

Marion Hendricks

Experiencing Level

*An instance of developing a variable
from a first person process so it can
be reliably measured and taught*

Abstract: *The concept 'Experiencing (EXP) Level' points to the manner in which what a person says relates to felt experience. The manner is a first person process which is quantitatively measurable. Examples of low, middle and high Experiencing are given. In a high experiencing manner a person attends directly to a bodily sense of what is implicit and allows words (or images and or gestures) to emerge from that sense. The Experiencing Scale which measures the manner of process is a third person rating of a first person process, according to precise linguistic and somatic characteristics. A new rating method gives high reliability. I will briefly summarize several of the more than one hundred research studies which have used the EXP Scale or other measures of high EXP process. The high end of the EXP Scale describes what came to be called 'Focusing'.*

Because EXP level is a variable of the manner of process, it can be applied to almost any content area. Examples from tape-recorded psychotherapy sessions, creative writing, and theory-building will be analyzed in terms of experiencing level. Having defined the variable in observable terms makes it possible to formulate exact steps for teaching high Experiencing. Two practices — Focusing and Thinking at the Edge — have been developed, which can be taught in precise steps. This kind of third person variable can be found only from first person process. Its value for studying living will be shown.

Correspondence:
Marion Hendricks, Ph.D., The Focusing Institute

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The Concept of ‘Experiencing Level’

It is often thought that because a process is experiential it can only be measured by self-report, which is considered unreliable. Therefore (it is thought), ‘subjective’ experience cannot be studied in a scientific way. This is untrue. I will trace the development from first person experience to a reliable research measure, and to practices that can be taught.

The concept of ‘Experiencing Level’ points to the manner in which what a person says relates to felt experience. The manner of process can range from a pure narration of events with no reference to felt experiencing to a present exploration of meanings arising from felt experiencing. In a high Experiencing manner a person attends directly to a bodily felt sense of some situation and allows words (or images and or gestures) to emerge directly from that sense. Usually after some small steps of attending to the felt sense, it opens and *new meanings come into a thereby changed situation*. The body responds with a deep breath or tears or some expression of whole body relief.

Each manner of process has precise linguistic and somatic characteristics which can be observed. This specificity allows the ‘subjective’ first person process to be researched and taught precisely. Two practices — Focusing and Thinking at the Edge — have been developed. In each practice there are precise instructions for making touch with implicit felt experience which has no words as yet.

Development of the Experiencing Scale

The concept of Experiencing Level and the Experiencing Scale were developed at the University of Chicago by Gendlin and colleagues. Gendlin’s philosophical model of how words function in relation to experiencing (Gendlin, 1962) was applied in the field of psychotherapy. At that time much innovative research had just been completed at the University of Chicago Counseling Center. For the first time in history therapy sessions were being tape-recorded and looked at to understand what helped people. There was an abundance of data — audio recordings and transcripts rather than descriptions by the therapist or client self reports. Gendlin came to this data with the beginnings of his ‘explication model’ already developed. This model developed out of his first person experience. It did not just exist ‘out

there' waiting to be found. Someone else would not have looked for or 'seen' what he saw in the data. But, once defined, anyone can see it, with training.

At that time, most research on the efficacy of psychotherapy examined the content of the client's verbalizations – *what* was discussed, e.g., one's mother, the relationship with the therapist, childhood memories. Because Gendlin's model makes the process of explication basic, it is possible to look at the *manner* in which *any* content is being discussed.

An Experiencing Scale (EXP) was developed which reliably measures the manner of process without the use of self reports. While clients' verbalizations in a therapy session might be considered self report, the variable we are observing is not what they are reporting. They are not saying, 'Now I am using language to point to a felt sense.' 'I am having a culturally prescribed emotion.' 'I'm relating events with no personal meanings.' It is important to distinguish the first person process and the process of measuring it. Clients are reporting on their lives. If we were measuring the content of their lives then we would be measuring by their self report. The process we are measuring itself is always first person, but it can be measured by trained raters who have no other contact with the situation.

Basic terms of the explication model

- '*Bodily Felt sense of*' refers to a person's immediately sensed, but implicit, experiencing of a situation, an issue, a creative task. One feels 'something' but does not yet know what. It is important to distinguish between the felt sense and an emotion. Emotions are a narrowing of the body sentience of a whole situation. They prevent us from being aware of the whole situation. A felt sense is a 'turning' one's attention on that which is implicitly present, and making it a datum, 'that whole thing about X'. See Gendlin (1997) for the philosophical derivation of this distinction between emotion and felt sense.
- '*Felt shift*' refers to the bodily felt release that occurs when words come to say exactly what was implied. This usually occurs after a number of small steps.
- '*Carrying forward*' is the effect of the explication in each step. What will 'carry forward' is found empirically. It is not arbitrary (not just any words will do), nor is it determined (only *these* words will do). Many words might carry forward what is implicit, but even one set can be hard to find.

Linguistic and somatic markers of experiencing level

I will illustrate these terms with transcript material, taken from psychotherapy sessions.¹ The observable linguistic and somatic markers of high experiencing (Focusing) lead to training procedures for therapists. The detailed markers help therapists recognize when a client has immediately sensed, but implicit, experience right now in the session. *This is the juncture at which something new can come.* I will also show one kind of therapist response that points toward the implicit, the felt sense, and will show the difference such a response or the lack of it makes to the client's subsequent responses. While drawn from psychotherapy sessions, the examples and the analysis of them in observable terms can help any person, including the reader, locate or learn this first person process in their own experience.

LOW EXP LEVEL Example

One day he [the doctor] called me and said, 'I'm afraid she won't last long. It's spreading like wildfire.' They couldn't get all of it. It was too late. And so that's about the extent of it, you know. She went into a coma, she lasted for about three or four months. Altogether from the time she became ill, the entire time was about two years. After he performed the operation he said, 'I'm surprised she lasted that long.' We didn't know it had gone all the way back. There was no sign of it, nothing. But it was there all the time. Can you imagine that.

