Chapter 7

Significant Directions for Research

In the two previous chapters we looked at some implications for improving practice that arise from the data of the first four chapters. I spelled out seven major directions for potential action over the next few years in hopes that these will stimulate readers to think of additional possibilities for their own situations.

Certain research directions, too, could contribute a great deal. As our knowledge and understanding of intentional changes increase, our policies and practices may become even more beneficial in fostering successful changes.

After careful thought, I have chosen the four directions for research that I believe will be most useful during the next few years. Each of these significant directions is outlined in one section.

The Place of Intentional Changes Within All Changes

It would be useful and fascinating to study the place and relative importance of intentional changes within the person's total change over the years.

Let me use myself as an example for a moment. My total range of changes includes changes I have chosen and achieved intentionally, changes that other people managed intentionally to produce in me through their efforts and expectations, random chance external

events over which I had little or no influence, unintended changes in my body, psychological development and maturation at various ages and stages, and changes in my ongoing stream of subconscious events (including dreams, fantasies, and symbols). How much has each type of change contributed to the differences between the person who is writing this and the Allen Tough of 10 or 20 years ago? How do the various types of changes interact and intermingle?

This could be a highly beneficial direction for research over the next decade. Our interview question (#10) and the discussion in chapters 1 and 3 barely scratch the surface of this whole area. In *Psychological Abstracts* and ERIC, however, I have not managed to find any other comprehensive research in this area.

Instead of studying the question at the most comprehensive level, researchers could begin with one or more particular areas. For example, what proportion of the person's changes over the years is intentional in each of the following areas: self-insight, effective satisfying human relationships, knowledge and understanding of the world, mental and physical health, job, child-raising approach, understanding of civic and political issues, recreational activities, altruistic efforts to contribute to others, major goals in life?

It would also be interesting to study the extent to which people vary. Are there two distinct types of people—reactors and searchers—as McGinnis (1975) suggested? Alternatively, are people arranged along a continuum from "most of my changes are intentional" to "most are unintentional"? How much do people vary from one year or decade of their life to another?

What sorts of people are generally at the two ends of the continuum? In chapter 3, when we looked at people with no intentional changes at all, we saw that they were often middle class and at a reasonably high educational level, not poor or deprived. Is this true of the population as a whole in each country, or was our sample highly unusual?

An interview schedule for comparing intentional and unintentional changes has recently been developed by Joan Neehall (1981). The interviewee is given handout sheets that provide detailed descriptions of eight areas of change. For each area in turn, the interviewee uses a four-point scale to rate the total size and importance of all changes within that area over the past four years. The person also selects the three most important areas of change. After receiving a careful explanation of intentional and unintentional, the interviewee reports the intentional percentage of the total change within each area in turn, and rates the benefit (to self and then to others) of

the intentional and unintentional portions of each change area. The person is also asked to describe the content and process of the unintentional portion of each area. The interviewer then collects data on a wide range of personal variables in order to find out which ones vary between high changers and low changers, and between persons whose changes are largely unintentional and those who are largely intentional.

Basic Surveys of Intentional Changes

The interviews conducted for this book have taken us a long way toward an accurate and comprehensive picture of intentional changes. There is also a clear need, however, for additional surveys and larger samples over the next few years. These could confirm or modify the figures presented in this book. In addition, various nations, subcultures, regions, ages, and occupational groups could be compared more thoroughly.

The basic data from each person will be the area of change, the percentage that was achieved, the size and importance of the change, and who performed the three major tasks. For these large-scale surveys, the supplementary questions at the end of the Appendix will probably be omitted and additional questions concerning personal and demographic variables will be added. A single-paragraph description of each of the nine areas of change could be useful as a probe for aiding recall, and could also be used by the interviewee to categorize his or her particular change. Questions 4 and 6 should be clarified to elicit either gross benefits or (my preference) net benefits. Also, question 11 could be improved by adding a four-point scale for the interviewee to rate the size of the additional change and how strongly it was wanted.

In order to obtain accurate data and a deep understanding of intentional changes, it is essential to use intensive, probing, medium-paced (almost leisurely at times), in-depth interviews. A quick interview in which the interviewer's main preoccupation is to jot down some data and then move on to another interview will simply not provide an accurate picture of an elusive complex phenomenon.

