

A MEMORIAL TRIBUTE

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Excerpts from the works of

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## Quotations from Mary Hendricks-Gendin, PhD

1978 - Experiencing level in dreams: An individual difference variable. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 15(3), 292-298. (co-authored with R. D. Cartwright)

*referring to workshop subjects (a subset of the total subject pool):*

This vivid portrayal of transference and countertransference material in the dreams surrounding the workshop raises the issue of the relationship between rapport and experiencing level. If the subject is on guard in a potentially threatening situation he may not have attention free to be self-experiencing in a high manner.”

The findings of this study support that Experiencing Level varies in dreams and that it has the properties of a trait, being stable for individuals over the time periods involved. As predicted, Dream EXP has a significant positive relationship to a measure of waking psychological differentiation, and is independent of the personality trait of extroversion-introversion.

.....(*regarding the results*)...The variability may lead to further interesting questions. For example, instead of asking, “What is the function of dreams?” as if all dreams are equivalent and serve the same single function, this question might better be asked as: “What is the function of a dream with a high experiencing manner?” or “Does waking behavior change occur when the content area has been dealt with in a high experiencing manner during dreaming?” “Does a high experiencing manner in a dream signal a coming ability for waking insight in a particular respect?”

1986 - Experiencing level as a therapeutic variable. *Person-Centered Review*, 1(2), 141-162.

To focus, one must allow a felt sense to form without immediately knowing what it is.

The content that emerges is not determined by our conscious, directed thought. What emerges may surprise us. The process is not our familiar way of thinking; it is bodily anchored. Many clients (and therapists) are not used to trusting the orderedness of this level. There is a very exact sequencing in the experiencing process. The person is living forward what is organismically implied.

An inwardly gentle, receptive, welcoming attitude is necessary to focus. One must want to hear from oneself and be able to welcome what comes, no matter what the content is.

Focusing cannot be inwardly coerced and whatever comes needs to be received and treated with respect. That is the reality of what is there now. By letting it be, further steps become possible. The client needs to be helped to respond to internal processes in a nurturing, respectful manner, very much as the therapist is responding to the client in their interaction.

2001 - An experiential version of unconditional positive regard. In J. Bozarth & P. Wilkins (Eds.), *Unconditional positive regard* (pp. 126-144). Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.

*Referring to a clinical vignette:*

”He short-circuits letting his body feel that now, because he doesn’t see any concrete way it could happen now in his life. He does not know that staying with a felt sense of what would be right opens situations and some step may then form or become possible. He predefines any positive step as impossible.”

“We don’t often have ‘negative’ feelings with our clients, partly because what they do or experience does not impact so strongly on our own lives. We go home after the hour; maybe we think of them and feel concern, but they are not centrally important to our sense of wellbeing. But the definition of Unconditional Positive Regard cannot rest on this relative distance of their lives from ours. It will be one thesis of this paper that UPR is not a prizing that depends on this distance. ...Something we are not capable of with our loved ones, cannot be what UPR means with our clients. There is a more genuine, deeper kind of UPR that doesn’t depend on this insulated, ‘hothouse’ effect.....I will develop a concept of UPR in which we needn’t constrict the range of our responses to the client. This may help solve the problem of the contradiction between UPR and congruence.” (p. 127).

“...”Perhaps Rogers meant this warmth as being UPR. But I believe equating the warm feeling in empathy with UPR gives rise to the seeming contradiction between congruence and UPR. In a UPR interaction, we do not put ourselves aside, and we may feel negative emotions.” (p. 128)

Unconditional positive regard is an interaction in which people inherently untwist by not protecting themselves with definitions. They exceed definitions, and participate in a joyful, thick, textured aliveness.” (p. 133)

“Definitions hold you suspended within themselves, stopping growth. ...I make the client into an instance of a concept and then relate to the ‘meanings’ of that concept. I proceed from that concept, rather than remaining in the interaction. I ‘empty out’ the person and end up with a set of meanings. Definitions twist people into shapes that constrain...”

