



May 28, 2020

Current status of the Lena interviews

A few months ago we set out to make public a complete Descriptive Experience Sampling investigation, so that all those interested in the exploration of inner experience might see for themselves the entire set of interactions and evaluate for themselves the adequacy of that process. Lena, whom we did not know prior to these interactions, volunteered as a participant. We rolled out those interviews as they occurred so that there could be no possibility of hindsight bias (in a way, this is the descriptive-study analogue of a registered experimental investigation). We made available video for each interview on YouTube and transcripts with commentary for each interview on the website.

We have now completed the interviews with Lena and thank her for her willingness to open herself to this kind of investigation. There are 11 DES sampling days as well as two Q/A sessions, one after the fourth sampling day and one at the end of the process.

Prior to this participation, Lena understood herself as having nearly constant internal monologue (it was Ryan Langdon's [blog](#) about inner monologue that triggered Lena's involvement). We discovered that her prior-to-sampling self-understanding was *not* correct: Lena's experience samples included little or no internal monologue (except sometimes while reading).

We discovered that Lena's experience frequently (well over half of her samples) included inner seeing (sometimes called seeing images or visual imagery). Prior to sampling, Lena was unaware of the dominance of this visual characteristic of her inner experience.

Since early in sampling, Lena described herself as "sensing" herself or aspects of the world around her. We tried over the course of sampling to figure out what she meant by that, but it was not until about the ninth sampling day that we finally seemed to arrive at an understanding. We then went back and reviewed the transcripts from earlier sampling days and found that she had been remarkably consistent in describing these sensing experiences, even if we have not been able to understand what she was conveying. It is to Lena's credit that she had continued to try to describe this phenomenon, and to our credit that we had continued to try to understand, for an extended time when it was clear that she was having trouble putting the phenomenon into words and that we were unable to grasp what she was trying to talk about. More importantly than any credit, it reflects the "stubbornness" of this experiential phenomenon: the phenomenon existed for her, and continued to exist, regardless of whether she could adequately describe it or whether we could adequately grasp it.

As we now understand it, Lena's sensing involves her apprehending a second "center of gravity" of experience that is experientially separate from what is recognized as her basic experiential center of gravity. This second center of gravity seemed to exist, broadly speaking, in two ways: empathy and meta-awareness. Here are illustrations of our understanding.

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Straightforward experience: In sample 11.1, Lena was (mostly) directly thinking about house upkeep. This seemed a (mostly) straightforward experience, which we illustrate in Figure 1:

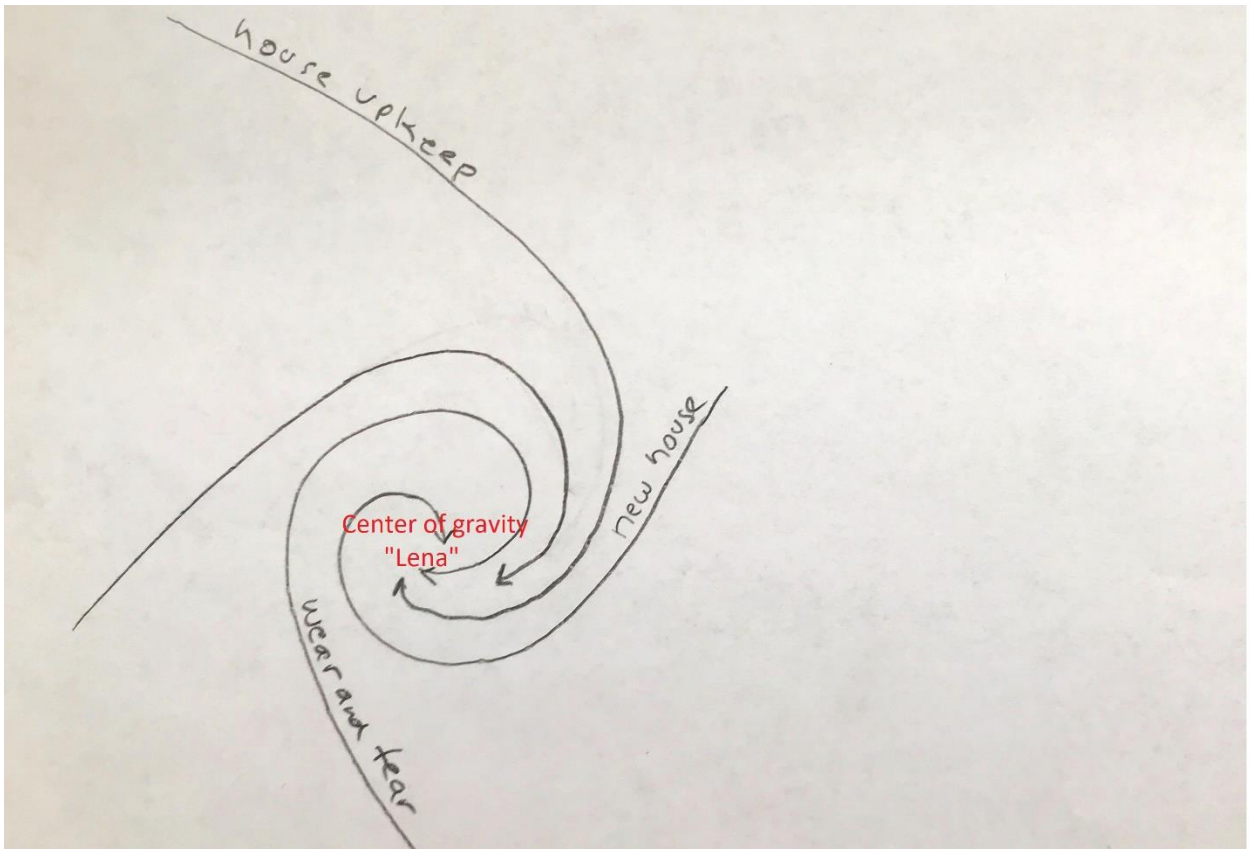


Figure 1: Lena's straightforward experience

Lena's apprehension of the house upkeep and wear and tear phenomena has one "center of gravity," schematized here as "Center of gravity 'Lena'" (we draw a center of gravity to illustrate no implication of a Cartesian theater or a homunculus). Lena understands herself as the center of the metaphorical vortex, her internal world and external perceptions pulling into her as she thinks about the responsibilities of home ownership.

Empathic sensing: In sample 11.4, Lena was empathically sensing how an injured person might feel defeated and the *why?-what's-the-point*-ness of life after losing the ability to be conscious after the injury. Lena apprehends herself as sensing: "In that sensing, it's almost as if I am going out of my body. Like I'm out of myself. I'm now, I'm no longer completely in myself. Um, but it's not so detached to the point where I don't sense my body anymore, y'know, or I don't sense my feelings, 'cause I still have my feelings. Um like, I'm not just completely gone" [Interview 13 (sampling day 11), 41:21–41:42]. Here's how we understand that:

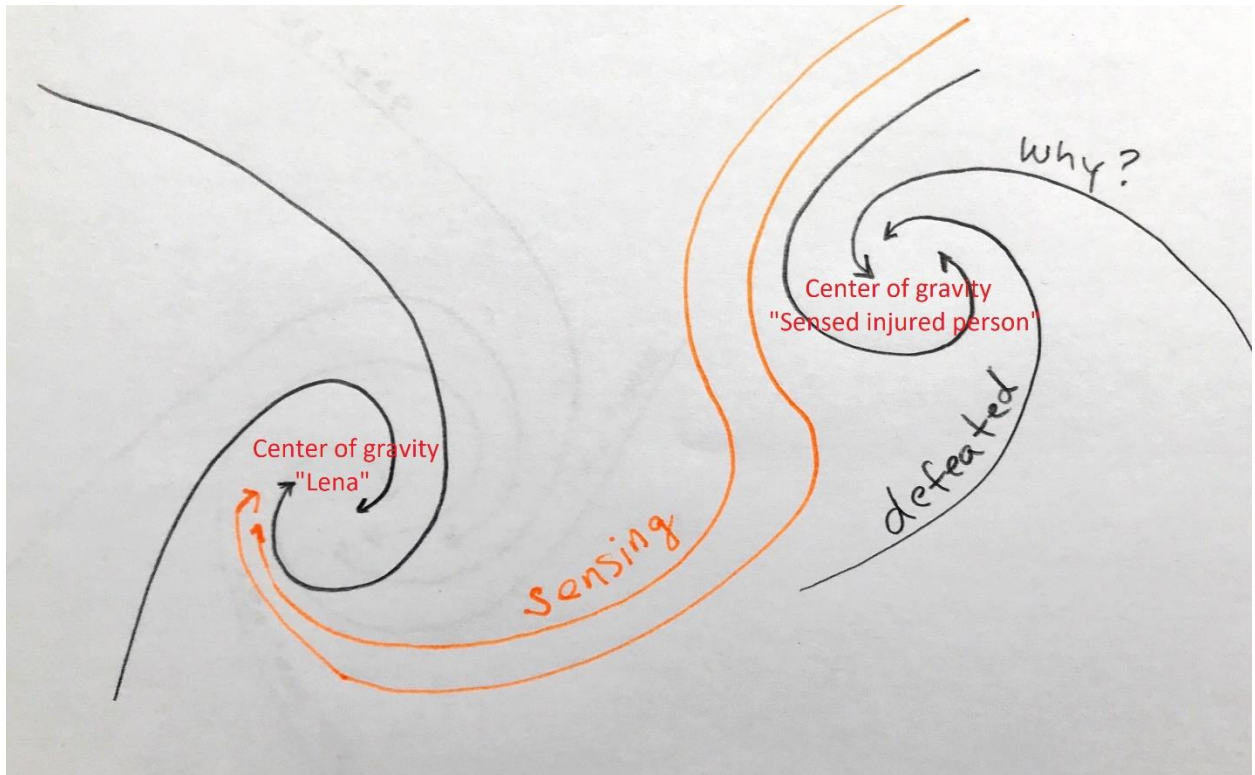


Figure 2: Lena sensing an injured person (empathy)

The apprehension of external and internal phenomena has two “centers of gravity,” schematized here as “Center of gravity ‘Lena’” and “Center of gravity ‘empathized injured person’” (again with no implication of a Cartesian theater or a homunculus). Lena’s empathic grasping of the injured person is *not* merely an observation from Lena’s point of view (that would be in incoming arrow like “new house” in Figure 1). Instead, she apparently develops an almost depersonalized apprehension from the point of view of (Lena’s take on) the injured person. That empathic action takes on a center of gravity of its own. But the Lena center of gravity is impacted by it, which is what Lena calls “sensing”: The Lena center of gravity being impacted by the empathized injured person’s center of gravity.

Another example of empathic sensing is sample 9.3, where Lena was wondering/sensing how a man such as Hitler could do such horrendous things. TO illustrate this, we could alter the right-hand side of Figure 2, replacing the red text with “Center of gravity ‘Sensed Hitler-like despot’” and the arrow labels with atrocities.

Meta-awareness sensing: In sample 10.1, Lena was sensing frustration and patience about her two-year-old’s scissor-drawer exploration. We came to understand that this kind of sensing of herself, or meta-awareness, was phenomenally similar to the empathic understanding illustrated in Figure 2, except in meta-awareness, Lena’s empathic understanding is not of an

external person but of herself. Figure 3 schematizes it.

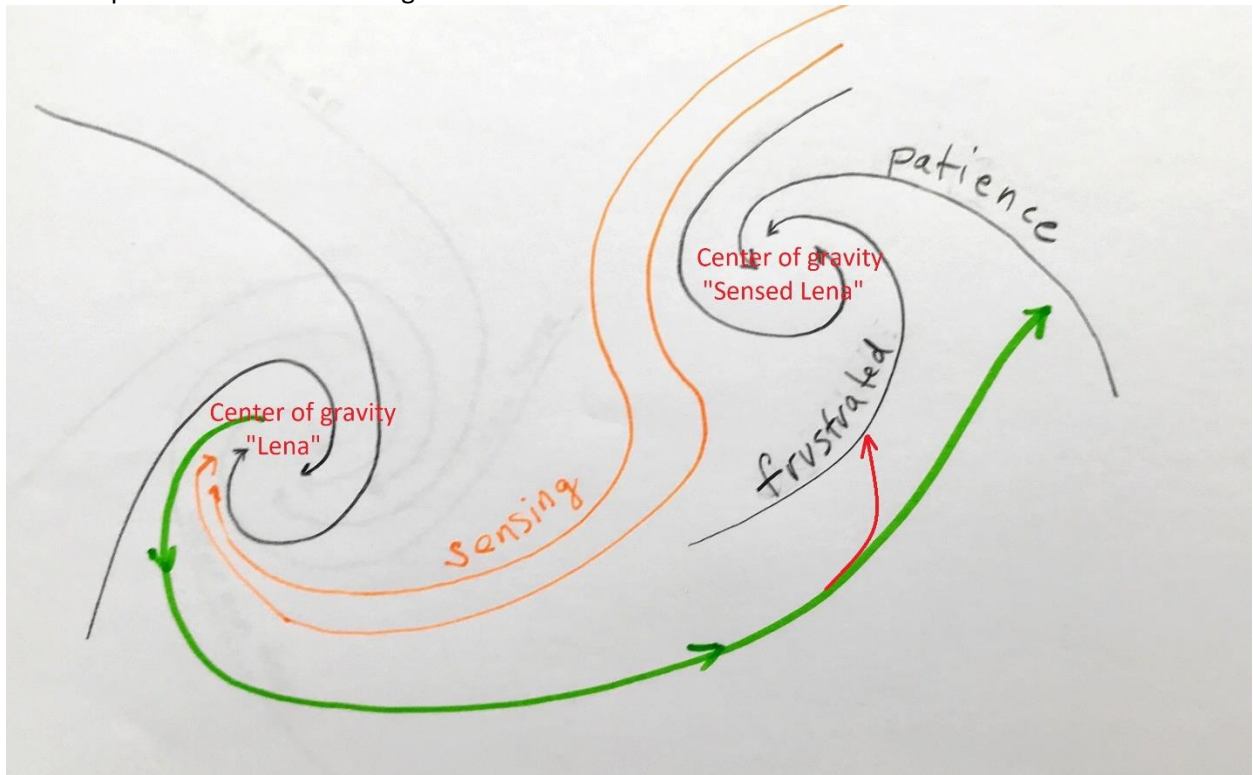


Figure 3: Lena sensing herself (meta-awareness)

Lena, in a meta-awareness way, senses herself as having a set of experiences related to her toddler (including frustration and patience). Lena does not experience the frustration and patience directly (in which case they would have been illustrated as aiming directly at the “Lena” center of gravity (similar to the “new house” experience of Figure 1). Instead, the directly apprehending Lena *senses* herself as experiencing these feelings. Furthermore, the directly apprehending Lena experiences herself as having the capability of impacting the sensed Lena—she chooses, explicitly in a meta-awareness way, to amplify the patience (green arrow) and inhibit the frustration (the arrow’s red branch).

We think these metaphorical schematics are helpful in illustrating our understanding of Lena’s experience. Lena approves of these schematics (although she would prefer the vortexes be three-dimensional, rather like water flowing down drains that are somehow orthogonal to each other). We don’t wish to make too much of the schematics—they are intended to convey our understanding of Lena’s experience in a situation where doing so in words is difficult. We think this understanding helps to disentangle the wonderings/feelings/sensings that Lena described in samples 3.2, 5.2, 5.4, 6.2, 7.3, 8.2, 8.4, 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 10.1, 10.2, 10.4, 11.4, and 11.5).

DES participants do sometimes describe meta-awarenesses, but Lena’s are unusually frequent and unusual in the autonomous locus that we have described.

The bottom line: We have completed the Lena interviews. Prior to sampling, Lena thought she had frequent or constant interior dialogue, but she (probably) doesn’t except while reading. She has frequent inner seeing, but prior to sampling she didn’t know that. We discovered frequent “sensing,” empathically putting herself into another’s experience or apprehending her own experience from a meta-awareness perspective.

April 17, 2020

Current status of the Lena interviews

The only way to evaluate the adequacy of the Descriptive Experience Sampling investigation of Lena is to examine the interviews themselves. We sincerely invite you to perform that evaluation, and in support have provided unedited videos of all interviews and word-for-word transcripts of most (more coming). We recognize the time commitment that such an examination entails but believe there is no real shortcut.

We have completed eight DES sampling days as well as a Q/A session after the fourth day. Video for all interviews is on YouTube, and transcripts with commentary for each interview are available.

It now seems pretty clear that Lena did not have much (or hardly any except while reading) of the internal monologue that she thought, prior to sampling, continuously populated her inner experience. Visual imagery (which DES calls “inner seeing”) continues to be very frequent (almost constant) for her.

Lena is becoming more and more skillful in distinguishing between directly apprehended (before-the-footlights-of-consciousness) experience and all else (self-theories, context, generalization, etc.). That is a fundamental discrimination in DES investigations.

Perhaps Lena’s increasing ability to discriminate will enable us to disentangle the wonderings/feelings/sensings that Lena described in sample 8.2 (and also, perhaps, in 8.4, 7.3, 6.2, 5.4, 5.2, and 3.2).

The bottom line: Prior to sampling, Lena thought she had frequent or constant interior dialogue, but she (probably) doesn’t except while reading. She has frequent inner seeing, but prior to sampling she didn’t know that. Lena’s interviews now contain substantially more description of directly apprehended experience and substantially less self-theory, context, and so on. That is, she is becoming better able to “cleave to experience,” to bracket away everything except directly apprehended experience.

April 8, 2020

Current status of the Lena interviews

The only way to evaluate the adequacy of the Descriptive Experience Sampling investigation of Lena is to examine the interviews themselves. We sincerely invite you to perform that evaluation, and in support have provided unedited videos of all interviews and word-for-word transcripts of most (more coming). We recognize the time commitment that such an examination entails but believe there is no real shortcut.

We have completed six DES sampling days as well as a Q/A session after the fourth day. Video for all interviews is on YouTube, and transcripts with commentary for each interview are available.

It now seems pretty clear that Lena did not have much (or maybe any) of the internal monologue that she thought, prior to sampling, populated her inner experience. Visual imagery (which DES calls “inner seeing”) continues to be frequent for her.

Beginning in previous interviews and building in intensity in Interview 8 (sampling day 6), the interviewers are tenaciously pursuing the distinction between directly apprehended (before-the-footlights-of-consciousness) experience and all else (self-theories, context, generalization, etc.). That is a fundamental discrimination in DES investigations, and it remains to be seen whether it can be successfully made with Lena, and if so, what will be the characteristics of her experience thereafter.

The bottom line: Prior to sampling, Lena thought she had frequent or constant interior dialogue, but she (probably) doesn't. She (probably) has frequent inner seeing, but prior to sampling she didn't know that. Lena's interviews contain a mixture of description of directly apprehended experience and self-theory, context, and so on. We are working to “cleave to experience,” that is, to bracket away everything except directly apprehended experience.

March 28, 2020

Current status of the Lena interviews

The only way to evaluate the adequacy of the Descriptive Experience Sampling investigation of Lena is to examine the interviews themselves. We sincerely invite you to perform that evaluation, and in support have provided unedited videos of all interviews and word-for-word transcripts of most (more coming). We recognize the time commitment that such an examination entails but believe there is no real shortcut.

We have completed five DES sampling days as well as a Q/A session after the fourth day. Video for all interviews is on YouTube; we are working on transcripts for each interview and will roll them out as they become available.

Lena collected six samples for each interview. However, because of the iterative training that goes on in the interview about each sample, and because Lena's experience is fairly complex, and because there are some features of her experience that require substantial clarification, we have never been able to discuss more than three samples in an hour-long expositional interview.

It is likely that we will be somewhat more efficient in future sampling interviews.

So far, it seems that a prominent characteristic of Lena's inner experience is visual imagery, which DES calls inner seeing. Lena's inner seeings are typically detailed and in color and motion. Some characteristics of her inner seeings are indeterminant or what Lena calls "wispy": moving in an undulating, reed-in-the-wind motion.

So far, interior monologue (which Lena had originally thought was a constant characteristic) has been only a very minor characteristic, if present at all. Whether this continues in future sampling remains to be seen.

We anticipate another sampling day and interview early in April, and more after that (all subject to change, of course).

The bottom line: Prior to sampling, Lena thought she had frequent or constant interior dialogue, but she (probably) doesn't. She (probably) has frequent inner seeing, but prior to sampling she didn't know that. Lena is not at all unusual in this regard: Many, perhaps most, people don't know the characteristics of their own inner experience.