

CONCEPTUAL ENCOUNTER

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Whenever we attend to a person's life, whether it be our own or another's, we find a person who is existing in the world in a certain way. We may catch ourselves, or the other, involved in some project, or in the midst of anger, or falling in love, or simply disinterested. Persons may always be seen as having some way of being in the world. We shall use the term "personal experience" to refer to a person's awareness of how he, she, or some other, is in the world, of the awareness of involvement, anger, love, disinterest.

It might be objected that a person may be in the world in many ways at the same time, that terms such as anger or love mean different things to different persons, that it would be fruitless and unprofitable to study anything as nebulous as a way-of-being or meanings as imprecise as those of love. In this book we shall show that, in fact, it is possible to describe precise structures for different ways of being, structures that may be profitably used to map our personal experience and that enable us to share our experience with others. We shall describe the method of research we use to create structures which reveal important aspects of different ways of being. Our findings are mere beginnings, our method is still being developed, but we are excited by a glimpse of new worlds to explore. We want to share what we have found thus far and the method that has enabled us to find it. We want others to join with us in mapping personal experience.

The knowledge generated by conceptual encounter, together with the skills involved in using the method, is useful both in the art of leading one's personal life and the practice of helping others.

First, it helps sensitize us so that we see choices, ways of being that we were previously unaware of.

Second, we begin to appreciate the functional value of ways of being that may have previously seemed alien. Given our ideals, it becomes clearer what we are called upon to do, that there is a necessity to certain choices.

Third, knowledge of the structures of different ways of being leads us to be aware of specific relationships so that if one aspect of experience is known we have a set of "looking rules" that lead us to ask questions about other aspects of the experience. This is especially useful to the clinical practitioner who may have to be sensitive to a nuance of behavior and infer aspects of experience of which the other is unaware.

Fourth, simply having a clear description of a way of being helps us recognize the experience. In the case of negative experiences, the mere fact of recognition, together with the knowledge that others have suffered the same experience, may be relieving. Further, a knowledge of the parameters of the experience may aid a person in managing the experience in him or her self. Likewise, one is equipped to recognize how an other is being and to respond in an appropriate way rather than thoughtlessly reacting. And one may have to recognize the existence of experiences which one has never personally experienced, whole ways of being in which the self has never engaged.

Because knowledge of the structures of personal experience helps us to recognize an experience, see how it relates to the way we are being in the world, what choices we have and how

different choices will lead to different experiences, such structures are analogous to maps, though they are maps of personal experience rather than physical terrain. And just as knowledge of the natural world helps us notice and appreciate a plant in the woods and instructs us in the building of a house, our knowledge of personal experience helps us to appreciate and accept the psychological events of ordinary life and enables us to transform our personal lives, to help others, and to make our relations with others more comfortable.

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Conceptual encounter refers to an encounter between the investigator and a person who has agreed to act as a research partner. The investigator is studying some aspect of human experience, such as getting angry or falling in love, or making a decision. He or she is trying to fully comprehend this experience -- to understand the way in which our lives are structured when we are angry or in love, to grasp what alternatives are available, to be able to articulate an abstract description of the general phenomena that will illuminate our specific experiences and enrich our appreciation of life. But to achieve an abstract conceptualization that really comprehends experience and is not a mere intellectualization, the investigation must be solidly grounded in the concrete experience of actual events in the lives of persons. Accordingly, the investigator asks each of his or her partners to give a specific, concrete example of anger, love, or whatever is being studied, and to faithfully describe the actual events that occurred in as much detail as possible. Carefully listening, skillfully questioning, the investigator allows the partner to recall, and to some extent to relive, a concrete experience. After this is achieved (perhaps 15 minutes, perhaps an hour or two has lapsed) the investigator shares his or her abstract ideas about the essential characteristics of anger, love, or whatever is the general type of experience under discussion. Now, the inquiry shifts its focus from

the concrete experience of the other to the abstract ideas of the investigator. She or he attempts to get the partner to comprehend these general ideas and asks the partner to what extent they fit the specific reality of his or her concrete experience. Thus, the abstract conceptualization that has been created by the investigator encounters the concrete experience as comprehended by the partner.¹ Is there an enlightening "fit" between ideas and experienced reality or is something wrong?

Some of these encounters are mild affairs where there is an easy fit between concept and experience, others are complete misses, cases of mistaken identity where the experience is not really relevant to the conceptualization. Often, however, the encounter is highly interesting, the impact of the experience forcing the investigator to create a new conceptualization, or the power of the conceptualization leading the partner to a new comprehension of his or her experience. Thus, in the course of a series of encounters with different partners, the conceptualization becomes more precise and acquires depth and generality so that it can illuminate some aspect of human experience.

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The topic of inquiry may involve any experience, behavioral pattern, or psychological phenomenon for which the investigator and research partners have a common name. The investigations considered here include various emotional states such as "anger," "joy," and "anxiety," the behavioral pattern of "laughter," and the interpersonal phenomenon of "distance" between persons. By using the name of the topic, the investigator can ask the research partners for examples of the topic, thus generating an unlimited number of experiences of whatever he or she is interested in. Such experiences should always be personal in the sense of being the person's own experience, rather than hearsay, and should be a concrete instance (e.g., "last night when I was angry at Sally I got hot," rather than

"when I'm angry I get hot," or "people get hot when they're angry"). However, the experience may be the person's own experience of someone else's behavior (e.g., "he was so angry he turned red"). At first the partner's awareness of the experience may be rather sketchy. However, if the investigator quietly listens to the experience and is sincerely interested in finding out exactly how the event was experienced, amazingly detailed accounts may unfold. After this spontaneous account of the experience, the investigator may ask about important details.

