of level and unit of analysis especially difficult (Meehl, 1978; Berscheid, 1986). For example, statistical problems often arise in the study of dyadic relationships relating to the "two-sidedness" of such relationships; often the most interesting questions involving two-person relationships cannot be adequately addressed by mainstream statistical methods (Kenny, 1988).

Much of traditional psychology has generally adopted a natural science approach to the investigation of these phenomena. This approach brings to the investigation not only particular methods but also underlying assumptions (Thompson, et al., 1989). This approach first seeks to break down a phenomenon into its component parts to understand the functioning of the parts. An understanding of parts in isolation is then applied to an understanding of the functioning of the phenomenon as a whole with the ultimate goal to arrive at causal explanation. This method also assumes that the phenomenon and its observation are separate, and that the



phenomenon is not affected by observation (Thompson, et al., 1989). These assumptions have been called into question by several interpersonal relationship researchers due to an increasing recognition of the complex, context-related nature of interpersonal relationships (Levinger, 1977; Raush, 1977; Berscheid, 1986).

For example, Kelley, et al. (1983) viewed an understanding of causal connections between relationship events (observed from a position of objectivity) as most important for our understanding of relationships. However, these researchers found that determining causality, especially in naturally occurring relationships is difficult; "covariant precedence" is usually not clear and multiple causation is the general rule of relationships. Other researchers have come to the conclusion that determining causality in naturally occurring dyads is a problem that is virtually insolvable by present methods (Berscheid, 1986; Levinger, 1977). There may be "too many variables to tease out causal explanations from the sheer number of possible causal factors." For example, Kelley et al. (1983) suggested five **general classifications** of "relevant causal factors" in the study of interpersonal relationships: (1) the individual (2) the partner (3) the interaction of individual and partner (4) the social environment, and (5) the interactions among all variables (1983).

The pressing needs of society have led psychology and other human sciences to search for means to predict and control aspects of human existence which, in turn, have led psychological researchers to favor an exploration of causes over a description of behavior and experience. Despite this emphasis, the diversity of phenomena related

to interpersonal relationship points to a crucial need for an adequate descriptive base (Hinde, 1981).

Purely descriptive analyses of interpersonal relationships also suffer from problems related to unit and analysis level. Relationships can be studied in terms of individual behavior and/or experience, interactions of behavioral components, dyadic relationships, and relationships to social structure (Hinde, 1976). Some would argue that behavioral reactions of participants to one another ultimately are the most important aspects of relationships. Relationships continue, however, over periods of time without meetings or communications between participants. The course of a relationship depends on the thoughts and feelings of its individual members as well as on events, both affective and behavioral, that occur in the interaction. As Hinde (1981) puts it, "what actually happened in an interaction may be less important than what the participants thought happened, or how they thought they felt, and what the partner is like may be no more important than what he is perceived to be like" (p. 3). Descriptions of interpersonal relationships, therefore, need to be concerned not only with behavior but also with what participants think and feel about their relationships.

All of these issues raise important considerations for the interpersonal relationship researcher. The question "Whose relationship is this?" or, more properly put, "From whose perspective do I choose to study relationships?" adds another level of complexity to investigations of the topic. The question is a basic one that may have far-reaching implications for interpretations of the results; sometimes, however, the matter of perspective is not addressed in research reports (Olson, 1977). Although

answers to the question of perspective may seem quite obvious, the problem of determining whose perspective is being studied can be a particularly intricate one.

### "Insider" and "Outsider" Perspectives

Olson (1977) describes two perspectives or "definitions of reality" commonly studied in interpersonal relationship research. Researchers either focus on the perspectives of participants ("insider" perspectives) or on the perspectives of those who observe the relationship ("outsider" perspectives). Olson notes that in many studies, the issue of perspective is not made explicit. He gives the example of family sociological research, in which "family relationships" (an outsider view) is often the purported object of study even though findings are based on reports about the family given by only one member of the family, typically the mother (an insider view).

Insider accounts ("self-reports") obtained from questionnaires, behavioral records kept by participants or interviews are the most common sources of data about relationships reported in the literature, partly because they are generally easy to obtain (Harvey, Christensen, and McClintock, 1983). More importantly, participants have greater access to the details of their relationship than do outsiders. Insiders know details pertaining, for example, to history, context, and other nuances of the relationship (Levinger, 1977). Further, participants have the only available access to personal experiences of the relationship as well as to less public aspects of the relationship such as those involving sexual behavior.

Members of a relationship typically have little access to determine if their relationship differs from other relationships; participants have their own biases and idiosyncratic ways of viewing the relationship leading them to an egocentric view (Levinger, 1977). Researchers, as "outsiders," have the advantage of observing a number of individuals and relationships even though the range of behaviors they observe may be restricted (Kelley, 1977). Kelley proposes this is one reason researcher and participant perspectives often do not agree (1977). Olson (1977) proposes that both insider and outsider perspectives are important to the study of interpersonal relationships and his view is that both are necessary to understand relationship phenomena.

In Levinger's comments (1977) on Olson's chapter concerning insider and outsider perspectives, he proposes a "continuum of insiderness" or "objectivity-subjectivity continuum." His view is that researchers, as observers of relationships, hold varying degrees of insiderness with respect to the interpersonal relationships being studied. He gives these examples: (1) an observer who is completely outside the relationship (such as one who watches unobtrusively through a window), (2) an observer who superficially interacts with the relationship pair (such as in a survey study), and (3) an observer who is intimately involved with the relationship (such as a friend who interviews one or both members of the relationship) (pp. 150-151). Levinger's view is that truly objective observers exist only in the abstract; observer-participant shared perspectives and assumptions assure that complete objectivity is not possible.

Levinger's comments pose an important question in interpersonal relationship research (Capra, 1982): How do researcher biases affect research findings? The answer to this question is not clear, although it must be addressed as carefully as possible by the researcher in every study. As Levinger states, "investigators are often more 'inside' than they expect to be" (p. 152). Further, relationships often are affected by the process of the research itself. He suggests that obtaining varying degrees of insiderness may be desirable in some cases, since differing perspectives provide different types of information. In a more recent paper, Raush (1986), describing an "ecological view" to community research, carries these ideas further:

The data we get are the resultant of the contextual frame; the intermesh of subject-investigator needs, expectations and assumptions, the instruments, definitions, instructions, the physical and social ambience. Data are not just produced by "subjects." Institutional arrangements, relationships between investigator and investigated, social setting, and especially the assumptions and theories of all parties involved, contribute to create the enactments that constitute data. (p. 602)

Perhaps the relationship between the insider and outsider perspectives may be best considered as dialectical. The researcher brings to his or her investigation a set of theories and assumptions which influence both the questions asked as well as the methods of research. The observer "sees" a phenomenon in the interpersonal relationship (in the context of research) and then relates what he has "seen" to phenomena from other relationships. His view of the general phenomenon is then reoriented. Relationship participants respond to research methods by involving themselves in the research and by bringing their own assumptions and priorities to the research endeavor.

Raush gives an example of a personal research experience illustrating participant contribution to the research process (1986). In a study of newlywed couples (Raush, Barry, Hertel, and Swain, 1974), couples spent "four long evenings" being surveyed and interviewed as part of the beginning of a longitudinal study. The couples were actively engaged and thanked the researchers for allowing them to participate. Months later, the researchers repeated some of the earlier procedures and added new ones. The couples were not as cooperative the second time; "responses were more cursory, our interactions were considerably briefer, people were far less likely to thank us" (1986, p. 603). Raush interpreted this response to mean that in the first encounter, the newlyweds were being affirmed in their new status; in the later encounter, no such affirmation was needed, and the data, thus, were diminished in richness. Further, he notes, the couples were giving them information that went beyond the "data": that is, information about transitions in identity and, possibly, about the effects of the research on their lives.

### Insider Perspectives

The use of multiple sources of information in interpersonal relationship research (e.g., both partners in a dyad as well as behavioral observations) has been advocated by several researchers (e.g., Olson, 1977; Levinger, 1977; Raush, 1977; Berscheid, 1986; Harvey, et al., 1983). Identification of conflicting views on the relationship under investigation is seen as important for clinical work as well as for empirical reasons. Olson (1977) reported a study by O'Dowd studying the degree of

supportiveness in families with addicted adolescents. She found that mothers of addicted adolescents reported they were as supportive as mothers of nonaddicted adolescents, while their adolescents did not rate their mothers as supportive as mothers of nonaddicted adolescents. Behavioral observations indicated that mothers of addicted adolescents did indeed give significantly less support than mothers of nonaddicted adolescents.

Another study, reported in Harvey, et al. (1983), by Gottman et al. (1976) evaluated discrepancies between intent and perception of messages communicated between married couples. The researchers found that distressed married couples exhibited significantly greater discrepancies than did nondistressed couples between the intent of messages sent from one spouse and the perception of that message by the other spouse. These researchers inferred that distressed couples had difficulty in interpreting each other's behavior. Harvey et al. (1988) note that the important findings of these studies would not have been possible if information from only one source had been obtained. Studies of discrepancies between different sources can be instrumental in developing therapeutic strategies.

As has already been noted, family sociologists have tended to focus only on one "insider" perspective (Olson, 1977). In his own research, Olson found that the "realities" of individual family members can be greatly divergent (Olson and Cromwell, 1975). He also points to the work of Bernard (1972), in which she refers to discrepancies between spousal conceptions of the marital relationship as "his" marriage or "her" marriage. Sternberg (1987) found that men are more satisfied with

romantic and marital relationships than are women. These results indicate that although varying perspectives on any one relationship may be congruent, or at least similar, it is often the case in current research that they need not be.

Although studying discrepancies between various relationship perspectives is certainly legitimate and necessary, some researchers feel that this type of research does not constitute research about the **relationship per se**, since the interdependence of participants' differing perspectives on the relationship is not taken into account (e.g., Thompson and Walker, 1982; Harvey, et al. 1988). These researchers have analyzed relationships by using various techniques of statistically aggregating data from relationship members to arrive at a measurement of the relationship as a whole. Choosing the specific elements and means of obtaining aggregations to obtain valid relationship measurements has been recognized by these researchers as a difficult, but not insurmountable, aspect of the research.

Raush (1977), following Davis (1973), describes the perspective of the relationship (as a whole) as a process "leading to an intersubjectivity through which individual boundaries are transformed." p. 171). He describes the following stages of the process: establishing a pattern of interrelating, linking communications (in terms of meaning), reducing "spheres of privacy," and increasing facilitation of the other's interactions with the environment.

That people have a particular point of view on any subject (including interpersonal relationships) is a given. We all bring to every event or topic our own history and our own set of assumptions. What is not so clearly distinguishable is the



relationship of our assumptions and perceptions to what is "real." Methodological approaches based on the natural sciences assume that what is "real" may be approached by stripping away personal biases until an objective stance is reached, revealing the one, true view of reality (Thompson, et al., 1989).

How one understands the question of perspective in interpersonal relationship research may also be considered as intrinsically related to one's stance towards the question of how we know what is real. As discussed, Levinger proposed a continuum of "insider-outsider" subjectivity (1977). If one accepts that complete objectivity is unattainable (as Levinger has suggested), then **any** information gained through observation is never purely free of the observer's perspective.

Further, knowledge of what is "real" is never free of assumptions, attitudes, feelings, etc. One could say the perspective of the observer is always present in the only "real-ness" of the relationship to which we have access, our own experience. The perspectives of each participant presents a "real" relationship of his or her own, although participant perspectives may differ from ours, the researcher, from each other, and even from the perspective of the relationship as a whole. The patterning of all of these perspectives can be seen as a relative one; each perspective is interrelated with the other in a process that is dynamic and changes over time.

### The Second Person Perspective

Another way of addressing the problem of perspective in relationship research is to use a perspective which is both "insider" and "outsider," the dialogic perspective

of existential phenomenology (Pollio, et al., 1996). First and third person perspectives are relevant as ways of investigating certain relationship phenomena; when the topic is the meaning of a relationship, a method which takes into account "insider" and "outsider" perspectives is called for. If one accepts Rausch's view that the interpersonal relationship is a dialectic among different perspectives, the methodology of existential phenomenology offers one alternative for solving the problem of other minds.

Since experience is personal, the problem of other minds can be bridged only with the help of some specific other whose experiences are at issue. The method that seems natural to attain a proper description of human experience is that of dialogue in which one member of the dialogic pair, normally called the investigator, assumes a respectful position *vis a vis* the real expert, the subject or, more appropriately, the co-researcher. In this way, a path toward understanding emerges from the common respect and concern of two people committed to exploring the life world of one of them (Pollio, et al., 1996, p. 41).

As a "second person" perspective, dialogue offers the opportunity to clarify meanings between the "you" (researcher) and the "you" (co-researcher). Dialogue encourages the co-researcher to describe his or her experience in a clear and precise way to the researcher, in a way that will help the researcher (and also, perhaps, the participant) to understand more fully the description. Existential phenomenological interviews lend themselves well to discover meanings which can be understood by others (Pollio, et al., 1996).

### Conclusions

When researchers study interpersonal relationships, an important question is "Whose relationship is being studied?" Despite considerable evidence that many of

the phenomena of interpersonal relationships are inextricably related to subjective (perspectival) accounts of the relationship, research on relationships has tended to focus on objective (i.e., more easily quantifiable) aspects of relationships. Various perspectives on a single relationship often do not agree, and, in some cases, the relationship may exist only from the perspective of one person (Jones, 1991).

As Berscheid has commented, interpersonal relationship researchers find themselves caught between the knowledge that the complexity of their topic is overwhelming the capacities of their methods and the fear that they risk losing legitimacy as a scientific enterprise if the goals of the research endeavor are limited to what can be answered by standard approaches. As Berscheid points out, despite these problems significant progress has been made in gaining knowledge, even though attempts to model the field after the natural sciences has been slow; her view is that interpersonal relationship research may "never look like classical physics." (p.281)

The perspectival nature of relationships contributes to the multi-faceted nature of relationships; looking at relationships from different "insider" points of view is important to understand the nature of interpersonal relationships. As Levinger (1977) points out, Western culture and the social sciences have tended to take an individual perspective in which the individual becomes the essential unit of analysis. Methods which take into account various perspectives combined in one study are needed. Berscheid (1986) suggests that psychologists studying interpersonal relationships need to be open to new approaches to studying the phenomena of human relationships. Interpersonal relationships are context-dependent as are many topics in psychology.

There may be too many complex "feedback loops" in interpersonal relationships to study the functioning of their elements in isolation (Berscheid, 1986).

### **An Existential Phenomenological Approach to Research**

Existential phenomenology is best understood as a philosophical perspective concerning the nature of human existence combined with a set of tenets concerning research methodology for the social sciences. These tenets are based on a set of assumptions which differ significantly from the underlying core assumptions of the methodology most often used in the social sciences. Existential phenomenology offers an alternative paradigm for studying the phenomena of the social sciences, human experience and behavior (Thompson, et al., 1989). The alternative research methods of existential phenomenology, while in some respects radically different from more traditional approaches, are no less empirical or rigorous.

The following section presents the philosophical basis and research program of existential phenomenology, the basic tenets and core assumptions of this philosophy with a description of the differences between the core assumptions of existential phenomenology and those of natural science methodologies. Finally, it will also present a general description of one existential phenomenological dialogical method.

### **The Existential Phenomenological Perspective**

Existential phenomenology maintains that human experience and objects of human experience (events and objects in the world) are inextricably related in terms of

their meaning for human existence. It also holds that human behavior is an expression of meaningful experience and thus the study of meaningful experience is fundamental to all human knowledge and constitutes the most important subject matter for psychology (Polkinghorne, 1989).

### Existential Background of Phenomenology

Existential phenomenology takes its theoretical base from the existential philosophy associated with the works of Sartre (1962/1956), Heidegger (1962/1927), Merleau-Ponty (1962/1945), and Buber (1986/1958) as well as from existential and humanist psychologists such as May (1969), Maslow (1970), Rogers (1961), and van den Berg (1961). Existentialism views human existence as a project of self-creation with each person responsible for discovering his or her own satisfying sense of personal identity and meaning in life (Pollio, et al., 1996). Existentialists emphasize the inevitable future-directedness of choices an individual makes in the face of death (seen by existentialists as the only certitude in life). The existential project, therefore, is to live life fully both in light of the recognition of its eventual ending and in the acceptance of ultimate personal responsibility for how one's own life is led. Existential phenomenologists are particularly interested in those aspects of everyday living holding personal meaning for the choices one makes in the personal creation of one's individual life.

Phenomenologists refer to the world as lived through personal experience as the "life-world," or *Lebenswelt* (Valle and King, 1978). The life-world and the individual are assumed to be in a relationship of mutually dependent meanings, such

that neither the individual nor the world can be adequately studied in isolation from one another. In order to study human existence, existential phenomenology may be considered a "first-person" psychology, since it attempts to take into account the interdependence of consciousness and world and gives preference to the study of the world through the eyes of an individual. Since it views the nature of knowledge (and research) as a dialectic of meaning created between individual and world (researcher and phenomenon under investigation), existential phenomenology is also a "second-person" psychology (Pollio, et al., 1996). At its best, phenomenological methodology provides an environment in which the meaning of an individual's experience is not only described but also clarified for the individual for the first time as researcher and participant co-participate in gathering the data.

### Phenomenological Research

The methods of existential phenomenology also have philosophical underpinnings, especially in the works of Husserl (1960/1925), Heidegger (1962/1927) and Merleau-Ponty (1962/1945). Modern existential phenomenological methods also take account of Dilthey (1958/1890) and Gestalt psychologists such as Koffka (1935), Kohler (1929), and Wertheimer (1945). The phenomenological method is descriptive, and the subject matter is the meanings of personal experiences as revealed to the individual through the course of everyday living. Husserl advocated a descriptive method of enquiry for philosophy and psychology, beginning with an exact, attentive description of one's intellectual processes while engaged with an object of perception (phenomenon).

Heidegger applied Husserl's method to existential topics, or those in which the human situation is revealed. Merleau-Ponty explored and underscored the relevance and importance for psychology of the study of human experience expressed as individual behavior in the world. Dilthey's hermeneutic analysis is used as a method and an approach to understanding the significance of the subject matter of psychology, the meanings of experience and behavior.

### Results of a Phenomenological Investigation

Existential phenomenology seeks to arrive at basic descriptions of experience which are pre-theoretical and sensitive to context; the researcher attempts to obtain a description of experience that is as near to "lived" experience as possible. The results of an existential phenomenological investigation are general descriptions of a specified human experience, e.g., the experience of one's body (MacGillivray, 1985), the experience of time (Dapkus, 1985), the experience of other people (Nowell, 1993), the experience of being anxious (Fischer, 1989), the experience of regret (Gordon, 1992), etc.

Results are presented in the form of a summary, such as in a brief narrative, or as "thematic" meanings. The summary or thematic structure presents "patterns or structures" common to the experience described by individual participants. The aim of this approach is to discover patterns and structures emerging from the phenomenon which are recognized and appreciated by anyone familiar with the topic as both accurate and enlightening descriptions of the experience. A "thematic structure" includes: (1) a general description of the phenomenon (themes) (2) inter-relationships

among the themes, and (3) the background or context within which the themes make sense; i.e., the "situations" or "grounds" of the phenomenon. The structure is often presented in terms of a geometric figure designed to capture relationships of the themes to one another and to their relevant contexts.

### Tenets of the Phenomenological Method

The main tenets of the existential phenomenological method are: (1) phenomena, as objects of perception, are always context dependent; (2) perception is always a perception of something; that is, perception is always directed attention; (3) results of a phenomenological investigation are descriptive, but not static, and human phenomena are seen as ever-evolving, never "finished"; (4) the relationship between the perceiver and that which is perceived is one of co-creation, or "co-constitution"; (5) the nature of experience is that it is both "unreflected" and "reflected"; and (6) a phenomenological investigator adopts an attitude of openness to the phenomenon which includes, in so far as possible, holding personal presuppositions in "abeyance."

### Contextual Nature of Perception

Gestalt psychologists Wertheimer, Kohler, and Koffka and also Gibson (1979) were interested in the contextual nature of psychological phenomena and developed methods for studying perceptual phenomena, taking their contextual nature into account. For example, the familiar Gestalt figure/ground reversal drawings are meant to illustrate several important phenomenological proposals concerning the unfolding of experience as well as the relationship between experience and context.



Existential phenomenology holds that experience and perception are constantly changing and shifting, as consciousness focuses on first one thing, then another, as in William James' (1950/1890) metaphor of a bird, flitting from one branch to another. Further, as in the example of a gestalt figure/ground reversal figure, perception of foreground and background often shift, such that what was once background becomes foreground and vice versa. Background and foreground are dependent upon each other to be "seen." Furthermore, it is possible intentionally to change one's focus such that the shift occurs (Thompson, et al., 1989).

Similarly, in everyday human existence contexts give rise to varying experiences; what was once context can quickly shift to the foreground of our awareness. For the phenomenologist, an event, phenomenon, or object and its context or background are inextricably related even though it is possible to think of an isolated object. For example, a table is still a table whether in my dining room or in my office. Yet when in my dining room, the table affords a certain "eat-on-able-ness" that is different from the "work-on-able-ness" of the table in my office. This aspect of knowledge and meaning that is context-related is considered by phenomenologists to be extremely important to our general understanding of phenomena; essential aspects of knowledge are considered to be lost when context is not considered.

#### The Intentional Nature of Perception

Focus of attention is assumed, by phenomenologists, to have an intentional quality; that is, there is always something that we focus upon. Further, the perceived "something" is defined by us and our past experiences and therefore refers back to us,

since it is the object of awareness of **our particular** focus. In turn, our awareness is modified by (and redefined) by the object of awareness which then refers back to the something we perceive, and so on.

It is this intentional quality to experience which leads phenomenology to emphasize that whenever one is studying anything, any object (whether a table, a work of art, a social act), one is studying a **relationship** between a perceiver and something perceived (Idhe, 1986). Existential phenomenology therefore attempts to take into account the nature of the researcher/object-of-research relationship. The particular perspective and experiences brought to the research by the researcher always (and unavoidably) form and define the research; in turn, the researcher's ideas are reformed and redefined by the topic under investigation, and so on. This process is considered to be ongoing and dynamic, influencing and changing an understanding of both the thing defined and the person defining.

### The Hermeneutic Approach

Results of a phenomenological study are never considered to be "static" or "finished," but are subject to continued revision as more information is obtained. The back and forth process of mutual influence is not a disadvantage to the research (as it might be in more natural science approaches), but simply the nature of how knowledge of the world is obtained and communicated. For example, my experience of another person changes as I get to know that person. At first, I may be aware of the color of his or her eyes, or of how the person reminds me of someone else. If our encounter continues and we become involved in a conversation, I may begin to

experience both in myself and in the other person a growing sense of enjoyment in our conversation and in each other. My experience of the other person may shift to seeing the person as someone I might be interested in talking with again. And, if our relationship continues to develop, I may eventually become aware of a deepening sense of closeness and connection (Nowell, 1993).

### The Co-Constitutive Nature of Experience

For the phenomenologist, the possibilities and meanings of experience and behavior are not "within" me nor are they in the world as "within" some other person "external" to me. All meanings are between me and some other person and/or the world. Thus meaning and perception are said to be created as a meeting between the two **poles** of the meaning act; one side is termed the **noema** (experienced) of the event whereas the other side is termed the **noesis** (experiencer) approaching the **noema** from his/her own perspective of the event (Husserl, 1960/1925). In this rendition, both sides of the meaning act are said to **co-constitute** (one could say co-create) each other.

In the case of interpersonal relationships, awareness of the other person focuses on certain aspects which emerge from the context of the totality of the our meeting, and which have to do with the meaning of the experience for me. The awareness is, thus, **my** awareness of the person as person-with-brown-eyes which changes (during the process of interacting with the person) to person-I-can-have-fun-with and, eventually, to person-I-feel-close-to. The process of experiencing is described, in

phenomenology, as a relationship between the thing focused upon (in this case, the other person) and individual doing the focusing (me).

### Reflected and Unreflected Experience

Existential phenomenology assumes that human experience is both reflected and unreflected (Pollio, 1982). Reflected meanings are seen as arising from the ground of unreflected experience (Thompson, et al., 1989). When immersed in an activity, we generally do not disengage ourselves to observe and reflect on what we are doing at the time; our everyday experience is usually one of being caught up in whatever project is at hand (unreflected).

The study of psychological topics as experienced is problematic due to the complex nature of consciousness as a dynamic ever-changing activity (Polkinghorne, 1989). In view of the existential phenomenological focus on the meaning of experience, however, reflections are considered valid data since reflection is a normal process of consciousness and it is through reflection and language that the meaning of human experience becomes manifest, often for the first time (Pollio, et al., 1996). Reflection and abstraction are important aspects of our experience as well; the human ability (and propensity) to reflect on experience is capitalized upon in the methodology of existential phenomenology.

