

# **Becoming More Human**

## **A Phenomenological Exploration of Embodied Emotional Awareness in Psychotherapy**

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*Dedicated to the Children of this Earth*  
*Remembering who they are*



Glyph of Metamorphosis by Elen Elenna

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## Abstract

This heuristic phenomenological research explores the lived experience of embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy and counselling psychology. The research springs from an embodied perspective of considering all human experiences holistically. It is an embodied research designed and conducted so it gathers data in an embodied way, and attends to the relationship between knowledge and experience, to share a more embodied way of being where understanding and feeling, self and other, inner and outer, head and heart, are intrinsically intertwined. Heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990) along with the researcher's self-inquiry are guiding the study. Additionally, the experience of seven participants is explored with in-depth semi-structured interviews and a research process of reflexive embodied empathy (Finlay, 2005). The analysis using Moustakas's (1990) seven stages of heuristic research reveals five major themes: embodiment is a process, being is feeling, disembodied being, multidimensional being, and relational connection points. The findings show the important and multidimensional connection between the body, emotions and awareness within psychotherapy: the therapist can feel themselves and the client, connect with the client, be aware of the two, discern between the two, choose what to bracket or what to focus on, and choose attitude and action. This research identifies embodied emotional awareness as a way of being where we simultaneously allow ourselves to feel everything in the present moment while staying aware of feeling. It also reveals that embodied emotional awareness is merely one aspect of embodiment, which is a process of integrating the multidimensionality of our whole being and bringing awareness into it. Embodied emotional awareness seems to be contagious; when we become more embodied it has a rippling effect on others. The implication for psychotherapy and counselling psychology is that they need to reintegrate the body into its core practice and training, and as psychotherapists become more embodied, this gets transmitted and supports the clients to become more embodied. Heuristic research is experienced as a multidimensional interactive and synchronistic process of embodiment, intimately intertwined with the researcher's life.



## **Keywords**

Embodiment, Disembodiment, Emotion, Awareness, Psychotherapy, Intersubjectivity, Presence, Heuristic, Phenomenology

## **Statement of Authorship**

This dissertation is written by Alja Lah and has ethical clearance from March 2018 from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University for the Degree of Doctor of Existential Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy. The author reports no conflicts of interest and is alone responsible for the content and writing of the dissertation.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Reflexivity on Discovering the Research Question

*The meaning of my existence is that life has addressed a question to me. Or, conversely, I myself am a question which is addressed to the world, and I must communicate my answer, for otherwise I am dependent upon the world's answer (Jung, 1995, p.350).*

According to Moustakas (1990) it is important to introduce a research manuscript with an elucidation of how our life journey and experience brought us to developing a research question that has personal as well as social relevance. I feel that I embarked on this research journey a long, long time ago. It was sparked by a profound and irresistible longing within my very core, to become wholly who I am, to live each moment fully and freely, to be open to life and to let life flow through me. My research question started with an opening – fresh experience that moved something profoundly and gave birth to a question, curiosity, and possibility.

The heuristic research process begins with the birth of an intimate question that is deeply felt, a question that has a life importance for the researcher and thus cannot be ignored (Moustakas, 1990). For me this kind of intimate question was born when in my personal psychotherapy I experienced a moment of surrendering to my emotional life. It felt like the first time I was open for life to flow through me. That is when I started asking myself: what is this opening and how do we stay open instead of closing down? That question soon transformed into “How do we get in touch with ourselves and how can therapy support us in that? How can we listen to ourselves if we don't even know who we are and thus who to listen to?”

What does it mean and more importantly how does it feel to be human?

Are we fully human? And if not:

How do we become more human?

The world's answer about being human was no longer enough for me and these questions started forming in my being.

*“Does learning how to be human entail learning how to become in touch with our consciousness, our emotions, our body, our soul? Is it about learning how to become more present? Is phenomenological therapy or dialogue actually a call to presence, a call to knowing? Is it a reminder that we already know it all? Is therapy about healing or realigning: becoming in touch with ourselves? How to embody and feel our emotions while staying aware? How to not get ruled by our emotions in reactivity but instead respond to them with awareness? How does this kind of embodied emotional awareness happen in psychotherapy? And can it develop into a way of being instead of merely a moment in therapy?”*

*(Alja, reflexive diary, initial engagement phase)*

Exploring these questions not only feels meaningful and exciting for me personally but also has a potential to clarify an essential aspect of psychotherapy, and with that contribute new knowledge to the profession. According to Jung (1995) each of us has a responsibility to answer the call of the personal question that was birthed with us.

