

THE EFFECTS OF FOCUSING WHEN APPLIED
TO PERSONAL JOURNAL WRITING

by

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ABSTRACT

The personal journal has been gaining recognition in the field of psychology as an instrument of therapeutic value. "Focusing", an inner experiential process, has been shown by researchers to be an important factor in therapeutic change. In this phenomenological study, the effects of applying focusing to personal journal writing were investigated. Seven journal writers, who focused on eight separate occasions, each time prior to writing in their journals, described their experiences in questionnaires and interviews. The phenomenological analysis showed that focusing affected the journal writing in the following ways: journal entries were shortened or eliminated for those who had used the journal as a place to pour out and sort through thoughts and feelings because the sorting took place internally while focusing, and journal entries describing a concern or event were clearer and more coherent after focusing. The participants found that focusing brought to an awareness level previously unrecognized feelings and other aspects of a concern, resulting at times in a redefinition of the concern, and at other times focusing offered alternate means of exploration and action. It was suggested that focusing and journal writing

were potentially useful tools which could be introduced during the counselling process and then continue to be used by clients on their own as a self-help method for personal learning.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

During the 20th Century, the search for self-knowledge has increased in importance for the general population. More and more people are seeking ways to achieve positive changes in their lives. The hundreds of workshops in yoga, t'ai chi, creative movement, meditation, re-birthing, dream analysis, journal writing, and many others; the popularity of the how-to literature; the emergence and growth of counselling services, all reflect this growing trend. Counselling services, whether in a college or university setting, a community agency, or private practice most often help a client through a crisis situation on a short-term basis, and yet the overall process of personal learning is lifelong. As a counsellor, I have observed clients' enthusiasm over new awareness and new changes and have wanted to teach them ways they could continue the process on their own, but often I have not known what to propose.

The use of a journal has been a valuable aid in my own personal learning. In it, I can express my feelings, describe the various aspects of a dilemma, record a moment of lucid thought, a meaningful phrase or a dream. The writing helps me clear my mind so that I can be present to the current realities of the day. It followed naturally that my interests in the therapeutic process and in journal writing should be combined as the general theme of my research.

The literature on journal writing contains many accounts of individuals who have connected personal journal writing with the search for self-understanding. Nearly 60 years ago Ponsonby (1923) claimed that one result of the psychological revolution was the increased use of diary writing as a way to expand self-knowledge. Ellis (1955) stated that personal writing could be a valuable adjunct to therapeutic techniques. Jourard (1971) discussed the therapeutic value in self-disclosure by writing. Maultsby (1971) found that written homework resulted in the client playing a more active role in psychotherapy. He also pointed out that the writing saved time and allowed the therapist to provide service to more people. Brand (1979), in a comprehensive literature review of writing used in psychotherapy, advised further exploration of journal writing as a therapeutic exercise. Nichols (1974), in her doctoral dissertation, The Personal Journal: A Mental Health Proposal, suggested that writing could be a partial solution to the lack of mental health services. One question asked by Nichols in her conclusion was "How might journal keeping, perhaps in conjunction with other tools, be used in lieu of supportive therapy with some individuals?" (p. 72) Here was a question that I chose to pursue.

Another tool which had been helpful to me in my own personal learning was a procedure known as "focusing". Focusing, described and named by Gendlin (1969, 1978), is one method used in counselling and psychotherapy to bring about positive changes in people. The structured steps which constitute the procedure allow a person to approach a problem from "the inside out" (Gendlin, 1969, p. 4). These steps can perhaps most easily be described through an example from my own

experience. In the early stages of this study after the initial literature search was completed and my research plans were set, I found myself seemingly unable to start writing my proposal. After a week of inaction, I decided to "focus" on the problem. Following the instructions, I relaxed, closed my eyes, and let the questions come to me: "Why can't I get started? Why can't I write? What is the block about?" Then, rather than trying to think of answers, I directed my attention to my chest area, the part of my body where I feel strong emotions, in order to discover my body's reaction to the whole problem. There was a heaviness which I let myself experience. I asked, "What is the main thing about this?" and I saw an infinite grey wall. The word "overwhelmed" came to me. Remaining quiet, I waited, and there followed an image of a large jigsaw puzzle scattered about with two pieces in the foreground fitting together. I relaxed, and the heaviness in my chest was gone as I knew the image matched my situation. I had a new feeling of confidence that the information was all there and piece by piece I could put it together. By including my bodily reaction in considering the problem, I was able to go beyond the block.

I was unable to find any published research on the effects of specific journal writing methods, or on the effects of the component parts of a particular method. However, several writers notable in the field of personal journal writing have described specific aids to journal writing. Many of these aids embody elements of focusing and are described in the paragraph which follows.

Progoff (1975), in his journal workshops, offered a complete structure in which to write so that the writers could discover their

unused resources and become more aware of the continuity of their lives in terms of their goals, meaning, and growth. As part of the structure, Progoff asked his students to close their eyes, relax, and turn their attention inward to feel the tone and quality of the experience they were writing about. As Progoff explained, "We are not thinking of it, but letting it present itself to us in the form of images, impressions, emotions, and especially through symbolic awarenesses that come to us in many sensory forms" (Progoff, 1975, pp. 81-82). The journal students do not judge, but record neutrally what comes to them. Baldwin (1977), author of One to One, a book on journal writing, encouraged "flow writing", where one registers a thought, idea, or question, and allows other thoughts or images to follow which are then written down. She claimed that as a result of these reflections, unanticipated connections were made. Rainer (1978) presented exercises in The New Diary which included a "here and now" exercise to bring the writer in touch with the immediacy of his life. Simons (1978), in Keeping Your Personal Journal, suggested the use of metaphors and analogies to help the writer stay specific and concrete. The famous diarist Anais Nin sat quietly for a few minutes before she wrote. She would close her eyes and let the most important happening or feeling since she last wrote surface, and that became her subject for writing (Rainer, 1978). "The main thing is that what you feel strongly about to-day is where you're at to-day, and that is the purpose of the diary.... I chose that way. I chose the event of the day that I felt most strongly about, the most vivid one, the warmest one, the strongest one" (Nin, 1975, p. 163).

I was thus led to the question: Can focusing be applied to journal writing and with what effects? More specifically, the research questions in the study were:

1. Does focusing, when applied to journal writing, increase the significance of the writing for the writer?
2. What specific effects does focusing have when applied to journal writing? For example:
 - a. Does focusing yield previously undisclosed feelings around a particular concern?
 - b. Do focusers report a redefinition of the concern as a result of focusing?
 - c. Does focusing elaborate the context in which the concern is being considered and thus provide more alternatives for exploration of that particular concern?
 - d. Does focusing bring about connections between a particular concern and other aspects of the person which were vague or undiscovered before focusing?
 - e. What other focusing effects can be identified as significant to focusers and their writing?
3. Are there difficulties which may be encountered in focusing, and how do these difficulties affect the focuser and his writing?
4. Are there optimal conditions for focusing in which the process is most likely to be successfully completed?

Definition of Terms

To aid reader clarity, the terms used in this study are defined in the following ways.

Personal Journal Writing

That writing a person does for his own satisfaction (Butler, 1977), in which he explores his experiences (Holbrook, 1964). It is a record of a person's encounter with life (Kraft, 1975). "Our story, but in its best moments of making it, it is our very process and our being" (Simons, 1978, p. 11).

Personal Learning

The coming to a new understanding of oneself which involves questioning the assumptions about how one lives. There is personal value in the learning, an involvement, an excitement, and the knowledge gained can be applied to specific problems (Corey, 1978). Implied is a readiness and willingness to change with resulting new behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.

Focusing

Within psychotherapy, focusing may be defined as a sub-process which brings about personal change (Gendlin, 1978). In every encounter with the environment, a person will have a reaction which involves both the mind and body, although only one may be at the level of awareness. For example, when solving a problem, one's thoughts are more likely to be in the foreground, whereas in an extreme situation, one may be most aware of the bodily reaction, for example, an immobility in response to panic. In the focusing procedure one pays attention to the directly

felt bodily experience of a situation, or "felt sense" (Gendlin, 1978). It is called "felt" because it is actually experienced as a feeling in the body. It is called "sense" because at first it is a perception of something unclear and vague (Hinterkopf, 1980). It is not just getting in touch with feelings, but with how the body carries what isn't yet clear about a problem or situation. The felt sense may be recognized by a tightness in certain parts of the body, as in the chest area, or as a vague feeling such as people experience when they know they have forgotten something, but don't know what. By gently asking what this felt sense is about, one lets words or images follow which match the felt sense and bring new information and clarity to the concern. The result is a physical easing of bodily tension. It is the kind of release one might feel when struggling to explain something confusing to someone, and he finally shows that he understands.

The purpose here is to conduct an exploratory study of the effects of applying focusing to personal journal writing. The first step is a literature review which covers aspects of the journal writing process, and background and research on focusing. A description of the method used for this particular study follows. The experiences reported by the journal writers who took part in the study are then recounted, and the thesis concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The focus of the literature review is twofold: the first part is directed toward the work of several investigators who have linked the process of journal writing to the therapeutic process, and the second part examines focusing, its background, and some of the research relating to it. Included in the former are the findings of Brand (1979), Nichols (1974), and Myers (1980) in their investigations of the journal writing process, a section on Anais Nin (1968, 1975), a diarist-writer, and a description of the Progoff (1975) method of journal writing. The focusing procedure as developed by Gendlin (1969, 1978) is reviewed in the latter part, as well as two research studies investigating the effects of focusing. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of Perl's (1980) teaching practises in which focusing and writing are combined.

Part One: Journal Writing and the Therapeutic Process

A comprehensive literature review of the uses of writing in the therapeutic process was written by Brand (1979). She pointed out that in modern times, it was Freud who first linked writing and the therapeutic process in his hypothesis that both writing, particularly in the form of poetry, and psychoanalysis acted as doors to the unconscious. He also discovered a form of self-treatment in his personal written correspondence. The humanistic theorists, Jourard (1971), and May (1969) have indicated that writing could be an important instru-

ment for persons to use in their total life development. In the mid-60s, the American psychological association held a symposium, the outcome of which was a publication, The Use of Written Communications in Psychotherapy (Pearson, 1965), which in detail explicated the therapeutic benefits attributable to personal writings in the form of diaries, autobiographies, letters, and poems. Brand also discussed Nichols' investigation into personal journal writing and Progoff's work which are described in the paragraphs which follow. Brand concluded that writing has the capacity to help people gain self-awareness, and that as a self-help means, it has a unique potential for inner exploration.

Nichols (1974), in a survey of 80 journal writers, ten of whom she interviewed in depth, investigated the relevance of journal writing to the field of psychology. She discovered that a wide variety of people found journal keeping to be a valuable process, adaptable to one's need over a period of many years. Benefits included increased self-awareness and acceptance, increased ease of expression of feelings, a means for centering and reducing tension, an opportunity to be a friend to oneself, and a creative outlet. Most reported psychological benefits such as catharsis, a place to make decisions, solve problems, calm down, and gain perspective. There were also difficulties and limitations reported. Many had difficulty disciplining themselves to set aside time for writing, whereas some were frustrated with the limitations of words and vocabulary in describing an experience. There were those who had a tendency to emphasize pain over joy, others clung to it as a place for introspection over "real living", and still others tended to intellectualize life events rather than explore them more fully through their writing. Another difficulty expressed was in not

knowing how to find the core of a concern, or how to leave out the non-essentials which seem important at the time, but later prove to be useless and boring.

Nichols found that for many the journal was a natural response to a crisis situation which then evolved as an attempt to meet that person's needs, be it catharsis, validation, clarity or support. The writer became not only the expresser, but the listener and healer, and thus began to take responsibility for himself. Nichols drew the parallel between journal writing and psychotherapy, and the potential usefulness of writing as an adjunct to therapy, as well as a bridge out of therapy, offering a place for a person to continue the growth process already begun.