Often, the investigator prepares a list of questions about general aspects of experience, and inquires into whatever aspects are not spontaneously mentioned. Thus, if the research partner has not mentioned how she or he experienced time, or bodily sensations, or psychological space, the investigator may ask how time, the body, or space, was experienced, and the extent of what is recalled may be expanded, in whatever areas seem to warrant attention.

The concrete experience of the partner's individual case provides the raw data of the investigation -- the "facts" or "existence" or "reality," which the investigator's conceptualization must fit. Hence, the existential details of the individual case are extremely important. However, the investigation would soon be hopelessly mired down in detail were it not balanced by the abstract conceptualization provided by the investigator. This conceptualization is an attempt to capture the essence of the phenomenon -- to describe how the experience is organized -- its structure. Such a description attempts to provide a sort of map or plan of the experience of anger, laughter, distance, or whatever phenomena are under investigation. It describes how the person's experience must be organized if he or she is to become angry, to laugh, to be distant. It describes what changes in experience occur with the anger or laughter, what other organizations were possible, and how the

"choice" of the particular configuration that constitutes anger, laughter, or whatever, functions in the overall context of the person's life.

Needless to say, a conceptualization that accurately fits experience and that reveals a hitherto unexpected order is almost an artistic creation that can only occur after patient study of numerous instances of the phenomenon.

In this task, the investigator is guided by two quite different demands. First, the conceptualization must be true to experience -- it must fit the various concrete experiences of the phenomenon. It must be broad enough to include all instances of the phenomenon yet narrow enough to exclude related phenomena. Thus, a conceptualization of joy must include all examples of joy but exclude cases of elation or gladness. Second, the conceptualization must be elegant. That is, it must be relatively simple rather than cumbersome, it must describe different aspects of the phenomenon and, ideally, it should use concepts that are related to other investigations of interest to the psychologist. It is the tension between these two poles -- the dialectic encounter between concrete instances of the phenomenon and abstract, elegant conceptualization that leads the investigator to create an interesting nontrivial conceptualization. In one sense, in order to formulate a good conceptualization the investigator must move away from the concrete data. That is, he or she can not simply select some concrete feature that seems important in many of the experiences, or abstract concrete features which different experiences have in common, or articulate some "family resemblance" shared by the experiences. Rather, the investigator must intuit an abstract symbolic form that succeeds in capturing the essential relationships involved in all of the concrete individual experiences. Like Michelangelo sculpting, he or she must free the form that lies hidden in the rock.

An adequate conceptualization usually takes a

long time to develop. At first the investigator may not be aware of any particular pattern in the different experiences that are examined. Then, a pattern may gradually emerge as he or she sifts through examples of the phenomenon and reads through the literature. Or there may be a sudden grasping of a pattern, the report of one experience may be a revelation, an insight into the essential structure of the phenomenon. On the other hand, the investigation may begin in a hit-or-miss style, the researcher having a notion about the structure which is thought in advance and only later checked with the literature, the observations of others and self-reflection. In such a case, repeated revisions will occur. Regardless of personal style the formation of a good conceptualization is a continual making process as the researcher moves back and forth between interviews, observations, literature and reflection, gradually becoming more alert to the nuances and patterns of the phenomenon.

The conceptualization develops through successive insights as it repeatedly encounters the experience of different persons. In one sense it can never be finished for there is always room for development in science, mathematics, and art. But there is a point where it is finished enough to share with others, a point where a product has been completed and publication is desirable. There are at least three criteria for this point where a conceptualization may be judged to be complete:

1. It is successful in explicating what has previously only been implicit in the phenomenon. Hence, it reveals the phenomenon in a new light so that a person examining his experience has a better understanding and appreciation of the experience. This is particularly evident when the conceptualization provokes an "ah-ha" as a person suddenly gains insight into his experience, realizes something that he or she was not aware of before.

2. It replicates in the sense that it fits

all the different experiences that different persons relate or, at least, further encounters no longer add anything new, no longer challenge the investigation.

3. The conceptualization is elegant and parsimonious. It uses few but powerful concepts in a precise way, concepts which may be related to the work of other investigators so that the conceptualization becomes a part of a wider sphere of inquiry. Rather than detracting from the precision of the fit between conceptualization and concrete personal experience, this systematic requirement seems to enhance the power of the conceptualization so that it is more apt to capture the essence of an experience. The requirement seems to function in much the same way that requirements of rhyme or meter and a sense of the history of literature seem to stimulate a poet's creativity.

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While the excellence of the investigator's work necessarily depends on his or her attaining a thorough acquaintance with the relevant literature and struggling to achieve creative insights, the development and testing of the conceptualization is ultimately dependent on the nature of the encounter between investigator and research partners. In one sense this is an intensely personal encounter. Its fruitfulness depends on both persons feeling comfortable with each other and the situation so that they can try to be completely open and honest with each other. However, the encounter is clearly structured with a research goal. Hence, it is not personal in the sense of two friends sharing an experience, nor personal in the sense of a therapeutic encounter. From the very beginning of the investigation, when the investigator asks the other if he or she would be willing to be a research partner, there is an atmosphere of partnership within the structure of objective inquiry. Open communications about very personal experiences have a meaning that is controlled (and often made pos-

sible) because of this research context.