“One reason we collect facets is because any instance is superior to a higher order generalization. When you have a generalization there is nothing further inside it. An instance has specificity. Any real life event has complex structure. It can answer a question.” (p. 131)

“...The intended meaning of UPR is that ‘positive’ regard does not depend on any definable way the client is being. I am trying to show a way that this becomes possible. UPR involves staying with the flow of experience, even if we see things which we would define negatively or positively. To stay with the flow of experience, rather than patterns, is to remain in interaction.” (p.134)

2002 - Focusing-oriented/experiential psychotherapy. In D. J. Cain (Ed.), *Humanistic psychotherapies: Handbook of research and practice* (pp. 221-251)

Experiencing refers to what you can sense in your body right now as you read this. Human beings have bodies that live in situations, not just in physical space. A little bit of good news in the mail about a situation you are worried about changes your body. You have been living in that interaction, even though the other person, the letter writer, is in another part of the world... Experiencing is neither just “inside” you or just “out there.” Human activities are both bodily and environmental. Breathing is the air and is your lungs. If there is no air, breathing stops and eventually the body structure disintegrates. Living organisms cannot continue to exist apart from activity. (p. 223)

When we pay attention to our bodily experiencing, we find that it has in it the complexity of how we are living with others. At first this is an unclear, whole sense in your body that does not yet have words or parts but is felt quite distinctly... This fuzzy sense is an intricate mesh of past history, current meanings, the other person, the physical setting, the relationship, and much more. All this is implicitly present. This body sense is not like a cramped muscle, but the body as it lives in a situation. This is called a felt sense. It is neither just thinking nor just emotion. It refers to meanings felt in the body. (pp. 223-4)

Living implies its own next steps in a highly ordered sequence. In digestion, eating implies saliva in the mouth, which implies juices in the stomach, which implies absorption of nutrients by the blood, which implies elimination of toxins and wastes. If the events that are implied do not occur, there is a disruption of this very fine order. There is trouble. Our felt experiencing has this same implying of next steps in our interactions. Our bodies can also imply brand new action steps. (p. 224)

When a needed interaction is lacking and the implied sequence cannot occur, the body continues to imply its forward living. Sometimes, we can respond to ourselves to change the situation. If we cannot, we may need a new interaction in which our living can be carried forward. Our concern in psychotherapy is to participate in such an interaction. Because a person's experiencing involves language, culture, other human beings, symbols, dreams, actions, or interpersonal behavior, any of these avenues may carry blocked experiencing forward. (p. 224)

2003 - *A felt sense is not an emotion: It is a new human development.*  
Unpublished manuscript, The Focusing Institute.

A felt sense is the whole sense of a situation, had as a body sentience. In the transcript there is visible 'emoting.' The client sobs. But the step of change (a sense that maybe she could live in relation to this energy all of the time) does not come from 'getting in touch with emotions.' The crying is a whole body response to the opening of the felt sense into symbolization. If the client turned and focused on why she is crying, it would probably articulate as some mix of grief at the long held constriction and the relief as the constriction begins to loosen. The client also names that she feels 'scared,' which would usually be thought of as an emotion. But she is stepping back from the 'scared' and getting a sense of what 'that whole thing' is for her right now, rather than drowning inside emotional sensations of being scared. The felt sense has in it the ground that gives rise to the emotion, not just the emotion.

Because it is part of the cultural pattern itself, feeling an emotion cannot change the pattern which gives rise to it. ...Emotion is a huge change in our bodies and may also change the situations, but it is not a change in the pattern. Rather it is a change in us and in our behavior, which the pattern itself prescribes.

To form and explicate a felt sense is a new human development. It is an expansion of human capacity to feel the whole context as a 'this.' We need access to this level to meet the current complexity in human situations and problems. A kind of change is possible from a felt sense that is not possible from emotions. When clients find this level, they often say, "I have moved more in 10 minutes than in many years." It is important to name the centrality of this dimension and explicitly including it in our training.