Myers (1980) conducted a study in which he analyzed the journal writing process from two perspectives: from an examination of the literature on journal writing and from reports of 23 student teachers who wrote journals as part of a course requirement. He described the themes which arose from the journal writing process and related them to the process of self-definition which he defined as "the particular quality of sensation, feeling, or thinking that congregates in a given moment as the gestalt of personal identity" (p. 3). Myers concluded that journal writing provides the writer with the opportunity to increase self-awareness, to acknowledge his value in his own and others' eyes, and to shift his self-definition. One of the themes of the student writers was the value of journal writing. The values included: the journal as a friend, as a place to organize thoughts and feelings, as a catharsis through the expression of feelings, as a means to gain self-awareness, insight and perspective, and as a method for improving

writing style. There are many similarities in the benefits of journal writing between Nichols' and Myers' subjects. In contrast to the values expressed, certain individuals in the Myers' study expressed negative reactions to journal writing. For example, some writers had difficulty finding the time to write regularly, an unwillingness to face their pain and doubts, and a negativity about writing in general and journal writing in particular.

Anais Nin was a writer and diarist who also wrote about the process of personal journal writing (1968, 1975). Throughout her life she encouraged others to keep a personal journal. Her own journal evolved from an eleven-year-old's desire to communicate with her lost father, through the recording of her dreams, feelings and thoughts, to portrayals of friends and her relationships to them, and eventually to her relationship with the world--the thousands she touched when the diaries began to be published. It was in her journal, in secret, that she would face her dark side; the side she did not allow others to see; the part of herself who was depressed, angry, and discouraged. Periodically throughout her life when she felt blocked in her writing or in her personal life, she sought psychoanalysis. Her life is an example of the meld of therapy and journal writing, each contributing in harmony to her personal learning. If the journal reflects the dimensions of the writer, as Nin believed, she always sought expansion, depth, and enrichment of life.

While working as a psychotherapist and director of the Institute for Research in Depth Psychology at Drew University graduate school, Ira Progoff (1975) began developing a method of journal writing.

Initially, he used an unstructured form as an adjunct to therapy for his clients. However, he realized that while this had a favourable therapeutic effect for many, there was a process at work which could be brought forth more actively. He observed limitations in the journal writing process for some. When used in conjunction with therapy, some used the writing well when working with him personally, but carried on only minimally when on their own. Others had a tendency to repeat themselves incessantly until they were "eloquently moving in circles" (p. 38), becoming more entrenched in their ruts rather than learning and changing. Progoff studied creative people and tried out and changed various forms of a structured journal over a number of years. From these efforts he developed the Intensive Journal, a detailed, open-ended format which is structured, but allows a natural flow so that the writing experience is never forced or artificial. Progoff found that when the instructions for the Intensive Journal were followed, the writer was able to use the journal as an instrument for learning and changing.

The Intensive Journal is made up of several sections through which a person moves back and forth according to their needs. A key phase of each section is what Progoff named Twilight Imaging. The writer relaxes and places herself in the state between waking and sleeping. The following instructions are given to the learner: "Now our eyes are closed and we are sitting in stillness. Our attention is turned to . . . [the focus of the writing]. We are not thinking of it, but letting it present itself to us in the form of images, impressions, emotions, and especially through symbolic awarenesses that come to us in many forms. We may see them, hear them, smell them, intuit them,

but always by inward perception at the twilight level. It may come at first as stirrings in our body, as joyous surges, or as stomach knots. By whatever form of perception they come to us, we observe them neutrally, without judgement, and we record them" (pp. 81-82). Progoff claimed that through the Twilight Imaging procedure "we are able to reach depths of ourselves with which it is very difficult to make contact by any other means" (p. 77). Twilight Imaging seems to be referring to the same internal process which focusing tries to activate.

Part Two: Focusing, Background and Research

The first research article on focusing appeared in 1968 after a series of studies carried out between 1959 and 1967 by Gendlin and his associates (Gendlin, Beebe, Cassens, Klein & Oberlander, 1968) in a client-centered therapy setting with neurotic and schizophrenic clients. It was discovered that clients who succeed in therapy, as measured by improvement of the MMPI Scale, are ones who are able to attend to "the not yet conceptually clear but directly felt experiencing" (p. 218) of a situation. The level by which the clients were able to experience a situation was measured in the early studies by Roger's (1959) Process Scale, and in the later studies by the Experiencing Scale (Klein, Mathlieu, Gendlin & Kiesler, 1970). In addition, in order to determine the predictability of success or failure in therapy according to one's experiencing level, an analysis of 50 cases from five separate studies was carried out. Of these cases, the data from 38 neurotic clients from four studies was combined and analyzed as a group, and the data from 12 schizophrenic clients was analyzed separately. In both the

neurotic and schizophrenic groups, it was found that prediction of success or failure in therapy could be made in over two-thirds of the cases by measuring experiencing ability in the early stages of therapy. Surprisingly, there was no significant change in the experiencing levels of either of the groups over the duration of therapy.

Gendlin gave the name "focusing" to what had so far been called the "experiencing process", and developed instructions for teaching focusing. The instructions are contained in the *Focusing Manual* (Gendlin, 1969, 1978). He also compiled a Post-Focusing Questionnaire, which was published in the 1969 article. The questionnaire was designed for administration after focusing to determine whether a person focused or not. Tests for the reliability of the Post-Focusing Questionnaire resulted in average interjudge correlations ranging from .108 to .482, and alpha coefficients ranging from .570 to .910. Gendlin later wrote Focusing, a book for the general public, which includes background, instructions, examples, and research on focusing, plus a directory of focusing trainers (Gendlin, 1978).

Although the early research on the experiential process was carried out within the confines of client-centered therapy, Friedman(1976), in a historical review of the experiential in therapy, traced the theme of the experiential process as revealed in the writings of various psychotherapists. Freud moved from an information gathering, interpretation, and passing-the-interpretation-on-to-the-client approach, which had disappointing results, to a more experiential based therapy where the client re-experienced parts of his life in order to make his own interpretive discoveries. Rank asserted that "the feeling of experience is made the central factor in the therapeutic task" (p. 237).

Horney emphasized that realizing intellectually one's existence is not enough, but that one must also feel the depths. Rogers worked by responding with sensitivity to the affective, rather than semantic meaning of his clients' expressions. Finally, Gendlin clarified the process by putting it into words that can be taught.

Many research studies have been carried out since Gendlin's early work, the majority of which have investigated correlates of focusing ability. Although these correlational studies are not directly related to the questions asked in this study, a summary of their results may be of interest to the reader. Gendlin et al. (1968) linked a high focusing ability with certain aspects of personality, such as being introspective, silent, intelligent, self-disciplined, persistent, not distractable, not impulsive, and relaxed. Summers (1980) found focusing ability to be negatively correlated with defensiveness, and Zimring and Balcombe (1974) discovered that focusing was negatively correlated with the ability to integrate and develop a theme, but positively correlated with the cognitive ability to concentrate. A side finding of the Kantor and Zimring (1976) study described in the next paragraph showed women to be better focusers than men. Weiss (1978) in his doctoral dissertation on The Effects of Meditation on Experiential Focusing found that meditation training helps in the learning of focusing.

A few studies have been carried out on the effects of focusing. Kantor and Zimring (1976) investigated the effects of focusing on a problem. An equal number of male and female undergraduate student focusers and non-focusers (23 and 24) described in writing two specific situations involving a common general problem. Experimental and

control groups, each with focusers and non-focusers, wrote a story about one of the situations in which they described the thoughts, the feelings, and the behavior of the story characters. The experimental group then focused on the general problem before writing the story about the second situation, while the control group went through an unrelated exercise. Judges rated the stories for the number of emotional referents, and the subjects themselves answered a questionnaire to determine whether their view of the problem had changed. Results showed that judges could detect no change in the experiential quality of the central problem, although a greater number of subjects in the experimental group than controls reported changes in their perceptions of the problems. However, there was a sharp increase in the number of feelings written about in the stories of the focusing subjects in the experimental group. The researchers concluded that in enriching the emotional context of the problem, focusing provides more alternatives for exploration and development which might eventually lead to redefinition of the problem. This is a somewhat different conclusion than Gendlin offered when he said that hidden aspects revealed during focusing caused a change in what the problem seemed to be (Gendlin, 1978, 1979).

Greenberg and Higgins (1980) compared the Gestalt Two-Chair Method with the Focusing procedure as a means of deepening the experiencing level, and the effects of each method on conflict resolution. The subjects in this experiment were 42 graduate students, divided into gestalt, focusing, and control groups with 24 students per group. The participants were asked to present a felt intrapersonal conflict which they worked on during an hour's counselling session with an

experienced counsellor, using the mode of therapy of their particular group. The depth of experiencing was measured by the Experiencing Scale (Klein et al., 1970) and one week after the completion of the study, the participants were asked how much progress they felt they had made in dealing with the issues. The results showed that although the Two-Chair Method resulted in deeper experiencing levels, both methods equally led to significantly greater reported progress by the subjects than controls in resolving their conflicts.

It was Sondra Perl, a teacher of creative writing, who linked writing and focusing (Perl & Egendorf, in press), claiming that both provide a context for creative discovery. Perl explained that a writer has an idea or experience to write about that is not yet clearly formulated. The writing process begins by breaking the topic down into manageable pieces and key words and building associations to the words. The writer frequently goes back and forth to the earlier written words to reflect on them and develop the idea further. Writing, therefore, is the development of the not yet formulated sense of what one has to say into explicit form.

In studying five unskilled writers, Perl analyzed records of their composing operations and was able by a coding system to separate the various features of the process and their relation to the whole. She discovered a tendency to correct their own writing and conform to a set of rules early in the process, thus narrowing their writing rather than going back to develop further the sense of what they wanted to say. Perl compared the unskilled writer to people in therapy who tend to be overcritical of themselves for not living up to their own particular standards and narrow their lives accordingly, rather than attempting

a full understanding of those standards, judging them appropriate or not, and using them as beginnings for new growth and change. She asserted that it is the people with direct access to their own experiencing in writing and in therapy, who foster their own discoveries. She concluded that teaching, then, is more than imparting knowledge, but should also provide "a context in which others can engage in creative discovery" (p. 132). Following her study, Perl (1980) took Gendlin's focusing instructions and adapted them to writing. She produced a three-page Focusing Manual for writing which she now gives to her students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

In undertaking a research project, the questions posed by the researcher guide the nature of the enquiry. An investigation into the effects of focusing when applied to personal journal writing faces a phenomenon which is neither easily quantifiable in terms of numbers, nor readily observable because of the private nature of most journals. The need is for a naturalistic enquiry which truly reflects the participants' experiences of the phenomenon. This suggests a phenomenological method for this study. Within the field of naturalistic enquiry, and specifically within the phenomenological field, there are numerous authorities who approach phenomenological research in a variety of ways. I have chosen to follow the methods explicated in the works of Giorgi (1975a,b) and Colaizzi (1978), who are two phenomenologists in the psychological field. This choice was made because their particular methods can be appropriately applied to the qualitative questions in this enquiry.

Giorgi (1975a, p. 83) defined phenomenology as "the study of the structure, and the variations of structure, of the consciousness to which any thing, event, or person appears." He noted that the definition was of necessity a general description because "phenomenology wants to exclude nothing that can appear and on the other hand, include only that which in fact appears precisely as it presents itself" (pp. 83, 84). Therefore, the researcher's task is to obtain the subject's description of the phenomenon as actually experienced, for herein lies its often implicit meaning for the subject. The

descriptions are studied and possibly deepened by the researcher, but not gone beyond, to yield interpretations and clarity. The challenge is to find a method of analyzing verbal descriptions that is as rigorous as the standard which has been practised in the traditional scientific method. According to Giorgi, a test of the rigor of qualitative research is that after a researcher states his perspective and the context in which he is studying the data, another person from a similar perspective can perceive the researcher's meaning and understanding of the phenomenon.

In phenomenological research, the investigator does not attempt to control phenomena, but to describe and understand them. Colaizzi (1978) stresses that the emphasis in phenomenological research is on discovery more than verification through replication. Research questions rather than hypotheses are used. As the enquiry proceeds, the specifics emerge as distinctions and meaning.