The process of allowing all aspects of researchers' curiosity to come into awareness is essential for the formulation of a clear question (Moustakas, 1990). Thus, connecting together all essential elements described above, the research question evolved into *What is the experience of Embodied Emotional Awareness in Psychotherapy?*

For clarity and focus of this research, a working definition of Embodied Emotional Awareness (EEA) is contrived: *Anchoring awareness into the body and feeling being alive through the body, through the sensations or emotions that arise in the moment.* The definition is developed following other theorists and researchers of these themes, which will be delineated in the next chapter.

## **1.2 The Aims of the Project**

This research project aims to tackle the research question by elucidating embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy and counselling psychology. This aim is achieved by conducting a heuristic phenomenological research that bridges the lived experience of the embodied emotional world and the awareness of what that experience means for psychotherapy and daily living.

A further aim for the way this research is conducted is to consider human beings holistically rather than separating human experience on thoughts, feelings, sensations, inner/outer and so on.

The intent is also to conduct the research in an embodied way, and not just to be research about embodiment. In addition, it intends to convey an embodied way of being through the thesis itself, so that readers are brought back to their own body, back to intimacy with their own emotions and the present moment awareness.

### 1.3 Reflexivity on my Assumptions

By reflecting on the discovery and development of my research question and aims I am also transparent about my assumptions and bias at the beginning of the research process. My general assumption about the research phenomena was that our bodies, emotions and awareness are much more inherently intelligent and capable than we know. In order to access that intelligence we need to let ourselves inhabit our body and feel our emotions. I assumed this was the reason why science has been merely skimming the surface of the vast embodied emotional intelligence. To discover its hidden significance we cannot approach it only with our thinking mind but with our whole feeling being. My bias was also that society in general and most individuals are focused on and function habitually with our thinking intelligence, and often disregard the rest of our being. During the research process, reflexivity, transparency and rigorous application of the phenomenological method are what keeps these assumptions in check, by bracketing my *natural attitude* (Husserl, 1983, p.51) and putting preconceived judgment, ideas, beliefs, and expectations into *epoché* (Husserl, 1982, p.21), which allows a fresh perspective of the researched phenomena to emerge.

## 2 Literature Review

The concept of embodiment cannot be researched without raising the issue of underlying epistemologies and ontologies. Johnson (2008) wrote about the difficulty that embodiment presents to philosophy and research:

One of the hardest tasks you will ever face is coming to terms with the fact of your embodiment. What makes this task so very difficult is the omnipresent idea of disembodied mind and thought that shows itself throughout our intellectual tradition... (p.19).

To consider embodiment seriously we need to question the dualist paradigm of a separate body and mind. The embodied view of existence contradicts the view of intelligence residing in the mind and the body being a mere vehicle for it. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Descartes (1637) presumed segregation between body and mind, the dualist paradigm remained the basis of psychological sciences. Psychology presumes knowledge about experience from researching the 'psyche', placing the body as part of the context (Damasio, 1994). Whereas embodied perspective acknowledges that we are creatures of the 'flesh' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.139; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Similarly, most psychotherapy approaches have the same underpinnings as general psychology. A chapter about 'the body' in *The Handbook of Counselling Psychology* states "the importance of the body is minimised or overlooked altogether in virtually all introductory texts related to psychological therapy, psychotherapy and counselling" (Wahl, 2003, p.592). They seem to address the concept of embodiment merely through the concept of the body, thus reinforcing the dualist paradigm. Even most conventional phenomenological perspectives often fail to recognize and address 'concrete' embodied subjectivity, however there are exceptions, for example corporeal feminism acknowledges the need to consider "how embodiment is lived out in its *specificity*" (Richardson and Harper, 2006, p.2). Feminist scholars have been challenging the artificial separation of reason, continuously emphasizing body-mind integration; in research they propose a



shift from “studying the body as an object of inquiry to using the body as a social category of analysis” (Allegranti, 2011, p.13). Damasio (1994) sought to correct Descartes’ error in order to arrive at a more comprehensive organismic perspective of the human being: “not only must the mind move from a nonphysical cogitum to the realm of biological tissue, but it must also be related to a whole organism possessed of integrated body proper and brain and fully interactive with a physical and social environment” (p.252). This research springs from an embodied view of considering all human experiences holistically rather than separating them into body and mind, likewise the literature review reflects this holistic view.

