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# A Theory of Personality Change

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After a few pages which state two main problems and two observations, a theory of personality change will be presented. The theory is another step in the continuing work on "experiencing" (Gendlin, 1957, 1962*b*; Gendlin and Zimring, 1955). The theory of experiencing provides a frame of reference in which theoretical considerations are viewed in a new way.

A theory requires terms, defined words with which to specify observations, and a formulation of a chain of theoretical hypotheses. The theory presented here is developed within this basic structure, and special notice should be given to the new terms which are introduced and defined. These terms are pointed out and numbered. (We can have a genuine theory only with carefully defined terms, and only by using defined terms can we later modify, improve, and extend theory.)

## **PROBLEMS AND OBSERVATIONS**

In most theories, the static content-and-structure aspects of personality are primary, and therefore personality change is an especially difficult problem. The present theoretical frame of reference is especially suited to account for change, since it employs concepts that apply to the experiencing process, and to the relationships between that process and content aspects of personality.

### **Personality Theory and Personality Change**

Personality theories have chiefly been concerned with the factors that determine and explain different individuals' personalities as they are, and the factors which have brought about the given personality. What is called personality maintains its character despite circumstances. Aspects of an individual fail to puzzle us if his current situation explains

them. We do not even attribute it to his personality when an individual shows all sorts of undesirable behavior under overwhelmingly bad circumstances, or when he becomes likable and secure under the influence of events which (as we say) would make almost anybody likable and secure. What we do attribute to personality is the reverse: when an individual remains likable and secure under overwhelmingly bad circumstances, and when an individual remains afraid and in pain despite apparent opportunities and good luck. Thus, it could be said that, far from explaining personality change, our theories have been endeavoring to explain and define personality as that which tends not to change when one would expect change.

To some extent this view of personality as factors which resist change is justified. We usually think of a person as involving identity and continuity through time. However, the contents and patterns in the theories are a *type of explanatory concept* which renders change impossible by definition. The structure of personality (in theories) is formulated in such a way that it is said to maintain itself against all new experience which might alter it. The individual is viewed as a structured entity with defined contents. These explanatory concepts can explain only why an individual cannot change.

Personality theory, then, has concentrated upon the factors which explain why an individual is as he is, how he has become so, and how these factors maintain him so, despite circumstances, fortunes, and opportunities. Such explanatory concepts of content and structure tell us what prevents an individual from being changed by experience, what factors will force him forever (by definition) to miss or distort everything that might change him unless (as we commonly say) his personality (somehow) changes first.

Since structure and content do tend to maintain themselves and distort present experience, we can account for personality change only if we can show exactly how this change resistance yields to change.

Theories in the past have not wanted to portray personality change as impossible. On the contrary, the theories assert that change does actually occur. The chief personality theories have sprung from psychotherapy--that is to say (when psychotherapy is successful), from ongoing personality change.

Quite paradoxically, as personality change occurs before their eyes and with their participation, therapists find their minds formulating what has been wrong. Even the individual, himself, as he searches into his feelings and expresses these, speaks as if the whole endeavor were to investigate what has been wrong--what has constituted the aspects of his personality which have prevented ordinary adaptation and change. And, usually, such an individual becomes aware of much which, he then says, has been true all along but of which he has not been aware.

Thus, psychotherapy regularly gives us this observation of an individual "uncovering" or "becoming aware" of these stubborn contents and his previous inability to be aware of them. So well have the various personality theories formulated these contents and this self-maintaining and censoring structure that, while we have concepts to explain what makes an individual as he is, we cannot formulate how he can change. Yet all the time the individual has been changing just these "uncovered" factors which we formulate in terms of static explanatory contents.[\[1\]](#)

I will now present in more detail the two main ways in which much current formulation of personality makes change appear theoretically impossible. I call these two impossibilities "the repression paradigm," and "the content paradigm."[\[2\]](#)

Since these theories, nevertheless, also assert that change does occur, I will then take up the two main ways in which theories attempt to account for change. I will try to show that theories usually cite two observations: a *feeling process*; and a certain *personal relationship*.

## Two Problems

### THE "REPRESSION PARADIGM."

Most personality theories (in different words and with somewhat different meanings) share what I call the "repression paradigm." They agree that in an individual's early family relations he introjected certain values, according to which he was loved only if he felt and behaved in certain ways. Experiences which contradicted these demands on him came to be "repressed" (Freud), or "denied to awareness" (Rogers), or "not me" (Sullivan). Later, when the individual encounters experiences of this contradicting sort, he must either distort them or remain totally unaware of them. For, were he to notice the contradictory experiences, he would become intolerably anxious. The ego (Freud), or self-concept (Rogers), or self-dynamism (Sullivan), thus basically influences awareness and perception. This influence is termed "resistance" (Freud), or "defensiveness" (Rogers), or "security operation" (Sullivan), and a great deal of behavior is thereby explainable. A personality is as it is, and remains as it is, because it cannot take account of these experiences. Or if, somehow, repression is forcefully lifted and the individual is made to become aware of these experiences, the ego will "lose control," the self will "disintegrate," and intolerable "uncanny emotions" will occur. In psychosis, it is said, the individual is aware of such experiences and the ego or self-organization has indeed broken down.

If the individual needed merely to be reminded, or to have the "repressed" factors called to his notice, he would soon be straightened out. There are always helpful or angry people who attempt this, and many situations grossly demand attention to these factors. The individual, however, represses not only the given factors within him but also anything outside him which would relate to these factors and remind him of them.[\[3\]](#) He misunderstands or reinterprets so as to prevent himself from noticing the aspects of events and persons which would bring these factors to his awareness.

Thus, the specific personality structure maintains itself and change is theoretically impossible. Whatever would change the individual in the necessary respects is distorted or goes unnoticed just to that extent and in those respects in which it could lift the repression and change him.

Now, this explanation (shared in some way, as I have tried to indicate, by the major personality theories of the day [\[4\]](#)) is based on the striking way in which the individual during psychotherapy becomes aware of what (so he now says) he has long felt but has not known that he felt. Moreover, the individual realizes how powerfully these previously

unaware experiences have affected his feelings and behavior. So many individuals have now reported this that there is no longer much doubt that it is a valid observation. The open question is how we are to formulate it theoretically.

Once we formulate theory along the lines of the repression paradigm, we cannot then blithely turn around and "explain" personality change as a "becoming aware" of the previously repressed. Once we have shown how anything will be distorted which tends to bring these experiences to awareness, we cannot then consider it an explanation to simply assert that personality change is (by definition supposedly impossible) a becoming aware. Change happens. But, to say that is not to offer an explanation-it is only to state the problem. We may take the "repression paradigm" to be one basic aspect of personality change-one of the two basic factors with which this chapter will be concerned. To account for personality change, we will have to account for how this crucial becoming aware really does occur, and then we will have to go back and reformulate our theory of repression and the unconscious.

### **THE "CONTENT PARADIGM."**

The second basic aspect of personality change (and the second way in which current modes of formulating make change theoretically impossible) concerns the view of personality as made up of various "contents." By "contents" I mean any *defined* entities, whether they are called "experiences," "factors," "S-R bonds," "needs," "drives," "motives," "appraisals," "traits," "self-concepts," "anxieties," "motivational systems," "infantile fixations," "developmental failures," or whatever.

If we are to understand personality change, we must understand how these personality constituents can change in nature.

To account for this change in the nature of contents, we need a type of definition (explanatory constructs) which also can change. We cannot explain *change* in the nature of the *content* when our theory specifically defines personality only as content. Such theory can formulate what needs to be changed, and later it can also formulate what has changed, and into what it has changed; but it will remain theoretically unexplained how such change is possible, so long as all our explanations are in terms of concepts of this or that defined content.

We require some kind of more basic personality variable to formulate an account of how, under what conditions, and through what process, change in the nature of contents can occur.

Thus, for example, chemistry defines the elements in terms of more basic activities of electrons and protons, and thereby we can account for the subatomic processes by which elements engage in chemical change reactions, and through which an element can be bombarded with subatomic particles and turned into a different element. Without these concepts, which view elements as motions of something more basic, we could not explain the chemical and atomic *change* we observe, nor operationally study and define the conditions under which it occurs. We could state only that at  $t_1$  the test tube had certain contents A, B, while at  $t_2$  the contents were C, D. Only if A, B, C, D, are not themselves the *ultimate* explanatory concepts can we expect to explain changes from one to another. And

so it is with personality change. If our ultimate explanatory constructs are "contents;" we cannot explain the change in the nature of just these contents.

Our conclusion here is not simply that defined contents of personality do not exist. Rather, it is that if we define personality as contents and in no further, more basic way, then we cannot expect to use the same concepts to explain just how these contents change. And, inasmuch as it will have been just these contents which define the personality (and the respects in which change must occur if it is to be important personality change), exactly this theoretically impossible task is posed when personality theories come to explain change.

For example, during psychotherapy the patient finally comes to realize these essential contents (they will be conceptualized in whatever the vocabulary of the particular theory the psychotherapist uses). He realizes now that he has been full of "hostility," or that he has felt and acted from "partial, fixated sexual desires;" or that he "hates his father," or that he is "passive-dependent," or was "never loved as a child." "Now what?;" he asks. How do you change such contents? No way is given. The fact that these contents actually do change is our good fortune. The theories explain the personality in terms of these defined contents, these "experiences," or "needs," or "lacks." The theories cannot explain how these contents melt and lose their character to become something of a different character. Yet they do.

Our second basic problem of personality change, then, is this "content paradigm." The question is, "In what way should the nature of personality definitions change so that we can arrive at a means of defining that will fit the process of change in personality contents?" In answering this, we will describe something more basic or ultimate than defined contents. Then we will consider how defined contents arise in this more ultimate personality process.

## **Two Universal Observations of Personality Change**

Now that two basic problems of personality change have been stated (becoming aware and change in the nature of contents), we will turn next to two basic *observations* of personality change. In contrast to the aforementioned *theoretical* impossibilities, most theories of personality cite two *observations*, which they assert are nearly always involved in personality change.

1. Major personality change involves some sort of intense affective or feeling process occurring in the individual.
2. Major personality change occurs nearly always in the context of an ongoing personal relationship.

### **THE FEELING PROCESS.**

When major personality change occurs, intense, emotional, inwardly felt events are usually observed. I would like to give the name "feeling process" to this affective dimension of personality change. The word "feeling" is preferable to "affective," because "feeling" usually refers to something concretely sensed by an individual. In personality change the

individual directly feels an inward reworking. His own concepts and constructs become partly unstructured and his felt experiencing at times exceeds his intellectual grasp.

In various contexts it has been noted that major personality change requires not only intellectual or actional operations, but also this felt process. For instance, psychotherapists (of whatever orientation) often discuss the presence or absence of this feeling process in a particular case. They discuss whether the individual, in a given psychotherapy hour, is engaged in "merely" intellectualizing, or whether (as they phrase it) he is "really" engaged in psychotherapy. The former they consider a waste of time or a defense, and they predict [5] that no major personality change will result from it. The latter they consider promising of personality change.

Now, although this difference is universally discussed, it is most often phrased so unclearly, and the words following "merely" ("merely" intellectualizing, defending, avoiding, externalizing, etc.), and the words following "really" ("really" engaged, facing, dealing with) are so undefined that we may as well simply refer to this difference as the difference between "merely" and "really." Although it may not be phrased well, what is always meant of referred to by "really" is a *feeling process* which is absent when something is termed "merely."

A similar distinction between "merely" and "really" is talked about in education: There has always been much concern with the contrast between "mere" rote learnings of facts and "really" learning something (making it one's own, becoming able to "integrate," "apply," and "creatively elaborate" it).

"Really" learning is predicted to result in observable behavior changes, while "mere" rote learning is predicted to result in little (or different) behavior change. The learning process is said to differ in the two instances, depending upon the degree of the individual's "internal motivation," his way of "taking the new material in," his "application of himself to what he learns," his genuine grasp of meanings. These metaphoric phrases indicate that, here again during learning, the difference between "really" and "merely" refers to a certain participation of the individual's feelings in the learning process.

Let me give some further aspects of this observation from psychotherapy.

An Adlerian therapist some years ago told me: "Of course interpretation is not enough. Of course the person doesn't change only because of the wisdoms which the therapist tells him. But no technique really expresses what makes the change itself. The change comes *through some* kind of emotional digesting; but then you must admit that none of us understand what *that is*."

Therapists often miss this fact. They labor at helping the individual to a better explanation of what is wrong with him, yet, when asked how the individual is to *change* this now clearly explained maladaptation, nothing very clear is said. Somehow, knowing his problem, the individual should change, yet *knowing is* not the process of changing.

A good diagnostician, perhaps with the aid of a few psychometric tests, can often give a very accurate and detailed description and explanation of an individual's personality. Therapist and client often both *know*, after such testing and a few interviews, a good deal of what is wrong and what needs to be changed. Quite often, after two years of therapeutic



interviews, the description and explanation which was (or could have been) given at the outset appears in retrospect to have been quite accurate. Yet it is clear that there is a major difference between knowing the *conceptual* explanation of personality (which one can devise in a few hours) and the actual *feeling process* of changing (which often requires years). Relatively little has been said about this process,<sup>[6]</sup> how one may observe and measure it, and just in what theoretical way this feeling process functions to permit personality change.

## THE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP.

Just as the feeling process is observed as essential in personality change-while little is said to delineate, observably define, or theoretically account for it-so also the personal relationship is always cited. Can theory define this enormous and critical difference which it makes to the individual to live in relation to another person?

We observe that when the individual thinks about his experiences and emotions by himself, there is often little change. We observe that when he speaks about these things to *some* other people, equally little change occurs.

However, when we come to the "therapeutic" or "effective" personal relationship, we say that "suggestion," or "libidinal support," or "approval and reinforcement," or the other person's "therapeutic attitudes," or the "conversation between the two unconsciousnesses," somehow obviates the factors which otherwise shape all his experiences and personal relations to keep the individual as he is. Somehow, now, he is said to "become aware" of what he previously could not be aware of, he is "influenced" by suggestions, he "overcomes" the transference, his "libidinal balance" is altered, he somehow now "perceives the attitudes" of the therapist, where he has always distorted and anticipated the attitudes of others. This is really the problem, not the explanation, of personality change.

But we do *observe* that almost always these changes occur in the context of a personal relationship. Some definitions of the kind of relationship which does (and the kind which does not) effect personality change have been offered (Rogers, 1957, 1959b). Very little has been said about how relationship events affect the conditions making for repression and the nature of contents, so that these alter.

So far we have formulated two problems of personality change and we have then cited *two observations*; the feeling process in the individual; and the personal relationship.

Our two observations and our two problems are related: simply, we may say that, while it is *theoretically* impossible for the individual to become aware of what he must *repress* and to change his personality *contents* into other *contents*, we *observe* that both occur *when* the individual is engaged in a deep and intense *feeling process* and in the context of a *personal relationship*. We need a theoretical account of this observed possibility, and we need to reformulate the theory of repression and the definitions of personality constituents, so that observed changes can be theoretically formulated.

# THE THEORY

## Basic Concepts-What Are Psychological Events?

### 1. EXPERIENCING.

(a) The "ing" in the term "experiencing" indicates that experience is considered as a *process*. (We will have to define the theoretical conceptions which go to make up a process framework.)

Now, of course, the above is not really a definition, since the usage of the word "experience" is currently confused and various. The field of psychology lacks a theory of experience. However, the theory of experiencing (Gendlin, 1962*b*) attempts to provide a process for determining a theory of experience.

Since the term "experiencing" is extremely broad, more specific terms will be defined for specific aspects of experiencing. Anything in particular which we may consider will be a particular *manner* or *mode* of experiencing, or a particular *function* of it, or a particular logical pattern we choose to impose. The term "experiencing," then, denotes all "experience" viewed in terms of the process framework.

(b) The word "experience" in psychology, wherever employed, means concrete psychological events. The same is the case here. Experiencing is a process of concrete, ongoing events.

(c) Finally, by experiencing we mean a *felt* process. We mean inwardly sensed, bodily felt events, and we hold that the concrete "stuff" of personality or of psychological events is this flow of bodily sensing or feeling.

Experiencing is the process of concrete, bodily feeling, which constitutes the basic matter of psychological and personality phenomena.

### 2. THE DIRECT REFERENT.

Both in social talk and in theory we so largely emphasize external events and logical meaning that it almost seems as if it were difficult to notice that, in addition to external objects and logic, we also have an inward bodily feeling or sensing. This is, of course, a commonplace that can be readily checked by anyone.

At any moment he wishes, one can refer directly to an inwardly felt datum. Experiencing, in the mode of being directly referred to in this way, I term the "direct referent."

Of course, there are other modes of experiencing. Situations and external events, symbols, and actions may interact with our feeling process quite without any reflexive attention paid to the direct referent. We are aware and feel without this direct attention as well as with it.

One can always refer directly to experiencing.

### 3. IMPLICIT.

It is less apparent, but still easily checked by anyone, that this direct referent contains meaning. At first it may seem that experiencing is simply the inward sense of our body, its tension, or its well-being. Yet, upon further reflection, we can notice that only in this direct sensing do we have the meanings of what we say and think. For, without our "feel" of the meaning, verbal symbols are only noises (or sound images of noises).

For example, someone listens to you speak, and then says: "Pardon me, but I don't grasp what you mean." If you would like to restate what you meant in different words, you will notice that you must inwardly attend to your direct referent, your *felt* meaning. Only in this way can you arrive at different words with which to restate it.

In fact, we employ explicit symbols only for very small portions of what we think. We have most of it in the form of *felt* meanings.

For example, when we think about a problem, we must think about quite a number of considerations together. We cannot do so *verbally*. In fact, we could not think about the meaning of these considerations at all if we had to keep reviewing the verbal symbols over and over. We may review them verbally. However, to think upon the problem we must use the *felt* meanings--we must think of how "this" (which we previously verbalized) relates to "that" (which we also previously verbalized). To think "this" and "that," we employ their *felt* meanings.

When felt meanings occur in interaction with verbal symbols and we feel what the symbols mean, we term such meanings "explicit" or "explicitly known." On the other hand, quite often we have just such felt meanings without a verbal symbolization. Instead we have an event, a perception, or some word such as the word "this" (which represents nothing, but only points). When this is the case, we can term the meaning "implicit" or "implicitly felt, but not explicitly known."

Please note that "explicit" and "implicit" meanings are both *in aware-ness*. What we concretely feel and calf inwardly refer to is certainly "in awareness" (though the term "awareness" will later require some reformulations). "Implicit" meaning is often confusingly discussed as if it were "unconscious" or "not in awareness." It should be quite clear that, since the direct referent is felt and is a direct datum of attention, it is "in awareness." *Anything termed "implicit" is felt in awareness.*

Furthermore, we may now add that even when a meaning is explicit (when we say "exactly what we mean") the felt meaning we have always contains a great deal more implicit meaning than we have made explicit. When we define the words we have just used, or when we "elaborate" what we

"meant," we notice that the felt meanings we have been employing always contain implicitly many, many meanings--always many more than those to which we gave explicit formulation. We find that we employed these mean-ings. We find they were central to what we did make explicit, that they made up what we actually meant, yet they were only felt. They were implicit.

#### 4. IMPLICIT FUNCTION (IN PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOR).

So far we have thought of implicit meanings as existing only in the direct referent; that is to say, only if and when we directly refer to our experiencing as a felt datum. However, quite without such direct reference to experiencing, most of life and behavior proceed on implicit meanings. (Explicit meanings serve only a few special purposes.) We say, for example, that our interpretation of and reactions to present situations are determined by our "past" experiences. But in which way are our past experiences here *now*? For instance, if I am to observe an immediate situation and then describe it, in what way are there present my knowledge and experiences of past events, my knowledge of language, and my memories of this situation which I have just observed so that they function now? To describe the situation I just observed, my words will arise for me from a felt sense of what I have observed, reacted to, and now mean to say. Rarely, if at all, do I think *in words* what I now observe. Nor do I think each of the past experiences which function in this observing. Rarely do I think in explicit words what I will say. All these meanings *function implicitly as my present, concretely felt* experiencing.

#### 5. COMPLETION; CARRYING FORWARD

#### 6. INTERACTION.

Implicit meanings are incomplete. *Symbolic completion--or carrying forward--*is a bodily felt process. There is an interacting, not an equation, between implicit meaning and symbols.

I must now make it quite clear that "implicit" and "explicit" meanings are different in nature. We may feel that some verbal statement says exactly what we mean; nevertheless, to feel the meaning is not the same kind of thing as verbal symbols. As we have shown, a felt meaning can contain very many meanings and can be further and further elaborated. Thus, the felt meaning is not the same in kind as the precise symbolized explicit meaning. The reason the difference in kind is so important is because if we ignore it we assume that explicit meanings are (or were) already in the implicit felt meaning. We are led to make the felt, implicit meaning a kind of dark place in which countless explicit meanings are hidden. We then wrongly **assume that these meanings are** "implicit" and felt only in that they are "hidden." I must emphasize that the "implicit" or "felt" datum of experiencing is a sensing of body life. As such it may have countless organized aspects, but this does not mean that they are conceptually formed, explicit, and hidden. Rather, we *complete* and form them when we explicate. Before symbolization, the "felt" meanings are *incomplete*. They are analogous, let us say, to the muscle movement in my stomach which I can call "hunger." This sensation certainly "means" something about eating, but it does not "contain" eating. To be even more graphic, the feeling of hunger .is not a repressed eating. It does not contain within itself the search for an animal, the killing and roasting of this animal, the eating, digesting, and absorbing of food particles, and the excretion and burying of wastes. Now just as all these steps (some of them patterned in the newborn organism, some of them learned) do not exist within the hunger sensation of muscle movement, so also the symbolic meaning "hunger" does not exist within it. Symbols must interact with the feeling before we have a meaning. The verbal symbol "hunger," just as "food," must interact with it before we carry forward the digestive process. The symbol "hunger," like other aspects of the search for food or my sitting down at a table, is a learned step of the digestive process and carries

that process forward. Before that occurs, the feeling of the muscle movement implicitly contains the body's patterned readiness for organized interaction but not the formed conceptual units. Implicit bodily feeling is *preconceptual*. Only when *interaction* with verbal symbols (or events) actually occurs, is the process actually carried forward and the explicit meaning formed.[7] So long as it is implicit, it is *incomplete*, awaiting symbols (or events) with which it can interact in preorganized ways.

Thus, to explicate is to *carry forward* a bodily felt process. Implicit meanings are *incomplete*. They are not hidden conceptual units. They are not the same in nature as explicitly known meanings. There is no equation possible between implicit meanings and "their" explicit symbolization. Rather than an equation, there is an *interaction* between felt experiencing and symbols (or events).[8]

## **The Feeling Process-How Change Takes Place in the Individual**

### **7. FOCUSING.**

"Focusing" (or, more exactly, "continuous focusing") will be defined in terms of four more specific definitions (8-11) below. "Focusing" is the whole process which ensues when the individual attends to the direct referent of experiencing.

We noted earlier that direct reference is one mode of experiencing. The feeling process we term "experiencing" also occurs in an individual's awareness without direct reference to it as a felt datum. In these other modes, also, experiencing has important functions in personality change. We will discuss them later.

"Focusing" refers to how one mode of experiencing, the direct referent, functions in ongoing personality change.

The foregoing definitions (I-6) will be employed in the following discussion, and four more definitions concerning focusing will be formulated.

Focusing will be analyzed in four phases. The division into these phases is more a result of my way of formulation than of any inherent four-step divisibility in the process. Although it may occur in these clearly separable phases, more often it does not.

### **8. DIRECT REFERENCE IN PSYCHOTHERAPY (PHASE ONE OF FOCUSING).**

A definitely felt, but conceptually vague referent is directly referred to by the individual. Let us say he has been discussing some troublesome situation or personal trait. He has described various events, emotions, opinions, and interpretations. Perhaps he has called himself "foolish," "unrealistic," and assured his listener that he really "knows better" than to react in the way he does. He is puzzled by his own reactions, and he disapproves of them. Or, what amounts to the same thing, he strongly defends his reactions against some real or imaginary critic who would say that the reactions make no sense, are self-defeating, unrealistic, and foolish. If he is understandingly listened to and responded to, he may be able to refer directly to the felt meaning which the matter has for him. He may then lay

aside, for a moment, all his better judgment or bad feeling about the fact that he is as he is, and he may refer directly to the felt meaning of what he is talking about. He may then say something like: "Well, I know it makes no sense, but in some way it does." Or: "It's awfully vague to me what this is with me, but I feel it pretty definitely." It may seem as if language and logic are insufficient, but the trouble is merely that we are not used to talking about something which is conceptually vague, but definitely and distinctly felt.

If the individual continues to focus his attention on this direct referent (if he does not break off attending to it because it seems too foolish, or too bad, or too doubtful whether he isn't just coddling himself, etc.), he may become able to conceptualize some rough aspects of it. For example, he may find: "I feel that way whenever anyone does such-and-such to me." Or: "I think there is something about that kind of thing which could make something completely terrible and frightening happen to me, but that's silly. You have to accept things like that. That's life. But that's the way it feels, kind of a terror."

Having conceptualized some such rough aspect of "it," the individual usually feels the felt meaning more strongly and vividly, becomes more excited and hopeful about the process of focusing within himself, and is less likely now to settle for the conceptual explanations, accusations, and apologies. It is a profound discovery for most people when they find it possible to continue direct reference. It comes to be deeply valued as "I am in touch with myself."

As the individual continues to focus on such a direct referent, he may puzzle over what a funny kind of a "this" he is talking about. He may call it "this feeling," or "this whole thing," or "this is the way I am when such-and-such occurs." Very clearly it is an inwardly sensed referent in his present experiencing. Nothing is vague about the definite way he *feels* it. He can turn to it with his inward attention. Only *conceptually* is it vague.

A very important and surprising fact about direct reference to felt meanings is that if the matter under consideration is anxiety producing or highly uncomfortable, this felt discomfort *decreases* as the individual directly refers to the felt meaning. One would have expected the opposite. Certainly the opposite is true, for example, when the individual chooses between various topics for discussion. The prospect of talking about this difficult, anxiety-provoking matter certainly makes the person more anxious than the prospect of talking about some neutral or pleasant subject. Thus, he may be in quite a lot of inward pain as he decides to bring the matter up at all. However, once into the topic, the more directly he attends to the direct referent, the felt meaning, the less his discomfort and anxiety. If he momentarily loses track of it, the anxiety flares up again, and the diffuse discomfort of the topic returns.

As the individual symbolizes some aspect of the felt meaning, he senses its rightness partly by the degree of *easing* of the anxiety which he feels.

In contrast to the anxiety or discomfort, the felt meaning itself becomes sharper, more distinctly felt, as he refers to and correctly symbolizes what it is. In fact, his sense of whether or not he has "correctly" symbolized is partly just this sense of increased intensity of the felt meaning.[\[9\]](#)

This decreased anxiety is a very surprising fact, much against the general assumptions about anxiety-provoking material. We generally assume that to focus directly on the

experiencing makes us more anxious. My observations indicate that increased anxiety comes from topic choice, and it is this which we generally expect. On the other hand, given the topic, the more we focus directly upon the felt meaning, and the more of it we symbolize correctly, the more relief we feel. Even a little error in symbolizing ("no, what I just said isn't quite it") again increases the anxiety.

We may theoretically interpret this observation in terms of definitions 5 and 6 and our use of the work of Mead and Sullivan. To symbolize a directly felt implicit meaning carries the organismic process a step forward. It is felt so. It also appears from this that we should consider the direct

reference (or the giving of attention), as itself, already a kind of symbolizing. Direct reference, as well as the resulting symbolizations, involves bodily felt tension relief.[\[10\]](#)

There are other ways of describing the individual's focusing on a direct referent of experiencing. We may say that, at such moments, his experiencing is "ahead of his concepts." It "guides" his concepts. He forms concepts and "checks them against" his directly felt meaning and, on this basis, decides their correctness.

As he continues to refer directly to the felt meaning (he is probably calling it "this"), he may find that his previous formulation which felt correct must be replaced by another which now feels more correct. The listener can help by pointing his words also at "this" and by helping to find words and concepts that might fit it.[\[11\]](#) The listener, of course, cannot judge the correctness. Not even the individual himself judges it but, we might say somewhat poetically, his direct referent does the judging. Both persons may thus be surprised by the direction which the symbolizing takes.

The above has been a description of how an individual may directly refer to or "focus on" a direct referent of experiencing which, for him, constitutes the felt meaning of some topic, situation, behavior, or personality aspect.

## **9. UNFOLDING (PHASE TWO OF FOCUSING).**

Sometimes, in focusing on a directly felt referent, there is a gradual step-by-step process of coming to know explicitly what it is. Yet, it may "open up" in one dramatic instant. Most often there is both a gradual coming to know it better and some instants during which there is a very noticeable "opening up." With a great physical relief and sudden dawning, the individual suddenly knows. He may sit there, nodding to himself, thinking only words such as "yes, I've got it" quite without as yet finding concepts to tell himself what it is he "has got." However, he knows that now he *can* say. It is possible that, if he is now suddenly interrupted, he may "lose it," so that later he can only say, "I really felt I knew what it was at that moment, but I've lost it now." Usually, however, he will as swiftly as possible find concepts and words to say what has opened up. It is almost always a number of things. For example:

Yes, of *course* he is afraid, he realizes. He has not permitted himself even to think about dealing with *this* and *this* aspect of the situation, and this has been because he has not believed that these aspects really existed. Well, yes, he did realize they existed, but he also felt compelled to blame himself for them as if he merely imagined them. And if they do exist (and they do), he does not know how he could possibly live with them. He has not

allowed himself to try to deal with them (he now realizes) or even to consider them anything other than merely his imagination, because, my God, if they are really there, then he is helpless. Then there is *nothing* he can do! But they are there. Well, it is a relief to know at least that.

This example illustrates the multiplicity one generally finds in an implicit meaning which was felt as one "this." It may, as in the example, be a multiplicity which can still be thought of as "one thing." Experiencing' has no given definite unit experiences.

The example also illustrates that, often, the meanings one finds with such great relief are not at all pleasant or good. The problem is not at all resolved. Quite the contrary, now it *really* looks impossible. Now it seems clear why one has been so anxious. It *does* seem hopeless. Yet it is a great and physically experienced tension reduction when the directly felt referent "unfolds" in this way.

The unfolding of a direct referent always involves a surprising and deeply emotional recognition of the good sense of our own (previously so seemingly irksome) feelings. "*Of course,*" we say over and over, "Of course!" Or, we say, "Well, what do you know, that's what that was!"

Because what was previously felt now actually "makes sense," problem resolutions can occur at this stage. For, we may see that *given this or that judgment*, or perception, or event, or situation, "of course" we felt as we did, but we do not now judge it in the same way. However, my example illustrated that even when the solution seems further away than ever, still the physiological tension reduction occurs, and a genuine change takes place. I believe that this change is really more basic than the resolution of specific problems.

A whole vast multiplicity of implicit aspects in the person's functioning and dysfunctioning is always involved. For, when a direct referent of experiencing "opens up," much more change has occurred than the cognitive realization of this or that. This is most dramatically evident when, after the "unfolding," the individual still sees no way out. He says, "At least I know what it is now, but how will I ever change it or deal with it?" Yet, during the following days and in the next therapy hour, it turns out that he is already different, that the quality of the problem has changed and his behavior has been different. And, as for a good explanation of all this resolution . . . "well, it just seems all right now." There is a global change in the whole manner of experiencing in this regard. From this *felt change*, with its lack of logical description, come some of our simple-minded notions: "Just accept it," we tell ourselves and others. We can recall that we have observed individuals, such as I just described, *report* a basic change in such a simplistic way:

"How is everything different?"

"Well, it just seems OK now!"

"Do you still feel that such-and-such might happen and you couldn't deal with it?"

"Yes, but now I kind of feel, well, that's life. That's the way it is, you have to accept things like that."



And that is just what he had said to himself over and over again, *without any effect*, before the process in which he focused on the felt meaning and it unfolded!

Thus, as I have said, only sometimes does *what* is unfolded lead to a solution in an explicable way. More often, deep global feeling change occurs as one unfolds the direct referent, even when it seems to open into something which sounds worse and more hopeless than one had expected. Whether or not some specific resolution is noticeable, the change appears to be broad and global. It is not just this problem resolved, or that trait changed, but a change in many areas and respects. We can say that the broad multiplicity of aspects which are implicit in any felt meaning are all of them changed—thus the global change. Or we can say that meanings are aspects of the experiencing process and that the very *manner of* experiencing changes, hence also the quality of all of its meanings.

As one client put it: "Until now I always saw this problem in black and white terms, and I struggled for a solution that would be gray. But now, this new way isn't black or white, *or* gray. It's in color!" Thus the unfolding of a felt referent does not just inform one about what was involved but, rather, it changes the whole manner in which one experiences.

## **10. GLOBAL APPLICATION (PHASE THREE OF FOCUSING).**

This global way in which the process of direct reference and unfolding affects many aspects of the person is noticeable not only in his later reports of the resulting difference, but also in the moments which immediately follow the unfolding of a felt referent. The individual is flooded by many different associations, memories, situations, and circumstances, all in relation to the felt referent. Although conceptually they can be very different, they share the same felt meaning with which he has been dealing. Except for this they may concern quite different and unrelated matters.<sup>[12]</sup> "Oh, and that's also why I can't get up any enthusiasm for this-and-this." "Yes, and another thing about it is, this comes in every time somebody tells me what to do or think. I can't say, well, what *I* think is more important, because, see, this way of making myself wrong comes in there." "Oh, and also, back when this and this happened, I did the *same* thing."

During this "wide application" period which often follows the unfolding of a felt referent, the individual may sit in silence, only occasionally voicing some of the pieces from this flood.

I realize that some of the foregoing observations have been termed by others as "insight." I believe that is a misnomer. First, the global application is in no way a figuring out, nor is it chiefly a better understanding. Rather, insight and better understanding are the results, the by-products, of this process, as a few of its very many changed aspects call attention to themselves. One can be sure that for every relation or application the individual here explicitly thinks, there are thousands which he does not think of, but which have, nevertheless, just changed. Not his thinking about the difference which the unfolding has made, but the unfolding itself, changes him in all these thousands of respects. The change occurs whether or not he thinks of any such applications, and whether or not he considers the unfolding to be a resolving. For, as I emphasized, he may well walk out saying, "I have no idea what I can do with this, or how I change it." But, it has already changed, and the great multiplicity of respects in which "it" *implicitly functions* have all changed.

## 11. REFERENT MOVEMENT (PHASE FOUR OF FOCUSING).

A definite alteration or movement in the direct referent is felt. This "referent movement" often occurs after the three phases just described. When there has been *direct reference*, dramatic *unfolding* occurs, and when the flood of *global application* subsides, the individual finds that he now refers to a direct referent which feels different. The *implicit* meanings which he can symbolize from this direct reference are now quite different ones. It is a new direct reference: and so the fourphase process begins again.

But focusing is not always such a neatly divisible four-phase process. As noted before, *unfolding* can occur with or without a noticeable flood of *global application*. Unfolding can also occur quite undramatically, in very small steps of successive symbolization. And, even without unfolding, even without any symbolization which feels "correct," the individual's direct reference can *carry forward* the feeling process and is experienced with bodily tension relief. What we are here calling the fourth phase of focusing, the *referent movement*, can occur at any of these times. Usually, direct reference alone does not change or move the direct referent, but does make it stronger, sharper, and more distinctly felt. It increases its intensity as a feeling and diminishes the diffuse tension, discomfort, and anxiety. However, sometimes the mere process of continuous direct reference will change or "move" the direct referent. More often, such a movement occurs after at least some unfolding and symbolizing, and especially after the felt flooding of global application.

The individual distinctly feels a change in the quality of the felt referent. It is not only a change but a directly experienced "give" or "movement" which feels right and welcome. Its tremendous importance lies in the fact that after such a referent movement (even very small), the implicit meanings are now different. The "scenery," as it were, which one confronts, changes.

It is just this referent movement which is usually missing when one talks *at oneself*, when one has recited all the good reasons, considerations, and ways one should feel and would be more sensible to feel, etc. Most often, thereafter, the *same unchanged* felt referent is still there, and the same diffuse anxiety as well. From this lack of referent movement, one knows that nothing has really changed.

Conversely, after referent movement, the meanings and symbolizations one formulates are different. The relevant considerations are different. The whole scene is different. Of course, most often in one such step one does not find "solutions." The individual may say: "Well, that doesn't help me either, because now this helpless feeling, it just seems like the worst crime in the world to be helpless, weak, just let everything happen to you. I can't stand that either. I don't know what is so bad about it, I mean, if actually, in reality, I can't do anything about it anyhow." Here we see that there is no hint of anything like a solution, but the relevant surrounding considerations have now changed. What he looks at and symbolizes is different as the felt referent to which he directly refers is different.

Reference movement gives direction to the focusing process. The individual's attention and symbolizing tends to follow that direction which produces referent movement.

Without reference movement, what is said is "merely" talk, "merely" intellectualization, "merely" hair splitting, or "merely" reporting.

Reference movement is the direct experience that something more than logic and verbalization has occurred. The movement can often be logically analyzed (that is to say, logical relationships can be formulated between what he said earlier and what he says now). However, such logical analysis can be made between any verbalizations, whether or not there has been reference movement. And, often, for a small bit of reference movement the logical or conceptual shift is extremely large. Even a *slight* reference movement can make for what conceptually looks like a totally different vantage point.

Reference movement is a change in the felt meaning which functions in symbolizing.

I hope I have conveyed something of the overlapping character of what I call the four phases of focusing. To summarize them: phase one, *direct reference* to a felt meaning which is conceptually vague but definite as felt; phase two, *unfolding* and the symbolizing of some aspects; phase three, a flooding of *global application*; phase four, *referent movement*, and the process can begin again with phase one.

These four definitions (8-11) define "focusing." [\[13\]](#)

## **12. THE SELF-PROPELLED FEELING PROCESS.**

AS the individual engages in focusing, and as *referent movement* occurs, he finds himself pulled along in a direction he neither chose nor predicted. There is a very strong impelling force exerted by the direct referent just then felt. The individual may "get off the track," "talk about something else," or put up with considerable distracting comments and useless deductions by his listener; and still the given felt, direct referent remains strikingly as the "next thing" with which he must deal.