The descriptive or phenomenological approach can be executed as a case study. An individual is studied in detail, and according to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), authors of a text on qualitative research methods, for a case study, a worthy subject is anyone who has experienced the phenomenon and has the ability to communicate that experience. Each case contributes useful information, but the greater number of cases collected from simultaneously increases the whole understanding of the phenomenon. The case study method was chosen for this phenomenological study because of the characteristics of the journal writing and focusing processes. Journal writing is a long-term activity which evolves with the needs of its writer, and focusing has the potential to provide the focuser with a variety of experiences which differ with each usage. Thus it followed that a few cases

studied in detail over a period of time would yield the most complete descriptions of the phenomenon of focusing used in conjunction with journal writing. Because of the large amount of data generated through this method of enquiry, and the time restraint imposed in a Master's thesis, the number of cases used here was limited to seven.

Pilot Study

Jahoda, Deutsch, and Cook (1956), authorities on research methods used in the social field, stressed the importance of a pilot study which tests whether the specific intent of each question is understood as intended and discovers any other difficulties encountered in answering the questions, such as resistance to content, and whether sufficient space is given for the answers.

Based on the Jahoda et al. (1956) recommendations, the decision was made to conduct a pilot study to test the instrumentation used in this study. Two cases were to be used in the pilot study, however, one subject dropped out after one instructional session of focusing due to a discomfort with the process. The other subject completed the study. During the pre-trial, changes were made in the wording of the focusing instructions and in the actual length of the study which was shortened from six weeks (12 trials) to one month (8 trials) of focusing used prior to the actual writing of the journal. The latter change was made on the assumption that a commitment of six weeks might be difficult, particularly if the procedure proved to be not useful for some of the participants. The pilot study also brought out the

necessity for the researcher to be in regular contact with the participants throughout the month's trial period to assure their implementation of the procedure.

Selection of Participants

The seven participants were drawn from two sources in the Victoria area: a list of former students who were recorded as being journal writers, collected by Dr. Vance Peavy, and a self-help group who regularly met to draw, discuss, and learn from their dreams. The list yielded three participants and the group yielded four. Of these, six were female and one was male. They were in the 20 to 50 age range with the majority in their thirties. The occupations of the participants were as follows: one administrative secretary, one psychiatric nurse, one government manager, two students and two homemakers.

Gendlin (1969) cautioned that focusing should be practised "only in the context of one's broader method of therapy" (p. 12). Taking this advice into consideration, the decision was made to use as subjects only those persons who had established a practise of journal writing for a minimum of a year, assuming that the personal journal could be considered "one's broader method of therapy". Also, by using as subjects established journal writers, the problems and resistances which tend to arise for beginning journal writers were avoided.

Instrumentation

The six instruments used in the study are described below in order of their use. Copies of the Focusing Manual and all questionnaires can be found in Appendix A.

1. Focusing Manual

The Focusing Manual is a set of instructions for the focusing procedure. The set adapted for this study is a combination of the instructions currently used by Gendlin (1978), Friedman (1980), and Perl (1980).

2. Post-Focusing Questionnaire (PFQ)

The PFQ, devised by Gendlin (1969), consists of nine open-ended questions designed to discover whether the subjects actually underwent the focusing process.

The PFQ Scoring Manual (Carey, note 1) was used in the training of the two counselling graduate student raters. They independently scored each PFQ on a 1 - 5 point scale. The distinctions between the numbers were made in the following way:

- 1 = did not focus. Dissociated, random thought sequences dominated.
- 2 = did not focus, but stayed thinking about the concern.
- 3 = focused on a bodily felt meaning which intensified or diminished, but did not change.
- 4 = focused on a specific bodily felt meaning whose outcome was neither chosen or predicted.
- 5 = focused with a resulting distinct change in the meaning of the concern.

The critical distinction between not focusing and focusing is between 2 and 3. At 3, there is an abrupt change from talking and thinking, to the felt sense of the concern. Any person with a score of 3 or more has learned the skill and is a focuser (Gendlin, 1969).

3. Questionnaire #1: Background Information

The initial questionnaire was developed by Susan Nichols for her doctoral dissertation, The Personal Journal: A Mental Health Proposal (1974). Questions 6, 7, 8 and 15 were added by the researcher to obtain information which was considered to be relevant to the focusing procedure.

The questionnaire was used as a baseline of each writer's experience of journal keeping so that the results could be understood within that context.

4. Questionnaire #2: Effects of Focusing

The second questionnaire was compiled by the researcher to discover the possible effects of focusing when used in conjunction with journal writing. The questions were based on results of previous research on focusing, on claims made by Gendlin (1969, 1978) for focusing, and on possible effects of quiet reflection and flow-writing as suggested in the literature on journal writing.

The format is a three-level structure: multiple-choice questions are followed by requests for specific descriptions of each particular effect, followed by two open-ended questions asking for any other comments on the focusing experience.

5. Questionnaire #3: Determination of Continued Use of Focusing

The purpose of the last questionnaire was to determine whether the participants had continued to use focusing one month after completion of the project and in what ways it was being used. The questionnaire was administered to all participants with specific questions to be answered, depending on whether the focusing had been continued or not.

6. Interviews

In addition to the questionnaires, each participant was interviewed twice by the researcher. The purpose of the interviews was twofold: to continue the development of an open rapport between the researcher and participants, and to clarify and add to the written material from the questionnaires. Although the journals themselves were not examined, the sharing of private experiences was being requested, and therefore a trusting relationship between the researcher and participants was considered to be especially important.

The researcher's part in the interview was minimal. In order to elicit more specific descriptions, the following type of questions were asked: You wrote . . . (in the questionnaire). Could you tell me more about that? Could you give me an example? What do you mean by . . .?

The audio-taped interviews were transcribed on paper and analyzed in exactly the same way as the questionnaires. The method is described in the section data analysis. The content of the interviews was integrated with the information written in the questionnaires.

Field Procedures

The length of the study was six weeks. During the first two weeks the participants described their usual journal writing practises in the initial questionnaires and interviews and then attended two focusing teaching sessions. The last month was the actual trial period when the subjects used the focusing procedure on at least eight separate occasions, each time prior to writing in their journals. In addition, there was a follow-up one month after the conclusion of the study to discover whether the participants had continued their use of focusing. The field procedures have been divided into six steps which are described below.

1. Introduction and Background Information Questionnaire and Interview #1

The first contact with the participants was made by telephone to the names on the writers' list and by a personal visit to the dream discussion group. The purpose was to outline the research project to determine the interest of the writers. As stated previously, seven people volunteered for the study. In order to begin establishing a trusting, working relationship, the researcher then met with each person individually to distribute the initial Background Information Questionnaire and to make appointments for the first interview. At this meeting, the participants were briefed on the total procedure including the time and involvement required of them. They were also given a typewritten sheet containing the same information, plus the researcher's name and phone number, should any questions or difficulties arise for the participants. A copy of this sheet can be found in Appendix A.

The participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time and also that, for the purpose of adding information to the project, a request would be made at the time of withdrawal for an interview or written statement giving their reasons. None of the participants withdrew. After the Background Information Questionnaires were completed, the first interviews were held. All interviews were audio-taped with the subjects' permission.

2. Focusing Training and Administration of Post-Focusing Questionnaire

The seven participants met together as a group on two occasions, one week apart, to learn the focusing procedure as described in the Focusing Manual. The administration of the manual was preceded by an introductory explanation of the focusing process as described by Gendlin (1978). This introduction included a brief overview of the research on the experiencing process carried out by Gendlin and his associates and the subsequent writing of the Focusing Manual by Gendlin, followed by a description of the focusing procedure with specific examples of what one might expect to experience at each stage of the process. At the conclusion of the first session, the participants discussed their experiences including problems encountered, and suggestions were made by the researcher on how to overcome the difficulties. The second session was followed by the administration of the Post-Focusing Questionnaire and another clarifying discussion.

3. Trial Period

At the conclusion of the second focusing training session, each participant was given a copy of the Focusing Manual to use at least twice a week before journal writing for a minimum of eight times.

Phone contact by the researcher with the participants was made throughout the month of the study of ensure the implementation of the procedure.

In previous studies, the focusing procedures have been given orally. In each instance, they were used only once or twice, followed immediately by other instructions relevant to the particular research study. However, Perl, in her creative writing course, gave her students written instructions to be used at home before writing. For this particular study, the decision to give the participants written instructions was made for two reasons. First, many trials were needed to acquire as complete a picture as possible on the effects of focusing on journal writing and it was not feasible to meet as a group twice a week for a month for oral instructions. Second, the researcher did not want to disrupt the participants' normal routine of journal writing any more than was necessary, to ensure that differences in their writings were attributable to focusing and not to some other variable introduced, such as writing in a group atmosphere.

4. Final PFQ Administration

At the end of the month, the participants met together as a group for a focusing session followed by the second and final administration of the PFQ. This gave the researcher two measures of each person's ability to focus; one at the beginning of the study, and the second at the conclusion of the month's trial period.

5. Effects of Focusing Questionnaire and Interview #2

After the administration of the PFQ, the participants were given the Effects of Focusing Questionnaire #2 to take home to complete. Upon completion, the participants were interviewed individually by the researcher for the purpose of clarifying and elaborating their questionnaire descriptions.

6. Questionnaire #3: Determination of Continued Use of Focusing

One month after the conclusion of the study, the group met once more to answer the third questionnaire. Three of the subjects who were unable to attend the meeting received and returned theirs by mail.

Data Analysis

The procedure followed in analysing the data is the method proposed and used by Giorgi (1975a,b) and further developed by deKoning (1980). The five steps of analysis are:

1. The researcher reads through each description of the focusing experiences to get a sense of the whole.

2. The descriptions are reread more slowly and marked each time that a transition in meaning is perceived. This procedure produces a series of meaning units. A meaning unit is a natural unit of the subject's actual expressions which is delineated according to transitions in the intent of its purpose.

3. The researcher eliminates redundancies, such as repeated words and sentences, and side comments unrelated to the questions, but otherwise keeps all units. The meaning units are then clarified by

relating them to each other and to the whole. This produces a series of statements which contain the central themes of the meaning units.

One example of a meaning unit translated into a central theme is:

Meaning unit--"Made me realize how I deal with things and that often I spend far too much time worrying about something instead of getting right down to deciding what I really feel and what is the most reasonable way to deal with it."; to Central Theme--"Through focusing, the subject discovered a tendency to spend a long time worrying about something rather than getting down to what she felt and how to deal with it".

4. The researcher reflects on the statements, still expressed essentially in the concrete language of the subjects, and extracts the essence of that situation for each subject with respect to the experience of focusing. In other words, each unit is systematically interrogated for what it reveals about the focusing process for that subject in that situation. As necessary, the researcher transforms each unit into the language of psychological science. The example given in step 3 is further clarified in step 4 to yield the following statement: "Focusing helped the subject make connections not made before between events written about and other aspects of her life. She wrote of one focusing experience when she discovered a tendency she had to worry about a concern rather than attempting to understand her feelings regarding that concern and then working toward a solution."

5. The insights achieved are then synthesized and integrated into consistent descriptions of the structure of focusing as applied to the questions asked regarding journal writing and the writers. The descriptions, when appropriate, are written in two ways. One is a description

at the situated level which includes the concreteness and specifics of the actual research situation, and the second is a general statement which centres on the aspects of the focusing descriptions which are trans-situational. Both descriptions are important. The situated descriptions have value in trying to understand each subject's individual experience, whereas the general descriptions have value in elaborating knowledge of the phenomenon. The general descriptions can be related to what is already known about the focusing process in a more theoretical context. The descriptions from step 5 make up the bulk of the material presented in Chapter Four.

The complete analysis of all the data is not included in this thesis due to its vast bulk; however, the analysis of the third and fourth questions of Questionnaire #2, Effects of Focusing, can be found in Appendix B as a demonstration of the method. Table 2 contains steps two and three of the data analysis just described, and Table 3 consists of the statements from step four. The final descriptions of the situated and general structure of questions 3 and 4 can be read in Chapter Four.

Assumptions

The following assumptions are made in connection with this research project:

1. that a person's inner experience influences his or her external behavior and is therefore worthy of investigation,
2. that human subjective experience is an important part of psychological research,

3. that participants' self-reports have validity as evidence in research, and that self-reports are considered "objective" if they accurately reflect the experience of the phenomena in question,

4. that journal writing is a significant medium for self-exploration and self-improvement, and thus worthy of study,

5. that people are capable of self-help.