2003 - *Focusing as a Force for Peace: The Revolutionary Pause*. Keynote Address to the Fifteenth Focusing International Conference 2003 in Germany

Focusing is a force for peace because it frees people from being manipulated by external authority, cultural roles, ideologies and the internal oppression of self-attacking and shame. This freeing has to do with an ability to pause the on-going situation and create a space in which a felt sense can form. (p. 1)

By pausing the routine, I am able to form a sense of the whole, entire situation, not just behave from within the expected pattern. (example given) It was quite a complex situation and I needed to have all of it functioning so that I could make good choices. (p. 2)

A felt sense develops after language and culture and emotions. All individuals have many strands of experience which could be differentiated and which do not fit the cultural patterns. But to allow the whole of this on-going experience to form as a bodily felt sense one has to pause the cultural story. This is still somewhat new for most people. (p. 5)

The reason the distinction between an emotion and a felt sense is so important is that when one can form a felt sense of the whole situation, new possibilities for carrying forward are implicit that do not exist from within the usual cultural-emotion sequences. (p. 6)

As our practice of Focusing deepens, we make this discrimination more and more between what is an emotional culturally determined response and what is from the wider sensing of the whole from which a right next step may come. We become reluctant to act in relation to another person from the cultural level if it would violate the particularness of 'this person in there.' (p. 8)

The Diversity Statement Adapted by The Focusing Institute Board of Directors, 2009.

Focusing is a practice that honors what arises freshly in the moment. Frozen structures of any kind are antithetical to the ethic of Focusing. Therefore, the Focusing Institute takes as a core value the principle that the practice of Focusing, how it is taught by certified Focusing teachers, and its application in different fields will not be standardized. Diversity of approaches will be protected. Constructive critiques among Focusing Trainers or between TFI and individuals presenting or applying Focusing are welcome and should be offered by means of open, respectful communication. TFI itself will seek to honor the values of non-standardization in its operations while recognizing that tension can arise between maximum diversity and the need for effectiveness and efficiency in meeting its goals.

2009 - Experiencing level: An instance of developing a variable from a first person process so it can be reliably measured and taught. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 16(10-12), 129-155.

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....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.

On the cross-cultural nature of Focusing: ...”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 new kind of concept supports new ways of relating to the natural world and to other living creatures, including humans.”

2002 - *Basic principles of experiential client-centered psychotherapy (Focusing-oriented)*. Paper presented at the meeting of the British Association for the Person Centered Approach, August 20. (Full Text)

### **Basic principles of experiential client-centered psychotherapy (Focusing-oriented)**

#### **The person is an irreducible whole and an originating source.**

That takes precedence over any thing. A person is never an instance of a content or process category. A person is the being “who looks out at you.” Who this person is, is never exhaustible. A person is inherently always “more” than can ever be made explicit. The therapist does not hide behind roles but is willing to be seen as a vulnerable person who also looks out.

#### **The therapist is able to rest in not-knowing.**

This understanding that the person is always more than any explication or model, lets us rest comfortably in not knowing. Our thin ideas or concepts could never be better than the person’s own explication. We have the repeated experience that if don’t interpose our own ideas the person goes somewhere unpredictable by us. And may not have been able to go there if we had said our ideas instead.

#### **The therapist pays attention to her own felt sense.**

We respond to the client from that level in ourselves where body, feeling and meaning are pre-separated and we also recognize and experience that level in the client. The therapist allows the client to create a felt sense of what it is like to be the client in the therapist. (Empathy)

#### **The therapist relies on an experiential order that is neither determined nor arbitrary but emerges in little steps of change.**

These little steps are generated from the client’s process within the context of the interaction. The organism implies its own next steps. Only the client can find and decide what comes next.

#### **Therapy is a relationship in which the client can have her own sense of her situation. Such a relationship involves empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence.**

The therapist does not impose external forms, interpretations or expectations on the client. Then the client’s own experiential intricacy can be found. This intricacy is a creative source of change. The intricacy opens when the client pays attention to her not-yet-formed but directly felt sense.



**With a lot of practice attending to one's own felt sense, the therapist finds many elaborated distinctions about how to be in contact with a bodily felt sense.**

These distinctions from within the therapist's lived experience allow her to see and respond to this same level in the client

**The therapist has an ethical commitment to a non-hierarchical relationship.**

The therapy is guided by the client's own process. It is not interpretive. The therapist is not the "expert". The client is not diagnosed, pathologized or considered an instance of a category. Everyone always makes perfect sense within his/her own frame of reference. Experiencing this repeatedly lets one respect the client even before one understands the sense the particular situation makes.

Focusing-Oriented psychotherapy (<http://www.focusing.org/psychotherapy.html>) grew out of a crossing between Rogers and Gendlin in the 1950s and early 1960s at the University of Chicago. Gendlin was trained in therapy by Rogers. He is a philosopher in the tradition of Dilthey, Dewey, Merleau-Ponty and McKeon. He developed a Philosophy of the "Implicit" and applied it to the work Rogers was doing. Gendlin's theoretical formulations were woven into CCT theory. His work in the psychotherapy field is entirely within the CCT framework. It provides conceptual foundations for Rogers' revolutionary discoveries.

Gendlin participated in Rogers' research after 1952. Attempts were being made to compare self concepts with denied experiences, which is methodologically not possible. Instead, from Gendlin's philosophy of Experiencing came a fundamental shift from analyzing content--what the client discusses--to the manner of process--how the client is relating to experience. Hundreds of CCT transcripts and hours of taped psychotherapy interviews were analyzed and a Process Scale (Rogers, 1959) was developed and eventually the Experiencing Scale (Klein et al 1969; 1986) which has been used in over 80 studies. The concept of Experiencing underlies many of the subsequent developments in the CCT/Experiential tradition.

CCT is often accused of being simplistic, both theoretically and in practice. In fact we have a highly sophisticated philosophical base and a practice that calls for intense self discipline and rigor. Several central points which give a theoretical underpinning to Rogers' basic observations are briefly discussed below.

- The difference between emotions and a felt sense
- The human body is situational and linguistic (relational)
- All living process implies its own next steps
- What carries forward living process is not determined but is also not arbitrary. It arises from inside and it is recognizable by the bodily change that it brings.

**Emotions as distinct from a Felt Sense**

In A Process Model (<http://www.focusing.org/philo.html>), emotions are defined as arising at certain cultural junctures, when particular behavior sequences and expectations occur. For example, in a culture in which respect is shown in certain ways, anger arises if respect is not shown. Emotions go with fixed cultural routines or biological events.

Emotions are a narrowing of the body sentience of the whole situation involved in a felt sense. We all know the injunction when we are angry to “count to ten” before acting. This is the popular understanding that emotions narrow our sense of the whole situation. We are likely to do something we will regret when we again have our “wider perspective.” Emotions are part of the pattern, which generates them and so cannot change from simply being re-lived.

In forming a felt sense, one lets a bodily sense of a whole situation come which is wider than what a typical acculturated person can feel. Our wider bodily experiencing has in it the complexity of how we are living with others. At first this is an unclear, whole sense in your body that doesn't yet have words or parts, but is felt quite distinctly. You can stop now for a minute and sense your whole situation right now, or, for example, you can pay attention to your whole sense of a friendship with someone with whom you love to spend time. It has a distinct feel, even without words. Now sense your relationship with someone who is difficult for you. Again, you have a distinct felt sense, but different from the first one. This fuzzy but very concrete physical sense is an intricate mesh of past history, current meanings, the other person, the physical setting, the relationship and much more. All this is implicitly present. This body-sense has the meaning of the situation in it so it is not a mere physical sensation like a cramped muscle. It is rather the body as it lives in a situation. This is called a “felt sense”. It is neither just thinking, nor is it emotion. It refers to meanings felt in the body. This felt sensing capacity used to be rare. It is now a new human development in evolutionary terms. A kind of change is possible from a felt sense that is not possible from emotions. This new kind of change is what Roger's observed in his successful clients. The process which arises from inside when the client is empathically accepted is Roger's big discovery.

### **The body as situational: A new understanding of Body and Environment**

“Experiencing” refers to what you can sense in your body right now as you read this. Human beings have bodies that live in situations, not just in physical space. A little bit of good news in the mail about a situation you are worried about changes your body. You feel relief in your body. You have been living in that interaction, even though the other person is in another part of the world. Experiencing is neither just “inside” the skin envelope or just “out there.” All human activities are both bodily and environmental. Breathing IS the air and IS your lungs. If there is no air, breathing stops and eventually the body structure disintegrates. Experiencing, at whatever level is always inherently relational. The therapist attitudes (experiencing) are one aspect of a process that involves client experience. There is one interaction.

### **Carrying Forward: Implied Next Steps Of Living**

Living implies its own next steps in a highly ordered sequence. In digestion, eating implies saliva in the mouth, which implies juices in the stomach, which implies absorption of nutrients by the blood, which implies elimination of toxins and wastes. If the events that are implied do not occur, (e.g. the food source disappears) there is a disruption of this very fine order. There is trouble. Our felt experiencing has this same implying of next steps in our interactions. Our bodies can also imply brand new action steps. Rogers observed that when therapists expressed empathy, unconditional regard and

congruence some clients seemed to naturally grow into fuller living. He called this the “self-actualizing tendency.” Now we can understand this more exactly when we see that living organisms imply their own exact next steps.

These theoretical underpinnings help us think about the issues of non-directiveness and intrapsychic process and its relation to interactional conditions.

### Non-directiveness

The focusing invitation to pay attention to what is happening in the body is not a technique to direct the process. If the therapist is applying techniques to get the client to fit into a pattern, this is not CCT. In FOT a therapist may invite the client to pay attention to a body sense by asking “how is that for you ?” “What is that whole thing like for you in your body?” These are tentative invitations dropped immediately if they are not wanted by the client. Such suggestions would be offered only occasionally and not at the price of steadily listening. If the client does not welcome this invitation to sense directly, then the therapist will continue to accompany the client in whatever way the client proceeds. The only process that we value is the one that originates from inside the client. There may seem to be a contradiction in the invitation to attend directly at a time when the client is not doing so, as if we wanted the client to be in some way which we consider desirable. This is not the case. If a client does attend to her direct experience in response to an invitation by the therapist, then this is immediately the client’s own inner process.

**Referring to one’s own experience is by definition only possible as the person’s own inwardly arising process.** The client is being invited from the outside to do something inside, but the inner process belongs to the client if it is found. Focusing is not a technique, which can be imposed on oneself or on anyone else. When Focusing one feels it from inside and knows it is one’s own process. The invitation is the opposite of a directing process. It is an invitation to let a process come that frees the person of any externally imposed pattern or form.

Confusion is possible because we have also developed steps to teach Focusing and Thinking at the Edge (TAE.) These are practices developed for people in many situation and professions. Focusing as a practice was developed in response to early research findings (replicated in recent studies), which indicated that Experiencing Level early in therapy predicts outcome. Clients who begin therapy already able to speak from their inner experience do well and those that start unable to do this don’t necessarily learn and may have a poorer outcome. In response to the problem that failure could be predicted from the outset, specific instructions were developed to teach people how to do this important “Focusing” process. This was a heuristic device for the purpose of teaching. It was not considered a part of psychotherapy. Today Focusing is taught in fields as diverse as medicine, architecture, dance, theory construction, business.

Research shows that therapists who don’t respond to the felt sense level in themselves may miss this level in the client. If empathic understanding does not respond to what is unclear but present for the client then we do not keep the client company with what is directly felt by the client but not yet articulated. This depresses the client’s experiencing process.

## **Experiencing and Therapist Attitudes**

Client experiencing and therapist attitudes must not be artificially split, as though attitudes are only relational and not “intrapsychic” and as if the client’s experiencing did not involve the relationship with the therapist. Rogers spoke of them together in his theory. The attitudes are the conditions under which clients engage in a certain kind of experiential process. The attitudes don’t float by themselves, but are involved in change in the client. The hypothesis is that if the attitudes are present, then change happens in the client, in the direction of knowing herself better (congruence) and accepting herself empathically. Congruence and self-acceptant empathy in the client are ways of being more aware of the experiencing process. What we call the felt sense is a direct awareness of experiencing before one even knows how to verbalize it.

The therapist attitudes are already part of the client’s experiencing because experiencing is an interaction with the environment, not something just inside the skin. Our bodies are always one process with the environment and for humans the main environment is our situations with other people, especially the whole therapy situation. The experience the client attends to always already has in it the relational situation and can never be thought of as “only intrapsychic.”

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