### Openness to the Phenomenon

Husserl's phenomenological method called for an investigation of the particulars of human consciousness using four related rules which have been adopted by existential phenomenologists (Ihde, 1986). These rules (summarized by Idhe,

1986) are as follows: (1) attend to phenomena as they appear in experience (be open to the phenomenon); (2) describe phenomena, rather than attempt to explain phenomena since attempts to explain inhibit pure description by seeking to find what is "behind" what is revealed by the phenomenon; (3) give equal weight to what is immediately revealed by the phenomenon without assuming that certain aspects are more important or "real" than others; (4) search for invariant patterns and structures of the phenomenon (search for essential features of the phenomenon).

The third rule, give equal weight to what is immediately revealed in the phenomenon, is approached through the process of "bracketing." A perceiver, including a social science investigator, always brings to an encounter with a phenomenon a personal world view including preconceptions and judgments about the phenomenon. The phenomenological investigator makes every effort to withhold prejudgments about the nature of a phenomenon until invariant patterns or structures emerge from the phenomenon itself. The process of holding prejudgments "in abeyance" is called "bracketing." This process of bracketing involves making explicit, and of then attempting to hold aside, preconceived assumptions about the phenomenon. The investigator explores and describes his or her own ideas about the phenomenon in order to hold these views to the side -- in "brackets," so to speak. This does not mean phenomenology expects the investigator to lay aside beliefs entirely, which would be impossible. Instead it means the phenomenological attitude is one of "looking before judging"; that is, by taking full notice of the particulars of

the phenomenon without imposing something upon them or drawing conclusions too quickly.

The investigator rigorously questions all interpretations and assumptions at every step of the investigation. Further steps to ensure rigor and bracket one's own preconceptions during the analysis of the data include: (1) making use of an "interpretive group," that is, a group of colleagues practiced in the method, whose purpose is to challenge the investigators and each others' prejudgments or presuppositions during the analysis stage of the investigation; (2) continually referring back to the data as evidence whenever preliminary patterns or structures begin to emerge; and (3) describing results of the analysis with words and phrases used by the participants; better phrased, the co-participants (subjects) in the study (Pollio, et al., 1996).

### An Alternative Methodology for Psychology

The predominant methodology in psychology, the methodology of the natural sciences, is based on a research paradigm deriving from logical positivism or its modern version, logical empiricism (Thompson, et al., 1989). The core assumptions underlying logical positivism are heavily influenced by a "Cartesian" or "rational" perspective (Giorgi, 1983; Pollio, 1982; Valle and King 1978) and it is to the assumptions we now turn.

### Core Assumptions of Logical Empiricism

Thompson, et al. (1989) illustrated the core assumptions of logical empiricism with the use of two metaphors, the metaphor of the machine (Pepper, 1942) and the metaphor of the container. Cartesianism views any system, such as a psychological phenomenon, as composed of various parts (like a machine). These parts can be analyzed and measured using a consensually agreed upon means of communicating results, mathematics. The operation of the system is seen as a function of its various parts, and an analysis of the parts is expected to lead to an explanation of the whole system. Furthermore, it is usually assumed the functioning of the system will not be dramatically disturbed by the analysis.

Thompson, et al. (1989) point out that one consequence of this view is that any aspects of the system which are not measurable tend to be viewed as not amenable to "scientific analysis." This leads to reductionistic explanations offered as explanations of the overall operation of the system. For example, complex behaviors are explained in terms of stimulus-response patterns; mental events and processes are explained as physiological, physical, or chemical events and processes in human brains; social processes are seen as reducible to relationships between individuals, and so on (Berry, 1977).

Another set of core assumptions underlying logical empiricism relates to Cartesian dualism. Thompson et al. (1989) used the metaphor of a container to describe the assumptions of logical empiricism which are based on Cartesian dualism. For this view, the body is viewed as container for "mind"; "mind" is viewed as

container for "internal representations" of "external reality" and so on. External reality is considered "objective" whereas internal events are considered "subjective." Subjective events can be isolated (as in "cognitive processes") and analyzed. External reality, however, is independent of human consciousness. A further implication of Cartesian dualism is that there is a one true (and quantifiable) description of events and objects in the world. Cartesianism dualism permeates much of current scientific and philosophical thought (Pollio, 1982).

### The Results of Natural Science Methodologies

Natural science seeks to describe causal relationships, which, hopefully, can then be used to control and predict events. Natural science methods are constructed to answer the basic question "Why?" and not "What?" (Thompson, et al., 1989). The result for psychology has been that in the rush to answer "why" questions, as in the natural sciences, there has been a tendency to bypass any attempt at grappling with the "what" of psychological phenomena. Despite the fact that "natural scientific psychology" has been quite productive, Valle and King (1978) feel that psychology has unnecessarily limited itself by adopting a natural science methodology. In general, the subject matter of psychology has become "behavior" in a restricted sense of the word, i.e, behaviors that are observable and quantifiable (Pollio, et al., 1996).

Another effect of a natural science approach to psychology is that the experiential world of the individual, which is difficult at best to operationalize in natural science terms, becomes a troublesome and sometimes impossible topic to study. Natural science methods are not designed to produce descriptions of personal



experience, such as a description of what the experience of anger is like for an individual. For example, the experience of anger could be operationalized as: making threatening gestures or facial expressions; increases in breathing, pulse and blood pressure rates; or, as instances of an individual's subjective experience of anger (Valle and King, 1978).

By studying anger in this fashion, psychology may learn much important information about anger: e.g., physical correlates, frequency of occurrence, rate of threatening behaviors, etc. When we think about our own experience, the phenomenon of anger seems different from that accounted for by any one or even all of these measurable aspects of anger. What is missing is what anger "feels like" and what it means to be angry. A researcher also could ask a subject to choose between several descriptors concerning the experience of anger (such as "feel like punching something" or "feel energized"); in order to quantify these descriptors, they would be need to be pre-determined by the researcher before the experiment began and may not necessarily "fit" the experience of any particular research subject. Any attempt to provide a hypothetical context for the descriptors would likely seem artificial and contrived. If the natural science researcher measures "subjective experience of anger" the problem of description (operationalization) arises, since one person's experience of anger may be very different from that of another.

Another approach might be to interview a subject and then analyze and count the words he or she uses related to the word anger. The results would be very

interesting from a linguistic standpoint, but still would not necessarily offer a contextually based description of the experience of anger.

### What Existential Phenomenology Offers Psychology

The core assumptions of existential phenomenology are essentially in disagreement with those of logical positivism and natural science methodology. These differences would seem to have far-reaching implications for phenomenological understandings of what a human science is supposed to look like and what is valid subject matter for psychology. Part of the existential phenomenological program has been to argue that the traditional natural science approach to psychology has unnecessarily narrowed the scope of the subject matter of psychology in order to make it amenable to the methodology of the natural sciences (e.g., Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Giorgi, 1971; Valle and King, 1978).

Existential phenomenologists argue that by adopting the methodology of the natural sciences, psychology has left basically uncharted many important and interesting domains, the ever-present way the world is revealed to each of us, through our experience (Pollio, 1982). Especially since the rise of behaviorism, psychology has become primarily a science of observable behaviors, almost to the exclusion any real concern with experience. Some phenomenologists, such as Merleau-Ponty (1964), have even suggested that by limiting itself in this manner, psychology has contributed only a surprisingly small amount of knowledge to our general knowledge in comparison to the contributions of the natural sciences. Even though some existential phenomenologists would argue that the logical positivist perspective is

wrong, a more reasonable stance would seem consider the logical positivistic approach of natural science psychology and existential phenomenology as defining differing world views (Thompson, et al., 1989).

Although there are basic differences in core theoretical assumptions and in methodology, existential phenomenological methodology shares with natural science methodology a concern for rigor. The existential phenomenological approach is empirical, its conclusions are based on evidence, procedures are followed to maintain fidelity to the original data, and research results are open to public and peer review and scrutiny of method (Thompson, et al., 1989). As William James (1950/1890) so aptly noted, our experience flows before us as a stream and our awareness flits from object to object as a bird lands first here and then there. Human consciousness does not present itself to us as describable in the fixed, objectifiable sense necessary for natural science methodology.

Existential phenomenology proposes a contextual approach that attempts to overcome the mind/body, subjective/objective split and attempts to offer a method for gaining knowledge about experience: the dynamic, complex, contextual and meaningful fabric of human existence. As such, phenomenology offers a research alternative to logical positivist approaches. While attempting to synthesize two widely differing perspectives/approaches is not considered to be desirable (Pepper, 1942), existential phenomenology, as an alternative, offers psychology a method that allows human experience to be studied in its fullness.

### The Dialogue Method

Phenomenological methods of research are varied, yet there are some generally used formats. Commonalities among these formats derive from the fact that all major methods are designed to describe experience while preserving the contextual nature of the specific topic under investigation. Many researchers contend (following Colaizzi, 1978) that the researcher should determine the choice of method based solely on what is best suited to the phenomenon under study. Most phenomenologists prefer a face-to-face interaction; an open-ended, unstructured interview format seems to be the most productive means of providing a powerfully meaningful, richly woven description of another person's experience (Kvale, 1983).

Dialogic methods have the advantage of allowing both researcher and research subject ("co-participant") to clarify for each other the meanings discovered in the course of the discussion. Thompson, et al. (1989) have described a frequently used method of obtaining and interpreting data from dialogic interviews. In this method, the researcher strives to understand experiences as described by the co-participant, who is considered to hold expert status on the subject of his or her experience. The interview usually begins with a simple question requesting the participant to describe his or her experience of some phenomenon. Asking the participant to situate his or her description of some experience in the narrative of a lived event in which the experience occurred is a useful way of helping the participant to produce "experience-near" descriptions.

Once the interview has begun, it proceeds in the form of a conversation; the researcher asks clarifying questions and refrains as much as possible from making interpretive comments. The researcher may make attempts to summarize what the participant has said during the interview in order to further clarify and increase understanding.

Usually, several interviews are obtained in this fashion. Often, a "bracketing" interview in which the researcher is interviewed by a colleague concerning his/her own experience of the topic is conducted before the researcher begins collecting data. The bracketing interview, as already noted, allows the researcher to explore his/her own particular perspective so as not to "push" for this understanding in the research interviews.

All interviews are transcribed and then interpreted within the context of an interpretive group familiar with existential phenomenological methods. The interpretive group evaluates the validity of interpretations by requiring of each suggested interpretation sufficient evidence in the words of the participant from the transcript. The group perspective is also meant to provide the researcher a broader base of understanding from which to approach the transcripts; the group also energizes and enlivens the interpretive process, facilitating continued openness and sensitivity to the meanings in the text of the interview.

Interpretations are continually related to each other and checked against the rest of the interview such that the interview is understood in a holistic fashion. After several interviews, patterns of experience ("themes") common to all interviews begin

to emerge. The results, the general themes common to all of the interviews, are usually expressed in the specific words used by participants.

"Themes" carry the requirement that they be readily understandable, recognizable, and verifiable by anyone reading the transcripts and having familiarity with the topic. At the general thematic level, as at the interpretive level, descriptions are evaluated against interviews to check for inclusiveness and accuracy.

### **Specific Methods Used in This Research**

The interview method used in this study has been used in numerous existential phenomenological studies completed at the University of Tennessee (e.g., MacGillivray, 1985; Taylor, 1995; Gordon, 1992; Peacher, 1995), and have been described in detail by Thompson, et al. (1989). The research was conducted with the assistance of a phenomenology research group. This group consists of ten to twelve people who meet weekly for the purpose of discussing existential phenomenology and for analyzing transcripts of phenomenological interviews.

#### **Preliminary Interview**

The study began by informally asking members during a meeting of the research group to think of times when they "have experienced connection with another person." Each member of the group could think of specific experiences, and one member agreed to be interviewed in the group meeting. This interview revealed the

topic to be a meaningful one, and one that could be easily discussed in a dialogic interview.

### The Bracketing Interview

After this preliminary interview, the researcher engaged in an interview with a colleague; this time with herself as participant. The purpose of this interview was to clarify the researcher's own experiences and reflections on interpersonal connection. This "bracketing" interview was audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed in the research group. The "bracketing interview" is a standard practice in studies conducted by anyone in the phenomenology research group at the University of Tennessee.

### Participants

The experience of connection in interpersonal relationships was studied by obtaining twelve open-ended, audiotaped interviews conducted with individuals recruited from two communities in Tennessee. Twelve people volunteered for the study when approached by the investigator. Potential participants also were suggested to the investigator by friends and family members.

The number of interviews necessary for a study using this method depends upon the topic; when meaningful "invariant patterns" emerge in the data, the researcher should continue to obtain a few more interviews to confirm the results. Usually eight to fifteen interviews are sufficient to arrive at a meaningful description of the phenomenon.

The only criteria for participation in the study were: (1) having available 2-4 hours of time to participate in the project, (2) having had experiences which the participant would be willing to describe as experiences of "interpersonal connection," and (3) a willingness to engage in dialogue concerning these experiences. Only two people who were approached about being participants in the study refused; both stated that time constraints prevented them from participating.

Of the twelve individuals participating in the study, six were female and six male. All had continued their education past high school. They ranged in age from 24 to 55. Nine participants were married; eight had children. All but one were involved in a college training program or in a professional career; the remaining participant had professional training, but had decided temporarily to forego her career to raise her children. The professional interests of participants were as follows: protestant ministry (1 participant), pharmacy (1), clinical psychology (2), accounting (1), attorney (1), free-lance writing (1), graphics design (2), television production (1), business management (1), and English literature (1). Three participants were in graduate school and one was in undergraduate school.

#### Interview Procedures

All interviews were conducted by the researcher. Interviews took place wherever and whenever was most convenient and comfortable for the participant. The only requirements were that the place be private, comfortable, and provide sufficiently few distractions to allow for the interview to continue without many interruptions.



Most interviews were conducted in the participant's home or place of employment. Two interviews took place in offices at the University of Tennessee; one took place outside in a park. Each interview began with a discussion of the project, a discussion of the informed consent process, and the consent of the participant to be a part of the study (see Appendix for a copy of the consent forms). All participants knew the topic of the interview ahead of time; most stated they had given considerable thought to the topic before the interview. After the purposes of the interview and of the study were described, and the consent forms were agreed upon and signed by the participant, the interview was conducted.

All interviews began with the simple question, "Can you think of some times when you experienced a sense of connection in a relationship with another person (or with other people)?" Following this, the participant was then asked: "Please tell me about them." The aim of the researcher in each interview was for the researcher and participant to clarify together the participant's experiences of connection as faithfully as possible. The researcher sought to listen to and assist the participant in describing and understanding his or her experiences without making inferential comments about the meaning of what the participant was saying.

The goal of the interview was to understand the experience of the participant, while holding (as much as possible) the interviewer's own preconceptions of the experience in abeyance. Until the interviewer felt that she had a good grasp of what the participant was saying, the participant was asked to elaborate or to describe further her or his experience. For instance, the researcher might say, "you said that you were

aware of the future the two of you had planned together; can you say more about that?". The participant was always regarded as the expert; the researcher took the stance of respectful curiosity.

At various times during the interview, the researcher would state her understanding of what the participant said in order to make any necessary clarifications. Each of the experiences mentioned by the participant was explored in this manner.

When the participant felt that he or she could not add any new or fundamentally different experiences, the interview was completed. Many participants got "wrapped up" in the dialogue and stated they knew they could continue talking about the topic for a very long time. The interviews ranged in length from about forty-five minutes to two hours.

At the end of each interview, the interviewer summarized her understanding of the interview, employing the words used by the participant as much as possible. Participants were then given an opportunity to clarify or augment the summaries, or to add comments about the research method itself. Clarifications made throughout the interviews, together with the summaries offered at the end of the interview comprised the beginning stages of analysis.

### Interview Analysis

The analysis involved the researcher becoming deeply immersed in and familiar with the data of all of the interviews. This occurred in many ways and at many

different times during the process of the analysis: with the participants during the interviews, while listening to and transcribing the interviews, while working with the phenomenological group, and when reading back over them and checking for themes.

After all interviews were completed, they were transcribed either by the researcher or a professional transcriptionist. All interviews were listened to repeatedly by the researcher to match the typed transcript to the audiotapes as closely as possible, and to capture as carefully as possible the emotional tone and meanings expressed in the interviews. At least portions of seven of the interview protocols were analyzed with the help of a research group practiced in phenomenological analysis. There are several advantages to using a group approach to phenomenological analysis, as noted by Thompson, et al. (1989).

The standard procedure used in the interpretive research group to begin the initial analysis of the interviews is the reading aloud of interview transcripts in the group meeting. The researcher usually reads the words of the participant so as to approximate the speech inflections of the participant. Several lines of text are read until group members begin to experience meaningful patterns emerge from the text (usually less than a page at a time).

The role of the group at this point is to listen for individual themes, offer interpretations, and work together to make sure all interpretations can be supported by evidence in the text. The interview is worked through in this manner until the group as a whole agrees on patterns of meaning emerging from the text are consistently faithful to individual portions and to the interview as a whole.

Each of the twelve interviews was worked through in this manner, either with the assistance of the group or by the researcher working alone. After several interviews were analyzed in their entirety, the researcher began to see general themes, or broad descriptions of the meaning of the experiences of connection emerge. As themes became more clearly defined, they were checked against original interviews for inclusiveness and faithfulness to the text.

### Arriving at the Thematic Structure

At this stage of the analysis, the interpretive group assisted the researcher in consolidating her themes into a "thematic structure" that was descriptive of the experience of interpersonal connection. The group eventually agreed upon a thematic structure which was (1) faithful and inclusive of the experiences reported in the interviews, and (2) recognizable by group members as being descriptive of their own experiences of interpersonal connection.

The language used in the thematic structure was drawn directly from the words of the participants, in order to stay as close to their description of the experience as possible. A diagram of the thematic structure was then designed, with the assistance of the group, to represent the results of the study.

Another aspect of the results, a list of the "whens" or situations when experiences of connection emerged for the participants was compiled and organized. Participants tended to report many situations including, for example, "in conversation," "while helping someone," "while working with someone," etc.

Another aspect of the "whens" emerged from the data: participants talked about many different types of relationships. The types also were compiled and analyzed.

A final step in the analysis was to present the results to participants for further clarification and validation. Each participant was mailed a copy of his or her individual transcript, along with a diagram and a written description of the results. Feedback was requested from the participants; when given, such feedback was integrated into the overall results of the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The aim of this project was to develop a comprehensive description of the experience of interpersonal connection. Presented here are two levels of results describing interpersonal connection: (1) the immediate context of times, activities, and relationships from which the experience of connection arises, and (2) the thematic structure defining these experiences of connection. All results were cast in language used by the participants in order to stay as close to their description of the experience as possible.

Many examples from the interview texts illustrate one or another aspect of the results. Quotations are numbered 1-12 to designate each particular participant. Male participants are designated by the letter M; female participants are designated by the letter F. Thus, 1F is the first participant, who is female; 3M is the third participant, who is male.

The present chapter will present results in three different segments. First, a description of some of the general features of the interviews will be given, including some of the participants' reflections about the general nature of connection and its importance in their lives. Second, a description will be given of the contexts in which the experiences of connection are reported to have taken place. Specifically, these will present the variety of circumstances, or situations, reported by participants in

which the experiences of connection occurred for them. Third, each of the major themes emerging from the analysis of the interviews will be presented together with numerous examples from interviews. These examples are designed to illustrate how each theme occurred in the interviews as well as how interrelationships among themes seemed to reveal a general understanding of the experience of connection.

### **General Description of the Interviews**

The interview question asked of all participants was: "Can you think of some times when you have experienced a sense of connection in a relationship with another person or with other people? Tell me about those experiences." The twelve people who volunteered their time, energy, and often very personal thoughts to the study demonstrated a great degree of curiosity and interest in the subject of connection. Together, they described a total of 125 examples of the experience of interpersonal connection, recounting quite varied experiences with a considerable degree of detail and often with much passion.

They discussed experiences with people in close relationships, with people they just barely knew, and with strangers. They discussed experiences that spanned long periods of time and experiences that were of brief duration. Some experiences seemed to them to be ordinary, common and everyday; other experiences seemed special, extraordinary, unusual. Participants also described experiences that were filled with a sense of awe, mystery, and even spirituality.

Without exception all participants stated they found it a very interesting topic and enjoyed reflecting on their experiences. Indeed, some of the interviews were quite long and many participants simply ended the interviews due to time constraints, saying they could talk more about this subject. Interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to over two hours. The transcribed protocols ranged in length from eleven to forty-five pages of text. There were 273 pages of transcribed single-spaced text, with the mean length covering approximately about 23 pages or about 11,250 words.

Many studies using the same methodology have tended to yield interviews considerably shorter in length (e.g., Seidner, 1987; Jacobs, 1994; Peacher, 1995). Although some allowances must be made for differences in interviewing style among the researchers, and individual differences among the persons interviewed, it seems safe to say the topic itself sparked the interest of the participants enough for many of them to discuss it at length. Other topics have brought forth longer interviews as well, such as Pennewell's (1995) study on "Coping with difficult times in your life."

#### Opinions about the General Nature of Connection

Participants were asked to think of specific situations or times when experiences of connection occurred, rather than asking them to give their personal "theories" of connection. All participants, however, knew ahead of time what the interview would be about and all had reflected on the subject beforehand. What this means is that all participants had fairly clear views about what the subject of connection abstractly meant to them; some mentioned they had thought about the



subject a great deal even before they were asked to be a part of the study. Two people had even written out some notes before the interview. Some participants came to their own conclusions about the general nature of experience of connection as it has been revealed in their own lives:

I think that for a long time I've characterized or thought about relationships in relation to whether you had a circle within which you were operating as opposed to a sense that a fight say could be lethal to that relationship. And that I also experienced pretty clearly, that there is a difference -- there's sort of an inner and outer relationship, part to a relationship. And if your relationship takes place within a circle you can do, do anything, or you can fight and have terrible times because the conflict is always within this circle. (1F)

I don't think that if you really connect with somebody that you could come out of it the same as you were before you went into it. I think when I really connect with somebody I am changed by that and they're changed by that. I keep thinking of a metaphor of a sculptor connecting with the clay that they leave an indentation, -- but that's too one-sided because I really think that you're sculpting together, you know, the connection sculpts you, both of you. (2F)

This is my interpretation, okay? We do for people -- well, we do it for countries -- Without really getting involved one on one. It's rush and do-for-'em, so you can rush and do something else. I mean, and it never, you never connect, because you've got to move on to the next thing, and the next thing, to the next thing. You never get a chance to savor and ponder what just happened. What just transpired. So that if, if you don't have the opportunity to do that, you're -- there's no fuel. It's just, and what I want is, I want the fuel. I may not do as much. But I want -- if it fills me, the more I get filled, the more I can fill. (12F)

I don't think this is something that you can really make happen. I think you can work on it prior to it and kind of set it up so that it's more likely, by whatever work you do on the relationship. But I don't think you can force a connection. I think it just kind of happens in a way and if you're lucky enough you kind of are aware enough to notice. (2F)

I think creativity is a symptom or a sign that you've reached a kind of joint connectedness that's almost forming a third personality, a new, a

new self that's creating new things. But I don't hope for connectedness in order to achieve creativity. I think it's a byproduct. (6M)

It is the -- it is the context covering around everything else. It is the format from which everything else springs [...] a context of feeling so strong that it colors everything. (1F)

Another thing I was going to say about connection is that it can't be, it can't be forced. I think it's something that if it does, it does, and that actually has always made me sort of sad. [...] because I think it's such a gift, you know. I say that you can't come by it by decision. (1F)

When participants described their personal "theories" of connection, they were describing a personal stance toward the topic, which is part of the context of the experience for each participant. These summary statements concerning their views of the topic of connection usually occurred at the end or the beginning of the interview. Some people also described connection as a "defining force" in their lives; for these people, the experience of connection seemed important to the way they see themselves:

I feel connections with people constantly. I mean, in fact, you, know, I'm seeking those connections constantly. If anything that has been a defining force in my life I think. (10M)

It's funny that you called me because I'm not sure that I, you know that I don't talk to people about this. I think I think a lot about this issue, a lot more than other people. (1F)

I think I can connect with people at lots of different places because of some experiences I've had in life. I'm divorced. I have three grown sons. My ex-wife turned out to be anorectic and was hospitalized for six weeks one summer. (4M)

My sister and I are both adopted, and, as far as I consciously know, that all went fine. I never consciously had any resentment about being adopted. I have no interest in finding biological parents. But I do think it affected me in that I feel less connections -- affected me politically, psychologically, you know, philosophically, the whole -- you know. So I have thought about it a lot. (7M)

In presenting their own "theories" of interpersonal connection, and by stating the effects of connection on ways they view themselves, the participant seemed to want to make it clear to the researcher that the topic is an important aspect of everyday experience and one that holds special meaning for them in their personal lives.

