

THE BODY AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Kathleen McGuire, Ph.D.

Creative Edge Focusing™

www.cefocusing.com

Dr. McGuire trained directly with Eugene Gendlin, creator of Focusing. She received the Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from University of Chicago in 1975. She was one of the co-founders of the original Changes Listening/Focusing Communities. As well as a career as a Focusing-Oriented (Client-Centered/Experiential) Therapist and workshop leader, she has created several more peer counseling communities and sees making self-help skills of Experiential Focusing and Empathic Listening as her contribution to a more harmonious world. She has also written extensively on therapy, building community, and articulating the feminine, including the role of tears of “being touched and being moved” as one way in which our body guides us to our deepest values. She also has free article and manual downloads for The Experiential Dimension In Therapy and Focusing In Community: How To Start A Listening/Focusing Support Group (also in Spanish translation, Focusing en Comunidad) on her website, as well as a free nine-month E-course.

ABSTRACT

"Embodied" and "disembodied" (cognitive, abstract) ways of being-in-the-world are described. The phenomenon is traced through Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's distinction between "separate" and "connected" knowing as epistemologies, Gendlin's theory of the relationship between felt experiencing and symbols, Jung's typological distinction between "thinking" and "feeling" as ways of making judgments, and Gilligan's gender-specific forms of moral judgment. The phenomenon correlates with but is not in one-to-one correspondence with gender. The role of the capacity to be moved to tears in the making of judgments according to value is explored. The capacity to make judgments according to feeling is presented as a rational skill of similar complexity to the capacity to make judgments according to thinking.

In contemplating writing this paper, I attempted to make the shift into the third person objective mode of language central to academic writing. I would then be turning my personal experiences into seeming facts by stating them as "It has been found that..." rather than "It has been my experience that..." I find that I do not want to make this shift, since it is a betrayal of the very phenomenon I am describing. I want to describe the way in which the world is experienced by a person who lives in an embodied, rather than an abstract, cognitive way.

In order to hold the interest of the "embodied," writing must touch, not cognitive, logical understanding but bodily experiencing. The writing must resonate; it must call forth a felt response, as does a poem or a piece of music. "Resonating" is a kind of knowledge. It is a physical experience and can happen in relation to ideas as well as to emotions. It is different from cognitive understanding.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, in their book *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), describe two different epistemological orientations:

...a separate epistemology, based upon impersonal procedures for establishing truth, and a connected epistemology, in which truth emerges through care (p.102).. .Presented with a proposition, separate knowers immediately look for something wrong--a loophole, a factual error, a logical contradiction, the omission of contrary evidence (p.104)...Feelings and personal beliefs are rigorously excluded (p.109)

In contrast:

...At the heart of these [connected knowers'] procedures is the capacity for empathy. Since knowledge comes from

experience, the only way they can hope to understand another person's ideas is to try to share the experience that has led the person to form the idea...truth that is personal, particular, and grounded in firsthand experience (p. 113).

I invite you to think with me in the manner of connected knowing. I will use my own experience as a guide. After describing it, I will connect my own experience with the writing of others.

As one of the embodied in a culture which places high value upon an abstract, objective way of being, I feel as if I am caught under ice, trying to find a hole where I can break through and breath, but constantly bumping my head against an impenetrable surface. My experience is submerged.

It is hard to know that I exist, when I do not see my experience mirrored in the culture. Most movies, books, poems, paintings, and academic papers are abstract, pleasing to the logical mind but not creating a felt response.

How can I describe being "embodied"? I mean, in general, that in many situations I gather knowledge first in my body and then use my thinking/words/symbolizing capacities to articulate it. For instance, when I walk into a room, I register the interpersonal dynamics in the room in

my body. I may notice that my body is going numb, my shoulders tense, my head aching. I then take this bodily information as indicating that there is something wrong, and I search my own feelings and the kind of interaction that is going on to see what it is. Once I make words for the problem, then I can act in some way to change the situation and relieve my bodily tension.

When I want to make a decision about a personal problem, I do not make a list of pros and cons and weigh them out in a cognitive, logical way. I try to ask my bodily experiencing what it wants. I use Gendlin's (1981) Focusing Technique to ask myself

open-ended questions, and I wait until words and other symbols arise which are an accurate symbolization of my bodily felt meanings.

I pay special attention to my felt reaction to the words or images which I create. I am especially attuned to the coming of tears. My tears let me know that something is important to me. They are my body's way of making a value judgment. I will tend to make a decision in the direction of this value, as indicated by my tears. Being able to sort through the feelings in terms of my body's response is a highly refined skill which I have developed over time and which is equal in complexity to the way that an abstract thinker might use the rules of logic in order to make a decision.

This different way of being-in-the-world has been loosely identified as a difference between men and women, but gender does not completely correlate with the phenomenon. "Left-brain/right-brain; visual/kinesthetic styles of learning, the "thinking/feeling" continuum as defined by Jung (1971) are other attempts to name the difference. Teasing the actual phenomenon out from the perceived gender difference will remove some noise generated in statistical data by the inclusion of "feeling" men and "thinking" women, for instance.

The first and foremost strand I have found is the theoretical work of Eugene Gendlin (1962). Gendlin talks about the creation of meaning through a back-and-forth between symbols and bodily felt experiencing. His is the only theory I have found which makes terms for the moments of silent checking with the body that happen between words and other symbols. Here are Gendlin's (1962) seven ways in which symbols and felt meanings can interact in creating meanings. I give these examples, conceptually complicated though they are, because they concretely demonstrate that, in most instances, symbols depend upon an experiential or felt dimension for their meaning:

1) Parallel Functional Relationships of Felt Meaning in Cognition

a) **Direct Reference.** Symbols are used to point to, without defining, a present felt meaning: "I want to stop and sense into this feeling I am having." Can then attend directly to "this feeling" without as yet forcing conceptualizations upon it.

b) **Recognition.** Symbols call forth felt meanings that are adequately conceptualized by the symbol. There is a one to one correspondence: "I know what 'red' means."

c) **Explication.** Creating further symbols for a given felt meaning: "I want to describe this feeling of sadness that I have. It's about..."

2) Creative Functional Relationships ("Specific," "Nonparallel")

a) **Metaphor.** Symbols that already have a parallel felt meaning are put together so as to create a new felt meaning: "Sunshine is like melting butter."

b) **Comprehension.** Finding exactly the right symbols to convey an already present felt meaning: "It's hard to describe.. .It's...It's like snow in summer! That's exactly it".

c) **Relevance.** A felt meaning of what has gone before enables one to understand what comes next: "I could understand this part of the movie because of the cumulated felt sense of what came before."

d) **Circumlocution.** A felt meaning is created in a person by means of symbols that do not adequately symbolize that felt meaning: "It's sort of like when...That's not exactly it, but do you know what I mean?" "I think so. Is it like when " "Yeah. Not exactly, but we're in the ball park. It's more..." Both people "know" what they are talking about but cannot put it into words.

Summarized from *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*, pp.90-137

Only 1) b) (recognition) involves the kind of abstract, symbols that can be manipulated by logic, that have no left-over felt meaning to be resonated with in a bodily way.

Gendlin puts the bodily, experiential half of the process into the definition of thinking. His work leads to practical applications in "Focusing" (1981) as a way of using direct reference for problem resolution and in "experiential psychotherapy" (Gendlin, 1973, 1994; McGuire, 1981) as a way of maximizing the creation of new meanings and thereby personality change in psychotherapy. Many of the people who resonate with Gendlin's theory are women, because they find concepts that articulate being embodied.

A second strand is The Experiencing (EXP) Scale, an empirical measure based upon Gendlin's theory (Klein, Mathieu, Gendlin, & Kiesler, 1969). The variable measured is the degree to which personal subjectivity (felt meaning) enters into verbalizations. Developed as a measure of in-session verbal behavior of clients in psychotherapy, the seven-point scale distinguishes between "low experiencing"(abstract intellectualizations or descriptions of events with little reference to the participant's own personal experience or self-reflections) and "high experiencing" (reflection upon ideas or problematic events in a

way which incorporates one's own subjective experience and allows for change in this experiencing).

Low experiencing correlates with a likelihood of failure in verbal psychotherapy; high experiencing is a client skill which increases the likelihood that the client will profit from verbal psychotherapy (Gendlin, Beebe, Cassens, Klein, & Oberlander, 1968). Gendlin's self-help skill called Focusing, learning to refer to one's own bodily experiencing, has been widely correlated, not just with success in psychotherapy, but with creativity in general (Gendlin et.al, 1968).

A third strand is the personality typology of C.G. Jung (1971) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, 1980) as an empirical measure of it. Jung's typology is based on a number of polarities. One is between **extroversion and introversion**. The extrovert is energized by contact with the external world. The introvert is energized by contact with the internal world. An introvert might be fascinated by Jung's dream theories or by Gendlin's focusing theory, which involves attending to and making careful distinctions in inner experiencing. An extrovert might be fascinated by behavior therapy, the manipulation of external events, or physical medicine. Gendlin's (1981) Focusing training, which places a great deal of emphasis upon learning to "clear a space" in the body, is one method for teaching introversion to extroverts.

Secondly, there are two different modalities for taking in information about the world. "**Sensation**" means perceiving through concrete sense impressions--color, sight, sound. "**Intuition**" means perceiving through a global, intuitive "feel" for the situation. Those preferring "intuition" will resonate with Gendlin's concept of a "felt sense." "Sensors" might tend toward "objectively observable" data, and would have to learn the difference between a concrete sensation like a muscular tightness and the broader, less localized "felt sense."

Thirdly, there are two different ways of judging the information that has been perceived. One is "**thinking**," making judgments according to abstract, impersonal principles. The

other is "**feeling**," making judgments according to personal values, the contextualized effect of the decision on the people involved. Jung(1971) defines "thinking" as follows:

Thinking is the psychological function which, following its own laws, brings the contents of ideation into conceptual connection with one another.. .The term 'thinking,' should, in my view, be confined to the linking up of ideas by means of a concept, in other words, to an act of judgment, no matter whether this act is intentional or not.. .Further, I call directed thinking a rational (q.v.) function, because it arranges the contents of ideation under concepts in accordance with a rational norm of which I am conscious. pp.481-482

Feeling is defined:

Feeling is a process, moreover, that imparts to the content a definite value in the sense of acceptance or rejection ("like" or "dislike")... feeling is a kind of judgment, differing from intellectual judgment in that its aim is not to establish conceptual relations but to set up a subjective criterion of acceptance or rejection.. .Feeling, like thinking, is a rational(q.v.) function, since values in general are assigned according to the laws of reason, just as concepts in general are formed according to these laws.pp.434-435

He states further:

Thinking and feeling (pp.v.) are rational functions in so far as they are decisively influenced by reflection. They function most perfectly when they are in the fullest possible accord with the

laws of reason. The irrational functions, sensation and intuition(pp.v.) , are those whose aim is pure perception; for, as far as possible, they are forced to dispense with the rational (which presupposes the exclusion of everything that is outside reason) in order to attain the most complete perception of the general flux of events.p.459

Again, the emphasis is upon the words judgment and rational. Thinking and feeling are both rational processes, ways of making distinctions and decisions. Not "rational" vs "irrational" or "emotional" vs. "unemotional." Everybody has emotions. Whether these emotions remain primitive and undifferentiated or are subjected to careful discrimination and judgment according to values depends upon the sophistication of the feeling function, just as whether a person's opinions are based upon careful logic or not depends upon the sophistication of their thinking.

There are two other main principles to Jung's theory of psychological types. One is that, throughout the life span, **a person needs to develop facility in the four functions--thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition, as well as in both introversion and extroversion. The midlife crisis is often the psyche's push toward development of the undeveloped potentialities.**

Secondly, initially the person will develop one dominant function and two others as auxiliaries. The fourth function, the one opposite the dominant one, will remain primitive and undeveloped. The person will tend to project this primitiveness upon other people. So the person dominant in sensation thinks the intuitive type is out of touch with reality. The person strongest in intuition thinks the sensation type is shallow and boring. The thinking type thinks the feeling type is overly emotional. The feeling type thinks the thinking type is cold and unemotional.

The true thinking type is not "cold and unemotional" but is seen as such because the feeling type's own inferior thinking is undifferentiated and primitive. The true feeling type is not "irrationally emotional" but is seen as such because the thinking type's own inferior feeling is undifferentiated and primitive.

You will never convince the logician that he/she would be better off with concepts that are tied to experiencing, nor will you get the feeler to be comfortable with manipulating symbols that have only a logical and not an experiential meaning.

Thinking and feeling are evenly distributed in the population but with a gender difference. Six out of ten men prefer thinking judgments. Six out of ten women prefer feeling judgments. So, while there is not a perfect correlation between gender and thinking vs. feeling, the majority of men prefer thinking as a form of judgment, the majority of women prefer feeling.

The majority of those seeking psychotherapy are women because they take comfort in this realm where the work is about human feeling. Yet the dominant theories of how to do therapy, the theories written by thinking and sensing types, are cognitive, analytical, behavioral.

A fourth strand is the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) on moral development. Gilligan was one of the first to point to a blindness in theory produced by the inability of one psychological type to see the experience of the other. While her work has been talked about in terms of a gender difference, I think it more accurately reflects the thinking/feeling dimension as described above.

For many years, Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981) stages of moral development, based upon the logic of the thinking function, had stood as the standard. It had been a mystery that women consistently failed to progress beyond Stage 3 of his six stages. Gilligan

finally solved the problem by finding that women were operating on a totally different continuum, a morality defined, not by abstract immutable and impersonal rules, which did not change from situation to situation, but by judgments according to feeling, personal (lived) value judgments dependent upon seeing people in contexts.

I believe that learning to be moved to tears is integral to learning to operate out of a feeling or value orientation. Tears, sometimes a subtle sheen in the eyes, sometimes deep sobbing, are the harbinger of personal meaning. People cry not just when they are in pain but when they are touched or moved. A feeling type can walk around in tears as a wide and differentiated landscape.

I remember hearing that an Eskimo could distinguish between many kinds of snow, each having a different functional meaning for him. Gendlin has made a world of distinctions in the inner landscape of symbols and experiencing. There is a similarly rich world of kinds of crying, and a relationship between being moved to tears and the careful discrimination of value. I would like the capacity to make distinctions in personal value to be seen as a skill as is the capacity to make logical distinctions.

People who prefer thinking judgment to feeling judgment may have a limited and negative experience with tears and may devalue crying. Yet they will be crippled by this lack of tears in their ability to make value judgments. A major part of an experiential psychotherapy involves teaching clients to welcome their tears as a first step in articulating personal values. I teach clients to find their tears with instructions for focusing upon present experiencing:

“ Can you look in your chest?.. Is there a tightening there, or a lump?...Can you imagine what it would be like if that lump melted a little bit.. .if it became warm...as if you put your arms around it and it became a warm feeling...not just sadness, but

the feeling of being moved or touched...there's a lot of love in that feeling, as well as pain...Can you try to just let the warmth spread, to let the tears well in your eyes if they are there?...I see a sheen of tears in your eyes... can you just notice that and maybe let it come a little bit...just let those tears be here and be very gentle with yourself, loving that little person inside of you who is crying, who is being moved.”

As feelers (the majority being women) learn to strengthen their logical thinking through formal education, thinkers (the majority being men) can strengthen their valuing process through experiential psychotherapy.

Within the arts, academia, and psychotherapy practice, there should be equal representation and credibility for the products of the embodied, be they men or women. This will necessitate procedures for avoiding the denigration of the experiential which can be predicted from the "feeling" blind spot of those "thinking" types, be they men or women, who are in the position of gatekeepers for the society. These will need to acknowledge that "feeling" is an equally valid source of knowledge.

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