Limitations

The findings are valid within the limits of:

1. the extent to which the participants' experiences of the phenomenon are tapped,

2. the verbal ability of the participants so that they may accurately describe their experiences,

3. the researcher's ability to maintain an observational approach, without prejudice and bias,

4. the completeness by which the themes are extracted in the analysis,

5. the accuracy of the interpretation of the intent of meaning of the units.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The four sections of this chapter are: the Post-Focusing Questionnaire results, a brief overview of the participants' writing histories taken from the first questionnaire, the descriptions of the effects of focusing applied to journal writing from the second questionnaire, and a summary of the follow-up survey taken one month after the conclusion of the project. The largest part of the chapter is devoted to the second questionnaire results on the Effects of Focusing, which are reported in their final form after their transformation from the original descriptions through the data analysis process explicated in Chapter Three, to the summary statements.

Post-Focusing Questionnaire

The results of the PFQ, administered at the conclusion of the instructional sessions before the month's trial period (test 1), and at the end of the month (test 2), are to be found in Table 1 below.

The individual scores, coded 1 - 7, are shown for each rater and each testing with their averages. Scores of 1 and 2 indicate non-focusers, and scores of 3 to 5, focusers. Therefore, all the participants in this study learned the skill and are considered to be focusers.

Gendlin's (1968) tested reliability scores for the PFQ showed inter-judge correlation coefficients of .570 to .910. The correlation coefficient of the PFQ ratings of this study is .612. Gendlin (1969)

Table 1

Post-Focusing Questionnaire Scores

Participant	Test 1			Test 2		
	Rater 1	Rater 2	Average	Rater 1	Rater 2	Average
1	3	3	3.0	4	4	4.0
2	4	4	4.0	4	3	3.5
3	5	4	4.5	4	4	4.0
4	3	3	3.0	3	3	3.0
5	3	3	3.0	4	4	4.0
6	3	4	3.5	3	3	3.0
7	5	4	4.5	4	3	3.5

emphasized that the critical difference in the scores is between 2 and 3, distinguishing non-focusers from focusers. In other words, the distinction between non-focusers and focusers is more important than variations in the level of focusing ability as shown in variations in the upper scores. As shown in Table 1, there is 100% agreement between the raters that all of the subjects are focusers.

Questionnaire #1: Background Information

Journal writing served a definite purpose for all the participants in the study. The journal was a place to record activities, dreams, poems, jokes, dialogue with others, thoughts, insights, aspirations, people met, memories, and recollections. It was a place to describe moods, pour out feelings, and list the pros and cons of a situation.

The significance of the journals was tied in with the purpose. Most often mentioned was the importance of having a life record of one's activities, perceptions, progress, and growth. Many placed high value on the journal as a friend and confidant. Its usefulness in clarifying thoughts and feelings and as a release before sleep was also stressed. Others found the journal helpful as a memory bank and a good writing exercise.

Except for two who wrote immediately upon sitting down, the journal writers took some time to prepare themselves for writing. One engaged in some chore or physical activity to "peel a few layers" or distance herself slightly from her day, whereas the others took a few minutes for quiet reflection, thought or meditation before beginning.

The participants were asked whether they followed other reflective practices, and all answered affirmatively. All except one were currently meditating, or had at one time meditated. Other practices listed were prayer, yoga, swimming, and Progoff's system of reflection and meditation combined with journal writing. Also, all except one person were currently attending at least one personal learning group. These included a spiritual growth group (Course in Miracles), T'ai Chi, peer counseling, and a dream discussion group.

All wrote their journals for themselves, and only two ever shared parts with others.

There were difficulties in the journal writing process expressed. Most had some difficulty finding the time and maintaining the discipline to write regularly and consistently. Some who tended to wander from a topic, and others who tended to get caught up in a problem and be stuck there, were looking for ways to focus more constructively on a subject. Another expressed a tendency to become lost in too many details, thus losing the meaningfulness of the writing. Two people recognized the value in reviewing the journal, but had not found a way to satisfactorily do this.

Questionnaire #2

In this section, each question is stated and followed by the response summary. For questions 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10, the summary descriptions are stated at two levels: first in terms of the situated structure which includes the specifics of the actual research situation used and, second, in terms of a general structure comprised of the aspects that are trans-situational.

Question 1

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU USED THE FOCUSING PROCEDURE IN THE PAST MONTH?

All of the seven participants completed at least eight focusing sessions in the month of the study, as requested. The exact count showed that two used the procedure ten times, one nine times, and four eight times.

Question 2

WHEN AND UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES DID YOU USE IT? IF THIS VARIED FROM TIME TO TIME WOULD YOU LIST THEM ALL?

The participants described a variety of times and circumstances when the focusing procedure was followed. It was used in the morning, throughout the day, and in the evening before bed-time. Most followed the entire procedure and then wrote, although one person wrote after each step at the beginning of the study while learning the process. Most sat down quietly to focus, then wrote in their journals, although one person focused several times while walking alone in the evening, then wrote afterwards at home. One focused prior to meditation, and another used it occasionally for relaxation.

Question 3

WAS THERE A PARTICULAR TIME OR CIRCUMSTANCE WHEN THE FOCUSING SEEMED TO WORK BEST FOR YOU?

Situated structure of best focusing experience. One dominant use of focusing was in resolving specific problems. One person gave an example of how she used focusing for emotional problems. When

experiencing anger obviously stronger than could be explained by the triggering event, she found the problems were revealed and the feelings dispersed by the handles which came during focusing. For another, focusing was useful when she had reached an impasse in a life situation and was ready for a change. To focus optimally, several expressed the need to be willing to work openly with the problem.

Others, rather than working on a specific problem, found focusing worked best when they experienced confusion in their thoughts and feelings which needed clarification.

Focusing worked best for one person when used at the end of the week to gain an awareness of the dominant themes and issues in her life. Focusing helped her put them into perspective.

Question 4

WAS THERE A PARTICULAR TIME OR CIRCUMSTANCE WHEN YOU HAD DIFFICULTY FOCUSING?

Situated structure of focusing difficulties. Numerous comments were made regarding focusing difficulties when there was a lack of concentration. Reasons given for an inability to concentrate were: being too tired, too dreamy, too tense after a busy day, and too emotionally tied to an issue. One person illustrated how being too emotionally tied to an issue blocked the process for her. A controversial situation involving a friend had left her feeling hurt and resentful. For several days she would focus to the point of getting in touch with feelings of being hurt, then block going any further by thinking of ways to get even.

One participant wrote of a difficulty she had focusing on positive day-to-day happenings. For her, the process seemed to be effective only with "some negativity or problem". Of all the examples of significant focusing sessions described in the study, none concerned a positive daily happening.

Two participants described negative experiences of focusing. One encountered a physical block which increased in intensity during the session until it became stone-like. She could not complete the process, and even when writing in her journal afterwards, could not find a release or understand the cause. The intense frustration experienced remained fresh in her memory for several weeks. She talked to the researcher who suggested she briefly shift her attention away from the tension area when it became too intense, which she did. In subsequent sessions the block was experienced with less severity and frequency, and she was able to complete the process most of the time.

A second participant described a distressing session which she could not finish. During step two, as the packages symbolizing her current life happenings piled up on the imagined bench beside her, she felt completely overwhelmed. This was an unfamiliar feeling for her and came as a surprise. The "packages", which were mostly tasks to be done, accumulated until she felt like a tiny speck about to be engulfed by waves. She found it impossible to proceed to the next step of picking one thing that most needed her attention. She turned to her journal writing which took much longer that night. She sorted things out by writing down everything that had come to her in the session, how she saw them at that time, and how they fit into the future. Gradually she felt clear and once again "resumed mastery of my fate".

A third participant twice experienced the focusing negatively at the beginning of the process, but each time stopped it by thinking of something else with no further distress.

General structure of optimal focusing conditions. The experience of the seven participants indicate there are optimal conditions for focusing. Two aspects are involved: the state of being of the focuser, and the nature of the issue. The focuser's state of being includes cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects.

FOCUSER'S STATE OF BEING:

1. Cognitive Aspects: Focusing is likely to be successfully completed if a person approaches the issue with an attitude of being open and ready for change. The subsequent changes may be in the focuser's understanding or perception of the concern, or it may direct the focuser to action.

2. Emotional Aspects: The focusing process requires the focuser to keep a small distance between himself and the issue. Therefore, being too emotionally tied to it, or conversely, too removed from it, makes focusing difficult.

3. Physical Aspects: A relaxed, but fully alert, state is needed for optimal focusing. Therefore, it is important to be neither too tired, nor too tense.

It is possible for a beginning focuser to contact a powerful feeling or bodily state, such as tenseness in a particular area, which intensifies throughout the process and does not change. This may be distressful to the person who then needs help to go beyond the block. A counsellor, or someone knowledgeable about the focusing process, may

help the person through it, or she may be able to turn to an alternate personal resource such as journal writing.

NATURE OF THE ISSUE:

The experience of the seven participants suggests that focusing is more easily adapted to problem situations than positive daily happenings.

Question 5

IN GENERAL, I FOUND FOCUSING INCREASED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MY WRITING FOR ME. STRONGLY DISAGREE (0), SLIGHTLY DISAGREE (1), SLIGHTLY AGREE (1), STRONGLY AGREE (5).

Five of the participants strongly agreed that focusing benefited their writing. The specifics of the focusing effects are described in questions 6 to 11.

Question 6

WHEN COMPARING MY PREVIOUS JOURNAL ENTRIES WITH THOSE WRITTEN AFTER FOCUSING, I FOUND THAT FOCUSING BROUGHT FORTH - MUCH LESS (1), THE SAME (1), MORE (4), CONSIDERABLY MORE (1) - FEELINGS AROUND A PARTICULAR EVENT.

Five out of seven participants found that focusing yielded more feelings around a particular event. Of the other two, the writer who answered much less explained that she formerly wrote down a jumble of thoughts and feelings, but after focusing she wrote fewer, more clearly defined feelings. A similar comment was made by the one who answered "the same", in that the feelings written down after focusing were more defined and concise than found in her usual journal entries.

Question 7

I FOUND THAT WHEN FOCUSING BROUGHT FORTH PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN FEELINGS AROUND A PARTICULAR CONCERN OR EVENT, THE RESULT WAS A CHANGE IN WHAT THE CONCERN AT FIRST SEEMED TO BE. NEVER (0), ONCE (0), OCCASIONALLY (2), OFTEN (5).

All the participants experienced occasions when there was a redefinition of their concerns.

Situated structure of redefinition of the concern. A common experience of the focuser was to begin with a life happening or feeling and then have a change occur in what it originally appeared to be. For some who focused on particular problems, the initially perceived cause of the problem changed. One person focusing on distressful events in her life often discovered the real issue was within herself rather than with any of the events or people. In contrast, another person who blamed herself and her friends for her feelings discovered the cause was another outside source. She had experienced feelings of paranoia and self-doubt after smoking pot with friends. Upon focusing, she realized the situation could be explained logically, and the awareness came that it was the smoking which undermined her newly-found self-confidence. For another person who focused on tensions believed to be associated with work, the discovery was made that the tensions were more related to her home life. Still another discovered the source of his anger was not the events of the day as suspected, but unresolved conflicts with his mother.

For others, the focusing began with something less defined than a particular concern. One person who focused on an undefined bodily tension, after two rounds of the process, gained deep insight into the previously

unrecognized reasons for it. Here the concern changed from a nebulous tenseness to a specific cause which could then be acted upon. On a particularly happy occasion, another focused on an undefined, but overwhelming amount of energy, with the resulting realization that she was in love.

A change in feelings resulted in a problem changing to a challenge for one person who began focusing with the feeling of being a "little boy lost". At the conclusion of the session, he had the feeling of a "little boy found", and was once more connected to that strong and independent part of himself. In a similar vein, another person used the focusing procedure often when experiencing confusion, with the result that she was always able to see things more clearly and in perspective; consequently, they became less serious.