### **The Context: Situations of Connection**

Experiences are always situated; that is, particular experiences are always embedded in a broader context of experience. In phenomenology, the immediate context of the experience is called the "situation." These situations, or "whens," as in when the experience of connection arises, are also considered part of the results, along with their thematic structure.

Three meaningful and useful categories of "situations" emerged from the analysis of the interviews. These categories included: (1) what people are doing when they experience connection (2) with whom people reported experiencing connection, and (3) what types of connection relationships were described.

#### **What People Report Doing When They Experience Connection**

The first way of looking at the situations in which connection was experienced concerns the activities reported and the number of participants who reported each activity. There is, of course, overlap in the activities reported; for example, talking and sharing something funny are potentially overlapping activities. Participants

reported the following activities as giving rise to connection experiences: (a) Talking, (b) Being with an other person, (c) Sharing something humorous, (d) Having the same feelings, (e) Helping each other, (f) Being physically close, (g) Looking into the other person's eyes, (h) Seeing the person from a distance, (i) Changing the nature of a relationship, (j) Being reminded of someone, and (k) Dreaming.

### Talking

All twelve participants reported experiences of connection that occurred in the midst of conversations. This was by far the most frequent situation in which connection was experienced. Conversations were usually in person, sometimes over the telephone and, in one instance, on a computer network. In describing these conversations, participants frequently used words like "flow" and "back and forth."

Here are some examples:

We'd come together and then we'd leave for a while then we'd come back together outside and we had this conversation that just sort of went -- on throughout the day. [...] So we were talking about that, you know, and uh, went back in, came back out, then we decided to go to lunch. And we started talking more about death and sex and love and relationships and then we got onto God. We were talking about God! (2F)

And there was just like a rhythm to our conversation, together, and we were like -- I'd say something, and she'd jump in after that, you know. and it just felt like we were so -- and there was a lot of energy, and we were talking. And there is always energy, behind the connection, I mean the thing I remember the most. Like I get excited, and I get just stimulated by -- it was like a manifestation of it - through the conversation, we were like talking back and forth, and we were just flowing. (3M)

After meetings, at night, we would stand in the church kitchen there, the last ones to leave and lock up, and we'd stand there for an hour and

relate about things of the faith, you know, and there was an excitement in the dynamic relationship back and forth. (4M)

We spent from ten o'clock one night until five o'clock in the morning discussing determinism versus free will. I'm a determinist and, we argued all night and then about five o'clock in the morning, he said, "Well, you've convinced me. You're right." Then he went and slept for a couple of hours and got up and cooked some eggs and said, "you know, I've just figured out that this is all very interesting, but it really doesn't make any difference!" I said, "that's right. It just happens to be that way." (Laughter) (9M)

Those lunches are a perfect example of how we would connect and often those conversations were, you whether we could be talking about work, or, often, you know, our humor is extremely, umm -- we would go through this whole process of cutting each other down, you know, and in very subtle ways, you know, which was always enjoyable. [...] you're pulling, you're sort of winking at each other and saying I know you and I know you know, you know, your stupid vanities as well as you know mine, you know! (10M)

I would say clicking in many instances are the specific moments, you know, like when you're surprised. You go to begrudgingly some social event, you know. And uh, you somehow end up sitting next to someone and you end up having this just amazing discussion, you know. (10M)

One participant found online conversations through computer networks to be the situation which led to the experience of connection much more quickly for him than any other situation.

It makes it harder to communicate in any way other than the heart level. It makes it more difficult. I mean it's easier for you and I to talk about the weather than anything else. Well online that's very hard to talk about online. It's just not that interesting. So as you get these little comfort pillows pulled out from under you online you're left with places you can still hide if you want to hide, but it's just faster to get down to the deeper levels if you're both inclined to do that. (6M)

### Being With the Other Person

Participants described their connection experiences as occurring while they were "just spending time together," "doing something together" or, "working together." Most (ten) participants discussed at least one experience about being engaged in some activity together as a context for connection experiences. The experience of connection usually occurred after the activity, mainly while reflecting on what the participant and the other person had done or accomplished together. One person experienced connection when engaged in parallel activities with her husband while they were alone but in their house together.

I know when my husband and I are both in the house together and he is doing something and I am doing something else, but I can kind of hear him -- doing whatever he is doing somewhere. And I kind of picture him in my mind doing it. And I know here's there and it is very comforting to me and I know that, if I want to I can get up and go in there and be with him, and, you know, touch him or talk to him, or whatever, but I don't really need to a lot of the time because I just know that he's there. (2F)

Here are some other examples of "being with the other person":

We also swim in the morning together, and I think we feel a sense of connection then, not when we go in, because I'm totally asleep at 6:30, but after we've accomplished and done the swimming, um, we both feel good that we did it together. And I guess it is usually times that you know we're together. [...] I guess it's just when we do things, or after we've done things together is when I feel connected. (7M)

We did everything together. I mean we were always together. For this one year we were always around each other. [...] We used to always watch this movie together, did you ever see "Interiors," by Woody Allen? We used to watch that a lot together. (3M)

I'm in a study group on Friday nights, I've been in... We meet once a month, been in it for about seven or eight years now. [...] And there's a good friendship there, and we take our turns in cooking and we study

together and pray together, and there's a kind of connectedness, across the miles, across the years that we've found. (4M)

I remember him taking us on hikes and if one of us got tired he would carry us and, but when we got to the end of the hike he would sit, he would've made lunches for everybody and himself also, but he would not eat, and if he, would wait, and when we got finished eating he would try to give his lunch away and would only eat what we wouldn't eat out of our lunch and what we wouldn't eat out of his lunch. (9M)

Another thing we do together on weekends is we walk our dog down by the river every Saturday and Sunday morning, you know, and we both enjoy that. It's not like I can't wait to get out the door. I mean some mornings it's "oh, it's raining, let's not go," or, you know, you know, we always enjoy that. So it's like kind of little non-monumental things. (7M)

Most participants (ten) talked about at least one experience of connection as occurring while they were having fun with the other person or other people. This included playing together, cooking together, "hanging out" together, going on a picnic.

I think I just feel a sense of connectedness when we are together. Like, it's actually fun when she comes home. (7F)

We ran for alderman at the same time. First time and we were both elected and for some reason we sat next to each other at the council table and a lot of time when it was boring why I'd aggravate her by, I'd tell her something that was distracting, I'm sure, to her, but we had a lot of fun. (5M)

And we just do silly things. We had a, had a contest to see how many different noises, how many sounds you can make with your mouth. (laughter) It was like a round robin thing. Uh, each person had to make a new noise with their mouth that no one had made yet. We were up to like noise number 75. Nobody dropped out. I don't even remember how it ended but it, it -- there was this creative environment. [...] To me that's the essence of play. Play is a creative and inventive process and here we were sort of because of each other's presence, we were literally creating new and wonderful fun things. (6M)

### Sharing Something Humorous

Ten participants described sharing something humorous was described as a context for their experiences of connection:

One of the times I feel most connected to J. is when I laugh. We have a similar sense of humor and so we can feel very connected that way with the same joke. (1F)

It was really kind of, it was funny. We kept laughing about it saying that people would just think we were crazy if they actually listened to all of this. (2F)

There was an old man that used to work down there, Mr. H., who had the store for forty something years before he sold it. And he was a unique old guy. He was a comedian. The people loved to come in and just talk to him. But he called everybody "Zuke." And consequently everyone called him Zuke. And I loved that old man. He was just, he was funny, but he had a lot of, he had a lot of Will Rogers in him and he could get more said to you and laugh about it while he was saying it and before you'd even known it, he had in a kind of way eaten you out a little bit. You know set you straight. (5M)

I had one with my best girlfriend one time. We were, we have a real humor connection, and we were laughing so much. We'd been out one night and we always observe everyone in the room and then we're always amazed that the other one has observed everyone in the room, you know. And then we end up spending hours talking about "Oh, did you notice how so-and-so was blah, blah doing something?" You know, it was people we didn't even know. But we could -- somehow, we can communicate to each other, you know, like, she'd say like, you know, "The guy that sort of looked like a, sort of liiiiike a sloth. Or sort of like-." But that sounds too condescending, it would more like, sort of like an antelope or a yak, or you know we'd communicate in some curious way like that, but it would be the way we would understand each other. (11F)

And his humor -- he would throw something out and I didn't see K. react to what he was saying, or whatever, and I watched for a minute and then i said something back to him, and he got -- once again! -- that bright smile, like "Oh! You got it didn't ya! Wasn't that a good one! Isn't that the funniest thing! 'Cause you can watch, you watch other



people enjoy having you appreciate them. Or their humor. Or something clever they said. (12F)

### Sharing the Same Feelings

Sharing the same emotional experience was the occasion for ten participants' reports of a sense of connection. This category also included experiences in which participants were struck by the sense that she or he and the other person had the same thoughts and/or opinions, communicated sometimes without words:

Like you're both at the same place. Like you've reached, you both have the same understanding, or something. Yeah, somehow it's communicated, like with your whole person, that you know it. Yeah, when we talk back and forth, when you truly understand something I've said, you know, I can kind of tell, you know. It's your facial expressions, and what you say, and other things, and you're looking at each other, you know, when that happens. So it's this feeling, I guess, that you're at the same place. (3M)

So they opened up. They started telling me about their experiences, or what happened when they went, you know, and of course it helps when you hear what someone else or how someone else handled the situation, you know, and why they had the divorce, and so forth. (5M)

The deeper level is, we're both human bodies. We're both human spirits, we both struggle and we can benefit from comparing and contrasting and commiserating over our struggles. (6M)

And so I think we feel a sense of connection, you know, whenever some positive confirmation comes through at the doctor's because it's kind of like she feels reassured that I was right. And I feel reassured that I was right. (7M)

In a birthing class not too long ago I was just looking around at this class that had two other couples that I was familiar with -- other couples there that we're all having babies within two weeks of each other and I was looking at this and I was just thinking, two of the people I didn't feel particularly close to two months ago. But, because they are going through the same experience, you know, I, I'm beginning to oversee, miraculously, things that really annoyed me, you know, in this guy.

[...] We've got something we're sharing together. You know, "Will you take care of my child? Weekends? That'd be great!" (10M)

And the way we communicate, you know, our little jokes that we have together, our appreciation for food and wine and music, you know, we'll talk about these things and try to express our love those things as clearly as we possibly can and that's our relationship in many ways. It has a lot of other things as well, I mean, we both, uh, both of our fathers are going, well, his father just passed away recently of the same disease my father has, which is cancer. (10M)

### Helping Each Other

Giving or receiving emotional support, especially during times of emotional crisis, was mentioned by eight participants as a context for the experience of connection. Four persons mentioned helping someone during a time of personal crisis; five mentioned feeling a sense of connection when the other person helped them through a crisis.

Two people reported situations in which the participant and another person were both going through a similar personal crisis: When I went to the hospital to see D., for the first time after she was shot, it was very scary, very, very scary to see her and um, and I can remember just leaning into [husband]'s shoulder and then I saw her and he was so THERE. He just stayed there, and I know that he always would be, and then it -- that was an intense moment of connection and our relationship moved from there at that point. (1F)

I don't know if you can relate to an entire congregation or not, but when I moved from J. to R., I finished cleaning out the refrigerator in the parsonage. I put the broom and the dustpan in the back of my car, and I drove off down the interstate to R. alone after 23 years of man, wife, and three children. And I moved into a house alone. [...] I would come home on many nights after I was visiting or been to the hospital and find a hot meal sitting at my back door from that congregation. They held me in their care. They did not judge me. (4M)

It seems like more during the bad times than the good times that we rally to each other. She's had a lot of knocks over the years and the day before my divorce she showed up at my front door. Just said, "I

just came to sit with you a few hours tonight. Just want you to know I'm here, you know." (5M)

He just, like, did not leave my side. And he was like, you know, you're going to get over this and everything and it was just weird. I mean, I think if he hadn't been here I probably would have just gotten more and more into myself and I'd felt sorry for myself and, like, freaking out. (8F)

Two people experienced connection whenever they thought about how they and a friend helped each other through small problems in their daily lives:

From the second grade there had always been a connection. And there's always been a connection and there's always been some competition and it's weird. And yet we will do just about, I mean, anytime he needs legal work I do the legal work, no charge. If I needed money, he has a lot more money. I owe him a couple of thousand right now. He gave me that computer in there. I had a bunch of redwood and I gave it to him, you know. [...] We don't keep up with who owes who what particularly, you know. (9M)

### Being Physically Close

Eight people reported physical touch as an aspect of the context of connection for them. This included holding hands, hugging or holding each other, kissing, having sex, and while breast feeding an infant.

And we are actually very physical with each other and he might say "I love you Mamma" and I might feel like saying -- and we are actually very physical with each other and he might -- you know, if we're driving in a car reach out and squeeze his hand and we'll play with each other's fingers. (1M)

It was really special, really very neat, just because I was always aware that I was holding hands with her, you know, but I was able to have -- to talk to people and even though I was talking to other people, it was still like being with her. I was communicating with her even if I was talking to someone else. Like my awareness was still with her, you know. (3M)

And she said, "Can I give you a hug?" and I said "Well, yeah." And I just kind of took her in my arms and I just kind of, you know was holding her and she had her head on my shoulder and I was patting her back, and I just thought, "God! This is just such an amazing experience for me." It was truly powerful, and then we walked out the door and you know there she was going off. (2F)

I was feeding her, and for the first time while I was feeding her I looked down and she, she just looked up and me and looked right into my eyes and smiled while I was feeding her. And there was just the first real moment of recognition of I was her mommy, you know. (11F)

And I guess it's just part of his being there. And I guess it's just sort of, I, I feel -- first of all I feel very physical with [husband]. It's very similar to how I felt with D. and how I feel with M. I mean, I love their bodies. (1F)

You know, partly I think that it has to do with the exchange of energy. I, I think it's partly because I'm, I'm a physical person. I mean that's one way that I'm comfortable showing that I care about someone -- but I'm moved to touch I guess by the feeling of connection, so when I feel that connection, I -- it becomes physical. I can also feel that in touch. So in other words, when I touch Z.'s hand, there's love there in that hand. Like you know, that's why it feels so wonderful to hold his hands, [...] it's through touch, but also when I say physical it's a sort of welling of emotion. It's, it's just there. I mean it's sort of the way a laugh is there. It sometimes feels the way a laugh burns, it's a palpable emotion. (1F)

### Looking Into The Other Person's Eyes

Looking into each other's eyes was an aspect of the context of experiences of connection for six participants.

I just kind of looked up and he looked up and we just kind of looked -- it was just this kind of connection, like you would have in a hallway, kind of like a "hi" connection. Like this connection, like we were acknowledging each other, and it is almost like knowing what the other person is thinking. What I thought was, well, it was good to see him and then he was like -- and I imagined that he thought that it was good to see me. (3M)

I have this [photography] shot of a complete stranger, who is, who's again, looking at me and then I guess that's sort of part of -- what I like about this is that, you know, from this bizarre -- you know, I'm on the other side of this cage, on the other side of the lens, you know. There's all this distance and yet, you know, there's like this great, you know, eyeball to eyeball, in this odd context. You know, I don't know who this guy is, you know, but I like that kind of fleeting, fleeting connection. (10M)

We were just really, really talking. We were in a restaurant, but the restaurant just sort of went away and we were just really talking and we were just sort of staring into each other's eyes. (11F)

All I remember is looking down in that child, and that child not being scared one bit. I mean it was, we would look, we just looked at one another, it was, it was probably one of the biggest gifts that I would be able to count, when I'm old, is seeing this child. (12F)

### Seeing The Other Person From a Distance

Three people reported experiences of connection that occurred while watching an other person from a distance, such as from across the room.

I was driving to pick him up yesterday and I could see him walking across the school yard with other children and what I saw first was that he was tall, what looked -- he's a chubby kid and -- but what I saw across the field was this tall lanky fellow and then I realized it was M., I mean I realized he is in the process of sort of elongating and I was very moved by that. (1F)

Okay, at the church potluck. We, I had arrived on my own and didn't really think we'd be there. I was there taking care of the kids and she turned up and there she was, unexpectedly, and I looked at her, she looked at me; we were just smiling. We were happy to see each other. And we just immediately walked, you know, broke off from wherever we were and came over and kissed or said hello or whatever, and um, I think it was just smiling at each other, and looking directly at each other, and touching each other, and she complimented me about something, that I looked really nice, and she just looked radiant, and we were just happy as we could be. (6M)

### Changing The Nature of a Relationship

Important moments in a ongoing relationship, such as the first time "I love you" was said, were reported by four participants as contexts for the experience of connection.

I was looking up at him, and he was looking down at me and all of a sudden I just, the tears just came. And I, I just looked at him and I shook my head and I, he just kind of smiled and said, "I know, I love you too." (2F)

In the following excerpt, the participant reported an experience of connection with his pregnant wife when they watched an ultrasound of their first child together.

And so I think that was very exciting and you know for us as a couple, not just seeing baby, but for us. [...] It's like, you know, we did this and this looks like our, and it just had seemed unreal and then looked real in some way. [...] So, it projected, and we felt a connection, that we saw our future in a way, even though, you know, we didn't see us, quite -- we could imagine a life down the road that included this kid. (7M)

### Being Reminded of Someone

Some participants (four) were reminded of their connection with another person when they see something that belongs to that person.

He has a picture on the refrigerator now, it just blew me away, and then he showed me what -- he has, he has a picture of his head and then around his head he has drawn many different pictures representing all the feelings. (1F)

This was especially true if the other person was no longer in the participant's life, through death or loss of the relationship.

If I see something that, in my, you know, some old furniture that was his furniture, or particularly if it's something that he patched up -- he would take putty or tape or what, screw or whatever and patch up anything -- I mean, just anything I still have of his. I have his Bible,

and other remem -- he went through and wrote down from reading some other book, the different years that the different books were written or that they believed they were written and who wrote them. (9M)

One participant's example of connection was looking at a photograph of his father. (He was actually showing the researcher the photograph in the interview.)

This is a shot of my father who's -- [...] my sisters were, you know, lavishing attention on him and he's looking, probably more peeved at me, you know, than the fact that my sisters are, you know, doting on him, which I am sure he loved. [...] First of all, he's got a great face, but I think it is something about the way he holds his mouth that's just very much like my father. (10M)

### Dreaming

Interestingly, two people mentioned experiences of connection that occurred while they were dreaming.

I was playing with her in a dream. I mean she was right, right here. And I was playing with her, and all of a sudden, we were having such a good time, and my umm, conscious kicked in and said to me, "Wait a minute, you can't be here you're dead!" (12F)

### With Whom People Experience Connection

Participants in this study reported experiencing a sense of connection with a variety of different people in their lives. This information is presented in Table 1 (following page) and on the next few pages. Presented in Table 1 is the type of relationship participants talked about (for example, spouse, family member), the number (over all interviews) of experiences reported as occurring within that type of relationship, and the number of participants who reported experiences of that type of relationship. Appendix D presents a breakdown of how many of each type of

Table 1. With Whom People Experience Connection  
(N = 125 experiences)

| Type of Relationship | No. of Experiences | No. of Participants |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Family Members       | 52                 | 12                  |
| Friends              | 30                 | 10                  |
| Romantic Partners    | 17                 | 4                   |
| Work Relationships   | 9                  | 5                   |
| Strangers            | 8                  | 3                   |
| Mentors              | 4                  | 3                   |
| Miscellaneous        | 5                  | 4                   |



relationship was reported by each participant; "Family Member" relationships are also broken down into terms of the relevant family member involved; i.e., "brother," "father," etc. The most frequently reported category of relationship reported in the interviews was "family member" (52 experiences). This was the only category in which all participants reported experiences of connection; two respondents referred only to relationships with family members. Husbands and wives accounted for 19 of entries in the family member category. Three of the eight married participants did not refer to relationships with their spouse as examples of connection experiences.

Relationships with mothers and fathers were mentioned by four participants. Although seven of the participants have children, only two reported connection experiences with their children. Two people reported experiences of connection with a sibling.

Friendship was the second most frequently mentioned category of relationship (30 experiences, 10 participants). Seventeen of these experiences were concerned with romantic partners (4 participants). Work relationships (including both with co-workers and others met while on the job, such as customers) were reported in nine experiences (5 participants); eight came from one participant, a protestant minister.

Encounters with strangers were discussed by three participants and encompassed nine different experiences. Four experiences with mentors were brought up by three male participants; no female participant discussed her relationship with a mentor. Three people mentioned experiences in which they felt a sense of connection with a large social or cultural group of people: one with black people, one with

several groups of people having values and lifestyles similar to his own, and one with Catholic nuns. Another miscellaneous connection was with a woman in a photograph. This participant identified with the woman's experience as he read it from the expression on her face.

### Typology of Connection Experiences

A final aspect of the interpersonal connection context to be presented here concerns the variety of connection experiences reported by participants. When participants described particular experiences of connection, their descriptions varied in two ways: (1) length of the connection encounter ("brief encounter" or "ongoing" -- as in longterm relationship), and (2) personal significance ("special" or "ordinary"). These two variations crossing with one another combine to form a typology of connection experiences consisting of four different types: special/onging; special/brief; ordinary/ongoing; ordinary/brief. Table 2 on the following page, and the next four pages of text, present examples of these types of connection experiences.

#### Length of Encounter

Some of the experiences described by participants were relatively brief in duration (minutes or hours); some were longer, ongoing experiences of connection (such as in an entire relationship). The research question would seem to lead most people to talk about brief experiences. That is, participants were asked to give specific times when they experienced connection. Despite this, many of the responses

TABLE 2. Typology of Connection Experiences

| Type of Encounter             | Special or Extraordinary                                                                                                        | Everyday or Ordinary                                                    |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ongoing                       | (#1) 4; (#2) 3<br>(#3) 3; (#4) 3<br>(#5) 5; (#6) 3<br>(#7) 1; (#8) 3<br>(#9) 6; (#10) 3<br>(#11) 1; (#12) 3<br>Total (*) = 46   | (#4) 2; (#5) 1<br>(#6) 3; (#9) 2<br>(#10) 7; (#12) 1<br>Total (**) = 20 |
| Momentary or Brief Encounters | (#1) 3; (#2) 3<br>(#3) 6; (#4) 3<br>(#5) 2; (#6) 3<br>(#7) 2; (#8) 1<br>(#9) 7; (#10) 5<br>(#11) 3; (#12) 5<br>Total (***) = 43 | (#4) 2; (#6) 2<br>(#10) 2; (#12) 1<br>Total = 7                         |

(\*) Includes nine "Typical" or "Example" experiences

(\*\*) Includes two "Typical" or "Example" experiences

(\*\*\*) Includes 30 experiences with people already connected with, in ongoing special relationships and four experiences occurring with people already connected with, in ongoing ordinary relationships

were of a more general nature about their experiences of connection in a longstanding, ongoing relationship.

### Significance of the Experience

Experiences described by participants had the quality of being rather ordinary and everyday or of being quite extraordinary and rare. These extraordinary experiences were special in the sense of being more meaningful and/or more powerful to the person. The extraordinary ("special") experiences, as well as the ordinary ("everyday"), experiences of connection reported by participants occurred in the contexts of both brief encounters and in long-term relationships; some participants, though not all, reported experiencing an extraordinary, special moment of connection within the context of a relationship in which they also experienced an ongoing sense of connection.

Thus, experiences were sometimes brief and extraordinary, such as the "stranger on the train" phenomenon or they were brief and ordinary, such as making eye contact with someone in an elevator. A prototypical example of a long lasting and special experience of connection concerned a marital partner. Work relationships were the context for some ordinary, ongoing experiences of connection.

### Special/Ongoing

All participants described experiences that fell in the special/ongoing category.