## **2.1 Literature Search**

The literature search was done using Middlesex University’s electronic databases, British Library databases and Google Scholar. Search terms used were: emotion, affect, embodiment, embodied, disembodied, body, awareness, consciousness, being, psychotherapy, body psychotherapy, counselling psychology, clients, therapeutic relationship, dialogue, intersubjective, relational depth, presence, focusing, existential, phenomenological, heuristic, qualitative, research, inquiry. These search terms were combined together with embodied and/or emotion and/or awareness, in order to produce a more exact and relevant outcome of available literature. Reference lists of retrieved literature were also examined. The results of the literature search yielded literature in the fields of psychotherapy and counselling psychology, psychology, neuroscience and neurophenomenology, mindfulness, existential and eastern philosophy. Included were studies from all of these fields that were focusing on embodiment and emotion, embodiment and awareness within psychology or psychotherapy context and/or were somehow connected with the working definition of embodied emotional awareness. Excluded were studies focusing purely on physical body therapies, and the ones focusing purely on emotion or awareness but not in connection to the body and psychotherapy.

As is usual for heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990) the researcher is open to discover meaning in all life wherever the theme is being expressed. Professors, co-researchers, supervisors, friends suggested some of the literature during the research process. Throughout the thesis I weave text with poetry and other kinds of metaphorical writing, as well as images, as a heuristic embodied expansion into the multidimensional layers of meaning of the associated themes (Moustakas, 1990). All poems that I share are deeply intimate and thus act as a bridge between myself and the content. “Poetry transpires at the juncture between feeling and understanding—and so does the bulk of emotional life.” (Lewis, Amini and Lannon, 2000, p.4). Sometimes pages of writing cannot reach an embodied understanding of an idea, which a poem can achieve in an instant.

The literature review that follows is structured into six parts. Firstly, each element of the concept Embodied Emotional Awareness is explored with the help of chosen literature. Secondly, qualitative research connected to EEA is described. Thirdly, neuroscientific research connected to EEA is mentioned. Then follows a depiction of how psychotherapy and the concept EEA are intertwined. Further a selection of authors and practical or philosophical disciplines that are related with EEA is portrayed. Lastly, the philosophy of some existential authors that in some way link to EEA is discussed. Each of the presented perspectives adds a piece to the outskirts of the puzzle of this complex and elusive concept, and thus creates a frame for the central pieces to be fulfilled with this heuristic research.

## **2.2 Delineation of Concepts**

Embodied Emotional Awareness (EEA) is a phenomenon consisting of three distinct concepts that connect into a greater whole. A description of each concept individually, will make it clearer to subsequently connect them together.

Additionally the concept of intersubjectivity will be explored as it is essentially connected to this research.

### **2.2.1 Embodiment**

The concept of embodiment is used in many different areas with different emphasis. According to The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy (1999) embodiment is the bodily aspects of human subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) account of embodiment distinguishes between the 'objective body' (p. 121), referring to the physiological entity, and the 'phenomenal body' (p. 121), referring to the lived body as an individual experience. Phenomenological meaning of embodiment pertains to the phenomenal body and the role it plays in our lived experience. Johnson (2008) says "Our embodiment shapes both what and how we experience, think, mean, imagine, reason and communicate" (p.19). Bosnak (2007) in his book about embodied imagination defines embodiment as "the fundamental archaic way of knowing" (p.71), it precedes mental and emotional knowing. Macdonald, Hargreaves and Miell (2002) view embodiment as the biological and physical presence of our bodies, a necessary precondition for subjectivity, emotion, language, thought and social interaction. Allegranti (2011) depicts embodied experience as autobiographical, relational, political and kinaesthetic. Koch and Fuch (2011) write: "Embodiment denominates a field of research, in which the reciprocal influence of the body as a living, animate, moving organism on the one side and cognition, emotion, perception and action on the other side is investigated with respect to the expressive and impressive functions, on three levels: the individual, the interactional, and the extended level." (p.276). In his biography, Albert Einstein (2011) reveals how his bodily enlivening physical sensations in the form of tingling and vibrations inspired insights that led him to some of his great discoveries. Relatedly Nietzsche (1969) wrote "the body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with one sense" (p. 61) and this is the aspect of embodiment that will be referred to in this study – the embodiment of intelligence, or in other words the inherent intelligence of the whole being.