After the research partner has shared his or her experience and the investigator has offered his or her conceptualization, the two must work together to determine whether or not the conceptualization fits the experience. Of course, it may be immediately apparent that there is an excellent fit, or that there has been a miscommunication and the two have little to do with each other. Often, however, and these are the most interesting encounters, some parts of the conceptualization fit but others do not. When these cases are pursued, either the conceptualization will help the research partner to attain a new insight into the nature of the experience so that he or she becomes more aware, realizing hitherto ignored aspects of the experience, or the concrete experience will convince the investigator that the conceptualization is in error and must be modified. Let us consider examples of these outcomes; first the latter case, where experience forces a modification of conceptualization.

When de Rivera initially began to investigate the emotion of anger, part of his conceptualization included the idea that when a person was angry, there was a desire to hurt the object of anger. This conceptualization seemed to fit his own experience and those of several other persons, so he began to ask his research partners if they could think of any exceptions to the statement. One responded with an experience that was an exception: she once became angry when her puppy wet the rug, yet did not want to hurt the puppy. She said that she was simply mad that the incident had happened and wished that her rug were not wet. Now an exception to a conceptualization may only be an apparent exception. The person in question may not have really been angry or may have had the desire to hurt the puppy but not let herself experience the desire because she felt such a desire would be wrong. But these alternative explanations did not seem to be valid -- the woman had acted angrily in other respects, and she seemed to be capable of admitting her aggres-

sive impulses. Thus, the investigator concluded that his conceptualization needed modification and this particular encounter with a person's experience forced an important revision of the conceptualization.

On the other hand, a good conceptualization may change how a person conceives of his or her experience. Lindsay's conceptualization of gladness includes the idea that gladness occurs when a hope is fulfilled. One of her research partners reported feeling glad after spending an enjoyable evening with her fiancé and some of his old friends. She was not quite sure exactly what occasioned the feeling of gladness -- only that the evening was enjoyable; she did not spontaneously mention having had any particular hopes for the evening. However, when she was given the conceptualization and asked if she had been hoping for anything, she suddenly realized how important it had been for the evening to be successful -- that she had been deeply hoping that she would get along well with her fiancé's old friends and that they would like her.

Of course, there are times when it is simply unclear whether or not a conceptualization fits an experience. In such instances a delicate judgement is required. These ambiguities should be recorded as indications of possible problems with the conceptualization and carefully preserved as data for future investigation. Often, later encounters, or modifications in conceptualization, will resolve these uncertainties.

When we speak of encountering the partner's "concrete experience" we obviously refer to the details of a specific incidence of the phenomenon (as opposed to the investigator's abstract conceptualizations of the phenomenon in general). But this notion of encountering a concrete experience may be misleading if it is not qualified and elaborated. For one thing, we must note that the investigator is largely dealing with a narrative -- with the partner's account of the concrete experi-

ence -- and clearly it is essential to establish conditions of inquiry which will promote faithful rather than distorted accounts, conditions we shall discuss below. Usually, this account is a mixture of literal statements about actual events, more abstract reflections about what happened, and figurative evocative language. The partner attempts to get back into the experience and communicate it to the investigator, but can only narrate what he or she can articulate about the experience. Hence, the partner is limited by his or her personal introspective and linguistic skills and, to some extent, by the language of the culture. Obviously, the whole process of conceptual encounter is facilitated when it is possible to select research partners who are reasonably articulate and generally aware of their experience in the area under investigation.

Nevertheless, conceptual encounter is not completely dependent on the narrative skills of the research partners. In fact, we are not interested in the narrative per se but in the experience on which the narrative is based, and the investigator's encounter with this experience is not completely limited by the partner's narrative for the latter may be able to recognize much more than he or she can relate. Hence, the investigator can draw upon his or her own descriptive skill, and knowledge of other examples, and of English literature, to offer literal or figurative statements about the experience which the research partner can recognize as applicable or inapplicable. Further, in a successful encounter the partner's narrative develops as he or she gets more in touch with the experience. As the encounter continues, the partner develops a better comprehension of the experience -- becoming aware of previously neglected features and appreciative of the richness of its construction (something previously taken for granted) -- convincing signs that an experience and not simply a narrative is being investigated. Thus, when any individual conceptual encounter is conducted in a satisfactory manner we may be assured that we have a reasonably valid description of the concrete experience of a

phenomenon.

Nevertheless, this concrete experience is itself an "abstraction" in the sense that it is created by a human being and may be a more or less accurate representation of the lived event. Since we wish to go beyond specific experience to the general phenomenon we must question the validity of the experience itself. Any concrete experience is of something, and we are interested in the experience of psychological events, such as anger. An experience ordinarily appears to be about a real event, that is, the anger, love or whatever is usually experienced as genuine. However, we know that this experience may change. Thus, in the course of either therapy or conceptual encounter, a person may initially experience his or her behavior as neutral but later experience the same behavior as angry, or may initially experience anger but later experience the anger as manufactured to avoid an experience of hurt or anxiety. In such cases, the initial experience is real enough but the events referred to by the experience -- the neutral remark or the anger -- prove somewhat unreal. If we are interested in the general phenomenon of anger as it is lived, then we must be alert to the possibility of its manifestation in ways that are not immediately experienced by the angry person and to the possibility that its nature may be a bit different from the description of an experience of anger that is defensive rather than fully real. Fortunately, while any particular experience may be partially invalid, the investigator encounters many different experiences in the course of studying a general phenomenon. It would be unlikely to arrive at a conceptualization which fits a number of different experiences without the conceptualization having some degree of validity.

