

## **The Exceptional Human Experience Process: A Preliminary Model with Exploratory Map**

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*Exceptional Human Experience Network*

In the early 1990s, Rhea A. White began extensive formal development and documentation of her comprehensive theory of Exceptional Human Experience (EHE). Consistent throughout her theoretical development, literature review, and prodigious number of scholarly articles and documentation is White's (1990; 1997e; 1998a) centralizing focus that anomalous or Exceptional Experiences (EEs) have the potential to be experienced and subsequently integrated into new personal and world view contexts. At these points of catalytic transpersonal insight — where/when the event is no longer apprehended as separate from the experience of the event and the experiencer realizes that he or she is wholly integral to the creation and resolution of the EE — the experience is potentiated, transmuted, and humanized, and becomes an Exceptional Human Experience (EHE). Likewise in parallel, the EEer and EHEer serve as broad categories of individuals who have engaged the EHE process. Yet the key difference between them is that the EHEer has also potentiated (acted upon) the experience, and in the process of potentiating and transmuting it “out there,” experiencers themselves have been transformed in some personally-meaningful way “in here.”

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White's general EHE theory is far-reaching in scope and thus spans and interacts with several fields of academic endeavor, most notably transpersonal psychology, and she is currently enjoying some degree of recognition. Yet the EHE theory is rooted in the field of parapsychology, a field in which White first ventured to better understand her own near-death experience. This experience occurred in 1952 and catapulted her directly into the experiential paradigm of the EHEer and back to the difficult work of finding answers to questions raised by the experience (White, 1997d). She took her questions to parapsychology because she noted that anomalous perceptions similar to those of her own direct experience were being investigated by those academic researchers. She apprenticed, and later mentored, in the field, being directly involved with the field for over 35 years.<sup>1</sup> During that time, however, she came no closer to answers to the questions that had brought her there in the first place. Instead, the engine that came to drive research parapsychology had limited its range and influence over the years, and by the mid-1980s, centered almost exclusively on methodological issues, event-centered proofs, and the investigation of truth-claims. The experiencers — and the sheer variety of their types of experiences — had been left on the sidelines to fend for themselves.<sup>2</sup>

This gathering insight kindled and fused to become a critical juncture for White. It marked a crossroads, a pivotal point, in her own EHE process. It was at this point that she founded the EHE Network in 1995. The Network was designed to offer a centralized vehicle for experiences and scholars alike to report and discuss their findings about exceptional experiences, exceptional human experiences, and their aftereffects.

The central message of the EHE Network was that by going beyond the phenomenological, event-centered issues into questions of personal meaningfulness of the whole experience (before, during, after), experiencers could become more aware of who they are, and the “More” they can be. Thus, White set out to uncover new insights as reported by actual experiencers rather than taking the word, words, and professional inter-

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1. Exceptional Human Experience (EHE) theoretical and background materials can be ordered directly from Rhea A. White, Executive Director, EHE Network, 414 Rockledge Road, New Bern, North Carolina, 28562, USA. Additional information and resources are available on the Network's website, [www.ehe.org](http://www.ehe.org).

2. Some examples of types of EEs (potential EHEs): (Psychical) precognitive dream, clairvoyant vision, telepathy, out-of-body experience; (Mystical) ecstatic bliss, cosmic consciousness, outer space experience, religious conversion; (Death-related) near-death experience, haunting, apparition, past life recall; (Encounter) UFO/alien, shrine/power place, ancestor; (Enhanced) in the sports zone, nostalgia, déjà vu, reverie, falling-in-love, remarkable coincidence.

pretations of third-party researcher and case worker reports. A subtle difference of methodological focus perhaps, but one that would lead White and those of us who work with her to uncover fresh perspectives about a wide range of EEs/EHEs and to raise questions once more about the nature of reality and the cultural definition of the word “anomaly.” In the process, we would come to learn that within first-person written narrative essays rested whole patterns of defining characteristics, attributive factors, and transformational dynamics of both EEs and EHEs.<sup>3</sup>

Many sets of EHE qualities extracted from experiencer narratives have been classified and codified. They continue to be updated by White for use across a number of projects (White, 1994; 1997d; 1997f; 1999; White & Brown, 1997). She was the first to classify and document preliminary lists of triggers, concomitants, and aftereffects (TCAs) that surround direct (exceptional) experiences. In addition, other researchers’ studies have been incorporated into these lists with references that highlight vertical, in-depth attributes of one or more particular type of EE and EHE (e.g., out-of-body experience, near-death experience, UFO encounter, cosmic consciousness, sports zone). These published lists and classifications and her continuing work to abstract and provide references across tangential fields of EHE are most notable in Part II of her journal, *Exceptional Human Experience*. These publications have provided students, scholars, academic researchers, and libraries with a central information resource for extending interdisciplinary study, and for comparing attributive features across the different types of EEs/EHEs, including those studied by parapsychologists.

White’s pioneering efforts to span and classify all types of EE/EHE originally yielded five classes (i.e., psychical, mystical, encounter, death-related, and enhanced “normal”) complete with respective sets of defining characteristics, and well over one hundred nominal types of EE (potential EHE).<sup>4</sup> In addition, we had extended the TCA lists to include longer spans of time surrounding direct experience, and to correspond with, and capture greater detail from, lengthier, more retrospective, self-reflective narratives which report suspected precursor triggers and residual long-term aftereffects. As such, and with findings gleaned from a labor-intensive exploratory research project, we have uncovered thus far a total of 678 triggers, physical, physiological, psychological, and

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3. Many thanks to Dr. Alexander Imich for sponsoring his essay contests in conjunction with Rhea White and EHE Network over the years. His contests have helped greatly to gather quality reflective, detailed narratives of EEs and EHEs.

4. White has revised some of these classes in 1999 to add two new ones, and will be describing them in various publications in 2000.

spiritual concomitants, and their aftereffects (Brown & White, 1997). Together, these qualitative TCA data, first observed and then later extracted in analytical detail from scores of narrative reports, were synthesized across potential classes of defining characteristics and further classified into type. In essence, the experiencer narratives with their embedded attributive characteristics form the original structural base of EHE theory and the body of our early work.

For many hard-core parapsychologists, emphasis on experience rather than on proving and/or modeling staged (laboratory or field) events will still hold no luster. Too, the inclusion of a wide range of anomalies (perceived anomalies) such as déjà vu, serendipity, encounters with otherworldly “aliens,” sacred places, and things that go bump in the night, “peak” mystical experiences, and even precognitive psi when it holds only pieces of a puzzle to solve (rather than researcher-required elements), can easily be dismissed as out-of-range to the proper focus and current methods of parapsychology. As such, the baby continues to be thrown out with the bath water, and admittedly, counting, recounting, and defending counts of a particular type of baby’s toes over several decades brings us no closer to understanding the baby as a whole living system, nor to discovering the environmental (contextual, related) factors vitally important to its overall health and potential for a thriving development.

On the other hand, hard-core experimental psychologists (I was trained in the behaviorist tradition) summarily dismiss the notion that there even is a baby to study. Exceptional experiences, part and parcel of any type, belong to the realm of clinical study, or in the hands of those “other” soft-core psychologists across the great divide who may be able to “help” the experiencers when confronted with aberrations of faulty learning, inaccurate perception, and non-rational cognition. Instead, research samples are selected from homogeneous populations of “normal” college students (ages 19-22) to ensure minimal statistical variance or error, and to maximize potential for the replication of “positive” results across similar colleges and norms.

On the other side of the great divide of psychology are the majority of developmental, existential, humanist, and transpersonal psychologists who do consider the living health and well being of the baby and recognize the qualities of the bath water as essential to overall development. Yet, for many of these psychologists the baby under study follows a predictable “normal” developmental life span, peppered with recognized and recognizable perceptual-cognitive shifts, existential life-crises, and adaptation to mainstream consensual values, truths, and realities. This leaves little room for EEs/EHEs who consider themselves “normal,” are recognized as “normal” by family, friends, and colleagues,

and who perform, on a daily basis “normally.” Yet, these perceptions, even whole paradigm shifts of cognition, and the experiential crises they can engender are likely to be initially depotentiated (i.e., ignored, dismissed, rationalized, forgotten) by experiencers and society at large. If or when they are recognized and questions are raised, then expert authorities entrained in contemporary cultural, consensual, common values typically can offer a variety of resources specifically designed to adapt experiencers back into the fold.

Needless to say the illustrations above are caricatures of worn stereotypes (as are sensationalist media portrayals of most EEers and EHEers) and the baby-bath metaphor is an overused cliché. However, if I caught your attention then the illustrations will have been well worth the editorial space. The sad truth is that most scholars consider their field the only field of valid knowledge and have drawn ever-tighter circles around acceptable content, methods, and hypothesis testing to serve as representations of that field. A maturing field may divide several times over its history (e.g., psychology currently includes over 100 recognized branches as defined by the American Psychological Association) and that is taken as a sign of growth and prosperity. Most scholars lose sight of their originating roots (philosophy, including all inquiries of science and religion) in the zeal to define the boundaries of a field’s territory and branches. At some point we (as individuals and as a culture) reach a critical juncture: Do we continue to fragment, erect rigid boundaries, and increase the number of partitions in ever-tightening attempts at analyses, or do we begin to (re)connect, allow “fuzzy” boundaries, and to communicate across disciplines in ever-opening attempts at synthesis? Or (there is always another “or” to consider when we begin to triangulate either/or into both/and options) do we search to discover and receive the insight of a novel perspective? One that honors both analysis and synthesis — a cross-pollination of fresh seeds of information — one firmly grounded in trial and error “facts” in order to create and produce hybrids of alternative hypotheses, methods, possible new vistas to explore?

This was the dilemma presented to White when she ventured out (and inward) to create and then formalize her own solution — the theory of EHE, and the establishment of the EHE Network as a vehicle to express EHE theory. Her story is an exemplar of the overarching EHE process. It always begins with an EE of some type, and in some sensational cases these are spontaneously transmuted to EHEs, as hers was. Yet, the transmutation of EE to EHE, and the dramatic transformative shift of world and life view that it may instigate (i.e., engender the experiential paradigm) is only one key part of the whole of the longitudinal EHE process.

Too many people are having too many experiences that fall outside the statistically-generated Bell Curves that depict and illustrate the “norms” of everyday life experience. Both personal and cultural definitions of reality (that is, personal experience nested within cultural experience) are limited and insufficient to capture the unique predicament of the EEer and the EHEer. Yet, it is these very exceptions to the rule that open new paradigms and, if potentiated, add remarkably to the quality of life. Exceptional human experiencers, one by one, are discovering the value of quality as well as the quantitative rule (ruler) that reveres and venerates safety in numbers alone. This marking of renewed balance between qualitative and quantitative experience is best measured in the words of experiencers who have repeatedly visualized, in one form or another, a new dawning of conscious awareness — an evolution of humankind, so to speak. Based on these individuals’ symphonic notes, the collected (and collective) words have been shared, analyzed, and synthesized across individual narrative accounts. As such, they provide a source of real-life human exploration, highlighting and underscoring the insights and discoveries of EHEers and the evolutionary process of EHE. This paper presents an integrated, dynamic synthesis of findings gathered across EEer and EHEer reports. It is a map of the largely- uncharted territory of anomalous worlds as they have been experienced, uncovered, and of the conclusions drawn by individual explorers, as described in their own words.