General structure of redefinition of the concern. When focusing, a person lets himself be drawn to whatever needs his attention most. Whatever emerges moves into the foreground and becomes the subject of the focusing. What comes may be a specific problem, a perception of an event, a prominent feeling, a confusion of thoughts and feelings, or an undefined tension or energy and is thus defined as the "concern". As the focusing continues, the concern is likely to change. The change may come in the person's perception of the concern, his understanding of the cause of it, or in his believed ability to deal with it.

Question 8

I FOUND THAT FOCUSING PROVIDED ME WITH MORE ALTERNATIVES FOR THE EXPLORATION OF PARTICULAR EVENTS OR CONCERNS. NEVER (4), ONCE (0), OCCASIONALLY (0), OFTEN (3).

Situated structure of alternatives offered. For four of the seven participants, focusing did not offer more alternatives; in fact for some, it had the opposite effect in that it narrowed them down. For one person who had a number of concerns and was involved in a multitude of activities, focusing brought out the question, "What do I need to focus on in my life NOW?" Focusing helped her move from feeling scattered to a sorting of priorities so that she was able to let some things go and then direct her energy to the areas of her choice. Some of the participants simply could not relate their focusing experiences of the month to this question.

Alternatives were often gained by the other three participants, and several examples were given. For one person who focused on personal and professional goals, the alternative of being more flexible in response to the changing needs of the environment was discovered. For another who began a focusing session feeling helpless about what course to take in her life situation, an image that came helped her be aware of her passivity, and the alternative of being active rather than passive became clear. Another gave the example of a focusing session about whether to live with her man. A former plan to live separately was not working to their satisfaction. Through focusing, the options available to them and their possible effects became clear for the first time. This in turn led to an active plan and a move.

General structure of alternatives offered. When the context of a concern is broadened and enriched through focusing, with new feelings, images, or words, new alternatives for the exploration and development of the concern may be provided.

In contrast, when the focuser experiences an overload of thoughts and information, the process tends to narrow the exploration.

Question 9

FOCUSING HAS HELPED ME MAKE CONNECTIONS NOT MADE BEFORE BETWEEN EVENTS AND CONCERNS I WRITE ABOUT AND OTHER ASPECTS OF MY LIFE. NEVER (2), ONCE (1), OCCASIONALLY (1), OFTEN (3).

Five of the seven participants of the study, at least once, through focusing, made new connections between the subject of their writings and other aspects of themselves or their lives.

Situated structure of connections made. Focusing helped one participant make connections between the events written about and her body tensions. Another reported that her smoking and food habits and her spiritual difficulties were connected through focusing in such a way that the connections could be articulated clearly. Another who focused upon the loss of a loving relationship, after focusing, felt connected once more to her capacity to love herself and everyone, rather than ONE other. Still others found connections could be made to their life situations after they had clarified their thoughts and feelings. Another discovered a pattern of worrying and inaction in her life situation.

General structure of connections made. When focusing clarifies thoughts and feelings and helps a person see life as a whole, connections may be made between what is written about and other aspects of her life.

Question 10

HAVE YOU NOTICED OTHER DIFFERENCES IN YOUR WRITINGS OR IN YOUR LIFE THAT MIGHT BE ATTRIBUTED TO FOCUSING?

The purpose of this question was to determine whether the participants had noted any other differences in their journal writing or in their lives attributable to focusing in addition to what they had already described. All but one answered affirmatively, adding more information to that already given. Distinctions are made in the summaries between differences noted in the journals themselves and differences the participants have noted in their lives.

Situated structure of other focusing effects on journal writing.

Some participants commented that when vague or confused feelings were clarified, or the essence of a concern was discovered through focusing, the searching phase of writing could be left out. The result was shortened entries, or their elimination entirely. Some noted that writing time was saved as a result of focusing. One participant described her journal after focusing as more disciplined. The writing was more directed and less diffused in another journal because focusing narrowed the area of concern for that writer. Several writers with a tendency to go over and over an issue, or a tendency to write in circles without reaching a conclusion, found a solution in focusing. An example was given by one focuser who found herself directed to the question, "What do I need to focus on in my life NOW?" She completed the focusing process and began her journal. In her own words, she said, "I even knew when I had written enough. I didn't have to write any more. I got what the answer was." The conclusion had been reached. Still

another writer who tended to become lost in too many details, thus losing the meaningfulness of the writing was helped through focusing. She wrote, "Focusing definitely helps me to pare down to the heart of the matter."

General structure of other effects on journal writing. Some journal writers tend to write a profusion of thoughts and feelings in their journals. For these writers, the process of focusing prior to writing affects the journals by shortened entries or their elimination, and more directed and clearly defined writing. Focusing leads the writer toward conclusions and decisions.

Situated structure of other differences in the focusers' lives. The differences noted in the participants' lives were in the area of new awareness, changed attitudes, and different behavior. Most commented on was the effect of taking in the whole rather than a part. For one, being aware of the "overall canvas" of her life, meant seeing the component parts in perspective. For another, seeing the whole of a concern allowed work on both cause and effect. The person who described difficulties focusing after a controversial situation with a friend (see question 4), explained that in a similar situation before learning focusing, she would have written comebacks in her journal and possibly used them destructively. However, this time, when she was finally ready to focus with an open attitude, she did not do that, but was able to see the situation in perspective and learn from it instead. One participant became aware of a tendency to look too pointedly at a concern without taking in the whole.

A change in attitude toward problems came for one person after learning focusing. She reported that now she feels more in control of her life and believes that no problem is unsolvable, or as difficult as it may seem at first. With her new confidence she wrote, "I almost look forward to problems." Because previously inaccessible information has become available for another person through focusing, he wrote that he has become more flexible in two ways: in considering alternatives to his usual patterned responses in situations, and in considering possible connections beyond the obvious.

Focusing led the way to action for some. "How to make my life work for me" was the main issue for one person during a focusing session. After a few minutes the focuser had worked out a complete schedule which she wrote down and was able to follow.

Another person noticed that since she began focusing, she had stopped trying to do so much at once. She had been able to determine priorities, and direct her energy to the areas of her choice.

Finally, one participant reported that focusing helped her gain access to her creativity more as she realized the many possibilities for her life. The most exciting aspect of it for her was the realization that "I can." For example, she became aware of a story she wanted to write once during focusing. Knowing she could do it, she immediately stopped to write it.

Question 11

OTHER COMMENTS?

The participants were taught the focusing procedure and asked to use it prior to writing in their journals, but an underlying question

remains: Does a connection actually occur between focusing and journal writing? Most of the participants addressed the issue. For those who used their journals to sort through confusions, or to search for answers, they wrote less after focusing because the searching took place internally. For some, the need to write afterwards was eliminated. Rather than using the journal to clarify a situation, one person, after focusing, would work directly with the concern as it was revealed to her. Another found that once connections were made, there was no need to write them down. Whether this shortening effect was desirable varied per individual. One person commented that unless she needed to save writing time, as during a vacation, she preferred the longer writing. Another participant had the opposite reaction. She wrote, "I'm glad to have focusing as it accomplishes much of what I'd get in longer entries." Another writer was beginning to avoid her journal before the study began because of all the time and writing it took to sort through all her confusions. By reaching the essence of a concern through focusing, she found that she wrote less and understood the concern at a deeper level. The extra time available, and the new insights gained have opened the way for more of a spiritual journal which she had been wanting to begin. One person, rather than recording the activities of the day, after focusing would record the awareness of a single most important event. She noted the similarity in this and what she had done in a Progoff journal workshop. She also noted that focusing differs from Progoff's Twilight Imaging procedure specifically in that focusing sorts the issues and asks certain questions.

For some who used their journals to record events, focusing was not always appropriate, as one person who used her journal to compare her

daily activities with her dreams discovered. Although she combined focusing with writing for the purpose of the study, she intended to separate them after the study was completed. Another writer reported having two opposing opinions on the issue of whether to combine focusing with journal writing. On the one hand, he noted that focusing narrowed his usual recording of a number of events to one event only, and so he lost some information. On the other hand, he found that he wrote in greater depth about the one event, with a gain in self-awareness, and this augmented his reason for writing. Overall, though, he found the focusing more useful for his daily life than for his journal writing. Still another explained that focusing was not helpful for her daily writing because it distracted her from her regular routine of meditation before writing.

Many of the participants remarked on the new tool they had in focusing for use in their lives. One commented that it worked well in conjunction with other reflective practises, and another wrote that with a spiritual growth course currently being taken, it had been instrumental in changing her life perspective. Still another reported it to be an excellent tool for psychological understanding. One person found she had a greater awareness of tensions held in her body throughout the day. Once aware of them, for example, in her face, she was able to use focusing to release the tensions. As well, in her yoga exercises, she has become more aware of how she holds tensions which prevent certain postures, and by focusing she has been getting some release and a greater body flexibility. Another person found focusing useful in clearing the mind prior to meditation.

Another question to be asked is in reference to the actual focusing instructions used. They were formulated and tested for optimal use in conjunction with journal writing, but in actual practise, how did they work? The preface to the instructions intended some flexibility in their use, but in practise most carried through the procedure exactly as written. One person changed them slightly to imagine the event or concern on a movie screen in order to feel the overall sense of it. Another who followed the instructions exactly felt directed to major issues rather than daily events. Because of her interpretation of the wording, she noted that she might have found it more useful for daily events if it had been worded differently. A suggestion was made for taped instructions rather than a typed manuscript. In all other ways the instructions were reported to be satisfactory.

Questionnaire #3:

Determination of Continued Use of Focusing

One month after the trial period was ended the participants answered the third questionnaire. Six of the seven had used the focusing procedure in the preceeding month, although two had used it entirely apart from journal writing. Three others had focused apart from their journals in addition to its use before writing. Frequency of use before writing varied from two to six times each.

Question 1

WHAT IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR CONTINUING THE USE OF FOCUSING?

The single most important reason for using the focusing procedure

was to clarify thoughts and feelings. The second most frequent reason given was to discover bodily feelings and tension areas, and the third reason reported was to clear the mind prior to meditation. The focusing was reported to result in clarity, relaxation, and an attainment of a sense of the whole person.

Question 2

HAVE THERE BEEN ANY CHANGES IN YOUR USE OF FOCUSING IN THE PAST MONTH?

The majority had made some kind of change in their use of focusing. One person reported that she now leaves out some of the steps and takes the wording much less literally. For another there had been a deepening of his focusing experience, that is, he had recently focused on more powerful emotions and memories. Also, at times, he experienced feelings of incompleteness and only a partial release. Others had separated focusing from their journal writing.

Question 3

IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE NOW IN THE NATURE AND CONTENT OF YOUR JOURNAL ENTRIES COMPARED TO THE ENTRIES YOU MADE BEFORE PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Four noted differences in their journals. The changes were described as "less rambling", "a lot clearer", "a greater clarity and simplicity in the information presented" and "more coherent and flowing".

Question 4

WHAT IS YOUR MAIN REASON FOR NOT CONTINUING THE USE OF FOCUSING BEFORE WRITING?

Three of the seven participants answered this question. One person explained that she had developed her own method of meditation and journal writing which precluded focusing. She found similarities in focusing and meditation, but preferred the less structured meditation. Another, whose journal is chiefly a log of activities, found focusing inappropriate for use with it. The other person had felt overextended in the month following the study and had written little in her journal. She had been tired in the evenings, her usual time of writing, and had not felt like making the effort to focus. However, the latter two had focused at other times apart from journal writing.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins with a discussion of the results as they relate to the questions asked. The research questions are:

1. Does focusing, when applied to journal writing, increase the significance of the writing for the writer?
2. What specific effects does focusing have when applied to journal writing? For example:
 - a. Does focusing yield previously undisclosed feelings around a particular concern?
 - b. Do focusers report a redefinition of the concern as a result of focusing?
 - c. Does focusing elaborate the context in which the concern is being considered and thus provide more alternative for exploration of that particular concern?
 - d. Does focusing bring about connections between a particular concern and other aspects of the person which were vague or undiscovered before focusing?
 - e. What other focusing effects can be identified as significant to focusers and their writing?
3. Are there difficulties which may be encountered in focusing, and how do these difficulties affect the focuser and his writing?
4. Are there optimal conditions for focusing in which the process is most likely to be successfully completed?

Next is a discussion of the method which includes a section on the study participants. The researcher then asks several questions

which might warrant further investigation, and the chapter ends with some concluding comments.