MIDDLE EXP LEVEL Example

A_____ and I ... spent about two hours talking over the luncheon about his problem. And I've never known him, until that time to be so low and despondent about his future in science. He said, 'You won't believe this Dad, until I tell you, that it has been over six months since I had a test-tube in my hand' ... and after listening *I was very much disturbed* by what he said because this was a very serious conversation, and it dealt with what I felt had to do with a decision he had to make regarding his work and his marriage, and they were both at stake ... I said, 'But A_____, don't you think if J_____ were made to realize how desperate the situation is that she would elect to allow you to do more of your science?' ... And there was silence for a moment or two and he shook his head, and said, 'She will never change.' Now when he said that I felt he had already made a decision ... to divorce rather than to continue ... *I felt absolutely consternated* by that because I knew they really loved each other, I knew they could have a harmonious relationship for many years to come if only she could understand.

[1] I have excerpted this description from an earlier article (Hendricks, 1986) with some changes.

HIGH EXP LEVEL Example

It's almost like ... it kind of feels like ... sitting here looking through a photo album. And, like each picture of me in there is one of my achievements. And, I think [inaud] because I wasn't achieving for me. I was always achieving for ... someone else so they'd think I was good enough. It's like it feels right to me to say ... that ... I don't know quite how to say it ... It's like the feeling is there, but I can't quite put words on it. It feels right somehow to say it's like I've chosen this man as my challenge ... knowing that I'd be defeated. That this person wouldn't respond to me in the same way. So that I could kind of buy right back into the photo album being flipped through. I didn't have what it took (T: Uhhum) to get what I wanted.

Reading these excerpts side by side one can see the differences in the manner of relating to felt experiencing. I will point out the linguistic and somatic markers of the EXP process for each level.

Low experiencing level

This man is telling a series of events: the course of his wife's illness, her death, what the doctor said. A characteristic of low EXP process is that it is *externalized*. We learn some details about the events but not about any inner process. There are few, if any, self-referential statements. In spite of the highly painful content, the client does not name his feelings about the events or the inner meanings of the events for him. One can guess that he feels angry at the doctors and bereaved, sad, and lonely about the loss of his wife. But he does not tell any of this. The closest he comes is his statement, 'Imagine that.' One can hear a suppressed shock, outrage, anguish in this comment. Again one can guess what he would be feeling if he could 'open up' this statement. 'How could something so awful happen with no warning, no signs?'; 'It's terrible to feel so helpless to save someone you love'; 'I'm furious that they didn't diagnose her properly.' But he is not exploring any of this kind of inner detail.

We cannot know what his wife's death actually means to him. One gets a sense of his discomfort with his feelings when he tells about the doctor informing him of the terminal nature of the illness. In the midst of telling this surely grief-laden material, he says, 'So that's about the extent of it, you know.' It's as though at the point where feeling might break through, he flattens or distances from the feelings, as though he were saying, 'There is nothing *more* here; I've told you the whole thing and that's it.' He's closing down, moving away from any larger, implicit, textured sense of that whole situation. Events are described as flat and self-evident. One has a sense that this man's experience

will remain blocked, silent, and pained for many years until time blurs its sharpness.

To summarize, Low EXP Level has the following characteristics:

- (1) Most comments are in the past tense.
- (2) One reports mostly external events.
- (3) Events are described as flat and self-evident.

Middle experiencing level

Again, an event is being reported — this man's conversation with his son. He describes the setting, their behavior, and their exchange: 'He said ... and then I said ...' However, there is a difference from segment one. This man refers to his feeling about the conversation and his son's situation: 'I was very much disturbed by what he said ...' 'I felt absolutely consternated by that ...' At this middle EXP level the narration of events is interspersed, parenthetically, with the client's impressions, feelings and emotions. We get some account of how he is affected by the events he describes.

However, references to personal meanings remain parenthetical to the event-story. Each of these self-referent statements has the structure, 'I felt X because ...' and what follows is more about the son than the father. 'I felt disturbed because they (son's marriage and career) were both at stake.' 'I felt consternated because they loved each other, they could have a harmonious relationship.' We don't hear what it is that is disturbed in him in response to his son's situation. What is it about the potential divorce that so disturbs him? The therapist does not and cannot know unless she can get him to differentiate inwardly his whole sense of that situation, the sense that he is calling 'disturbed.' What is it exactly that feels so disturbing? Again we can guess: It hurts him to see his child in pain. He's scared his son's career will be jeopardized because he needs his son to succeed so he can feel like he is someone through his son. If his son claims what he needs, and divorces, perhaps it raises issues about the father's own marriage and how he stayed at too great a price to his selfhood. These are, of course, pure speculations. We cannot know what's actually in the 'disturbedness' this father felt as he listened to his son's struggle. Quite possibly, the client himself couldn't tell us what his 'disturbed' feeling was even if we asked him, or at least not at first. He would probably give us some obvious answer: 'Any parent would feel upset about his child's marriage breaking up. We want the best for our children.' Or some such 'commonsense,' 'self-evident' conventional

answer. (And, of course, that would be true in a way.) A person at this middle EXP Level is not used to turning and attending to the body sense of a situation and letting it articulate itself.

As in the first segment, the past tense is used. Even when feeling is referred to, it is a present report about what was felt then. There is not now an ongoing sensing of the problematic situation.

Middle level EXP has the following characteristics:

- (1) One gives mainly a descriptive narrative of events.
- (2) Emotions are referred to, but briefly, without internal elaboration.