The EHE process is but one cornerstone of overall EHE theory. White first discussed the possibility of a progressive, developmental process unique to EHEers in 1993 (White, 1998a). Soon after submitting my own essay narrative at the end of 1994 (Brown, 1995), I joined the EHE Network to first assist in refereeing a variety of journal papers, and soon after to become a contributing editor for the “Synchronicity Connection,” a featured column of *EHE News*. After talking with scores of friends and colleagues over the previous two to three decades about our experiences (typically shared in confidential secrecy), I began corresponding in earnest in 1995 with experiencers around the globe using the technological miracle of Internet e-mail. These more casual email discussions, together with the large number of the EHE Network’s more formal narrative reports I had read by 1996, and with my own experience of over four decades of EEs and EHEs, I could no longer deny these experiencers nor their experiences, nor continue to try to rationalize my own away. I volunteered for the post of the EHE Network’s Director of Research and Development, offering my collective background in human information processing, experimental psychology, motivation, and individual differences (personality) studies, and as an EHEer. From the beginning, the EHE process with its inherent dynamic flow as evidenced

by the narrative reports I had read, and its implied multidimensional, interweaving puzzle captured my attention. It was a personal challenge for me, both as a researcher and as an experiencer. How were we to bridge the gap between our ineffable experiences (including “simple” creative insight) and the formal logic/feedback flow of sensation-perception-cognition processing that allows little or no variance in interpretation?

As White had already determined by exploring and adopting methods from transpersonal psychology, field anthropology, and interdisciplinary studies, a solution for this puzzle might best be pieced together by close inspection of the data submitted by the experiencer “introspective researchers” themselves. For those readers who recall the origins of Western experimental psychology, both classical perception and psychophysics began with researchers from adjacent academic fields using introspective methods to formulate null hypotheses (Boring, 1957; Peters, 1965). In fact, almost all innovations in science and technology, the arts and humanities begin with an EEEr’s insight. This fact did not escape us in our early discussions regarding the relative value of introspective and retrospective reports (Brown, 1997b; White, 1998b).

Using this rationale, each narrative report is viewed as a research (case) study onto itself with the experimenter and the experiencer being one and the same. Introspective analysis and retrospective synthesis (i.e., “Tell us what happened in your own words, what did the experience[s] mean to you?”) are methods of a lost science, perhaps, but also of a lost art. White quickly learned that experiencers wanted, even craved to tell their own stories in their own words — often divulging for the first time in their lives to another human being one or more experiences which may have laid fallow for years, even decades. Because experiencers were further challenged to view their experiences in the context of personal meaningfulness, more often than not, simply dwelling on this task alone would fuse the direct experience, thus catalyzing and sparking far-ranging new insights (Brown, 1997c; 1997d; White, 1997b). In contrast to amassing narratives that simply recount the facts of direct exceptional experiences, the EHE Network’s introspective-retrospective method often enlivens and revitalizes the relatively flat, dormant event experience into the dimension of meaningful experience. Importantly, for both researchers and experiencers, direct experiences could thus be viewed differently, no longer perceived as existing solely in a vacuum, where each represented an independent stand-alone (statistical point or case) event, or a collection of similar events.<sup>5</sup> Instead, these direct experiences when

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5. See also Eugene Gendlin (1997); or check his website, <http://www.focusing.org>, for substantial efforts to define and apply a “first person science of meaning.”

we take them at face value “exist” within whole human contexts, including baselines which mark life streams of steady state everyday experiences (i.e., the experiencer-defined status quo) for which we could then begin to define a relative Ground Zero.

Mature disciplines of science already have their methods, procedures and preferences for testing and analyses well entrenched. But EHE theory, including the subject matter of EEs and EHEs, and gathering pieces of a huge puzzle called anomalous experiences (labeled as such by both experiencers and Western culture) had virtually no precedent in research, or in interdisciplinary, collective, cohesive scholarship. For our exploratory research with EHEs it was vitally important to see first just what we were dealing with before jumping to any *a priori* conclusions based on preferred procedures, comfortable research methodologies, or experimenter expectations for the data and how they should work.

### Evolution of the EHE Process Model

Based on our early reviews of narrative essays, we learned that not only did they cover a wide range of types of exceptional experiences, they also covered varying spans of time between apprehending the initial direct experience and the submission of the written report. Essays could represent spans of (hypothetical processing) time that ranged from several days to several years to many decades. To set the stage for the possibility of capturing an EHE process in any detailed examination of narrative reports, White offered an outline of five graduated developmental (evolving) stages for us to consider, including descriptive titles and prevalent themes based on longitudinal patterns she recognized as universal across EHEer essays and from reflection into her own EHE process evolution over the years.<sup>6</sup> Together we adopted her outline, discussed it at length, and subsequently published a pair of complementary papers in which we compared and contrasted both the subjective (White, 1997a) and the objective (Brown, 1997a) viewpoints for the EHE process. The five stages were designated in ascending order:

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6. As White describes her original epiphany of the EHE process: “[T]he idea was based on my reading of 139 essays submitted to the 1994 Imich contest in a brief period of time so that I was able to catch the drift of the overall pattern as well as [confirm it within myself because] I had already begun to own and live from my own experiences since 1993, and observe what happened as a result. I was completely surprised. ... [it] was totally unexpected, not rationally anticipated [or derived].” (White, personal communication, December, 1999.)

1. The initiating event/experience
2. Search for reconciliation
3. Between two worlds
4. In the experiential paradigm
5. A new way of being in the world.

By initially designating five hypothetical stages and outlining their prevailing themes, we literally set the stage for ourselves to begin to examine and extract distinguishing characteristics representative for each of the stages. Thus, during our 1998 exploratory research project sponsored by the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), we chose to extract several variables in addition to those direct experience TCAs specifically requested by IONS (Brown & White, 1997).<sup>7</sup> We noted that, for selected variables pertaining to time spans and acknowledged history of previous EEs/EHEs, experiencers' introspective-retrospective emphasis seems to shift remarkably. For example, those experiencers who reported relatively-shorter spans (less than 12 months) tended to focus more on the immediacy of the direct experience, detailing concomitant descriptive characteristics and short-term residual aftereffects. Those reporting progressively-longer spans shed light on the experience as it is nested within a dynamic (human life) context, including shifts of TCA perspective toward long-term aftereffects and more inferences of personal meaningfulness. Close examination of these additional data sets, nonetheless, did seem to support our preliminary hypothesis of an overarching EHE process, and suggest that experiencers' apprehension, perception, and response to the originating EE do indeed shift over the time span, and with type and number of experiences.

Although we implicitly understood, and had learned from reading some of the more "advanced" EHEer reports, that the EHE process was not necessarily limited to these five stages and could otherwise be extended out in a linear series, these five stages were sufficient to capture key qualities of the process. Specifically, the basic model was designed to capture the transmutation of EE to EHE with emphasis on how these experiences can, and do, shift perspectives (e.g., paradigms), and redirect lives when they are potentiated. We also learned that advanced EHEer (longitudinal, retrospective, contextual, autobiographical EHE) reports

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7. Several additional variables were extracted for potential further analysis and publication including: experiencer's age, span of time between experience and submitting essay, changes in occupation, religion/beliefs, lifestyle; writer's tone; process stage before/after; and class/type defining characteristics.

were few and far between when compared to the inordinate number of single experience EE/EHE accounts that the EHE Network had received over the years. At that point we surmised that advanced EHEers were simply getting on with the business of Stage 5 (i.e., a new way of being in the world) and did not have the desire to necessarily talk about it nor explain to others how an initial EE got them “there” in the first place. To do so would mean writing a full EHE autobiography describing several or many EHEs over a life time and tying these together in some personally-meaningful way, typically called the EHEer’s “calling” and its longitudinal import (see White, 1997c). These essays can be massive undertakings for EHEers, and yet anyone who has written an EHE autobiography will tell you, the creative formulation effort in itself is a richly-rewarding experience packed with additional insights often engendering new EHEs (Brown, 1995). We also understood that the various modes of expression, including the language, symbols, and metaphors used by EHEers are not easily translated to non-EHEers (that is, to those who have not at least once visited Stage 4 in the experiential paradigm).<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of sharing our initial findings with other scholars and experiencers, five stages were sufficient to communicate the dynamics of a potentiated EHE, including gradations of experiencer-perceived shifts of conscious awareness and some of the more prominent characteristics of subjective meaningfulness and objective behaviors. The original 5-stage model continues to serve well as a columnar backbone for a general developmental EHE process. Yet, for anyone who has studied EHE narratives in any scope and depth, it becomes apparent that within each of the stages there are qualitative sets of attributive characteristics that could be used to distinguish (more or less) one stage from the others.<sup>9</sup> I subsequently attempted to capture, identify, and label some of those characteristic qualities.

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8. See Wade, 1996, and Rosen, 1994, 1997, for examples of extraordinary efforts of EHEers to express the experiential paradigm and its perennial philosophy over the ages and across cultures.

9. In any dynamic process “something” shifts. That “something” is different in some way (i. e., some form) at each stage of a series of (progressive) developments over perceived time, and yet also that “something” stays the same at its core descriptive level and can be used to compare and contrast dynamic shifts of form across the stages. For example: The cake in the box is also perceived as (the same, yet somehow different) cake in the mixing bowl, the cake baking in the oven, the cake served, the one tasted and enjoyed for dessert. In essence, we could say that a label “cake” is the lowest common qualitative denominator that dynamically changes in form over time and can still be called “the same yet different cake.” In questioning what “something” is shifting along the stages of the EHE process, we could answer “the experiencer” is. In questioning how experiencers dynamically change, we can only surmise the “facts” by nature of

In selecting qualifier labels, it was important to identify not only sets of particularly distinctive and distinct qualities, but also to arrange them such that they suggest the approximate dynamic progression of those qualities — from first entry to stated awareness — within a hypothetical stage. Further, the labels selected should be generic enough to serve for simple comparison and contrast of sets of characteristics across the stages. To this end, the original five-stage model was expanded orthogonally to include twelve classifiers common across stages. The result was a 5-column by 12-row matrix model design structure into which I could then begin to map key characteristics for each of the 60 resultant cells. The twelve qualifier labels selected are:

1. *Definition* — A synthesized description of the stage gleaned from the experiencers' point of view;
2. *Examples* — Keywords, activities, and experiencer descriptions which help clarify definition;
3. *Search focus* — Key questions transmuted to the experiencer's "search for X";
4. *Questions asked* — Common questions voicing fears, speculation, wonder;
5. *Cognitive dissonance* — The dilemma between old and new perspectives (worlds) which need to be resolved;
6. *Depotentiating activities* — Behaviors, choices that may impede, or thwart the process;
7. *Results of depotentiation* — Common aftereffects when the process is frustrated, or thwarted;
8. *Potentiation activities* — Behaviors, choices that serve to facilitate, or enhance the process;
9. *Results of potentiation* — Common aftereffects when the process is facilitated;
10. *Challenges* — Common pitfalls, perceived risks, new dilemmas encountered which need to be resolved;
11. *Critical juncture* — Pivotal point, fusion of choice and insight to gain novel realization;
12. *Crossroads to next stage* — New level of conscious awareness realized, clearly reported.

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experiencers' stated aftereffects (their tracks) gleaned from report essays.

In the next section, I present the expanded EHE process model and a detailed mapping of characteristic features gleaned from experiencer narratives for each of the 60 matrix cells.

## **A Matrix Model of the EHE Process with Characteristic Map**

### *Stage 1: The Initiating Event/Experience*

*Definition:* The initial, originating Exceptional Experience (EE) is of sufficient strength or potency to capture the individual's attention and disrupt the status quo of everyday life activities. The EE may be one of over 100 types reported by experiencers and initiated by one or more of a variety of physical, physiological, psychological, or spiritual (i.e., intangible) anomalous phenomenological events. EEs are classified as either psychical, mystical, death-related, encounter, or enhanced.

*Examples:* (Psychical) precognitive dream, telepathy, out-of-body experience; (Mystical) ecstatic bliss, cosmic consciousness, conversion; (Death-related) near-death experience, haunting, past life recall; (Encounter) UFO, ancestor, shrine/power place; (Enhanced) in the sports zone, nostalgia, déjà vu.

*Search focus:* Meaning of the EE.

*Questions asked:* What just happened? How can I explain this? Am I crazy? possessed? losing touch with reality? Who can help me understand?

*Cognitive dissonance:* The EE resides outside of the individual's everyday life view or belief structure; temporarily (typically from a few seconds to a few hours, rarely more than a day) the EEer shifts his or her attentional focus away from baseline/steady state of conscious awareness and the status quo is disrupted.

*Depotentiating activities:* Exercising one or several forms of defense mechanisms: denial, repression, rationalization, projection, and so on, in which the experience and its inherent conflict may be consciously ignored, mitigated, explained or laughed away. Rigid compartmentalizing of life and activities in an effort to revert to pre-experience order and status quo; choices viewed as either/or, reality as black or white. Other experiencers and their experiences may be ridiculed with vehemence.

*Results of Depotentiation:* The EEer shuts down to experience.

*Potentiation activities:* Reading authoritative texts, papers; contacting and communicating with relevant mainstream scientific, religious, counseling authorities; sharing EE fears and wonders with significant others; meeting and discussing similar types of EEs with other experiencers;

recording EE and thoughts/feelings about it in a personal journal and/or submitting an EE account to the EHE Network; developing new interests in TV shows, documentaries, books, research papers, World Wide Web to gather information about the EE itself.

*Results of Potentiation:* The EEer opens to exploration and investigates EE within the traditional, mainstream world view; gathers a wide variety of facts about the EE itself.

*Challenges:* To address the EE directly, investigate it further, and recognize its uniqueness within the overall stream of everyday life events.

*Critical juncture:* Realization and insight that answers may not all be found within the mainstream world view (paradigm); that authorities may not have adequate answers and/or the explanations are not sufficiently satisfying.

*Crossroads to next stage:* Awareness that there may be alternative approaches of exploration that lie outside of the traditional ones.

### *Stage 2: Search for Reconciliation*

*Definition:* The EEer chooses to widen the search beyond conventional authorities and seek novel, alternative, and even unconventional perspectives that were previously considered irrational and even absurd before the initiating EE. This phase is highlighted by active, sometimes frantic exploration to discover novel ways of testing, examining, and coping with the EE.

*Examples:* Exploring such alternative ideologies as perennial philosophy, mystery schools, new age, theosophy, Zen, Tao, nature-based religions (paganism); exploring such alternative health practices as acupuncture, regression therapy, massage therapy, homeopathy, chiropractic, meditation/breath work; learning such divination tools as I Ching, astrology, tarot, and runes; seeking out such alternative authorities as gurus, mystics, psychics, and channelers.

*Search for:* Meaning of EE in a new context.

*Questions asked:* How and where do I find truth? Who else has had my experience? What other avenues are there which can explain what happened to me? Am I (my experience) unique or special? Am I just another weirdo?

*Cognitive dissonance:* The search itself moves beyond the previously acceptable paradigmatic framework into new contexts/behaviors that can be threatening, peculiar, bizarre, or exotic, in efforts to integrate EE into a new, revised life view and to reset the status quo.

*Depotentiating activities:* Locking immediately into the first ideology, method, or practice that accepts EEer and EE; preoccupation/addiction

to tools, ritualistic practices and/or idolizing their practitioners (e.g., guru worship, abuse of psychic hotlines).

*Results of depotentiation:* Wider search is discontinued and the EEer locks and/or converts into a new, narrow framework with its practitioners. Locus of authority shifts, but the search and answers continue to reside outside of self.

*Potentiation activities:* Exploring a wide variety of alternatives, assimilating the best of what each has to offer; maintaining a balance of expansion and discrimination in questioning practices, tools, and practitioners rather than taking them at surface value. Locating a mentor, practitioner, network, or support group of fellow experiencers who recognize the process and will provide an accepting environment without dogma.

*Results of potentiation:* A personal shift of life view that desires knowledge over specific dogmas and the dawning realization that there may be many roads to truth.

*Challenges:* To avoid the common pitfalls of guru worship (idolizing another), inflation (idolizing self); to stay balanced with shifts of affect, activity, life focus; to balance dramatic life-style changes based primarily on the EE and its shorter-term aftereffects; to not adopt a “know-it-all” attitude and/or “spiritual bypass” to counter concerns of family, friends, colleagues, or practitioners.

*Critical Juncture:* Realization and insight that all roads have some truth; discrimination to separate the wheat from the chaff so as to glean personally-meaningful answers.

*Crossroads to next stage:* Awareness that there are many questions and many answers that go beyond the EE itself; that the EE served as a catalyst into other levels of consciousness and personal discovery; that exploration of alternative perspectives is enlightening, meaningful, and may generate additional EEs; additional EEs are sought and encouraged, often testing a wide variety of tools and personal hypotheses.

### *Stage 3: Between Two Worlds*

*Definition:* The intense search activity of the past stage(s) is muted or put on hold as the metamorphosing EEer to EHEer takes time out to assimilate, digest, and integrate findings into a new life view, sense of self, and endeavors to get back to the tasks of everyday life. Observed as a relatively-lengthy, sterile, dry, dormant period as the experiencer subjectively vacillates between the old perspective and the new, unable to totally embrace the new.

*Examples:* Outsider, outlander, stranger in a strange land; walking a fine border/line, crossing the river, caught between two worlds, locked

in irons (feeling stuck), on the edge of the shore/cliff ready to leap; existential dark night of the soul, return to the underworld (inner world), return to alchemists' hermetic vessel for mixing, blending, and refining.

*Search focus:* Meaning of experiencer-self.

*Questions asked:* Which world is real? Where do I fit in? How do my experience and what I have learned about it sustain and fortify me? What was that experience all about anyway in the grand scheme of things (life, reality)?

*Cognitive dissonance:* Neither the old restrictive view of the world nor the new one that loosely accommodates the experiencer and the experience(s) is satisfactory, yet the experiencer feels that he or she must choose one **or** the other and often switches between them.

*Depotentiating activities:* Minimizing previous EE(s) and prior search activity, including any insights, discoveries, meaning, and short-term aftereffects achieved about self and alternative realities; categorizing own EE(s) and quest as aberration of "real" life; re-classifying and lumping all experiencers together and their views, methods, and tools as total garbage; returning to the everyday world and its activities with a vengeance and zeal to make up for perceived lost time. Adopting the slogan "ignorance is bliss" and/or one of several escape/avoidance behaviors in efforts to ward off/shift focus away from EE(s) and spontaneous glimpses of the experiential paradigm.

*Results of depotentiation:* Experiencer and the search are side-railed for months, years, or even a lifetime. Long-term cognitive dissonance festers, and chronic unease, use of defense mechanisms, and inertia take their toll on body, mind, and spirit.

*Potentiation activities:* Accepting/valuing the experience for what it was, what it meant, what it shared, where it led, and entertaining possibilities for where it could lead. Feeling more comfortable with ambiguity, paradoxes, uncertainty, and carrying this comfort level back into everyday activities, even when experiencer has no firm answers. Embracing any additional EEs and especially the meaningful insights they engender. Thoughtfully and empathetically sharing experience(s) with others. Striving to maintain a balance in life and life view.

*Results of potentiation:* Experiencer's shift of life view incorporates the best of both worlds, and accepts, assimilates, and integrates all life experience into a coordinated, authentic collective representation of self.

*Challenges:* To avoid the common defensive pitfalls, especially when no new insights or meaning appear forthcoming. Understanding that EEs are typically not delivered upon demand or "willed" into being by merely requiring them at one's convenience. To find a personal comfort zone that includes a renewed sense of self. (At this stage experiencers may exhibit any or all classical characteristics inherent in the grieving process:

numbness, denial, anger, negotiation, and so on, while an old ego identity dies and a new one is being formulated.)

*Critical juncture:* Realization and insight that the experience(s) served as a vehicle toward a new level of conscious self-awareness and as a gateway to greater self-discovery. Accepting, understanding, and integrating all personas of self into a more integrated whole, a collective personality of Self.

*Crossroads to the next stage:* Awareness that one is greater than the sum of one's parts and that there is no need to sacrifice a portion of oneself in order to be wholly oneself; that the EHEer does not have to choose either one world or the other, but may assimilate, integrate, "choose" both, and is thus more integrated, healthier by doing so.

#### *Stage 4: In the Experiential Paradigm*

*Definition:* The EHEer envisions and "knows" the world/Universe as one great, interconnected whole of living consciousness where artificially-constructed boundaries of reality are null in the "grand scheme of things, essential truth." Depending on point of entry to this stage, experiencers may be catapulted into it at any age with no prior EE/EHE contextual anchors, discover it more or less spontaneously, and already have some contextual EE/EHE anchors, or return into it as a "place" for gathering inspiration, fresh insight, and guidance.

*Examples:* EHEers "know" that they have "awakened," "leaped into the void," "crossed the river," "returned home." Life view encompasses "double vision" where either/or dilemmas may be resolved with both/and hybrid considerations, often spurring fresh catalytic insights and transmuting them to EHEs. Observations may include transcendental ecstasy, inspired creativity, frequent number and/or intensity of serendipity, patterns of synchronicity, "good-luck," insights, discoveries, inventions.

*Search for:* Meaning of higher self.

*Questions asked:* Where do I go from here? Who else envisions the world as I do? How will I recognize them? What are our possibilities and extensions? How do we manifest them and share them with others? How do I get back to "that place?"

*Cognitive dissonance:* The search that has brought the EHEer to a new world pregnant with meaning, metaphor, discovery, and great vision is not easily conveyed to those left behind in the old world. Initial spontaneous entry (and often subsequent, early reiterations) is paradoxically both shocking and desired.

*Depotentiating activities:* Reluctance to explore further levels of awareness and/or entertain/select new lifestyle, pursuits, and professional

options that seem to further widen the gap between EHEer and those “left behind.” Clinging to old-world emotional attachments while body, mind, and soul have crossed into the new world. Endeavoring to awaken (significant) others before their time.

*Results of depotentiation:* The EHEer locks into a routine that allows for larger world view, but does not investigate options further, nor endeavor to increase overall awareness; remains emotionally attached to specific people, values, and/or things; experiences aftereffects of deep sadness and loss.

*Potentiation activities:* Recognizing, accepting, assimilating, and integrating additional experiences into life view according to EHEer’s inner criteria for meaningfulness rather than tacit acceptance of consensual views; recognizing other EHEers and mutuality of shared path; more easily shifting personality preferences, vocabulary, actions, social interaction style as circumstances warrant. Beginning to recognize and follow a “calling.”

*Results of Potentiation:* EHEer realizes that he or she has a unique contribution to make, purpose to fulfill, is an integral, dynamic part of the whole, the Universe. Additional EEs to EHEs intuited as signposts, becoming compass-pointers of life.

*Challenges:* To discover purpose and align with those actions, people, and circumstances that add to fulfillment; follow intuition; to maintain balance; recognize, accept, have compassion and love self and others for the essential “who” that they are. To have the courage to let go of out-worn attachments, including belief-structures and any residual re-occurring patterns that no longer serve the evolving self and new perspective. To have the courage to return to Stage 3 (and even Stage 2, less likely Stage 1) when necessary to “gather one’s self” as self may (once again) undergo a cycle of grief at loss (destruction) of a former ego identification.

*Critical juncture:* Realization and insight that one’s purpose/way is integral to a larger purpose/way and that any and all actions, thoughts, emotions, imaginal desires are seamlessly interconnected within and without. Understands that perceptions are (largely) based on personal and cultural world view (i.e., *maya*), that cognitive boundaries (e.g., I-Thou, subject-experimenter, cause-effect, life-death) are convenient constructs for human communication only (e.g., symbolic representations, approximations of reality).

*Crossroads to next stage:* Awareness that we (the collective All) are dynamic, evolving co-creators of the Universe as the Universe dynamically evolves and is being defined and co-created by the we (All). Implicit trust that “all will be as it is” as well as (paradoxically) understanding that

“as it is” does not necessarily mean (then yet again it may mean) what it appears to mean at any selected, perceived moment of time/space.

*Stage 5: A New Way of Being in the World*

*Definition:* The EHEer forges a personally-fulfilling, meaningful path that reflects and sustains inner calling as well as outwardly contributes his or her personal best to the world-at-large. Both (many, multidimensional) worlds are integrated within and without, represented (i.e., “known”) as one world of an intricately-interconnected singularity where the EHEer mirrors, reflects, aligns with the Universe. The EHEer is consciously aware that individual choices (core actions, thoughts, emotions, desires, intents) have the power to dynamically shape outcomes (the Universe), and he or she endeavors to live through that knowledge responsively and responsibly.

*Examples:* The EHEer brings transcendental knowledge, “inner/outer” calling, unique gifts “back to earth;” returns from Home to home; “as above so below;” “the macrocosm is reflected in the microcosm;” “after the return before the return;” “I am another yourself;” “chop wood, carry water;” selecting an explicate order out of seemingly-implicate chaos; the organizing principle, Self/Universe is both perfectly hole and whole.

*Search for:* Meaning of the universal self.

*Questions asked:* How do I best align myself/my purpose/my calling with Universe? How can I best serve given my collection of unique talents/abilities/gifts? How can I contribute to overall evolution of consciousness, including my own?

*Cognitive dissonance:* Experiential paradigm, transcendent awareness has revealed an abundance of extensions, branches, worlds of potential and possibility and inner self-awareness has deepened, strengthened and coalesced the EHEer to the very core, yet the EHEer consciously senses (with composed, calm urgency) that he or she must choose a path and get on with the program of life and living in the world-at-large.

*Depotentiating activities:* Reluctance to recognize that even a seemingly connected and purposeful life can still carry doubts, fears, frustrations, and that these also can be signposts that leave EE/EHE aftereffects yet unresolved, and that serve as compass-pointers for the process; requiring perfection of self and others; getting caught up in formalizing, controlling “the goal” rather than recalling that the process leads naturally to “the goal.”

*Results of depotentiation:* The EHEer may temporarily encounter setbacks, indecision by reverting to old outworn, yet familiar defenses; personal demands for perfection or desiring to will or control outcomes

stalls (sense of) fulfillment; potential contributions do not take form, are not “brought back to earth,” new EEs are not recognized or transmuted; long-term aftereffects of one or more previous EHEs remain dormant.

*Potentiating activities:* Acknowledging new EEs and transmuting them into EHEs by questioning meaningfulness; going inside to resolve old issues remaining, including long-term aftereffects of previous EHEs that may have been “lost in the shuffle.” Taking setbacks and doubts in stride and understanding that these are opportunities to evolve further; learning new skills, meeting new people and integrating these contributions into the EHEer’s way (personal calling) as perspective shifts and evolves. Recognizing, respecting, and having compassion for our very humanness, holes and wholes alike.

*Results of potentiation:* The EHEer is living, being, fulfilling, and doing a personal project of transcendence (i.e., has grounded inner calling into life-worthy projects), and has the flexibility to shift means, methods, and tools as needed to accomplish it.

*Challenges:* To remain open to all facets of EHE, including those insights, and circumstances that will enhance calling, and not to become stuck in a particular method, means, or mode to accomplish it; to serve as a human embodiment of one’s purpose/calling. To consciously, seamlessly, reiteratively return to the “operations center” (Stage 3) to regenerate batteries, while assimilating and integrating new (Stage 4) transcendental information as needed to resolve cognitive dissonance. To seamlessly (automatically) accommodate and fine-tune evolving shifts of both inner and outer perspective and awareness as they are presented.

*Critical juncture:* Realization and insight that there is no magic bullet or fast food package called “the Truth,” “the Way to Enlightenment” nor does the EHEer self singularly embody (all) truth and enlightenment. That reality is constantly, dynamically being re-formulated, destroyed and re-created, and with that knowledge there is a responsibility of choice as to where to place one’s energies and service. That the universal self is necessary, integral to the Universe as the Universe is perceived through the lens of self; that alignment choices made (including no-choice) can co-create (have the imaginal power to shape) potential tangible outcomes. To transmute EEs to EHEs has more or less become second nature; EHE is understood as humankind’s first nature.

*Crossroads into next stage:* Awareness that dynamically, fluidly, organically aligning, harmonizing, refining, reinventing the self resonates and enlightens throughout the universal village/kingdom, the Universe. The EHEer has learned for him- or herself a personal way to navigate, reiteratively re-negotiate, the staging areas of the EHE process in any permutation as needed, when needed. The EHEer returns home “sim-

ply” to be, live, serve, fulfill and embody the matter of self, works, and discoveries made along the way.

## General Discussion

Before moving on to the individual stage by stage discussions to highlight, and flesh out some of the key characteristics and pivotal points, and the dynamics between them, I would like to alert readers to some general observations that may add to their review of the matrix model and exploratory map:

1. Each stage may be viewed as a “staging area of operations flow” rather than a discrete, independent stage, patterned linearly into a stair-step series of relative less-than/greater-than intervals.
2. Each stage includes both an inner, dynamic, perceptual/cognitive flow, as well as is connected interdependently and transpersonally with other stages via one or more transmuted, catalytic, pivotal, insights. (One could just as well argue that each sub-stage classifier transfer or series of transfers — challenges to critical juncture — mark pivotal points within each stage.) Ongoing dualistic debates continue to rage regarding levels of analysis, and so at this point, I will just concede to the reader’s comfort level for weighing relative degrees of structure (form) versus process (dynamics).
3. The crossroads for each stage could also be modeled as halfway points between stages (e.g., 3+, 5+). That was my intent when endeavoring to show both the fluidity as well as the discrete qualifier characteristics of each stage. Crossroads involve the catalytic fusion of both decision and realization to reach (evolve to) a heightened (or deepened) level of conscious awareness.
4. As always when we work with EEs, and especially EHEs, there is the problem of language, symbolic expression, and translation. In order to describe and communicate the pivotal, the transcendental, the numinous, EHEers must resort to a common language that can be grasped and understood by others. In our culture there are several possible modes, particularly story-telling literary devices (e.g., allegory, metaphor, myth), art (e.g., dance, painting, architecture, music), and science (e.g., logic flow charts, maps, mathematics).
5. Readers will quickly note the change of language expression across the stages. These too can be clues for us, both as to our own comprehension of the process and when used for communicating EEs and EHEs with others and to different audiences.
6. Because this is a characteristic map representing a wide range of experiences and experiencer expressions, I have endeavored to

synthesize the flavor, color, and tone of the attributes without detailing the variety of descriptions used to symbolize those concepts. For example, I use a more neutral “Universe” to describe the incredible array of symbols to denote the “Source,” “Ultimate Reality,” “All-that-Is,” “God,” “Goddess,” the “Dynamic Force.”

7. Language in the advanced stages of EHE is more “fuzzy” than not to those who prefer “crisp” expressions of direct sensory “tangible reality.” I cannot help that, as these are the words and the expressions gleaned from experiencers, and a major reason for sharing these data and writing this paper. Instead, one could ask the questions of individual and cultural differences (preferences) regarding comfort levels with fuzzy sets, or contribute to the artificial intelligence/cognitive science work being conducted investigating them and/or other forms of non-linear processing.

8. Indeed, most of the long-term aftereffects offered by EHEers include many such intangible expressions in these often “heroic explorer” efforts to communicate experiences within the limits of common symbolic language. Recall that the EHE Network solicits only (formal) written reports and we study those reports equally for contributing value. The experiencer is not talking one-to-one off the top of his or her head, nor does he or she have the benefit of eye contact and other body language to further convey the gist of the communication. Nor are they recording a journal entry to themselves or for a family member or friend. It takes courage (and foresight, and the ability to introspect, retrospect, and then tangibly ground in intelligent, coherent, linear, written language) to produce each and every one of these narrative reports and submit them to relative strangers and/or essay contest judges.

9. These experiencers are a rich, largely-untapped natural resource and have much to share with us in their own words. Their narratives can be examined by many fields of scientific investigation, the arts and humanities, and have potentially innovative and useful applications.

10. Scholars of religious texts, literature/arts, folklore, archetype, divination tools, mystery schools, and other “fraternal” organizations that include rites of passage will readily recognize many of these stages (and stages within stages) as perennial efforts across cultures to attempt to communicate what is commonly called the “journey of life.”

11. The Map is a working, living document. These 12 classifiers are only a few that could be used to differentiate the stages and the dynamics within each stage, and the 60 characteristics only a small sampling of what experiencers have shared with us.

*Stage 1: The Initiating Event/Experience*

Each of us will be confronted with an exceptional experience — and we will recognize it as such — at least once in our lifetime. The question here is not whether it will happen, or when, or of what type, or where to place it, but rather how we react to and deal with that initiating experience (Brown, 1997b). From this frame of reference, an anomalous event is “out there” until some one individual pays attention to it and experiences it as something “in here.” In the traditional jargon of human information processing psychology (HIPP) we would say that the stimulus (signal) has crossed a critical sensory attentional threshold. By definition, the instigating EE lies outside or beyond the experiencer’s everyday steady state (status quo) of life experience — it is exceptional. This does not preclude the fact that the experiencer may have had other EEs at different times or in other circumstances over his or her lifetime. It simply means that this particular EE has some quality or measure, inherent strength or potency, to capture the EEer’s attention. Indeed, this is the case when EHEers, upon retrospect, often remark that there was something different about “this” particular experience (the one around which they focus their account) because it moved them to take notice and investigate further. When we look at EEs as initiators into the EHE process we are led to several thought-provoking questions:

What was it about that particular event that brought it to the conscious attention (crossed a subjective threshold) of the experiencer?

Why this particular EE and not others? For example, why an NDE and not a *déjà vu*?

Which qualities of the event were sufficient to cross this attention threshold?

What are the characteristics of the threshold crossed?

What are the individual differences which correlate to higher or lower thresholds of attention toward these events and those experiencers who convey (transmute) them into conscious experiential awareness?

Can relative strength within an EE class/type, or relative relationships between different classes/types be measured (e.g., ordered, ranked, clustered) and/or graphically represented?

Can these qualitative (and possibly quantitative) descriptors help us predict who will have an EE, and who of those will engage and convey the EHE process more effectively and efficiently?

Within the context of HIPP, and noting individual differences of attention and motivation, an exceptional event may be likened to a “signal” against the background steady-state “noise” of everyday life and its expectations of a predictable, status quo environment/world. In this perspective, Signal Detection Theory (SDT) borrowed from communication engineers and applied to processing psychology may be of some value (Green & Swets, 1966; Klatsky, 1975). Basically, in this scenario, the anomalous event is the signal, everyday life is the noise; the experiencer is the receiver of the signal. When the event reaches conscious awareness — that is, it is attended to, it spikes above an attention threshold and is recognized as an anomaly or an EE — then the experiencer can make a (conscious/subconscious) decision as to whether to respond to (potentiate) it, or to ignore (depotentiate) it. In the basic 2 x 2 factorial design, “Signal? Yes/No — Response? Yes/No,” individuals may apprehend signal (anomaly) and respond to it. In this case a Yes/Yes would be considered a “Hit.” For purposes of this paper, the EHE process is engaged. Likewise, the individual may apprehend a signal that “was not sent” and respond that he or she apprehended a signal anyway, a “False Alarm (FA).” The question of what comprises a signal becomes an issue in this case, particularly in laboratory settings where the quality and/or measure of (externally-generated) stimuli often serve as independent variables. From an EHE process perspective, the “signals/events” are just as likely to arise from the inside and/or direct causality cannot be established. For many EEs the very spontaneity of a déjà vu, eureka insight, lucid dream, or feelings of nostalgia is sufficient to engage the process and often does. In these cases it is not so much the type of the experience itself as it is the surprise of the “out-of-the-blue” quality of the event. To continue with SDT, when an event signal is apprehended and the EE chooses not to respond, it is a “Miss.” In these cases, EEs elect not to engage the EHE process; in effect they chose not to potentiate an experience for the time being or “forever.” In retrospect, EHEers often cite a litany of fears common across many first-time experiencers for this non-response stemming from personal past conditioning and/or cultural taboos regarding anomaly, exception, or being different in some way. This is an especially-difficult dilemma for those EEs whose feet have been firmly planted in the soil of consensual reality for decades and who have abided by a particular paradigm (belief structure) that cannot accommodate the experience — and sometimes cannot accommodate the very experiencers themselves. In these cases we could hypothesize that the response threshold is set inordinately “high” when compared to the relatively lower response thresholds of experiencers who have had a number of experiences,

potentiated experiences, or one that was particularly jarring. The final 2 x 2 factorial cell includes those events that were both not apprehended and did not elicit any response, that is, a “Correct Rejection.” From the individual’s standpoint the non-event was indeed a non-event. It could also be the case that both the attention threshold and the response threshold are set relatively high against spurious input and unqualified responses.

Signal Detection Theory is useful to begin teasing apart the observable objective factors that come into play for the event to experience transmutation (attention/awareness of event to experience) and for understanding whether the EHE process is engaged or not, and if so, how (reaction/response). The notion of co-varying thresholds (and their initial settings, and shifts of settings over the process) for signal and response is especially apropos for its ease of communication with experimental researchers. Too, this framework could assist in creating new hypotheses to consider the EHE process in general, and to begin to answer some of the more specific questions asked at the beginning of this section.

One other model which is, perhaps, better known to personality psychologists may also serve as a useful conceptual approach to these questions. The Jungian-based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) specifically looks at individual differences in experiential apprehension and perception, as well as at individual preferences in reaction and response to perceptual inputs (Jung, 1954; McCaulley, 1981; Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998).<sup>10</sup> Very simply speaking, individuals have a preference or predilection for how they apprehend (perceive) “the world” as well as how they respond to, and evaluate (judge) those perceptions.<sup>11</sup> In general, these preferences do not change significantly, if ever, over an individual’s lifetime. Usually, preferences become even more strongly entrenched as individuals become more familiar with their way of perceiving the world and making critical decisions about it. From the EHE process standpoint, this could reflect the status quo center of operations for the individual (and collectively, mark the norms of consensual reality for a particular organization or a culture).

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10. MBTI resources for testing, research, and application are available from the Center for Applications of Psychological Type, Inc., 2815 N. W. 13th Street, Suite 401, Gainesville, Florida, 32609, or from their website at <http://www.capt.org>.

11. See Krippner (1984) and Rosen, (1994, pp. 167-178) for an illuminating look at parapsychology as a research community, that is, as a cultural entity comprised of four diverse operating styles based on a topology of perception and judging preferences.

Yet, in some cases, one or more preference factors may dramatically shift along either perception or judging continua when measured over the lifetime of an individual or pre- to post-crisis episodes (McCaulley, 1981; also see Arcangel, 1997; Van Sant, 1999). In very rare cases, up to all four of the primary preference factors may have shifted when measured in test-retest (longitudinal) reliability studies. This brings Jung's theory of the individuation process into consideration, and general comparisons to the EHE process — again highlighting the questions raised earlier and underscoring the value of longitudinal data. At that point we must ask, what kinds of experiences can shift a person's preferences so dramatically? One further note, the majority (75%) of individuals in Western culture prefer apprehending and perceiving "the world" via their 5 classical (tangible) senses (Keirse & Bates, 1984). This disposition can create quite a cognitive dissonance for many experiencers, particularly those who have been catapulted into the heights and depths of outer/inner space (that is, into a seemingly mystical or "cosmic" experience), or those who have encountered otherwise non-tangible people, places, and things. Perception of reality's solidarity may also be rocked to its very foundation when experiencers register a particularly powerful insight, "distant" (time/space) recollection, or a numinous visceral "feeling sense" that something is not quite the same, somehow, in some way. Note here that exceptional experiences are exceptional, not because they are odd or bizarre events occurring in a vacuum, but because they are exceptions to "normal" everyday expectations of an orderly, predictable reality as defined by the individual in context of the mainstream. I hypothesize that individuals with a strong preference for classical 5-sense perceptual input anchored deeply in the consensus of tangible reality would be the least likely to apprehend and potentiate an EE — and engage the EHE process — unless the initiating experience literally ejects the experiencer off his or her moorings.

Because White's theory of the EHE covers a wide-range of experiences from the simply odd to the incredibly bizarre (as defined by both experiencer and culture), the questions of type of experience, attention and response thresholds, and individual differences are particularly pertinent to Stage 1. We do not presume that the EE highlighted in a narrative account is necessarily the first EE the individual has experienced. Indeed, advanced EHEers' more detailed retrospective reports often cite several different types of EEs having occurred prior to the one that is highlighted in the narrative, some of those stretching back into childhood. All we can say is that there is some quality or potency of a particular EE that, for a particular experiencer, has initiated a search for answers about the EE (the mark of Stage 1 potentiated) and thus engaged the EHE process. As students of EHE, we can thus begin to look at the

complex factors that contribute to the indefinite concepts of meaning, what is meaningful, and personal meaningfulness that are key components to the EHE process at any stage.

Very simply speaking, all EEs and EHEs begin at a hypothetical Ground Zero, the status quo, a relatively-steady state of a personally-functional life view nested within a shared reality of culture's consensual world view. The dynamics of Stage 1 focus on fitting the experience (and the experiencer) into an inviolate cultural framework. Activity centers around seeking out respected cultural authorities and their resources. For particularly bizarre EEs, there may be no authority nor the authoritative resources to provide an intrinsically-satisfactory answer. At this point, either the EEer honors his or her experience and stretches the envelope of what is construed as acceptable authority, or they depotentiate the experience in one way or another, returning to the consensual fold. At the crossroads of Stage 1 and Stage 2 ("in between"), the EEer once again is faced with a critical decision as a result of insufficient or unsatisfactory information gathered from their search in Stage 1. To progress to Stage 2, experiencers must elect to question the norms of culture and of what constitutes an authority rather than consciously denying the EE or their personal comprehension of it.

Although all EHEs technically begin with the experience of an anomalous event, for those experiencers who have already encountered several EEs, and especially after having had transmuted these to EHEs, the intensity and even the necessity of Stage 1 quickly become more or less automatic. In essence, more seasoned experiencers may quickly mitigate, or totally bypass this stage altogether to return to more intermediate stages (processing levels) with which they are already familiar. This too may be viewed as a variation of the learning process for those scholars who prefer to look at the EHE from the contexts of classical psychology, cognition, and development theory.

### *Stage 2: The Search for Reconciliation*

Although the EEer has already endeavored to reconcile the EE within the confines of mainstream norms, at Stage 2 the search for reconciliation begins in earnest. The major focus of the search is no longer about how the EE and EEer fits — that is, can be accommodated back into — the more comfortable norm; but rather, how the experiencer can reconcile him- or herself and the experience into *any* recognized framework that can accommodate both. The search thus becomes relatively open-ended and initially the possibilities for potential reconciliation appear endless and hopeful. For many, this is the stage in which the search activity is most obvious and most easily observed by others. In a sense, the EEer

has declared a “cause” to understand the EE in depth and is most anxious to discover a context — a place — for that cause, one that will embrace the experiencer as well.

Although the experiencer has more or less rejected the security of the mainstream’s easy answers, and feels a decided relief because of that choice to move the search process forward, it is at this stage (perhaps more than any other) at which the EEer feels most insecure, most groundless, and at a loss. Reiterations (repeat visits) to this stage are not uncommon for EEers and EHEers alike as the experience itself, or the addition of novel experiences, shift perspective (often rapidly and dramatically) during energetic attempts to reconcile self to experience as well as to re-anchor both within a satisfactory context. For many, the context sought will be a slight shift to what had been comfortable in the past, similar to one’s background and inherent leanings of the past. For example, those trained in the scientific tradition may seek out research parapsychologists and their resources;<sup>12</sup> those utilizing allopathic medicine may seek out alternative medicine and practitioners; those used to confiding with a friend or family member may seek out psychics/other experiencers who have had a similar experience; and those who have found comfort in a particular religious tradition may seek out a church that espouses similar beliefs, a familiar godhead and set of rituals and teachings. These shifts to reframe the experience (and the experiencer-self) within an alternative — yet intrinsically, a relatively-comfortable — world view are graduated trial-and-error movements, and in themselves, may become a holding pattern for many EEers. From the perspective of the overarching EHE process, we see these reconciliation efforts as attempts to fit one’s self and one’s experience into an acceptable framework which is, as yet, still defined by others.

Again we need to reiterate that the so-called comfort zone (i.e., an inner “sense” of renewed balance, homeostasis, resetting of the status quo) is entirely self-defined by experiencers in their reports and taken at their face value as a qualifier characteristic. Thus, experiencers who have reset their status quo and discovered an inner sense of relief for making an (any) observable choice which fosters (perceived) progress toward meaningfulness may appear alien or even deluded to those who have not encountered a similar experience personally, nor metaphorically by walking in the shoes of other experiencers.<sup>13</sup> At this stage more than any

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12. Charles Tart states that his website, <http://www.issc-taste.org/> or “T.A.S.T.E.” (The Archive of Scientists’ Transcendent Experiences) was created specifically for scientists to debunk the stereotype that “real” scientists do not have “spiritual,” “mystical,” or “psychic” experiences.

other that experiencers actively begin to stretch old paradigms (i.e., a former belief structure) while entertaining possible alternatives for new perspectives and contexts. Yet, unlike victims of natural disaster, crises, or trauma, the experiencer does not typically have the luxury of culturally-recognized support groups, nor access to EHEer-seasoned practitioners. By definition, both the experience and the experiencer are anomalous, a-nominal (without a label) and a-normal (outside of normal range), and the mainstream offers few, if any, supportive anchors that honor EEs and EEers. This dilemma (cognitive dissonance and its challenges), perhaps more than at any other stage, best describes the plight of the EEer and ultimately what becomes another critical juncture in the EHE process. It also marks another major point of departure of the EHE process from more predictable patterns better studied and understood by transpersonal psychologists. (Recall that the first point of departure was the perceptual apprehending of an anomaly and responding to its cognitive dissonance.) Victims of recognized traumas and recognizable life crises (such as natural disaster, grief, “mid-life,” “existential angst”) have a bounty of socially-sanctioned support structures and recognized resources from which to choose. In our culture, EEers typically do not. Further, if no particular life crisis is immediately evident, then the ubiquitous label “stress” and its cousins may be offered as a causal factor. In this consensual context the EEer-initiate may be offered options to reduce (depotentiate) generalized stress (etiology unknown) to get on with the stuff of everyday living.<sup>14</sup>

Exceptional experiencers who choose to potentiate an experience and more or less have identified with the experiencer-self find relatively few resources available within the mainstream. Rather than mitigating the experience, the choice of Stage 2 has been made — to consciously explore, honor the experience, and to see where it leads. This is also the stage in which experiencers are most vulnerable to authorities or resources that are quick to accommodate the experience and embrace the

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13. As Jenny Wade (1996, p. 277) writes eloquently about levels of functioning: “This indiscriminate relegation of all nonordinary [non-Newtonian, non-“para”-normal] states to some retrograde status must be recognized as axiomatic for people with mainstream levels of functioning, since developmental theories are epigenetic. That is, higher stages are inaccessible and incomprehensible to people functioning at lower levels of development, but the reverse is not true. Furthermore, higher stages do not appear to be higher to people functioning at a given level, but lower.”

14. For an insightful discussion into the missing link of EHE within divisions of mainstream psychology, see Reed (1997). See also the books by Cortright (1997) and Wade (1996) for recent developments in the field of transpersonal psychology, including the introduction and discussion of innovative, holistic models.

experiencer. In effect, I suggest that this drive to attach to a teacher, organization, and/or belief structure is similar to that of newly-hatched chick who indiscriminately imprints on the first “parent” (e.g., dogma, ideology, guru) to come along. For the remainder of Stage 2 (and subsequent iterations of trial-and-error testing) activities are centered around the issue of authority in general, and more specifically who speaks “the truth” about these types of experiences and from where the truth stems. Healthy potentiation of the process becomes a conscious sampling of a variety of alternatives as the experiencer learns to sort the wheat from chaff. By the critical juncture of Stage 2, experiencers have realized that there may be some truth to be gleaned from any or all of the myriad presentations of truth encountered to help identify and explain exceptional experience(s). The EE has brought the experiencer out into the world in order to explore and investigate alternatives. In the process of “going out” the experiencer finds he or she “goes in” to sort, to make value judgments and refinements that are intrinsically satisfying, and to reset the comfort zone. At the crossroads between Stages 2 and 3, the experiencer becomes more or less aware that he or she may be the best authority on his or her particular direct experience. The experiencer has absorbed — and to some degree been absorbed by — the experience and can therefore effectively choose to define self by the nature of the experience. The experiencer-self identity has emerged and been realized. It is also at this point at which we may observe EEers radically adopting their experiencer identity more or less exclusively, and sometimes to the detriment of the whole-self personality.<sup>15</sup>

### *Stage 3: Between Two Worlds*

One of the best ways to define this stage is that it is the quintessential crossroads for the EHE process as a whole. In effect, this is where the previous life and world view structures are confronted with new input. The key to the center of operations in Stage 3 is that experiencers must be consciously aware of both old and new positions before cognitive dissonance can be resolved to any satisfactory degree. In contrast to the largely-extroverted (that the world or the authority is “out there”) search activities that are more easily observed in the previous stages, and

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15. For example, those who have had one or more psychical experience may announce that they are consequently “a psychic,” or those who have had a mystical experience may write an authoritative book on the personal steps to enlightenment. In such cases, experiencers may have reconciled their Stage 2 experiencer-self, recognized their inner sense of authority, and therefore, *claim to be an authority*.

especially in Stage 2. Stage 3 is characterized by intense inner world work to arrive at a form of resolution. This stage is perhaps the best studied by post-modern existential psychologists and philosophers who may mark the dilemmas that roil within and the individual's need to do battle with life crises.

Yet, there is an additional battle that, at least in the early steps of Stage 3, is specific and unique to most EEers and newly-emergent EHEers. After the experiencer has more or less come to terms with, reconciled and honored the experience in some personally-meaningful way, the experiencer-self must choose to return once again to the culture at large (or not). The individual's life view has been significantly altered to accommodate the experience, but it and the experiencer continue to remain at odds within the mainstream view. The experiencer is aware of the source of the alienation that he or she feels, and has come to grips with it in the best way he or she can. Yet, this is not felt as the nebulous anxiety of being different, "an outsider" in search of a way to fold back into the mainstream of life. At this point, the experiencer understands very well that he or she is an outsider and the reason is because of an experience that has already proven itself to be a source of "meaning" somehow, having been validated in some personally-meaningful way. The onset of Stage 3, more than any other stage, is the point at which experiencers are most likely to depotentiate their experiences, resort to one or more defense and return (often with a vengeance) to the safe haven of everyday life. The objective of this stage, as with all stages and their reiterations — and to continue on with the process — is a return "to life." The challenge this time is that the experiencer-self has been enriched by the experience(s) to such a degree that he or she cannot go back to the old world as it was without sacrificing a significant part of him or herself. In recognizing that they cannot totally revert to the old, once again coming face to face with the need to relieve the cognitive dissonance between the old and new, experiencers feel compelled to discover a higher-order integral form that can better accommodate both. This deconstruct-reconstruct dynamic is key to all EHE stages (and all life stages) in which the experiencer desires "more" resolution, an augmented return (based on the Gestalt tenet that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts") to homeostasis, to one's center of meaningfulness. In essence, advanced EHEers reiterate that it is this stage (and subsequent returns to it over their lifetime) more than any other, that is crucial to the overall EHE process. It is the crossroads of the crossroads, and as such, is absolutely necessary for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual integration, regeneration, and survival.

Many EEers will never get to, nor feel compelled to move into this stage as a conscious choice. Entry into Stage 3 is accessed directly from

either Stage 2 or Stage 4; yet to navigate it successfully experiencers will have felt the full strength of both Stage 2 and Stage 4. To make this particularly strong statement, let us return again to the questions of relative EE strength and individual preferences for apprehension and decision thresholds discussed in Stage 1. White (personal communication) recognized early on that even in the recognized universe of EEs (and their potential transmutations into EHEs) there were varying degrees of “anomaly” along a hypothetical psychological and cultural continuum called everyday experience. These statistical outliers to the norm might in themselves be measurable (ordered, perhaps ranked) by their aftereffects. For example, few would disagree that a fleeting note of nostalgia, a short burst into the sports zone, or a remarkable coincidence would carry the same inner-sense of weightiness and import of a full-blown NDE, an OBE vision of a disaster, contact with otherworldly beings, or the spontaneous healing of a morbid disease. I suggest that the short-term (residual) aftereffects of such experiences provide clues into these differentials by marking EEs’ entry stages. Further, the long-term aftereffects provide clues as to the extension, the staying power, of these direct experiences over the whole of the EHE process — to the extent that it (the EE nested within the process) has been potentiated.

We have noted in our exploration that points of entry do indeed vary (Brown & White, 1997, both reported and unpublished data). In general, for the majority of EEs and EHEs, the questing begins with Stage 1 and proceeds more or less linearly to Stage 3 in the progressive developmental pattern described above. Of course, this process proceeds only if and when the experiencer consciously decides (potentiates) that the experience is worthy of being investigated beyond the answers and solutions provided by “the other” authorities. In Stage 3, the assimilating, testing, and integrating continue at deeper levels (i.e., inside, well below the surface in the psychic “underground”), and is represented by the dilemmas and challenges common to EEs and EHEs alike in the process of creative reformulation of the nested self within a new world view. On the other hand, experiencers of particularly bizarre (alien abduction), sensational (transcendental), repetitive (similar type), frequent (dissimilar types), and/or “long-lasting” EEs may literally be transported into outer space and directly into Stage 4 — the experiential paradigm — with little to no conscious forewarning. Individual differences seem to play a key role in how the experiencer reacts to the experiential paradigm (EP); these differences are best captured in the short-term (direct experience residual) and long-term aftereffects. As we will see in Stage 4 the EP is so diametrically different from the everyday steady state of being that the first order of business for the experiencer is to attempt to anchor, compare and contrast in some way the EP world

with that of the everyday. Thus direct entry or initiation into the EHE process via Stage 4 will reverse the “typical progressive developmental,” quasi-linear stair-step process we have observed with Stages 1 to 2 to 3. Instead, entry to 4 reverts to 3, and Stage 3 becomes the (inner) battle between the worlds ranging across a much wider gulf than for those experiencers who have already worked “up” to Stage 3 — and already have had familiarity with, or a history of, EE assimilation and integration. Simply speaking, the gulf (and the EEer’s level of shock) may be represented as that distance (dissonance) between consensus Ground Zero and Stage 4 apprehended in an instant, and contrasted to the relative subjective ease of graduated shifting between Stages 1 to 2 to 3 over many years.

As stated previously, entry into Stage 3 is contingent upon, and may come from, either the crossroads of conscious awareness that occur in either Stage 2 or Stage 4. At Stage 3, the “work” of the crossroads of crossroads (the crucible) begins in earnest and continues throughout an individual’s lifetime. Neither the initial trial-and-error, the reconciliation efforts of Stage 2, nor the one transcendental, unitive experience of Stage 4 is sufficient to successfully continue beyond the full challenges of Stage 3. To catch the whole meaning of this stage, to honor the inner depths of this stage, a minimum of experience with navigating both Stages 2 and 4 is necessary for even the first pass. For those who have entered via Stage 2, they will need to experience, at least once, the EP of the unitive transcendence of Stage 4. For those who have been catapulted into Stage 4, they will need to experience the wider search for reconciliation of the locus of authority and the acceptance of the experiencer-self of Stage 2.

During Stage 3, the before and after worlds dynamically converge to meet, collide, and conform within “the tangible body of” the experiencer. A metamorphosis occurs: the EEer becomes a first-time EHEer; and repeat EHEers establish within themselves yet another (triangulated, hybrid, gestalt, new) world that has been explored, conquered, claimed, and mapped. For repeat EHEers with much experience with the staging area challenges, critical junctures, and crossroads of Stage 3, returns to this stage become more or less automatic as novel EEs are quickly integrated into EHEs.

#### *Stage 4: In the Experiential Paradigm*

Whether experiencers are catapulted into the experiential paradigm, spontaneously cross into it, or their everyday steady state has evolved to living through it as a way of life, the key note of Stage 4 is “knowing” for oneself that unity is consciousness and that all boundaries are consciously-constructed choices. Stage 4 may serve as either an abrupt entry

point or the result of a progressive (trial-and-error) evolutionary point of arrival. With repeat EHEers, who have experienced several (many) returns to the dynamic crossroads of Stage 3, Stage 4 may be experienced as a conscious return to transcendence. Being “in the experiential paradigm” is often expressed simply as “home” or as a “return to home,” a “place” that houses one’s essence and essential spirit.<sup>16</sup> It is at this stage at which language and symbolic expression shift the most dramatically as experiencers grasp for metaphorical anchors and/or ways to communicate the transcendent world(s).<sup>17</sup> Written expressions representing the concomitants of these direct experiences and their short-term aftereffects are especially remarkable for their irregularities in punctuation and grammar (e.g., “I KNOW,” “I Knew,” “the town felt familiar”) and descriptions of quasi-sensory experience (e.g., “I swirled into pulsing black space,” “I became a pinpoint of LIGHT”).

Whereas Stage 3 entry is characterized by apprehending incongruent, discordant worlds (realities) with a wide gulf between them, Stage 4 entry is noted for its total immersion into one (holographic) world where dimensions, divisions, gradations, and paradoxes simply do not exist.<sup>18</sup> For experiential paradigm experiencers the consensual rules of linear time, cause-effect logic, either-or, measures of more or less, are merely prisms (*maya*), convenient human constructs (hypotheses, theories, beliefs), and selected reflections of the dynamic (living, organic, recombinant consciousness) whole of the hologram (Reality, All-that-Is, Universe). Simply speaking, the contrast between entry to Stages 3 and 4 is as different as night and day. In terms of the EHE process, both are necessary and neither alone is sufficient to progress to Stage 5. With every subsequent repeat visit to, every iteration of Stage 4, experiencers

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16. One’s essence may also be described as soul; Self and essential spirit as living consciousness, God, Universe, Nature, and so on, depending on individual preferences.

17. The language at this point is incredibly varied. Experiencers’ (prior) backgrounds, belief structures, and familiarity with the Stage 4 Experiential Paradigm seems to play a large role in the form of expression used. I have endeavored to select (synthesize, translate) words and phrases across experiencer reports that might be a more familiar language to readers of this *Journal*.

18. Steve Rosen’s transcultural (multi-dimensional) approach to the evolution of the “body” of wholeness via questions of science and perceived anomaly, ambiguity, and paradox continues as a major theme for his new book in progress, *Phenomenological Quantum Topology*. As he explains: “‘Phenomenological’ because it works with the kind of grounded intuition offered by people like Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, ‘topological’ because it features paradoxical dimensional structures like the Klein bottle and the Moebius strip, and ‘quantum’ because these structures are quantized (i. e., discontinuous with regard to classical space,” [Rosen, personal communication, August, 1999]).

return to the inner mixing bowl of Stage 3 in order to formulate, rarefy, and blend a new coherence of self and world view.

Over time, trial and error life experience with the transmuted of anomalous events to exceptional experiences to exceptional human experiences, and with increased familiarity of the EHE process overall, the passageway between 3 ↔ 4 may become itself a seamless flow of dynamic, reiterative, “inner/outer” operations. For those EHEers who are relatively comfortable and familiar with integrating the seams of (seemingly) paradoxical worlds, and with incorporating new inner and outer worlds as they are apprehended, navigating the passageway(s) between the worlds may become yet again more or less an automatic, functional response. Thus, each iteration between Stages 3 and 4 strengthens the passageway (mode of operation) between them and refines the movement above (4) and below (3) through the center point of being — that is, through the body of the experiencer (Rosen, 1996). In essence, the resolution process becomes (is reduced to) second nature. Metaphorically-speaking (and metaphysically-speaking), the EHEer at that universal moment and at the center of Universe, is the quintessential perfect point of singularity between heaven and earth.<sup>19</sup>

Stage 4 is understood among EHEers as the “knowing” space. First time visitors with no prior apprehension (perception) of EEs, and seasoned EHEers alike, are easily recognized by this simple expression in their narratives: “I know.” This verb is usually typed in capital letters or highlighted in quotation marks to indicate that this particular mode of apprehension was not arrived at or caused by logical deduction of the intellect, nor did it stem from a conscious desire to direct the will (intent, willfulness) toward a particular outcome (e.g., a transcendental experience, a miracle, a psychical vision on demand). To know is not to believe, to understand, to feel, to sense, to have figured-out, to desire to the point of ecstasy about that desire. Nor is knowing equated with intense scholarly training and study, participating in intensive psychic or mystical awareness workshops, performing psi or mysterious feats, or selling the masses or one student on “the way of truth and reality.” “To Know” simply *is* to “Know.” Often it is easier to translate the experiential paradigm by what it is not, rather than attempt to describe what it is.

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19. Readers at this point may note the sequencing of 5 to 4 to 3 to 2 to 1 are now representing nominal qualities to demonstrate both consensual usage of meaning/direction as well as experiential usage of symbolic levels of meaning (functioning). In effect, number has enjoyed multiple meanings/interpretations over the ages and across cultures. Relative quantity is only one form of expression and is the most dominant form in contemporary Western culture.

The word “ineffable” today is commonly used, and yet that too is describing the difficulty the experiencer has in translation. It is not a remark that signals direct knowledge conveyed through the body of the experiencer, or through the experience itself.<sup>20</sup> For the experiencer, being in the experiential paradigm is truth, is reality, is evidence, and is most tangible — wholly tangible — the one pure essence.

For some transpersonal psychologists and noetic scientists (including parapsychologists who study “survival” issues) direct experience of transcendental awareness is the whole story, the causal reason for, and reasoning behind, the paradigm shift. It is the dynamic that speaks to the notion of before and after a particular pivotal point. Further, for many first-time mystics, new age sojourners (and for the popular culture depicted in the media), the grail of transcendence is the ultimate discovery, the goal. Metaphorically, mystics retire to the mountain to live outside of the world, and grail seekers/explorers celebrate their thanksgiving “upon arriving” to the new world. Both responses depotentiate the EHE process if and when (a glimpse of) the experiential paradigm alone is made to serve as the goal. Advanced EHEers (and only upon their arrival to the Stage 4/5 crossroads of awareness) will have discovered the supreme cosmic joke, the secret coded message, which has been told over the ages in many forms: That the lauded hero’s journey out is only “half” of the journey. The rest of the story, the flip-side, the requisite fulfillment of the explorer’s journey is equally if not more treacherous — to carry the mountain, the new world discoveries, the “Knowledge” back to the beginning, to the starting point, bringing Paradise back “home.”

### *Stage 5: A New Way of Being in the World*

Throughout the EHE process the experiencer has visited and been confronted by many worlds: the old and the new, the inner and outer, the existential depths and the experiential heights. What began as an anomalous event apprehended became an exceptional experience worthy of note, which opened up the EEer to the possibility that the everyday world might not be all that it appears to be on the surface. The EE, thus, became a potential catalyst for personal change, a marker for comparison between the everyday and the exceptional. Early in the process attention is focused on the EE as something “out there.” Answers to questions will be provided by others, bestowed on the experiencer by authorities who

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20. Many thanks to EHEer Dick Richardson for sharing his clear insights over several e-mail discussions and his willingness to help me better define the words “ineffable” and “to know” as they might be expressed within the experiential paradigm and context.

likewise reside “out there.” The initial EE has brought the experiencer out into the world of the weird, the curious, even the bizarre, and in that process of stepping out the experiencer learns that he must choose, discover a (re)resolution to cognitive dissonance, in order to regain a steady state center of operation. Once the experiencer makes a choice, he or she is personally involved with the EE and it is no longer out there but has to some degree become an integral part of the experience “in here.” In effect, the EHE process has been engaged. One way or another (potentiated or not) the experience has gotten under the experiencer’s skin and cannot be erased as if it had never happened. Questions raised become transformed into conscious choices made to dig and stretch, to discover and find answers about the self, reality, and meaning. Whereas the EE brought the experiencer out into the outer world, the search for meaning brings the experiencer relatively deeper inside into the inner world. At each critical juncture (staged or reiterative) the experiencer has been challenged, and exists on the horns of another dilemma. For not only are the everyday and the exceptional worlds at odds, so too is the presentation of self (the persona) at odds with the inner self who has since accepted, integrated, and evolved to the role of exceptional experiencer.

At every critical juncture the experiencer must decide which world to value, which self is more authentic, in which direction to move, and how to regain a sense of balance between all of the worlds that present themselves dynamically, organically, including those of the perceived past, present, and future. Each decision made is an effort to close the gap, to resolve a cognitive dissonance between the worlds (world views), to patch a hole in the fabric of one’s life and perspective of reality. As we have seen, EEs by their very definition can create a mighty big hole in that fabric to mend. Yet EEs may become more easily recognized as one’s attention-perceptual threshold for EEs in general is lowered with repetition and intensity, and as the evaluative-decision threshold to potentiate, to make conscious choices about them, moves likewise. Together these lowering thresholds can allow the experiencer more room to navigate the challenges of EEs, more or less as needed. By itself this and reiterative feedback loops, may be viewed as a form of creative resolution, a triangulated higher-order gestalt constructed between the choices of the matter(s) presented. In this case each of these gestalts become a hybrid form of EE transmutation of the experience (i.e., an eureka insight) complete with narrative reports of new realizations and awareness gained. But even for the evolved EEer, the worlds discovered and represented thus far continue to remain a patchwork, a world of attempts to fill the holes and knit the fabric of life, meaning, reality back together. As long as the experiencer attempts to fill in and patch the holes, one’s ongoing creation will still build “up” from a series of either/or choices

in which the EEer weighs one world against the other, as the challenges of each new EE are perceived and met. Theoretically, the farthest distance an experiencer can travel in this scenario is Stage 3; perpetually choosing one of two worlds and dynamically creating a patchwork representation of an intricately-patterned hybrid world, *ad infinitum*, until the next EE or life challenge appears tantalizingly within reach.

As we have seen, the human story requires, at minimum, one experience that transports the experiencer into the experiential paradigm in which the “whole” fabric of reality is “Known” all at once, seemingly, and seamed in a cosmic flash. At this juncture of realization and awareness, the experiencer and the experience merge and unite, and the EHE process dynamically switches direction. Rather than building “up” to something based on an EE or a series of EEs, the EHE moment of the experiential paradigm is apprehended, conveyed back home, “down” into the experiencer’s center of internal operations, Stage 3. The “Known” more than fills any remaining holes in the constructed fabric and then some more. That “more” is the gift of the experiential paradigm in which, from that point on, “Home” and “home” are known to be the same at any moment in spacetime on which the experiencer chooses to focus. From there/here on out and back, the challenge for the experiencer will be to keep (paradoxically, by not keeping) “Home” and “home” aligned, in phase, and in process, continuing to dynamically move and adjust as needed. The EE that engaged the “call” has become transmuted, an EHE “entity” in its own right, and the EEer has been transformed into an EHEer “entity” in his or her own right. Paradoxically, there is no difference between them, nor between the EHE process (“entity”) that had conveyed or conveys them. Thus Stage 5, a new way of being in the world perpetually becomes, and is the EHEer’s embodied answer to the call that, in retrospective narrative reports, he or she now clearly recognizes had been the one calling all along.

### Summary

One-by-one experiencers from all walks of life are exploring the depths of inner space and the heights of outer space and have come back home to tell about it — to live and embody what they have found for themselves to be true, truth, reality. Each finds his or her uniquely individual way, and although the initiating EEs do vary, the stories and the narrative “maps” taken together are remarkably more similar than different, particularly in the case in which we compare (overlay) narrative detail and major themes submitted by EHEer-explorers.

When we consider that Exceptional Experiencers and Exceptional Human Experiencers are our present-day explorers, discovering un-

charted land forms (staging areas), and navigating routes (processes) between them, then each narrative serves as a map of these new territories, as well as a detailed captain's log chronicling events of the journey. Even meticulous study of only 50 EE/EHE accounts and autobiographies can yield well over 1000 pieces of characteristic detail that can then be collated and overlaid onto a preliminary map. As such, the distinguishing features of each of the land forms (the prevailing themes) and the processional events as experienced are taken together as patterns, and begin to take on an aggregate shape, to refine contours, and to offer a manifest record for other explorers who may choose to follow.

The matrix model and explorers' map presented here is but one effort to gather and illustrate these charted landmarks and routes of the EHE process. Regardless of an individual EEer's originating port of call (the initiating EE, the perceived anomaly), any of over 100 different types could serve as a potential entry point into an EHE. Based on White's general EHE theory, exceptional experiences can range from the simply odd to the incredibly bizarre, from the sacred to the profane, and indeed cover all the points and routes in between when viewed across the extensive array of experiencer narratives. These individual reports remain a rich, largely-untapped resource. They offer incredible depth and breadth into the mysteries of human potential and the evolution of conscious awareness.

From all cultures and across all times, the perennial story of EHE has been told and passed down in various forms through generations of explorers curious enough to ask questions beyond the status quo. I sincerely hope that readers will discover something of value within these pages, and feel free to add, subtract, or modify the preliminary EHE process model and map by virtue of their own unique talents and explorations.

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### Abstract

The Exceptional Human Experience (EHE) process is a unique, dynamic, progressive, reiterative, evolving pattern of human consciousness development initiated by an anomalous experience and evidenced by expanding levels of reported inner and outer transpersonal awareness. This paper is based on a review of hundreds of experiencer first-person written narratives solicited by Rhea White and the EHE Network over the past decade. It presents an orthogonal expansion of our original 5-stage EHE process outline. The expanded model highlights a 5-stage x 12-classifier matrix design, including 60 unique cells into which characteristics synthesized across, and detailed within, experiencer narratives can be captured and mapped. The matrix model offers both a tool for researchers, in the form of a classification grid, as well as a map of key features noted and synthesized across, and within, each of the stages of the EHE process. The discussion fleshes out some of the key issues for each of the stages. In addition, the discussion speaks to the overarching processional interactions between stages with a focus toward furthering exploration, research, and application.

### Résumé

Au début des années 90, Rhea White a entrepris d'étendre et de documenter sa théorie compréhensive intitulée Expériences Humaines Exceptionnelles. Le développement théorique, l'état des lieux des écrits et les nombreuses références et articles scientifiques, cherchent à soutenir la thèse selon laquelle les Expériences Exceptionnelles (EEs) peuvent être expérimentées et puis intégrées dans une nouvelle vision du monde. Ce moment d'illumination transpersonnelle agit tel un catalyseur: l'événement n'est plus perçu comme distinct de l'expérience de l'événement, et la personne se rend compte qu'elle fait complètement partie de la création et du déploiement de l'EE, ce qui transmute et humanise l'expérience, la transformant en une Expérience Humaine Exceptionnelle. Les deux expériences — exceptionnelle et humaine-exceptionnelle — font partie du même processus. Néanmoins, ces expériences sont distinctes : l'individu qui a eu une EHE complète a aussi agi sur l'expérience. En activant et transmutant le «dehors», ils sont eux même transformé «dedans».

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz beruht auf einer Durchsicht von Hunderten von Berichten, die von den erlebenden Personen in der IchForm verfaßt und von Rhea White und dem EHE Netzwerk während des letzten Jahrzehntes erfaßt worden sind. Er bietet eine rechtwinkelige Erweiterung unseres originalen Entwurfes des 5 stufigen EHE-Prozesses. Das expandierte Modell hebt die Gestaltung einer Matrix von 5 Stadien sowie 12 Klassifikatoren hervor, somit 60 einzelne Zellen, in denen die Erlebnisberichte erfaßt und dargestellt werden können: bis in die Einzelheiten beschrieben, aber die Charakteristika übergreifend synthetisiert. Dieses Matrix-Modell bietet sowohl ein Werkzeug für Forscher, in der Form eines Koordinatennetzes der Klassifikation, wie auch eine Abbildung der Hauptmerkmale, die festgestellt und über die Stadien des EHE-Prozesses hinweg, aber auch innerhalb eines jeden derselben synthetisiert worden sind. Die Diskussion hebt einige der Kernhemmen für jedes der Stadien hervor. Weiters spricht die Diskussion die überspannenden prozeßhaften Interaktionen zwischen den Stadien an, mit dem Fokus auf der Förderung von Erforschung, Untersuchung und Anwendung.

### Sommario

Questo lavoro si fonda su una rassegna di centinaia di testimonianze scritte, fornite negli ultimi dieci anni dietro sollecitazione di Rhea White e dall'EHE Network, e presenta un'espansione ortogonale del nostro modello originale a 5 stadi del processo EHE (Esperienze Umane Eccezionali). Il modello ampliato consiste in una matrice di 5 stadi per 12 classificazioni, nelle cui 60 celle individuali si possono includere e mappare le varie caratteristiche sintetizzate da più esperienze o estratte in dettaglio dalle singole narrazioni. Il modello a matrice si offre come uno strumento per i ricercatori, nella forma di griglia di classificazione, ma anche come mappa delle caratteristiche-chiave

notate e riprese in forma sintetica sia dall'insieme delle varie fasi sia all'interno dei singoli stadi del processo EHE. La discussione dettaglia alcune questioni di primaria importanza per ciascuno degli stadi e illustra le interazioni tra i processi dei vari stadi, nell'ottica di ulteriori esplorazioni, ricerche e applicazioni.

### 抄 録

本稿は、リーア・ホワイトとEHEネットワークが、この10年ほどの間に追い求めてきた体験を持つ人々によって記された、数百にのぼる体験談を再検討したものを基盤にしている。本稿では、人間の例外的体験（EHE）に関するわれわれの5段階の分類法が縦横に拡張される。われわれの新版のモデルが主眼とするのは、そうした体験を5段階、12等級に分類することである。それにより、さまざまなレベルの各特徴を、60個のマス目の中に収めることができる。この方法を使えば、体験者の語った内容を説明し特徴づけることができる。このモデルは、分類法として研究の道具にもなり、EHE過程の各段階の内外で見られる主特徴を位置づけることもできる。本稿の考察部では、この過程の各段階の主な側面を詳細に紹介する。また、各段階間に発生する、この過程の相互作用に関する考察も行ない、合わせて、われわれの着想を探究、調査、応用する研究者の援助について述べる。

### Resumo

Este artigo baseia-se na revisão de centenas de narrativas escritas por pessoas que vivenciaram as experiências solicitadas por Rhea White e pela EHE Network na última década. Apresenta uma expansão ortogonal de nosso primeiro esboço de 5 etapas do processo de experiências humanas excepcionais (EHEs). A nova versão do modelo destaca um esquema de 5 etapas x 12 classificadores, incluindo 60 células de características nos diferentes níveis. Nesse esquema, as narrativas das experiências são apresentadas e ordenadas. Esse modelo oferece uma ferramenta para a pesquisa na forma de uma grade de classificação, e um mapa de características-chave entre e dentro de cada uma das etapas do processo das EHEs. A discussão traz maiores detalhes a respeito dos principais aspectos de cada etapa. Além disso, o artigo também discute as interações dos processos entre as etapas, dando ênfase à exploração, pesquisa e aplicação dessas idéias.

### Resumen

Este artículo está basado en una revisión de cientos de narrativas de experiencias escritas por las personas que tuvieron las experiencias solicitadas por Rhea White y el EHE Network durante la década pasada. Se presenta una expansión ortogonal de nuestro sistema de cinco etapas del proceso de experiencias humanas excepcionales (EHE). La nueva versión del modelo enfatiza un diseño de cinco etapas x 12 clasificaciones, incluyendo 60 celdas

de características en los diferentes niveles, en el cual se exponen y se ordenan las narrativas de las experiencias. El modelo ofrece una herramienta para la investigación, en forma de un marco de clasificación, y un mapa de las características principales entre y dentro de cada una de las etapas del proceso de EHEs. La discusión ofrece detalles de los aspectos principales de cada etapa. También se discuten las interacciones de los procesos entre las etapas con énfasis en asistir la exploración, investigación, y aplicación de estas ideas.