Here are some examples:

But that was an opening scene for a long friendship, because then for the rest of my high school days, just from time to time, we've run across each other somewhere. You know, she just always seemed interested in me, it wasn't just, well here's a young kid, you know -

just brushed me off -- she was always interested in what was going on in my life and that meant a lot. (5M)

Just like, I mean, I feel like whatever I do, I mean, he's not going to like leave. I mean we've had like, oh we've had like, initially, you know, we had fights about my relationship with (friend) and everything like that. But, I mean, I, I've never felt like, you know, he was going to get mad and just take off and leave one day you know. I, I mean, I just feel like it's pretty much unconditional, you know. (8F)

When (husband) and I are both in the house together and he is doing something and I am doing something else, but I can kind of hear him -- doing whatever it is that he is doing somewhere. And I kind of picture him in my mind doing it. And I know he's there and it is very comforting to me and I know that, if, if I want to I can get up and go in there and be with him, and, you know, touch him or talk to him, or whatever, but I don't really need to a lot of the time cause I just know he is there. Uh, but I do feel very connected with him, and I feel connected with him like -- I think I almost always feel connected with him on some level, so that when I don't it's very striking. (2F)

### Special/Brief

One example of the "special/brief" experience is what one person called "clicking":

I would say clicking in many instances are the specific moments, you know, like when you're, you're surprised --you go to, begrudgingly, some social event, you know. Uh, and uh, you somehow end up setting next to someone and you end up having this just amazing discussion, you know. (10M)

Only two people gave examples of a "stranger on the train" type of experience.

One woman reported several instances of this type; here is her animated account of one of these encounters:

I was gasing up over here at (place), near the (place)? (Yes.) And I was filling my car up, and some man, and I-- again, this is just so strange. I was coming up from our way here, (street). And I noticed the man in the white, just one of those little white cars, pointed this way on the outside of the island. And his gas thing was open, the cap,

and I thought, "Well, I wonder if he is finished, or I wonder -- ." And I took notice of him. And I don't know why I took notice of him, but I just took notice of him. And he's sitting there writing stuff in the car. And I kind of pulled up, and was filling as I was headed west. All of a sudden, he started talking to me. Beth he was so handsome! (laughing) So handsome! Slender, just handsome, and talking about the car, and that he has a friend that's got one, and the friend calls it something "hippo." And you know, he was going on, and I'm telling you, this is what I got from him: he's from Canada, and um, his wife works at -- I forget where he said his wife works -- he quit smoking two years ago, he exercises regularly, he has two teenage children, the boy--. I mean to tell, I'm just tellin' ya, it was the most bizarre thing! We could have sat down on the curb and --! I mean he was dressed in -- I don't even remember what I was dressed in. And he just started talking to beat the band. He talked! I mean I could have--. It was just like, it -- WILD! He was just vomiting all this information. Just, it was bizarre. And I think I needed that. It's interesting, when I feel like, you know, low on gas, you gotta go fill up. (12F)

One other person reported brief experiences of connection with people who were almost strangers to him (a minister).

I remember visiting nursing homes. A lady who had had a stroke, her right side was paralyzed. As I entered the room, she couldn't talk. As I entered the room, and got close to the bed, her left hand automatically came up and was reaching for me. It was like she was reaching out for connection. Wanting to be touched. (4M)

A final example of a special/brief experience that occurred in the context of an ongoing relationship is the previously given example of the man who was pleasantly surprised to find his wife had already arrived at the church potluck. Some other examples are as follows:

Then there was one time when -- I don't even really remember what had happened but I just remember -- I don't even know if we had been having sex, or were going to, or maybe just lying on the bed together, or -- I don't -- We spent a lot time in a bed, not always having sex -- but we were on the bed at any rate. And I was looking up at him and he was looking down at me and all of a sudden I just, the tears just came. And I, I just looked at him and I shook my head and I, and he

and he just kind of smiled and said "I know, I love you too." And then I started sobbing. (2F)

Well it's happened like that with Mom and I several times, usually just through our conversation and it doesn't happen a whole lot, you know. Though we always have a really good rapport, you know, even when we disagree. It's not a big deal anymore, not like it was in high school, but -- I don't know it seems like, just during conversation we'll just get sometimes really connected like that and it just sort of transcends everyday reality in some strange way, that I don't know how to say without sounding hokey. You know, it just, it goes way beyond. (11F)

### Ordinary/Ongoing

Ordinary/ongoing experiences are "familiar" "everyday" experiences of connection, not necessarily involving close relationships. In this category, participants described experiences occurring in relationships that are longer than a brief encounter, have positive aspects, but are somewhat limited in terms of meaningfulness to the participant's life.

A prototypical example concerns the experience of connection one might have in a casual relationship with someone at work.

Even though I can get down to a certain level with them and function at a certain level with them and I care about what happens to them and I'll fight for them at work if they need my assistance, and they'll stand up for me as well, but it's such a limited connection for some reason. Probably by mutual, everybody's mutual agreement. (6M)

Another type of ongoing/ordinary experience of connection concerned what one person called a "collective connection," or the experience of connection with people going through similar life experiences to the person reporting the experience.

I know that at this point in my life it makes absolute sense for me to be having a child. At this point in my life it makes sense for me to be owning a house, you know. At this point in my life it makes sense for

me to have friends who are going through similar experiences. And so, this sort of connection becomes less of a, of a unique kind of individual uh revelation. It's more of a, a collective warm kind of connection. (10M)

Another example of ongoing/ordinary example concerns the report by some participants of "everyday" experiences of connection involving someone with whom the participant is involved in an ongoing special relationship. This type of experience is pre-reflective, since it is only by reflecting back on the experience that a sense of connection becomes figural.

I guess that's just kind of the everyday sense of being connected. It's just kind of moving in and out of each other's paths, and making what accommodations you need to make. But, you know, you have to know where that person is spatially and emotionally and cognitively to be able to do that. But it's not something that you are really aware of, it's just something that you kind of do. (2F)

### Ordinary/Brief

The prototypical example of the ordinary/brief connection is talking to someone in the elevator:

It happens at different levels, I suppose, but even if I'm standing on the elevator with somebody and we get into a conversation, no matter how brief, or even if they're asking for directions to the bathroom or something, that's sort of level one of connectedness that, I consider that to be a real form of connection. (6M)

This person, a photographer, reported experiencing brief encounters frequently; as, for example, when he photographs strangers on the street.

I have this shot of a complete stranger, you know, who is, who's again looking at me and then I guess that's sort of, that's a part of, you know, what I like about this is that, you know, from this bizarre, you know, I'm on this other side of this cage, on the other side of the lens, on the other si-, you know, there's all this distance and yet, you know, there's like this great, you know, eyeball to eyeball -- in this odd



context. You know, I don't know who this guy is, you know, but I like that kind of uh fleeting, fleeting connection. (10M)

Ordinary/brief connection experiences might occur anytime one is talking with a stranger. The next participant, a pharmacist, reports he experiences brief/ordinary connections in his work all day long (and wonders why people seem drawn to confide in him):

You know, people come to talk to you about their sex life, they talk to you about their bowel movements, they talk to you about acne on kids, you know, all kinds of things that you hear, day in, day out. (5M)

This same participant also gave the example of experiencing brief/ordinary connections when he and another acquaintance get involved in talking about a common interest.

Well this old vet that I was talking to not too long ago, I found out that he was a navigator on a bomber and he had a lot of information about the Memphis Bell and all this kind of stuff. And he was just a neat guy and some was, came up about the Zeros that the Japanese flew, that were their kamikaze planes, their crash -- The Zeros were made by Mitsubishi and this is the reason that the public acceptance of the Mitsubishi from WWII has been the way it is, that stigma. (5M)

All participants reported experiences from the special/ongoing and special/brief categories. Only six participants reported ordinary/ongoing and only four reported ordinary/brief experiences. Most participants primarily described experiences which in some way held a strong significance for them in their lives.

### **Thematic Structure of Connection Experiences**

Four themes emerged as significant to the experience of interpersonal connection. These themes are Being Present to Each Other, Openness, History and

Possibilities, and Feels Good. The following sections of this chapter will describe the themes in detail and provide examples from the text. First, however, a general description of how the themes work together to form one overall general description of the experience of connection will be presented.

The four themes, Openness, Being Present, History and Possibilities, and Feels Good are to be thought of as forming a gestalt (see Figure 1, next page). Although each theme is meaningful on its own (and was focused upon and discussed by itself), all themes are all interrelated aspects of a more global experience of connection. Each theme may be said to be an aspect of the "invariant structure of the phenomenon"; that is, all of the themes are referred to or implied in all experiences of connection reported by participants.

Each theme may be more figural as other themes temporarily recede into the background, as in the figure/ground relationship of a gestalt figure. Seen together, the themes provide a basic description of the nature of the experience of connection. In Figure 1 the dotted lines connecting each of the four themes signify the interrelatedness of themes.

It also might be helpful to think of the thematic structure as a blueprint for a simple, basic house. All the important parts of the house are represented by the lines and numbers on the blueprint; the house can be built with many different variations of the basic plan to make it more individualistic. To make the house more lively, one would need to imagine or see it finished with its walls erected, painted or bricked,

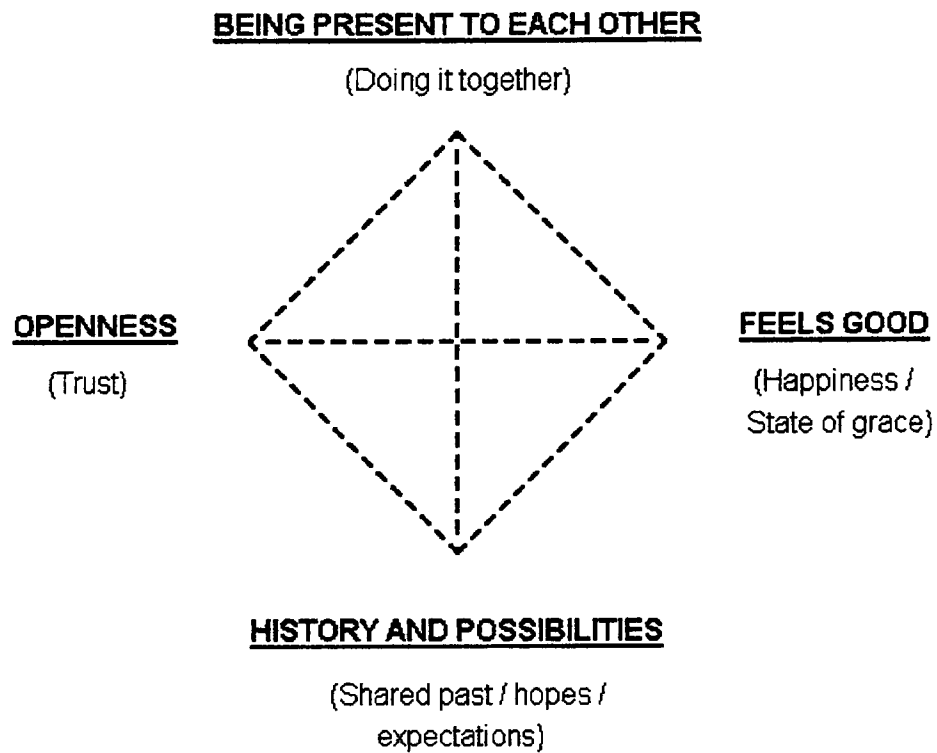


Figure 1. Thematic Structure of Interpersonal Connection

with a roof and windows, people living inside, and so on. The thematic structure is to be thought of as a simple "bare-bones" representation or diagram of the experience of connection.

When each particular experience of connection was described by an individual participant, his or her experience is of the house already built, with the individual features of the house being analogous to the particular thoughts and feelings of the person reporting the experience. To carry the metaphor a bit further, the level of situations or context is analogous to the land on which the house is built. This includes the trees surrounding the house, the people who will use the house, the ones who built it, the other houses in the neighborhood, and, further, the season, year, and century in which the house was built.

In contrast to the rich fullness of the experiences themselves, the thematic structure is starkly diagrammatic; yet that, too, has some advantages. Even though the thematic structure provides only a basic diagram without the "thick, rich texture" of the significant experiences themselves, all the facets of the experience are represented. This gives a useful description of the experience which can be easily "seen." The structure allows the experiences to be described and presented in such a way that one can gain understanding of any experiences of connection. Since the themes are to be thought of as facets of the phenomenon, it does not matter where we begin describing the individual themes comprising Figure 1; all of the themes are important to the experience.

### Theme I: Being Present to Each Other

When describing experiences, an important part of the experience of connection for participants was the sense that the other person was also aware of a similar sense of connection. Experiencing connection as "being present to each other" means "we are in this together" or "we're doing it together." There is a sense of mutuality involved, a sense that somehow this experience is important for the other person as well as for the self.

Of course, this study was not designed to discover whether or not the other person would agree with the participant and we do not know whether or not the other person also was experiencing a sense of connection. For the people in this study, however, it was a necessary condition to have the experience that the other person felt connected too.

It was not necessary, however, for the sense of connection to be reciprocal. That is, the participants' definition of connection did not require the sense that the other person's sense of connection was equally as strong or as important to them as it was for the participant. When describing an experience of connection with a child, for example, the experience of the child's sense of connection would be described as different from that of the parent. Sometimes participants described an experience in which they experienced the other person's investment in the relationship as less than their own. Never-the-less, the idea that the other person was also experiencing at least some sense of connection was an invariant of the experience of connection. Here are some examples of the theme "Being Present to Each Other":

Somehow we're real together, it's uh, you know, I don't know -- We don't talk about trivial -- I don't know, we're just really just right together, touching. Our little spirits are just right next to each other sometimes, you know. I don't know how to really explain it other than that. (11F)

[That feeling of] being so close to her and feeling so very much with her and very present to one another. (2F)

Yeah, maybe even a little bit of mirroring of body postures, because I think we were both kind of sitting forward and looking at each other across the table and then we both kind of sat back and went "Wow." (laughter) So there was kind of a parallelling -- kind of like with one echoing the other a little bit, only you didn't know who started it. (2F)

Yeah, I felt like that was a -- really the first connection I felt with someone who I was really attracted to, and I felt this energy with. I felt like a mutual, I felt, like I think, connection, like I think about this mutual kind of respect, or something, a mutual kind of liking. A mutual liking. And of, and I felt like I had that with her and, I really like her, and I really liked that feeling, you know. (3M)

After all those weeks of having a little newborn, you know, you know they're knowing who you are -- sort of. But that's the first time that her eyes reflected it, you know. And I was looking at her and she was looking at me and we had never had that before. (11F)

I thought everyone felt this way towards them, but they have said several times they've been gone from town ten years and they've said there's nobody else who we connect with in this way. There's nobody else who we can be ourselves around. And I'm just thinking, wow! (6M)

She will connect instantly [his sister]. There's, there's this experience that we'll have -- we're very we're very uh, intimate. And when I photograph her she'll, when she's not posing, she'll definitely connect with me. And I, and it's with the senses. It's uh, it's an earnest attempt on both of our parts to be together at the same time in this acknowledgement of each other. And I sense that, you know, in her. (10M)

All of a sudden I thought, I kept trying to think, why do I know her, and why did we shine for one another, and I thought well maybe she was in that order at (place) at (church). So that's why I went back out

and I thought I'd get into a conversation with her and I mean, I went up and down and looked in some of the other stores because, I can't tell you. It's the neatest thing, it was the neatest thing. It's just, it's -- spurts, it's like lightening. (12F)

So here we were flattering each other like a couple of cliquish teenagers or something, so -- but it was a pleasant feeling and a nice flattery and it suited the moment. It was hardly spiritual or profound but as far as connectedness went I think it couldn't have gotten much better than that -- at a heart level. (6M)

The sense of being present to each other is also implied in participants' descriptions of "doing things together." Sometimes, it is as if the sense of mutuality is taken for granted.

Yeah, like last night, um, she ran a couple of errands after work so she was later than usual. And um, my and dog and us, our dog and us, um, we just sat on the front steps and she drove in and the dog went nuts. And, you know, we were happy to see her and we ran in and just sat around, and um, said "do we want to cook? No, let's go out to eat." And anyhow we went. (7M)

It was still a friendliness, a warmth that extended more than just a "hello, how are you," and the time came that we became neighbors up on H. street. And we stayed up late at night and they did too. And it was not uncommon after eleven o'clock for one of them to call to see if we had any popcorn or just something because we were up. We still didn't do a lot socially, but the friendship was always there. More than just a passing acquaintance. (5M)

I guess it's mainly just the companionship, you know. That somebody is interested in being with me. [...] Yeah, it's just so comfortable. He's just like, you know, "run errands with me," and I'm like "okay." It's real comfortable. (8F)

Participants sometimes spoke of experiences in which the experience of "being present to each other" was strongly felt. There was a sense of merging, becoming "like the same person," or of being emotionally "in the same place."

It was like always back and forth, almost like everything we talked about, you know. And then eventually, you start feeling like, that you and that person are kind of like the same person. (3M)

Yeah, there was some kind of connection there. I don't know. Somehow we met up in that look, when she looked at me. Somehow we really met up together and that's the first time I've felt that -- with her. And I don't guess I've ever felt it quite like that since then. But yeah, somehow we really just, we were definitely merging or something in some way. (11F)

There is really a kind of a sense of realizing that somebody feels the same way that you do or somebody thinks the same thing that you do or somebody is with you in the same way that you are with them. And it is kind of like seeing yourself in them, and feeling them inside of you, I guess is what it feels like to me. So, knowing yourself and then knowing them, and knowing that there's some, same thing going on. (2F)

Like you're just at the same place, like you've reached, you both have the same understanding, or something. Yeah, somehow, it's communicated, like with your whole person, that you know it. Yeah, when we talk back and forth, when you truly understand something I've said, you know, I can kind of tell, you know. It's your facial expressions, and what you say, and other things, but I guess I just like look, I guess, and you're looking at each other, you know, when that happens. So it's this feeling, I guess, that you're at the same place. And almost like, you feel like the boundaries become, that there aren't rigid boundaries, you know. (3M)

There's just kind of this sense of -- kind of like a lava lamp (laughter). Just kind of moving around each other's area and, and it's kind, it's really pretty effortless most of the time. You just kind of do it and it just kind of feels like being on the same boat together or something. (2F)

In summary, the theme "Being Present to Each Other" refers to a sense that the other person is also experiencing the connection. Being Present to Each Other is sometimes implied when people talk about relationships with others, especially in close relationships where the present-ness of the other is sometimes so clear that it can



be taken for granted. Sometimes the experience of presence was described as so strong that the experience became one of being "merged," "in the same place" or "just alike."

### Theme II: Openness

Openness refers to that aspect of connection involving the sense of trust the participants reported experiencing; their trust was located in the other person and/or in the relationship. Participants reported themselves and the other person as willing to be vulnerable and "open":

It was like, like an opening inside of myself. And, then at some point later I realized that he had the same feelings. And then that was an extra connection. Yeah, it was all very gradual, just one thing on top of another, on top of another thing, until he became, just basically, indispensable. (laughter) (2F)

I think the connection then between them and me at the spirit level is not that we get to join. It's just that there's no need for filters between their brightest inner light and my brightest inner light. They can mingle in safety. And that to me, of course with my wife it's the same way -- it's safe to expose that most vulnerable, tender part of yourself. [...] I just think it's like, you finally shed the last of your inhibitions or your protectedness and just relax, lie on the beach for a while and soak up the rays, and you know. (6M)

They came and got me and said, "Come on, you're going." So that was before bird season had opened but they said "You're going to run these dogs with us this afternoon just to get out." They had both been divorced, so we hadn't been out in the field, we hadn't walked 200 yards until -- out in the sunshine, you know the beautiful day and all. And I felt like the whole world was -- then I broke down and started crying and they said "Just go on and do it. Get it out." So they opened up, they started telling about their experiences or what happened when they went, you know, and of course it helps when you hear what someone else or how someone else handled the situation, you know and the reasons why they had the divorce and so forth and you know. (5M)

It's as if the first door of connectedness has been opened. And I guess, being a visual kind of person, the way I would picture it is circular rooms. Each circular room being enclosed by a slightly larger circular room in sort of a radiating pattern and each room has a door on it. All in perfect alignment and people who are asking directions to the rest room, the first door opens to them. I guess the people who don't even get that first door are people who look like they're about to approach me because they want something like a handout or whatever. Those are the only people I don't even open the door for. And I never open the door for them. Sorry to say. So the first door opens. As it gets into a deeper and deeper level, more and more doors are opening and they are getting closer and closer to the center of where I am. So, in a sense it's a form of layering, layered intimacy. (6M)

This theme also has five interrelated "subthemes" which are aspects of the more general theme of Openness. The participants described connection experiences in terms of: Being Known and Knowing, Trust, Acceptance, Honesty, and Being "Tuned In."

#### Subtheme 1: Being Known and Knowing

The theme of openness is reflected in the desire to know the other person and to known by the other person.

I guess just being that intimate with another human. It's so essential in life to feel you know like there's somebody who knows you for who you are more than, more like knows your soul, you know, cause so many people know you, but -- you know they don't really know your soul, and Mom comes closer to knowing my soul, I guess, you know, than anybody, for sure, than anybody, yeah, yeah. She's a jewel, I have to say. She's a jewel. She really is a good one. (11F)

#### Subtheme 2: Trust

Some participants reported that a sense of trust was an important aspect of the experience of connection. Often trust was experienced as reciprocal; that is,

participants described the sense of trust as equal for both participants in the relationship.

I knew that we both knew that we could trust each other completely. That we could tell each other anything, do anything. (1F)

He makes me feel safe, and for various reasons that's a really powerful thing for me. Feeling safe is not something that I've ever been particularly good at in my life. [...] Safe, first of all because I know he would never, ever hurt me, ever. (2F)

### Subtheme 3: Acceptance

Another subtheme of Openness is a sense of acceptance, experienced both towards and from the other person; participants described a sense of acceptance and openness to the relationship and also to the experience of being connected:

Just real, nothing we could say would be unacceptable, you know. (9M)

It's a feeling like it is okay to be whatever, however I am. (3M)

It's very accepting, she's sort of a -- not exactly self-exploration, but it's like I'm exploring parts of her personality with her and she's exploring parts of my personality with me. And we're both open to the other one exploring it. Giving, you know, look at this, what do you think this may mean, be? (9M)

The question that I had was "What was it that he saw in me that he felt comfortable enough to open up and confide this in when I couldn't even tell you his name?." But here's a man, you can tell from his - he's had a hard life. And he's not one that's going to break down and cry every day. I might, you know, under the circumstances. But here's a man that's just not going to break down and weep. Yet the man stood there and sobbed. (5M)

#### Subtheme 4: Honesty

For many participants, the theme of openness was reflected in the sense of honesty they experienced as being an aspect of their connection experiences. The importance of honesty was described in these examples:

I felt like I could show her kind of who I, who I really was in a way. Not that what I'd been showing her before was false, you know, I just could show her more of who I was and it would be okay and it would be appropriate. (2F)

Doing things for each other, finding things to share together and the openness. The, the openness and the accepting of ideas and the willingness to talk without getting angry about something even if you disagree or maybe until you agree, or not, you know. (9M)

You're sort of winking at each other and saying I know you and I know, you know, your stupid you know vanities as well as you know mine, you know. (10M)

I mean, and at that time I was in my late 20's and she was easy, 60. I mean in her sixties. And I was just -- I mean you could not -- yes, you could get angry with her, and you can get frustrated with her, but you couldn't stay that way because of her honesty. She was, to me, she was very easy to deal with, because she allowed me honesty also. (12F)

These things may be little hooks that catch your attention for -- but they're fleeting, but it's, it's the person themselves. The makeup of the core of that person, their interactions, their thoughts. And sometimes, you know -- And I would, you know I respect her opinion, and I'd ask her "You know, well what do you think about so and so" Maybe she doesn't tell me what I would like to hear, but I weigh that, you know. And I take stock in the fact that she'll tell me not what she thinks I want to hear, but she'll tell me what she thinks. (5M)

#### Subtheme 5: Being "Tuned In"

The last subtheme of Openness, being "Tuned In" describes experiences in which a sense of being extraordinarily open and unusually sensitive to the other person

was an aspect of the experience. Participants sometimes described these experiences as being "tuned in":

There are these enormous satellite dishes called the VLA, the Very Large Array satellite dishes in New Mexico. And they're, they have just tons of them all over the desert, in this one place, that, you know, are all directed at various points in space -- to pick up whatever phenomena are happening, you know. And that's kind of how it felt, how it feels, like being one of those, being one of those satellite dishes directing toward the other person. And just kind of being open to whatever stimulus they are going to give you and just being very kind of charged to receive it. [...] It's just this sense of attentive, directed openness. (2F)

I think that's about as open as it gets. And cause with my wife, in intimate terms when we make love, we've been married 13 years, we should be tired of it by now (laughter) but because we're together and because we're tuned in or whatever. (6M)

The theme of openness refers to a sense of being open to the experience of connection; it also refers to experiencing an openness directed both towards and from the other person. The theme Openness has five interrelated subthemes: (1) a sense of desiring to know -- intimately -- an other person and/or to be known intimately, (2) the experience of trust in the relationship and in an other person, (3) a feeling of being accepted by and accepting an other person, (4) the experience of honesty in the relationship, and (5) having the sense of being "tuned in" (unusually open and sensitive) to the other person.