High experiencing level

Segment three illustrates a high EXP level process. There is almost no narration of events. It isn't even clear what the client is talking about in terms of time, place, event. There is only a brief, vague reference to 'a man' who 'won't respond' to her. This is the reverse of segment two. The events are parenthetical to the inner exploration, which is the main focus. If one had to summarize what each segment is about one could say: Segment one, 'wife's death'; Segment two, 'upset about son's divorce.' But what shall we say of the third? The first two are about someone else. The third is about the client herself, her own sensing of inner meanings. The entire process is self-referential.

In the other two segments one could make guesses about what the implied meanings might be, but here one can't even guess. She is working at a level where the process is unique, specific to the individual. What comes next can only arise out of her wholistic sensing of whatever situation/issue she is working on.

Much of the segment is in the momentary present tense, for example, '*if I could ...*' '*it sort of feels like ...*' '*The feeling is there.*' When the past tense is used it is to articulate a felt sense she experiences currently.

She isn't afraid to let something come — an image, a phrase for a whole sense of something. '*What comes ... what comes to me ...*' She is able to let new content emerge freshly from her immediate sensing. We see this again when she says, '*I don't know quite how to say it ... it's like the feeling is there but I can't quite put words on it ... it feels right somehow to say ...*' She has an immediately present tangible sense, but she does not yet 'know' cognitively what it is. She lets words (or images) come from it directly. When they come, she learns something about herself that she hasn't articulated previously. Her process is also characterized by pauses as she attends to her bodily felt

sense and waits for words to come from it (instead of trying to fill in or deduce what it must be). She has to grope for words that will ‘fit’ the sense just right. This bodily sensing is individually specific. Clichés and ordinary uses of language have little power. She creates metaphors or similes to get at the exact specific quality of the experience. Metaphors and similes are a use of language marked by ‘it’s like ...’ (‘Your eyes are like stars’). She is using language this way when she says, ‘it kind of feels like ... [pause as she gropes for words and lets them come] sitting here looking through a picture album.’

To summarize, a high EXP process has specific, observable linguistic and bodily characteristics:

- (1) An inner exploration of personally felt meanings is the main focus. Events are referred to only as a base from which to sense inwardly into one’s whole body sense of a situation.
- (2) Present tense is used.
- (3) There are pauses as one waits to let words or images come from the felt sense.
- (4) One uses language metaphorically: ‘The feeling is like ...’
- (5) One uses language to point to the implicit: ‘it,’ ‘that,’ ‘something,’— what is sensed but not yet known.

Therapist responses can increase or decrease client’s experiencing level

While I am discussing this in terms of psychotherapy the same points apply to any interaction. Open pronouns and content free words are the most important words in Focusing-oriented psychotherapy e.g ‘it’, ‘that’ ‘this’ ‘something’ ‘in some way’. They allow the therapist and client to stay in direct connection to that which is sensed but which does not yet have words. They help us not to prematurely name and thereby close what is emerging. Unfortunately it is often the case that a therapist does not know the high EXP process. Below is an example in which the client is at a high EXP level and the therapist is not familiar with pointing to or with speaking from the implicit.

Client: Yuh ... it’s really gone... And yet, like I feel ... there’s ... there’s something underneath it all but I don’t know what ... and if I kind of knew what it was ... I might feel differently, I don’t know. But it’s vague right now.

Therapist: Okay, .if things could be a little more definite. If you were really able to identify the cause you really think that you'd be able to cope with it then. But right now you can't seem to put your finger on what the real problem is.

Client: Yuh ... and ... that ... like when you say that ... that makes me mad because I feel ... you know like I'm ... intelligent. I can, figure things out. And yet ... right now I don't know what the hell's going on with me.

In the first statement, the client is in a high EXP level process. She literally describes having a felt sense, 'Something (there) . . . but I don't know what.' She is concretely sensing the presence of some whole thing, but it is implicit. She does not yet know what is in this sense. Such an implicit sense is often felt as 'vague' initially. It doesn't yet have a sharp, definite, explicit form. The possibility of something new, some change, arises when working in direct contact with what is not yet known. The client can sense that if this felt 'something' would become explicit, it might shift her whole context or bring some release. Actually, she is telling the therapist exactly what needs to happen next — that she and he would stay next to the 'something' underneath so it could explicate. Notice the high EXP characteristics: pauses, not being able to find words immediately, the use of 'something' to point to what is there without prematurely labeling or imposing definition on it.

The therapist's response is not inaccurate. We can see what he responds to, with each of his phrases. His 'identify the cause' refers to client's 'if I kind of knew what it was'. His 'be able to cope' refers to 'then I might feel differently' and 'more definite' refers to 'vague'. However, every major word or phrase the therapist has chosen ('definite', 'identify causes', 'cope', 'the real problem') is closed, explicit, 'definite'. His message seems to be, 'Stop being so tentative and vague ... let's uncover and label the cause and solve the problem.' The therapist does not recognize the felt sense, He moves away from the implicit in his response and the client's EXP level is decreased.

The therapist is often defined by the client as having power and expertise. When there is trouble in the interaction, as there is here, clients may define it as something wrong with them. Most clients would feel vaguely put down without knowing why, give up the attempt to articulate the felt sense of the issue, and shift to a more cognitive, problem-solving, speculative manner of process, or feel badly about their ineptitude. This client is somewhat able to hold onto her experiential response, after her initial verbal agreement with the therapist. But he doesn't recognize the problem as a therapist error. She defends

herself against the implied message that she is cognitively inadequate. 'I'm intelligent', 'I can figure things out'. Notice she has shifted to the therapist's cognitive framework, 'figure out', and away from her original felt sense, 'I feel ... I might feel differently.'

How would the therapist respond in this excerpt if he had recognized the client's high EXP process? He might have said, 'You can feel something right there ...' Or, 'You can feel it right there underneath ...' Therapists can use open pronouns that function as pointers *toward the implicit* without labeling or defining it. The therapist would acknowledge and reflect that the client has a direct referent, a 'something' concretely felt. He might say that neither the client nor he as yet knows what it is. In this way they both turn their attention toward it, to let words come from it.