This validity is, however, completely dependent on the honesty of the encounter between the investigator's conceptualization and the partner's experience. Hence, the investigator must be alert to the possibility that the partner may distort the

experience, accepting the conceptualization out of suggestibility rather than because it really fits and gives insight. The likelihood of such a distortion depends a good deal on the configuration of the field of forces during the encounter. It is easy to imagine a situation where a partner who is not used to trusting his or her own experience and is not committed to the goals of the investigation wants to please the investigator and, hence, accepts a conceptualization that distorts the experience in order to avoid the uncomfortable tension involved in frustrating an enthusiastic investigator. On the other hand, to the extent that the partner discovers that the experience is valued in its own right, to the extent that he or she is committed to the goal of discovery, to the extent that it is clear that the way to please the investigator is to express one's own experience, and to the extent that it is clear that the investigator can tolerate the frustration of hearing discomfoting evidence -- accepting it as a challenge rather than a defeat -- to that extent the partner will stick to the experience and reject an incorrect conceptualization.

There is significant evidence that persons give an investigator what he or she is looking for. If a person can see that the investigator is looking for the truth, genuinely wants a conceptualization that will fit the facts of the experience, then the person will make an honest inquiry. Hence, the best defense against the possibility of distortion is: (1) for the investigator to involve the other as a partner in the research enterprise, and (2) for the investigator to continually work on his or her ability to be personally accepting of the other's experience and to face disagreement as an opportunity rather than a defeat.

Conceptual encounter is a powerful and highly sensitive method that can probably be used in any area of inquiry. However, its power is completely dependent on the personal qualities of the researcher and somewhat dependent on the personal qualities of the research partner.

Different investigators naturally bring their personalities to the encounter. Some confidently assert their conceptualization and argue with their research partner, almost forcing their research partner to oppose the experience to the conceptualization. Others gently encourage the partner to speak and offer their conceptualization with diffidence. These differences do not matter; if it is clear that the investigator is honest in the pursuit of the truth, the research partner adjusts to the situation and will clearly assert the truth of his or her own experience. What is crucial is this: on the one hand, the investigator must be fully involved in and committed to the research so that the partner can experience a conviction that the results matter; on the other hand, the investigator must cultivate detachment in the sense that he or she is committed to the acceptance of whatever experiences are reported.

Even with the most articulate partner, the investigator must train to be a sensitive listener. He or she must be able to go into the other's position so that the partner's experience is fully comprehended, must be alert for any apparent incongruities in the narration of the experience. Such incongruities are usually a sign that either the investigator or the partner is fooling the self about the true nature of the experience. The data here are how the partner in fact experiences the situation, not how the partner or the investigator thinks he or she experiences it. A difficult problem is posed when the research partner may be out of touch with his or her feelings -- thinking he or she experiences something without really stopping to become aware of how it is actually experienced. When this seems to be happening the investigator may help by asking for concrete descriptions of the experience and what actually happened. For example, during an interview on the emotion of horror, the investigator noted a slight incongruity in his partner's report of his horror at reading an account of torture. The account related how some early pioneers heard a missing member of their

party screaming for mercy as he was tortured by some Indians. The partner assumed (thought) that his horror was a horror of being the torturer. However, when he was encouraged to reflect carefully on the specific details of his experience, he realized that his horror was actually a horror of being in the position of victim -- specifically at being reduced to the point of having to plea for mercy.

Listening to the account of the partner's experience, the investigator compares it with his or her own experience. Is the experience recognized as an instance of the phenomenon that is being studied? If not, there may be some unreliability in the way the English term is used to refer to the experience. (In fact, we have found high reliability in word usage, but several instances where one word was used by different persons to refer to different "sub-species" of the experience). Does the investigator comprehend how the partner could have the experience in the context of the situation that is described, can he or she imagine acting in the way the partner acted? Any lack of recognition or understanding indicates a possible source of unreliability in the data. Perhaps the investigator lacks the necessary experience or imagination for recognition, or either the investigator or research partner is not in touch with some aspect of the experience that is difficult for him or her to acknowledge. Ultimately, of course, the final conceptualization must satisfy the investigator's own experiences. These personal concrete experiences of the phenomenon are extremely important instances because they may be studied from a privileged position, compared with one another, and examined for the essential similarities and differences which may provide the basis for abstract conceptualization.

The importance of the encounter between investigator and research partner and the fact that judgement as to the adequacy of a conceptual fit must come from this dialogue should not lead the reader to neglect the importance of the creative activity involved in formulating the conceptualiza-

tion. The investigator must take full responsibility for creating this conceptualization. She or he is the only person fully acquainted with the history of previous attempts, with the full range of experiences the conceptualization must fit, with the demands of logical consistency required by other conceptualizations and so on. The partner cannot be expected to do the investigator's work.

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Psychological terms are a starting point, a way of gaining access to a range of experiences. If many experiences are referred to with the same terms, e.g., "anger," then perhaps it makes sense to look for what these experiences have in common. What ties them together? In its most simple sense, this is our starting point. The necessity of relying on the words and terms used to describe experiences arises out of the obvious fact that the experiences themselves are hidden until they are articulated, except possibly for one's own experiences, and even there exactly what process of knowing is involved is difficult to specify. Words help us clarify our own experience, and words are a major (though not the only) avenue to understanding the experience of others. Thus, while we are not interested in word usage but, rather, in a reality that lies beyond words, we have a basic trust in language as a gateway to experience.²

So we begin with words; we attempt to define an area of investigation by choosing a psychological word or concept (e.g., distance, joy, laughter), and then we attempt to gather examples of experiences which are related to our initial concept or term. What we would like is a collection of experiences; but of course what we necessarily get is a collection of descriptions of experiences, gathered from ourselves, from reading, and from interviews with other people. Each of these sources is important and though no one of them will give an accurate or full picture by itself, all of them taken together will give us a more complete picture of some partic-

ular experiential landscape than we would obtain from any one source. And we want as full a picture as possible.

If we simply wanted a series of pictures (or an average picture) of some experience, we might choose a random sample of subjects to provide us with such descriptions. But since what we want is a full picture of an experiential landscape, we instead seek out a particular kind of person to help us: someone who is sensitive, verbal, introspective, interested in nuances of experience, articulate in talking about those nuances. While the process of gathering examples cannot be unbiased in the conventional sense, we do endeavor to proceed with caution and are careful to be as circumspect in our methods of gathering information as we can. For example, although we choose certain kinds of people to talk with, we may tape-record our interviews and then have someone else listen to the interviews, to check our understanding of what is being said against someone else's. Or if we think a particular passage from a novel describes a particular kind of distance between two characters, we may ask another observer to read the passage and make a judgement about the kind of distance involved. We want to explore the meaning of psychological events; hence, we want to obtain descriptions of psychological events which are full and explicit and accurate.

The term "explicit" is a key word for us, since there is a sense in which our aim is to make explicit the kind of understanding of psychological events which many of us have only implicitly. There is an important distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge. The world most of us live in is crowded with occasions in which people do things with one another, which we observe and repeatedly attempt to make sense of. The sense we make of these events is for the most part implicit. If you ask a person to say what he sees in some interpersonal situation he is confronted with, he may fail miserably to specify explicitly and articulately its important features, and yet at the same time he

may demonstrate his understanding of the situation by his deft and tactful handling of it. This kind of understanding is at the basis of all skills such as that of getting along with people.³ Language is perhaps our principal way of making explicit what we implicitly apprehend of what goes on around us. But language is helpful only insofar as it is synchronous with the structure which we assume exists in our experience. The structure of experience is what makes possible implicit knowledge (of the sort which enables us to act with tact for example) and explicit knowledge (of the sort embodied in psychological theory).

Much of our work consists of our attempt to elucidate the structure which we assume exists within the psychological events we are examining. There is some sense in which we cannot entirely justify this assumption of structure; that is, in a sense it is a given of our procedure, and so basic as to be beyond argument. However, we have certain arguments which we think persuasive. For example, we think that the fact that we can communicate with each other at all about our experience indicates there is some structure inherent in the experience, a structure which by being there enables us to talk about our experiences. That is, the experiences are not in constant chaotic flux; there is some element of order, some element of repetitive stability or organization in our experience, and it is order which is not totally idiosyncratic, else we could not talk to one another about our experiences. Further, we think that words are not applied entirely arbitrarily to experiences; at least once a culture has developed a language we think there is considerable agreement in language usage so that what one person calls anxiety will not ordinarily be entirely different from what another person calls anxiety. Of course, some persons may use some words bizarrely, differently than the rest of us, and there are often "sub-species" of meanings. But we could not do our kind of psychological investigation unless we believed that most persons use most words similarly, that words are applied to experiences in an orderly fashion, that experiences do have enough order to enable persons to apply words to their

experiences in repetitively similar ways. Our results appear to support the validity of these assumptions.

We do not take a clear-cut position on whether the structures we are describing are inherent in universal processes (in the manner of the dynamics described by the Gestalt psychologist), or an inherited pattern of organismic-environmental relationships (as some ethologists would assert), or are a consequence of the uniquely human child-mother relationship (as described by developmental psychoanalysis), or are cultural phenomena acquired early along with language (an ethnomethodologist might argue). In any case, it is clear that language is very tied up with the structures we are describing, and we want to leave open questions such as whether or not investigations carried out in other cultures would find structures which were not exactly identical with those we find. Indeed, the precision with which we can articulate the structure of experience by using conceptual encounter opens up an exciting new area of cross-cultural research. The results of an encounter within one language may be compared with the results from another language (using terms which are ordinarily presumed to be bilingual equivalents). Does a detailed comparison reveal equivalent structures or are there important differences in how the different cultures choose to structure emotional experience?⁴

So we assume that our experience is structured and that part of our job is to articulate the nature of these structures. Within social psychology, Heider (1958, p. 12) has clearly presented this position. As he states it, his own endeavor is to "make explicit the system of concepts that underlies interpersonal behavior, and the analysis of words and situations is considered only a means to this end." He uses the phrase "a system of concepts" where we have been using the word "structure," but the intent is the same.

Heider uses the phrase to "make explicit." Our procedure is best characterized as an attempt to make explicit the structure of psychological processes. This is a necessary beginning for our attempt to

develop psychology since so much of our experience in inarticulate. That is, often we are not clear about what we are experiencing or how to describe it, and certainly even when we are clear about what we are experiencing, we often do not see any connection between one experience and another; we do not comprehend the underlying structure. To return to our earlier emphasis on using words and psychological terms as a starting point: if we are interested in joy and we gather examples of what people call joy, we know that the same term is being used to describe many different experiences, but we do not explicitly understand what these experiences have in common that permits persons to identify them as recurrent events. The relation between the term and the various psychological events it is used to point toward is hazy and implicit until we begin to study those events to discern the inherent structure, and until we do this we can hardly begin to set the connections between joy and other aspects of our experience.

Such basic conceptualization, the explication of structure, is also quite useful for the therapeutic enterprise. Of course, therapy involves much more than a conceptualization of experience; it involves changing how one lives, influencing the very process of experiencing.⁵ In fact, conceptualization can be misused, as when a person intellectualizes so that experiencing is avoided. But there is an important place for reflection and accurate conceptualization in therapy. A good conceptualization, like a good map, makes important discriminations and reveals important relationships; it is hardly the same as going somewhere, but it can be quite useful in helping a person get there.