### Theme III: History and Possibilities

Time is an important aspect to the experience of connection. When participants were aware of history, they spoke of being aware of either the history of

the relationship or the way this particular experience stuck in their memory over a long period of time. Participants often spoke about the enduring quality of their experiences of connection. Sometimes participants spoke of the experience of connection enduring past the death of the other person. For several participants, an important aspect of the connection experience was that they experienced it as "always there." Participants also remembered being aware of the future of the relationship, or of the potential that was there for future relating.

This theme was comprised of six interrelated subthemes: (1) History Together, (2) Enduring, (3) Enduring in Memory, (4) Transcending Death, (5) Always There, and (6) Projected Future. Descriptions and examples of each subtheme are presented in the next sections.

#### Subtheme 1: History Together

This subtheme refers to participants' descriptions of their awareness of the history of their relationship with the other person and of the importance of this history to their experience of connection:

I just felt like, like the whole weight of our history together was there in the room with us, that we were both thinking about the difficult times and the good times that we had been through together. And how we had really worked hard together to help her get through that. And just, just kind of a sense of looking back at the time that we had spent together and really feeling it very strongly. But it was all right there and that we knew that we had been together through all these two and a half years and had changed together through that. So there was really a strong sense of just time in the room with us, all this time that we had spent together. (2F)

She will kind of live in my heart forever and I think I will in hers too. I don't think that the connection is going to be severed because she's, because we probably won't actually talk to each other anymore. Um,

you know, I think we really are inside of each other in some way now, that she, will carry -- we'll carry parts of each other off from this. [...] But, in a really kind of more important way, the connection wasn't broken. (2F)

### Subtheme 2: Enduring

The sense that the relationship with the other person "is here to stay" was another aspect of the experience of time in some participants' descriptions of connection experiences. These participants described their experience of connection as lasting; they felt that nothing could change the nature of their relationship such that they no longer experienced the connection: I knew then that it was un-failable. I, I think it would -- I really feel that X. and I are, are blood. You know I think it would take -- I, I can't imagine what could sever us. (1F)

It isn't that there isn't -- that we can't -- that we don't fight and get mad and say and even say mean things. But it's the context is much, is much, uh, larger and unshakable. It's a real, it's a real safety zone. It's a real -- D. would always be my sister. She would always love me. I always knew that. And she will. (1F)

I feel like whatever I do, I mean, he's not going to like leave. I mean we've had like, oh we've had like, initially, you know, we had fights about my relationship with (friend) and everything like that. But, I've never felt like, you know, he was going to get mad and just take off and leave one day you know. I mean, I just feel like it's pretty much unconditional, you know. I just don't, like, whatever I do, you know, I don't feel like he'd ever just get to the point and say, you know, I've had it with you. (8F)

### Subtheme 3: Enduring in Memory

For some participants, it was the memory of a particular experience that endured. These participants reported experiences which had happened many years ago; despite the time that had past, the memory still held personal significance in their

lives. Here is one example given by a middle-aged woman, recalling an event which had happened twenty years ago:

All I remember is looking down in that child, and that child not being scared one bit. I mean it was, we would look, we just looked at one another, it was probably one of the biggest gifts that I would ever be able to count when I'm old, is seeing this child. (12F)

#### Subtheme 4: Transcending Death

The experience of connection with another was described by some participants as extending past the death of the other person. For these participants, the experience of connection was a solace for the emotional pain of the loss of that person in his or her day to day life. This participant describes her experience of connection with her deceased sister:

I think I feel that our connection could not be severed and was not about life and death. And I still feel that way. I mean, I'm, I'm, I've moved on in my life but I have, I am, I have had -- in some -- in a certain way I have had much more trouble dealing with my mother's death because I don't get connected to her and but I do with my sister. It isn't, it isn't so much an active thing. I think, I think the feeling of connection has allowed me to feel at peace with her being gone. (1F)

#### Subtheme 5: Always There

This subtheme refers to some participants' sense that the experience of connection is an ever-present aspect of their relationship with another person. For these participants, their experience of connection with this particular other person extends from the past, through the present, and into the future:

He has been with me through most of the difficult things that have happened to me in my adult life, you know. And so he's always been there to help me through those, and that always meant a great deal to me, to know that he was willing to do that, because some of it was pretty difficult at times. And he's -- just always was there -- this very



safe, protective presence who didn't need to be asked twice, you know. And didn't even need to be asked once sometimes. He was just always kind of there. And I'm aware of him in the house, kind of always sort of being -- somewhere. It's really powerful. He's just, he's just a presence in my life that I'm, that I'm just kind of always peripherally aware of. (2F)

In my fantasy, I just, I see us seeing each other, or running into each other. And just, looking at each other, and just seeing the connection's still there. I mean, just looking at each other and like having that experience, um, I don't know what it is, like that experience of looking into someone's eyes. And just like feeling that reciprocal-ness, like how it would be now. Cause I still feel like if I ran into her now, I would still have that connection through the eyes, or something, through looking at each other. (3M)

She's the person I feel most connected to, of anybody and that comes after nearly thirteen years of being married. We've had the chance to open a lot of doors, so many I've lost count. (6M)

It's that my love for him is unreserved. It's, it's always there. You know I, I guess I definitely feel a part of him. [...] You just feel like -- that fills me up over and over, and it's so clear, so always present and unquestioned. (1F)

#### Subtheme 6: Future Connection

The last subtheme refers to some participants' descriptions of connection experiences in which they were aware that their present relationship with another person would be extending into the future. These participants were aware of the possibilities the future holds for them and for the other person. In the following example, a young father-to-be describes the connection he experienced while watching the first ultrasound of their baby with his wife:

So I think we felt a connection that way too. It wasn't just "we're pregnant" or "we're going to have a baby" that seemed unreal. It seemed, not to have a personality, but that it was a person, and it was a person who would require care and would determine, determine our lives in a certain direction somehow. [...] Yeah, so I think it, right --

seeing that projected a future, and that was definitely a connection that was projected together. We saw not only the kid but our future lives in some way. (7M)

The theme of History and Possibilities captures the importance of time in the experience of interpersonal connection. Participants were aware of the history of the relationship they had with another person; some participants were aware of connection as enduring: always there, enduring in memory, or even past death. Some participants were aware of a sense that the experience of connection held possibilities for future relating.

#### Theme IV: Feels Good

Participants consistently described connection experiences as "good experiences." At times, participants described unpleasant interpersonal experiences which were "close to" connection experiences. Further clarification within the interviews themselves found that when an interpersonal experience was not pleasurable, it did not fit what the participant could comfortably describe as connection. If a connection experience became unpleasant for the participants, it was no longer characterized as fitting the word connection.

Thus, the theme Feels Good has two subthemes: the first, Pleasure/Joy, captures the range of good feelings participants described as being aspects of their experiences of connection. The second subtheme, Spiritual Connection, concerns some participants' descriptions of their experiences of interpersonal connection connecting them to "something larger" than themselves and/or their relationship with

another person. They often referred to this aspect of their experiences as a form of "spirituality."

#### Subtheme 1: Pleasure/Joy

The experience of connection was always described as a "good experience." This is not to say the relationship -- which was context for the experience of connection the participant was describing -- was always a "good relationship." For example, some participants described long term romantic relationships which were ultimately (and often) frustrating; however, embedded within these difficult relationships were experiences of connection described by them as pleasurable. Participants' descriptions of their experiences of connection concerning the theme "Feels Good" covered a broad range of positive emotional states; they used words such as "sense of joy," "awe," "rewarding," "satisfying," "a gift," or, simply, "pleasurable." The following excerpts provide examples of the subtheme Pleasure/Joy:

I felt my hand on her back and she was really warm and she's kind of thin so she was kind of small and I was just very aware of her physically and very aware that this was, this really wonderful human being who was in the room with me and that we had just shared something really intense and really powerful and that -- that it was just really good. (2F)

I go out of a sense of responsibility and an opportunity to connect with them. But when I leave there, they've given so much to me, in the sense of feeling, I feel -- I feel good. It affirms me as a human being as much as anything else. It causes something in me to be encouraged. (4M)

These are the kind of friends that, that you want to stay around on earth for, this kind of connection. (5M)

It was a pleasant feeling and a nice flattery and it suited the moment. It was hardly spiritual or profound, but as far as connectedness went I think it couldn't have gotten much better than that -- at a heart level. (6M)

When I'm around them I feel such genuine joy and such genuine admiration of them as people that I just cannot have enough of talking to them and being around them and everything else. (6M)

I think I just feel a sense of connectedness when we are together. Like I'm home a lot more than she is because I'm working on my dissertation, and you know, it's actually fun when she comes home. (7M)

I mean, there's all kinds of ways of connecting where you're just sort of, you know, unconsciously enjoying each other's presence, and you sort of think in retrospect, you know, what a wonderful moment that was to connect. (10M)

Everything sort of got hazy and golden and real pleasant. It was fine you know. (11F)

It was very euphoric. Very euphoric. And like, I guess with my, with my Mom it was sort of blissful, and with B. it was sort of euphoric, I guess. And it had, but it had humor mixed in. That's what -- it sort of seems like these things get you to that point. Like humor can get you there or making love. (11F)

And looking at somebody, and just kind of going, "Woo-ooo! That felt good." You know -- or a spark, and you kind of look, and you just look away real quick and go "Oops, they saw!" (12F)

I had had several of those fun things happen to me within a two week period -- it's incredible. It does not make me feel cocky -- it makes me feel, "Oh, okay, all is well with the world. All is well. It's a good life. It is a good life." (12F)

### Subtheme 2: Spiritual Connection

Several participants related the experience of interpersonal connection to a sense of spirituality, to religious experiences, or to "something larger." These

participants spoke about their experiences of interpersonal connection as being especially powerful and deeply personal:

Yeah, a sort of blissful feeling like being connected with God in a way. Like, connecting with another human, it's such a deep connection, it's sort of like somehow, like this person is so much my brother or my sister that somehow it -- when you sort of fuse in with another person, it's got sort of a bliss thing to it and it's almost like connecting -- like connecting with God. I mean it's not like, you know, praying -- it's a different form of connecting with God. (11F)

That is kind of, that is really kind of my way of knowing that I am open to something kind of sublime. That -- I keep thinking that, that there really is something in me that is very sacred about it. Uh, not in any kind of religious way, but just in a very deep you know -- I think my soul was involved, whatever that is. I think that everything I am is in that, and it's open to whatever I can see from the thing or person I'm being connected with. (2F)

That's why I was interested in doing this because for a while I was trying to define for myself, what my definition of spirituality was, because I had always been opposed to organized religion, you know. I was listening to, there's a song by Sam Phillips, who says "I want God, I don't want some political, political religion." I can't really even deal with the whole issue of God per se, you know, but I had this little notion of clicking -- clicking with people. That to me was my spirituality. [...] And so I think, how would I define that -- spirituality? And often it's this sense of, you know, commonality that I was talking about, you know, this, this clicking. [...] it's such a funny kind of an informal word for something that is very, you know, profound to me. (10M)

We started talking about grace, about being in a state of grace. And what that meant to both of us and then I just, I just was sitting there looking at her, I thought "God, this, this, this is it!" And I thought you know, this is what it's like to really be graced, with the presence of somebody like this and to be connected with somebody like this. (2F)

When you connect, it's like knowing a greater joy than average. And it's almost universal. It's just, it's beyond our limitations. It's beyond our limitations. I don't know where, I don't know how to separate it out -- the spiritual, God, you know, religion. (12F)

Well, I don't know if I think it's so much that you're connected with this human, I think it's that you're maybe that you've quickly connected with this human but somehow that connection connects you in with something much bigger. And so that's what I'm thinking the connection is. There is that human connection that's sort of the diving board. It springs you into that other place. It's like, I guess, the bridge to the really big connection feeling -- of God, is what I would call it. (11F)

And when I'm connecting with someone, you know, I'm feeling that, that common humanity, that common experience, I mean, that's, that's both on an intellectual level and on an emotional level as well. It's another reason why I like literature. You know, I've always loved literature because literature is always getting at that connectiveness. (10M)

Well, I think the reason maybe that we don't feel connected sometimes in life is because we're not connected with our deepest self and our deepest self is God. Like, I mean, I think like of the supreme as a big huge fire. We're all little sparks from, of that. But we may not realize it; we're not in touch with our own deepest self, therefore we're not really connected to ourselves, so we have a hard time being connected to other people. And other people are also sparks of God, so we're all sparks of God. So I, I believe that we're all sort of the same thing, just in different -- I think that life is like a big costume party and that all the guests are God and they're all wearing costumes a lot of the time. [...] But we don't realize our God self and that God is giving the party. God is the part, God is the guests, God is everything is sort of what I think. But perceiving it as like you're separate is what causes suffering and that lack of connectedness. That's what I think. (11F)

The theme "Feels Good" was found to describe a significant aspect of the experience of interpersonal connection. Participants invariably reported experiences of connection as pleasurable in nature. An important aspect to this theme is that many participants related the experience of interpersonal connection to spiritual experiences and/or to "something larger than myself."

### Interrelationships Among Themes

Each of the four themes has been focused upon, described, and illustrated with examples from the interview protocols. These examples are meant to demonstrate the way in which each theme was uniquely figural at any one particular time. However, all four of the themes are interrelated and together combine to form the gestalt of the experience interpersonal connection.

Another way to consider interrelationships among themes is to think of them as facets of a gemstone. When one focuses on any one facet of the stone, other facets recede into the background of awareness; however, the other facets reflect back into the stone and add richness, color, and light both to the perception of the facet and to the perception of the stone one is gazing upon. Similarly, themes refer back to each other, adding richness and depth of meaning to one another and to the whole of the experience. Within each individual experience of interpersonal connection the light from one or more of the themes may be relatively dim; as any one particular experience is described one or more of the themes may be more salient at any given moment. When referring to the whole of the experience of interpersonal connection for each individual, however, all four themes are regarded to describe the experience.

In one of the interviews, the shortest one actually, all four of the themes may easily be seen in almost all of the particular experiences reported. This interview is presented in its entirety in the Appendix. What follows are some illustrations of the interrelationships of themes within particular experiences of connection.

In the following examples, all four themes are salient within a particular experience. The reader should note that portions of these examples have already been quoted from in previous sections of the results.

The first experience occurred about twenty years before this interview. The experience took place with a stranger, a young child she met while watching a tennis match.

This child, I mean here I am in my 20's, and this child was four or five, no, maybe not even that. I don't remember. All I remember is looking down in that child, and that child not being scared one bit. I mean it was, we would look, we just looked at one another, it was, it was probably one of the biggest gifts -- that I would be able to count, when I'm old, is seeing this child. No fear whatsoever, you know. I think about being childlike -- I mean, and even in the Bible, it talks about being childlike. It was so open, so fresh, no protection. And the first thing about the child, I didn't know anything. And we just -- we laughed, and we played, I mean. In fact I cannot remember what it was, something happened. And the two of us looked -- I know you've done this before -- the two of us looked at one another. And it was like -- at the same time, there was acknowledgment of whatever it was that had happened, and it hit us both the same way. And I've done that with others, but not as much as I remember this thing. Isn't that funny? (12F)

This participant is describing a sense of openness between her and the child when she talks about the lack of fear in the child and the open way in which they were relating to each other (Openness and Being Present to Each Other). Her experience was that both she and the child were present to the openness between them (Openness and Being Present to Each Other). Her experience of the encounter is they played together, they both acknowledged the experience they were having together in the "look," and they laughed together (Being Present to Each Other and Feels Good). She also is aware that the memory of this experience is one she will treasure "until I



am old," as one of "the biggest gifts" in her life (History and Possibilities and Feels Good).

In the next example, the participant describes an experience with a friend; the "situation" is a conversation carried on throughout a day at work together.

We started out in the morning talking about -- I'd loaned her all of my Anne Rice vampire books. And she'd been reading them in sequence. and she was reading them all at once. And so she was telling me about them. And, and you know -- what did I think of this character, and symbolically, and the metaphors involved, and stuff like that. And also we were kind of doing some lusting after various characters and --. So that's how it started. And then, we started talking about love and sex and then we had to go back in.

[...] So we were talking about that, you know, and went back in, came back out, then we decided to go to lunch. And we started talking more about just kind of death and sex and love and relationships. And then we got onto God. We were talking about God! I know! It was really kind of, it was funny. We kept laughing about it saying that people would just think we were crazy if they actually listened to all of this.

[...] But we started talking about grace, about being in a state of grace. And what that meant to both of us. And then I just, I just was sitting there looking at her -- I thought "God, this, this, this is it!" And I thought you know, this is what it's like to really be graced, with the presence of somebody like this and to be connected with somebody like this. And I was just thinking that. And I just was starting to say it and then she said it. She said exactly the same thing. She said, "Well, it's like this, what we're doing," and I said "Yeah." And uh, we just kind of sat there looking at each other for a minute.

[...] And you feel like all of your nerve endings are kind of flailing about and open to things. And there was this sense of my physical self being open her in a way.

[...] She's given me some insight into myself because she is real different from me and I've, we've actually sat down at times and tried to figure out how in the world we became friends because we are so different.

[...] And so I think there is some of that again and we're coming together and changing each other, and that we'll always carry part of each other with us.

[...] After, you know, she moves away or -- hopefully, we will be able to stay in contact physically too, but, even if we didn't -- you know, I would still, she'd still be with me. (2F)

The description just given presents an example of a (special/ brief) experience of connection occurring in the context of an ongoing relationship. This experience was one of extraordinary pleasure for this woman and, at least in her experience, for her friend as well (Feels Good and Being Present to Each Other). She reports being aware of the history of their relationship, the way the memory and the effects of this relationship stay with her, and the potential for future encounters (History and Possibilities). She also was aware that she was open to her friend, and that her "physical self" was involved even in the midst of the encounter (Openness).

There is one other aspect of the experience of interpersonal connection that is not captured in or by the themes; this aspect is what some participants described as a sense of "intensity." Several participants described some of their experiences of connection as being "very intense." The experience of intensity is not at the level of a theme because: (1) Intensity was not reported by some of the participants to be an aspect of their experiences of connection; and (2) Even those participants who reported Intensity as being an aspect of their experiences, did not describe it as an aspect of all of their experiences of connection. Although intensity is not a theme, participants' descriptions of intensity in the experience of connection demonstrate other important ways in which the themes interrelate to one another. Also, Intensity was a very salient aspect of the experience for some of the participants' experiences of connection.

### Intensity

Several participants talked about their experiences of connection as being "intense" ones. Specifically, these participants noted that these "intense" experiences of connection were highly charged with emotion and/or heightened physical sensation. Participants described these experiences of connection as somewhat extreme in nature; they used words such as "electricity," "power," "alive," and "energy." Here are some examples of "Intensity":

Yeah, I think the older I get, it's more of a -- um, I hate using "energy," but it is -- it is, it's like a magnet. I mean it's just, if you're open to it, it's there. (12F)

And there was like a lot of energy, and we were, like talking. There is always energy, behind the connection, I mean the thing I remember the most. Like I get excited, and I get, you know, just stimulated, by -- it was, like a manifestation was -- through the conversation, we were like talking back and forth, and like we were just flowing. (3M)

Have you ever gotten kind of close to a transformer tower when there is a lot of electricity in the air kind of -- or like during an electrical storm or something like that, and it's like your hair is kind of standing on end, sort of? And you feel like all of your nerve endings are, kind of flailing about and open to things. There was this sense of my physical self being open to her, in a way, that uh that I just felt that, you know, I was very aware of like my skin, kind of, in a way. (2F)

Yeah, and it just sort of became timeless, you know, the sounds in the room just sort of got murky and you know not distinguishable and we just sort of were in our little pocket, you know? And everything was sort of something else except for what we were saying. It was real alive what we were saying. (11F)

I guess where you feel that, you know, this great passionate connection like, not that we're soul mates or that, somehow there's this bond that is uh, you know, so meaningful and -- you know, I keep saying the word "passionate," cause it's, it's very intense. (10M)

It was just like she, you know, we'd probably seen each other but never noticed each other in church. And it's just like -- and I just said "that's somebody that -- we've got something, there's something here, there's some kind of vibes, chemistry or whatever." (9M)

She had the most beautiful, glowing, smile, older, quite a bit older. The most, just a beautiful, beautiful, smile. And, you couldn't help but notice her, it was like, I don't know how to explain this. Energy? I kept trying to think, why do I know her, and why did we shine for one another? [...] It's the neatest thing, it was the neatest thing. It's just, it's -- spurts, it's like lightening. (12F)

There is a real dynamic feeling to it that -- a feeling of intensity, intense emotion, intense thinking. That you're putting everything that you are and have into it and it takes a lot of energy. But it doesn't really feel like work -- exactly. Kind of like being on a roller coaster, kind of, because, you know, you're hanging on and -- but you don't, it's not like you're, you know, running along pushing the roller coaster. You are on it and it's kind of taking you, but at the same time it wears you out. (2F)

I think that has to do with the exchange of energy. I think it's partly because I'm, I'm a physical person. I mean that's one way that I'm comfortable showing that I care about someone. But I'm moved to touch I guess by the feeling of connection, so when I feel that connection, I, it becomes physical. (1F)

Although most participants who described their experiences as "intense" indicated that the intensity increased their sense of joy and pleasure in their experiences of connection, some participants also mentioned being "overwhelmed" by "too much intensity." The experience of Intensity in the context of interpersonal connection sometimes is described as stimulating and as providing a feeling of "being alive." When overwhelming, however, the Intensity can sometimes lead to withdrawing from the connection and a sense of discomfort.

There is a bittersweet quality to being that connected and feeling it in the moment, because you know it won't last. You can't just go around

feeling that connected with people all the time, you know. I think you'd go insane. (2F)

When participants described their experiences of connection as being "too intense," they described a sense of needing to "shut down," "withdraw," or "pull back" from the connection in order to regain a sense of "comfort," "protection," or "distance."

Some participants described experiences in which there was "too much" going on in the experience and they described feeling "overwhelmed." Also, when participants described Intensity, they often described it in terms of being "too much" of one or another of the themes. Specifically, participants sometimes described feeling "too close" (Present to Each Other), too open or "vulnerable" (Openness), or too overwhelmed by the possibilities of the relationship (History and Possibilities). When overwhelmed by "too much," some participants were aware of "disconnecting" from the relationship or the experience; they were aware that the sense of connection was lost or that they had interrupted it because they were overwhelmed and felt a need to back off.

None of the participants, however, mentioned experiencing a need to distance themselves from connection due to feeling overwhelmed by good feelings about the connection. Rather, feeling overwhelmed led to feeling bad about the experience and also wanting to "disconnect." Furthermore, when one or more of the major aspects of the experience of connection (themes) was described as "too intense," the other themes were affected. For example, when participants described feeling too open and vulnerable (Openness), they frequently described experiencing a need to be less close to the other person (Present to Each Other); further, possibilities for the future were

described in terms of "too many expectations" (History and Possibilities). They described their experiences as shifting away from the experience of connection and towards something else; specifically, "disconnection." Some other examples of being overwhelmed by "too much Intensity" concerning each of the themes will be presented in the next few pages.