Here is an exchange in which both therapist and client are in a high Experiencing process. The client has been discussing two issues.

ML: (pause). I don't know how they're intertwined right now, but it ... they're ... they feel ... what I mean is I don't know if they're dependent on one another, but, the way my hands are going right now, *somehow* they're, they're connected. And I, ... *tears come up and I feel a softening in my throat.*

J: Yeah. There's a quality change, and tears come, and it softens somehow.

ML: Yeah, (in a quavering voice) ... and (there is a) *wanting* that it could be this connection I keep. It could be this connection, and, and it feels broken, or withdrawn from, *or something.*

Notice the characteristic markers of High Experiencing in the first client statement. She is pausing, groping for words, letting her hand gestures explicate the felt sense of her situation. In her use of 'somehow' she is pointing to a sensed relation between two feelings, but she is holding it open what exactly that relation is. She is not prematurely naming her felt sense, thereby closing it. And so 'it' opens further and brings the whole body marker of tears, which often come when the felt sense begins to open into explicit symbolization. She makes a distinction between the thought that her two feelings may be dependent on each other ('I don't know if they are') and her gesturing which resonates in her body and brings the tears. Her body responds to the freshly emergent gesturing and not to the thought — the words 'dependent on each other' don't carry forward her felt sense right now. The therapist's response is gentle and exact. By repeating her words, he welcomes not only the content that comes, but also her manner of process. This non-intrusive response lets her continue in a High EXP

manner and she finds that she cares more about this connection than she knew. She wants it to be the one she can keep. Her use of ‘or something’ is again this odd use of language which indicates that ‘broken’ and ‘withdrawn from’ don’t quite fit her felt sense, or at least that there is more there than is explicated by these words.

The Experiencing Scale measures this first person process

Having shown experiencing level using verbatim tape recorded segments, I will discuss the Experiencing Scale (EXP) which was developed to measure the manners of process illustrated above. It has seven stages. The scale was tested until a successful method for attaining reliability was found. Samples of each experiencing level were excerpted from session tape recordings. They were rated by experts and then used for rater training. A rater is trained individually in a room alone until the ratings are reliable with the expert ratings of the standard segments. Given that training is to a standard, there is no necessity for raters to meet each other. This precludes a situation in which raters talk together and their ratings then correlate with each other, but not to the standard. This rater training procedure results in high inter-rater reliability, typically in the 80s. The rater training package² consists of tape recorded practice segments and transcripts, the EXP Scale, the history of the concept and a rater instruction manual which includes expert ratings with justifications for each practice rating. The rating procedure can be taught in eight training sessions. The scale can also be used to rate written material. .

The Experiencing Level variable has been widely used in research

The EXP Scale and several related measures have been used in over 100 studies. Researchers Lambert & Hill (1994, p. 94) state, ‘Perhaps the most widely used and best-researched observer-rated measure(s) of client involvement in the therapy process (is) the Experiencing Scale ...’ The EXP Scale is available in Dutch, German, Japanese, and Spanish. A new study from Japan (Miyaki 2008) validated a five-step EXP Scale against the original seven-step scale.

Many studies (Hendricks, 2002) have found a positive significant correlation between measures of EXP level or Focusing and various psychotherapy outcome measures. For example, Goldman (2005) found that EXP levels, at Stage 4 and even more so at Stage 6 in the

[2] The training package is available from Dr. Marjorie H. Klein, Department of Psychiatry, Wisconsin Psychiatric Institute and Clinics, 6001 Research Park Boulevard, Madison, Wisconsin 53719-1179.

last half of therapy, were strong predictors for reduction in depressive symptoms, and Stage 6 predicted an increase in self-esteem.

In addition to psychotherapy outcome studies, EXP level has been shown to have a positive, significant correlation with measures of creativity, ego strength and psychological differentiation. Correlations with physiological, attentional, and cognitive variables have been found. I will give a brief overview summary of some of this work.

Focusing is based in the body. '*Bodily felt sense*' is one of the main terms in this model. The correlations between Focusing and physiological measures is not surprising. Focusers or high EXP subjects are better able to discriminate physiological states (Kolilis, 1988). The process of focusing is accompanied by body relaxation indicators (Gendlin & Berlin, 1961; Bernick *et al.*, 1969). The felt shift correlates with an increase in EEG alpha frequencies (Don, 1977). Lutgendorf *et al.* (1994) studied whether or not verbal disclosure of a traumatic experience would influence immune responsiveness. The extent of experiential involvement in the disclosure of the traumatic event was measured using the Experiencing Scale and focusing. Questions were used to increase experiential involvement in the disclosures. Her findings showed that disclosure alone did not affect the EBV-VCA antibody titres in a statistically significant way. However, greater experiential involvement, as measured by the Experiencing Scale, summed up across three disclosure sessions, was associated with increased immune function over the course of the experiment. This suggests that it is the *manner* in which one engages in the expression of the trauma that makes the difference in immune functioning rather than just talking or writing. Physical illness or injury is a trauma. Utilizing focusing to increase experiential involvement may be a key variable in the area of psychoneuroimmunology.

A series of five studies (Zimring, 1974; 1990) show that performance on complex mental tasks requiring attention to internally generated stimuli is increased by doing the first step of Focusing, Clearing A Space before the task. In line with the idea that focusing enhances cognitive process, focusers were found to do better on measures of creativity, intuition, flexible use of attention, and conceptual complexity. Focusers can maintain concentration and withstand distractions while attending to an internal body sense.

Given the range and number of studies which have used the EXP Scale or other measures of Focusing, it is clear that a useful research variable has been developed from first person process. Looked at all together the studies provide validity for the variable.