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We have said that when we explore a psychological event such as joy, we are attempting to articulate the structure of our experience of the event. But we do not conceive experience to be a private, subjective, mind-idea, that is "inside" a person. Rather, we are using the term to refer to an awareness of some way of being-in-the world.⁶

Thus, when we refer to "joy" or "laughter" or a person being "distant," we do not mean merely a subjective feeling or a given set of behaviors. We mean a way of being-in-the-world, a unity, which is reflected in how a person perceives the world, the actions that are taken, the feelings we have and so forth. In our own work we make the assumption that any given way of being is a "choice," not in a conscious sense, but in the sense that there are always alternative ways of being and that a person can accept some responsibility for the way he or she lives. We find it useful to inquire into how any given way of being functions in a person's life. Thus, we may ask what function joy serves or what would go wrong if a person could not laugh. We want to clarify exactly how various ways of being are different from one another.

We examine accounts of experience in literature as well as the accounts of our research partners and it may be objected that since literary accounts are often acts of imagination, the investigation is dealing with imagined experience rather than actual experience. For that matter, it might be objected that since our research partners are usually recalling some experience in the past, we are dealing with remembered experience rather than actual experience. Such objections miss an important point about the nature of human experience. They assume that experience is a natural phenomenon that happens to us whereas, in actuality, experience is a created interpretation. The experience of the moment is just as much an interpretation as is the experience of a past event or the experience portrayed by a work of art.⁷

Of course, our experience may be more or less formed. Dewey (1934) has discussed this. Often, our experience may shift chaotically and be rather unclear, but when our experience is truly An Experience it has an internal unity of a successful work of art. By working with experiences which have been completed -- which are from the past or from works of literature -- and which are unambiguous instances of anger, joy, or whatever, we have deliberately

selected experiences with good form and taken advantage of this good form to articulate clear structures. However, we have had to sacrifice a full investigation into the developmental dynamics of experience -- of how a person who is currently experiencing a situation attempts to structure his or her being-in-the-world. The description of this area, which is now largely the province of psychotherapy, will have to await future investigation.

It should be noted that regardless of whether we study past experience or current experiences we are not interested in studying experience as an objective event. One can study how different circumstances affect how a person perceives, or how the memory of an event changes as time passes and the person attempts to reconcile the memory with the rest of his or her life, or how different persons perceive the "same" event. Or one can study, as cognitive psychology does, what persons think about their experience -- how they conceive of anger, love, or any other phenomena. However, these are questions whose answers can be sought with traditional methods.

Conceptual encounter seeks to answer a radically different type of question. It asks how we can describe the meaning of an experience -- the organization of a person's experience at a given moment, the person's way of being-in-the-world -- the various choices that confront him as a creative participant in experience.

We could, of course, ask our research partner to participate in an experiment. We could contrive a situation in which our partner actually becomes angry, laughs, or whatever, and interview on the spot as to his or her experience. We could also interview other research partners who observe the situation. In fact, as we shall see, there is no reason why conceptual encounter could not be used in conjunction with an experimental approach. However, this would not necessarily allow us to grasp the "actual" experience any more accurately than via retrospective accounts. We would simply have additional accounts of experiences. On the one hand,

these more immediate accounts might give us a different access into the meaning of the phenomenon -- and, hence, such investigation is worth pursuing. On the other hand, the heat and focus of the movement might blind the research partners to important aspects of the experience, and such accounts often suffer from the observers' not having the time to reflect and contrast the experience with others of the same or different type. While an experience may be distorted by memory, it is also true that the full meaning of an experience may only become clear with the passage of time. It is desirable to have as many accesses to experiences as is possible, and if one wants to grasp the meaning of experience, one may well look for it in a work of literature or art where the essential features of an experience are sometimes captured with a minimum of confusing detail.

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To comprehend the method of conceptual encounter fully, it may be useful to compare it briefly to other methods, contrasting it with traditional experimental and psycho-analytic methods, and relating it to phenomenology and field theory. Perhaps the sharpest points of contrast with the usual experimental or correlational procedure are conceptual encounter's regard for the "subject" as a partner in the research enterprise rather than as an organism whose behavior is being studied, and its regard for the evidence obtained by detailed analysis of single cases rather than the statistical assessment of the differences between groups subjected to different treatment. In contrast to classical psycho-analytic methodology, conceptual encounter involves a dialogue aimed at the investigation of a particular type of human experience, rather than a therapeutic encounter between an analyst and a patient aimed at helping the patient achieve an adequate historical comprehension of his or her life. While the investigator offers a type of interpretation of the other's experience, the other retains the authority to argue whether or not

the interpretation fits his or her experience. (Of course, in principle this is also true in analysis but the dynamics of a treatment situation, as opposed to a research situation, seem to lead the patient's experience to change much more frequently than analytic theory.)

Since conceptual encounter seeks to articulate essential structures that are implicit in experience, it is closely related to the phenomenological psychology envisioned by Husserl and developed, in different ways, by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (cf. Kockelmans, 1967). However, the investigator does not only reflect upon his or her own experience but also upon the experiences which partners report, thus almost immediately expressing a concern for inter-subjective validity. The group of phenomenological psychologists at Duquesne have been concerned with this problem of inter-subjective validity and Colaizzi (1973) has contrasted the method of reflecting only upon one's own experience with a method of empirical phenomenology in which the investigator attempts to articulate a structure that is common to the experiences of others, and to various combinations of these procedures.⁸ While conceptual encounter is closely related to these procedures, it stresses the importance of dialogue between the investigator and the research partner and it emphasizes the inherent creative tension between concrete experiences and systematic conceptualization.⁹ The latter has the ultimate goal of a network of systematic relationships that will, hopefully, relate different investigations to one another in an ever broadening map of human experience.

In this latter regard, conceptual encounter is closely related to Kurt Lewin's experimental methodology. Lewin emphasized the tension between the concrete details of the individual's experience and behavior and the investigator's abstract conceptualization of a dynamic genotypic field, the "lifespace," which was conceived to underlie the phenotypic details of behavior and experience.¹⁰ While the method differs from Lewin's in conceiving of the

person as a subject who creates the life-space as well as being an objective part of it, it shares his desire to construct a consistent body of abstract conceptualization that is responsive to the specifics of lived experience. It is important to note that this aspect of conceptual encounter permits the investigator to build on prior conceptualization and eventually to offer conceptualization to be built upon. A serious phenomenological investigation often attempts to see experience through fresh eyes with as few preconceptions as possible. Such radical beginnings have no place for prior conceptualizations. The benefits of such a procedure -- the freshness of viewpoint and the opportunity to build a new and more coherent structure -- are somewhat offset by the disadvantage -- the fact that one is bound to be operating with whatever cultural sets are most unconsciously taken for granted and the fact that one isolates the investigation from prior conceptualizations and may wind up rediscovering the wheel. If one places too high a value on radical beginnings and every investigation begins completely anew, there would be no way to build on each other's work and no cooperative community could form. Conceptual encounter attempts to work towards a balance between the desire for new insight and fresh beginning and the desire to share and build with others. Each new experience that is presented by a research partner forces a renewal as we encounter a new being-in-the-world. In fact, this aspect of the method resembles ethno-methodology in that the encounter may "breach" the reality of the investigator and certainly broaden his experience. However, the abstract conceptualization unites us with a community of others and permits us to build on their work and to contribute our own work to the building.

Conceptual encounter may be used whenever the object of inquiry is an aspect of human experience, whenever an investigator wishes to comprehend the structure or essential organization of some experience. Using the method permits the investigator to sample a far wider range of experiences than can be obtained from a given experimental situation. The investigator may even ask each research partner to

reflect over his or her entire life experience in an attempt to come up with exceptions to the proposed conceptualization. It should be noted that the requirements for articulate research partners do not necessarily restrict the domain of research. Many persons can be helped to become more articulate and aware of their experience, particularly if they are asked to compare their experience with the conceptualizations developed with more articulate partners. The latter may also be checked against observations of behavior in order to note whether the conceptualizations fit and can be consistently applied. One may even use conceptual encounter as a technique to work with the experiences of experts who have been working with small children or animals, inquiring as to whether or not the conceptualization fits their experience of the phenomenon as they observe it in their area of expertise. For example, we could ask an ethologist whether or not a conceptualization of anger relates to his or her experience of "anger" in dogs. Is there or is there not a close structural analogy?

In its present form, conceptual encounter uses words to gain access to experience and is, therefore, limited by the scope of language. For many purposes this limitation poses no problem. English is a very rich language and it is relatively easy to extend its own scope by going to other languages and working with the somewhat different structures of experience which another culture has chosen to name. However, if we wish complete access to the full range of experience, we must have some way of encountering the everyday behavior for which we have no words and the nuances of experience presented by the creative arts. That is, the method must be extended so that the investigator can use a piece of behavior or a work of art (rather than a word) to evoke the experience of research partners.

Actually the "experimental phenomenology" that flourished in Germany from 1900 until Hitler came into power made extensive use of the experience of behavior. The investigator would produce a piece of behavior in the laboratory and carefully tap into

his or her research partner's experience of the behavior as various experimental parameters were altered. Ach's study of will, Ovsiankina's study of the tendency to resume an interrupted task, Karsten's study of the satiation of behavior, Schwarz's study of relapsing into a prior habit, are all excellent examples. In these studies the "subject" is more of a research partner whose experience is carefully consulted and whose behavior must be individually explained without recourse to random error terms. Elsewhere, I have described this method in detail and contrasted it with the "statistical experimentation" that is used today (de Rivera, 1976, pp. 10-20). It would be easy to modify such experimental phenomenology so that it became a conceptual encounter, having a type of behavior provide the concrete experience for the encounter. In a somewhat similar manner, conceptual encounter could be used in conjunction with the method of participant observation, modifying that technique so that the observed were taken into the investigator's confidence and asked to comment on the shared conceptualization. Likewise, it might be possible in some cases to use conceptual encounter as a way of investigating unconscious behavior and the experiential changes of persons undergoing psycho-therapy.

It might be more difficult to work with art, where the emphasis is on the uniqueness of the individual work. However, successful art seems somehow to capture universal experience in the unique instance. If one worked with a sample of persons who had learned to look at a painting -- were aware of the choices the artist must make in dealing with the canvas and open to what the artist was attempting to convey -- it might be possible to use an individual painting (rather than a word) to evoke experience. The investigator could then attempt to conceptualize the structure of the particular type of experience expressed by the artistic work. Such a study might be viewed as an aspect of art criticism and could conceivably both profit from and contribute to that difficult field.