Before the discussion begins, the researcher wishes to restate here that the study was undertaken in order to explore and understand as thoroughly as possible the participants' own experiences of focusing when applied to journal writing. Except to determine actual focusing abilities, no attempt was made in this initial exploratory study to validate the focusers' reports by referencing them to external criteria.

Discussion of the Research Questions

Six of the seven participants reported that focusing increased the significance of their writing. However, two of those six had completely separated their use of focusing from their journal writing a month after the trial period had ended, and three others were using it apart from as well as in conjunction with their writing. Thus focusing for most of the participants had import in their writing and in their lives.

Focusing had specific effects which could be articulated by the users. Five of the seven participants became aware of more feelings around a particular concern, but for two who usually wrote a profusion of thoughts and feelings, focusing directed them to fewer, more clearly defined feelings. In pondering this, an analogy came to the researcher which she now ventures to present to the reader. The saying, "You can't see the forest for the trees," seems to fit this situation. The latter two writers mentioned above were the ones who tended to become lost in the "trees". Focusing helped them stand back and see the

forest as a whole. Once out of the trees, the essence of the forest was understood, and could be clearly described. The majority of the others were able to stand back from the forest, but they were wearing blinkers, and believed that the narrow part they saw was the whole forest. Focusing removed their blinkers, and they became aware of more of the forest. As a result, their perceptions of it changed, and, in some instances, the forest had to be redefined.

All of the participants of this study, at least occasionally, found that focusing resulted in a redefinition of their concern. Three examples in the words of the focusers are: "Events in my life which I felt were distracting or distressing, one by one got discarded and often the real issue was within me rather than with any of the events or people." "At one focusing I realized I was in love! I didn't know clearly what the feeling was. Just this overwhelming energy. During focusing bells started ringing and chiming all over--little bells, big church bells. I was in love!." "In working through tensions I felt were associated with job and work I discovered they were related to home life. I met a man during focusing who talked with me and gave me some insights." These results support Gendlin's (1978, 1979) claim that hidden aspects of the experience are revealed and the concern redefined through the focusing process.

The Kantor and Zimring (1976) study reported in Chapter Two examined the effects of focusing on a problem. Their findings showed that more of their subjects than controls reported changes in their perceptions of the problems, although these changes were not observed by the judges when the written stories were examined. The Kantor and Zimring results disclose a difficulty present in all research into the

inner psychological processes; the difficulty of validation by an impartial observer. Were the subjects untruthful or incomplete in their descriptions of their experience after focusing, or were the measurements inadequate? Other questions occurring to the researcher regarding validation in future studies can be found in the question section later in this chapter.

Only three of the seven participants reported that focusing provided them with more alternatives, but these three reported that after focusing they frequently found alternate ways to perceive and explore their concerns. For them, a tendency to view a concern from one perspective only was overcome by focusing, and new feelings, images, and words offered them more alternatives. For example, one wrote:

I was feeling really unclear about all the alternatives in my life--which to choose, how to hold it all together. I felt quite helpless--no time--bringing up a child, etc. Did focusing. Felt both an excited feeling and an impatient feeling inside. Saw a vision of a lid on a waterfall--the lid was holding the water back from bursting forth. I saw myself as a waterfall waiting for someone to take the lid off. Realized the only way was to initially push hard. Which is what I need to do!"

Thus there is some support for the Kantor and Zimring conclusion that focusing enriches the context in which the problem is being considered and thus provides more alternatives for explorations.

Focusing, like "flow writing", described by Baldwin (1977), takes a thought, question, or feeling and allows other words, images, or feelings to follow which can then be written down. Baldwin's claim that unanticipated connections are made was borne out in this study by five of the seven focusers who gave examples of connections made between their concerns and other aspects of their lives. For example, one wrote:

I was connected with my food (eating) and other potentially compulsive behaviors. From that I began to see the connection between my still ongoing difficulty with food and my difficulty spiritually and was able to zero in and articulate that. I am now seeing the 'problem' in perspective and working on cause as well as effect.

Here it would seem that through focusing more is discovered and awareness of previously hidden connections and patterns are brought out.

The effects of focusing were also shown in the journals themselves. Some writers prior to the study had used their journals to get rid of pent-up emotions by writing them down, and others had used their journals to sort out confused thoughts and feelings. For these people, the journal entries were shortened or eliminated after focusing because what was usually written down was processed internally before the actual writing time. For example, two wrote:

Before journal writing, my thoughts are usually scattered and feelings ill-defined. The process of journal writing clarifies thoughts and feelings. However, with this focusing technique the clarification is done first and the 'plans' are made. I feel almost a sense of urgency to get started on the journal or make a resolution to bring some plan to fruition at the conclusion of focusing.

and,

My writing has become much less a need to clarify and often lately I have worked directly with the thing that is revealed rather than writing about it.

For others who used their journals as a log of all their daily activities, the single event written about after focusing was described in more depth and detail. The participants who in their initial questionnaire expressed difficulties in staying on a topic or working a problem through to its conclusion found those difficulties solved after focusing. For example, one wrote, "I feel the writing to be more coherent and flowing and I will write more often to a conclusion, achieving an end or an

approach to solving a problem." The ones in a rut, "eloquently moving in circles" to put in Progoff's (1975, p. 39) words, were offered in focusing a means to move on. In one participant's words:

I tended to allow my mind to go over and over and over an incident that was troubling me, without being able to either switch off or to discover what was the lesson for me in it. The best thing was this method, rightly called focusing, brings together various things I knew about 'creative pondering', gives the process a shape and allows space for answers or insights to appear.

What seemed to happen for some was that focusing worked so well the actual writing became redundant. For example, as one person colorfully expressed it, "Like getting rid of all the gobbledy-gook, yap, yap, yap, just to get in touch with stuff and wading through the connections. I now see the connections, but don't feel the need to write them down."

Learning can occur, and insights can be gained which seem obvious and unforgettable after they have taken place, but in this researcher's experience they can also be forgotten. It seems reasonable to speculate that there is an added benefit in the actual recording and review of this learning.

There are potential difficulties in the focusing process, as many of the participants in this study discovered. Several had difficulty focusing when they were unable to concentrate but the reasons were self-evident and correctable; for example, one person wrote that he had difficulty "after a high-pressure, high-activity day, when I had given inadequate time to properly relax prior to sitting down to focus." However, two of the participants' negative experiences in which they became intensely involved in the focusing process and were unable to move on through the steps to complete the process were less easily remedied. From studying their experiences this researcher concurs with

Gendlin's advice that focusing should be practised "only in the context of one's broader method of therapy" (Gendlin, 1969, p. 12). Focusing is a powerful tool, and when a person allows herself access to the direct experiencing of a previously unclear phenomenon, the intensity of the bodily expression of that experience is likely to increase. When the focusing is completed, there is always a release of the bodily tension, even when something unpleasant is learned. It is that kind of release a person feels upon receiving some news after a long, anxious waiting period. Even if the news is unpleasant, it is that feeling of "Whew, at least now I know," and there is a release of tension. However, if the focuser, for any reason, is unable to complete the process, she may be left with a bodily tension ranging from a vague sense of incompleteness to a stone-like tightness. Consequently, some additional means of help to enable the beginning focuser to go beyond the tension to a relaxed state is desirable. This type of help can be provided by counselling or some other means. As described earlier, one of the participants in this study completed the process by writing everything down in her journal. Without some additional help, this researcher surmises that a few instances of incompleteness of the focusing process might discourage the focuser from continued use of a valuable procedure.

In preparation for focusing, Gendlin (1978) advised his students to "find a sense of general physical comfort" (p. 55) and to be mentally relaxed, but alert. He also stressed the importance of being able to put a small distance between oneself and the concern. The experiences of the participants in this study concurred with Gendlin's recommendations. In addition, they found that their attitudes influenced their

ability to focus; that is, they needed to approach focusing with an attitude of openness and readiness for change.

The nature of the issue focused upon was important for the participants as well. In the examples described by the participants, there was always some clarity achieved on a previously unclear or misunderstood issue. It seems likely that one participant who made a distinction in the usefulness of focusing depending upon whether the issue was a problem (focusing useful) or a positive day-to-day happening (focusing not useful) would have been more accurate if she had divided the situations between ones in which there was a lack of clarity (focusing useful) and others which were clearly understood (focusing not useful). As one focuser said, "If things were clear--there was no problem or concern--just happy-go-lucky, no sort of reason to focus in, I think."

Therefore, as a counsellor who plans to teach focusing as a tool for some clients to use, this researcher is now more aware of the value in adequate preparation for the process. There seems to be sufficient evidence to assert that paying attention to the physical, emotional, and cognitive readiness of the client, plus the choosing of an issue which needs clarifying, will enhance the client's chances of successfully completing the process.

Focusing was reported by the participants to affect their lives in changed attitudes and behavior, and in new awarenesses, particularly those gained by clarity and taking in the whole of a concern rather than a part. This indicates to the researcher the potential value of focusing in its continued use in a person's life, whether used in conjunction with, or apart from journal writing.

Discussion of the Method

The discussion of the results to this point has centered on the questionnaire and interview process. The focus in this section is on the participants and the method.

Unexpectedly, all participants learned the focusing skill. In the studies reviewed in Chapter Two, only a fraction of the subjects were focusers. In the Gendlin et al. (1968) studies one-half learned the skill; in the 1980 Summers' study, one-third successfully focused, and only one-fifth of the potential subjects in the Kantor and Zimring (1976) study were focusers. This researcher has had to question how to account for the differences in this particular study. Going back to the summary of the correlational studies in Chapter Two, it can be seen that high focusing ability was positively correlated with certain aspects of personality, with the cognitive ability to concentrate, with the ability to meditate, and with females. One element needed by the potential focuser is an ability to concentrate, and perhaps a majority of journal writers, women, and meditators share that ability. Focusing is a complex process, and the total answer to the question of why some people learn focusing easily, while others do not learn the process remains to be discovered. However, one firm conclusion reached by this researcher in this study is that journal writing and focusing are compatible processes.

The participants had two training sessions and then were given the written focusing manual to use on their own. The beginning training taught the student focusers what to expect in each step of the process and gave them the opportunity to discuss their own experience of focusing.

Their consequent use of the manual helped them memorize the procedure. Eventually the process becomes familiar and the manual can be discarded. Feedback from some of the participants indicated a preference for taped instructions over written ones throughout the learning period for the reason that they were able to concentrate better when they did not have to open their eyes to check the instructions. This is a consideration to note for teachers of focusing, not only for use in research, but also for counsellors who may wish to teach their clients the process to use at home.

Questions Pertaining to Future Research

This study was an initial exploration into the effects of applying focusing to personal journal writing. From the results, several questions have emerged. It is this researcher's belief that some of the issues raised warrant further investigation. Some questions in the phenomenological field are:

1. How do the effects of teaching focusing on its own compare with the effects of teaching focusing in conjunction with journal writing?
2. Might counsellors introduce journal writing to clients as a way to enhance personal learning by having them focus and then record the experience?
3. Many of the effects of focusing have been described, but exactly how do these effects happen; that is, what words, images, feelings, or sensations present themselves to the focuser at each step of the process, and how are these experienced?

Then, turning toward the experimental psychological approach other questions occur:

4. Can adequate external criteria be found for measuring changes in perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors brought about by focusing?

5. If adequate external criteria were found, would the believed reported changes of the focusers be validated by those criteria?

6. Would a survey of a large number of journal writers reveal a high percentage of focusers?

Concluding Comments

This study investigated the effects of focusing as experienced by seven established journal writers. There was consistency in the results of this study and the findings and claims of other notable investigators of focusing and other closely related processes. They are: focusing may reveal previously hidden feelings and aspects around a concern, resulting in a redefinition of the concern; focusing, by helping the focuser gain a sense of the whole of a concern, may offer more alternatives for its exploration; focusing may help a person make connections between a concern focused upon and other aspects of his life.

In this phenomenological study, seven journal writers applied focusing to their journal writing and described the results by questionnaires and interviews. An analysis of those descriptions has been presented in this thesis. The results indicate that focusing and journal writing have potential value for some people in their search for self-knowledge and understanding.