A startling discovery

The initial hypothesis tested, in using the EXP Scale, was that clients would increase in EXP level in the course of psychotherapy. However, much to the surprise and chagrin of the experimenters, the studies showed that clients who came to therapy already high in experiencing manner remained high and had a successful outcome, but that clients who began therapy in a low EXP manner did not significantly increase in EXP level during therapy and tended not to succeed. *A failure prognosis could be predicted as early as the second therapy session!* This posed an ethical dilemma. The finding showed a need for Focusing training and raised the question whether a high experiencing manner could be taught, thus reversing the failure prognosis.

A high experiencing manner (focusing) can be taught

This question has since been addressed in thirty nine studies which found that Focusing ability (EXP level)can be increased by training and by specific therapist interventions (Hendricks, 2002). For example, Durak et al (1997) measured client EXP in two tape recorded therapy sessions before and in two sessions after focusing training. Eight therapists sent one or more clients who were then trained in Focusing by one of three trainers. The whole client group was higher on EXP after training. The studies indicate that some people who come into therapy without the ability to focus can be trained to do so and may become able to succeed in therapy.

In some of the studies the increase in EXP level or Focusing ability was not maintained after training. Sustaining a high EXP manner usually requires training and practice over months or years, depending on what level of proficiency is desired. In other studies, clients identified a number of factors that helped them focus: having a listener who refers to the Focuser's experiencing and helps the Focuser find a right distance from the problem, creating a safe space (Tamura, 1987; 1990), and 'trusting one's experiencing' and 'clearing a space' (Morikaya, 1997)

Client EXP level can be affected, by the Therapist EXP level.

Earlier in this article I gave examples of how the EXP level of therapist responses can support or can flatten the client's EXP level. This has been confirmed in the research. In a series of studies with fine grained analyses Sachse (1990) found that therapist 'processing proposals' can deepen or flatten subsequent client responses. He developed a Client Processing Scale and a Therapist Processing Scale,

based on Gendlin's Experiencing theory. The higher stages on these scales represent Focusing. Sachse established reliabilities between .79 and .94. An initial study analyzing 1520 triplets (C-T-C statement units) from 152 clients at mid therapy found that clients deepened their process 70% of the time when the therapist made a deepening proposal and *flattened their process 73% of the time when the therapist made a flattening proposal*. These findings are corroborated by a number of similar studies.

The EXP/Focusing variable is just beginning to unfold its power. Related instruments have been developed for assessing the manner of experiencing in other contexts. For example a Clearing A Space Check List was developed (Grindler, 1991) to measure the ability to do the first step in Focusing. The new instrument correlates with Experiencing Level at .70. It has been used in several studies with people who have cancer (Grindler, 1991, and Klagsbrun *et al.*, 2005). In the Grindler study experimenters used a standard training protocol to teach the process of Clearing a Space during six 90-minute weekly sessions. The purpose of the training was to experientially introduce each subject to the steps of this process and then to guide them through it each week. Results showed a significant decrease in depression and a significant improvement in body image for the treatment group when compared to the wait group.

In another example the EXP scale was adapted for use in rating EXP level in dreams (Hendricks, 1978). The concept of Dream Experiencing refers to the manner in which the events of dreams are explicated during the dream by the characters.³ Dream EXP manner was found to be highly stable for individuals and to correlate positively with Witkin's Body Sophistication Scale (1962), a measure of waking psychological differentiation.

Many studies could benefit from including the EXP variable.

Training in Focusing for Anyone

Focusing instructions in six steps were developed to make the beginning of coming in contact with one's experiencing accessible to anyone, not just for clients and therapists. The book *Focusing* (Gendlin, 1981) has chapters explaining each step and has many examples. There are specific instructions for what to do in the case of typical

[3] Although EXP level is defined in a content-free way, it can be thought mistakenly that because an event is 'inner' that it would thereby be high in experiencing level. It is possible to confuse the high experiencing manner with 'internal' events, such as fantasy, dream or images. Events from both internal and external sources, can be experienced as a felt sense or as bare events.

difficulties. Since then, there has been much elaboration of different ways to teach Focusing. Any particular formulation for teaching is never the only 'right' one. The process of Focusing is always 'more' than any set of formulations. Once people know the Focusing process for themselves, they can train someone else, because they can see where another person gets stuck, and then they can create steps specific to that person. Ann Weiser Cornell, a linguist by background, has written *The Power of Focusing* (1996). This book and her student and teacher manuals (Cornell and McGavin, 2002) help many people learn Focusing. Robert Lee (2007) has developed twelve ways to find a felt sense. Many people have designed exercises to help with each aspect of the Focusing process. Instructions have been adapted for particular situations. For example, in Afghanistan, among many other innovations, Focusing has been taught with reference to the Rumi poem 'A Guest House'.

The process nature of Focusing allows people to not divulge content, but only indicate their process, e.g. 'Now I have a feeling in my stomach about the problem. Now I'm checking in my body whether the words that came are exactly right.' This has been important because disclosing problems is often not possible in many circumstances.

Focusing Proficiency

Focusing is a skill that requires development over time, and differs according to the practitioner. With practice and training, one can expect to gain fluency, and become able to apply Focusing and its principles to an ever-broadening array of contexts. Many exactly differentiated nuances of the process have been articulated in three levels of proficiency. Below are proficiencies for levels 1 and 3 (see www.focusing.org for level 2).

Level 1 Focusing Proficiencies

- Can sense the body, be with it, from inside.
- Can get a 'felt sense,' a physical sensation that contains meaning and pertains to a particular situation, for example an issue in one's work, a creative project or a relationship.
- Can recognize how a felt sense differs from emotions.
- Can recognize when words or images have come directly from the felt sense.

- Is able to notice what would feel right to say from the felt sense of a particular situation.
- Knows when a decision regarding the situation ‘sits right’ and when it does not.
- Can name or describe the crux of a situation in a way that ‘fits’ the felt sense.
- Is able to recognize a distinct bodily knowing even when she/he has no words yet to describe it.