## 2.2.2 Emotion

William James (1884) wrote an article ‘What is an emotion?’ published in the philosophy journal *Mind*. He asked a question: If you see a bear in the woods, do you run because you are afraid or are you afraid because you run? James’s thesis was that “bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion” (p.190). According to James (1884) emotion is perception of embodiment and thus embodiment precedes emotional awareness. On the contrary Walter Cannon, the experimental physiologist and author of *Wisdom of the Body* (1927), who had explored the workings of the vagus nerve, postulated that the hypothalamus of the brain was the seat of the emotions. For a long time, the view of general psychology was similarly that mental perception of the world arouses the mental affection called emotion and this reflects in the body’s reaction and manifestation. For example, De Sousa (2010) defines emotions as affective responses to certain situations, involving evident bodily changes and motivating a specific behavior. Further on Fuchs and Koch (2014) have defined an embodied and extended concept of emotions:

Emotions result from the body's own feedback and the circular interaction between affective affordances in the environment and the subject's bodily resonance, be it in the form of sensations, postures, expressive movements, or movement tendencies. Through its resonance, the body functions as a medium of emotional perception. (p.9).

Before going further, it is pertinent to explore the distinction between feeling, emotion and affect. Scientists, psychotherapists and philosophers use and define these concepts without having a definitive or consensual understanding. Often they are used interchangeably without any attempt of conceptual differentiation (Ott, 2017; Batson, Shaw, and Oleson, 1992). The process of using language to label our emotional experience allows us to communicate and make sense of it. Also, it might have been evolutionary adaptive but in essence it cannot capture our experience: “Because emotion is dynamic and constantly shifting, it is

difficult to capture in static categories.” (Greenberg, Malberg and Tompkins, 2019, p.4).

According to Tomkins’s (1982) theory of primary affects, an affect is “the primary motivational system ... innate biological ... mechanism” (p. 354) involving stimulus and response. It is distinguished from feeling, which he regarded as conscious awareness of an affect, and emotion, as the combination of an affect, a feeling, and memory of previous experiences of the originating affect. Similarly, Greenberg and Paivio (2003) suggest that affect is an unconscious biological response to stimulation, encompassing autonomic, physiological, motivational, and neural processes involved in the evolutionary adaptive behavioural response system; feeling involves awareness of these basic affect sensations; and emotion is an experience that results from integrating evoking situations, feeling, action tendencies and the self, thus emotion gives subjective meaning to our experience. Shouse (2005) describes affect as “the body’s way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience.” (p.1). Damasio (1999) doesn’t use the term affect and defines feeling as a “private, mental experience of an emotion” (p.54), while emotion for him is a collection of responses, some of which can also be observed outwardly. Similarly, Fogel (2009) distinguishes feeling as sensation that is experienced as coming from our own bodies, from emotion as the embodied evaluation of that feeling. Furthermore, Masters (2013) suggests emotion includes feeling, context, cognition, social and historical factors, and related action tendencies as well as the interplay between all four, making it a highly complex composition.

Taking all of the above into account it is clear that affect cannot be the subject of phenomenological exploration. The body has a grammar of its own, thus affect cannot be expressed in language because it is always outside of consciousness (Massumi, 2002). Accordingly the focus of this research are feelings and emotions, with an understanding of emotions as a more autobiographically and socially complex composition of feelings, and all the while staying as close as

possible to the phenomenology of subjective experience rather than getting lost in definitions and labels.

One of the aims of this research is becoming aware of the phenomenology of emotions in order to better understand ourselves and our engagement with the world. The evolving widespread acknowledgement of the embodied extended view of emotions and psychobiological states in both research and clinical practice (Willis and Cromby, 2020; Payne, 2017) is already suggesting an intertwining of the two concepts embodiment and emotions.