The results have led the researcher toward the following statement regarding focusing and its application to personal journal writing. The statement may be considered to be a hypothesis.

Focusing is a process which can appropriately be applied to personal journal writing when the journal is a life record of one's perceptions, reactions, insights, experiences, learning, and progress. The writing after a focusing session can be expected to have the qualities of simplicity and clarity. A journal may also be used as a place to pour out one's emotions and sort through one's confusions. In the focusing process, a person, by paying attention to his bodily expression of a concern, that is, the felt sense of it, is able to discard one-by-one the superfluous details and feelings and discover the essence of that concern. In this latter instance, the journal and the focusing process have the same results; the person feels a release and has a clearer understanding of the concern. Therefore, one familiar with both processes has a choice of two alternative means of release and discovery.

In conclusion, this researcher would like to suggest that journal writing and focusing are two processes which can be flexibly applied to a variety of individual needs, and as such are worthy of the consideration of counsellors. In addition, focusing and journal writing offer clients one means of continuing on their own the personal learning process initiated in counselling.

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The Effect of 'Focusing' on Personal Journal Writing

To the Participants:

I wish to thank you for volunteering as a participant in this project. The procedure will be as follows:

Week of January 5th - Fill out Questionnaire #1.

- A short interview with researcher regarding your journal writing.

Weeks of Jan. 12 and 19 - Two group sessions to learn the 'focusing' procedure (1½ hours per session).

- At 2nd session, fill out Post-Focusing Questionnaire

The time required to learn to 'focus' varies per individual. If anyone requires and wishes more instruction at this point, I will give it individually.

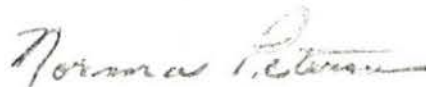
Next 4 weeks: Jan. 26 to Feb. 21 - Use the 'focusing' procedure before writing in your journals twice a week for a total of 8 times.

- At last session, fill out the Post-Focusing Questionnaire again.
- Fill out a Questionnaire determining the effect, if any, of 'focusing' on your journal writing.
- A short interview with the researcher regarding the questionnaire.

Week of March 22nd - Fill out a questionnaire to determine whether or not you have continued 'focusing' for your own use.

If, for any reason, you find you must withdraw from the project, I would ask that you submit a written statement giving your reasons for withdrawal for the purposes of adding information for the project.

If you have any further questions, please phone me at 381-6998.



Norma Petersen

Focusing Instructions for Writing

The following instructions are only guides.

Think of 'focusing' as a process of discovery. It is a gentle process. You are to be good to yourself.

You ask questions and wait for a response. Do not force anything.

You may want to write as you go along, or you may prefer completing the whole process before writing. You may leave out a step or two. The point is to be able to use the instructions as a "way in" to your experiences so that you may more completely write them down.

Note: The dots mean a pause whose duration is a matter of trial and feedback.

1. Find a comfortable position..... Relax and close your eyes.... Take a few deep breaths...and when you are ready just ask, "How am I inside right now?" and don't answer. Turn your attention like a searchlight into your inside feeling place and greet whatever you find there.... Practice taking a friendly attitude toward whatever is there.... Just listen to your body.
2. Now imagine yourself sitting on a park bench. Ask yourself, "Of all the things happening in my life now, what would I like to write about?... Let whatever comes up, come up. Don't go inside. ... Just imagine stacking them next to you on the bench. (You may want to jot them down.)
3. Ask yourself, "Is there anything else I've left out - any other piece I'm overlooking?.... If more comes up, add that to the stack. Stay comfortably distanced from your stack. (You may add them to your written list.)
4. Now, feel yourself magnetically pulled toward the one thing in the stack that most needs your attention right now.... Pick one thing. Don't go inside yet. Stand back from it.... Of course there are many parts to that one thing that has your attention - too many to think of each one alone. But you can FEEL all of these things together. Pay attention there where you usually feel things, and in there you can get a sense of what ALL THAT feels like. Let yourself feel ALL OF THAT....
5. As you pay attention to the whole feeling of it, you may find that one special feeling comes up. Let yourself pay attention to that one feeling.... Wait and let a word or picture come from the feeling... Let it act as a handle to the feel of all of it.....

6. Now, take this word or picture and use it. Ask, "What's this all about?... If it changes, go with the change. Stay with your experiencing..... (You may want to write down whatever comes. What you are doing is describing the handle.) Ask, "Does this fit? Am I getting closer? Am I saying it?".... When you feel you are on the right track, let your energy release... Experience the shift of "Oh, yes, that says it. That fits!"

7. Ask yourself, "Is there anything I can add to make this more complete?" (Write anything more you wish).... Repeat until there is nothing missing.

8. Now, giving yourself the time you need, you may begin to write. If you have already been writing, you may want to add more.

Post-Focusing Questionnaire

1. Without saying what you thought about, describe in two or three sentences what was happening for you during this time.
2. How is this different from what you normally do?
3. What about this was the best thing for you?
4. What was the worst thing about it?
5. What surprised you most about doing this?
6. Did the feeling change or move?
7. Describe what happened for you when I said: "Try to get a sense of what all that feels like. Let yourself feel all of that."
8. What happened for you when I said: "As you pay attention to the whole feeling you may find that one special feeling comes up."
9. Describe what happened when I said: "Wait and let words or pictures come from the feeling."

Questionnaire #1: Background Information

Code number:

1. Occupation:
2. Sex: M____ F____
3. Age: (Under 20)____ (20-29)____ (30-39)____ (40-49)____ (50 or over)____
4. When and under what circumstances did you first begin to keep a personal journal?
5. How often, on the average, do you make entries? How long are they?
6. Do you usually write at a particular time of the day?

If so, when?
7. Do you sit down and begin to write immediately, or do you take some time for yourself first?
8. If you follow the latter course, exactly what do you do in that time?

Questionnaire #2: Effects of Focusing

Code number:

1. How many times have you used the 'focusing' procedure in the past month?
2. When and under what circumstances did you use it? If this varied from time to time would you list them all?
3. Was there a particular time or circumstance when the 'focusing' seemed to work best for you?
4. Was there a particular time or circumstance when you had difficulty 'focusing'?

In the following questions please circle the appropriate word or words in the brackets in part (a) of each question.

5. (a) In general, I found 'focusing' increased the significance of my writing for me.
(Strongly disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, strongly agree)

The following questions refer to the possible specific effects of 'focusing'.

6. (a) When comparing my previous journal entries with those written after 'focusing', I find 'focusing' brought forth (much less, less, the same, more, considerably more) feelings around a particular event or concern.
- (b) Was this consistent throughout the four weeks?
- (c) If not, how did it vary?
7. (a) I found that when 'focusing' brought forth previously unknown feelings around a particular concern or event, the result was a change in what the concern at first "seemed to be". (Never, once, occasionally, often)
- (b) Would you give me an example from your journal if this applies to you?

8. (a) I found that 'focusing' provided me with more alternatives for the exploration of particular events or concerns.
(never, once, occasionally, often)

(b) Would you give me an example if this applies?

9. (a) 'Focusing' has helped me make connections not made before between the events and concerns I write about and other aspects of my life. (never, once, occasionally, often)

(b) Would you give me an example if this applies?

10. (a) Have you noticed other differences in your writings or in your life that might be attributed to 'focusing'?

(b) What are they? Please give examples if possible.

11. Do you have any other comments?

Questionnaire #3: Determination of Continued Use

Code number:

1. Have you used all or part of the 'focusing' procedure before your journal writing in the past month?

If you answered "yes" to question 1, please answer questions 2, 3, 4 and 6.

If you answered "no" to question 1, please answer questions 5 and 6 only.

2. How often have you used the 'focusing' procedure in the past month?
3. (a) What is your most important reason for continuing the use of 'focusing'?

(b) Are there other reasons as well? Please list.

4. (a) Have there been any changes in your use of 'focusing' in the past month?

(b) If there are changes, what are they?

5. (a) What is your main reason for not continuing the use of 'focusing' before writing?
- (b) Are there any other reasons? Please list.
6. (a) Is there any difference now in the nature and content of your journal entries compared to the entries you made before participating in this study?
- (b) If you answered "yes", what is the difference?

APPENDIX B

DATA ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE #2, QUESTIONS 3 AND 4

Table 2 = steps 2 and 3

Table 3 = step 4

Explanation of code:- the first digit refers to the subjects (coded 1 - 7),
- the second digit refers to the question number,
- the lower case letters refer to the meaning units in their order of appearance in the questionnaires and interviews.
- the letter I represents an interview answer.

Thus, 24eI would be an answer from subject #2, question #4, the 5th meaning unit, from the interview.

Meaning units: the subjects' exact words, divided into natural meaning units with each transition of meaning.

Central theme: the main theme of each unit as perceived by the researcher.

Abbreviations: j. = journal, f. = focused or focusing.

Table 2

The Natural Meaning Units of the Descriptions
and the Central Theme for Each Meaning Unit

Code	Meaning Unit	Central Theme
13a	The j. was more disciplined if I f. during writing.	The j. was more disciplined if she f. during writing.
13b	F. technique worked very well when I was confused or jumbled in my feelings - i.e., unable to define the "most important thing to think of right now".	She found f. worked very well when she experienced confusion in her thoughts or feelings.
13cI	Of the three (f. during walk, writing after each f. step, or f. then writing) I preferred writing as I was going along. It got me to know it better. And then, perhaps after - that's when I was writing - to memorize the steps here. At the beginning phase, the writing as I was going along was better.	When she first began f., she preferred writing after each f. step, as it helped her memorize the procedure.
13dI	Then, after that, it probably worked very well when I was out walking, too.	Once the steps were memorized, it worked well if she f. while out walking.
13eI	If things were clear - there was no problem or concern - just, happy-go-lucky, no sort of reason to f. in, I think	She found no reason to f. if she had no problem or concern.
13fI	I felt the reason for the f. would be to get down to what it really was you were feeling and try to make the connections from there. But first you have to zero in and if there is no confusion, there is no point.	For her, the importance in f. was to zero in through the confusion to important feelings and then make connections from there; thus, no confusion, no reason to f.

Table 2 (continued)

Code	Meaning Unit	Central Theme
14a	It didn't work well as a prelude if the j. was to be a book review or play critique, etc.	She found f. before writing didn't work if the writing was a book review or play critique.
* 19a	Once, during f. while I was out walking, I suddenly felt extremely small, surrounded by all those packages stacked up on the bench beside me. I was completely overwhelmed.	Once, while f. on a walk, she felt extremely small and overwhelmed by all the packages stacked on the bench beside her.
19bI	That was a negative experience. I couldn't proceed with the f. that night.	It was a negative experience and she couldn't proceed further with the f.
19cI	But I could get over that when I started to write things down. I resumed mastery of my fate.	At home, after writing in her j. she resumed mastery of her fate.
19dI	That was the only time it happened and it was, you know, just thinking about things. I couldn't make the things smaller.	The experience of being overwhelmed, not able to make things smaller, happened only once.
19eI	And they are all small. But then, when I got home and I was able to scribble in my book, then I could.	She could make her tasks small again after writing in her j.
19fI	The whole thing was a complete surprise. I didn't feel this at all before f.	That whole experience came as a complete surprise.
19gI	So there might be a danger in this. If somebody often felt overwhelmed or if they were very anxious about everything, this might increase their anxiety.	She has a concern that f. could increase a person's anxiety.

* Moved to #4 because it describes a focusing difficulty.

Table 2 (continued)

Code	Meaning Unit	Central Theme
19hI	What kept coming to me was mostly just practical things - assignments due at university, painters coming, the children, food, diets.	The "packages" were mostly tasks to be done.
19iI	Everything suddenly became so huge and I felt as though I was a little speck and everything was rolling along in huge waves and it didn't matter what I did, it was just going to engulf me.	Suddenly she felt like a tiny, helpless speck about to be engulfed by waves.
19jI	which is not the way I usually feel.	She does not usually feel this way.
19kI	When I tried to go on and say, O.K. pick out one thing - it was impossible. It was absolutely impossible.	She found it impossible to go on to f. step 4 to pick one thing that needed her attention.
19lI	When I wrote that night it took much longer than usual because I was starting from a position of just not knowing where I was. So I wrote down all the things and what was going to happen and how I could see them in the future and what they were doing now, and everything became clear.	Her j. writing that night took much longer as she wrote and sorted until everything became clear.
19mI	I went to bed really happy and content.	She went to bed happy and content.
23aI	There were several occasions when I found it very helpful in clarifying what I really felt about something or really thought about something, or gave me alternate ways of looking at the situation.	Several time f. helped him identify his feelings or thoughts about something, or gave him alternate ways of looking at a situation.