Stage 3 Focusing Proficiencies

- Is able to attend to a felt sense and allow many aspects of it to emerge.
- Often finds whole new fields or ‘subtexts’ emerging from a felt sense.
- Can let the subtexts inform a resulting decision on an issue.
- Can choose to wait for subtext changes before taking action on a particular situation.
- Recognizes new possibilities within a situation, which were not apparent from the original ‘given facts’. New facts can be formulated.
- Can discover new questions arising from the felt sense of a situation, leading to a new gathering of information.
- Is able to make better decisions based on greater bodily knowledge.
- Finds an expanded bodily-sensed realm in which one can move between different ‘places’, clusters, and attitudes.
- Can choose to live from the intricacy which is now always accessible.
- Experiences a sense of reliable safety inside.

There are over 800 Certified Focusing teachers and Focusing-Oriented therapists in thirty-five countries. Most training towards certification takes two years and includes a weekly Focusing partnership for the whole two years. In addition there are numerous written, audio, and video materials.

Teaching Focusing in areas other than psychotherapy

Because Focusing (high EXP manner) is a specific carrying forward relation between words (images, gestures) and a felt sense, it can be

introduced in almost any content area of human living. Focusing is used in many fields including medicine, education, business, furniture making, architecture and theory construction. I will briefly mention several applications and will give an example of each. The examples are instances of teaching Focusing. The ways of teaching are all different, but the reader can recognize the basic process of allowing words or images or gestures to arise freshly from a bodily felt sense.

Young children can Focus

There has been much work especially in The Netherlands and in Japan, on teaching children how to Focus. Sometimes a parent may teach the child. In classrooms the children may be taught focusing along with the teacher. I excerpt an example from Marta Stapert's book, *Focusing with Children* (2008) in which you can see the Focusing process with a six-year-old, being guided by her mother. Sophie illustrates a High EXP manner of process: She is able to turn her attention inside; locate a felt sense of her situation in her stomach; allow gestures and a metaphor to come. She draws a picture which emerges directly from her felt sense. With a subsequent felt shift and a smile, she says 'it is gone.' I will put the Focusing instructions in bold and my commentary in bold italics.

Story:

Sophie is thrilled to receive a bicycle for her sixth birthday and wants to bike to the park immediately. Her mother rides behind her. Sophie is having a great time. As she cycles she gets braver and starts to go faster. Her mother cautions: 'Watch out for the bend,' but it is already too late. Sophie can't slow herself down. She slips, falls, and scrapes her knee. Nearby, two girls watch without saying a word. Once at home, Sophie bursts into tears. Her mother does everything she can to comfort her. But Sophie keeps crying.

(Notice that mother has made her own assumption that Sophie is crying because her knee hurts We will see how different what comes is as Sophie focuses.)

Mother: Come here Sophie. Let me give your knee a big kiss. Shall we have some lemonade? . . . Maybe that bicycle is a little too big for you after all. Let me dry your tears. You were going fast . . . Did you hear me call out to you? You shouldn't cycle quite so fast anymore. Let's get a band-aid, shall we? We'll try again tomorrow and then you can take it a little bit slower.

But Sophie continues to sob. Then, her mother remembers what she learned in a course on focusing with children. She changes her

approach and helps Sophie discover from within what the essence of the problem really is.

Mother: **Shall we listen inside together to hear what happened ?**

Sophie: Yesss ...

Mother You took a really bad fall with your new bicycle, didn't you? You were just doing so well ... you dared to go fast ... and now you have a scraped knee. And it hurts.

Sophie: *(Continues to cry and sobs)* Yes ... yes ... yes ...

Mother: You also have to sob really badly. **Can you feel inside where that bad thing is?**

Sophie: *(Points to her stomach.)*

Mother: **Can you sit with it in a friendly way and ask what it feels like there?**

Sophie: It is in my stomach here ... really bad ... *(She grows quiet and attentive)* **(This is a felt sense)**

Mother: It is in your stomach ... **How is it there in your stomach?**

Sophie: It's all going around ... *(She moves her hands around)* around and around ... *(She is letting words and gestures come from the felt sense.)*

Mother: It just keeps going around inside ...

Sophie: Just like grabbing hands ... *(She makes a metaphor)*

Mother: Just like grabbing hands ... **If you sit still with that, do those grabbing hands and the feeling that goes with them have a story to tell you?**

Sophie: *(Sobbing loudly again now)* Yes, those big girls should not have stood there looking like that ... I'm sure they think I'm a stupid little kid ...

Mother: You hated that they were standing there looking ... they are bigger. And then you are afraid that they think you're small and stupid ... **Does that feeling have a color inside? Maybe you can close your eyes for a minute and wait for what comes ...**

Sophie: Yes ... red is coming ... and also something black ...

Mother: **Would you draw and color it? Your hand will know how it wants to put everything on the paper ...** It doesn't have to be beautiful ... Inside the feeling will know what it means ...

Hesitantly, Sophie starts with dark colors. Then the lines get stronger. The sobbing stops. She scratches fiercely, adding more lines and another color. She sighs deeply. Then she adds yellow and orange circles. She looks up at her mother and smiles.

Sophie: It's gone (*She has a felt shift with the typical body markers of a deep sigh and a smile.*)

Stapert's book includes chapters on Focusing with different age groups in schools, at home with parents, and in individual counseling. What does it tell us about consciousness, that Focusing can be done by a six-year-old? Children can consciously turn toward their body sense of a situation and make it a datum, a felt sense. They can allow words, images, gestures to come from it. What emerges carries forward what was sensed, and a shift is felt in the body as relief. The capacity to 'turn' on their sensed but not yet articulated experience is already present at six years. Young children can often access implicit functioning more easily than older children and adults, who need longer training. This finding further dispels the idea that children are in all ways less developed than adults.