#### Too Much Closeness (Present-ness)

Some participants reported feeling overwhelmed when by Intensity when they experience their connection with an other person as "too close," or "too much alike." In this first example, this woman contrasted her relationship with her husband, which she describes experiencing as "more safe" than the relationship she once had with her sister; with her sister, at times she felt they were so close that sometimes they even had the same emotions and physical sensations:

Actually she would pull me in and we were much more submerged in each other and then it was much harder for me to swim out and get some distance from what is going on. It's one of the reasons, I'm sure, that I was so drawn to my husband is that his boundaries -- he has been the best boundary control I have ever had. And I think that makes me feel safe. I think that has really -- I really, really love that. He doesn't, for the most part, he doesn't get confused by my issues. He doesn't get lost in me and, to see my woods through that with each other. [...] I think that somehow in my sister, I'm so tuned in to her emotionally that when I could tell she was anxious or upset or had pain, I could literally feel myself tighten up and get, get anxious and that just doesn't happen with my husband you know. [...] You know, the inability to pull myself out when my sister and I got too, you know, our emotions got too entangled. (1F)

In the next example, a participant described her relationship with her husband in which their "rhythms together" "get too intense," and then she experienced a loss

of the experience of connection in the relationship. More examples of "too much closeness" follow:

It's very jarring. It's very uh, uh, jolting, uh. Unsettling, it doesn't feel safe at all. And it's not like I feel any kind of sense of danger with him or anything. It's just the world isn't supposed to be like that. That's not how it is supposed to go and, I don't know, to some extent maybe we just get kind of too intense in our rhythms together and it's kind of hard still for us to deal with, when they get off you know. (2F)

But then, I don't know, like (fiance)'s family's just like that too, and I mean, you, only, and I guess maybe I'm a little bit like my parents cause I go over there and they're just almost too much like touchy feely. I mean, you get, and then it gets to the point where I start feeling like kinda uncomfortable you know. (8F)

When I say intensity, I mean the energy, yeah. Yeah, energy and intensity. Yeah. Absolutely. It's a main part of it. Yeah, yeah. And a lot of times, it's almost like too much, or something. I think about -- With my mom, I felt that connection a lot. She's always trying to bring about the connection, and it's always very, like intense, for me, so I always like, block it out. We've had a lot of problems in our relationship because of that, because of me just trying to block it out, her feeling like she wants to make a connection, but then, it's always too intense, for me, you know. So I kind of back down, or something. (3M)

### Too Much Openness

Some participants did not feel comfortable with the level of openness they experienced in their relationship with the other person. Sometimes the issue was that there did not seem to be enough trust in the relationship, and this led to increased sense of intensity, a shutting down, or a feeling of vulnerability.

I used to feel like I had such a connection with her, that I felt like we were kind of this the same person, kind of. I mean, really weird. When I talk about it, it sounds really weird, you know, like we were fused or something. But -- it's hard to say, but it was always diffuse, I think, because, I can never let myself have that connection with her.

Because if I do, if I do in a direct way, I'd just be pushed away. You know, because, I know I have a lot of feelings towards her. And I would just be, I'd be vulnerable. You know how we, when you have a connection, you're like, emotionally vulnerable. (3M)

When they stopped seeing each other and -- I mean, I felt like still real close to him. But then I guess we were so close to where he -- I mean I know they kinda had a bad breakup and stuff where -- Yeah, I would go over there and he'd want to talk about Mom. And he felt so close to me that he would tell me stuff that like I really didn't want to know about my Mom, you know. I don't know, it just got kind of awkward. (8F)

The following example described the participant's discomfort when a customer, a man he barely knew, "unloaded" a story about his war combat experiences.

I felt complimented, yet a little bit overwhelmed at the fact that the man volunteered that information to me. And asked me what I thought. And all I could do was simply say, "To me you saved six men's lives." I said, you don't know how bad the man was wounded, he may have, he may have been dead in a matter of seconds, or minutes or whatever. And you simply did what you had to do. (5M)

The next participant described the "instant openness" he experienced with people he met through a computer network. Another participant described his experience of getting close, opening up, and then backing off.

Scary because it happened so quickly. I went from having no friends who I could really sit and talk to, because these close friends were gone, to this. I went from having none to having five or six people who just thought I was the greatest person in the world and I thought the same way about them. Within these ridiculous confines of a little tiny box with the shimmering screen! And as I found out, it's not uncommon for people to sort of crash and burn, but they burn too brightly they get into relationships so fast, go through so many doors so quickly they can kind of go into shock and really have problems. (6M)

I wasn't used to those, that kind of experience. I was, I think I didn't kind of -- I mean I was scared of it. But I also kind of went into it. That was like my whole relationship with her. Like I'd get kind of close, and I'd feel like connected and then, I'd back up somehow.



Cause, I didn't trust her somehow. Like I didn't trust, to, to connect.  
(3M)

### Possibilities are Overwhelming

Two participants described feeling overwhelmed by the thoughts of what possibilities might lie ahead in the relationship. One of the following examples is also a humorous description of "too much biological closeness."

Her emotions, yeah, her emotional energy level, was just too much for me. It was like I didn't feel it then, I didn't feel the connection, although it's like I saw it -- it was like I couldn't reach the expectation of what that connection was -- it was like so far beyond me, or something. [...] Yeah, it is so much more of a connection or something-- like you're both agreeing that there the connection is there. And that makes it feel overwhelming. Not that the connection (the acknowledgement?) Yeah, the acknowledgment of the connection somehow makes it too -- I guess, too emotional, or something. Or too many possibilities -- too much possibility for feeling the emotional that I just back off. (3M)

I mean, you know, and I suspect having the kid will change me. I mean, I think you know, I may feel a connection there. And I think I find that scary too, like my wife -- we haven't taken breast feeding classes yet, but we talk about breast feeding. We saw something -- You know, even after the kid's born, the kid will depend on the mother for all of it's nutrients, it's antibodies, it's, you know, immune system, through the milk. [...] And I think my wife feels a little frightened and I completely understand this. Like you know, "get this off me." It's sort of too close, like, you know. I mean, you know, cause, I mean, well, she said this and I, you know, this is true. [...] And every spring the scallions and onions would come through the grass and cows would eat the scallions and onions and then they'd milk the cows and then they give the milk to the kids and the kids wouldn't drink it because it tasted like onions! And my wife said, "it's like our friend's cow, whatever I eat passes through." (Laughter) You know, it didn't sound that great. So like, you know, too much biological closeness and connection actually puts me off a little. (7M)

### Overcoming Being Overwhelmed

One of the experiences described by one participant, a clinical psychology student, concerned her last session with one of her clients. In the participant's experience, this client had made vast improvements in her ability to relate to others: this seemed to be demonstrated in her relationship with her therapist, the participant. Although we do not know the client's experience of this encounter, the following excerpt perhaps illustrates how the experience of being overwhelmed in an interpersonal relationship might change to one of connection: in this case, specifically in the context of psychotherapy. Parenthetically, it might be noted that the following excerpt also provides one last example of the interrelationship of the themes discovered in this study: Being Present to Each Other, Openness, History and Possibilities, and Feels Good.

What keeps striking me is that I really was feeling just our whole history there in that moment. That being so close to her and feeling so very much -- with her and very present to one another, uh, just really felt more powerful given the fact that it had been so much not like that in the beginning. That here was this woman now who was kind of relaxed and laughing and I, I could feel like I could say things and she wouldn't -- she would understand what I meant. And I could tease her a little bit and she could tease me. And, and we could show a genuine interest in each other without her getting really paranoid, or freaking out, and withdrawing. And I guess really just -- just the sense that when this woman had first come in she had been so disconnected from everybody and so afraid. (2F)

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The topic of human relationships stands at the center of many traditions in philosophy and the social sciences. Recent decades have seen an increasing sense of isolation and alienation in modern society which has led psychology to increase its focus on close relationships. Social psychological research on close relationships alone has increased dramatically in recent years (Berscheid, 1994).

In today's world, clinical psychology could arguably be called a psychology of interpersonal relationships, as most people who present themselves for psychotherapy are wanting to improve the quality of their affiliations with others. Psychoanalytic theory has increasingly shifted towards more relational theories of personality development and the advances in psychoanalytic theory have been both heralded and prodded by recent research on human infancy (Mitchell, 1988).

Although empirical psychology and sociology have developed a broad and vast base of information regarding interpersonal relationships -- focusing on topics such as parent/child relationship styles (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall, 1978), love (e.g., Sternberg, 1988), friendships (e.g., Davis and Todd, 1985), marital satisfaction (e.g., Bradbury and Fincham, 1990), interpersonal attraction (e.g., Berscheid, 1985), and loneliness (e.g., Weiss, 1973) -- many aspects of these, and other, topics in interpersonal relationship research have yet to be explored. To

advance research in these areas, an empirically derived descriptive base for the experiential aspects of relationships is needed (Berscheid, 1994). This study addresses that need through a thematic description of experiences of interpersonal connection.

The present chapter will relate present findings to those in the literatures presented in chapter one: the "redefined" theories of psychoanalytic theory, the social psychology literatures on relationship cognition, love, and loneliness, and the existential philosophies of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Buber. Of these, the social psychology literature on loneliness and Buber's contributions would seem to be most relevant to the present set of results.

### **Dialogue as Method**

The word dialogue comes from a Greek word meaning "to converse," and is related to root words meaning "between" (**dia**) and "pattern" or "order" (**logos**). Dialogue, then, means "a pattern between things." This study engaged in dialogues with adult participants in order to gather "patterns between people" describing the human meanings associated with experiences of interpersonal connection.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe experiences of connection using an existential phenomenological method of dialogue. This approach seems especially suited to this topic since the interpersonal nature of the method mirrors the phenomenon itself. As this study has shown, dialogue, or conversation, is the context in which many experiences of connection take place.

As described in the second chapter, the dialogical method involves a "second person" perspective (Pollio, et al., 1996). The subject matter, the meaning of experience and behavior, emerges from the "in-between" of two people engaged with the topic, in dialogue with each other. Meanings are understood and clarified in the midst of the conversation often for the first time, or in ways not previously understood by either participant.

As such, the dialogical method offers one resolution to a thorny methodological problem involved in studying interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationship researchers have struggled with the issue of perspective, sorting out answers to the question, "Whose perspective on the relationship are we studying?" (Rausch and Berscheid, 1983). The methodology of this study answers this question by saying, "you and you;" researcher and participant joined together in a conversation whose purpose is to gather, together, descriptions of the meaning of the experience for the participant. Through dialogue results are "found": a nomothetic description of the phenomenon derived from idiographic descriptions created in dialogue.

This method makes use of dialogue on several different levels of analysis:

- (1) The researcher engages in dialogue to make explicit her or his own assumptions concerning the topic. The purpose of this "bracketing of experience" is to allow the researcher to be more "open" to the phenomenon, both during data collection and during analysis.

(2) The researcher engages in open-ended dialogues with participants. The meanings of experiences emerge from both the participant's reflected awareness of his or her experiences and from the "in-between" of participant and researcher as meanings become progressively clarified in dialogue.

(3) The researcher enters into an interpretive hermeneutic dialogue with texts of the transcribed conversations. This dialogue involves immersing oneself in the various meanings of the phenomenon given in the texts and then working through each individual text as well as all of the texts as a whole.

(4) Analysis of the dialogues is carried out with the assistance of interactions -- dialogues -- with a group of colleagues practiced in the use of interpretive methods. The phenomenon, the texts, and bracketing issues become the foci of these dialogues.

The process of going back and forth, from individual texts to all of the texts, from personal interpretation to group interpretation, and back again, yields various patterns of the phenomenon. In phenomenological research, results attempt to present the "invariant structure of the phenomenon." This structure is "invariant" in the sense that it reveals essential features or aspects of the phenomenon; however, aspects always are in flux. Human experience is always dynamic and flowing, and any one aspect or combination of aspects of the phenomenon may be salient to awareness at any one point in time.

In this study interpersonal connection was found to be a familiar, yet complex, feature of human experience. The results, the invariant structure of the experience of connection, are presented in the form of four "themes." These themes are: (1) Being

Present to Each Other, (2) Openness, (3) History and Possibilities, and (4) Feels Good. In addition to these themes another aspect, Intensity, was found to be an important, although not invariant, feature of the phenomenon.

Another level of results concerns the "situations," or contexts within which participants described experiences of connection. That is, the participants' experiences were given form (and defined by) the situations in which it (they) occurred: connections happen with someone, in a certain place, under a certain set of circumstances, with a certain emotional tone, and so on. Other "background" features defining the context of interpersonal connection are the contexts held by phenomenology to be significant for all human experiences: Time (Dapkus, 1983), Body (Macgillivray, 1985), Others (Nowell, 1991), and World (Pollio, et al., 1996).

Results of the present research indicate that people experience connection with others in many different circumstances. Participants reported the following situations as times when they experience connection: talking with an other person, being engaged in an activity with an other person, sharing something humorous, sharing emotional experiences, helping each other, being physically close, looking into the other person's eyes, seeing the person from a distance, going through changes in the relationship, being reminded of the other person, and while dreaming. Most of the time, however, people reported experiencing connection when talking to someone else in conversation or when jointly engaged in an activity.

Results also imply that connection occurs in many different types of relationships. Participants reported experiencing connection in relationships with

friends, family members, people at work, and strangers. Some participants experienced connection with people they had never met, such as Gandhi or an anonymous woman in a photograph. Others experienced connection with a group of people, such as with a particular race or social group. These results, however, lead to the implication that experiences of connection most often occur in close relationships with family and friends.

Another implication is that experiences of connection vary in duration. They may be short, as in the "stranger on the train" phenomenon, or longer, as in a marital relationship. Also implied is that some connection experiences seem ordinary or "everyday;" for example, as part of daily routine with a spouse or with a stranger asking for directions. On the other hand, some experiences with both strangers and intimates seem "special;" that is, filled with a sense of wonder, joy, awe, or imbued with special meaning.

The main results of the study are comprised of the description of the themes which entail the structure of the experience of connection. These themes are interdependent, both in terms of being context for each other and in terms of describing the experience of connection. All four themes are to be considered as interrelated aspects of the experience of connection. Although it is possible to consider each theme independently, descriptions of all four themes are necessary to fully describe the experience of connection. Following is a summary description of these themes.



### Being Present to Each Other

Being Present to Each Other connotes the sense "we are in this together;" it also connotes that the other person experiences the connection as well. There is thus a sense of mutuality to the experience. The experience is that, although the other person may not be experiencing the connection in a reciprocal way, he or she is aware of the connection, at least on some level. This theme encompasses some experiences in which there is a feeling of "merging" with the other person, or "becoming one." To a lesser degree, this experience was expressed as "having the same emotions" or being "just alike."

### Openness

People experience connection as an openness between themselves and another person. This theme may be described as an awareness of a sense of trust and honesty, a willingness to be vulnerable, being "tuned in" to the relationship and to the other person, accepting and being accepted, sharing intimate information, feeling free to be oneself, being known and knowing the other.

### History and Possibilities

History and Possibilities holds the meaning of connection as it relates to time. In connection, people experience a shared history and/or future with the other person, awareness of possibilities there might be/were for the relationship, and a sense that something of this encounter will endure.

### Feels Good

Feels Good captures the sense that interpersonal connection is a pleasurable experience; sometimes connection was described as mildly pleasurable, sometimes as extremely so. Words used by participants to express this included: "sense of joy," "awe," "rewarding," "satisfying," "a gift," "spiritual," "close to God," or simply, "pleasurable."

### Intensity

Another aspect of the experience, although not present in all protocols, was Intensity. Sometimes participants described their experiences as "intense" and the intensity contributed in a positive way to the experience, sometimes powerfully so. When intensity was described as a positive aspect of the experience, the sense of connection was heightened and participants described intense experiences of connection as exceptionally pleasurable and rare. When the experience became too intense, however, the experience no longer felt good; instead, it was described as "overwhelming," "too close," and participants reported the tendency was to "shut down," "pull back," or "get some distance." When participants felt overwhelmed, their experience shifted to something other than "connection;" they described their experience as needing to "disconnect."

### **Relationship of Results to Psychoanalytic Theory**

Present results suggest that although psychoanalytic theory is changing its focus towards more relational theories of personality development and psychopathology (Mitchell, 1988), the everyday sense of interpersonal connection as revealed in this research has not been directly addressed in this literature. Although various aspects of the experiential sense of interpersonal connection are implied in psychoanalytic theory, a more holistic account of the experience of interpersonal connection has not been a usual topic for psychoanalytic theory.

Perhaps connection has been neglected in psychoanalysis because it is more a feature of healthy living than of "pathology." Much of psychoanalytic theory has been based on work with people who have problems in living satisfying and/or productive lives; therefore, psychoanalytic personality theories tend to reflect a stance that searches for "unhealthy" or "pathological" ways of being with and experiencing other people. As a result, psychoanalysis has tended to focus on certain types of "unhealthy" modes of human existence.

Although more modern psychoanalytic approaches do tend to view experiences with others as providing the material from which virtually all of experience is molded (Mitchell, 1988), there seem to be very few references to the experience of interpersonal connection, as described in this study. Holistic descriptions of the experience of connection are not addressed adequately in this literature; partial descriptions of aspects of the experience are, however, scattered throughout.

In the review of psychoanalytic literature in Chapter 2, theories were sorted into various ways psychoanalysis has addressed the experience of other people. These theories were found to describe experiences in the following terms: (1) Other as frustrating or gratifying (e.g., Freud, 1900; Fairbairn, 1952; Blanck and Blanck, 1974), (2) Other as facilitating development and growth (e.g., Winnicott, 1945; Kohut, 1971), (3) Other as object of destructive wishes (e.g., Klein, 1935), (4) Other as moral standard (e.g., Erikson, 1950), (5) Other as "not me" (e.g., Kernberg, 1975; Masterson, 1981; Winnicott, 1945), and (6) Other as part of an interactional field (e.g., Sullivan, 1953). Some of these categories are reflected in the themes of connection found in this study, although not to a great degree.

For example, the experience of connection as reflected in the theme Feels Good echoes portions of psychoanalytic theories which emphasize (1) Other as frustrating or gratifying, or (2) Other as facilitating development and growth. Freud's theories (1900, 1912, 1924), for example, were based on the assumption that other people are inherently experienced as either gratifying or frustrating the instinctual wishes of the child and, and, later, the adult individual. The individual's personality and functioning in the world reflect her or his ability to manage anxiety against the backdrop of experiencing other people either as objects of love (gratifying) or of frustration. Following this line of thinking, relationships could be thought to "feel good" when they gratify unmet wishes or desires.

In theories which portray the "other as facilitating," (Kohut's theories, 1971, for example), the other is seen as providing for aspects of life that support and foster

the development of the individual; relationships "feel good" when they provide basic needs for security and dependency. These two types of theory -- Freud and Kohut -- are based on the assumption that other people **have something** that the individual needs or wants and all relationships are based on the usefulness people have as providers for the self.

The experience of interpersonal connection, as described by participants in this investigation, seems to be related more to a sense that relating is **inherently** pleasurable. Although some participants reflected on intimate relationships they considered to be helpful in maintaining a sense of well-being and security, especially during times of crisis, many reported instances of connection which just "felt good" on their own. In these experiences, nothing in particular was gained from the interaction other than the joy of relating with another human being in a state of openness and presentness. Such experiences also left the person with fond memories and/or anticipations of other experiences of connection.

In other words, "underlying" fears of anxiety or frustration are not necessarily inherent aspects of the everyday experience of connection. This is not to say, of course, that needs, anxiety and fear are not common phenomena of interpersonal relating; only that there are relational experiences not founded upon frustration and anxiety, as has been assumed by psychoanalytic theory.

The cluster of psychoanalytic theories which view the other as "not me" (e.g., Kernberg, 1975; Masterson, 1976) tend to focus on issues related to the development of a sense of self. The basic assumption for this line of thought is that the

development of a sense of self is a progression from feelings of oneness to feelings of separateness, a process usually called "individuation." Psychoanalysis had supposed states of oneness occurred in the infant because psychoanalytic patients seemed to be experiencing oneness fantasies with other people (especially with the analysts themselves).

Findings from infancy research have not supported the view of early childhood as a state of experiencing oneness with the world and with other people, only later eventuating in a sense of self as separate from others. Babies apparently come into the world actively **engaging** in interactions with their caregivers (Stern, 1985).

Psychoanalytic theorists who have attempted to relate the infant research findings with separation/individuation theory (such as Beebe and Lachmann, 1988) have postulated that oneness fantasies are only one of a range of adult experiences of other people based on patterns of interaction developed during the lifespan. Infancy research suggests, further, that the ability to actively engage with other people begins in early infancy and has its own developmental course (Stern, 1985). While psychoanalysis has emphasized the development of self (and maturity) through separation and individuation from others, infancy research findings suggest the ability to relate to others is a developmental task at least as important as individuation (Westin, 1991).

In this study, the experience of Being Present to Each Other, found to be an aspect of the experience of connection, only vaguely resembles the experience of the other as in "me or not me" psychoanalytic theories. One participant did speak of "feeling exactly the same way" as the other person, or as "feeling like you are the

same person;" a second participant talked about a sense of "merging." For the most part, however, participants seemed to be experiencing connection as neither "separate" nor fused ("as one"); their experience was of relationship itself. Consider these examples:

We're just really right together, touching. Our little spirits are just right next to each other sometimes, you know. I don't know how to really explain it other than that. (11F)

It's this earnest attempt on both our parts to be together at the same time in this acknowledgement of each other. (10M)

Both "oneness" and "separateness" were implied in many of the encounters, although neither seemed to be the focus. The "new thinking" in psychoanalytic theory was drawn on the assumption that humans are inherently social beings rather than the more monadic view taken by early libido theory. These "new" theories focus on the experience of the other as "part of the interactional field" (Sullivan, 1953; Winnicott, 1945).

Of these theories, Winnicott's notion of "transitional objects" (1958) seems the most relevant for the present results. Winnicott further developed his conception of transitional objects and conceived a theory of play, creativity, and religious experience based on his observations of children and their favorite toy, such as a teddy bear or blanket (1971). Winnicott's conception is based on the interplay, or space between, the child and the world. From his view, the relationship between the child and the toy is one of a flow (back and forth) between relationship and non-relationship, as when the child first is inseparable from the toy and then throws it down and, still later, picks it up again. Winnicott uses this pattern as both a metaphor and a

description of how humans learn to understand, accept, and come to use paradox. In this view, the child learns to play with the "space between," where reality is **both** "mine and not mine" (as the child both clings to and discards the toy). For Winnicott, the use of paradox forms the basis of all creative processes including play, artistic endeavors, and religious experiences.

What Winnicott's conception adds to those of the separation/individuation theories that is relevant for the present discussion is his focus on the relationship itself as a foundation for satisfaction and creative living. Winnicott's theories of play and transitional objects view human relating as inherently valuable, rather than as reaching backward or underneath for an explanation of relationships as fulfilling an unmet need or desire. By applying his interpersonal interactional theory to a broader conception of human experiences than those considered to be pathological, the theory is more relevant to a study of everyday human experience such as in the present context. For Winnicott, it is in the pattern of interactions between the self and another -- in the connection -- that some of the most satisfying and rewarding aspects of human living occur, such as play, creativity, and religious experiences. Finally, Winnicott's theory focuses on the nature of the relationship itself whereas other psychoanalytic theories have tended to focus on the individual within the relationship.

### **The Experience of Connection and Social Psychology**

The importance of human relationships is illustrated by the proliferation of theories and research concerning interpersonal relationships; the field of relationship



research spans several disciplines as well as many different areas of clinical, developmental and social psychology (Berscheid, 1994). One reason the field is so broad and varied is that researchers and theorists have tended to study specific relationship types (Berscheid, 1994), such as child peer relationships (Hartup, 1989), friendships (Fischer and Phillips, 1982), and marital relationships (Bradbury and Finchum, 1990).

Although there have been several approaches to understanding relationship phenomena which are common to a broad variety of relationships, these approaches are still comparatively few in number (Berscheid, 1994). One approach has been to develop operational definitions of terms such as "relationship" (Kelly, et al., 1983) and "intimacy" (Reis and Shaver, 1988); another concern is the research relevant to the topic of "relationship cognition" (e.g., Berscheid, et al., 1976). The present study, as an investigation into phenomena that cross over several relationship types, also is an attempt to discover features descriptive of the general nature of interpersonal relationships. The experience of connection was found to occur in a wide variety of relationships -- with strangers, with spouses, with friends, with lovers, and with family members. The method of the present study seems especially suited to study general relationship phenomena, since its unstructured and exploratory approach allows phenomena to emerge with fewer restraints related to relationship type.

### Relationship Cognition

The study of relationship cognition is similar in some respects to the research approach of the present study since its methods allow investigations of relationship phenomena common to many different types of relationships; it tends to emphasize the importance of personal meanings in relationship research, and it attempts to emphasize and incorporate contextual aspects of relational phenomena into its investigations (Berscheid, 1994). These features of relationship cognition research parallel some of the main tenets of phenomenology which also emphasizes context and meaning, and provides a method for investigating aspects of the experience of general relationship phenomena (Idhe, 1986).

Some research findings deriving from the cognition approach to relationships have led researchers to the view that social information is organized in terms of categories of relationship rather than by person categories (e.g., Fiske, et al., 1991). These findings imply that individuals think about and remember information about other people according to the interpersonal relationships in which those other people are engaged. This view is similar to that of phenomenology; that is, that the primary mode of perception is relational in nature (Idhe, 1986). Phenomenology holds, however, that all phenomena of experience are relational (including social phenomena); that is, that events (social or otherwise) in the world are always perceived as being in a relationship with their contexts and, further, as being in a relationship with the person who is perceiving the event (Husserl, 1960). For phenomenology, events are not perceived independently of their contexts. These

findings also relate to the recent theories of psychoanalysis, which hold the view that human experience is primarily interpersonal in nature (Mitchell, 1988).