While conceptual encounter can probably inves-

tigate any realm of human experience, it is not designed to be an all-purpose method useful for the entire range of psychological inquiry. A method inevitably reflects both goals and subject matter. In order to gain certain advantages, certain sacrifices must be made. The power of conceptual encounter lies in its ability to sample an extremely large variety of incidents and the fact that even a single incident may force a revision of the conceptualization. Hence, conceptual encounter leads to a rapid growth of sophisticated, logically consistent, conceptualization applicable to human experience. Further, it broadens the experience of the investigator. However, it is not designed to aid in the prediction and control of behavior. Moreover, to the extent that our experience is objectively determined, conceptual encounter alone cannot help us to reveal the facts of this determination and must rely on the experience of those who discover these facts by using other methods (observation, experimentation, etc.). Then, too, at least in the investigations up to now, the method has been used to uncover the structure rather than the dynamics of experience -- to articulate what is given, implied and what must be true, rather than how things come about. While we view every structure as functional it is still uncertain as to whether the method can be used to uncover how an experience develops and how it depends on the person's environment. As mentioned above, we hope that conceptual encounter can be wedded to experimental and observational methods to investigate these aspects of lived experience.

Regardless of how far conceptual encounter can be extended, of what its power and limitations eventually prove to be, we wish to establish its legitimacy as a valid method to investigate psychological processes. Earlier, we said that the final conceptualization of a properly conducted conceptual encounter had to have some degree of validity. We said some degree of validity because, of course, the establishment of full validity is always a research goal rather than an achievement. Any particular investigator may have a blind spot that limits the

accuracy of his or her conceptualization; the full deepening of the idea may have to await the work of some future researcher. And there is always a question as to the limits of the breadth of a conceptualization: does it fit the experience of relatively inarticulate subjects, of children, of persons from different cultures? As further investigations proceed, the limits to a conceptualization emerge, new possibilities become apparent, and an altered conceptualization with more breadth may be created.

Finally, still another factor influences the eventual shape and ultimate validity of a conceptualization. A good conceptualization must not only fit the phenomenon with which it immediately deals, but must relate to other conceptualizations. As our understanding of other phenomena grows, these new conceptualizations may or may not be precisely related to the conceptualization in question and, hence, may either support or diminish its value, or possibly provoke some interesting revision.

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An important aspect of conceptual encounter is its ability to accommodate itself to the different personalities and interests of different investigators. In the succeeding chapters the reader will see how each of us has used conceptual encounter in a somewhat different way. De Rivera's predilection is towards the precision of mathematics. Hence, he tends to favor the abstract pole of the encounter -- attempting to arrive at an almost geometric conceptualization of the experience of anger. At the other extreme, Goodman is a clinician and hence committed to working from the particularities of the individual case. Her investigation of anxiety is concrete and practical; it will be particularly appealing to those who like to begin with facts rather than abstractions. In spite of this difference, both Goodman and de Rivera tend towards "realism:" they sense that they are discovering structures of experience. On the other hand, Lindsay leans towards "idealism" insofar as she feels that the structures are not

really there before they are "discovered." Of course, we can intellectually agree that experience is interpretation but for some of us our experience is an interpretation of reality while for others of us reality is an interpretation!

In addition to these stylistic or temperamental differences, our varying interests lead to different choices of subject matter. Thus, Funk's interest in the work of Reich and Lowen reveals itself in the choice of topic that clearly depends on the body -- the behavior of laughter. He was concerned with the odd behavioral pattern universally recognized as laughter, the apparently pointless oscillations of the belly, the turning up of the mouth, the helplessness ("the comic killed the audience") and so on. In trying to find a function for this odd behavior, Funk was forced to postulate that the world of the laughter is quite separate from our normal reality. On the other hand, Kreilkamp is interested in literature. Hence, his investigations of psychological distance is basically anchored in material from literature and many of his encounters are with examples from literature rather than from an interview. Thus, his research partner is often an author, who may have written his experience of an imagined event long ago. Perhaps the fact that our human differences are so easily manifested, that the use of conceptual encounter provides us with a common discipline yet does not require us to set aside important aspects of our personality, is a feature of the method which may particularly commend its use in humanistic psychology or psychology conceived as human-science.

Reference Notes
for Chapter I

1. The investigator need not necessarily begin with an idea. It may only gradually develop in the course of the investigation. In such a case, after listening to his partner's experience, the investigator simply presents his or her abstract understanding of the experience -- thus beginning an articulation of a structure that fits the experience.
2. It is interesting to note that Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956, p. 36), ordinarily an advocate of the view that different languages may structure experience in different ways, refers to a "... common stock of conceptions, possibly possessing a yet unstudied arrangement of its own...(which) ...seems to be a necessary concomitant of the communicability of ideas by language...and is in a sense the universal language to which the various specific languages give entrance."
3. See Polanyi (1958, Chapter 4). He discusses this in detail.
4. In this regard see Doi's (1973) description of the Japanese emotion of "amae," and de Rivera's (1977) discussion of the cross-cultural comparison of emotion terms.
5. See, for example, the description in Gendlin (1962).
6. This, of course, is the sense of the term as developed by Brentano, Husserl and Heidegger and closely related to what Lewin meant by "life-space."
7. This is not to say that there are no differences among perception, memory and imagination, that the first two are experienced as real, the second is experienced as referring to the past, etc., but all these modes of experience are,

necessarily, interpretations.

8. For a sampling of their thoughts and studies, see Giorgi, Fischer, and Von Eckartsberg (1971).
9. The emphasis on dialogue reflects the ideas of Martin Buber (1970). Such dialogue plays a key role in the "collaborative" assessment procedure developed by Constance Fischer (1978) and the research methodology suggested by Robert Sardello (1971).
10. For a complete discussion, see de Rivera (1976, pp. 15-20).

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for Chapter I

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