Teaching Focusing to college students in creative writing classes

Sondra Perl is a professor of English at Herbert Lehmann College and founder of the New York City Writing Project. Her book *Felt Sense: Writing with the Body* (2004) includes a CD of her composing guidelines. I have excerpted two of her instructions to show how she teaches students to write from a felt sense. This is another example of specifying exact steps for teaching focusing in different contexts.

Perl invites the students first to write down what they *already know and have thought*, i.e. what is explicit. In the theory of experiencing, change, novelty, and creativity are possible when one begins from a felt sense – not from what is already explicit. She gives the students plenty of time to clear out the 'already thought' and become ready to attend to the implicit, and to let language come from it directly. The language she uses in this first instruction — 'associations' and 'parts' probably is deliberately not the language of Focusing.

Now — taking a deep breath and settling comfortably into your chair — ask yourself, 'What are all the associations and parts I know about this topic? What can I say about it now?' Spend as long as you need writing down these responses. Perhaps it will be a sustained piece of freewriting or stream of consciousness, or perhaps separate bits, a long list, or notes to yourself.

Now she can have them take 'all of that' which they already know and put it aside. This brings them to an edge and helps the students find a felt sense of 'the whole topic' and then to pose Focusing questions to themselves.

Now having written for a while, interrupt yourself, set aside all the writing you've done, and take a fresh look at this topic or issue. Grab hold of the whole topic — not the bits and pieces — and ask yourself, 'What makes this topic interesting to me? What's important about this that I haven't said yet? What's the heart of this issue?' Wait quietly for a word, image, or phrase to arise from your 'felt sense' of the topic. Write whatever comes.

Take this word or image and use it. Ask yourself, 'What's this all about?' Describe the feeling, image, or word. As you write, let the 'felt sense' deepen. Where do you feel that 'felt sense'? In your head, stomach, forearms? Where in your body does it seem centered? Continue to ask yourself, 'Is this right? Am I getting closer? Am I saying it?' See if you can feel when you're on the right track. See if you can feel the shift or click inside when you get close, 'Oh yes, this says it.'

One of Perl's graduate students articulated the difference these guidelines made for her:

... ever since I've come to understand felt sense, I have a feeling of connectedness to my dissertation that I had lost ... it has to do with whose words I privilege in my own text. I had gotten to a point in my academic work in which I just tried to amass as much of other people's theories as possible because I didn't feel as if I myself had anything important to say about 'my author'. This even though I am one of about five people who really knows this author's work! I had been so indoctrinated with the idea that my work needed to reflect everyone else's that I no longer had a voice ... Writing the diss is still hard for me, but for the first time in years I am writing from a sense of centrality, my own. Everyone else's theory and criticism are fine, and they actually support a lot of what I want to say, but now find myself locating my message in my own sense — my felt sense — of what my author said, meant, implied, left out, etc. My experience of felt sense is more identifiable in personal and creative writing, yes, but I am using that experience to free my academic writing and make it what I hope is more creative and truer.

Thinking at the Edge (TAE)

After Focusing there is a second practice, coming from the model of explicating a felt sense. The graduate student quoted above is addressing what the practice of TAE places centrally — how to generate terms and make theory, starting from one's felt sense of knowing something but not being able to say it yet. The TAE protocol of instructions has fourteen steps (Gendlin & Hendricks, 2004). It makes three assumptions:

1. A person who is experienced in a field and knows Focusing may have a felt sense of some knowledge that cannot now be said in the usual phrases.

2. Letting linguistically unusual sentences come from the felt sense frees one from being trapped in the usual assumptions. This allows one to say something new.
3. Within such freshly generated sentences one can find and separate new terms which are internally related in a new pattern. This can be the starting point for a new kind of theory which is both logical and experiential.

TAE is a method for original thinking, ‘original’ meaning that thinking starts from implicit knowing and systematically uses the implicit in formulating each step. The terms then have internal or inherent interlocking relations, as well as the power of the external connections of logic. The example below is a tiny glimpse from the middle of the TAE process (Boukydis 2004). It includes commentary by Kye Nelson, a Focusing trainer and TAE teacher. One can notice the odd use of language that characterizes a High Experiencing manner. I have bolded the words that point to the implicit knowing. In this exchange Gendlin is a TAE partner, listening, saying back, and writing down the exact new phrases and sentences as they come.

It is important that the TAE process be in an area where one has long experience and therefore a rich implicit ‘knowing’. Boukydis, a psychologist, has spent thousands of hours with babies and mothers.

Zack Boukydis: My felt sense is about the relationship between mothers and babies ... there’s a certain way that inside of me for a long time I’ve kept saying ... there’s something missing in all of these elegant theories.

Gene Gendlin: In the territory between mothers and babies, and there’s something there ... that is missing, in the theory

Boukydis: It feels like the territory has got a lot of skid marks across a very delicate sentient place. There are a lot of formulations that don’t feel right, inside.

Gendlin: There’s something painfully wrong about those.

Boukydis: And then the critic says ‘well, you think you can do better ...’

Gendlin: Oh, well, the critic ... [both laugh]

Boukydis: One of my sentences is ... ‘When they are separate, mother and baby can still be... participating in the same body process.’

Gendlin: When they are **separate**, they can still participate ... mother and baby can still participate in the **same body process**.

.....

Boukydis: Then there's that ... turnaround question ... "What are human beings, such that they can be physically separate... and yet can still be working in the **same** body process?" ...

Gendlin: They are the **same body-living** even if they are not physically in the same place, in contact.

Boukydis: Right. The first facet is the experience of parents who have prematurely born babies in special care in an isolette. The mothers tell me they have a body feeling of being separate from their baby, and yet, also they feel the life and death struggle of their baby.

Gendlin: They are ... physically ... in the **same body process** even though they are not in contact.

Boukydis: Right. It sounds so strange when I hear it, but ... it also sounds true.

Gendlin: It is what she experiences.

.....

Boukydis: Yeah ... And ... what's radical for me ... as you said back the part about mother and the baby in the isolette ... [Pause] ... There is this tremendous yearning that the mother has to go and be with her baby, and to hold her baby or at least to touch her baby. But there's another way that **the baby is also living the life process for the mother** ... like, a lot of paradigms have the baby as dependent ... in some essential way ... the baby has ... as much effect.

Gendlin: The baby has as much effective power in carrying ... this single process forward. It's not just one way ...

Boukydis: [pause] ... It still wants to say the **same** body process ... I'm not even happy with the words, and yet that's the best I have, but ... It still wants to say the **same body process**.

Gendlin: The **same body process**.

Boukydis: Right. And um.

.....

Gendlin: The current theories say that an infant isn't anything at all ... and gradually fills in. And you are saying that these are really two beings of the same order, and you are correcting this mistake.

Boukydis: And there's a lot, biologically, emotionally, historically, spiritually. They're biologically wired ... I'll stay on that level ... they're biologically made ... to be this way, or something.

Gendlin: Well, in TAE we would **turn that around** and say, the fact that they are this way tells us something new about biology and wiring.

Turning it around' is a basic move in TAE. This is the 'reversal.'
Rather than saying something new only about mother and child

and leaving the big words 'biologically wired' unchanged, the reversal lets Boukydis' point reformulate the entire field. If this turning around is not carried out, the new point will soon become impossible to articulate, because the old assumptions will destroy it. KN

We defend what we have to say here ... good ... but the minute we get to some other words, we are

Boukydis: ... [laughs]. And I want to protect it from the intellectual world that I live in, that says, 'Oh, I know what you're saying, it's like Sullivan said ... it's like Freud said ... it's like ...' And then I have to go away and ... two days later it starts to come alive again, and then I can try to begin to work with it ... I need to protect it.

.....

Afterword: At the end of the transcript above, we were asking: 'What is a biology that could account for two human beings, though separate, who are living the same body process?' At the end of this session, I had little space for that question. It is now giving me a simple, spine-full stature in the world of ideas ... Now I have a way past where I have laid waste to my own thinking.

The importance of variables drawn from first person process

The implicit intricacy of experience, events, situations tends to be excluded from science, social structure, and human relations. TAE lets us speak and think about the world and ourselves in language and concepts that have our experiential intricacy built in, rather than with concepts which make us into only externally viewed objects. Concepts generated from a 'felt sense' have certain characteristics. Because they grow out of bodily sensing of implicit knowing, they retain their living organization, rather than violating it, as externally imposed concepts often do. In TAE new conceptual structures have the external relations of logic without losing their experienced internal connections. Such 'reflexive' concepts are essential. The experiential nature of what we want to think about needs to be built into the tools with which to think about it. Something like TAE is needed to create forms of language, theory and practices that take account of human experience.

When we help someone develop the capacity to pause and form a felt sense we increase the persons ability to think for him/herself, and not to be emotionally manipulated by ideologies and rhetoric.

The cross-cultural nature of Focusing

Focusing is practiced in cultures as diverse as those of Afghanistan, Japan and Chile. As the practice of Focusing deepens, the differences become clear between an emotional, culturally determined response and one which is from the wider sensing from which a carrying forward next step may come. We no longer just see ‘a doctor’, a ‘bus driver’, a ‘fat’ person, an Arab, a Jew. Rather than the role, or the general category, we see this totally unique person who is a vast intricacy never exhaustively described by any formulation or role. This shift rests on this new kind of process concept in which the carrying forward of the implicit creates emergent meaning. This kind of concept supports new ways of relating to the natural world and to other living creatures, including humans. When seeing oneself or another at this Focusing level, we become reluctant to act just from the cultural level in a way which would violate the particularness of *this* person.

Overcoming the rejection of first person process in studying consciousness

A ‘felt sense’ implies words (images, gestures) which will ‘carry it forward’ and thereby change the organism’s implying into a next implying.⁴ This model answers the question of the relation between subjective experience and the world. The explication model defines the body as *originally* a body–environment process, e.g. there are no lungs without air. Breathing IS the air-going-into-expanding-lungs. Usually, the body is thought of as what is physically within the skin. This generates the problem of the split between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ and how to get the body and the environment together, and questions about the veracity of ‘subjective experience’ In this new kind of concept the body is *always already* an ongoing body-environment process. In humans a felt sense is how we are bodily living our situations. The world and the person are always already together. The many other ways to study living take place within this wider understanding.

The new kind of concept addresses the dilemma of wanting to study consciousness but ruling out the role of ‘subjective’ experience because of its unreliability. I have shown that verbalizations from felt

[4] This new kind of concept allowed Gendlin to develop a process theory of psychotherapy (Gendlin, 1964, 1996). In his philosophical book *A Process Model* (1997) he uses the carrying forward model to derive how human capacities emerge in an internal continuity from animals and plants. Current models have to assume that consciousness is somehow added on top, in the brain, but without the rest of the body. Using this new kind of concept Gendlin is able to *derive* motion, behavior, gesturing, perception, motivation, language and consciousness and to make many new distinctions.

experiencing can be reliably distinguished from other kinds, and that the Focusing process can help people access their experiencing through precise steps which can be learned. It has a wide range of sought after outcomes and applications. First person processes can become powerful and relevant variables which can add to our knowledge and which can generate teachable practices which help people.

To consider Focusing as an introverted internal process which is 'just subjective' is to deny that *our bodies are linguistic, situational, and interactive to begin with*. The living body is not just what is enclosed within the skin envelope. Our felt sense is OF our lived situations. It is our bodily sense of how all of 'this' situation is for us now. When our felt sense opens up, we say 'Oh, that is what this situation is for me.' It often implies steps of action. High experiencing shows something in so many different areas that we care about and across cultures because the Focusing steps allow one to find the door through which new, exactly relevant meanings emerge, regardless of content area. It is a basic human variable.

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