Chapter 5
Presencing as Being in Care:
Extending Theory U through a Relational Framework

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ABSTRACT
Theory U invites us to co-create a new future through personal development, connecting with source, imaging, and designing with others. What is needed is guidance on the nature of being in relationship with others and our environment and participating in ways that foster transformative learning and co-creativity. Furthering the possibilities of collective wisdom and creativity will require greater attention to the challenges of working in the social field with many different world views and experiences of both privilege and need. A concept of Being in Care, presented as an embedded relational system, is offered to further understand the nature of relational being and to explore how encounters with “the other” are critical for transformative learning and change. This chapter incorporates theoretical lenses from hermeneutic philosophy, transformative learning, and systems science to further Scharmer’s invitation to co-create the field of the future.

INTRODUCTION
One of my colleagues recently questioned “where are the ethics in Theory U?”
What he noticed was missing was a clearly defined space in the theoretical model to intentionally engage difference. While many people consider ethics as doing the right thing, clearly the focus and intention of Theory U, Marvin T. Brown (2005) defines ethics as a process which invites and engages different perspectives toward an integrated wholeness or integrity. This is what I believe Scharmer is proposing. Yet Theory U does not provide much guidance on the nature of relationships that support engaging difference and how to participate in them to co-create a desired
future. Furthering the possibilities of collective wisdom and creativity will require greater attention to the challenges of working in the social field with many different world views and experiences of both privilege and need.

Transformative learning and change are needed to develop our collective capacity to rethink and redesign new structures and processes that support creative ways of living and working together that protect people and natural resources. Now is the time to challenge some of the assumptions upon which organizations and societies were constructed during the 20th century. One assumption is that we need a few good leaders who can define reality and provide direction for others. The reality facing leaders today is more complex than that experienced in the 20th century. IBM’s 2010 study of 1500 CEOs of organizations worldwide revealed that the greatest challenge facing leaders was working in an increasing volatile and uncertain world. The complexity that surrounds them is changing the nature of their organizations and their roles as leaders and most stated they felt ill equipped to meet the challenge. IBM’s 2012 CEO study indicated leaders are moving toward greater relational work as a way to address complexity. As complexity grows, the need for shared leadership, dialogue, and the work Scharmer (2007) describes as “learning from the future, as it emerges”, is critical to support the sustainable development of organizations, communities, and societies.

Another 20th century assumption that can be challenged is that leadership development is primarily personal “inner” work. I would like to propose that it is primarily relational work, which clearly requires introspection and personal development along with a shift in the Western assumption of the separate individual self. The view I present in this chapter is one that has emerged from my coming to understand myself as a relational being, always in relationship, and shaped through those relationships. Thus becoming more fully present, alive, and capable of working with complexity while shaping a desired future, is relational work. As such, it is both inner and outer work, which includes the ability to place oneself in a vulnerable place, opening up opportunities to be influenced, and then coming back to self in a centered way to reflect and learn from one’s engagement with others and in the world. When we fully understand and live into our relational self, we do not experience the separation in a way that focuses one’s attention in an inner condition. Rather, our attention becomes centered on our relationships with others, our environment, and our work, as a way to authentically live and express ourselves.

This transformative work calls us into relationships with “the other” that which is new, different, and foreign to our experiences and beliefs, creating tension that is supportive of challenging existing belief systems and patterns of action, or as Schamer discusses, stopping the automatic downloading process. As leaders develop their capacity for working in complex and ambiguous realities, facing problems that are foreign to them, their ability to lean into complexity, as an “other”, will support transformative learning and greater opportunities to shift from the old assumptions of leadership grounded in individual action to new ways of being and working through shared leadership. (Southern, Gaffney, and Moore, 2012).

Transformative learning and the work of Jack Mezirow (1990, 1991, 2000) and his many associates has influenced my view of how we create the conditions for transformative learning and change. Mezirow (1990) recognized the importance of perspective transformation and new ways of being in the world that open our minds and hearts to both the challenges before us and the possibilities those challenges create for learning and change. Transformative learning theory supports both a critical and appreciative stance, recognizing the importance of the encounter with the “other”, that which is different, to developing new horizons of understanding, perspectives, and ways of being. The theory of transformative learning, like hermeneutic philosophy, seeks to understand the