### **2.2.3 Awareness**

In this study the term 'awareness' is used instead of 'being' or 'presence' or 'consciousness' because it implies a certain all-encompassing openness. Damasio (1999) uses the term consciousness and defines it as an "organism's awareness of its own self and surroundings" (p.7). Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes about consciousness as "a light which does not change its character with the various objects which it shines upon" (p.32). He sees consciousness coming to light through the body: "Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body." (p.160). For him "perception is inseparable from the consciousness which it has, or rather is, of reaching the thing itself" (p.436). Thus, perception is meant here as awareness of sensations through the senses. Crowdes (2000) refers to awareness as 'conscious embodiment' and believes that if we follow the path of our awareness back to the point of origin we arrive at the point where we first felt it in our bodies. Brown (2010) describes present moment awareness as a "state of being as opposed to something we do." (p.5). Husserl (1983) believed that we can draw away from our natural habit of unawareness and become more aware about what is going on in us and around us. Maté (2003) argues that developing awareness means regaining our lost capacity to perceive emotional reality. For that we need to pay constant attention to our emotional states and learn to trust them more than our thoughts. Adding

the concept of awareness to the already discussed embodiment and emotions expresses the importance of not merely letting ourselves feel the emotions but also having an awareness of them.

#### **2.2.4 Embodied Emotional Awareness – Greater Whole**

Each of the concepts, embodiment, emotions, awareness, has been delineated separately, so now they can be connected together into a greater whole. For the purpose of guiding and focusing this research a preliminary definition of embodied emotional awareness is developed: *anchoring awareness into the body and feeling being alive through the body, through the sensations or emotions that arise in the moment*. Similarly, Levine (2010) defines embodiment as the “gaining, through the vehicle of awareness, the capacity to feel the ambient physical sensations of unfettered energy and aliveness as they pulse through our bodies” (p.279). It is not merely being aware of the body but experiencing the world through the whole body, rather than only through thoughts. Fogel (2009) coined the concept ‘embodied self-awareness’ and defines it as the “ability to pay attention to ourselves, to feel our sensations, emotions, and movements online, in the present moment, without the mediating influence of judgmental thoughts” (p.1). He contrasts it to conceptual self-awareness, where we think about the self and our experience. It is a kind of shift of attention from thinking our thoughts and observing our emotions, to observing our thoughts and feeling our emotions.

Damasio (1999) emphasizes three distinct although closely related phenomena: “an emotion, the feeling of that emotion, and knowing that we have a feeling of that emotion” (p.12). There is a similarity between these three phenomena and the concept of EEA: emotional – emotion, embodied – the feeling of emotion, and awareness – knowing that we have a feeling of that emotion. According to Damasio (1999) consciousness must be present if feelings are to influence the subject having them beyond the immediate here and now. There is significance in this idea, suggesting that the ultimate consequences of human emotion

depend on consciousness: “although emotion and consciousness are different phenomena, their underpinnings may be connected” (p.47).

In embodied emotional awareness there is a sense of letting go to what is and letting oneself be moved by it. Buber (1955) puts it best:

Then he intervenes no more, but at the same time he does not let things merely happen. He listens to what is emerging from himself, to the course of being in the world; not in order to be supported by it, but in order to bring it to reality as it desires (p.67).

By now the complexity of the concept of embodied emotional awareness as well as its elusiveness is becoming apparent. This research builds on the existing theories by connecting these concepts together and exploring them from an embodied holistic perspective. It also takes on the challenge of expressing something with thoughts that seems to exist on a much more complex dimension of being.

### **2.2.5 Intersubjectivity – The Pervading Principle**

The concept of intersubjectivity within the topic of this research is significant because it touches upon the role that embodiment, emotions and awareness play in connecting human beings. There are various perspectives and definitions of intersubjectivity; in an attempt to organize different theories of intersubjectivity some researchers have even proposed ‘forms of intersubjectivity’ (Beebe et al., 2005, p.xix). However, in this research the focus will be on phenomenological and embodied perspectives: “Intersubjectivity is bound to our embodied presence and self-other relatedness.” (Samaritter and Payne, 2013, p.143).

Phenomenologists Husserl (1983) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) used the concept of intersubjectivity in their explorations of subject’s experiences of being in the world with others. Husserl (1983) stated “the intersubjective world is the



correlate of intersubjective experience, i.e., experience mediated by ‘empathy’” (p.363), which is for him an embodied relationship. Merleau-Ponty (1962) further developed this view of human being as inextricably intertwined with the world and others: “I am all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and historical situation, but, on the contrary, by being this body and this situation, and through them, all the rest” (1962, p.525). He believed it is our embodiment that allows us to perceive and relate with another person.