### Love

Theories of love abound in the literature, although few have led to vigorous programs of research (Berscheid, 1994). Love theorists and researchers have attempted to: differentiate "love" from "liking" (e.g., Rubin, 1973); distinguish between "companionate" and "passionate" love (e.g., Hatfield, 1988); explore the role of physiological arousal in "passionate love" (e.g., Berscheid and Walster, 1974); develop love taxonomies (e.g., Lee, 1988); and, relate love to "attachment style" (e.g., Hazan and Shaver, 1987) -- to name a few of topics studied.

Results of the present study suggest that the experience of interpersonal connection transcends the distinction researchers have made between "companionate" and "passionate" love (Hatfield, 1988), although participant experiences of connection do reflect aspects of both. Companionate love involves trust and a sense of security, similar to certain aspects of the theme of Openness found to characterize the experience of connection described in this study. Participants, for example, described experiencing trust both in the other person and in the relationship. The theme Feels Good seems to be reflected in the concept of passionate love, which involves pleasure and also intense emotional states such as anxiety and obsession (Hindy, Schwarz, and Brodsky, 1989). Participants reported that their experiences of connection invariably involved pleasure; when relationship aspects became too intense, however, they

reported becoming "overwhelmed," and the experience became one of disconnection. In this respect, the concept of passionate love and the experience of connection described by participants in the present study differ; passionate love has been associated in research finding with experiences which, although intense, are not necessarily pleasurable (e.g., Hindy, Schwarz, and Brodsky, 1989).

In general, relationships between the various love theories and results of the present study are scattered and inconsistent; that is, the descriptions of the experiences of connection from participants do not fit well with any of the theories of love. Reflections of some of the themes are to be found in the theories of love, and aspects of the love theories seem to reflect certain aspects of each of the themes found in this study. It would seem that love and interpersonal connection are related, although distinctly different experiences.

For example, the research on love and "attachment style" do not seem to relate well to each other. Relationship researchers have borrowed a concept from developmental psychology, "attachment style," and applied it to adult love relationships (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall, 1978). Attachment styles, based on parent-child relationships, have been found to be related to experiences adults report of their romantic relationships (Hazen and Shaver, 1987). Findings from the present study do not support the view suggested by attachment style research that there are three types of interpersonal relationship experiences: avoidant, secure, and anxious/ambivalent. Experiences of connection appear to be concerned primarily with positive experiences; participants did report negative experiences when they described

their experiences of Intensity. Intensity was described often by participants as being "overwhelming;" perhaps such experiences were similar to experiences described as representative of "avoidant" and "anxious/ambivalent" styles. An important distinction, however, is that the concept of attachment style refers to a supposedly stable interpersonal pattern; participants in the present study, when describing their experiences of intensity, referred to different aspects of relationship experiences that varied with time and relationship.

Similarly, Lee's typology of love styles (1988), which is based on experiential accounts of love relationships, is similar to the description of connection experiences found in this study; Lee's typology, however, seems to include a broader range of experiences. For example, "Agape love" (altruistic, unselfish love) and "Ludic love" (playful and uncommitted) were not reflected in any of the aspects of connection found in the present study. These differences suggest, again, that the experience of connection is different from the experience of love as presented in these theories.

Hendrick and Hendrick (1989) attempted to integrate various theories of love and concluded that love has different meanings for different people at different times. The experience of interpersonal connection as described in this study does not seem to support any particular theory of love, but seems instead to be a different sort of experience -- related to love, but not the same as it. Participants also made this discrimination; several participants wondered at their lack of experiences of connection with a particular family member even though they did experience loving that person.

### Loneliness

Of all the research in social psychology, perhaps research on loneliness bears the most relevance for the topic of connection. Research findings in the literature on loneliness should in some respects provide a reversed image of those found in this study. Loneliness, in a sense, is an experience of a **lack** of connection. And, indeed, present results do seem to reflect the opposite of findings in the area of loneliness research.

In Being Present to Each Other, people experience a "togetherness" in which both individuals are sensitive to, and welcome, each other. In this experience, there is a sense of mutuality, and give and take. Research on lonely people, by contrast, suggests that they tend to be fairly unresponsive to other people particularly in conversations; lonely people tend to talk less, ask fewer questions, obtain less information, change the topic more frequently, and attend less to their interaction partners (Bell, 1985; Jones, Hobbs, and Hockenbury, 1982). There seems to be a lack of mutuality in their interactions which perhaps contributes to the tendency for lonely people to remain lonely.

In Openness, participants described experiencing a sense of trust and acceptance; participants felt accepted by the other person and they also accepted the other person "faults and all." Lonely people, however, assume that strangers in conversations with them do not view them positively; and, lonely people do not view their conversational partners positively either (Bell, 1985; Jones et al., 1981; Jones et al., 1983). These findings suggest that lonely people are not open in their

relationships with others, at least in the beginning stages of the relationship. Results of the present study were not limited to long term relationships; several participants described experiences of connection occurring with strangers.

In History and Possibilities, participants described a sense of endurance in the relationship or in the memory of the experience. For lonely people, however, research findings suggest (at least in conversations with strangers) that they expect relationships to end rather than endure over time; they do not seem to experience any hope that the relationship can endure. Lonely people assume that the other person does not want to continue interactions with them, and also they do not want to continue interactions with the other person (Bell, 1985; Jones et al., 1981; Jones et al., 1983). Apparently, for lonely people, there is less hope of a future in their relationships with others; in connection experiences, participants described a strong sense of the future of the relationship.

Participants in the present study reported "feeling good" about their experiences of connection. They described their experiences in terms of a broad range of words connoting pleasure, such as "sense of awe," "grace," "powerful," "nice," and "gives me hope." This is quite different from the experiential descriptions of loneliness as reported, for example, by Rubenstein, et al., (1979); in that study, participants reported experiencing many negative feelings as aspects of loneliness. Some examples of the feeling states reported in that study are: "helpless," "afraid," "without hope," "empty," and "alienated." Results of the present study suggest that

loneliness and connection may be "opposite" experiences; that is, each reflects back on the other, with loneliness a negative reflection of interpersonal connection.

The correspondence between results of the current study and findings in the field of interpersonal relationship research appears to be strongest as it relates to the research into the experience and behavior of lonely people; loneliness as it has been revealed in this research bears striking resemblance to the description of connection found in this study, although as a negative reflection of it.

### **Relationship to Philosophical Perspectives**

With the exceptions of Merleau-Ponty and Martin Buber, most existential approaches to relations with other people, (e.g., Heidegger, 1962; and Sartre, 1956) begin with the proposition that alienation and "inauthentic" living are the basic nature of modern interpersonal life. Other people either assist or distract the person from his or her projects, which involve the capacity to live life meaningfully while facing the eventual loss of all that is meaningful in life; that is, to face one's own death.

Sartre (1956) believes that every human encounter involves being objectified by the other or by attempting to objectify the other(s). Results of this study do not support this view: in connection, other people are experienced as being open and present to one another in mutuality. The views of Merleau-Ponty and Buber would seem more in accord with the thematic structure of connection revealed in this study.



### Merleau-Ponty

Human relatedness is a fundamental theme in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Barral, 1986). In Merleau-Ponty's conception, human beings "live" their relations with others unreflectively; that is, before they are recognized and conceptualized. Through the body, and its being in the world, humans come to know each other, first through perception and then through communication which includes language, art, and sexuality. For Merleau-Ponty, interpersonal relations are a given: we are born into society, and into the presence of the other people. Yet, individuals can choose to be more or less open in relating with each other; that is, they can choose to be more or less authentic in their relationships.

Emotions play an important role for Merleau-Ponty in the "truly personal encounter." He differentiates human relations which are "exterior" and "superficial" from ones that are more profound and personal. In communication, there can be merely sharing of information, or there can be "communication of being." The latter involves recognizing each other's freedom and each other's subjectivity. This is in stark contrast to Sartre's (1956) view that human beings are never free in their relationships with others; for Sartre, others are not known subjectively and human relationships are seen as a constant battle between two people, each wanting subjectivity and each being fated to objectivity by the other.

For Merleau-Ponty, the fact that human beings have a sense of history and are able to share perspectives on their "situatedness" in the world allows for them to have subjectivity without losing their freedom. Because humans communicate, their

respective situations can intermingle and thereby, change one another. As they enter each other's world, new perspectives develop between them. Mutual transformation may occur even when the relation is not an intimate one, but simply "an event in the world, at a certain point in time, and in a certain field of perception common to them both" (Barral, 1986, p. 162). Thus, human relations are "inevitable, because to exist is to act, and action in the world spills over into others' lives." Merleau-Ponty speaks of "threads intertwined and enmeshed, so that not any life is lived autonomously, or without relations; no life can be lived outside the world." (1962, p. 361).

Several themes in Merleau-Ponty's view on human relations resonate with results of the present study. In a "truly personal encounter" people are present to each other's subjectivity through open "communication of being" (as in *Being Present to Each Other and Openness*). Part of what it means to be human is to share perspectives on our histories and to make new meanings together (as in *History and Possibilities*). In their conversations with other people in *Connection*, new personal meanings emerged for the participants. Consider these two examples of participants' experiences of connection from the interview texts:

It was like a real deep connection. I mean, not a connection like you have stuff in common. This is like -- here we are, talking about the deepest things, about how we had gotten to where we were. (11F)

And she said, "Well, you know, the thing is that I feel like that time was really necessary for me, that I wouldn't be where I am right now if I hadn't gone through it." And we talked about why that was true and I just felt like, like the whole weight of our history together was there in the room with us, that we were both thinking about the difficult times and the good times that we had been through together and how we had really worked hard together. (2F)

The experience of interpersonal connection, as described by the participants in this study, bears resemblance to the "truly personal encounter" of Merleau-Ponty's conception of authentic human relating since connection was described as an awareness of "being present to each other." A further similarity to the views of Merleau-Ponty is that the present results imply that one aspect of the experience of connection is the "making of personal meanings" through dialogue.

### Buber

Buber's conception of human relationships (1958/1987) is based on the view that there are two ways in which humans relate with other human beings (and, also, with nonhuman beings). In his terms, these two forms of relating are "I-Thou" and "I-It." In "I-Thou" relationships people relate to each other in full openness and presentness to one another, without attempting to categorize, use, or understand the other person. In "I-It" relating, people are objectified and analyzed, so that they may be used for some purpose of the "I." The experience of interpersonal connection as described by the participants in this study closely resembles Buber's I-Thou conception of interpersonal relating.

In a previous phenomenological study, the more general experience of "other people" was investigated with the same dialogical method employed in the present study (Nowell, 1992). Results of that earlier study found that the following themes captured the human experience of other people: (1) Comparison (Similarity and Difference), (2) Benefit (Utility and Hindrance), and (3) Connection (Relatedness and

Alienation). The theme of Comparison refers to our tendency to categorize other people, both as similar to and different from each other and ourselves. The theme of Benefit refers to the utility we experience other people as having for us and for each other; it describes the way people are often instrumental in meeting needs and desires. Conversely, people are also sometimes perceived as hindrances, or even as threats, to the well-being of self or others. The theme of Connection refers to the experience of others in relationship with self and with each other; this theme also includes experiences of alienation.

In Comparison, people are measured, categorized, compared; in Benefit, they are experienced as functional; in Connection, as simply relational. These three themes are reminiscent of Buber's conception of the essences of human relationships, I-Thou and I-It (Buber, 1987) In I-It relationships, individuals relate to the world and to others as objects to be understood, manipulated and used. The relationship is one of functionality and measurement, as in expressed in the themes of Comparison and Benefit.

The structure of interpersonal connection found in this study is similar in many respects to Buber's conception of authentic human relating, I-Thou. In this form of relating, or what Buber calls "meeting," others are encountered in "pure relation" by being fully present and open to each other. This aspect of I-Thou is reflected in the themes of Being Present to Each Other and Openness. The theme of History and Possibilities is reflected in Buber's belief that only by relating to others in this fully

present, accepting manner could human individuals reach their full potential (Buber, 1967a).

In Buber's concept I-Thou, strictly speaking, there is no "I" and there is no "Thou;" there is only the relationship. For Buber, dialogue provides the purest human-to-human example of I-Thou relating.

I proceed from a simple real situation: two men are engrossed in a genuine dialogue. I want to appraise the facts of the situation. It turns out that the customary categories do not suffice for it. I mark: first the "physical" phenomena of the two speaking and gesturing men, second the "psychic" phenomena of it, what goes on "in them." But the meaningful dialogue itself that proceeds between the two men and into which the acoustic and optical events fit, the dialogue that arises out of the souls and is reflected in them, this remains unregistered. What is its nature, what is its place: My appraisal of the facts of the case cannot be managed without the category that I call "the between."  
(Buber, 1967b; p. 707)

As can be seen, Buber's conception of I-Thou seems very close to the description of interpersonal connection found in this study. In Connection, the presentness of human to human relating is revealed; participants reported being open to the other person, and all of his or her history and possibilities -- and for seemingly no other purpose than for the joy of relating fully with another human being.

### **Implications for Clinical Practice**

The experience of interpersonal connection is basic to an understanding of human existence and the results of this study have clear implications for clinical practice. Beyond the obvious implications for psychoanalytic therapy, three other types of implications will also be discussed: (1) as a model for healthy relationships,

(2) as a way to understand particular problems in relating, and (3) as a way to understand the therapeutic relationship.

Present results support revisions in psychoanalytic theory brought on, in part, by recent research in infant development (Stern, 1985). The view that individuation is a goal of "healthy" living may have to be shifted to view separation/individuation more as a constitutional given, or at least with increased focus placed on the lifelong issue of developing capacities for mutuality in interactions with others throughout life (Westin, 1991).

Present results suggest the experience of Connection may be an aspect of human experience leading to an overall sense of well-being and happiness. All of the participants described their experiences of Connection as being "good" experiences; some participants described their experiences of connection as being important to their general sense of well-being:

I don't know exactly -- you just feel like -- that it fills me up over and over. (1F)

In the sense of feeling, I feel good. It affirms me as a human being as much as anything else. It causes something in me to be encouraged. (4M)

It makes me feel, "Oh, okay, all is well with the world. All is well. It's a good life. It is a good life." (12F)

Present findings, therefore, suggest a model of healthy relating as a guide for the process of therapy. Specifically, these results would seem to suggest that loneliness describes a mirror image of interpersonal connection. Connection may be an experience that is more related to health than psychopathology. Psychoanalytic

theories have historically been based on pathological states; it would seem that psychoanalysis needs more models of healthy relating with which to view the therapist's work with patients.

Through increased understanding of a "healthy" model of interpersonal relating, the therapist may be able to recognize and support aspects of healthy functioning as presented by the patient. If the experience of connection is one of "pure relation," as in Buber's conception of I-Thou, helping patients understand, clarify, and improve their experiences of connection may assist in facilitating psychological growth and well-being. An important point, however, is that it would seem that the experience of connection described in the present study cannot be controlled. That is, participants reported that experiences of connection are "gifts." One can, however, be open to the experience of connection, and also can, perhaps teach others to be open to it.

The themes found in this study also pertain in direct ways to specific problems in human relating. Understanding the thematic structure of, and interrelationships among, the various themes may increase our understanding of particular patterns of interpersonal difficulties, eventuating in freeing the patient to make positive changes in relationships. Since the experiences of loneliness and interpersonal connection seem to be closely related, yet opposite reflections of each other, results of this study may be a prescription for helping lonely individuals improve the quality of their relationships. If any of the aspects of the connection becomes too intense, for example, a person may tend to distance him or herself from the other. Results of the

present study suggest that some people tend to distance themselves when feeling "too close" or "too open," or when there are "too many expectations." Increased understanding of individual modes of relating may facilitate a patient's ability either to change the nature of the relationship and thereby reduce its intensity to a more comfortable level, or to increase his or her ability to tolerate greater degrees of intensity. As the patient gains more knowledge of ways in which his or her behaviors may be leading to relationship difficulties, changes can be facilitated which should eventually lead to improvement in the quality of his or her relationships.

Similarly, in couples or family therapy, relationship partners may not experience the themes of connection in the same ways; clarification of differences in their experiences may lead to increased relationship satisfaction. For example, partners may not be able to tolerate the same level of openness in their relationship. One may feel "overwhelmed" by the same degree of intimacy and sharing of emotional reactions that the other partner experiences as "exciting" or "wonderful." As the first partner distances him or herself as a reaction to overly intense feelings of intimacy, the other partner may attempt to "turn up the volume" so as to pursue a more intense level of connection which, in turn, could lead to more distancing from the first partner.

Another example of the ways in which present themes can be applied to relational difficulties involves a potential interaction between the experiences of the partners as pertains to the two themes, History and Possibilities, and Openness. For many people, a sense that the relationship will endure is necessary to decrease a sense



of vulnerability and increase a desire to be open with the other person. If, however, one relationship partner is not ready to commit to the relationship until the other partner allows him or herself to become more vulnerable, and the other partner needs commitment first, difficulties may arise and the relationship may dissolve before it has time to develop. By helping individuals (and couples) see their own patterns of interpersonal experiences in terms of the themes of Connection, we may be able to help them make the adjustments necessary to improve their relationships.

Another implication relates to the therapeutic relationship itself, as a "real" relationship of Connection. If, as Buber has implied, "I-Thou" relationships are healing relationships (1967a), and if connection experiences as described by the participants are comparable to experiences of "I-Thou," perhaps therapists need to be open to experiences of genuine Connection in their relationships with patients. Through moments of relating with the patient in "I-Thou," the therapist would be more present to the patient as a person, and more open to his or her potential as a human being rather than as a "psychotherapy patient." Through connection experiences, the therapist may be able to be more open to what the patient brings to each session -- his or her personal history and possibilities -- while lessening tendencies to objectify and shoehorn the patient into theoretical conceptions which do not necessarily fit the person.

In Connection experiences, the therapist and patient may enter a rare, healing, and special form of relating -- the "in-between" -- in which creativity and joy potentiate and enliven the human spirit of both patient and therapist. While this may

seem to be a radical view when viewed from the perspective of traditional psychoanalysis, it supports and perhaps enriches newer psychoanalytic approaches which view human experience as primarily relational in nature.

This is not to say, of course, that all of therapy could (or should) be conducted in the experience of Connection as described by participants in this study. If the therapist is open to connection experiences in the therapy, however, special moments of joy in Connection may occur between therapist and patient. At these moments, patient and therapist may perhaps be more present, accepting, and respectful of each other -- in an authentic human encounter -- than heretofore had been experienced by the patient. These moments may lead, perhaps, to the patient's increased ability to experience an increased sense of pleasure or joy in living, both inside and outside of the therapeutic relationship. Experiences of Connection in their relationship, furthermore, may provide a broader climate more conducive to creating shared meanings concerning the patient's history and his or her possibilities for future relating.

A final point relates to the use of dialogue as a research method. The approach used in this study is both empirical and rigorous. The use of dialogue as an empirical method is similar to its use in psychotherapy, and there would seem to be a need in clinical psychology for more experiential descriptions of psychological phenomena. It is hoped that this study will stimulate further research using phenomenological dialogue as a method for exploring the thick rich texture of human relationships.

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## APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

I am a graduate student in clinical psychology, presently engaged in collecting information for my doctoral dissertation research project. I am asking your help as a participant in this work.

The purpose of the study is to find out more about experiences in which there is a sense of connection with another person. I am asking you to participate by sharing with me some of your own experiences of connection in your interpersonal relationships. I believe the experience of connection is a common sort of experience that occurs in many different ways and under many different circumstances. For some people, it may happen more frequently than for others; sometimes it may be a very vivid experience and at other times may seem quite ordinary.

I am interested in hearing about your unique personal experiences with this phenomenon in order to understand what the experience is like for you and what you are aware of during the experience. This in turn will help me understand the general characteristics of the phenomenon of a sense of connection with another person and the meanings this experience has for individuals. I am interested in learning about your typical experiences with a sense of connection because although many psychological theories concern this common experience, more direct research which examines individuals' actual experience is needed.

Your participation in this study, if you agree, will require a time commitment of about two to four hours and involve two interviews, the first of which will be audiotaped. During the first interview, I will ask you to think of some specific times when you were aware of a sense of connection with another person. I will ask you to describe those experiences in as much detail as possible, including what you were aware of and what the experience was like for you. The interview is expected to take about 1-2 hours. Afterwards, the interview will be transcribed from the audiotape.

After your interview is completed and transcribed, I will contact you again at a later date to arrange a briefer follow-up interview (which will not be audiotaped). At that time, I will provide you with a copy of your transcript and ask if you have anything to change or add. I will also share with you my preliminary findings and ask for your comments and suggestions concerning the study. I will then ask your permission to publish all or parts of your interview or any shortened versions of it in my dissertation (or any subsequent publication on the study).

The primary risks involved in participating in the study are those stemming from the possibility that your identity may not be held confidential. Therefore I will describe to you the means I will use to maintain the confidentiality of the participants' identities. The information obtained will be held in strict confidence. All audiotapes, transcripts, and any other information will be coded by number and will be identifiable only through a master list. This master list will be kept in a locked file to which only I will have access. Audiotapes and all other material collected will be stored in a separate locked file to which only I will have a key. Any potential

identifying information in the interview will be edited out of the transcript, and the audiotapes will be erased as soon as the interview is transcribed. The master list will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

The audiotapes will be transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist has signed a statement attesting that she will protect the confidentiality of the audiotapes by storing the tapes and the transcripts in a locked drawer in her office while they are in her possession, and by attesting that she will not discuss any of the information in the interviews with any person or persons. She is the only person who will have access to the drawer in her office where the tapes and transcripts will be stored.

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You will choose the experiences that you wish to talk about, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without question. Many people find that exploring their experiences with another person is satisfying and beneficial, and I hope this will be the case for you. Hopefully you will find the topic is an interesting one to think about and discuss.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions now or at any other point in the study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep. If you agree to participate in this project please read the statement below and sign both pages of this consent form.

Beth Nowell

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

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM II

At the time of our interview, we discussed the possibility of my using all or parts of your interview in my dissertation and/or other publication. I am now asking your permission to print excerpts from the interview, the summary I have developed, and the verbatim transcript. I plan to use excerpts of the interviews as specific examples of the way people describe their experiences of connection in interpersonal relationships. The purpose of including the transcripts and summaries is to illustrate how the interviews were conducted and the steps involved in the analysis of the interviews.

I have provided you a copy of your interview transcript and my summary of it. You will notice that I have deleted all names, dates, places, and any other potentially identifying information. I would like you to carefully check over the transcript and summary to make sure that they are accurate accounts of your experience and of our interview and that they do not leave out any important points you wished to make. Please make any changes you want or mark sections that you do not want me to publish. Further comments and suggestions are welcome. We can go over these and any questions you may have in our follow-up interview.

I want to remind you that neither your name nor any identifying information will be presented along with the material. I will not publish any part of the transcript or summary without your explicit permission on this consent form. If you do consent, I will include only what you have approved for publication. If you decide for any reason that you prefer not to have your transcript or summary published, this is of course fully and freely your choice.

If you feel comfortable with my publishing either the transcript and summary as they are, or with your corrections of them, please sign this consent form in the space below. A copy of this form will be provided for you to keep. Please contact me at the address or phone number listed if any additional questions or concerns arise. Again, thank you for your participation in my research. Your assistance has been greatly appreciated.

Beth Nowell

I have read the above Information and Consent Form, and approve the reproduction of the verbatim transcript and summary of my interview with Ms. Nowell on the experience of connection in interpersonal relationships, in the form that we have agreed upon.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I attest that I will be transcribing audiotapes of interviews with research subjects as part of a project conducted by Beth Nowell. The topic of the research is "The Experience of a Sense of Connection". I am a professional transcriptionist employed for the past ten years transcribing depositions and court transcripts; also, I have been employed as a paralegal for fifteen years.

I understand that audiotapes and transcripts produced from audiotapes are to be handled as confidential materials and therefore require specified means for securing the confidentiality of the persons being interviewed. To the best of my ability, I will maintain the confidentiality of all information on the audiotapes by the following means:

- (1) While in my possession, audiotapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked file drawer in my office, to which only I will have access.
- (2) Audiotapes and transcripts will be identified by number and not by name of the person being interviewed. (I will not have access to names, addresses or telephone numbers of subjects.)
- (3) I will not give out any information in the interviews to any person other than the researcher.
- (4) I understand that my name will be included as the project's transcriptionist on the Consent Form to be signed by the subjects in the study, and that the specific means of protecting the confidentiality of the subjects described in this document will explained to the subjects in both written and verbal form.