If the listener's responsiveness makes it possible, the individual finds himself moving from one referent movement and unfolding to another and another. Each time the inward scene changes, new felt meanings are there for him. The cycles of the four phases set into motion an overall feeling process. This feeling process has a very striking, concretely felt, self-propelled quality.

As a psychotherapist I have learned that I must depend on this self-propelled feeling process in the client. This is an important principle, because I have the power to distract him. When I do so (by too many explanations or insights of my own into what he says), then this feeling process does not occur. On the other hand, I have also learned that my questions and self-expressions can be useful, provided I always intend what I say to refer to the individual's felt referent and I show that I would like him to continue to focus on it.

In order to permit the feeling process to arise, we must sometimes remain silent, at least for some brief periods. If either he or I talk all the time, little direct reference can take place. Therefore, when he has stopped talking and I have stopped responding, I am glad if there is a little silence in which he can feel the meaning of what we have been saying. I am especially glad if the next thing he then says follows not simply and logically from what we have said, but shows that he has been immersed in something felt. In this way I can notice that a felt referent has provided the transition from what he did say to what he now says. This "descent" into himself, this focusing, and the overall feeling process which arises, give verbalization to the underlying flow of events of personality change. This self-propelled feeling process is the essential motor of personality change.

Once this feeling process has arisen, it continues even between the times the individual engages in the four-phase focusing process I have outlined. Thus, during the several days between two psychotherapy hours, the client may find important thoughts, feelings, memories, and insights "coming" to him. He may find a generalized "stirring," an inward "eventfulness," even without a specific symbolized content. Thus the overall *feeling process* comes to be self-propelled and broader than just the four phases of focusing I have described.

### **The Role of the Personal Relationship-How Another Person's Responses Affect the Individual's Experiencing, and How Personality "Contents" Are Inherently Changeable Thereby**

We tend to be so concerned with content (symbolized meanings) that we sometimes discuss psychological questions as if personality were nothing but contents. We forget the obvious differences which exist not only in *what* an individual's experience is at a given moment, but also in *how* he experiences. Thus we ask a question such as this: What difference does the personal relationship make, since the individual can think and feel the same contents when he is alone as he can when he talks to another person?

Often a psychotherapist (or any listener who wants to be helpful) will feel that he must "do something," "add something," bring in some new content or insight, so that he will be helpful and make a difference.

Yet, there is already all the difference between *how* one thinks and feels *alone* and *how* one thinks and feels *with another person*. The conceptual content may (for a time) be the same as the individual can think and feel by himself; but, the *manner* of experiencing will be totally different. Consider, for example, the type of listener who interrupts with his own concerns and is inclined to be annoyed and critical long before he understands what is said. With him, my manner of experiencing will be quite constricted. I will think of less and feel less than I do when I am alone. I will tend to say what I must in round, general, swiftly finished terms. I *will not* tend to feel deeply, or intensely, or richly. Certain things will never occur to me when I am with him or, if they do occur to me, I will save them for the time when I am alone, and can feel them through without the constricting effects of his responses. We all know this difference between the manner of our experiencing with certain persons as compared with when we are alone.

Similarly, there are others (we are fortunate to know one) with whom we feel more intensely and freely whatever we feel, we think of more things, we have the patience and the ability to go more deeply into the details, we bear better our own inward strain when we are speaking to this person. If we are sad and dry-eyed alone, then with this person we cry. If we are stopped by our guilt, shame, and anxiety, then with this person we come to life again, inwardly, as being more than these emotions. If we have showered disgust and annoyance on ourselves to the point of becoming silent and deadened inside, then with this person we "come alive" again. As we tell this person some old, familiar, many times repeated story, we find it richer and freshly meaningful, and we may not get all the way through it for the many facets of personal meaning which now unfold.

How shall we theoretically explain these differences in the *manner* in which we experience in different relationships and alone?

### 13. MANNER OF EXPERIENCING.

Whatever the content which we are said to experience, there is also the manner in which we experience. Few terms in our formal psychological language denote differences in *manner of experiencing*. Let us, therefore, define some more terms. (These terms overlap, so that fully explicating one of them would give us the others.)

***Immediacy of Experiencing.*** Immediacy can be contrasted with disassociation or postponement of affect. Descriptive and poetic terms are usually invented by individuals to describe immediacy and its opposites: "I do everything right, but I'm not in it"; or "I am a spectator of my own behavior"; or "What it means to me so occupies me that I don't feel what is going on at all"; "Life is going on all right, but I'm in some back room. I merely hear about it, I'm not living it."

***Presentness.*** Am I reacting to the present situation? Am I feeling a *now*, or is the present situation merely an occasion, a cue for a familiar, repetitious, structured pattern of feeling?

***Richness of Fresh Detail.*** Any moment's experience has a host of fresh details that I experience implicitly, some of which I could symbolize and differentiate. In contrast, the structured feeling pattern consists of only a few emotions and meanings. Sometimes, however, I have none of the richness of the present, only the same old, stale feeling pattern. In such instances psychologists are inclined to notice chiefly the content of the stale pattern. We say: "This is a protesting reaction against authority," or "this is a need to dominate," or a "partial" infantile sex drive such as "voyeurism," or "exhibitionism," or a "passive-aggressive need." We tend to neglect the fact that such feeling patterns are also different in *manner* from an immediate, present, and richly detailed experiencing. It is not only that I react poorly to authority. Rather, I react this way to *every* person whom I perceive as an authority. And, more important, I react *only* to his being an authority, not to him as a person, and to the very many present facets of him and our situation which are different from any other situation. The "authority pattern," or any similar pattern, is really only a bare outline. My experiencing is *structure-bound* in manner, when I experience only this bare outline and feel only this bare set of emotions, lacking the myriad of fresh detail of the present. I might resent my boss's behaviors even if my manner of experiencing were optimal. Too much time and attention is wasted in deciding whether my reaction to him is to be blamed on me or on him. It does not matter. What does matter is the *manner* of my experiencing. No matter how obnoxious he may really be, if my experiencing is structure bound, I do not even experience *his* obnoxiousness except as mere cues for the experience of my old bare structure.

***Frozen Wholes.*** We often speak of contents or "experiences" as if they were set, shaped units with their own set structure. But this is the case only to the extent that my experiencing is structure bound in its manner. For example, when I listen as you tell me something of your feelings I may occasionally think of my own experiences. I need the feelings and meanings of my own experiences in order to understand yours. However, if I must keep thinking of my experiences explicitly as such, then I cannot grasp the meanings yours have to you. I will then insist that your experiences are the same as mine (or, if I am

wise, I will know that I am not understanding you). Unless *my* experiences *implicitly function* so that I can newly understand you, I cannot really understand *you* at all. Insofar as my experiencing is structure bound, it does not implicitly function. It is not "seamlessly" felt by me with its thousands of implicit aspects functioning so that I arrive at some fresh meaning, something you are trying to convey to me. Rather, in this regard, my experience is a "frozen whole" and will not give up its structure. Whatever requires the implicit function of experiencing in these regards makes me feel my whole frozen structure and nothing new.

***Repetitive versus Modifiable.*** Since within the bare structured *frozen whole* experiencing does not function in interaction with present detail, the structure is not *modified* by the present. Hence, it remains the same, it repeats itself in many situations without ever changing. So long as the manner of experiencing remains structure bound, the structures themselves are not *modifiable* by present occurrences.

***Optimal Implicit Functioning.*** It is clear from the above that, to the extent the manner of experiencing is structure bound, the implicit functioning of experiencing cannot occur. Instead of the many, many implicit meanings of experiencing which must interact with present detail to interpret and react, the individual has a structured feeling pattern.

These terms define *manner of experiencing*.

#### **14. IN PROCESS VERSUS STRUCTURE BOUND.**

Experiencing is always in process and always functions implicitly. The respects in which it is *structure bound* are not experiencing. The conceptual content *in an abstract way* can *appear* to be the same with different manners of experiencing. However, in the structure-bound manner the experiencing process is, in given respects, missing. By "missing" we mean that from an external viewpoint we may notice that the implicit functioning of experiencing ought to be there, but there is only the process-skipping structure, *and the experiencing surrounding it and leading up to it*. Thus we say that *structure-bound* aspects are not *in process*.

#### **15. RECONSTITUTING.**

Earlier we said that symbols, or events can *carry forward* the process of experiencing. Experiencing is essentially an *interaction* between feeling and "symbols" (attention, words, events), just as body life is an *interaction* between body and environment. In its basic nature, the physical life process is interaction. It requires not only the body's respiratory machinery but also oxygen. And the body's respiratory machinery itself consists of cells which again are chemical processes involving oxygen and particles. If we apply this conceptual model of interaction process to experiencing, we can consider it an *interaction of feeling* and events ("events" here includes verbal noises, others' behaviors, external occurrences--anything that can interact with feeling).

If we formulate the theory of experiencing in this way, we can formulate why the other person's responses so basically affect the individual's manner of experiencing.[\[14\]](#) For, *if there is a response, there will be an ongoing interaction process*. Certain aspects of the personality will be *in process*. However, without the response, there will not (in these respects) be a process at all.

Subjectively, phenomenologically, people describe this as "coming alive inside," or as "feeling many more facets" of oneself. *Responses* can *reconstitute* the experiencing process in respects in which, before the response, there was no process (no interaction between feeling and something else and hence no *ongoing* interaction process).

The peculiar condition of "experience" which is not *in process* has puzzled psychology for many years. It has been called "unconscious," [15] "repressed," "covert," "inhibited," "denied," etc. The fact is that we observe individuals awarely and actively feeling (in ways which were missing before) when they are responded to in certain ways. The individual feels that the feelings "have always been there in some sense, but were not felt." Psychology cannot deny this common observation. One way of formulating it is as the *reconstituting* of the experiencing process.

## 16. CONTENTS ARE PROCESS ASPECTS.

What is a "content" of experience (or "*an* experience," when that is meant to refer to a given content)? We noted (definitions 3 and 5) that the felt implicit meanings of experiencing can be put into interaction with verbal symbols. We then say that the symbols "mean" or "represent" what the experience is "of" or, more simply, that the symbols symbolize the experience. Such a *symbolized unit is a content*. [16]

Thus, in order for there to be a content, some aspect of *implicit function* (see definition 4) must be ongoing in interaction with symbols.

But what if there are not, as yet, any *verbal* symbols? Is there then no ongoing experiencing either? The answer is that verbal symbols are not the only events with which feelings can be in an interaction process. External occurrences, other people's responses, even our own attention, can interact with feeling so as to constitute a process.

Therefore, it is often the case that there is an ongoing experiencing process without verbal symbols. In fact, most situations and behaviors involve feeling in interaction with nonverbal events. Experiencing *functions implicitly* with countless meanings which, as felt (without verbal symbolization), are aspects of the ongoing interaction.

The respects in which experiencing is ongoing are also those in which we *can* verbally symbolize contents. The respects in which it is not ongoing (no matter how it may appear externally) cannot be verbally symbolized. Only pale, useless, general meaning can be given to concepts of the supposed contents which are not at this instant process aspects. Contents are aspects of ongoing felt process. That is to say, contents are *process aspects*.

## 17. THE LAW OF RECONSTITUTION OF THE EXPERIENCING PROCESS.

An individual can symbolize only those aspects which are *already* implicitly functioning in ongoing experiencing.

In any experiencing (that is to say, in any ongoing interaction of feeling and events) a great many implicit meanings are process aspects (so-called "contents"). Thus, for any moment's ongoing experiencing one can symbolize a great many contents. These are *incomplete* (definition 5) until some symbols (or events) *carry forward* the process in these respects.

Thus there are two different definitions: to *carry forward*, and to *reconstitute*. To "carry forward" means that symbols (or events) occur to interact with *already* implicitly functioning aspects of ongoing experiencing. To "reconstitute" means that the process has become ongoing and implicitly functions in respects in which it previously was not ongoing.

We can now state a *law of the reconstitution of experiencing process*: When certain *implicitly functioning* aspects of experiencing are *carried forward* by symbols or events, the resulting experiencing always involves *other* sometimes newly *reconstituted* aspects which thereby come to be *in process* and *function implicitly* in that experiencing.

## 18. HIERARCHY OF PROCESS ASPECTS.

If contents are viewed as process aspects -- that is to say, as implicitly functioning aspects of ongoing experiencing -- then *the law of reconstitution* implies that *certain* contents (process aspects) must be symbolized before certain *other contents* (process aspects) can thereby become process aspects. that are capable of being symbolized.

This fact gives the individual's self-exploration an ordered or hierarchical character. It is as if he can "get to" certain things-only via certain other things. We must let him travel his "own road," not because we believe in democracy, and not because we like self-reliance, but because *only* when the experiencing process has been reconstituted, so that certain aspects become implicit in it, can he symbolize these.

## 19. SELF-PROCESS.

To the extent that experiencing does *implicitly function*, the individual may respond to himself and may *carry forward* his own experiencing. This interaction of the individual's feelings with his own (symbolic or actual) behavior,<sup>[17]</sup> we term "self." A more exact term: *self-process*.

To the extent that experiencing does not implicitly function, the individual cannot respond to himself and carry forward his experiencing. In what ever respects it does not function (is structure bound), responses are needed first to *reconstitute* the interaction process of experiencing in these respects.

Why is it that the individual himself does not *carry forward* his already *implicitly functioning* experiencing in ways which would newly reconstitute *structure-bound* aspects of it? Of course, he cannot respond to the structure-bound aspects, as such (they are not implicitly functioning), but neither can the psychotherapist. The psychotherapeutic response can be defined as one which responds to aspects of experiencing which *are* implicitly functioning, but to which the individual himself tends not to respond. More precisely, his own response is a whole frozen structure which does not carry forward the felt experiencing process in these respects.

## 20. THE RECONSTITUTING RESPONSE IS IMPLICITLY INDICATED.

The response which *will reconstitute* the experiencing process (in some now *structure-bound* respect) is already implied<sup>[18]</sup> in the individual's experiencing. One must respond to



*the functioning experiencing, not to the structure.* In practice this means that one must take at face value and give a personal response to the *functioning* aspect of the person. No one is greatly changed by responses and analyses of how he does not function (though we are often tempted in this direction). We see that the individual's work behavior actually defeats his desire to work, that his sexual behavior turns away opportunities for genuine sexuality, that his desire to please makes him annoy people, that his way of reaching out to people actually turns people away, that his self-expression is dramatized and hollow. Yet these structures are his responses *to his actually functioning* desire to work, his actually functioning sexuality, his actually functioning desire to relate to people and be close to them, and his actual self-expressive urge. Only if we respond to these actually functioning aspects of his experiencing (despite the obviously opposite character of his behavior and symbolic self-responding) can we carry forward what is now actual and reconstitute the process where he himself had (symbolically and actually) responded only with structure.

## 21. PRIMACY OF PROCESS.

We tend to neglect the fact that contents are process aspects. We pay the most attention to contents as symbolized meanings with specific logical implications (which they also are). Hence we often discuss self-exploration as if it were purely a logical inquiry in search of conceptual answers. However, in psychotherapy (and in one's private self-exploration as well) the logical contents and insights are secondary. Process has primacy. We must attend and symbolize in order to carry forward the process and thereby reconstitute it in certain new aspects. *Only then*, as new contents come to function implicitly in feeling, can we symbolize them.

In definition 9 we noted that "unfolding" can occur as a felt "now I've got it," quite without symbolization. This is a direct experience of *reconstituting*. The process is felt as ongoing in newly reconstituted respects. Reconstituting occurs when one symbolizes meanings which, in the previous moments, have already been implicit. The carrying forward of these implicit meanings turns out to involve the wider process which reconstitutes the new aspects.

In psychotherapy, therefore, the situation is not that first we figure out what is wrong with an individual and how he must change-and then, somehow, he does it. Rather, his experiencing with us is *already* vitally different with us than it previously could be. From this different experiencing arise the solutions of his problems. The changes are already occurring as he speaks. *Our* responses (as verbal symbols *and as events*) interact and carry forward *his* experiencing. Our gestures and attitude, the very fact that he is talking to us, the differences which each moment he makes to us-all of this interacts concretely with what implicitly functions in him, his felt experiencing. Conceptually it may look like a futile statement and restatement of problems. Or, conceptually, we may arrive at *the* most basic causes and factors-the ways in which an individual ought to change, the reasons and lacks which prevent him from so changing-but no genuine *solution* is *conceptually* arrived at. The conceptual search ends by shrugging and attaching some blameful label to the individual who, through bad will or constitution, is said to lack these or those basic essentials. Yet, *given certain interpersonal responses, he is already different.*

By *primacy of process* over conceptual content, we mean this fact: [19] The presently ongoing experiencing process must be *carried forward* concretely. Thereby it is in many

respects reconstituted, made more immediate in its manner of experiencing, more full of differentiable detail. Thereby new process aspects (contents), "solutions," and personality changes arise. Most often these solutions seem terribly Simple,[\[20\]](#) conceptually (see definition 9), and cannot possibly be the reason for the change. Rather, they are rough conceptualizations of a few aspects of a broadly different process.

## 22. PROCESS UNITY.

There is a *single* process which involves all of the following: environmental interaction, body life, feeling, cognitive meanings, interpersonal relations, and self. The concretely occurring process is one, although we can isolate and emphasize these various aspects of it. Our "thing Language" tends to present whatever we discuss as if it were a separable object in space. In this way we artificially separate environment, body, feeling, meanings, other people, and self.[\[21\]](#) When they are discussed as separable things, their obvious interrelations become puzzling: How can *feelings* be involved in (psychosomatic) body illnesses? How can *cognitive* thought be influenced by *felt* needs? How is it that expressing ourselves *interpersonally* results in changes in the *self*? At every juncture the "separate thing" view of these phenomena builds these puzzles into our discussions. Instead we can employ a frame of reference which considers the *one* process which concretely occurs. I want to give the name *process unity* to the way in which the one concrete process is basic to these various aspects.

We have tried to show that *feeling* is a bodily affair, an aspect of physiological process. We have shown that *cognitive meanings* consist not only of verbal or pictorial symbols, but also of a *felt* sense which is implicitly meaningful and must function in interaction with symbols. *Interpersonal responses* (like other types of events) can interact with *feeling* and carry forward the concrete process. Now we will try to show that the *self* (the individual's own responses to his implicitly functioning experiencing) is also an aspect of the one concretely felt process, continuous with body, feeling, meanings, and interpersonal relations.

## 23. THE SELF PROCESS AND ITS INTERPERSONAL CONTINUITY.

Throughout this discussion we have been dealing with one concretely occurring interaction process between *feeling* and *events*. Interpersonal events occur before there is a self. Others respond to us before we come to respond to ourselves. If these responses were not in interaction with feeling—if there were nothing but other people's responses as such—the self could become nothing but the learned responses of others. But interpersonal responses are not merely external events. They are events *in interaction with the individual's feeling*. The individual then develops a capacity *to respond* to his feeling. The self is not merely a learned repertoire of responses, but a response process *to feeling*.

If feeling did not have implicit meaning, then all meaning would depend totally on the events or responses which occur. Again then, the self could never become anything but the repetition of the responses of others. The individual would always have to interpret himself and shape his personal meanings just as others had interpreted him.

But feeling has implicit meanings. Therefore, to the extent that a feeling process is ongoing, we can *further* respond to it differently than others have. However, to the extent to which

we respond to our own feeling so as to skip or stop the process rather than carry it forward, to that extent we need others to help us be ourselves. Not only the genesis, but the adult development of the self also may require interpersonal responses. Such responses are required not because of their appraisal or content, but because we need them concretely to reconstitute the feeling process. If in certain respects the process is not ongoing when we are alone, it does not help to recite to ourselves some content or happy appraisal which we may remember from a person with whom we felt "more ourselves"; that person's effect on us was brought about not by his appraisal or evaluation, which we can recite to ourselves. Rather, the effect occurred through his responses to our concrete feeling process and, in some respects, reconstituted it and carried it forward. If we can do *that* alone, we are independent selves in that respect.

Thus, personality change in us is not a result of our perceiving another's positive appraisals of us or attitudes toward us. It is true that rejecting attitudes toward us are unlikely to carry forward our implicit meanings. However, that is not because of the negative appraisal as such, but because rejection usually ignores the implicit meanings of my feeling. To reject is to turn away or push away. In contrast, someone's "unconditional positive regard" toward us is not only an appraisal or attitude. They respond and carry forward the concretely ongoing process with their responses.

We must, therefore, reformulate Rogers' (1959b) view that personality change depends on the client's *perception* of the therapist's attitudes. The present theory implies that the client may perceive the therapist's attitudes correctly, or he may not. He may be convinced that the therapist must dislike him and cannot possibly understand him. Not these *perceptions*, but the *manner of process which is actually occurring*, will determine whether personality change results. In many cases, the client can perceive positive therapist attitudes only after the concrete personality change process has already occurred.

The change-effective factor is not the perception of a content, an appraisal, an evaluation, or an attitude, considered apart from the concrete process.

Personality change is the difference made by *your* responses in *carrying forward my* concrete experiencing. To be myself I need your responses, to the extent to which my own responses fail to *carry my feelings forward*. At first, in these respects, I am "really myself" *only when I am with you*.

For a time, the individual can have this fuller *self-process* only in just this *relationship*.<sup>[22]</sup> That is not "dependence." It should not lead one to back away, but to fuller and deeper responses carrying forward the experiencing, which, for the time being, the individual says he can feel "only here." The continued *carrying forward* into *ongoing interaction process* is necessary to *reconstitute* the experiencing long enough for the individual himself to obtain the ability to carry it forward as *self-process*.

## Repression and Content Definitions Reformulated

### 24. THE UNCONSCIOUS AS INCOMPLETE PROCESS.

When "ego" or "self-system" are said to "exclude" some experiences from awareness, usually it is assumed that these experiences nevertheless exist "in the unconscious" or "in the organism." Our discussion, however, leads us to the conclusion that they do not. *Something* exists, to be sure, but it is not the experiences as they would be if they were optimally ongoing. Rather, what exists is a felt and physiological condition which results when, in some regards, the body interaction process *is* stopped - i.e., is not occurring. What kind of condition is that?

We have shown how the resulting dysfunction will be such that something *is* "missing," but we should not place what is missing into the unconscious (any more than we should place *eating* into the unconscious when someone is *hungry*). Rather, the unconscious consists of the body's stopped processes, the muscular and visceral blockage--just as a stopped electric current does not consist of a current that is going on under cover, but rather of certain electric potentials which build up in various parts (not only at the interruption) of the circuit. When a conductor re-establishes the electric current, different events occur than were occurring in its interrupted condition--yet, of course, the two are related. We say that this is the electrical energy which existed (in static form) before the current was reconstituted. This is "the unconscious."

When we say that certain experiences, perceptions, motives, feelings, etc. are "missing" from our awareness, it is not that *they* exist "below" awareness (somewhere under there in the body or in an unconscious). Rather there is a narrowed, or in some respects blocked, interaction and experiencing. The manner of experiencing which we have described is one in which, in a good many regards, the experiencing and body life process is *not* "completed" or fully ongoing.

Does this mean that there is no "unconscious"? Only what we are aware of exists? To put the matter in that too simple way ignores important observations. The present theory must be able to account for these observations.[\[23\]](#) Therefore, we are basically reformulating the theory of the unconscious rather than in any simple way throwing it out. The unconscious is redefined as *incomplete process*.

Since there is no sharp distinction between *carrying forward* what is implicitly felt, and *reconstituting* experiencing in previously stopped respects (the former will involve the latter),[\[24\]](#) the felt datum which *is* there, in a sense, contains everything. In what sense does it? In the sense that, *given fully carrying forward responses* to it, everything will be here as aspects of ongoing process.

Therefore, in practice the rule is: "Never mind what is not being felt. Respond to what is being felt."

## **25. EXTREME STRUCTURE-BOUND MANNER OF EXPERIENCING (PSYCHOSES, DREAMS, HYPNOSIS, CO<sub>2</sub>, LSD, STIMULUS DEPRIVATION).**

Throughout, we have been discussing the *felt, implicit functioning* of the interaction process we term "experiencing." We have been pointing out that all appropriate behavior and interpretations of present situations depend on this *felt* functioning. It constitutes the thousands of meanings and past experiences which determine appropriate present behavior. In addition, it is this felt functioning to which we can respond ourselves, and this is the *self-process*. The functioning I am discussing is *felt*, meaning that we can refer to it ourselves. For example, as we read this page the words are sound images for us. These sound images are all we explicitly have in mind. However, we also have the *meanings* of the sound images. How? We do not *say* to ourselves what it all means. We *feel* the meanings of what we read as we go along. They function implicitly. This feeling process is an interaction between the symbols on the page and our feeling. This felt interaction process is now ongoing and gives us appropriate feelings and meanings.

When the *interaction process* is greatly curtailed (as in sleep, hypnosis, psychosis, and isolation experiments), the inwardly felt experiencing is thereby curtailed. The individual then lacks the implicit function of felt experiencing and loses both his sense of "self" and his capacity to respond to and interpret present events appropriately. Both require the felt process just illustrated.

The peculiar phenomena which occur under these circumstances are somewhat more understandable when they are considered in terms of curtailment or stoppage of the *interaction process* and *implicit function of felt* experiencing.

I would like now to state some of the characteristics of this (hallucinatory or dreamlike) *extreme structure-bound manner of experiencing*.