Elaborating on these views, Fuchs and Koch (2014) suggest emotions are essentially relational, therefore not only individual, but are primarily shared states that we experience through interaffectivity: “our body is affected by the other’s expression, and we experience the kinetics and intensity of his emotions through our own bodily kinaesthesia and sensation” (p.5). Similarly, Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009) write about intercorporeality as a “bodily link that allows emotions to immediately affect the other and thus enables empathic understanding” (p.7). They describe an intersubjective experience happening through intercorporeal participation in shared dynamic whole body actions: “in which each lived body reaches out to embody the other” (p.474). We experience the other’s emotional expression through our bodies. At the same time the other experiences a bodily resonance with us; thus a mutual intersubjective embodied emotionality is created through and in between us. These contemporary phenomenologists describe intersubjectivity as embodied, socially adapted actions between subjects, indicating a step beyond the dualist paradigm that no longer separates the brain from the body.

Intersubjectivity also pierces the paradigm of separate selves. While rejecting the limited view of self as subject, Allegranti (2011) argues for embodied intersubjectivity recognising that “selves are co-created within a network of others” (p.116). She reframes Stern’s (2004) postulation “two minds create intersubjectivity. But equally intersubjectivity shapes two minds” (p.78) into: “two bodies create intersubjectivity and embodied intersubjectivity shapes us from the cellular to the cerebral” (p.27). Allegranti and Silas (2021) reconsider the fixity of selves within the concept of individualism, suggesting instead, that

“we are processual beings, unbound and that more-than-human relating is an Intra-active Signature: a distributed and dynamic process” (p.7). With that they propose a process perspective of humans and relating.

Some researchers within the dance movement psychotherapy research argue about the important role of kinaesthesia in human relating (Allegranti and Silas, 2021; Allegranti, 2019; Sheets-Johnstone, 2018; Samaritter and Payne, 2013; Fischman, 2009). Kinaesthesia is the awareness of positioning and movement of the body or the “process of sensing through movement” (Rova, 2017, p.29). Kinaesthesia in relating refers to our proprioceptive sense making within relationship: “Body-informed intersubjectivity emerges from attentive, kinaesthetic orientation towards a shared ‘in-between’” (Samaritter and Payne, 2013, p.149). Claxton (2015) portrays kinaesthetic embodiment as bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence: “deepest, oldest, most fundamental and most important intelligence” (p.9). Allegranti (2019) describes the neologism ‘kin-aesthesia’ as including three aspects: the sense of movement, the aesthetic process in forming movement, and the emergent material kinship (including ethics and politics) during the process of movement relating. Allegranti and Silas (2021) recognise an essential aspect of kin-aesthetic relating which is “that our moving bodies are never neutral and that (bio-psycho-social) layers of gender, sex, sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, dis/ability, size, age, home/place/space - our intersecting ‘body politics’ - are ever present and visible” (p.4), impacting our private and social lives in sometimes subtle, taken for granted and yet powerful ways. A ‘political body’ (Allegranti, 2011, p.154) is developed from personal experiences of power or disempowerment and deeply embedded into every aspect of our lives.

In sum, intersubjectivity, embodiment, emotionality, awareness, kinaesthesia, and affectivity are not only integral to being human but essential dimensions of human experience. As Sheets-Johnston (2018) exclaims, “They do indeed matter” (p.24) and are the cornerstone of this research on becoming more human, with intention to explore them further in the context of psychotherapy.

## 2.3 Qualitative Research Connected with EEA

There is an increasing amount of research exploring concepts of embodiment, emotions and awareness; this research advances the existing contemporary research with its methodological approach and integration of the concepts. Thus, this chapter looks at a selection of qualitative research on individual concepts: embodiment, emotion, or awareness within psychotherapy or counselling psychology that are somehow related with the topic and aim of this study. In the end the common findings of these studies are outlined and the uniqueness of this research is discussed.

Lodge (2010) conducted a qualitative study looking at the experience of emotional connection in therapy from both clients' and therapists' perspectives. It was a heuristic enquiry exploring the experiences of five client/therapist pairs including the researcher and the researcher's therapist. The main findings were: (1) emotional connection was experienced on two different levels: a conscious, articulated level (the 'manifest level') and an unarticulated, subliminal level (the 'hidden level'); (2) emotional connection was connected to client change on both levels; (3) the main 'work' of therapy took place on the manifest level; (4) however, healing of the client's deepest, or primary hurt, took place at the hidden level; (5) at the hidden level there was a good emotional match between the client and therapist. The findings that the healing within therapy may not always be under our conscious control and that a good fit at an emotional level between client and therapist is significant, point at the importance of further exploration of embodied emotional awareness within therapy.