Transcriptionist: \_\_\_\_\_

Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## APPENDIX D

Table 3. Connection Relationships

| Type of Relationship  | Participant Number | Number of Reported Experiences |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| <u>Family Members</u> |                    |                                |
| Husband               | 1F                 | 6                              |
|                       | 2F                 | 5                              |
| Wife                  | 6M                 | 2                              |
|                       | 7M                 | 5                              |
|                       | 10M                | 1                              |
| Mother                | 3M                 | 1                              |
|                       | 11M                | 2                              |
|                       | 12F                | 1                              |
| Father                | 9M                 | 4                              |
| Son                   | 1F                 | 11                             |
| Daughter<br>(Infant)  | 11F                | 1                              |
| Mother-in-Law         | 12F                | 3                              |
| Brother-in-Law        | 10M                | 1                              |
| Sister                | 1F                 | 6                              |
|                       | 10M                | 1                              |
| Twin                  | 1F                 | 22                             |
| Family in General     | 10M                | 1                              |

Table 3 (continued)

| Type of Relationship                            | Participant Number | Number of Reported Experiences |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| <u>Friends</u>                                  | 2F                 | 2                              |
|                                                 | 3M                 | 4                              |
|                                                 | 4M                 | 1                              |
|                                                 | 5M                 | 5                              |
|                                                 | 6M                 | 4                              |
|                                                 | 8F                 | 3                              |
|                                                 | 9M                 | 4                              |
|                                                 | 10M                | 4                              |
|                                                 | 11F                | 1                              |
|                                                 | 12F                | 2                              |
| <u>Romantic Partners</u>                        | 3M                 | 12                             |
|                                                 | 8F                 | 2                              |
|                                                 | 9M                 | 2                              |
|                                                 | 10M                | 1                              |
| <u>Mentors</u>                                  | 4M                 | 1                              |
|                                                 | 5M                 | 1                              |
|                                                 | 9M                 | 2                              |
| <u>Strangers</u>                                |                    |                                |
| People on the Internet                          | 6M                 | 4                              |
| People Who Need Something<br>(e.g., Directions) | 6M                 | 2                              |
| People You Start Up a<br>Conversation With      | 5M                 | 1                              |
|                                                 | 10M                | 1                              |
|                                                 | 12F                | 3                              |
| <u>Work Relationships</u>                       |                    |                                |
| Customer                                        | 5M                 | 1                              |
| Psychotherapy Client                            | 2F                 | 2                              |
| Psychotherapist                                 | 5M                 | 1                              |

Table 3 (continued)

| Type of Relationship                    | Participant Number | Number of Reported Experiences |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Students                                | 4M                 | 1                              |
| Minister with General Congregation      | 4M                 | 3                              |
| Minister with Members of Congregation   | 4M                 | 5                              |
| Photographer with Subject of Photograph | 10M                | 1                              |
| Co-Workers                              | 5M                 | 2                              |
|                                         | 6M                 | 1                              |
|                                         | 10M                | 2                              |
| <u>Miscellaneous</u>                    |                    |                                |
| Woman in a Photograph                   | 10M                | 1                              |
| Cultural or Social Groups (as a whole)  | 9M                 | 1                              |
|                                         | 10M                | 2                              |
|                                         | 12F                | 1                              |

## APPENDIX E

CONNECTION #11: 29 year old female

Interview by Beth Nowell (I)

Respondent (R)

I: Can you think of some times when you have experienced a sense of connection in relationship with another person or with other people?

R: Yes, I can. (Good.) I can think of several times and most of them are pretty recently. (Okay.) Uh, I don't know if I really had that many connective type experiences until pretty recently, uh that I really thought were strong connections. I had one with my Mom recently. - (laughing) Baby gas! - We were talking about family uh, stuff that had gone on in my family for my whole growing up years and uh we just were really, really talking. We were in a restaurant but the restaurant just sort of went away and we were just really talking and we were just sort of staring into each other's eyes and just -- almost, it was like meditation is what it felt like. (Really!) It was like a real, a real deep connection. I mean, not a connection like you have stuff in common. This is like -- here we were talking about, you know, just the deepest things, about -- of how we had gotten to where we were and, you know, just physically --

[Baby crying.] Gosh maybe we should just stop, she's really....

(Okay)

[Tape stopped.]

R: We just better grab it while we can. But that was much more deep of a connection than just having a conversation with a good friend even. It was something -- it went on to some other realm, it really did, it felt like some kind of meditation.

I: Huh, what do you mean by that?

R: It was very, well just sort of, we just sort of got real tuned in to each other and attached and everything sort of went away and sort of what we were talking about was sort of still there, but it really felt like, I don't know if you've ever have done much meditation, it just sort of, it was just sort of floating above everything else. Everything else was just -- I don't know, almost even maybe what we were talking about seemed insignificant cause we made such a connection. But it, I mean, I think like the room was just sort of warm and uh, I sort of lost track of everybody and we were just sort of, I don't know, tuned into each other's eyes and I don't know, it was really a deep warm connection. Really, a really nice one especially to have with your Mom, you know. A psychic in Morristown, Bobby Drinnon, had at one time

told Mom and I, that we were soul mates and I, I sort of thought "Huh, are you sure about that?" [Laughter.] But uh, but I think, whatever soul mates are, I think, now I think we are.

I: Really?

R: Yeah. After -- Just recently it seems like it, that has happened. This soul mate idea --

I: What is it? What is it that you think -- Yeah, what makes you think that, I guess?

R: Well I just sort of, it just sort of opened up and I guess we have just a real spiritual communication with each other, we, you know, I don't know, somehow we're real together, it's uh, you know, I don't know; we don't talk about trivial-- I don't know, we're just really just right together, touching. Our little spirits are just right next to each other sometimes, you know. I don't know how to really explain it other than that. You know it's not --

I: And it changed after this --?

R: No, it was always getting more and more and more and more like that uh after she got divorced um from my Dad, you know, I think that she started just really blooming, blooming you know... It really it was good for her and finding her own peace, you know. She's one of the most, I mean I hate to say enlightened, but she's really more spiritual than, or not more spiritual just I don't know, she's more, she's so enlightened, I mean she's a really enlightened type person. You know she, I don't know how... to say it other than that really. But she's really up there in what she, how she uses her life, and how she is...treats humans and animals and nature. I mean she's just really, I think she's really enlightened. I feel like she is. I feel lucky that she's my Mom.

I: Huh.

R: Definitely. She just, she's just like full of love and everybody just is attracted to her and flocks to her, you know. It's really interesting. She just, I mean, I mean, people know her for that you know. It's like I go anywhere with her, she, all kinds of people come up to her and she just makes everyone feel so good and you know, she's just really gifted at that kind of nurturing...

I: Uh-huh, oh...

R: ...thing in life, she's really good at it.

- I: So you said, sometimes you feel like your spirits are right close to each other. Can you think of a time when that happened?
- R: Oh, other times?
- I: Yeah.
- R: Well, you mean with Mom or with other people?
- I: With your mother but also with other people if you --
- R: Well it's happened like that with Mom and I several times, usually just throughout conversation and it doesn't happen a whole lot, you know. Though we always have a really good rapport, you know, even when we disagree. It's not a big deal anymore, not like it was in high school, but -- I don't know it seems like, just during conversation we'll just get sometimes really connected like that and it just sort of transcends everyday reality in some strange way that I don't know how to say without sounding hokey. You know, it just, it goes way beyond. Really, it's like, it's like sort of like, it's like a state of meditation is what it feels like, it really does.
- I: Um hm. What are you talking, I mean what were you talking about this first time around or the second time?
- R: We were oh, we were talking about um things that have happened like about my Mom and my Dad and during their marriage and stuff about my marriage. We were talking about you know really deep, deep important stuff to us about love, you know, and life-- you know sharing stuff. We have sort of parallel experiences in a lot of stuff. You know, not always, but she can, the way she listens, she can really understand, really understand me and I can really understand her, you know and it's like, since we understand it, you know we're not judging each other so we like to listen to each other cause we understand each other and we're not saying well you should just tell him to "Er-er-er" you know it's sort of like well, I know what you mean and, you know, I understand. It -- I don't know, it's definitely spiritual. It's a very spiritual relationship with my mother for sure.
- I: Um hm.
- R: It's really a strong and probably the strongest -- We need each other, too, I think. We help each other in life for sure. Cause she, she's the one who can really understand when I have, when something is bothering me. She can really understand and I can really understand when something happens to her. I don't know if it's sounding as intimate as it feels.

- I: Really?
- R: I mean, I don't know if I'm conveying it in a way that makes it sound as intimate as it feels when it's happening. It feels, it's a very intimate relationship.
- I: Can you say more about that feeling, intimacy?
- R: I don't know if I can other than it has to do with I think knowing yourself maybe a little bit, and knowing I don't know where you are or where you're going or spiritually what's going on with yourself and knowing where that other person is spiritually and sort of just turning into one person (laughing), almost is what it feels like a little bit.
- I: Huh. Can you say more about that?
- R: Ma-- can I tell you, I have this idea about connectedness. Can I tell you that?
- I: Yeah, tell me, please.
- R: O.K. Well uh, I think the reason maybe that we don't feel connected sometimes in life is because we're not connected with our deepest self and our deepest self is God. Like, I mean, I think like of the supreme as a big huge fire. We're all little sparks from, of that. But we may not realize it; we're not in touch with our own deepest self, therefore we're not really connected to ourselves, so we have a hard time being connected to other people. And other people are also sparks of God, so we're really all sparks of God. So I, I believe that we're all, all, you know, sort of the same thing, just in different--like, like I sort of think that, (this is my little metaphor) I think that life is like um a big costume party and that um all the guests are God and they're, but they're all wearing costumes and they don't really, really, really realize they're wearing costumes a lot of the time. It's like you're sort of -- maybe they don't realize they're wearing costumes and that's sort of what causes the suffering I think that people, me included, I'm not saying people --out there, but we don't realize our God self and that God is giving the party. God is the party, God is the costumes, God is the guests, God is everything is sort of what I think. But perceiving it as like you're separate is what causes suffering and that lack of connectedness, that's sort of ( to baby who's making noise - that's what you think ) that's what I think.
- I: So when you're feeling um this intimacy with your mother and you feel like you're sort of one, that's what you're talking about that there are no costumes or--?

- R: Yeah, a sort of blissful feeling like being connected with God in a way like by connecting with another human; it's such a deep connection, it's sort of like somehow, like this person is so much my brother or my sister that we're sort of the same. So somehow it's like realizing God in a way. Somehow it bec-- when you sort of fuse in with another person, it's got sort of a bliss thing to it and it's almost like connecting-- it's like connecting with God. I mean it's not like, you know, praying-- It's just a different form of connecting with God, yeah. It's a different form of it, is what I think. I feels like it at least to me.
- I: Yeah, yeah. Well, and then the, when the rest-- was it in a restaurant, you were saying, with your Mom?
- R: Yeah, S&S Cafeteria (laugh).
- I: And you, and you were talking about your relationships with your husbands and your father--
- R: Yeah, and my brother.
- I: Close relationships?
- R: Yeah, family, familial--
- I: And you were understanding each other?
- R: Yeah, and it just sort of became timeless, you know, the sounds in the room just sort of got murky and you know not distinguishable and we just sort of were in our little pocket, you know? And everything was sort of something else except for what we were saying. It was real alive what we were saying.
- I: And everything else faded away?
- R: Sort of got hazy and golden and real pleasant. It was fine you know.
- I: And this is on the background of sort of all this feeling of connection with her? Is that what you're saying?
- R: Yeah, yeah we pretty much always feel a connection. We didn't used to but after she got divorced, I guess after life taught us some stuff, you know.
- I: Is that two different types of connection that you're talking about where the one where these sort of intense moments which is what I asked you to talk about, but are you also calling your relationship with her a sense of connection too. Is that something else or is that ?



- R: They're definitely different, very different. Like that moment I told you about was a sort of a spiritual experience and it's not like that at all every time, you know. We always are on good terms and can talk well, but it-- it's never, it is not always like that.
- I: No that would be hard to maintain. (Laughter) But I'm wondering, is it, what I wondered, are you calling, I mean do you feel a sense of connection with her sort of as a general -- is that what you're calling connection too? (Yes.) Would you call that a connection relationship with your mother? (Yes.) Is that part of your definition of what it is to be connected or is it just these moments that stand out?
- R: Oh I'd say both, I'd say both, definitely.
- I: That's what I was wondering, yeah.
- R: Yeah both, but just Mom's like sort of an anchor for me I guess. Our connection --
- I: Is an anchor.
- R: Is a real anchor for me, yeah.
- I: Like how?
- R: I don't know. I guess just being that intimate with another human, is so essential in life to feel you know like there's somebody who knows you for who you are more than, more like knows your soul, you know, cause so many people know you, but-- you know they don't really know your soul, and Mom comes closer to knowing my soul, I guess, you know, than anybody for sure, than anybody, yeah, yeah. She's a jewel, I have to say. She's a jewel. She really is a good one.
- I: Yeah.
- R: But she's -- we've both had a hard time. She had a hard time. You know it took a long time for her to get to be so much of a flower, blooming.
- I: Right.
- R: Uh huh. It wasn't always like that. We had a hard time when I was growing up, you know.
- I: And so you've established this connection and it keeps growing.

- R: Yeah. Um hm. It happened I guess more as I went to college when she got divorced and we started being on our own more. I was away from my family of "disgusting origin" (Laughter). Torturous origin.
- I: Disg- say that again, I--
- R: My family of disgusting origin. (laughing) Torturous origin.
- I: That's good. I'll remember that.
- R: That's what it was.
- I: So for you it's been very much a process of growth and maybe the torturous, the family of torturous origin, does that contribute to your feeling connected now? I mean, do you think so?
- R: Probably. Yeah. Because I think I wouldn't have learned certain things had I not gone through that, that uh like, yeah that I needed to learn, I'm sure, you know. Otherwise I would have just, I don't know, I wouldn't know what I know. I don't know much, but I wouldn't know what I do know. You know, it's like, I guess, all that's a refining sort of process, I think. But -- Yeah, I guess that bonded us, having that past. But I think we would have been bonded if it had been a blissful past. But I don't know if there is such a thing as a blissful past. I don't think there is, so--
- I: Yeah. Yeah. Huh. Well, you said there were some other things that you wanted to talk about too, some other connections.
- R: Uh, yeah, uh yeah uh well -- Let's see there's two other ones that have stood out recently and they're all mostly recently. I was struck with realizing they are mostly recent, you know. Um, well actually there's three I can think of. (Child coughing - Well honey what's wrong?) One was with her (baby). I was feeding her and uh -- and uh I looked down and she just she looked like she imitated me, didn't she? (Talking to her child, "Who is there? Is that Beth? Is she coming to ask your mommy questions that mommy even can't answer? Yeah?) (Laughter.) So I was glad having a daughter, having had such a wonderful mother. I was like oh wow, maybe, maybe it'll be like as good as it is with my Mom, you know. Hoping, but I mean --
- I: And maybe it won't be torturous either!
- R: I'm hoping I learned something. I'm going to try to make it -- Well, yeah, one time, well this one's sort of, this one was also close but not exactly the same, but I was feeding her and for the first time while I was feeding her I

looked down and she, she just looked up at me and looked right into my eyes and smiled while I was feeding her. And there was this just the first real moment of recognition of I was her Mommy, you know. (Uh-huh.) And it felt really good and I could feel -- and sometimes when I talk to her I can feel something rushing to my head-- like my hormones, or something, are just getting activated by her presence, you know.

I: Huh, wow--

R: It's not like I need to feed her but I can feel like my head, stuff rushing to my head and my head getting sort of hot and getting sort of a little bit dizzy feeling. And it's a similar feeling I remember back when I tried to take birth control pills years ago, I would get a warm dizzy sort of feeling and my ears would turn beet red and I remember thinking, this, I don't know about this. I think this is too much. I don't need to be taking these, you know. But (To baby: Oh gosh, that was a good one. Say I'm good at that.) But a similar feeling happens with her. It's some kind of hormone reflex being around her.

I: Wow, isn't that interesting.

R: It is. Very interesting. Yeah, it even sometimes makes my head almost hurt a little bit and I don't ever get that any other time.

I: Huh, and so when you, this moment of recognition, you felt that then too?

R: Yeah, I think I got just sort of oozy headed and dizzy feeling a little bit but I think it's the hormones just --

I: Kicking in?

R: Yeah, um hm. (To baby: She likes to kick em in. Are you going to be sweet?)

I: So was the recognition that you're talking about, was that that she recognized you, or that you recognized that you were her mother, or what was that recognition and where was it?

R: Well let's see. Well --

I: That may not be answerable? I don't know.

R: I'm sure, it's just the first time that we had, you know, after all those weeks of having a little newborn, you know, you know they're knowing who you are, sort of but that's the first time that her eyes reflected it, you know, and I was

looking at her and she was looking at me and we had never had that before, and it was just (Baby sounds, mother imitating "Whaah. Is that what you thought about it? Maybe you should tell her what you thought. What did you think about that time mommy looked at you?)

I: It sounds so wonderful.

R: It was. It was. It was sort of one of those heartbreaker type-- I think I teared up, one of those type of things, you know. But I never, I never had really had that with her where, I mean I've observed her and gotten all aw-feelin' inside, but this one was different; 'cause she really just looked right at me, just gave me a big old smile and acknowledged my existence, you know.

I: Well there's something about that acknowledging that reminds me of your experience with your mother because you said that you understand each other.

R: Yeah, there was some kind of connection there. I don't know. Somehow we met up in that look, when she looked at me. Somehow we really met up together and that's the first time I've felt that-- with her. And I don't guess I've ever felt it quite like that since then. But yeah, somehow we really just, we were definitely merging or something in some way. I mean we were really -- they're really, it's kind of hard to describe that kind of thing, I'm sure you know.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: (Responding to baby noises. Yes. Is that hand going to be tasty? Oh yeah.) She got her first solid food yesterday.

I: Wow!

R: It was sort of sad.

I: Growing up already.

R: I know. She's a little wee thing and she's already growin' up.

I: She's a happy baby.

R: She is. We call her "Happy Baby". (Laughter.) I'm gonna write it in that terrible sorority writing, you know how they have those balls at the end of it.

I: Yeah.

R: I want to write something that says "happy baby" and put it up on the wall.  
(Laughing) Happy. Happy Baby.

I: Happy!

R: Happy baby. They do that monogramming at the mall. I've seen it, that writing.

I: That'll be good. That'll be good.

R: Yeah. It'll be great on a little rocking chair. Happy baby sits here.

I: Put it on her director's chair when she gets older, you know. Really embarrass her.

R: Yeah. But that was a feeling of connectedness. And I was thinking, the other -- I've had two other experiences that I, that just automatically came to the top of my brain and it seemed like they all had a timeless feeling about them.

I: Huh.

R: Like where everything just sort of fuzzed and went away except that moment in time. All of a sudden it was just like removed from it's background and the background got fuzzed and it was just sort of suspended there for a second, you know. That's what it felt like the other two times too. It was just-- that's what it felt like. There was a real timeless, almost a, almost a slow motion.

I: (To baby, who burped.) There we go.

R: (To baby) There! We're good at that! She's full of, full of herself today. But-

I: So that was timeless?

R: Yeah, there's a timeless feeling about it. It's like a deep sort of meditation feeling where -- sort of like that, really.

I: It, it and --

R: It's just sort of like it's lifted out of time, like that little moment is just sort of lifted and stuff just sort of goes away a little bit. And it's just, I mean that's all I really know how to say it as.

I: I think that is hard to describe, that experience.

R: Um Hm. Yeah. I had one with my best girlfriend one time. We were, we have a real humor connection and we were laughing so much. We'd been out one night and we always observe everyone in the room and then we're always amazed that the other one has observed everyone in the room, you know. It's, and then we end up spending hours talking about "Oh did you notice how so-and-so was blah, blah doing something?" You know, it was people we didn't even know. But we could-- somehow, we can communicate to each other, you know, you know, you know like, she'd say like you know, "The guy that sort of looked like a, sort of liiiiiiike a sloth or sort of like--(laughter), or sort of like-- but that sounds too condescending, that wouldn't be what we'd say, so much, it would be more like-- sort of like an antelope or a yak, or you know we'd communicate in some curious way like that, but it would be the way that we would understand each other.

I: And you'd know.

R: (Laughter.) We'd know. We'd say "Oh I know exactly which one you're talking about," you know, but we were turning a corner and we started laughing and we had such an intense connection over this thing we were laughing at, it was connected so -- but we could barely turn into the drive and it was like time stood still and we'd still talk about turning into the driveway at my house after coming home from being out that night. And it wasn't like alcohol induced or anything, you know. It was just totally, you know, natural, but we still talk about how that was the eternal turn because we -- it was so suspended in our mind that it was like--

I: It lasted forever.

R: It seemed like it took us foreeeever to turn, cause we were laughing and did take us long too like ha,ha,ha,ha. I tried to turn in the driveway. But it was like still seemed like longer than that, I don't know.

I: And you both felt this kind of -- like this eternal --

R: Yeah, yeah, we still talk about that, yeah. Uh huh.

I: And you were laughing and then it --

R: We were laughing and turning into the driveway simultaneously and it just seemed like it took forever, because we were so, we realized we were so connected on that and you know nobody else in the world probably would see the humor as we had seen it. But we both saw it sort of the same way, you know.

I: And that felt really connected, but you --

R: It felt really good too.

I: Well what was the connection like in that experience? I mean it was eternal.

R: It was euphoric.

I: Euphoric.

R: Yeah. It was very euphoric. Very euphoric. And like, I guess with my, with my Mom's it was sort of blissful, and with B. it was sort of euphoric, I guess. And it had, but it had humor mixed in. That's what -- it sort of seems like these things get you to that point. Like humor can get you there or making love. I was going to say the one with my husband was making love and it can get you to that point where it's sort of a timeless place. It's like different ways to get there but it's sort of the same place once you get there.

I: Um hm.

R: Or like meditating can get you there. Or just, you know, being by yourself, even can get you there. But it's a real connection feeling. I don't know --

I: Um hm. Um hm. So you can get that way feeling by yourself when you're meditating?

R: Uh, well I don't have much time to meditate any more.

I: Right.

R: But, it's a meditative feeling yes. Sometimes. Actually, or dreaming. Sometimes when I dream I've gotten there before. It's not exactly the same place, I mean I'm still trying to understand all this stuff, you know. It's not like I've got it figured out.

I: Right. Right.

R: I'm still piecing stuff together. So I'm not sure if it's the exact same place. It might be one step before the exact same place.

I: It feels something like it though.

R: Yeah, there's something in common for sure with all of them. Um hm. For sure. Definitely for sure.

I: And what was -- in, you said that you felt connected with B.

R: Oh yeah.

I: And it was euphoric and it was funny and it was eternal.

R: Yeah, it was very eternal.

I: And what, I mean what made you feel connected to her, I guess, in that moment, I mean ?

R: Well I don't know if it's so -- I don't know if I think it's so much as that you're connected with this human, I think it's that you're maybe that you've quickly connected with this human but somehow that connection connects you in with something much bigger.

I: Right.

R: And so that's what I'm thinking the connection is. There is that human connection that's sort of the diving board.

I: Right, right.

R: But that's not the real, that's not what I think the real, for me, connection or that feeling of euphoria or whatever.

I: It's the diving board you said.

R: It's the diving board. Yeah.

I: It's springs you into that

R: It springs you into the other place. It's like, I guess, the bridge to the

I: To whatever this is.

R: To the really big connection feeling-- of God is what I would call it.

I: And you knew you were into that because of the euphoria? How did you know you were there or at that wherever you were?

R: Well I guess at the time I don't know that I thought of it so much because I wasn't reflecting, I wasn't like trying to piece things together like -- (Honey what's wrong other than that you have a very stinky, gross bottom?)



I: Do you want to go change her?

R: I might should cause it should make her feel better.

(End of tape.)

## VITA

Bethany Leigh Campbell Nowell was born in Memphis, Tennessee on October 20, 1952. She grew up in Trenton, a small town in west Tennessee, and graduated from Peabody High School. Her father is a retired optometrist and her mother was a bank vice-president. She obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville in 1976. For several years she worked as a librarian and also as a bookstore manager in Topsail Beach, North Carolina and in Knoxville, Tennessee. In September of 1987, she entered the clinical psychology doctoral program at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. In 1994, she completed a predoctoral internship at the Medical College of Georgia and Veterans Affairs Medical Center Consortium in Augusta, Georgia. She is currently living in Knoxville and is employed at Cherokee Health Systems in Talbott, Tennessee. She will receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in psychology in August, 1996. Her plans are to move to Columbia, South Carolina and work with the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice.