

## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to see if people's motivation can be developed by the practice of the method focusing. The motivational constructs used to reflect the participants sense of motivation is; autonomy and competence. Autonomy is in this study derived from the theory of self-determination and is concerned with the participant's degree of expressing their personal or autonomous desires, choices and goals (Skinner & Edge, 2002). Competence is in this study, a construct derived from Self-efficacy theory, and is concerned with the participants' degree of using their capabilities effectively (Bandura, 1997).

I have used qualitative methods; more specifically I have been inspired by phenomenology, to explore the common essences of the effects of focusing on their sense of motivation. I have interviewed three participants which have at least completed two levels of focusing. They are thus considered familiar with the essence of focusing, which practically means spending time or listening to a bodily felt issue, experience or problem (Gendlin, 1996).

The raw data were analyzed by using a phenomenological reduction which resulted in four themes. The three themes that caught the essence of their experience of motivation were; "I focus on what I can do in my career," "I am clearer about me in relationship with other people," and "I want to do this." The degree of their motivation was discussed with literature from Albert Bandura (1997, 2001), Edvard Deci and Richard Ryan (1985, 2002). The final theme representing their experience of focusing; "I can read what is going on," was used together with relevant literature from Eugene Gendlin (1996, 2003) to gauge the effect of focusing, on the participants' sense of motivation.

The Findings in this study indicate that there is a positive effect from the practice of focusing on the participants' motivation. The participants seem to use their competence and autonomy better. Focusing seem to contribute in terms of; higher levels of self-aiding thoughts and feelings, a stronger inward relationship and a stronger control in terms of overcoming negative states and perceived challenges. The participants seem *more* inclined to act from personal or autonomous desires and goals and to use relevant competence effectively in social and occupational settings.

## **Preface**

The idea for the subject of this master's thesis was inspired by the experience I gained from attending the master courses in counseling, department of education, at the Norwegian University for Science and Technology (NTNU). At the time I started to take the master courses, it was possible to join some of the classes if they had the capacity.

My fellow classmates from these courses have served as a valuable inspiration for this study. Being able to watch their personal strategies fueled with hard work and optimism made me question and change my own study methods and motivational beliefs. These particular students made me realize that it is not how well you are generally doing that need to be your main focus, rather it is the optimistic beliefs in your competence and work strategies in certain areas, that can be crucial for your motivation and the chance of meeting your goals.

From the first day I attended counseling class, I felt I was on the right track, but nevertheless, I could feel a deep frustration from not being enrolled as a master student yet, and as a consequence I did not feel as a part of the group. My exploration and taking time to pause and feel helped me accept or dis-identify with these feelings and thoughts by using a technique called focusing. Later on, I also found myself doing this, when good feelings and thoughts were available. My experience from my focusing practice was that I found myself more ready to learn and focus my energy towards making the requirements needed to enroll in this master.

Before I move on to the master thesis, I want to thank Christine and Rodney Weaver and their children for bolstering me with so much care and hospitality in their home prior to the interviews where done. And I want to thank Suzanne Tuch for participating in the pilot interview. Her openness gave me so many insights on the theory of motivation. I also want to thank Joshua Weaver for Technical support. I want to thank my friends at counseling for showing me their self-efficacy strategies, and the two hotels I have been working at throughout my period of studying: Residence and Prinsen hotel. I have met a lot of role models there. I want to thank my supervisor Jonathan Reams for helpful, generous and valuable guidance with my master thesis. I also want to show my appreciation towards all the teachers of counseling and finally my gratitude goes to the three research participants for sharing their experiences of motivation and focusing with me. Your experiences made my work very interesting and pleasurable.

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Objective of the thesis and problem formulation

Before I continue with the disposition and give brief definitions of the constructs I am using, I will share some more reflections of the objective of my thesis. I do not think my experience of challenge in my studies is very unique. First of all, I believe in the existentialist<sup>1</sup> notion that we are alone in this world, and that we *have* the resources, and *can* work out our own unique way of functioning in our daily life. I believe we are in a time where a lot of people experience the focus on what we do and accomplish, thus the importance of being aware of, and being able to use our potential, (or competence and autonomy) may aid people function better in their lives.

During my master study, I was later able to witness and practice a technique during my internship, well known in Norway, as a solution based technique, called “Løsningsfokusert coaching”<sup>2</sup> or ”Løft”. I was in this period of my life able to see how some motivation theories were put into practice. The theories I have selected from the field of motivation concern the constructs competence and autonomy. They are important constructs from Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory and Albert Bandera’s social cognitive and self-efficacy theory. I will present these theories further in chapter two.

My experience of Løft during my internship was its effectiveness in facilitating optimistic mental representation of skills and behavior. However, with my focusing background, I was interested in how cognitive inspired approaches could be combined with a more body-mind inspired method to aid peoples’ use of their competence and autonomy and thus effective functioning.

Eugene Gendlin is the founder of a body-mind tool which he called focusing. He proposed that focusing can be used as a tool to promote a deeper knowing of what is needed and wanted in one’s life by accessing the persons feelings or felt senses through bodily awareness (Gendlin, 1996). I will elaborate this process further in the next chapter.

In this thesis, I am questioning whether the motivational constructs; autonomy and competence can be developed by using the tool of focusing. So looking at the research

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<sup>1</sup> Existentialisms roots may be traced to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. He maintained that the individual is responsible to intentionally choose and decide their own destiny, in spite of existential challenges such as anxiety and alienation (Ivey, D’Andrea, Ivey & Simek-Morgan, 2002)

<sup>2</sup> Løft is a solution based technique, founded by Gro J. Langslet. Løft aims to make individuals acknowledge and propose what they can do, in setbacks, and when succeeding in life, with regards to their own strengths (Langsleth, 2004).

participant's degree of motivation, following the practice of the focusing method by using in-depth interviews, I am interested in getting new insights to answer my problem formulation:

*“Can the practice of focusing promote a higher sense of motivation?”*

In spite of using theory as a backcloth, I was also interested in using phenomenology as a tool, as in this way I could explore the possible effect in an open manner by bracketing off own ideas, in order to discover the interview participants subjective meaning and experiences as grounded as possible from the data (Creswell, 2007).

My research focus in this study can thus be said to be both inductive and deductive, meaning both grounded in the data and supported by selected theories from the field of motivation and focusing.

My objective with this thesis is thus, not to impose a truth or a common understanding for everyone. It is important for me to convey that by having an explorative focus of the field of motivation following the practice of focusing, I leave it open for the reader to be inspired from reading this thesis, to either raise their own motivation, or to work on raising others motivation, to learn or be inspired to practice the tool of focusing, to do further research, or be inspired from one, more or the combination of these theories selected from both the humanistic and cognitive tradition.

In gathering the data, I conducted the interviews at a focusing conference in New York. I will go no further in explaining this conference. First, because I find it irrelevant to my thesis and second, because I want to remain confidential towards the research participants in this study.

In analyzing the data, I found three themes representing the phenomenon motivation and one theme representing the meaning of the subjects understanding of the phenomenon focusing. The themes concerning motivation contain both the research subjects' experience of motivation before and after their practice of focusing.

I will end this thesis with a discussion concerning the effect of (the theme) focusing on motivation by discussing this theme separately at the end of the themes concerning motivation. The reader can thus decide whether they find focusing as a helpful tool, to strengthen people's competence and autonomy and thus their motivation and enablement to function more effectively in their life. At the end of the thesis, I will move on to a summary of the findings, reflection of further research and some concluding comments.

## 1.2 Disposition and definition of constructs in the thesis

In this chapter, I have shared some of my own ideas and experiences about the topic. I will also briefly describe the main constructs that I am using starting with constructs from motivation theory.

Self-efficacy: is concerned with “personal capabilities to produce certain performances” (Bandura, 1997, p. 126).

Competence: refers to the need to experience oneself as effective in one’s environment and is hypothesized to involve processes of control (Bandura, 1997 in Skinner & Edge, 2002).

Autonomy: refers to the need to express one’s authentic self, and to experience that oneself is the source of action. Autonomy is linked to the process of self-determination (Skinner & Edge, 2002).

Self-determination: is perceived as a need to have the freedom of choice. The freedom of choice is linked to intrinsic motivation, and sometimes external motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006).

Intrinsic motivation: “refers to behaviors done out of interest and enjoyment” (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002 p. 37).

Extrinsic motivation: pertains to behavior carried out to get conditional outcomes (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

Further I will also present constructs from the method of focusing:

Focusing: is a method developed by Eugene Gendlin, where easy steps can be followed in order to aid the process of listening to a bodily felt problem or issue (Gendlin, 1996).

Felt sense: The unclear body sense of a problem (Gendlin 1996).

The present state: also known as body-mind receptivity (Gendlin, 2003). This is done through dis-identification, by allowing some space or separation from the issue or the problem (Gendlin, 1996).

I used Phenomenology as a research method from the paradigm of qualitative method.

Qualitative research: aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior in their natural setting (Postholm, 2005). Qualitative research is conducted when a problem or issue needs to be explored (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenological study: focus on getting at the essence, or what is typical of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people (Patton, 2002).

The four themes that I found caught the essence of my problem formulation were: “*I focus on what I can do in my career*”, “*I am clearer about me in relationships with other people*”,



*“I want to do this”*, and *“I can read what is going on”*. The first three represent the research participants’ experience, feelings and thoughts of the phenomena motivation. The last theme can serve as an understanding of the effect of practicing focusing, and can be seen as affecting the other themes. I will present them further in chapter four, and discuss them with theory in chapter five. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, I will conclude and give my opinions of further research in chapter six.

### **1.3 Earlier research**

In this thesis I will try to get a better understanding of how the motivational constructs; autonomy and competence can be developed by using the tool of focusing. I have not yet found research, on the relationship of focusing and motivation, but I have found earlier research that can give some valuable insights to the area.

Deci and Ryan (1985) found self awareness to correlate positively with people’s sense of autonomy. Similarly Brown and Ryan (2003), found an awareness practice known as mindfulness<sup>3</sup> to help people make autonomous choices.

Bandura (1997, 2001) well known for his research on Self-efficacy, suggest, that people cultivate multiple competences to meet the ever changing occupational demands and roles.

Research by Paul K Maciejewski (2000) can relate to this. His studies found that people, high in self-efficacy are better at coping with the demanding and stressful conditions in occupational settings. People low in self-efficacy, were more easily overwhelmed by negative emotional states, such as stress and frustration, which led to a decrease in their working productivity.

It seems from the above studies that autonomy, competence and awareness are all, important constructs in motivation settings such as in peoples career, and when making choices. Although the constructs of awareness and mindfulness will not be explored by themselves in this thesis, they are related to the practice of focusing. The latter is concerned with a bodily-awareness. I will now turn to the theory section of this thesis and explore the above mentioned motivational constructs and the skill of focusing closer.

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<sup>3</sup> Mindfulness is described as an open and receptive awareness of what is occurring (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

## 2.0 Theory

I will in this chapter start by presenting a general understanding of motivation from the cognitive and humanistic perspective. Further I will look at motivation in terms of peoples' autonomy and competence. The latter two constructs will be presented in the theories of Self-determination and Self-efficacy. I will end this chapter by taking a closer look at the tool, focusing, which as I mentioned in the introduction; may aid the process of motivation. I will in this chapter describe this tool, and initially explain its similarities to another theory from the humanistic tradition called: person centered theory. I am doing this only for the reader to get a clearer picture of what focusing is.

### 2.1 Motivation

Considerable attention has been given to the area of motivation. Many theories from the field of motivation concern how peoples' beliefs can serve as self-fulfilling prophecies in terms of success and failure in performance settings. Other theories within the field of motivation focus on psychological needs when explaining why people direct their energy in certain directions (Woolfolk, 2004, Deci & Ryan, 1985).

One of the theorists well known for his social cognitive theory is Albert Bandura. An important construct from his theory is self-efficacy. In his theory, he uses cognitive principles such as belief, thought patterns and expectations when explaining peoples' motivation to do an activity (Imsen, 1995). He postulates the humans often have higher capabilities than we believe (Woolfolk, 2004). Consequently, the importance of *believing* that one "has what it takes" is important for using our potential for proactive and effective behavior. Deci and Ryan stress the notion of self-determination as important for effective functioning. They believe the nature of our cognitive evaluations and choices depends on having our psychological *needs* (autonomy, competence and relatedness) met. While cognitive representations are important aspects of both theories, Deci and Ryan's understanding of needs have roots also in the humanistic tradition (Woolfolk, 2004).

I will thus present a brief presentation of some principles from both the cognitive and humanistic way of viewing motivation before I move on to the theories themselves.

Cognitive theories believe that our actions are governed by how we reason our behavior and what we think or believe is true or not. Thus our attribution can give rise to perceptions of competence or incompetence, control or lack of control that have motivational effects

(Zimmermann & Schunck, 2006). For example if someone is applying for a job, people may evaluate their motivational behavior in terms of these questions. Why am I applying for this job? Do I have what it takes to get it? Can I make this decision on my own, or do I need a second opinion from other people?

Humanistic theories focus on an individual's inherent capabilities and potential to make choices and gain integrity in context with the social environment. A central person to this tradition is Carl Rogers, who stressed the importance of positive feedback and empathy for healthy development. Another person, Abraham Maslow stressed the importance of satisfying fundamental needs in order to use our inherent potential (Woolfolk, 2004).

Perception of autonomy and competence are thus relevant aspects of how both the humanistic and cognitive traditions view motivational processes.

### **2.1.1 How to measure motivation**

As elaborated in more detail later in this chapter, human development and motivation can seem like an invisible process that can be hard to measure. Bandura postulates that the degree of motivation or self-efficacy can be witnessed in certain evaluations concerning their skills for a particular activity or domain. The motivation for the activity can be measured when people use "I can" statements, such as "I can jump over that bar" or "I can seduce women." (Bandura, 1997, Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2005, Woolfolk, 2004).

Deci and Ryan made a distinction between intrinsic and external motivation. They proposed "why-questions" as relevant for measuring motivation. For instance "Why" or "for what reasons are you doing the activity" They postulate the degree of intrinsic motivation to be reflected in whether our motive to act is localized inside or outside the activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Asking questions of people's motivation may thus be helpful, however challenging because it might be hard to know and be aware of one's own reasons, or self-beliefs in motivational settings (Woolfolk, 2004).

I will after presenting two motivation theories, present the tool of focusing, which is less concerned with our motives or evaluations in an achievement setting, but more with how the focusing skill can be used to get in touch with deeper layers and feelings of the self. I question whether this tool, can be useful for peoples motivation.

## **2.2 Self-determination theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT) focuses on the need to be self-determined or have the freedom of choice in motivational settings (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Their research was originally concerned with how external motivation affected intrinsic motivation. They later expanded their theory into mini-theories, which they called; cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory, causality orientations theory and basic needs theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). I will in the following not refer to these theories directly, but I will include important aspects of these mini theories in explaining motivation and self-determined behavior.

### **2.2.1: The types of motivation**

Deci and Ryan identified two types of self-determined behavior, intrinsically motivated and extrinsically motivated behavior. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are the classic case of self-determined behavior and are anchored in the persons will, core self or self-structures. To infer intrinsically motivational behavior, one can recognize feelings such as: joy, satisfaction, freedom, interest, confidence and authenticity derived from the activity itself. These feelings are often accompanied when intrinsically motivated people experience an optimal challenge, also known as the state of flow. Flow can be experienced when the task is not too difficult or too easy, and the person often feels using their resources free from pressure. Children's play can be example of such a state. But it can also be witnessed in adults working from their strengths, joy and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

On the contrary, when actions are governed by forces like expectations, rewards or internal pressure, originating outside the individual, extrinsic motivation is often involved. Extrinsic motivated behavior can also be self-motivated or self-determined in some cases, but always in a less pure form than intrinsic motivation. I will describe this process in the model depicting four degrees of external motivation, later in this section (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

A third motivational style is called a-motivated behavior. This behavior is neither self-determined nor extrinsically motivated, as this state can signify a learned helpless state, due to lack of control or autonomy and feelings of incompetence. Examples of this behavior can involve overwhelming feelings, confusion or dissociation from the self by distorting, rationalizing or forgetting important reasons or needs for engaging in the activity. They also tend to quit the activity, as they see no purpose or desired results related to their behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

### **2.2.2: The three psychological needs**

The roots of intrinsic motivation consist of individuals' perception related to three basic psychological and universal human needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. If these three needs are stimulated in a social context they promote the inherent growth tendencies in the human, which Deci and Ryan refer to as intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). I will now present the three needs, with some illustrating examples of how they can be affected by the social world.

The first and the most important need, is the experience of autonomy. This need is concerned with choices or self-determination, and thus the control over what a person wants to do. This aspect of motivation is quite complex as we will see in the following.

A genuine choice of being free and true to the self may be spontaneous and intuitive when experienced as a pure form of intrinsic motivation. The experience of flow can illustrate this. However, deeper reflections such as awareness or a careful attending to one's thoughts are sometimes needed to be self-determined. An example could be deciding to go to college. Deci and Ryan (1985), explain this decision as a real choice only if one really considers the option of not taking a higher education. One can facilitate a true choice by letting people attend to options, or reasons behind their choice. If the person is referring to the activity itself, of studying something that interests them, their motivation tend to be more self-determined or intrinsic. However if their choice is based on friends, family or values from the society, the choice is based on external reasons, and one can infer that external motivation is involved (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Deci and Ryan (1985) stressed the importance of distinguishing the construct of choice or autonomy from independence, in the context of intrinsic motivation. As acting independently may not be self-determined, or internally directed. An example of independence may imply the lack of trusting other people, or it can represent a need to demonstrate or rebel. An example could be a person that chooses not to go to college, because they feel too much pressure from their parents. This individual may originally be autonomously and intrinsically motivated, but as we see in this case, people can become less self-determined and thus more externally motivated when subjected to too much external pressure. The person may in this case feel the need to control or rebel. Deci and Ryan encourage rebelling over complying, as the first may represent the need and desire to be autonomous, however without the accompanying positive feelings mentioned earlier where intrinsic motivation is involved (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

The second need, which involves feelings of mastery, is the need to feel competent in providing desired outcomes, or preventing undesired outcomes. If social agents thwart or control independent mastery attempts, intrinsic motivation may suffer. An example of a controlling way of giving feedback could be: “Well done, you managed to do it, because I helped you.” Or, they can give positive feedback in what Deci and Ryan (1985) characterizes as informative; by stressing the persons own competence and autonomy, for instance: “You describe things really well in this article.” The feeling of competence can give rise to peoples’ readiness to rely on their skills in a later situation (which are intrinsic rewards).

Relatedness or belonging is the third need and recognizes the basic need to feel safe and belong. This need can be stimulated by being supported, cared for and valued by significant others. This can easily be witnessed in children, as they explore, relax and enjoy their environment to a greater extent when they are accompanied by their mother or someone they trust. Well documented research demonstrates how athletes perform better when they feel connected to other teammates (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002). Another example can be the importance of being included in a new job. The feeling of safety, justice and inclusion can help the person direct their energy towards relevant job tasks, and to use their autonomy and competence effectively.

Ideally people act out of natural growth tendencies where needs of autonomy and competence and relations are met. This kind of behavior is more aligned with individuals’ natural tendencies. Individuals are at most peace, feel joy and satisfaction, when they can be their true self. These responses are cultivated in what they call an informative or autonomy-supportive environment, where choice, skills and feelings of belonging or safety are developed. This can be done by informative positive feedback, mentioned above. However it is frequently the case that people’s behavior arises not from the authentic strivings of the self, but instead from feelings of coercion, anxiety control and pressure which are typical responses to contingencies or powerful others in a controlling environment, where typically controlling feedback like the one mentioned above is given. The person may in this case become alienated from the self, act with a lack of choice and become dependent on social status, praise or other tangible rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2002, Kasser, 2002, Skinner & Edge, 2002, Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

The social influences may, as presented in the above, have a powerful impact on our quality or type of motivation. This will be explored further in the next section, where an internalization continuum of four degrees of external motivation is presented (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

### **2.2.3 Four types of external motivation**

Deci & Ryan (2002), identified four types of external motivation that vary in their degree of self-determination, or actions governed from the self. However none of them is intrinsically motivated because they are more or less influenced by their social surroundings by internalizing or bringing in themselves' influences from the environment.

The first type is called externally regulated behavior, and is the classic case of external motivation, explained earlier, where there is no self-determination or internalization involved. The reasons for doing the activity is external and separated from the activity and the persons are simply complying with the surroundings (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002, Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

The second external motivation is called: introjected regulation and is another example where lack of personal choice is involved. The reasons for this behavior are often referred to as "should" or "have to." However, with this type of motivation, the person feels obligated to do the behavior, and is now bringing in or internalizing a value or influence from the environment, but the guilt is not a part of who they are on a deep level, as the value or influence is not accepted completely. The person is motivated to go to college. The reason for going is to feel less guilty and, to obtain credit from their parents and finally to experience less internal pressure (or guilt) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002, Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

The third type of external motivation is called identified regulation. The person is identifying with the value of the activity, yet, the value is not in harmony with all the parts of, or structures of the self. For instance, the student may now have a personal desire to go to the college, because he or she finds it personally relevant for a later job. The reason for going to college is now internalized and performed with a sense of self-determination, however not fully. The person may not like to study, but he or she wants to get that degree or the job they are longing for. Identified regulation is thus regarded as self-determined, and can facilitate, meeting internally directed or self-determined goals, like getting a job they really want (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002, Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

The last type of external motivation is called integrated regulation. This one is the closest to intrinsic motivation, as there is some coherence or harmony between the parts, or structures of the self. The behavior is self-determined, but not fully intrinsically motivated, as the process of internalization is still needed, (the action doesn't happen intuitively). For instance, a student may have integrated learning strategies at a college. They may now volitionally seek for activities promoting these learning strategies in the future, as the person may have integrated the strategies from the college to the extent that they have become permanent

structures of the self, the person may now feel competent, and self-determined or autonomously motivated (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002 Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

#### **2.2.4: Self-determination and cognitive evaluations.**

The hallmark of self-determination theory is flexible thinking. To be able to interpret situations in a flexible way, ideally, making choices based on psychological needs and volition (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The humanist Carl Rogers believed people tend to be less flexible when making choices. People often place the demands of the environment ahead of their own needs and feelings and thus are externally motivated. In this way they would give up their own internal choices and needs in order to obtain love and affection from others (Kasser, 2002). Externally motivated people are more inclined to evaluate their surroundings as demands in such a context. They have patterns of less flexible cognitive structures when subjected to choices. This may in turn lead to mental health problems which are often witnessed in a-motivated behavior such as helplessness, depression, alienation or apathy (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002, Kasser, 2002).

Self-determination research thus suggests the importance of cultivating awareness and informative or autonomy supportive environments where people can learn to protect themselves from controlling demands, in terms of learning to read their environment more flexibly or as informative, and to pursue goals for autonomous and well internalized reasons. (Deci & Ryan, 1985, Zimmermann & Schunck, 2006).

As referred to in the above, behavior based on personal desires and choices is self-determined and emanates from the integrated sense of self that underlies the most important need, autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985); I will in this study (although referring to other relevant needs), mainly focus on the construct *autonomy* in motivational settings, from the theory of STD.

### **2.3 Social cognitive theory**

Albert Bandura's theory of social cognitive theory concerns the interplay of the social forces on the individual and vice versa. A key construct in this theory is self-efficacy, which stresses the individual's self-beliefs as crucial in effective functioning and motivation. Bandura (1997) stresses in his theory of self-efficacy that the human being is proactive and not just reactive in a social context. By exercising influence, people can generate their



capabilities and competencies through the power of belief, effort and persistence (Bandura, 1997).

### **2.3.1 The theory of Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy can be explained by people's perception or judgment of their competence in dealing with their environment. People high in self-efficacy are healthier, more effective, and generally more successful than those with low self-efficacy according to this theory. What we think of our competence in specific domains thus affect how we lead our life. A more formal definition of self-efficacy is "People's belief in their own ability to organize and execute the actions that are necessary to obtain certain goals" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3)

### **2.3.2 Self-fulfilling prophecies**

As our belief system is crucial to this theory, how we think can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. People with high self-efficacy tend to have a more optimistic outlook on tasks and challenges and tend to choose higher goals. This in turn affects their competence-development and their expectations for succeeding later. When facing a challenge, high efficacious people, tend to stay task-focused, spend more effort, persist and may even change strategy to maximize their potential of succeeding. Bandura, suggest people to slightly overestimate their competence when choosing a goal, as challenges as well as failures may serve as important sources for learning (Bandura, 1997, Miller 2002).

On the other hand, people that are insecure about their efficacy may limit their range of activities, invest little effort, or give up and think of challenges as a threat. They may be less inclined to move out of their comfort zone and aim high. Rather they tend to dwell on negative thoughts, leaving their competence intact (Bandura, 1997). Bandura ( in Beck, 2008) refers to Thomas Edison for inspiration on how to learn to manage failure: "It took Thomas Edison 1,000 tries before he invented the light bulb. *"I didn't fail 1,000 times," he told a reporter. "The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps."*

### **2.3.3 Self-efficacy, attribution and control**

Attribution or how we explain our success or failure will as seen in the above, often influence our self-efficacy and motivation. People high in self-efficacy tend to credit themselves when succeeding, by attributing to abilities or effort. When they fail, they tend to, attribute in a way they can feel in control and grow, so they explain their failure by attributing to wrong strategy or circumstantial reasons. These people can be characterized as proactive,

as they believe they have the capability to exercise control or influence their situation, by intentionally using helpful strategies and effort to improve later attempts. They may focus on what they *can do*, in terms of abilities and efforts to improve a situation or task, instead of being caught by negative thinking, hindrances and lack of ability, which are more typical reactions to stress and challenges by people low in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 2001). Bandura (1997) postulates that people with high self-efficacy, might even look for another environment, if their efforts are not rewarded, possibly a more responsive one, where they can use and develop their capabilities more effectively.

#### **2.3.4 Self-efficacy; a domain oriented construct**

Self-efficacy is a domain oriented construct. This means our perception of our competence is based on our judgment of experiences, social influences in specific areas rather than our general feeling or perception of self worth. Although, there is often a link, between self-efficacy and self-worth, as people who feel competent and experience success in many domains, tend to have a higher self-esteem or self-worth and people can still learn certain general skills such as coping skills, or have important experiences that can have a strong impact across different settings. However, the general tendency postulated by this theory is that self-efficacy is domain oriented, which means that a person that hold a high self-efficacy in one area, such as mathematics, may still have low self-efficacy in dancing, and this may not involve their self-worth (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006, Bandura, 1997).

In addition to being a domain oriented construct, self-efficacy is also a changing quality, which can be generated. According to the self-efficacy theory, people can acquire information from four sources, to gauge their self-efficacy (Bandura 1997).

#### **2.3.5 Self-efficacy and four main sources**

The most powerful and direct source of information, Bandura (1997) calls *authentic or mastery experiences*. This source has the most enduring and effectual change on self-efficacy. Experiences can extend or thwart our self efficacy. Numerous negative experiences might influence a person to think they do not have what it takes to master a situation. Whereas numerous positive experiences will serve as a powerful motivator in subsequent situation or might even neutralize later negative ones. The notion “Fake it until you make it” can illustrate the example of how powerful experience is when succeeding, even when the previous experiences or abilities are lacking. Although Bandura (1997 in Pajares, 2008, p.102) recognizes the importance of trying when there is an opportunity for success, he stress

the importance of noticing success-experiences based on actual skills, minimizing the risk of becoming a “self-confident fool” (Bandura, 1997, Pajares, 2008).

The second most powerful source to affect self efficacy he calls *vicarious experience*, which concerns the influence of the world around us. When observing others fail or succeed, our self-efficacy is more affected when we feel similar to the model. For instance when a person we feel similar to are holding a speech, we will be more affected, if we perceive the person to have similar abilities. Although social models can inspire us positively, Bandura (1997) notes that social comparison can thwart our motivation when experienced in competitive environments. He thus stresses the importance of looking at our own standard for self improvement when succeeding or failing, in competitive environments (Bandura, 1997).

A third source of information is *verbal persuasion*; Self-efficacy can be strengthened though positive encouragement and weakened by negative appraisal. It can be positively strengthen particularly, when we need reminders of our positive capabilities. Bandura (1997) further notes that these appraisals should be realistic and believed or they might be felt as a discouragement or lack credibility. Especially depressed people may rely more on how other people see them, and their self-beliefs may be vulnerable and inaccurate (Pajares, 2008, Bandura 1997). Bandura (1997) thus stresses the importance of being specific, genuine and to focus on positive aspects of people’s performance. “You are a great writer” can be more helpful raising writing skills than “you are a great student” and “you are a good girl” is less effective than “you were polite when you said hello” The latter may have a greater chance of influencing the girl in later social settings, as self-efficacy as mentioned earlier is more concerned with what we *can do* in certain contexts and not who we are, or more permanent self-structures.

*Physiological and emotional energy level* is the fourth source. The individual interprets typically positive moods or optimism as enhancing self efficacy, whereas depression or anxiety or stress tends to weaken self efficacy. For instance a person that feels anxious and low may be less inclined to feel ready to use effective communication skills, even if it is obvious to other people, that they have what it takes to communicate clearly and well reasoned. This information is less relevant to them if they interpret their butterflies in the stomach as a means to fail and thus might avoid the speech, in spite of the above mentioned abilities. However, if the person on the contrary judged their butterflies as normal and energizing, they could use their competence and resources more effectively. The value being aware of and knowing how to circumvent anxiety and avoidance behavior is thus important to raise self-efficacy (Pajares, 2008, Bandura 1997).

As referred to in the above, the importance of optimistic beliefs regarding ones competencies can have important motivational consequences. I will in this study mainly focus on the construct; *competence* in motivation-settings, from the theory of self-efficacy.

## **2.4 Focusing**

Eugene Gendlin is the founder of Focusing and claims “Focusing is a person centered therapy” (Eugene Gendlin, 1996, p.301). Both focusing and person centered therapy belongs to the humanistic tradition (Campbell, 2004), and I will start by pointing out some similarities, before I move on to some main aspects of the theory and the tool of Focusing.

### **2.4.1 Focusing and the Person-centered approach**

Carl Rogers, the founder of Person centered therapy focused on the human potential of creating one’s own reality. The locus of control and decision can be internalized in a therapeutic setting, facilitated by key relational attitudes by the counselor. These were communicated through empathic listening skills, authenticity, and the ability to show the client positive regards (Mearns and Thorne, 1999).

The listening skills and the accepting attitude are in a similar manner vital to the focusing process. Gendlin takes this a step further, by teaching clients how to empathize with themselves. He calls this focusing (Mearns & Thorne, 1999).

### **2.4.2 The evolution of Focusing**

Focusing was discovered by the American philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin, after doing research on what determined successful psychotherapy. He and his colleagues studied thousands of therapy sessions and found only significant differences in something the *client did*, regardless of the therapist. In the successful sessions, the clients would slow down their talk, become less articulate, and they would begin to search for words to describe something they were feeling at that moment in their bodies. By contrast, the unsuccessful ones stayed articulate, venting out their feelings, in a more analytical and logic way (Cornell, 1996, Gendlin, 2003, Gendlin & Tavis, 1970).

In 1978, Gendlin published a book, which he called Focusing. At first he thought focusing would be a tool, to improve psychotherapy. But this book and his later teachings became known as a self-help tool or skill of emotional healing, which could be learned outside the

therapy room (Cornell, 1996, Gendlin, 2003, Gendlin & Tavis, 1970). I will thus use the word “focuser” or person, instead of client in the rest of the thesis.

### **2.4.3 The essence of Focusing: spending time with the felt sense**

The term focusing, is defined by Gendlin as “attending to a bodily uneasiness of a problem” (Gendlin, 1996 p. 304). The unclear body sense of a problem, he calls *the felt sense*. This felt sense, or bodily sense of any topic, occurs in the zone between the conscious and unconscious and requires a special type of listening, or spending time with. A person who has learned this skill of felt sensing may experience a holistic way knowing of what is needed in a special situation in their life (Gendlin, 1996).

Gendlin originally created six steps<sup>4</sup> involving a “facilitating language<sup>5</sup>” to aid the process of focusing. Today many professional focusing teachers have found their own way of teaching and cultivating focusing. However they all adhere to the *essence of focusing*, which consists of spending time or being present with a feeling, thought or issue, by resonating or confirming it with their bodies, or felt sense. My focus in this thesis is the essence of focusing (Cornell, 1995, Gendlin, 1996).

### **2.4.4 The felt sense**

The felt sense is as mentioned earlier a body sensation. Unlike emotions, a felt sense has a distinct quality from emotions, in the sense of having an “implicit wisdom.” When operating on an emotional level, of a feeling; “fear is just fear.” Thus the quality of *experiencing* and spending time with a feeling at a focusing level of the feeling, can promote a deeper meaning of what kind of fear it is, and it may point to what *it* needs or wants. Eugene compares the felt sense with a seed, with inherent qualities of knowing how to change. If provided with *the right conditions*, it will change on its own premises. Gendlin taught people how to respect this process by holding an open or present space and a bodily awareness (Cornell, 1996, Gendlin, 2004).

### **2.4.5 The conditions: the relational skills**

Just as a therapist would do to a client, the focuser learns to cultivate an inward relationship. They learn to hold a friendly relational attitude toward their story, issue or

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<sup>4</sup> The six steps, is referred to in appendix four.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the facilitating language taught by Eugene Gendlin is presented in the six steps.

feelings, by staying with what is happening in the body right now, in an open and curious manner.

At the early stages, they are first guided to become present in their body, and to just let the person feel how things are. They learn to be or spend time or be present with any issue. This is done through dis-identification, by allowing some space or separation from the issue or the problem. A helpful step in this process is to localize it in the body (Gendlin, 1996). An example could be “can you feel right now, where in the body, you sense what you are talking about the most?”

When the focusing partner reflects what they hear, the focuser is at the driver’s wheel, judging, what is helpful, by sensing and experiencing in their body. An important part of the focusing process is thus to check their feelings, thoughts or stories with the felt sense. However if the partner or therapist uses different words from the focuser, the focuser may even be encouraged to check the partners words with their own body sense (Gendlin, 1996, Cornell, 1996). An excerpt from a focusing session, may illustrate this process.

Client: *I’m feeling really, sort of trapped, I guess.*

Therapist: *It sounds like you might be feeling very helpless.*

Client: *I guess so.*

Therapist: *You might just check with your body, to see if helpless is right, or maybe trapped fits better* (Cornell, 1996 p. 94).

#### **2.4.6 Experiential versus a cognitive approach**

The accepting and open attitude is contrasted with trying to change, label or fix something. Gendlin says it is quite common to intellectualize, or in other ways, be cut off from the experience. This attitude was witnessed in the unsuccessful clients mentioned above, as they tended to stay more “in their heads” (Cornell, 1996 p.5, Gendlin, 1996).

Gendlin postulates that the body is wise. The steps of spending time with something bodily felt, is quite different from the interpretive screen of what one think is happening. The human body can be experienced directly and immediately and by spending time with the issue, problem or a feeling in a physical way, the organism can give its own directions and valuations for a life forward movement (Gendlin, 1996, 2003).

#### **2.4.7 The life forward movement: the essence of the person**

Gendlin refers to the *essence of the person*, or the deeper self, as a life forward movement. The person’s inherent desire is *to live*. Thus getting in touch with what is needed or wanted in

a person's life is a process of *moving forward*. It may be experienced on a bodily level as a physical relief, opening or a freeing and alive feeling; something is feeling right. Eugene is calling this a shift, and may point to a new way of living or acting (Cornell, 1996, Gendlin, 1996).

Often, the focusing session starts with a bodily felt problem that initially may be negative, or life-depleting. With repeated experience of a friendly and a present attitude, people may learn that all parts are good. Something that appears negative in the beginning may contain a positive "life energy" that is twisted, blocked or stopped, maybe by an earlier life experience. The focusing partner is thus taught to respond to and encourage what may be positive or freeing, from the felt sense. Anything that gives the essence of the person, or their true self, more space and self-respect is given priority (Gendlin, 1996).

#### **2.4.8 Living a more forward moving life**

To illustrate the implicit forward moving energy in the body feeling, or the felt sense, I will present three people, who initially feel something negative, and who finally get in touch with a more positive life forward way of living. The first person discovers by the process of felt sensing, that there is a lack of time for him or herself in their life. "There is always something that should be done for others." The focusing partner may in this session, be encouraged to sense and check in their body, how it physically feels to be, to play and have fun (Gendlin, 1996). If their "inner sense of rightness," is aligned with the latter, the person may be motivated to change their time schedule. Another case may be a person sensing and discovering blocked feelings, and the process of asserting themselves in and outside the focusing session, may be felt as a positive shift in their body and by becoming aware of this, the person may feel or be motivated to assert themselves more in their daily living. A third person may discover an uncomfortable feeling when thinking of socializing with other people. They may notice a bodily relief or an alive, freeing feeling, when this person thinks of giving *other people* space. This person may in turn be motivated to sense other's needs, or to notice how fascinating other people are, before they start to assert themselves. This process illustrated here, may also be called an action step in the focusing literature. Gendlin (1996) states that an inward change may lead to an outer change or action steps and an outer change (or an event or action in their life) may lead to an inner change. This process can be witnessed in the research participants' life and actions, as they are using the skill of focusing to sense when something is bothering them or when something feels right from a body level perspective, which seem to have motivational consequences in their daily living.

## **3.0 Methodology**

I will in this chapter, explain the research process starting with some information about the method. Further, I will move on to how I collected the data and describe how I analyzed the material. Finally I will discuss the quality, ethics and my own role as a researcher.

### **3.1 A Phenomenological approach**

My objective of this thesis was to explore the phenomena of motivation by people who have been practicing focusing. I wanted in this study to use a methodology that placed the emphasis on the research subject's experiences. I thus found Phenomenology, within the paradigm of Qualitative methods, relevant for this study, and can be described as "getting at the essence of the experience of some phenomenon" (Patton, 2002, p.107). As I found little research related to motivation in a focusing context, Phenomenology is concerned with an exploratory focus, where the aim of the researcher is to get a hold of the participants' life world, by learning and getting to know the meaning of the research participants experiences (Moustakas, 1994). I will in this thesis try to make sense of the research participants' personal experiences by describing my understanding of the effect of practicing focusing on their motivation in their life by using indebt interviews. I have been aware of my tendencies to rely on every day and theoretical assumptions, and I have thus been inspired by Phenomenology, to bracket off preconceived ideas, temporarily in order to take in the research participants understanding and experience. I will elaborate this process further in the interview section (Denscome, 2007, Postholm, 2005). My research focus is only inspired by Phenomenology, as this study can be said to be both inductive and deductive, meaning both grounded in the data and supported by my own ideas and selected theories from the field of motivation and focusing.

#### **3.1.1 Heuristic Inquiry**

The word heuristic can be translated as a discovery. Heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings in the personal insights and experience of the researcher (Patton, 2002). It is a way of engaging in research methods aimed at discovery. "It is a way of self inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of human experiences" (Moustakas, 1994 p. 18). I will in this study present rich examples of each participant's quotes verbatim in chapter four and my own connection and interest within the



field of motivation and focusing is conveyed with examples in chapter one and at the very end of this thesis (chapter six). The selected theory I found relevant is based on the problem-formulation and the research data, presented in chapter two.

In this research I am only inspired by heuristic inquiry, as I will also focus on describing the common essence of the phenomenon under study by suspending own ideas and presumptions, yet being heuristic in the sense of using my own ideas in addition to focusing on the individual voices of the participants, which I believe will create a better understanding of the data material. I will thus as mentioned earlier give the reader a chance to explore each research subject's individual voice, before I present the common essence of their experiences in the result section of this thesis (chapter four). My research study can thus be said to be inspired by principles of both heuristic inquiry and phenomenology.

### **3.2 The selection of respondents**

One general guideline in qualitative research is to study only a few individuals, but also to collect extensive and rich detail about each participant. The intent in most qualitative research is, consequently, to not generalize, but rather elucidate specific information in order to explore the phenomena under study in depth. Dukes (1984 in Postholm, 2005) recommends studying three to ten subjects in a phenomenological study. I chose three participants, as a narrow range of sampling is appropriate for the frames of this thesis. Creswell calls this criterion sampling, because they represent people who have personal experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). My criteria were to find relevant information for my problem hypothesis. First, of all I was concerned with participants to have adequate experience with focusing. I chose the criteria to be two levels of focusing<sup>6</sup>. Second I made sure of that their instructors were certified by the focusing institute<sup>7</sup>, third I wanted to make sure they were interested in expressing their experiences with focusing and motivation in a volunteer, specific and rich manner. The latter can be important for the quality of the data.

As I believe all humans are motivated (Lillemyr, 2007), I didn't stress the criterion on motivation too much. I spent a week at this rather big conference, so I would describe the selection of participants as an easy process. One of them volunteered, and the other two, I asked.

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<sup>6</sup> The first two levels of focusing cover the essence of focusing, according to one of Eugene Gendlin's certified focusing teachers (personal communication).

<sup>7</sup> The focusing institute certifies focusing instructors after a two year period of training.

### **3.3 Procedure for data collection**

As my educational history and my own experiences reflect a deep interest in motivation, questions were both rooted in selected theories and my own ideas and experiences. They were however asked in an open ended fashion. This kind of interview is called semi structured, and allows for some structure, in order to cover the main themes, and yet stay open to the participants own point of views. The latter is an important aspect phenomenology, and by doing a pilot interview before the actual research, I was able to rehearse skills important for the actual research interviews.

#### **3.3.1 A pilot interview**

The Pilot interview was done only a few days prior to the research. I did this interview with a woman I knew very well in New York, so the setting for the practice seemed quite comfortable. As my friend had no experience with focusing, I skipped this part, and focused on the questions regarding motivation. The pilot interview was still important for many reasons. The first reason was the better understanding of the time-frame, as I wanted to cover all the important themes in about an hour. Secondly I become increasingly aware of the sensitive nature of some of my questions, particularly the questions concerning the experience of failure. As a consequence I was reminded of the importance of being a sensitive listener. The latter also made me more aware of the importance of the interview subject's rights, which I will discuss further in the ethics section. Another insight that came to my mind during this interview was a closer sense of the motivation theory and being clearer about the importance of follow up questions. The practice of follow up questions was also important when I witnessed new information and point of views, different from my own ideas and selected theory. I was now more mentally prepared to stay open and to bracket off own ideas. Needless to say, one hour long pilot interview later, I was more prepared to collect the data at the conference.

#### **3.3.2 The interviews**

At first, each of the participants obtained an informed consent in which they agreed and signed (appendix two). I also gave some additional instructions verbally, such as their rights to pull out anytime, that I would use fictive names and their opportunity to correct misunderstandings, over e-mail.

However, I did have two main themes I wanted to cover and these were asked in an open ended manner. More specifically, I wanted to get their own descriptions about how they experienced motivation (success and failure in their life before and after focusing) and some questions regarding focusing (their experience of their own practice). I divided the interview in three themes<sup>8</sup>. The first concerned their experience of motivation in their life before they learned focusing. The questions of focusing were asked as a second part of the interview and their experience of motivation after they had learned focusing was asked in the ending of the interview.

Colonize (1978, in Creswell, 2007) holds that the success of phenomenological research depends on the extent to which the questions touch the lived experiences different from theoretical explanations.

As I had read a lot of motivation theories prior to the interviews and I was practicing focusing on a regularly basis myself, bracketing off own ideas to hear the participants voice was an important aspect of doing the interviews successfully. I will discuss this further at the very end of this chapter.

All the interviews were tape-recorded, in order to get all the information, and to be available to the participants. In this process I used some basic listening skills<sup>9</sup> that I had learned during my counseling education; and as best I could, I tried to stay neutral and open to receive the participant's point of view. Some reflections were used to make sure I had understood the content, and some prompts such as, could you explain this more, can you mention an example, or to clarify the context of the experience was used to clarify whether their experience of motivation happened before, after, or was an experience during both times (Creswell, 2007, Kvale & Brinkman, 2009 ).

My own experience was that they seemed willing to share information in an open and honest manner.

### **3.4 The Transcription**

Transcribing the interviews verbatim was a time consuming and important aspect of the analysis, as each interview lasted about an hour. I found the time spent on getting the wording right by listening many times, also helpful as I felt the material became more alive and easier

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<sup>8</sup> The interview manual is in appendix one.

<sup>9</sup> Basic listening is a form of listening that requires sensitive listening, and alertness from the listener, intended to bring out peoples stories. According to the humanistic tradition, important factors for positive development, is for the person to feel accepted, listened to and respected in a genuine way (Ivey, D'Andrea, Ivey & Simek-Morgan, 2002).

to work with later on. In this phase I also highlighted important parts or sentences and I wrote down initial codes or labels that I thought were reflected in the text.

### **3.5 The analysis; reducing the data material**

In phenomenology there are several methods of structuring the raw data, when analyzing. I am inspired by a version of the Stoic Colonize-Keen method discussed by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007). This is a way of reducing the data, looking at the participant's point of views best describing my problem formulation. However, the most time consuming part of this analysis was used by reading literature to support my findings. The reduction of the data will be explained in the following.

According to the first step of this method of analysis, Creswell (2007) is inspired by Moustakas as he suggests writing down one's own personal experiences with the phenomena under study in the beginning of the thesis. This is called Heuristic Inquiry, and is explained in the above section. This is a way of bracketing off one's own ideas, so the participants point of view can be analyzed and treated separately from selected theory and own ideas. In spite of this not being entirely possible or true in this thesis (this will be explored further in the quality section: 3.6), my own ideas and selected theories were at least, as mentioned earlier, presented separately in the beginning of this thesis (chapters one and two).

The further steps of structuring the analysis explained in this section was done in the order mentioned, but the literature search supplying the findings done in the analysis can best be symbolized as moving up and down a spiral (Creswell, 2007) rather than moving stepwise in a linear fashion, as the literature search went on until the very end of writing this thesis

In the second step of this analysis, I selected sentences I found standing out as significant to the problem formulation. After highlighting them in the transcription, I wrote the sentences down individually for the three participants.

In the third step I combined these sentences to themes I found best representing them. For instance sentences representing aspects of motivation was put together in different clusters from the sentences representing their experience of focusing.

In the fourth step I wrote down the separate clusters of verbatim sentences in two columns for each participant. In the first column I described "what" happened, this is called a textual description, in which my own reflections of "what" I thought happen was described. The other column was filled with descriptions or reflections of "how" it happened, in this way, the setting or the context is included in the analysis. The latter is called a structural description.

In the last step, the two types of descriptions are combined and represented by a common essence. I tried to find a final essence representing each theme or cluster of descriptions and verbatim sentences for all three participants.

The four themes that I found to best describe the essence from the process of reducing the raw data are; “I can read what is going on”, “I focus on what I can do in my career”, I am clearer about me in relationship with other people” and “I want to do this.”

### **3.6 Quality in qualitative research**

Methodological rigor was attained by being familiar with ethical guidelines, the value of validity and reliability and reflecting on my own role as a researcher. As frequently is the case in qualitative research, the results found in this thesis is a result of the analysis that is unique to the particular investigator, participants and context of the study, and accordingly I have not tried to impose a truth, nor an objective reality (Creswell, 2007).

#### **3.6.1 Validity**

Validity is concerned with whether the study actually measures what it is intended to study (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Using a qualitative study, I was looking for subjective points of view. It is not the intent or possible by using phenomenological method to obtain objective knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann). However a lot of literature search intending to describe the phenomenon, writing down notes, using an adequate sample, identifying contradictory examples and adhering to the phenomenological method by bracketing off past experiences was done to achieve validity (Creswell, 2007).

#### **3.6.2 Member validation**

I did a member check, to ensure that my interpretations were consistent with the participants of the study. This is important to ensure that my interpretation were true and an adequate representation of my participants’ reality. I did this by sending my informants my transcripts of the interviews, in addition to the sentences I found best representing the phenomena, from my own analysis. I wanted them to comment on it, so I could correct possibly conflicting views and to have them confirm their participation. I wanted my findings to be as grounded in the data as possible (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, Postholm, 2005).

### **3.6.3 Reliability**

Reliability describes whether the study may be replicated. The results developed through analysis was not meant for neither representing a wider population, or for presenting an objective truth, that can be replicated. Had I asked different questions, had my experiences or the research participants been different, the result would have been different. I have therefore chosen to use a lot of verbatim examples, and sufficient descriptions in order to facilitate the transference of the phenomenon of motivation and focusing to the readers experiences (Creswell, 2007, Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

### **3.6.4 Ethical considerations**

In dealing with themes within the field of motivation and focusing, sensitive issues may arise. High ethical standards are thus important in order to protect the participants, and for this purpose I resisted using private data that could identify the participants. Also they were provided with a pseudonym for the research and were promised the opportunity to review their personal quotes I would be using before the publication. The latter was done, to avoid the opportunity for misunderstandings, or including data, considered inappropriate.

Doing a member check is according to Lincoln and Guba (1985, in Postholm, 2005) very important for the above reasons, but also for the quality of the data and to ensure the participants' integrity. My plan was to send the participants the chosen quotes, I would use in this study, at an earlier stage. However, because of a delayed time-frame, I included their transcription or interview verbatim, so they could verify and check the context of the quotes, I intended to use, if they needed to. All the participants received a letter of consent, which they all signed. They were also given an information letter<sup>10</sup> prior to the interview. This letter concerned the methodology I was using, ethical concerns and the main theme. I did not report to The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH)<sup>11</sup>. But I have tried to follow the guidelines regarding research ethics for storage of personal data and ensuring anonymity (Thagaard, 2003). I have thus deleted the interviews from my recorder, and deleted or shredded all the transcriptions from my computer or in paper form at the end of this study. I have further tried to make personal information as anonymous as possible. The participants have had various teachers within the focusing

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<sup>10</sup> This letter can be found in appendix 3.

<sup>11</sup> NESH: Among other things, NESH deals with safeguarding ethical considerations in research projects. Their webpage provide information and guidelines regarding research ethics : <http://etikkom.no/no/>

community, and I have chosen not to refer to either of them in the result chapter except for Eugene Gendlin, as he is considered the founder of focusing.

### **3.6.5 My own role as a researcher**

Phenomenological research relies on the researcher as the main source for gathering and analyzing the data. Reflecting on the role of the researcher can thus be considered important. The self-consciousness of the researcher can be important for the impact of the foreknowledge of the study and the ethical aspects of the interview situation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

Upon the data gathering, I tried to make sure the participants were aware of agreeing to anticipate in a *research interview*, rather than in a normal or therapeutic conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). I thus tried to make the asymmetry in our relation explicit by pointing out my agenda with the research prior to the interview. I did this by sharing my intentions with the study, such as, sharing the sequence of the themes and the exploratory focus of the study. The latter I did by focusing on the importance of their subjective understanding of motivation and focusing. I also mentioned their rights as participants orally prior to the interview, such as their opportunity to refrain from answering, pulling out completely, or doing changes over e-mail.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) mentions that, although the purpose of an exploratory study is to discover new dimensions of a research topic, knowledge of the subject matter may serve to create order and meaning regarding the interviews. My own experience and knowledge, from counseling and focusing, could have aided my listening skills, in addition to understanding the language and concepts derived from the focusing method. I also believe my personal knowledge of focusing helped me ask relevant follow up questions. However, my positive experiences with focusing, could have, if not consciously, made me avoid negative aspects and thus excluded relevant information. Also, the setting of the interview could have influenced the participants to be more open than what was comfortable, even though I had no prior focusing experience with the participants or any intention of doing a therapeutic focusing session during the interview. With regards to the ethics section above, all the participants was given a form of control over their own participation in this study, by accepting the quotes being used over e-mail, in addition to receiving their rights in both written and oral form. However, I could have stressed further, at the ending of the actual interview, if there was something, they were uncomfortable with me using in the final thesis. The latter can serve as valuable reminder for possible later research.

## 4.0 Presenting the research

### 4.1 The research subjects

They are all currently living in the United States, and have completed the first two levels of focusing.

#### **Lisa**

Lisa is an artist. She has a college degree in art and has created her own modality in counseling. She has spent a lot of time during the last years in working on what is healing her emotional distress

#### **Alexander**

Alexander has a PhD in special education. He has had a lot of different careers. He is now teaching at a University.

#### **Laura**

Laura works as a psychotherapist in mental care settings. She is also an author, which she considers her second career.

### 4.2 Presentation of the data

I found four themes representing the essence of the three interviews. Even though the first theme, *I can read what is going on*, is about their general view of using focusing<sup>12</sup>, the other themes are also affected by their experience of focusing. I chose to present this theme first, as this is the main theme of focusing, and may thus have consequences for their motivational thinking and behavior illustrated in the other three themes: *“I focus on what I can do in my career”*, *“I can read what is going on with me in relation to other people”*, and: *“I want to do this.”* The latter three themes presented in this chapter, concern their motivational experiences before and after focusing. More specifically, the second theme concerns their experience of using their competence more effectively in their occupational setting, the third theme concern their experience of using their social competence, and the final theme concerns making choices, aligned with their personal wanting, goals and desires.

As I have not yet found research dealing with motivation and focusing, I decided to use a more exploratory focus in this chapter. The meaning of the themes and the common essence found in this research are to a greater extent illustrated by the participants’ “voices”, or

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<sup>12</sup> I will not make a specific distinction of whether the participants have an experience of doing focusing with a partner or on their own, also known as solo-focusing in the examples presented.



verbatim examples than my own descriptions. I will first present each individual's "voice" as I mentioned in the section about heuristic inquiry, and at the end of each theme, I will present the common essence of the theme, which is in alignment with phenomenology.

To what degree the first theme about focusing is influencing the other themes about motivation, and how all the themes can give insights to my problem formulation; "*Can the practice of focusing promote a higher sense of motivation?*" will be discussed, in light of theory by Albert Bandura, Deci and Ryan, and Eugene Gendlin in the next chapter.

As mentioned earlier, the first theme is about their experience of the phenomena focusing; "*I can read what is going on*" and describes how they are using what in focusing is referred to as, the "felt sense" and a "present state" in their daily life.

#### **4. 2.1: I can read what is going on**

As this theme is about their experience with the phenomena focusing. I wanted to know their general view of focusing, their use of it, the effect of it and their reasons for practicing focusing. Even though their experience of focusing is reflected in all the themes, they do describe their general use of being more "present"<sup>13</sup> and the effect of using the "felt sense" in their lives. They are illustrating this by allowing some space, separation or distance in order to "sense" what is at stake in the situation, and they describe this process as a way of knowing what is going on.

Alexander describes how a present state is facilitated by using helpful phrases when reflecting opposed to giving advice: "*There is something in you, you are sensing or you are noticing, that there is a feeling of anger somewhere, as opposed to the direct reflection of you are angry, which I knew intuitively wasn't helpful, we are always so smart about other peoples' problems, focusing is based on the belief that we are all smart to figure things out.*" "(...) there is always a disempowerment when someone gives you an advice because there is a: you are getting a content that are not really yours and b: you are receiving a meta-message, that you are not competent enough to figure this out." He also describes how focusing has impacted his life in terms of getting a clearer sense of his actions: "*The way it has impacted me, is that I am more likely to be true, to myself in the things that I am motivated to do. I am much clearer than I used to be. The other piece that was important was the ability to use my own felt sense as a companion (...) I think the more you get a sense, a felt sense kind of way of your needs, the clearer your action can be. I think what can happen*

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<sup>13</sup> The language of focusing is elaborated in chapter two.

*without having a felt sense of your needs, is that your actions are based on compound things, that appear to be singular, but that they are really compound you know, I want to get this job is one thing, if you have the felt sense underneath that, that you are not aware of, that I want to get this better job, because I feel so crappy about myself, then you are going to approach that job in a really weird way, because you are always going to be looking for peoples approval”*

Lisa describes how she can read what is going on by being present in a bodily way, and she describes the felt sense as having many manifestations: *“I am not so much in my head I am more present in my body”* and *“Focusing is like the very first time I went, oh, this thing doesn’t have to be like grabbing me by the throat (...) I can have it over here. I can see it, and get some space from it. “(...) I started feeling towards myself like a mother. Oh, so I got this baby in me (...) The part of me that is freaking out all the time, I could just find a way whether it was a sensation in my body, or just an overwhelming feeling that could come up in a situation (...) I just had to be there, so I was like a Buddhist, you know be with it (...) I get to take care of this, I didn’t think of that (...) being able to take space and select the distance from my distress,(...) to be separate from like fear, running through me all the time. Like really being there for my little self. I have done similar work, but never quite gotten there. “(...)I am not losing myself in a mechanical label,(...)that is what I like about focusing, I don’t need to name stuff, because it is different things at different times, it takes different manifestations(...)It is open ended and possible, maybe it is some wonderful things if I go through it. (...)I think focusing can help me through every obstacle (...), (...) it is allowing me to be really connected to everything that is going on in me, physical, mental, emotional, like in any given second, I can just read what is going on with me, so I can deal with everything just better, at least I have myself present more. I am there.”*

Laura describes this process by sharing how she experiences the felt sense and how saying “hello” to it can help her stay present and accept what is going on: *“it is something about focusing that is nonverbal. (... )Focusing allows me to go deep down and really be with the thing, and feel it and experience it, you know like, say to myself, say hello to the anger, or say, I can be with this, this discomfort. It allows reflecting in that way. (... ) Like in decision-making. Before I did focusing, it took me longer to get at a place of peace. I would get there eventually, after a lot of back and forth in my head and not in my gut.”*

They all seem to value and be competent in using the tool of focusing, or spending time with the felt sense, or a body sensation. The spending time, or the space or present state of being with the felt sense, is explained through being bodily grounded and allowing something

to be “open ended and possible.” They also seem to be less overwhelmed or merged/labeled by their feelings in this state. Their communication with the felt sense, is expressed by Laura as a reflection, and by Alexander as a “checking” and by Lisa as “reading.” Further, the process of focusing seems to help them become more self-reliant in the context of dealing with negative feelings and thoughts, and to make decisions and actions based on bodily awareness, and the felt sense. They also seem to be more influenced and have more positive feelings in their daily life. This can also be illustrated by something Lisa said: *“I would get this blissful state and realize like, wow, it is right there too, like I am just a hair width away from feeling great (...) I tested it for some really intense situation, where I normally would you know, called a co-counselor, after like 15 minutes, I would be just fine, that was quite interesting.”*

#### **4.2.2: I focus on what I can do in my career**

This theme concerns the participant’s experience of abilities and efforts in their work or career setting. I wanted to know if focusing had an effect on their motivation; how they explained and evaluated themselves in terms of success and failure. I also wanted to know how they handled challenges and what qualities or sources were influencing their motivation the most in performance settings.

Alexander describes how he always has been persistent *“I have always worked really hard on things in life before focusing. It is like a bull, I am going to do this.* Further he explains he was more disappointed when he failed at something: *“(…) I would be more inclined to discount their positive feedback and say, well, I work hard, that is the reason, and I am not very smart. (...) Working hard is sort of a self-punishment” (...)* it is pretty much always there, that I worry about being competent. I always pushed myself beyond the level of my actual competence, somehow to overcome the feelings of incompetence that sort of is the background noise all the time. It is related to my mother (...) In 12<sup>th</sup> grade I had come 3<sup>rd</sup> in my class at the high school I left, and she explained to the guidance counsel that I had only done that to hurt her instead of 1<sup>st</sup>, and so a pretty heavy duty message. I carry that with me all the time. In his life after focusing he seems more ready to believe in positive feedback, concerning his own strategies and skills: *“I am much more inclined to be able to say, yeah, I am pretty good at that. I do better at accepting it is a mix of ability and hard work. I think Jean Paul Sartre is one who said that at a certain age every man is responsible for the face he has (...)* I think work is a key. Alexander also talks about Gendlin’s use of the word, “intricate.” *Now I think I am much more open to, you know again the complexity of things, like sometimes things*

*happen, sometimes it is because you don't work hard enough, sometimes you can work as hard as you want and not get it and it may not have anything to do with you. And then he gives an example of working hard for a grant proposal, where he eventually won the grant. "So what focusing allowed me to do was sort of to go back and check, and see, you know, was there something that I wasn't bringing."*

Laura describes how her persistence is reflected in her writing career, *"When I put my intention into getting something, I have gotten almost everything I ever wanted."* Then she gives an example of how she persisted in a competition where the prize was publishing her book before she started to practice focusing: *"I wanted to win this contest, I was not giving up. I worked it and fixed the book, to a place where I felt I had a chance (...) if they call me one third time, it is going to be devastating to me (...) it was going to affect my ability to continue writing. I didn't win this first year (...) I felt so bad (...) they told me how to improve it again, and the third time I put it in, I won. I never share with people what I am trying to get. (...) their energy may get in the way. After focusing she describes how she is still affected when people do not believe in her, but she spends less time on negative thoughts and feelings. She is more focused on her own strategies; abilities and she credits herself and finds credit from other people. "Before, it could have made me anxious, it could have made me feel not confident (...) Now I can feel the pain and move forward (...) Focusing allows me to accept my feelings of anger and feelings of frustration and still go beyond that. I can be present, despite my feeling that I am a little upset this is a man's world. I am unstoppable now (...). I still find moments that I say, I can still thrive, I can still grow, I can still win grants, I can still write another book, nothing can stop me. I get credit from other people (...).*

Lisa describes her thinking being more negative, before focusing: *"Often people give me compliments, so I would sort of take it in, but I wouldn't really go with it (...) I would be like, yeah, thank you, just to be polite. "I would be negative towards myself, put myself down, being like very hard on myself. There is a giving up that would happen to me, and a feeling of it doesn't matter, I am not a real artist, or just self-invalidating thing that I would hear, and I mean in my own head, that would stop me, just getting really critical."* Even though she has been critical of herself, she has always persisted: *(...) Well, the funny thing is, I kept going with things, I was always doing things, I kept going, I was miserable, I had places to work on, but I had so much coming up everywhere, it was hard, but I kept exposing myself to new and challenging situations. After focusing she has become more competent in her career, and she seems to accept more positive feedback. She has also found a role model, in which seem to bolster her motivation. "With art, I got a profound shift too. I finally connected to some of my*

*deeper material with my art. (...)There were real feelings actually getting into my pictures. I now have the discipline; I am now able to carry it forward, getting it out there. I called my focusing partner right from the studio, (...) I am stuck right now, and I really want to get into this (...) I can deal with everything just better, at least I have myself present more, I am there, that is why I am going to teach, that is actually one of the revelations.(...) What brings up all the anxiety and stage fright is that you are not even in your own body, you are projecting all energy outward, you are not receiving other people, you can't even hear them, so it is just the cycle of anxiety, and projection and disconnection. It is like a visual thing, when you have yourself; you imagine people coming towards you instead of you having to go to them. Not so much relying on the outside of myself. I think I lived more in my head, outside of myself. And I am getting so great feedback. I guess I can teach. I guess I have been doing it anyways. And I am actually going to teach a class (...) in just six weeks, there is a little fear around that one (...) I am going to charge money, and I am actually willing to, like even if nobody signs up, I am still going to try it next semester. My mother is also teaching, she is not at the same level that I am at, she tried one time and the class did fail, so she did three tries, I am like yeah, that is a good model. And I advised her, and her course went really well, I actually helped her a lot, so that felt good too. I have always seen that, so I see that coach is a good title.”*

All of the participants describe being persistent prior and after they started practicing focusing. Before focusing they were all having more negative feelings and thoughts, such as self-blame, overwhelming feelings and challenges, yet they all persisted. After they were familiar with the focusing tool they seem more inclined to focus on their competence and what they can do, in terms of relying on themselves more than external influences when facing challenges. They all seem to have a more positive attitude towards their abilities as relevant for their professional career. Alexander and Laura seem to have a positive focus and seem confident in their writing abilities and Lisa seems to be confident about her teaching abilities. They all seem to use focusing as a tool or strategy to move forward in their career. Laura explains how she accepts her feelings to move forward, Alexander, checks with his felt sense in order to use his capability, and Lisa believes connecting with herself, is helping her move forward in her career. However they are still affected negatively by what other people think. This can be reflected in: *“It is unfamiliar right now to feel really confident, and there is like a part of that says; oh don't do that. It is like a family thing, not being visible (...); I guess it is always going to be that way” (Lisa)*. Yet they seem to focus more on what they can do in their career *“Me and a friend we are coaching each other (...) We give each other feedback,*

*she raves about my work, and it feels really valuable. I am starting to offer it to people”*  
(Lisa).

#### **4.2.3 I am clearer about me in relationship with other people**

As in the theme above, I wanted to see if they had more optimistic views of their capabilities that would help them function better in important domains of their life. In this theme, they describe how they evaluate their relations with people professionally, and outside work settings. As reflected in the theme above, they seem to have more positive experiences after focusing in both of these settings.

Laura is describing that she was less authentic to a friend before focusing: *“before I would be in more pain emotionally, I would go to a story in my head, and then I’d say (...) it is my fault it is her fault. I would try to be compassionate; I don’t think I would go to a place that was as compassionate as I hoped. It would be intellectual compassion. It wasn’t emotional compassion, where you really are authentically (...).”* And then she describes how the focusing community and herself relate to each other. *“Now there is a different acceptance. When you meet people doing focusing (...) they really listen, they are really here, they are really available, you really feel their presence, it is a listening beyond any listening... there is a different acceptance of the other.* Then she moves on to an example from listening: *(...) based on like really experiencing where she was at, I really felt deeply this meant a lot to her. People doing focusing they are trying, they want that and you can feel that within them.”*

Lisa describes how she used to look for disapproval in social settings. *“A huge thing for me is feeling poorly about myself based on other peoples’ reaction, you know to me, what I thought was a reaction, so approval, kind of stuff, maybe going to a party at someone’s house; I am not up to the level I need to be at, being good enough, lots of thoughts like that. I think I was faking things, often like, yeah, pretended everything was fine. I was more sensitive for disapproval, or what would look like rejections, like I was looking for it everywhere.”* Then she gives an example of how focusing helped her see that all parts are good. She gives an example of how she feels when being a companion with a partner: *“There are all good parts, that is the other thing that focusing helped me with: like Oh, so you are feeling sad, because your needs weren’t met, it sounds so rigid. Focusing takes you in, and feels how that feels and come out from there. I don’t have to use the words; it is a way of making it more alive. It is more organic (...) you go into that empathy place, like totally with me and totally with you like a double awareness. I am holding both of us now, the words aren’t important; I am really giving you, my really good intention. I have to be connected to myself in order to have that. Then that energy can help us be connected together”* And then an example with her

husband: *“It has been really good for intimacy too, yeah; it really helps to be with myself, instead of worry about what is happening. It is one of the essential places to really be connected, really in general, a relationship with yourself, really have yourself. I don’t worry so much, I am there”*

Alexander describes being less worked out and self-critical after learning the tool of focusing. *“I think I am much more successful with my job, because of focusing, because I feel a lot clearer about people and about you know, me in relation to people. I also feel I don’t get so worked out as I used to.”* He further describes that he has improved his listening skills: *“I am more effective with people (...) I have a capacity to feel with people, without being absorbed by their feelings. The feedbacks I get from families and from students are: boy you really get us. I think my presence is different with people than it used to be, I used to be more guarded and know it all, sort of a little more pushy around things, so I feel like I am much more able to just be with people wherever they are, whenever, however they are. (...) I used to get an ego pride out of being a good diagnostician and telling people exactly what I thought was their issue. I am less inclined to do that now. The idea from the practice of focusing is this idea of how important safety is and boundaries is, and also how rich peoples’ experiences are, so you can’t sum it up with a phrase. The impact on relating to other people is that I am clearer and I also pay more attention to whether I believe that the other person I am speaking with is being clear. If I don’t get a felt sense of authenticity from the other person, I am more likely to ask questions, what is going on.”*

As in the theme above, they describe having less negative judgments about themselves after they were introduced to the focusing tool. Lisa describes worrying less, Laura, experiences less pain emotionally and Alexander feels less worked out by others feelings and pushy about things. After focusing they describe being able to listen better, and to feel where the other person is, respecting the other person’s rich experience. They further describe “being” with the other person, or holding a double awareness, or being emphatic. They also describe being less intellectual, cut off from experience, or faking things. They seem to have positive experiences with the above mentioned social skills from practicing focusing, and they all seem to feel competent and believe and use these skills in social settings, outside of focusing as well as when being a focusing partner. The participants also seem to have gained more clarity and seem less influenced by negative feelings when they are socializing with others, also professionally at work. This can be illustrated by something Laura experiences at her job: *“When I work from my strength, I see the other from their strength.”*

#### 4.2.4 I want to do this

I wanted initially to see if focusing had an effect on the participants' motivation, or reasons for doing different activities solely on a cognitive level. Rather, I found the effect of focusing to affect the degree of internal satisfaction and inner wanting to do the activity on a more holistic level in the interviews, which resulted in this theme. Thus I will use self-determination theory; that stress both affective and cognitive elements when discussing this theme in the next chapter. Like the other themes of motivation, they are mostly talking about their work setting. However as self-determination and autonomy are more general constructs than self-efficacy (Deci & Ryan, 1985, Bandura, 1997), I am also including information, from other settings in their life.

Alexander describes how he was less in touch with what he wanted in his life prior to focusing. *I needed to prove to myself or to somebody, to my mother or who knows that I can do anything (...), you know as much that I was interested in a lot of things (...) I was bored, more than perceiving it to be a challenge; it wasn't purposeful (...).* He gives examples. *"(...) I was a state bureaucrat for 11 years and I work very hard (...), but it was awful. I was miserable. You know, it was not internally directed (...). My girlfriend was going to college, and I showed up there, and she told me that we had broken up, I just hadn't noticed it, that is how out of touch I was."* And *"Before focusing I would think I need to teach to do good to the world" (...)"I was more about what I should than what I wanted"* After focusing he describes being certain and clear about his desire and motivation for doing the activity. *"The way it has had an impact on my life is that I am more likely to be true to myself in the things that I am motivated to do. I am much clearer than I used to be. Like when XXX (a certified focusing instructor) mentioned (...) something was not quite right (...).* Alexander gives also an example of how he was clear about why he was teaching: *I am teaching an extra course this semester, because I need the money you know. I am not sure if I would have been so clear about that, as ok, before focusing. I would have wrapped all sorts of crap around it, like I want to share my knowledge with the world (...). I had a class of five students, three of them dropped out for a variety of reasons, not having to do with me (...). The college paid me the full amount of money. I was fine with that, because I knew that I was doing it for the money. If I hadn't known that (...), I would have tied myself with knots to be Mr. nice guy*

Lisa describes how she was unsure about what she wanted before focusing. *I have never had like a real career. I mean other than a few little jobs here and there. It's not anything I*



*was ever wanting or able to do. (...) I have been doing art really consistently for about 12 years, but not being sure what I am doing, what I am expressing, and finally just getting so sick of it, and then putting it away, like I am waiting until authentic material comes up, so that was a disconnect there. I did achieve something craft wise, but not what I was expecting. (...) It was confusing what I really liked. Like I would forget whether I liked it or not sometimes, (...) their opinion would take over sometimes. (...) I would be easily influenced, I think if an art teacher said, this is wonderful, I didn't think it was, and then I would start go in that direction. After focusing she describes she is more connected in terms of her feelings, doing what she likes and believing in her skills. She starts by talking about how her focus has changed: "I finally connected to some of my deeper material with my art. I now have the discipline and I am able to carry it forward, getting it out there. I called my focusing partner right from the studio, I am stuck right now, and I really want to get into this, it just came right out." And then she talks about how she can use her focusing skills professionally and create her own avenue within focusing: "I have to use the process for myself, so I become like my own(...). I am not so interested in other peoples use of it, I want to make it mine; maybe create my own little avenue of area of specialty within it. It has given me that feeling. I am making it mine. I don't care about your experiences (she laughs but seem sincere)." Then she explains how her looking for disapproval is somehow gone: "This is really old; it is the baby in me. I can take care of her, so somehow it is gone, and taking myself seriously as professional making money out of what I love, is a step, like really doing it.*

Laura describes doing two careers, and most of her desires and decisions have been based on what she wanted both prior and after focusing: *(...) In the U.S now, to be a writer, you have to go to a MF program, a masters in fine art, and I am like, to be a writer you write (...). I learned from my reading and my life experience to write. I feel I have done pretty well for myself. (...) Nothing is going to make me stop writing, even if I don't publish again you know, nothing is going to, writing is like breathing so. I consider it a second career right now. It is hard to manage a fulltime career and a second career, but that is the choice that I have made so I kind of have to deal with it."* Laura describes how she is used to choosing activities based on her inner wanting and strengths *"I am not going to force myself into doing gymnastics when I am afraid of heights. I do yoga, I like the feeling it does to my body and I am flexible."* And *"Doing mental health work can be hard, but when you work from a place of strength and you also see the other from a place of strength, people just strive."* Further she describes always being committed to do what she has decided to do, even though she isn't happy. She describes that focusing is helping her move forward at a shorter time when

challenged with obstacles such as negative feedback at work. In this example she describes disagreeing with negative feedback she got from her co-workers, and she seems to want to become even more confident. *“A lot of people will stop doing things because of those experiences. I think I did have the qualities, but I was in a lot of pain emotionally a little bit more than now. (...) now I can feel the pain and move forward (...) I am more aware of this situation is bothering me, rather than something is bothering me, but I don’t know what. (...) I am feeling more confident about where the exercises (focusing) are taking me and in dealing with my fears. Even now, as we speak I am learning more about moving forward with even more confidence (...) I can be happy with unhappiness and still move forward, that doesn’t make me happy, but it is not going to stop me.*

Before focusing, the participants describe more negative feelings, such as boredom, emotional pain or doing something they did not want to do. After focusing they seem to be less influenced by their environment by being more aware of themselves in terms of what they want based on themselves, more than on influences from their environment. Laura describes she is aware of what is bothering her and has become more confident at where she is going. Alexander is aware of what feels is the right action in terms of doing what he wants to do. Lisa is waiting for authentic material in her artwork, and seems more influenced by herself in her art making. She also seems to be more ready to use and express her focusing skills professionally. All the participants seem to focus more on their strengths. Even though they seem freer to do and express what they want and desire, their degree of satisfaction and how easy it seem to act based on their internal wanting, seems to be mediated by the interplay between themselves and their social context. This can be witnessed in something Laura said *“(...) Even now as we speak I am learning more about moving forward with even more confidence”*

## 5.0 Discussion

My problem formulation in this master thesis concerns whether focusing can aid the process of motivation, more specifically peoples use of their competence and autonomy. I will in this chapter discuss the three themes about motivation with relevant theory form chapter two. Under each theme about motivation, I will discuss the effect of the theme about focusing: "I can read what is going on."

### 5.1 Discussing; I focus on what I can do in my career

I will in this theme clarify how their efficacy beliefs regulate the participants' use of their capabilities in their occupational setting after they started to practice focusing, by using Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. The effect of focusing I will discuss in the end.

According to the theory of self-efficacy, high self-efficacious people use optimistic thinking, intensify their effort, and use effective strategies when facing challenges. Aligned with this thinking, they all seem to interpret their competence in work-settings, in a more positive light. Laura and Alexander seem more confident about their writing abilities and Lisa feels more ready to use her teaching ability. They all seem to experience more positive expectations and mastery experience. They also seem to view challenges and social encouragements more positively.

Lisa describes how she feels more disciplined in her art-work: "*I now have the discipline; I am now able to carry it forward, getting it out there.*" She also describes using a helpful positive visualization to overcome her fear of teaching. Alexander and Laura also seem to believe they have the capabilities to produce the result they want in their career. They both report mastery experiences of winning challenging competitions by using effort and persistence. This can be reflected in Laura's optimistic expectations: "*(...) I can still thrive, I can still grow, I can still win grants, I can still write another book.*"

The participants also seem to have a more positive outlook on failure. This can be witnessed in something Alexander said: "*Now I am more inclined to think, if I fail, that it might not have anything to do with me, it might be circumstances*" This coincides with something Bandura (1997) says about attribution and high self-efficacy. People with high self- efficacy tend to attribute experiences with success or failure in ways that improve their motivation and control. When they fail, they often attribute to lack of effort or situational circumstances like Alexander did, but when they succeed, high self-efficacious people

attribute their success to their efforts and abilities. The latter can be related to something Laura said: *“When I put my intention into getting something, I have gotten almost everything I ever wanted.”*

Bandura (1997) says that although mastery experiences are the most powerful influence of self-efficacy, the interpretation of social influences such as the actions of others and verbal feedbacks are also important when gauging capabilities. Lisa is using her mother as an inspiration for the class she plans on teaching. She seems to feel more confident in persisting after witnessing her mother fail three times before she succeeded. Alexander and Lisa seem to believe in their positive feedback. This can be illustrated in something Alexander said: *“I do better at accepting it is a mix of ability and hard work.”* Laura’s self-efficacy may however seem vulnerable as she is not willing to share her experiences before she wins a contest. She is afraid of people’s *“energy”* may disturb her. Similarly, Bandura (1997) recommends focusing on self-improvement over the triumphs of others, however, he postulates that people with high self-efficacy, will be less affected negatively by competitive environments. Even though Laura’s self-efficacy seems vulnerable in what may be a competitive environment, Laura still seems to hold an optimistic focus regarding her capabilities, as she claims to credit herself, and focus on positive feedback from *“other”* people. This might indicate that she looks for credit in more responsive environments. Similarly Bandura (1997, 2001) says that proactive and efficacious individuals are more likely to shape their lives by strategically changing environments, to aid their personal development when experiencing challenges.

### **Affective states and control**

Bandura (1997, p.145) refers to a Chinese proverb in his well-known book: *Self-efficacy: the exercise of control*: *“You cannot prevent the birds of worry and care from flying over your head. But you can stop them from building a nest in your head.”* Bandura (1997) believes that high efficacious people are generally of the opinion that they are in control over their lives, and similarly, able to exercise control over their consciousness by focusing on what they can do, to succeed. In contrast, people with low self-efficacy tend to dwell on negative feelings, thoughts and what may be hindering their success (Bandura, 1997). The participants seem less overwhelmed by negative feelings and thoughts, and to spend more time on self-aiding strategies, such as effort and optimistic thinking. In turn, they seem more motivated to use their occupational competence, such as writing and teaching. I will illustrate this further, when discussing the effect of practicing focusing on their self-efficacy or the effective use of their competence in their career.

### 5.1.1 Discussing; the effect of: “I can read what is going on,” on their perception of self-efficacy/competence in their career

As referred to in chapter two, the Focusing tool was founded on the idea that people are capable of knowing their own answers when they attend to a present state of bodily inward listening (Gendlin, 1996). Similarly, the participants describe their experience of focusing as possible, open ended and “(...) *the belief that we are all smart to figure things out*” (Alexander).

The importance of staying present, open and curious is vital to the essence of focusing, which is explained as spending time with something that is yet unclear. The participants seem to believe this focusing process is aiding them “move forward,”<sup>14</sup> by separating and making space from the bodily sensed problem or felt sense. As mentioned earlier Bandura (1997) claim we often know more than we believe, as there may be undeveloped capabilities within that may remain intact when people are disturbed by negative feelings and thoughts. Similarly the participants seem capable of coping with their negative feelings and thoughts by using the process of focusing mentioned above in moving beyond them. However, Gendlin (2003) explains how making space from feelings may be challenging because people can get so accustomed to their feelings that they identify with them, or believe it is them. Gendlin (2003, p. 78-79, Freminville, 2008) explains: “*There is usually for each person a “background feeling” that is always there, (for instance “always gray”, “always a little sad”, “always running scared”, “always trying hard”)*. These “always feelings” can be related to the participants experiences. Alexander mentions that he carries his mother’s message as a “*background noise*,” Laura seems to feel stuck in the man’s world, and Lisa explains her families’ tendency of being “*invisible*”, as if “*it is always going to be that way.*”

Yet the process of focusing as mentioned earlier, seemed to help them identify them, and to experience separation and space from them. Lisa is describing how she feels more separate from her fear, by using bodily grounding to distance herself from the fear running through her all the time. In a similar fashion Alexander and Laura seem to feel less identified with their negative thoughts and emotions by experiencing a space from them. By identifying their negative thought pattern and affective state, they seem less overwhelmed and disturbed by them, and in turn, more focused on what they *can do* in their career. This process can be illustrated in something Laura said “*Before, it could have made me anxious, it could have made me feel not confident (...) now I can feel the pain and move forward.*”

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<sup>14</sup> Moving forward is referred to in the focusing literature and in this thesis as getting in touch with what is needed or wanted in a persons’ life (Chapter 2.4.8).

According to the data they also seemed to persist and get positive feedback *before* they started to practice focusing. The differences seem to appear in their self-beliefs. Before focusing they seemed less inclined to believe in positive feedback and they were having less positive self-appraisals concerning their abilities at work. This can be illustrated in something Alexander said “(...) *I would be more inclined to discount their positive feedback and say, well, I work hard, that is the reason, and I am not very smart.* ” Similarly, self-efficacy theory postulates that positive feedback and self appraisal are more effective and tend to intensify our motivation for similar situations when we *believe* they are related to controllable sources like, our own effort *and* abilities, and when we believe the people giving us the information are credible sources (Bandura, 1997).

The latter may be true for the participants, as focusing is defined as an experiential skill, focusing on the present state, of what is happening in the body in the moment, in addition, Gendlin, explains how negative feelings, with an accepting attitude, can become positive resources of strength (Gendlin, 1996, 2003). The latter can be related to the participants’ positive experiences with focusing. This can be illustrated in something Lisa said; “*I think focusing can help me through every obstacle*” and “*I would get this blissful state and realize like, wow, it is right there too, like I am just a hair width away from feeling great.*” The positive feedback and self-appraisals may thus seem more credible and realistic, when they are aligned with what they are actually noticing or sensing in their bodies. Similarly, Bandura (1997) says that our interpretation or reaction to our physiological and affective states, will affect our ability to use our competence and to deal with challenges.

Focusing seemed to contribute to their increased sense of self-efficacy in their occupational life, in terms of increased control in using their competence, or focus on what they *can do* by experiencing more self-aiding feelings and thoughts, and a stronger control in coping with negative feelings and thoughts.

## **5.2 Discussing; I am clearer about me in relationship with other people**

As in the theme above I will discuss how the participants use both self-appraisal from authentic or mastery experiences and social sources to judge their self-efficacy. Even though this theme also contains some professional experiences, this theme concerns their relational skills in their life in general. The three participants all report being more clear about themselves when relating to other people, and they seem to feel more confident about using their listening skills and “being” with people. Laura explains how she is listening more deeply

at a compassionate level “(...) *experiencing where she was at.*” Lisa expresses she is more empathetic “(...) *I am holding both(...)*”, and Alexander says he is able to “(...) *just be with people wherever they are.*”

As in the theme above, they were all persistent in their efforts before focusing, but their quality in their effort seem to be different. They seem more accepting when listening to other people. Alexander reports how he used to get an ego pride out of diagnosing people, and now he reports experiencing a sense of clarity with people, Laura reports being more accepting of the other after she learned focusing and Lisa explains how her ability to be “connected”, is helping her “hold a double awareness.”

Lisa calls the experience of deep listening an “organic process.” Laura and Alexander both describe being more authentic. This can be illustrated in something Laura said: “*before I would blame, it is my fault, it is her fault, and I think it was intellectual, not so compassionate, where you are authentic.*” Their positive feelings can be related to something Bandura (1997) says about people with high self-efficacy. The latter are motivated by challenges, and when experiencing mastery, they can experience feelings of satisfaction, deep interest and serenity. Similarly, in addition to more positive feelings, the participants seem to feel motivated rather than defeated by challenges. They seem to experience a sense of control over their social abilities in various social settings. Alexander describes how he is more inclined to ask open ended questions if he notices people lack authenticity, Laura describes how mental health work is hard, but when she is working from a place of strength, she can see the other from a place of strength and Lisa said, she did not feel like she had a career, but yet she is now motivated to offer her relational skills professionally, by coaching people. She also reports that her sense of worry is gone, which allow her to be more present with her husband and in other social settings.

As in the theme above, their positive self-beliefs concerning their social or relational skills seem to be strengthened from their social surroundings as well.

Laura seem to recognize the strengths and values from the focusing community that is similar to her own, this seem to have an impact on her, which can be illustrated in the following: “*Now there is a different acceptance. When you meet people doing focusing (...) they really listen, they are really here, they are really available, you really feel their presence, it is a listening beyond any listening (...) there is a different acceptance of the other. (...) People doing focusing are trying, they want that and you can feel that within them.*” In a similar fashion, Bandura (1997) holds that personal capabilities is frequently gauged

relationally, and when it is, modeled efficacy information can override the influence of personal experiences in appraising personal efficacy.

Alexander and Lisa seem to be affected positively by social influences as well. In addition to having a positive experience with doing focusing with people, they seem to believe their positive feedback. Alexander has heard people say: *“boy you really get us.”* And Lisa experienced her coaching friend raving about her work: *“(…) it feels really valuable.”*

As in the theme above, they all seem to cope better with stress and negative emotions. The latter seem to aid them in social settings, by being more clear, authentic and empathic with other people. They all seem to experience more positive mastery experiences and to be positively influenced by social influences. They seem to be more motivated to use their social competence effectively in professional and private settings.

### **5.2.1 Discussing; the effect of “I can read what is going on” on their perception of self-efficacy/competence in a social setting**

Gendlin (2003, p. 76) explains *“bad feelings, is the body knowing and pushing toward what good would be. Every bad feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of being if you give it space to move toward its rightness.”* Further he explains how people will evolve and grow, if they are provided with respect and being cared for (Gendlin, 1996). Alexander’s experience of focusing can relate to this as he reports respecting peoples’ boundaries and safety more after learning the tool of focusing, and he is more inclined to ask open ended questions in contrast to diagnosing people. Similarly Lisa describes. *“I don’t have to use the words; it is a way of making it more alive. I am really giving you my good intention”* and Laura describes, focusing as *“a form of listening that is beyond any listening”* and as *“(…) a different acceptance.”*

It seems that the tool of focusing is affecting their sense of being authentic, clear, compassionate and empathetic. Gendlin (1996) explains that intellectualizing, or being cut from experience, is something that can make us more alienated to ourselves and other people. It seems like the three participants can relate to this. Alexander mention: *“I think my presence is different with people than it used to be, I used to be more guarded and know it all, sort of a little more pushy around things”* He explains further how he has changed after he learning focusing: *“I have a capacity to feel with people, without being absorbed by their feelings.* Lisa says that she worries less and she is less sensitive to peoples’ disapproval: *I think I was faking things, often like, yeah, pretended everything was fine. I was more sensitive for disapproval, or what would look like rejections.”* After focusing she explains: *“I am more there.”* Laura



says “*before I would be in more pain emotionally, I would go to a story in my head.*” As with the other participants she reports being less intellectual and more authentic after she learned the tool of focusing.

It seems like they are more present and less affected by disturbing feelings and thoughts by giving themselves empathy, space and openness by using the process of focusing. It seems as focusing has contributed in terms of improving their own inward relationship. Their ability to spend time with themselves in a non-judgmental and accepting manner, seem to have contributed to a higher level and quality of social competence, in terms of listening and being present with other people.

### **5.3 Discussing; I want to do it**

In the themes above I have discussed how positive self beliefs or peoples competence in specific contexts can aid peoples' self-efficacy and motivation.

The relevance of competence to effective functioning and motivation is also illustrated in Deci and Ryan’s Self-determination theory (1985, 2002). Competence is considered a psychological need in this theory and by satisfying the need, a person may feel a stronger autonomy based choice, or self-determination.

This theme concerns the need to be autonomously motivated or self-determined in their decision making and actions. This means that the choices and actions are more aligned with the satisfaction of their psychological needs, and thus closer to who they are, in contrast to making choices based on external rewards, such as values or social approval (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

As I questioned earlier, it might be hard to be aware of whether your actions are based on internal or external reasons. Deci and Ryan (in Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002) propose there is a continuum of motivation for doing an activity from externally regulated to internally regulate motivated behavior. A lot of people are externally motivated to some degree. As a consequence people may end up in the middle of this continuum as they are holding introjected values (Schunk and Zimmerman, 1996). This can also be witnessed in the research participants, although their autonomy level has improved.

Laura explains how mental health work can be hard. She also explains how her work place holds different values from her own. She is also doing two careers. These factors may contribute to external motivated reactions. In response to her two careers she says, “*I chose it so I have to deal with it.*” If her days are busier than what is comfortable, her choice may

reveal some sense of obligation and thus seem more externally oriented. This coincides with the Self-determination theory, as this theory holds that words like “have to” “Should do,” demonstrate a sense of obligation and thus may reflect a more externally oriented motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

The three needs which are promoting self-determination, is the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2002). As Laura seem to be describing a controlling environment based on negative feedback (Chapter 4.2.4), these three needs may be lacking. In response to her co-workers, she seems to lack the more positive feelings that accompany intrinsic motivation. She says “*A lot of people will stop doing things because of those experiences (...)*” and “*I can be happy with unhappiness and still move forward, that doesn't make me happy (...)*.”

According to Self-determination theory, people that are more autonomy-driven or intrinsically motivated, are persistent in their goals and can handle aversive stimuli because they tend to read their environment as more informative and choiceful. It seems like Laura wants to learn and grow in order to become more confident with her own standing which can be illustrated by: “*(...) it is not going to stop me*” and “*even now, as we speak I am learning more about moving forward with even more confidence.*” Even though her environment seems to thwart her intrinsic motivation, Laura seems to want to satisfy her need for autonomy, based on her desire to become more confident in her own pursuits. She also seems competent in her job, which can be illustrated in the statement: “*when you work from a place of strength and you also see the other from a place of strength, people just thrive*”. It thus seems reasonable to infer that Laura has a degree of an autonomy-driven motivation, called identified motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002, Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002), because she is identifying with the importance of autonomy and competence.

Alexander explains that he was teaching an extra course for the money, at the college he works at. As with Laura, he seems somewhat externally motivated. Although some external motivation seems involved, he seems autonomous in his choice. This can be illustrated in “*I am ok with that.*” Self-determination theory holds that people who have a more autonomy based motivation, regarding an activity, tend to hold more flexible cognitive structures or a deeper sense of awareness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This may coincide with Alexander, as he is able to attend to and act from his intentions, and needs. The latter may be illustrated by something he said: “*I am teaching an extra course this semester, because I need the money you know, I am not sure if I would have been so clear about that, as ok, before focusing. I would have wrapped all sorts of crap around it, like I want to share my knowledge with the*

world (...)“ and “(...)I had a class of five students, three of them dropped out for a variety of reasons, not having to do with me (...). The college paid me the full amount of money. I was fine with that, because I knew that I was doing it for the money. If I hadn't known that (...) I would have tied myself with knots to be Mr. nice guy. From this statement he seems to have the three psychological needs somewhat satisfied as he seems autonomous in his choice. He seems to be supported or treated just by the college, in terms of getting the full amount of money. He also seems competent in what he is teaching, which can be illustrated by: “(...) share my knowledge with the world.” Yet his motive for doing the activity seem to be somewhat externally oriented, rather than based on needs by the activity itself, such as developing his competence, or expressing himself in his teaching. As with Laura, he seems to hold an identified type of motivation, as he is identified with and aware of the importance of getting the money from the college (belonging) and his choice seem personally relevant (autonomy). In contrast to introjected motivation, which would have been a result of guilt or pressure, he seems autonomous in the sense of being satisfied with his choice. His environment seems also less controlling than Laura's which may contribute to the need of belonging and thus his satisfaction or confidence. If he would have stressed his inner desire or wanting to do the teaching in terms of expressing his resources, growing and showing deep interest for the activity itself, his motivation could have been referred to as an integrated regulation, as the activity itself would have been more internalized or in harmony with all the three needs (also the need to grow from the activity). The latter form of motivation is the closest to intrinsically motivation, yet it is still a form of external motivation, as the internalization process is still needed. A form of pure intrinsic motivation will be presented in the below.

The last participant, Lisa seems determined when it comes to using her focusing skills professionally, however she explains that she needs to become more familiar with the tool of focusing. *I have to use the process for myself, so I become like my own. I am not so interested in other people's use of it. I want to make it mine; maybe create my own little avenue of area of specialty within it. It has given me that feeling (...).*” This statement can indicate that she is not completely confident in using the tool yet in a professional setting. Self-determination theory holds that competence level will affect the level of autonomy. Her desire to use focusing in her career may thus be something she is motivated to accomplish in the future after she has brought in or internalized the competence needed for her to be fully autonomously motivated and thus confident and competent enough to use the skill aligned with her personal wanting and values. If this holds true, her motivation would be integrated

and the knowledge may be fully integrated in her sense of self. As of now, it seems she has an identified type of motivation, as she is identified with the desire to be autonomously motivated and to be competent.

Deci and Ryan (2002) focus on autonomy or volition over competence in motivation settings. Similarly, Laura's volition to learn more can be illustrated in something she said: "(...) *taking myself seriously as a professional making money out of what I love, is a step, like really doing it (...).*" She also describes another form of motivation, when connecting to her internal resources in her art making: "*I called my focusing partner right from the studio, I am stuck right now, and I really want to get into this, it just came right out.*" In this specific incident, she got help from a focusing partner. According to Deci and Ryan (2002, 1985), people perform better when they feel safe as the feeling of safety correspond to the psychological need for belonging or relatedness. This specific situation may seem like a state of flow. Flow may be described as a state where, a person loses track of time, as the person feels totally free from external pressure. The person is challenged, but at the same time competent enough to perform successfully. In this incident it thus seems as if all the three needs; competence, autonomy and relations are met and one can infer a pure form of intrinsic motivation, as she seem to have feelings of satisfaction and competence derived from the activity itself.

All of the three participants seem to have become more autonomously motivated or self-determined in their choices, desires and goals after they learned the skill of focusing. I will now discuss their sense of autonomy in regards to their practice of focusing.

### **5.3.1 Discussing; the effect of "I can read what is going on" on their sense of autonomy**

Both Laura and Lisa use the term moving forward as they explain their choices and actions. This might indicate that what they are doing is based on information from the felt sense. Similarly Alexander, says that he is more able to notice "when something isn't quite right"

Getting information from their body sense is explained by Gendlin (1996), as being in touch with the edge of awareness. Practically speaking, they need to spend time and listen to "the messenger" which may often have a meaning different than what can be inferred by the logical mind. The body has implicit knowledge, and knows what "would have felt right" (Gendlin, 2003 p.78). Similarly when Alexander can notice, "*something isn't quite right*" he is listening or spending time with the felt sense of meaning, rather than the logical meaning.

Before focusing, the participants described their life being more overwhelmed with feelings such as pain, confusion and lack of purpose. The latter can be signified as a-motivated reactions. A-motivation can be contrasted with intrinsically motivation, in the sense that the latter is characterized by the perception of choice and flexible thinking. In contrast, people who feel a-motivated tend experience lack of control and awareness in terms of their needs, and are more inclined to place the demands of the environment ahead of their own needs and feelings (Kasser, 2002). This can be illustrated by something Lisa said: *It was confusing what I really liked.* “(...) *I would be easily influenced I think, if an art teacher said, this is wonderful, I didn't think it was, and then I would start go in that direction.*”

After they started the practice of focusing, they seem to be more in touch with their internal wanting, needs and goals. The practice of focusing may seem similar to the state of awareness, and flexible thinking proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985) and Brown and Ryan (2003). However, the process of awareness communicated by Deci and Ryan and Brown and Ryan may not involve a “conversation” with the body, which differentiates focusing from the other meditative or awareness practices referred to above.

The participants seem to respect the process of focusing in terms of being able to attend to their bodies in an accepting and non judgmental way, and as mentioned earlier, they seem to move forward in terms of experiencing bodily felt shifts, which can be illustrated by Laura as *“I am more aware of this situation is bothering me, rather than something is bothering me, but I don't know what.”* Gendlin (2003) describes the body shift as an alive and positive feeling, and can happen when people get a different perspective on the problem, even just by getting in touch with a bodily felt issue or problem, as when dis-identifying from the felt sense of the problem. Gendlin (2003) explains the process as a transfer of information from the body to the mind, and the process to hold a positive potential, when sensing them in the body. He (Gendlin, 1986, p. 178) says: *“What is split off, not felt, remains the same. When it is felt, it changes. Most people don't know this! They think that by not permitting the feeling of their negative ways they make themselves good. On the contrary, that keeps these negatives static, the same from year to year.”* Similarly, Lisa experienced the process of focusing as moving from being stuck in her art work to be able to express herself and to use her resources in a confident manner, she said: *“It came right out.”* Similarly Alexander reported, *“The more you get a sense, a felt sense kind of way of your needs, the clearer your actions can be.”*

Self-determination theory holds that the type of motivation and level of self-determination is a result of the experience of the degree of autonomy support in the environment (Skinner &

Edge, 2002). Maybe more so than the theory of Self-efficacy, which holds that the human is capable of taking control over their surroundings (Bandura, 1997).

Laura is probably the participant that describes her environment as the most controlling, and her intrinsic motivation seem to suffer. What focusing seems to do for her is to help her be aware of that *“something is bothering her”* and by *“being separate from the pain.”*

Although, a shift can help people move forward, Gendlin (2003) says that more cycles of focusing are sometimes needed to get a complete resolution of a bodily felt problem. This can be related to something Laura says: *“I want to learn how to deal with my fear and where these exercises (focusing) are taking me”*

It seems as all the participants are more aware of the inner wanting. They seem more autonomously motivated. Laura’s desire to learn more about moving forward can be related to self-determination theory, which holds that people with a higher sense of autonomy are more likely to overcome barriers of difficulty to reach their autonomy related goals (Edge & Skinner, 2002). Similarly with earlier research done on awareness of autonomy, mentioned in the introduction (Brown & Ryan, 2003), it seems like focusing has an impact on the participants motivation. It seems that focusing provides a non judgmental and autonomy supportive atmosphere where the participants can grow and make better choices in terms of using their autonomy and (competence) more effectively.

I would like to end this discussion with something Alexander said that can illustrate the above. *“(…) the difference is more qualitative than quantitative. I feel after focusing that I am much more persistent, because I believe in the things that I am persisting in, and that those are authentic for me, and internally directed.*

## 6.0 Concluding comments/summary

### 6.1 Findings

In this chapter, I will point out the main aspects of this study that can answer my research question. I will also suggest further research, some limitations of this study and finally end this thesis with some personal comments.

My research question was “*Can the practice of focusing promote a higher sense of motivation.*” According to the results in chapter four, and the results discussed with relevant theory, in chapter five, this study points to a positive answer of my research question.

I reduced the raw data to four themes. The theme about Focusing was used to get an understanding of the participants’ meaning of focusing and further used to gauge the effect of focusing on the participants’ sense of autonomy and competence in motivation settings. The first two themes of motivation concerning the participants level of competence in their career and social setting; “I focus on what I can do in my career” and “I am clearer about me in relationship with other people” show that the participants are more motivated to use their competence more effectively in a career and in social settings after their practice of focusing. These findings are supported by Self-efficacy theory which holds that optimistic beliefs correlate positively with their sense of control, and effective use of capabilities when facing challenges (Bandura, 1997). The effect of focusing seem to be related to a stronger inward relationship, more positive feelings and a stronger sense of control over thoughts and affective states. In turn they seem more confident or more motivated to believe in and use relevant competence in social and occupational settings. The third theme of motivation concerns their level of autonomy and was called “I want to do this.” This theme shows that the participants experience a greater sense of autonomous motivation after they practiced focusing. Opportunities to experience one’s self as autonomous are facilitated by a context that is informative or autonomy supportive according to Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, Skinner & Edge, 2002). The latter involves a greater experience of respect, and encouragement to attend to and express their true self, internal needs and desires. Their inward relationship from their practice of focusing seems to be related to autonomy supportive conditions aiding intrinsic motivation in SDT, as the participants show a stronger tendency to reflect and be more aware of their authentic needs and wants. In turn, the participants seem to act more from their personal and autonomous goals, desires and choices.

It seems from the above that the practice of focusing has positive motivational effects that enable the participants to function better and lead a more effective life. This study indicates that the motivational constructs; autonomy and competence can be developed by using the tool of focusing.

## **6.2 Further research and limitations of this study**

Gendlin proposed that Focusing is a tool which can be combined with any other therapeutic approach (Gendlin, 1996). It seems from this study that an experiential tool like focusing can serve as a tool to aid peoples' motivation. In the introduction, I questioned if it would be possible to combine Focusing with a more cognitive oriented approach like "Løft". Personally I found it useful to combine the two during my internship, so a study of the combination would be interesting.

A possible bias in my study could have been the small sample and my foreknowledge of focusing. The latter could have affected the solely positive focus of focusing. It could therefore be interesting to see if a larger sample could create greater variations. This could be done by combining this study with q-methodology, or a quantitative study which allow for a greater sample, and more anonymous answers. Nevertheless, I hope as I mentioned introductory, that the reader can feel inspired from reading this thesis, either for raising their own motivation, for the work of raising other people's motivation, learning about or practicing the tool of focusing or to be inspired to do more research within these fields.

## **6.3 Concluding comments**

At the conference where I did my research, I was able to have a personal conversation with Eugene Gendlin himself. We were talking mostly about my thesis, and how I would try to combine motivation with focusing. In the conversation he told me about the importance of noticing when you are "yourself." He also shared a story of how he would tell some monks' looking up to their leader, to rather start looking up to themselves. I do not think he meant for them to be "self-confident fools," like Bandura mentioned, but it made me think of how important belief and experience are in motivation settings. Not only believing you can do things, but also the experience of being comfortable and genuine in the things you do.

On a personal note, I believe the tool of focusing has been a powerful ally for myself throughout this study. I feel my own practice has contributed to my motivation in terms of noticing more enjoyable feelings of self-reliance. I feel that the space where I can listen



within is larger, and I feel it enables me to direct my efficacy to overcome stress and to enjoy a greater integrity in the things I do.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Guide

What is your background?

When did you start doing focusing?

*(Questions concerning the life before he/she practiced focusing).*

Have you ever worked hard/put a lot of effort into something, and not been able to achieve what you wanted?

Have that situation or happening affected you somehow later?

Can you describe any experience/time in your life when you suffered defeat/failed

Can you describe a situation where you achieved success?

How did you explain it for yourself/others?

Can you explain a situation you find challenging?

Why did you sign up for focusing level one/level two?

Why are you at this retreat?

How has the practice of focusing or the focusing courses affected your life?

*(Questions concerning the life after he/she practiced focusing).*

Have you ever worked hard/put a lot of effort into something after you started practicing focusing, and not been able to achieve what you wanted?

Have that situation or happening affected you somehow later?

Can you describe any experience/time in your life after you started to practice focusing when you suffered defeat/failed

Can you describe a situation after you became familiar with focusing where you achieved success?

How did you explain it for yourself/others?

Can you explain a situation today, that you find challenging?

## Appendix 2: Letter of Consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place from XXXXX to XXXX. This letter is about your rights and information as a participant of my research.

By signing this letter of consent you are agreeing to participate in this master thesis that deals with the experience of focusing and motivation.

Although direct quotes from you may be used in the thesis, I will exclude anything that you would consider sensitive information as you will be able to read through a summary of what you have said during the interview. At the same time your reading will be a safety check for me, and knowing that the information is correct will be in my best interest.

A sound recorder will be used during the interview. It will help me as a researcher to accurately capture your experiences, and it will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. It will be deleted as soon as it is transcribed.

If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder at any time, just let me know, and I will turn it off immediately. Further, the transcription will be shredded as soon as the work of the analysis is done.

As a researcher I will follow the ethical guidelines provided by serious qualitative researchers such as Thagaard (2008) and Postholm (2005).

As this participation is voluntarily, you have every right to discontinue, with no consequence. At the moment you do, all information provided by you will be deleted.

In order for you to receive something in return, you will get the opportunity to receive this thesis either in an electronically or book form.

Research participant

Time/Place Name

Researcher

Time/place Name

### **Appendix 3: Letter to the Research Participants.**

Thank you so much for showing interest for my master thesis.

The purpose of this study is to better understand insights of the participants' experience of practicing focusing and sense of self-efficacy.

The goal with this thesis is to get a better understanding of your unique experiences and the similarities that might be found with other participants' experience. I will use a one on one interview with 3-4 participants that lasts approximately an hour. You will be asked a series of questions concerning the above theme. You are not required to answer each question if you find any of them uncomfortable.

You will be completely anonymous in the thesis and so will the "focusing conference." A summary will be made of the interview, which you get the possibility of reading through. It is in my best interest to assure that all the information provided by the participants is correct. Also if you as a participant find any of the information too sensitive, I will in any case remove incorrect or unwanted information.

I will bring a sound recorder during the interviews, so I can concentrate on your unique experience in your own words, instead of taking notes. I will delete the interviews as soon as possible after the transcription (It takes approximately a day to transcribe the interview). I will also shred the transcription when the work of the analysis is done.

I will follow serious ethical guidelines of qualitative research developed by other researchers such as Thagaard (2008) and Postholm (2005).

Before the interviews start, you will also get the possibility of signing an informed consent form. Among other facts, it is about your rights as a research participant to stay anonymous and treated with confidentiality and respect.

Questions regarding the nature of the study or the methods I am using are welcome at any time. Please contact me at the e-mail address or telephone number listed beneath.

Sincerely Yours,

Mona-Agathe Hogstad

Master of educational Counselling, NTNU  
Contact information

Telephone +47 41515999

E-mail: [monaagat@stud.ntnu.no](mailto:monaagat@stud.ntnu.no)

## **Appendix 4: The six steps of Focusing (short form) by Eugene Gendlin**

(2003, p. 173-174)

### **1. Clear a space**

How are you? What's between you and feeling fine?

Don't answer; let what comes in your body do the answering

Don't go into anything.

Greet each concern that comes. Put each aside for a while, next to you.

Except for that, are you fine?

### **2. Felt sense**

Pick one problem to focus on.

Don't go into the problem. What do you sense in your body when you recall the whole of that problem? Sense all of that, the sense of the whole thing, the murky discomfort or the unclear body-sense of it.

### **3. Get a handle**

What is the quality of the felt sense?

What one word, phrase or image comes out of this felt sense?

What quality-word would fit it better?

### **4. Resonate**

Go back and forth between work (or image) and the felt sense. Is that right?

If they match, have the sensation of matching several times.

If the felt sense changes, follow it with you attention.

When you get a perfect match, the words (images) being just right for this feeling, let yourself feel that for a minute.

### **5. Ask**

“What is it, about the whole problem, that makes me so ....?”

When stuck, ask questions:

*What is the worst of this feeling?*

*What's really so bad about this?*

*What does it need?*

*What should happen?*

*Don't answer; wait for the feeling to stir and give you an answer*

*What would it feel like if it was all OK?*

*Let the body answer:*

*What is in the way of that?*

## **6. Receive**

Welcome what came. Be glad it spoke.

It is only one step on this problem, not the last.

Now that you know where it is, you can leave it and come back to it later.

Protect from critical voices that interrupt.

Does your body want another round of focusing, or is this a good stopping place?