Doctoral students and other researchers interested in one particular area might want to study intentional changes in that particular area. For example, they could adapt the basic survey questions in the Appendix to cover intentional changes in any one of the following areas:

1. self-insight, emotions, and relationships,
2. job and career,
3. religion and spiritual growth,
4. philosophy of life, broad perspective on the meaning and purpose of life, and clarifying basic goals in life,
5. personality and behavior changes similar to those sought by therapists,
6. child-raising, marriage enrichment, and relating to members of one's household,
7. freedom from stereotyping in attitudes and behavior concerning sex roles or age roles,
8. ESP, astral travel, healing powers,
9. physical health and fitness,
10. giving up alcohol, gambling, crime, or child abuse,
11. managing one's time and life,
12. the researcher's process,
13. efforts to help others and contribute to the world.

Whether studying the total range of intentional changes or just the changes in one area of life, some researchers may want to try various definitions of the phenomenon. The changes that are recorded, and some of the other data, may vary according to the focus selected. For instance, one could focus on any one of the following:

1. the person's largest, most significant intentional change during the past two years (the focus of this book),
2. the largest intentional change during the past one, three, five, ten, or twenty years,
3. the two or three largest intentional changes during the given period,
4. all major intentional changes over the past two to ten years, or over several decades of the person's life, or over the entire lifetime,
5. the current change efforts that the person considers most important or to which the person is devoting the most effort or time.

The Causes of Overcontrol

Another highly significant direction for further research is the causes of overcontrol in some helping relationships. During face-to-face interaction between a helper and another person, what factors and forces (both inner and outer) sometimes contribute to helper overcontrol and to the person's passive submission?

One section of the previous chapter was devoted to this question. It was highly speculative, however, rather than based on careful research. If research over the next few years illuminates this question, we may then develop even better strategies for encouraging both helper and client to operate more effectively.

The Needs for Additional Help

From what additional help would people especially benefit? Research that successfully and precisely answered this question would be highly useful. Only by grasping the greatest unmet needs can helpers and institutions dramatically increase their effectiveness in fostering intentional changes. Insightful research along this line could lead to the provision of much better information, advice, services, materials, and helpers for intentional change. Only by discovering the gaps and unfilled needs can one be effective at filling them.

One key part of this research thrust will be to ask people directly about the additional help and resources and competence that would have been highly beneficial to them (questions 9D, 9E, and 9F in the Appendix). More precise answers to these questions are obtained if they are asked after the person has discussed a particular intentional change in some detail, rather than early in the interview.

It is also useful to ask about difficulties (question 6A) and about the major tasks performed by the person (questions 9A, 9B, and 9C). It is important to understand the person's entire natural process of intentional change, especially the tasks and help that already occur, and what goes wrong in that process. What forces repress change and limit the person's horizons? What are the greatest obstacles and barriers in the external world? What are the inner forces that produce self-deprecation, low awareness of thoughtfulness and success at previous changes, and willingness to submit readily to external authority? What goes wrong during the help-seeking process (see framework in Tough, 1979, chap. 10)? Where does the person stumble or almost quit? What mistakes does the person make? All of this information will provide an excellent foundation for thinking about what additional help, services, and resources to provide.

Some researchers may choose the concept of phases as their way of understanding and describing the process of intentional change. For example, Adams, Hayes, and Hopson (1976, chaps. 1 and 14) discuss phases as "a general model of transitions" (p. 8) and as "a

cycle of reaction and feelings that is predictable" (p. 9). Research on phases may turn out to be fruitful, but my own preference is to use the three major tasks (choosing , planning, and implementing) as a basic framework.

All of the research suggested in this section could focus on the person's entire range and process of intentional change. Some researchers, however, will prefer a narrower focus.

Some might focus on one particular tool or resource, for example. How does the book by Browne (1973) or the O'Neills (1974) or Bolles (1980) or Tough (1980) fit into the person's process, and what difficulties and needs remain? How do libraries, medical doctors, courses, television, or some other particular resource fit into the process, and what else could such a resource contribute?

Other researchers might focus on one particular area of change. What are the difficulties and unmet needs in the human growth area, in spiritual growth, in understanding the world, in job change, in moving to another home, in becoming freer of sex-role stereotyping, in physical health, in child-raising and marriage enrichment, in basic education?

Still other researchers might focus on one particular aspect of the person's natural process of intentional change. They might intensively study one basic task or another, such as the detailed thought process in choosing the change or the difficulties in implementing it. They might study the sorts of changes that require no outside help, the sorts that require help from nonprofessionals or books, and the sorts that require various amounts of professional help.

A somewhat different line of research could focus on persons who are especially effective at choosing and managing their major changes. How do these highly successful changers go about the various tasks? How do they react to obstacles and doubts? In what ways does their process differ from the process followed by unsuccessful changers? What paths and methods and strategies do they choose? What are the secrets of their success? Principles and tips for all of us might emerge from such research.