***Structures Are Perceived as Such.*** Ordinarily, past experiences and learnings function implicitly in felt experiencing, so that we interpret and perceive the present, not the past experiences themselves. Yet under hypnosis, in dreams, and in hallucinations, we may perceive rigid structures and past events as such. Characteristically, we do not then have the relevant aspects of felt process which usually function. Thus hallucinations and dreams are not understandable to the present individual. He is puzzled or aghast at them. They often seem to him "not his." The felt experiencing that would give him a sense of their being "his," and would let him know their meaning, is not ongoing. Dreams and hallucinations are, so to speak, decomposed pieces of what would otherwise be a functioning, felt process. This interaction process with the present is not ongoing, and hence the felt meanings are not functioning.

Let me now trace through these several different kinds of circumstances how in each the interaction process is first curtailed, and how in each the function of felt experiencing is then missing.

***Extreme Structure-Bound Manner Occurs Whenever the Interaction Process is Greatly Curtailed.*** Dreams, hypnosis, psychosis, CO<sub>2</sub> and LSD, and stimulus deprivation share at least one factor, the curtailment of ongoing interaction.

In sleep there is a great reduction of external stimuli. Dreams occur with this curtailment of the usually ongoing interaction process with the environment.

In hypnosis, too, the subject must shut off his interaction with present stimuli, and must cease his own self-responsiveness. He must concentrate on a point.

Psychosis, as has often been remarked (for example, Shlien, 1960), involves both in its genesis and later, an "isolation," a curtailment of interaction between feeling and events. Also, physical isolation from people can, in some individuals, bring on hallucinations.

Certain poisons (CO<sub>2</sub>, LSD) are inimical to the physiological interaction process of body life. CO<sub>2</sub> narrows (and eventually stops) the process of respiration.

Experiments in which individuals are placed in soundproof and lightproof suits that also prevent touch stimuli result (after a few hours) in psychotic-like hallucinations.

The peculiarly similar experiences which arise under these widely different conditions hint at something similar. At least one factor they all share is the curtailment of the ongoing interaction process which, as felt, is experiencing. We would thus expect a lack of the implicit functioning which ongoing experiencing usually provides.

And indeed this is shared by the phenomena which occur in all these circumstances. The peculiar character of these phenomena is understandable as a rigidity or lack of this *felt functioning* which usually interprets every present situation for us, and to which we respond in *self-process*. Thus appropriate interpreting of situations and sense of self are lost.

***Lack of Implicit Function.*** The implicit function (see definition 4) of felt experiencing becomes rigid (not *in process*) or "literal" in all these conditions. In hypnosis, for example, when the individual is told to "raise your hand," he will lift the palm of his hand up by his wrist. He will not, as when awake, interpret the idiomatic phrase appropriately (it means, of course, to raise one's whole arm up into the air). The same "literal" quality occurs in dreams and in psychosis. Much of what has been called "primary process," "schizophrenic thinking," or the schizophrenic's inability to "abstract" his "concrete" thinking, his "taking the part for the whole" (Goldstein, 1954), really consists of this *literal* and rigid manner in which experiencing functions. As in dreams and hypnosis, the *felt* process of experiencing is curtailed and does not provide its implicit functioning.

The many implicit *felt* meanings that are needed for appropriate interpretations and reactions do not function, since the *felt* process (of which they are process aspects) is not ongoing. That is exactly what "literal" means: the lack of functioning of *other* meanings which should inform our interpretation of a given set of words or events.

***"Loss of Self."*** Another characteristic shared by dreams, hypnosis, psychosis, and the phenomena obtained in stimulus-deprivation and LSD, is the loss of a sense of self. In dreams what we perceive is beyond the control, interpretation, ownership, of the self (or ego). In hypnosis the individual specifically accepts another's suggestions for his own and totally permits them to replace his own self-responding. And in psychosis so often the patient complains: "I didn't do that. Something made me do it"; or "I'm not myself"; or "These voices are not mine"; or, "Inside me I'm nothing at all." The hallucinations, voices, and things in his head are not *felt* to be his own. He lacks the sense of self. If he does have a

sense of self (an "intact ego"), this felt sense does not inform the hallucinatory phenomena. In regard to these, he has no sense of self that implicitly contains their meaning.

This loss of self is due to the missing felt functioning of experiencing. Just as outward events (to the extent of psychosis) are not interpreted and interacted with on the basis of felt experiencing, so also this felt experiencing is missing for self-responses.

We have defined the self as *self-process*. The self exists to the extent that the individual can carry his felt process forward by means of his own symbols, behaviors, or attention. Experiments with stimulus deprivation have found that individuals who develop psychosis more slowly have a greater capacity to respond to themselves (the most "imagination" and "creativity;" it was called). The finding would corroborate our views since, to the extent the individual can carry forward his own experiencing, he will be maintaining (by symbols and attention) his interaction process. When the interaction process is greatly narrowed, not only do psychotic-like experiences occur, but the sense of "self" is lost. The felt process to which there can be self-response becomes static and the individual has *unowned* perceptions.

***Static, Repetitious, Unmodifiable Manner.*** Insofar as the implicit function of felt experiencing is rigid, there is no way for present situations to interact with it, and to modify it so that it becomes an interpretation of the present situation. Instead we perceive a repetitious pattern that is not modified by the present situation. The sequence may "go off" as a result of being "cued" by present events, but it is not an interpretation of, or response to, present events.

***The Universality of Psychotic "Contents."*** Experiences in the extreme structure-bound manner are not *process aspects*. They occur precisely to the extent that the felt process is not ongoing. It is striking how certain themes universally recur—usually the familiar "oral, anal, and genital" themes. It seems that this is the stuff of which we are all composed . . . and into which the usually ongoing process decomposes, insofar as it is not ongoing.

***Psychotic Experiences Are Not "the Repressed."*** It is fallacious to consider these structure-bound manifestations as repressed experiences which have now "emerged" or "erupted." To so consider them raises the puzzling question: On the one hand many theories hold that adjustment requires awareness, and that repression makes maladjustment, but on the other hand they hold that the psychotic is "too aware" and needs to "rerepress" all these experiences.

A better formulation, I think, would be to interpret this observation as follows: Optimally these universal past experiences function implicitly in felt experiencing. When that ongoing process ceases, decomposed static patterns occupy the center of the sensorium.

The implications of this reformulation can be seen, for example, in the following. "The psychosis," in this view, is *not* these supposedly underlying contents (in that sense everyone is "psychotic"). Rather, *"the psychosis" is the curtailment or cessation of the interaction process of feeling and events*. When, therefore, we label an individual "borderline psychotic," this does *not* mean that certain dangerous *contents* lie down there in him. Rather, he is "isolated," "uninvolved," "not quite there," "withdrawn," or "out of touch with himself"; i.e., his *manner* of experiencing is highly structure bound. To prevent "the psychosis" from occurring, one must respond as much as possible to such feelings as do

implicitly function, so as to carry forward and reconstitute ongoing interaction and experiencing.

The view of "*latent psychotic contents*" leads to two dangerous errors: either one decides that the individual's feelings of difficulty and trouble had better be ignored (lest they "blossom into" full psychosis), or one "interprets" them and "digs" them "out." Either decision denies and pushes away the personal interaction and the individual's *implicitly functioning* feelings. Either decision will result in psychosis-they involve the same selfverifying misconception that "contents" are psychotic.

There is nothing "psychotic" about any "underlying contents." What is psychotic is the structure-bound manner of experiencing, the absence or literal rigidity of felt experiencing and interaction.

Whether "borderline" or seemingly "gone," the person will "come alive" if interaction and experiencing [25] is reconstituted by personal responses which carry forward what does still function .[26]

## 26. CONTENT MUTATION.

As *implicitly functioning* felt meanings are *carried forward* and the process is *reconstituted* and made more immediate in *manner*, there is a constant change in "content." As *referent movement* occurs, both symbolization and direct referent change. There is a sequence of successive "contents." Sometimes these successive contents are said to "emerge" as if they had always been there, or as if the final basic content is now finally revealed. But I prefer to call this *content mutation*. It is not a change only in how one interprets but, rather a change both in feeling and in symbols. The contents change because the process is being newly completed and reconstituted by responses. What the contents will be depends greatly on the responses.

An example of *content mutation* has already been given (definitions 8-9). Here are more examples of content mutation:

The client is in terror. She says there will be "doom." The world will fly to pieces. Something awful will happen. There is a monster.

Here is "the psychosis" someone might say. At any rate, a common enough psychotic *content*.

She is awfully afraid, she says. I respond that she is afraid and that I want to keep company and be with her, since she is afraid. She repeats that she is afraid. No matter how much or little meaningful symbology there is to the "doom," she is *afraid now*.

Minutes or months later she can say:

"I'm afraid of being lost. I'm lost. I'm *so* lost!"

"For years I have had to know exactly what to do every moment. I'd plan to know exactly what to do so I'd be distracted. It's like blinders. I'd be afraid to look up, sort of. I need someone or something to hold on to, or I'll disappear."



This is more understandable than world doom. The *content* seems now to be "objectless" or "passive-dependent needs." Whatever it is, the response needed must provide contact: I grasp her hand; or I talk gently, saying something, pertinent or not-something from me to maintain contact and not to talk away the fear of being lost. In terms of *process unity* such talking and such touching are really the same, in that they both *reestablish interaction*. To do so it must be personal and it must convert the *need* to "hold on" into a successfully *ongoing* contact, real or symbolic.

"I need to hold on, but I'm a monster. No one can love me. You must be sick of me. I need so much, all I do is need.: I'm just selfish and evil. I'll suck you dry if I can. I'm just a horrible mouth."

Oral needs, oral incorporation, are now the contents that might be proposed.

But her need *does feel* endless, infinite, hungry. "Sure," I say, "It feels endless, bottomless, and awful to you. It's like you want to be fed and held forever."

Then, or some other time, she may say: "I'm just a baby. I hate that child. An ugly child. I *was* an ugly child. Nobody could like me the way I am."

But we have come a long way when the monster is now a child! A child is quite a nice thing. What became of the monster? A child is quite a human, every day, daylight thing. What became of the terror? *The psychosis?*

Such *content mutation* can occur within a few minutes or over months. It may occur in such words and symbols as above or in purely socially acceptable language, or with bizarre incoherent words, or in silence. The point I am trying to make is that *the content changes as one responds* and thereby carries forward and reconstitutes an interaction process. Such interaction constitutes felt experiencing, and contents are always aspects thereof. As the process changes, the contents change. I term it *content mutation*.

Content mutation occurs strikingly with so-called "psychotic contents." The monsters, weird fears, infinite hungers, and doom-expectant terrors are so often aspects of isolation, loss of self and interaction. They are not psychotic "things" in a person, but a narrowed or stopped interaction process. As the interaction process is restored the contents change and, also, they become more understandable and commonly human.

But *content mutation* occurs not only with quite dramatic expressions, such as in the above example. It occurs equally with the often silent, unexpressive, and "unmotivated" individuals with whom we have so largely been working in the current research on psychotherapy with schizophrenics (Rogers et al., 1961; Gendlin, 1961*b*, 1962*a*, 1962*c*), although these individuals often conceptualize so little of what they are feeling. The following is a further example of *content mutation*:

An individual talks about a chain of circumstances which disturb him. Numerous patterns, characteristics, and personality "contents," seem noticeable in his report of these circumstances.

Perhaps with the aid of responses, he goes on to find that this chain of circumstances really makes him *very angry*. That's it! He is furious. He wishes he could harm and destroy the

people involved. He is afraid he will attack them when he next sees them. He hopes he will be able to control this destructive desire. He is amazed at his own *hostility* and his own fear of it. He hardly needs further to report the circumstances, so deeply true is his experience of this anger and destructive need. Again, now, 'we are tempted to consider personality "contents." Our first deductions now seem too broad. Here, really, we have some contents of this man's personality. We are familiar with this fear of one's own hostility and what some of the bases of the hostility probably are.

But let us say the man continues (and I continue to respond to his *felt meanings*). He imagines himself attempting to vent his anger at these people. He finds now that he is not afraid he will uncontrollably attack and harm them. It is more likely (of all things!) that he will not be able even to yell at them, because perhaps he will cry. His voice would choke up, he is sure. In fact, it is somewhat choked up right now. This thing is not really hostility, it now appears. It is rather that he feels *so hurt!* They should not have done this to him! They hurt him, and . . . what can he do? And now he feels, with some relief, that he finally is in touch with what all this really means to him. (We may now propose a third group of personality contents, again different.)

But, as he continues, it turns out that the circumstances as such do not really matter. No wonder! It seemed all along quite a petty thing to be so upset about. The content is really something else and that is what hurts. And he finds now it is not a hurt after all. Rather, it brought home to him that he feels weak and helpless. "I'm not really hurt" (he now finds), "it's more that it points up to me how I can't make it in the world" (passivity, castration, we may now say).

The term "content mutation" can be applied to this sequential shifting of what seems to be the "content." Contents are process aspects of ongoing feeling process. They can be symbolized because they function implicitly in that feeling process. As it is carried forward, there is referent movement and change in what can be symbolized. It is not merely a shifting of interpretation. There is *referent movement--that is to say, that which is being symbolized is changing.*

*Content mutation* does not imply that all our concepts are simply map, plicable. Often they are correct in terms of predicting the individual's other behaviors, and often they enable us to guess or be sensitively ready for a next content mutation. However, the concepts of personality contents are static and much too general [27] and empty. They are never a substitute for *direct reference, referent movement, and content mutation.*

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1. This tendency to view ongoing change in terms of the static contents it reveals can be seen also in the very many research projects which have employed psychotherapy and hospital situations to study diagnostic and classificatory aspects of people as compared with the very few researches which have employed these treatment settings to study change. Our psychometric instruments do not as yet have standardized or even defined indices of personality change, having been used so rarely before and after psychotherapy. This is another example of the way we tend to think most about the change-resistant contents of personality, even in treatment situations.

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2. "Paradigm," or model, refers to the *theoretical* models used in these theories, regard less of whether they use the words "repression" and "content" or not.

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3. The repression paradigm in its most oversimplified form can be noticed in use when person A insists that person B has some content he cannot be aware of, because it is "unconscious." B's own experiences and feelings are, by definition, undercut and "thrown out of court." No way to the supposed content exists which B can use.

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4. S. Freud, 1914 (p. 375), 1920 (pp. 16-19), 1930 (p. 105). H. S. Sullivan, 1940 (pp. 20-21, 205-207), 1953 (pp. 42, 160-163). C. R. Rogers, 1957, 1958, 1959*a* and *b*, 1960, 1961*a* and *b*, 1962.

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5. Throughout, the new concepts and words defined here are intended to lead to new and more effective operational variables. Where research is cited, the theory has already led to some operational variables. One must distinguish *theoretical concepts* from *operational variables*. For example, above, "feeling process" is a theoretical concept. The operational variables (and there will be many specific ones) which a theoretical concept aids us to isolate and define are indices of behavior and exactly repeatable procedures whereby these can be reliably measured.

When it is held that the difference above between "really" and "merely" is a "subjective" difference, this only means that we have *not yet* defined the observable variables which enable a common-sense observer to predict differential behavioral results.

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6. Rogers discovered how, in practice, the individual can be helped to overcome the repression model.

His discovery is that defensiveness and resistance are obviated when one responds to an individual "within his own internal frame of reference." This phrase means that the psychotherapist's response always refers to something which is directly present in the individual's own momentary awareness.

Rogers at first found that even if the therapist did nothing, more than to rephrase the patient's communication--that is to say, if the therapist clearly showed that he was receiving and exactly understanding the patient's moment-by-moment communications--a very deep and self-propelled change process began and continued in the patient. Something happens

in an individual when he is understood in this way. Some change takes place in what he momentarily confronts. Something releases. He then has something else, further, to say; and if this, again, is received and understood, something still further emerges which ;he individual would not even have thought of (nor was capable of thinking), had not such a sequence of expressions and responses taken place.

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[7.](#) Experiencing is essentially an *interaction* between feeling and "symbols" (attention, words, events), just as body life is an *interaction* between body and environment. In its basic nature, the physical life process is interaction. (This is an application of Sullivan's basic concepts.) For example, the body consists of cells which are interaction processes involving the environment (oxygen and food particles). If we apply this concept of interaction to experiencing, we can view it as an interaction of feeling and events ("events" here includes verbal noises, others' behaviors, external occurrences-anything that can interact with feeling).

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[8.](#) For the full theory of affect and meaning see Gendlin (1962*b*). As will be seen later (definitions 15-18 and 26), the discussion here lays the ground for a view of personality which avoids the "content paradigm"; i.e., the erroneous assumption that psychological events involve conceptually formed static units.

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[9.](#) The word "correctly" here really refers just to this interaction between the felt referent and the symbols which we are describing. The fact that, a few minutes later, the *same* type of interaction with further symbols can again produce a very different, yet now "correct" further conceptualization shows that "correctness" does not imply that a given set of symbols means what the felt referent alone means. Rather, "correctness" refers to the experienced effect which certain s) symbols produce and which is described above, and in definitions 5 and 6.

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[10.](#) Research (Gendlin and Berlin, 1961) employing autonomic correlates has borne out this observation operationally. Individuals were given tape-recorded instructions to engage in various processes. After each instruction there was a period of silence in which to carry it out. It was found that galvanic skin resistance (also skin temperature and heart rate) indicated tension reduction during the period when individuals were instructed to (and reported later that they did) focus inwardly on the felt meanings of a troublesome personal problem. It has continued to be difficult to define and check individuals' performances after this and other instructions. Therefore, this research remains tentative. Nevertheless, several replications have supported the observation that, while threatening topics in general raise tension, direct inward focusing involves tension reduction.

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11. It is extremely important that the listener refers his words to "this" felt datum in the individual and that he shares the sense that the datum itself decides what is correct and what is not. It is much less important whether or not the listener's words turn out to be accurate.

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12. We can always apply logic after the process and formulate the relationships implied, but we can almost never choose correctly ahead of time which of the thousands of possible relations between various problems and topics will function in a concretely felt process as described above.

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13. I must now describe some common sorts of so-called "internal" attention which do not involve direct reference and thus are not *focusing*.

Since the term "experiencing" includes any kind of experience at all, so long as we consider it as inwardly *felt* and apply to it the theoretical formulation of *process*, misunderstandings have arisen concerning the mode of experiencing called the *direct referent*. By this latter, more specific term we do not at all mean just anything at all which can be called inward attention.

Especially since the direct referent is "felt;" it has been confused with emotions. (Emotions are also said to be "felt.") But the direct referent is internally complex and an individual feels "in touch with himself" when he refers to it, while emotions are internally all one quality . . . they are "sheer." They often keep him from sensing that in himself which is the complex ground of the emotion.

This and other distinctions will become clearer in the following list of kinds of occurrences in an individual which are not direct reference and thus are not focusing.

Direct reference is not:

1. *Sheer emotions*. The emotions of guilt, shame, embarrassment, or feeling that I am "bad" are *about* me or this aspect of my experience and its meaning to me. These emotions are not themselves the experience and its meaning to me. The emotions as such are not a direct reference to the felt experiencing. I must, at least momentarily, *get by* these emotions *about it* (or about myself) in order to refer directly to what all this means to me, why and what makes me feel ashamed. For example, I must say to myself: "All right, yes, I *am very* ashamed; but for a minute now, although it makes me feel very ashamed, I want to sense *what* this is in me."

For example: One client spent many sleepless hours each night with anxiety, shame, and resentment. He blamed himself for his reactions to a certain situation. He felt foolish and ashamed of the whole thing. As he tried to resolve it, he alternately felt resentful (he would decide to confront them, fight it out, not back down, etc.), and alternately he felt ashamed

(he was a fool, and humiliatingly so, etc.). Only in the psychotherapy hour did it become possible for him to focus directly on "this," what it was, how it felt, and where it "lived" in him. In "this" he found a good many valid perceptions concerning the other people and the situation which he had not been able to specify before, and a good many personal aspects of himself. During a number of hours he directly referred to successive direct referents and felt meanings. Yet between hours he was unable to do this alone, but felt only shame or resentment. Only by moving temporarily "on by" these emotions could he refer directly to "this," "what I feel," about which, granted, I also have these emotions.

It seems quite striking and universal that we feel guilt, shame, and badness, *instead of* feeling that concerning which we feel shame, guilt, and badness. It is almost as if these emotions themselves preclude our feeling what it is to us—not so much because they are so unpleasant, as because they skip the point at which we might complete, symbolize, respond or attend to that which centrally we feel. I am inclined to hypothesize that guilt, shame, and badness are emotions which occur as responses instead of the response which, by action or symbolizing, we would otherwise give our felt referent. These emotions win to complete but actually "skip" the incomplete implicit meanings. It is like an animal whose response to hunger is to bite itself in the leg. Instead of responding with 1 behavior which in some way "symbolizes" the hunger and carries forward the organismic digestion process, such an animal would be most aware of the pain in its leg and would behave accordingly. At any rate, the preoccupation with these emotions is not to be confused with the felt meaning which, though connected to these emotions, needs the focusing.

One client describes it in terms of a hurricane: "If you only go so far into something, its like going into a hurricane and getting terribly blown around. You have to go into it and then keep going further and further in till you get to the eye of the hurricane. There it's quiet and you can see where you are." This beautifully expresses the fact that the direction of focusing is definitely into the emotions, not away from them, yet also that focusing involves something qualitatively very different than merely "being blown around" by the emotions. The illustration also captures something of the centrality, depth, and quiet which one finds—the quality which others have called "being in touch with myself." The felt referent, for the moment, is "me." It *unfolds* and is a thousand things. In comparison, the emotional tone which attaches to it and precedes it is not itself a thousand things. To remain with it merely feeds it. There is always a "breath-held," tense, tight quality about most of these emotional tones. Yet to turn away from the emotion is to turn away also from the direction in which one "finds oneself." Thus, one must "move into" and "through," or "on by," these emotional tones to the direct referent which is the *felt meaning* of it all.

The difference between focusing and "wallowing" or "being trapped in" certain emotions is most dramatically evident when one compares the usual experiences of an individual when he works on a personality difficulty alone and when he does so in the presence of an understanding other person. The difference is dramatic, because during many hours he has gone round and round, feeling the same series of emotions and lacking any *referent movement*. In contrast, often even just saying to the other person a little of what one has been feeling and thinking produces direct reference and referent movement. Later I will discuss this role of the other person in making focusing and other therapeutic processes possible. Another person's responses to the emotions, for instance, can make it possible to "grant them," "let them," and "get by" them, so as to refer directly to the felt meanings. It is often possible, though always unsteady and difficult, for the individual to focus by himself.

2. *Circumstantial orbit.* Just as one may get lost in the sheer emotions of guilt, shame, or badness, so one may also get lost in an inward recitation of circumstances, such as: what one ought to have done or did do; what others did, or might have done, or can be imagined to have done, etc. Such circumstantial play and replay, the inward repetitions of conversations, and dramatic re-enactings are clearly different from the felt meaning all this has and on which the individual could (perhaps, with help) focus. Often the client arrives for the therapy hour after sleepless nights and tired days of this kind of circumstantial "runaround" and finds, with a few responses to the felt meaning of "all this;" that with great relief he now directly refers to and unfolds the felt meaning. No matter what a bad look it turns out to have, the physically felt and verbalized steps of focusing are clearly anti-relievable different from the circumstantial orbit.

3. *Explanatory orbit.* Attempts at explanations are different from direct reference: "Is it just that I'm so hostile?" "It must mean that I'm protecting some latent homosexuality." "This means I have a need to fail." "It's just that I'm trying to be right." "I'm just trying to get the love I didn't get as a child." "This is paranoid." "Other people don't get upset at this, so it must be that I'm not grateful for what I have."

Whether the explanatory concepts are simple and foolish, or sophisticated and quite correct, they are useless unless one employs them as pointers to momentarily name and hold onto a directly felt meaning. Without that, one cogitates in a vacuum and gets "no further." The explanatory "runaround" races the mental engine, disengaged from the wheels. It makes one tired and confused, and it is quite different from focusing on the felt meaning. Even one small step of the focusing process can change the inner scene so that one's whole set of explanatory concepts suddenly becomes irrelevant. In comparison with the felt meaning, explanatory concepts are so gross, so general, so empty, that even when they are accurate they are helpless abstractions.

4. *Self-engineering.* A fourth runaround consists in something that might be called "self-engineering." In this also one does not attend to one's felt meaning. Instead, one "talks at" oneself, inwardly. One is very active and constructive, arranging and rearranging one's feelings without stopping to sense quite what they are. This self-engineering is clearly different from focusing on a felt referent and the sensing and symbolizing of its implicit meaning.

Self-engineering is not always futile. In fact, it can succeed exactly to the extent to which one's experiencing in the given regard functions implicitly. The trouble with willpower and engineering is not, as Sullivan held and Rogers sometimes seems to assume, that there is no such thing. There is. One is not always automatically "wafted" into action or self-control. Willpower, decision, and self-engineering are often necessary. However, they cannot be effectively exerted at points where experiencing does not implicitly function. In such regards self-responses or the responses of others are required first, so that the process can be carried forward and experiencing then does implicitly function.

This focusing may be what has always been meant in religious terms by "listening to the still small voice." This has more recently been confused with conscience (and, only in very well-adjusted people can one identify conscience with direct reference). All but a few people have been puzzled as to where inside to "listen" and "hear" this "voice." The above indicates that to "listen" really means to keep quiet, to stop "talking at" yourself, and to

sense just what is there, bodily felt, meaningful, and about to become clearer and then verbalizable.

The rule for focusing--a rule to be applied inwardly to oneself--is "Keep quiet and listen!" Then, by referring to the concretely felt referent, it will unfold; the sense of its meaning, and then the words, will come into focus.

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[14.](#) Our formulation here may be seen as an extension of Sullivan's basic concepts referred to earlier at the beginning of our discussion of Sullivan.

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[15.](#) Recall our earlier discussion of the repression paradigm. Also see later discussion of the unconscious, definition 24.

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[16.](#) Compare our earlier discussion of the "content paradigm."

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[17.](#) Compare George Herbert Mead (1938, p. 445): "The self ... grows out of the more primitive attitude of indicating to others, and later arousing in the organism the response of the other, because this response is native to the organism, so that the stimulation which calls it out in another tends to call it out in the individual himself."

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[18.](#) This point has been made by others. Freud said that the energy of the defense comes from the repressed--i.e., that the *concrete force* which motivates the behavior is the *real* one, despite the opposite and *unreal* nature of the *structure that determines the behavior*. Rogers said that the most therapeutic response is to take the basic, intended felt meaning of the individual's self-expression at face value, no matter how obvious the defensiveness and rationalization. But we may add specificity to these more general statements.

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[19.](#) I call it a fact, because in psychotherapy we observe it. In the above context it is a matter of theoretical formulation, not of fact.

Some observable research variables have been defined: Assents to one set of descriptions of "immediacy" were found to increase significantly in successful psychotherapy (Gendlin and Shlien, 1961). One group of therapists observed significantly more of the above described



new experiencing during the hour in success cases (Gendlin, Jenny, and Shlien, 1960). Successful clients were judged significantly higher on scale-defined variables called immediate manner of experiencing and expression (concerning self, personal meanings, the therapist, problems ... any content), as compared with failure clients.

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[20.](#) This is a trouble with most concepts about personality change and psychotherapy, as well as with most concepts of ideals, moral values, and life wisdom: The concepts tell a little something of how it seems when one has arrived at the aim, but they tell nothing of the process of getting there. Such concepts make all sorts of mischief because we tend to try to fit them without allowing ourselves the very different process of getting there. Better concepts about the process of getting there can remedy this age-old problem.

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[21.](#) Many contemporary writers point to the essential interpersonal relatedness of the human individual. Daseinsanalyse, Sullivan, Mead, and Buber point out that individual personality is not a self-contained piece of machinery with its own primary characteristics which is *then* placed into interaction. Rather, *personality is an interacting*.

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[22.](#) Only in verbal and conceptual content is "self-exploration" in psychotherapy distinguishable from the personal "relationship." As an ongoing experience process they are the same. The individual may say "only here am I myself" (showing the process to include both self and relationship), or he may speak mostly about the *relationship*, or mostly about *himself*. It is the same process whether the content seems to be mostly about self or mostly about the relationship.

One research finding (Gendlin, Jenny, and Shlien, 1960) employed some operational variables related to this point. Psychotherapists were asked to make ratings of the extent to which "therapy, for this client, focuses chiefly on his problems, or ... on his relationship with you." These ratings were *not* associated with outcome.

On the other hand, outcome did correlate with the following two scales: "How important to the client is the relationship as a source of new experience? Examples: 'I've never been able to let go and just feel dependent and helpless as I do now'; or, 'This is the first time I've ever really gotten angry at someone.'" Another scale which also correlated with outcome was: "To what extent does the client *express* his feelings, and to what extent does he rather talk *about* them?" These findings indicate that outcome is not affected by whether the *content (topic)* is the self or the relationship. Rather, it matters whether the individual is engaged in a manner of ongoing interaction process which involves newly reconstituted aspects of experiencing.

This research illustrates the usefulness of process concepts as compared to content concepts to generate operational research variables. Earlier research (Seeman, 1954) had posed the

problem by finding no significant association between success in psychotherapy and discussion of the relationship with the therapist. The finding seemed to contradict the importance of the relationship. New research replicated that finding and added scales concerning the ongoing interaction *process*.

We need theory to create operational definitions. The most effective kind of theory for that purpose is one which employs process concepts in reference to experiencing. We must carefully distinguish from theory the operational terms (to which it leads) that are then defined by procedure and observation, not by theory.

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23. I will choose two observations and show how the reformulation accounts for them:

1. A sequence of words is flashed, each for fractions of a second, on a screen by means of a tachistoscope. When the individual is unable to read the word it is flashed again and again. Now, for example, an individual may be able to read the words "grass," "democracy," "table," "independence;" with an average number of repetitions, but for the word "sex" he requires twice as many repetitions. The theories of the unconscious explain this as follows:

The organism can discriminate a stimulus and its meaning for the organism without utilizing the higher nerve centers involved in awareness.

The current theories have this assumption in common: Words such as "unconscious," "repression," "covert," "not me," "denial to awareness," "subception," all involve the uncomfortable but seemingly necessary assumption that there is a discrimination before an aware discrimination takes place, and that the experience or *content* which the individual misses in awareness actually exists somewhere in him. How else can one account for the above example and the many other observations just like it?

But we need not assume that something in the individual first reads the word sex, then becomes anxious about it, and then forces it to remain outside of awareness. Rather let us try to interpret this observation as a case where the individual does not ever read it until he does so in awareness. Why then does he take so long to read just that word when he could read the others in half the time? We have tried to show earlier (definitions 4 and 16) that, in order to read a word and to say what it is, the function of *felt* experiencing is necessary. We read without *explicitly* thinking the meanings of what we read. We have the sound images and *we have the felt meaning*. Now if for some reason our felt process cannot interact with the words, our eyes may continue, but we cannot say what we have read.

To explain the matter, process theory must take the place of content theory. The process of interacting with the symbols, of "reading them," requires the function of experiencing (the inwardly felt body process). If this felt process is not functioning in some regards, then the expected discriminating will not occur in these regards. Aspects which ought to be "implicit" will not function and, therefore, cannot interact and interpret the present situation. Hence, in these regards, the individual may misconstrue or simply miss (be unable to complete) the process, without this implying that he first interpreted these fully and then keeps them out of awareness.

The difference can be put simply: content theories assume that one completes the process of knowing, experiencing, interpreting, reacting, but that some of this process does not reach awareness. The present theory holds that the process does not completely occur.

2. A second observation:

An individual leaves a certain situation feeling quite happy. Four days later he becomes aware that really he has been quite angry about what happened. He feels that he "has been" angry all along but "wasn't aware of it."

Now, our theory denies that what he now calls anger was in his body all along, without awareness. Rather, *there was something, but not the process of being angry*. He calls it being angry *now*, because *now* he is engaged in that process, and he clearly feels the releasing (see definition 8) quality which physiologically lets him know that his present anger "satisfies," "discharges," "releases," "symbolizes," "completes"--in short, *has some deeply felt relation to*--the condition he physically felt during the four preceding days. The process *was* not occurring, and that made for a physiological condition which is *only now* altered. When "structure bound" experience "goes to completion," we feel that we now know what it was then; we did not know it then, because the ongoing process of now is different from the stopped condition of then.

Only by *completing* the process by response to the feeling or felt meaning that is there (and is not anger) does the individual then "become aware" of anger. If we view this in terms of content, it is all very puzzling. First the content is not there, and then, later on, it is said to have been there all along (hidden in there, somewhere). But in terms of process it is precisely this deeply felt relationship of the later anger to the previously felt condition that tells us that a previously stopped process has only now been completed.

We, therefore, need not assume that there are two minds in the individual--one being an unconscious mind that first perceives a content and then permits or prohibits the aware mind to perceive it. Rather, the aware feeling (whatever it is--let us say it is a tension or a dissatisfaction, not at all anger) must be responded to and carried forward. Only thereby does the process go to completion and anger (or whatever supposed content) come to be an aspect of the reconstituted process.

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[24.](#) See definition 17, the law of reconstitution.

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[25.](#) In the large research (Rogers, 1960, p. 93) into psychotherapy with schizophrenics in which I am now engaged, we are applying process variables to the behavior changes of psychotics. The findings so far (Rogers et al., 1961) indicate that improvement on diagnostic tests is associated with operational behavior variables of a less rigid, less repetitive, less structure-bound manner of experiencing, and a greater use of felt experiencing as a direct referent and as a basis for behavior, expression, and relating. These tentative findings are defined in terms of rating scale variables and rating procedures.

26. Therapist's self-expression used to reconstitute process:

When the client's verbalization or behavior gives us a sense of the implicit, felt meanings from which he speaks, then responding to that (even if it is not at all clear) carries the process forward and reconstitutes it as well. However, when the client is silent or speaks only of external matters, then *the therapist's* voicing his own feelings is an important mode of response which can reconstitute *the client's* experiencing process.

There are several other kinds of difficulties. Sometimes the client's talk is bizarre and hard to understand. If there are bits which do make sense, one must repeat these carefully, checking one's understanding. This gives the isolated individual a moment-by-moment sense of contact-something like the pier is for a drowning man. I do not want to be merely poetic in saying that. I want to point up the need for a concretely felt sense of the interacting listener which, where welcome to the client, should be given every few moments during talk that is hard to follow.

Sometimes there is no understandable logical content, but the symbolic images do add up to a feeling. (Client: "The Austrian army took all my possessions. They're going to pay me a million dollars." Therapist: "Somebody did you dirt? Took everything away from you? You want to make them pay back?").

Sometimes even less is understandable, but one can be sure the individual is suffering, lonely, hurt, having a rough time. The therapist can talk about any of these without needing any confirming response from the client.

Sometimes the therapist must simply *imagine* what *might* be going on in the client. If the therapist says he does not know, would like to know but need not be told, and imagines so-and-so, the therapist can speak about what he imagines and thereby an interaction process is restored.

The client may not say a word, but what is occurring is a felt interaction process in which articulation and symbolization is given his feelings. One person's behavior can *reconstitute* the interaction and experiencing process of the other person (see definition 23).

During silent hours the therapist can express what might go on in a troubled person uncomfortably sitting there; or, what goes on in the therapist as he wishes to help, wishes to hear, wishes not to pressure, hates to be useless, would be glad if he knew the silent time was useful, or imagines many feelings and perhaps painful ones going through the client's mind which he is not ready to talk about yet.

These therapist self-expressions require four specifications:

1. They are expressed explicitly *as the therapist's own*. If they imply anything about the client, then the therapist says he is not sure it is so, he imagines it, has this impression, etc. It needs no affirmation or denial from the client. It is the therapist, speaking for himself.
2. The therapist spends a few moments *focusing* on the feeling he might express. He seeks some aspect from all he feels, some bit which he can safely and simply say. No one can say

all of the thousand *implicit* meanings he feels at one moment. One or two--especially those which, at the moment, seem too personal or bad or embarrassing--become, after a moments *focusing*, an intimate and personal expression of present interaction.

Perhaps it is hard for me that we are silent and I am perhaps useless to him. There! That is something I can tell him. Or, I wonder if in this silence he is doing anything at all. I find that I am glad to be silent if that gives him time and peace to think and feel. I can express that. Such expressions are a warmly personal interaction. But they require a few moments of self-attention during which I locus on and unfold my present experiencing in this interaction.

3. The phrasings and meanings which arise in us are very strongly influenced by our overall feeling toward the person to whom we speak. The therapeutic attitude toward the client as a person is an attitude of being totally for him-Rogers' (1957) "unconditional regard." Whitehorn (1959) terms it being like the patient's "lawyer." It is an attitude that whatever we both dislike about this trouble, *the individual as a person it "up against" that in himself.* I can always truly assume that. (This attitude has nothing to do with an overall approval or agreement or liking for this or that behavior, trait, attitude, or peculiarity.) Often I must imagine the person inside, who is "up against" all this. Only months later do I come to love and know that person.

It is amazing what a definable and concrete attitude this is. One can depend on it. There is always a person "up against" anything dislikable in him.

4. When the client expresses himself, a response to that is needed. At such times therapist self-expression can get in the way.

When one has an opportunity to respond to the client's feeling, to *his* specific felt meaning, and the exact way of perceiving and interpreting something, responding exactly u, that is the best and most powerful response. The self-expressive modes of responding fit those clients who give little to which one can respond.

Therapist self-expression as a mode of responding is important with those among the people labeled psychotic, who express little feeling, only externalized situational descriptions, or who sit in pure silence. However, there are many well-functioning persons with whom it is difficult to form a deep interaction because they do not express themselves. Kirtner (1958) found that individuals can be predicted to fail in therapy if their *first* interview shows little inward attention. Recently we are learning that therapist self-expression can help reconstitute the interaction and experiencing process of such individuals.

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[27.](#) A note on the many new terms:

In the realm of personality *change* we largely lack sufficiently specific concepts to discuss and define observations. 'The present theory attempts to offer such concepts. It is hoped that with these concepts (and others) our thinking and discussing will be advanced and our ability to isolate and define observations sharpened.

There may be some difficulty in holding fast to new definitions such as *direct referent*, *referent movement*, *carrying forward*, *reconstituting*, *manner of experiencing*, *implicit function*. It cannot be hoped that all twenty-six definitions will succeed in entering the language. Nevertheless, we need these (or better) terms to discuss personality change.

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