Table 2 (continued)

Code	Meaning Unit	Central Theme
23bI	I don't think any of the sessions would be more outstanding than the others.	No particular session was most outstanding.
24a	After a hectic, high pressure, high activity day, when I had given inadequate time to properly relax prior to sitting down to f.	He had difficulty f. after a busy day when he didn't take sufficient time to relax.
24b	On some occasions I went on with it and it worked, and on other occasions I was just too tired and didn't pursue it.	Sometimes he could stay with the f. and complete it successfully, but at other times he was too tired to pursue it.
33a	It seemed to work best when I was confused or fed up with some circumstance without being too emotional.	F. worked best when she was confused or fed up with some circumstance without being too emotional.
34a	F. was difficult for me when I was too obsessed and emotional about an issue	F. was difficult for her when she was too obsessed and emotional about an issue.
34b	or too dreamy.	It was also difficult when she was too dreamy.
34cI	Two times it was negative at the beginning. Those times I didn't finish - I'd just go off thinking about something else.	Twice when the f. was a negative experience at the beginning, she stopped the process by thinking of something else.
43a	As with so many other things, it worked best when concentration was up and not over-tired.	She found f. worked best when she was not over-tired, and when she was able to concentrate well.
43b	It worked particularly well when there was a particular problem to work through.	F. worked best for her when there was a definite problem to work through.

Table 2 (continued)

Code	Meaning Unit	Central Theme
43c	It provided a process of dealing with the problem.	It provided a process of dealing with the problem.
44a	During one session I encountered a block which became stone-like. The longer I f. on it, the harder it became.	During one f. session, she encountered a physical block which became stone-like.
44b	I was really distressed with it.	The block really distressed her.
44cI	That was the one I talked to you on the phone about.	She talked to the researcher on the phone about that session.
44dI	It just got harder and harder, and until you said change your focus to something else - I'd never thought of doing that. Since then I've been keeping that in mind and working on it, and realizing that maybe I'm working too hard at something and need to focus on something else.	The suggestion was made to shift her attention elsewhere for a time, which she tried, realizing she may work too hard at something.
44eI	That's sort of starting to come together. It isn't happening near as often. I haven't experienced it as hard as I did then.	Since that session, she has experienced the tension blocks with less severity and less frequency.
44fI	Maybe it released something in a different way.	She believes that something may have been realized in a different way.
44gI	But that day I felt worse as the f. progressed, and became distressed.	That particular session she felt more distressed as the session progressed.
44hI	That time I wrote down after in my j. how I was feeling, and was trying to work through - like where am I stuck and what am I stuck at - and I really haven't come up with an answer yet.	Although she wrote down her feelings in her j. that session, plus how she might be stuck, to the present she hasn't found an answer.

Table 2 (continued)

Code	Meaning Unit	Central Theme
44iI	When you mentioned about changing the focus to somewhere else, maybe what I have a tendency to do anyhow, is to look too closely, too pointedly, without taking in the whole thing, and that was the one time it happened.	She is becoming aware of a tendency she has to look too pointedly at a concern without taking in the whole, as happened that one session.
44jI	And I think that because it was so intense - it really is fresh now - the frustration of not being able to release that tension probably because I was f. too much on it.	She still feels intensely the frustration of not being able to get past the block.
53a	Not a particular time, but I find it most helpful when dealing with an emotional problem.	She found f. most helpful when dealing with an emotional problem.
53bI	When I suddenly find I have feelings of anger or whatever, and they are obviously more than could be explained by what the event was that set them off, then I need to look inside and trace back to where those feelings came from. This is just excellent. It works wonderfully for me.	She finds f. an excellent help in finding the source of feelings, such as anger, that are obviously stronger than can be explained by the triggering event.
53cI	I ask for a title or handle to do it that way. The title is what reveals to me where the problem is.	While f., she asks for a "handle", which reveals the problem to her.
53dI	Once I've traced it back and have a title, always the problem is dispersed.	Once she has traced the feeling back and has a title, the problem disperses.

Table 2 (continued)

Code	Meaning Unit	Central Theme
53eI	Perhaps I could add that, depending on what the problem is, there might be things that I need to share if another person is involved, but that is more in the way of explaining the results.	A resolution of the problem may involve finishing unfinished business with another person.
54a	I had some difficulty when trying to f. on day-to-day happenings which were positive for me. It was as if the procedure was only effective if f. on some negativity or problem.	She found f. effective only in dealing with problems, and not for positive day-to-day happenings.
63a	Not really, unless I say the mornings.	There was not time or circumstance when f. worked best for her, except perhaps in the mornings.
63b	Other times during the day I found it more difficult mainly because it was time consuming and once my day was moving I found it difficult to stop and do it.	Because of the time involved, she didn't find time to f. during the day.
64a	Yes, at bedtime I felt too tired.	She had difficulty f. at night because she was too tired.
73a	When I honestly wanted help - needed to sort out and see a thing.	F. worked best for her when she honestly wanted to sort out something.
73bI	When I really needed to take a look at something - and I wasn't trying to justify or anything. I just really wanted to take a look at it.	She had to be ready to look at the concern openly.

Table 2 (continued)

Code	Meaning Unit	Central Theme
74a	When I wanted to hang on to "justified" feelings of anger, resentment, etc.	She had difficulty f. when she wanted to hold on to "justified" feelings of anger or resentment.
74bI	The focusing would just stop - like I would think about doing the f. and I wouldn't sit down and do it properly because I wasn't willing to give it up.	When she wasn't ready to give up her angry feelings, she would put off sitting down to f. seriously.
74cI	I can remember one circumstance - this woman is a friend of mine - she blows hot and cold all the time and last time I had an encounter with her it was hugging and everything was really friendly.	She recalls one circumstance involving a friend who is alternately friendly and unfriendly.
74dI	I arrived over there and she was sitting on the porch with ___ and her guy and she felt threatened because there was another female there, so she just cold-shouldered me and stomped into the house and it was really childish.	The last time together the friend was very unfriendly to her.
74eI	I nurtured that one and couldn't let it go. I was feeling resentful. I was thinking of comebacks for her, instead of looking at how the thing happened. I could look at how I was reacting but didn't want to do that.	As a result, she felt resentful and only wanted to get even.
74fI	So instead of learning what I could from that, I was hanging on to the hostility thing and when I finally did sit down and do it honestly, then I came through it and saw some really neat stuff about it and was able to put it in perspective - but it took awhile! I hung on like crazy.	When she was finally ready to let go and f. seriously, she was able to see the situation in perspective and learn from it.

Table 2 (continued)

Code	Meaning Unit	Central Theme
74gI	In that case I'd start the f. and not get very far. I'd sit down and sort of do the unpeeling and like, comebacks would be coming to me. I had, sort of retorts, and it just blocked off. I didn't get anywhere.	Until then, she would begin f., but become blocked and only think of comebacks.
74hI	I did get to the feelings of being hurt and stuff in the beginning - but as soon as I got to that, I was thinking of how I could use that to get back. I wasn't going past into anything real.	She would begin f., get to the feelings of being hurt, and then think how she could pay back the person. She would stay stuck there.
74iI	There's an interesting thing in connection with that example. Before, I was writing in my j. and would often go through these kind of feelings and then I would write what I wished I'd said to her. It wouldn't be me staying with how I felt with her acting that way and I might even have used it.	Before f., if this had happened, she would write the comebacks in her j. and might even use them, rather than staying with her own feelings and reactions to the situation.
74jI	But with the f. I went way past that to more of an understanding of what I could learn from it rather than confronting her.	With the f., rather than telling off the friend, she was able to go past into a deeper understanding of the situation and learn from it.

Table 3
 Expression of Central Themes in Terms Revelatory
 of the Focusing Experience

Code	Descriptions Revelatory of Focusing Experience
13c	At the beginning of the study, she preferred writing as she focused, as it helped her memorize the procedure.
13a	Writing during f. resulted in a more disciplined journal.
13d	Once the steps were learned, f. worked well for her while out walking.
13bef	She found f. was most useful when she was experiencing confusion in her thoughts and feelings. With f. she could zero in on her important feelings and make connections to her life situation from there. Without confusion, there seemed no reason to focus.
<hr/>	
14a	F. before writing didn't work for her if the writing was a play critique or a book review.
<hr/>	
19ab	Once she had a particularly difficult time f. while walking, and she could not finish the steps of the process. As the packages symbolizing her current life happenings piled up on the bench beside her, she felt completely overwhelmed.
19fdi	She had not felt overwhelmed before she began the f., so it came as a complete surprise. It is not a familiar feeling for her.
19eh	The "packages", which were all small and mostly tasks to be done, accumulated until she felt like a tiny speck about to be engulfed by waves.
19j	She found it impossible to proceed to the next step of f. in which she picked the one thing that most needed her attention.
19kc	Back home, she began her j. writing which took much longer that night. She sorted things out by writing down everything that came to her in the f., how she saw them now, and how they fit into her future, until she felt clear and once more master of her fate. She went to bed happy and content.

Table 3 (continued)

Code	Descriptions Revelatory of Focusing Experience
23a	Several times f. helped him identify and clarify his feelings and thoughts about something.
23b	No particular session stood out from the others.
24a	He had difficulty f. after a busy day, particularly if he took insufficient time for relaxation prior to sitting down to f.
24b	At those times he might stay with the f. and complete it successfully, or be too tired to go on.
33a	F. worked best when she was confused or at an impasse and ready for a change without being too emotional.
34a	F. was difficult for her when she was very emotional or preoccupied and fixed on a particular issue.
34b	It was also difficult when she was dreamy and lacked concentration.
34c	Twice when f. was a negative experience at the beginning, she stopped the process and thought of something else.
43a	She found f. worked best when she could concentrate well and was not over-tired.
43bc	F. was most effective in helping her work through a definite problem.
44abg	She had a difficult and distressing f. session once when she encountered a physical block which worsened and became stone-like.
44h	She could not complete the f. and, even when writing in her j. afterwards, could not find a release or understand the cause.
44cde	She talked to the researcher who suggested shifting the attention away from the tension area for a time, which she did. In subsequent sessions she experienced the tension blocks with less severity and less frequency.

Table 3 (continued)

Code	Descriptions Revelatory of Focusing Experience
44j	She still feels intensely the frustration of not having been able to find release and go beyond the block that particular session.
44i	She is becoming aware of a tendency to look too pointedly at a concern without taking in the whole.
53a	She found that f. was most helpful in working with an emotional problem.
53b	For example, when experiencing a feeling of anger which is obviously stronger than can be explained by the triggering event, she will use the f. procedure.
53cd	It is the handle or title which reveals the problem and disperses the feeling.
53e	Depending on the problem, a resolution may mean completing unfinished business if another person is involved.
54a	She had difficulty f. on positive day to day happenings. F. was effective for her only in dealing with the problem.
63ab	There was no particular time or circumstance when f. worked best for her, except perhaps in the mornings when she had time.
64a	She had difficulty f. at bedtime when tired.
73ab	F. worked best when she seriously wanted to work on a concern and was willing to do so openly.
74ab	She found f. difficult when she wanted to hold on to perceived justified feelings of anger and resentment. She would tend to put off sitting down to f. seriously.
74cdegh	Once, a controversial situation involving a friend left her feeling hurt and resentful. She would begin f., get in touch with the feeling of being hurt, then block going further by thinking of ways to get even.

Table 3 (continued)

Code	Descriptions Revelatory of Focusing Experience
74i	Before learning f., if a similar situation had occurred, she would have written comebacks in her j. and might even have used them.
47fj	However, this time, when she was finally ready to f. with an open attitude, she saw the situation in perspective and was able to learn from it.

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December 14, 1981

Date