Brown (2014) also explored the emotional experience of the psychotherapeutic relationship for existential therapists using hermeneutic phenomenology. Eight existential therapists were interviewed. Five themes emerged: the primacy of emotions in therapy relationship, the emotional work required by the therapist, the fact that emotions are embodied, the idea that the relationship is the therapy, and the idea of the dance of therapy and moments of meeting. The findings,

similarly to those of Lodge (2010), suggest “that it is what takes place in the emotional relationship between client and existential therapist that is relevant, both at a manifest verbal level and at a more implicit bodily level” (p.170). The implications of the study were a call for increased awareness and focus on the emotional work of psychotherapy in training and practice as well as further qualitative research that delves into more specific aspects of emotions in therapy, which shows importance of research of EEA.

Baillie (2012) researched the usefulness of the concept of embodiment to counselling psychologists working with individuals diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. Adopting hermeneutic methodology, she conducted semi-structured interviews with eight practitioners of psychotherapy about their work with these individuals. They were also invited to respond to a Merleau-Ponty quotation regarding embodiment and to consider its usefulness in their work. Asking participants to respond to a quotation about embodiment is a way of bringing embodiment into the interviews but it still seems like trying to research the body when actually researching what the mind thinks about the body. The findings of the research suggest, “engaging with embodied views highlights the embedded nature of being, opens up ambiguity, challenges dichotomies and acknowledges non-psychological aspects of existence and practice” (p.3).

Danielsson and Rosberg (2015) explored the experience of basic body awareness therapy (BBAT) in 15 persons diagnosed with major depression. They used hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, and in order to get richer data the interview focused on each participant’s description of a concrete moment from treatment, as well as using follow-up questions about sensory dimensions of the experience (for example presence of emotions, ambience in the room). The researchers also tried doing BBAT movements together with the interviewees during the interview to enable more immediate ‘lived through’ experiential description but did not find that useful because “a gap remained between verbal accounts and tacitly working with the body” (p.11). Nevertheless, this experience provided the researchers with an embodied dimension for the interpretation of data gathered. Participants’ experiences were essentially grasped as a process of

enhanced existential openness, opening toward corporeal, emotional, temporal, and relational aspects of life. Five constituents of this meaning were described: vitality springing forth, grounding oneself, recognizing patterns in one's body, grasping the vagueness, and being acknowledged and allowed to be oneself. Participants found that increasing body awareness also increased emotional awareness, making them "emotionally able to take in more of the outer world" (p.7). This finding confirms the connection of the body, emotions and awareness that is implied within the EEA concept.

Similarly, Hedlund and Gyllensten (2010) conducted a qualitative study interviewing eight participants with diagnosed schizophrenia about their experience of psychotherapy with BBAT. The interview transcriptions were analysed with content analysis methodology. Four main categories were identified: affect regulation, body awareness and self-esteem, effects described in a social context, and effects on the ability to think. Participants reported positive effects of BBAT; they became more aware of different emotions, their emotional state changed, and they gained a feeling of security and ability to protect their integrity. These findings also show an important connection between embodiment, emotions and awareness.

Dinas (2012) conducted a qualitative study exploring the experiences of ten therapists and two clients who have had Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, and in particular, how they experienced the work with the body in therapy. Sensorimotor Psychotherapy is an approach based on contemporary philosophies of embodiment and neurobiological evidence of the effect of trauma on the body. An inductive thematic analysis of interview transcripts generated four main themes: accessing the truth through the body, dilemmas of mind and body, the elusiveness of words, and change occurs through and within the body. The findings show that by working primarily with the body there is the possibility of accessing the direct core of traumatic experience, and that parts of this process were difficult to describe in words.

Galon (2018) used hermeneutic phenomenology to explore the components of the therapeutic processes used in trauma-informed Dance Movement Psychotherapy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Dance Movement Psychotherapy and Body Psychotherapy practitioners. Additionally, heuristic inquiry was utilised as an embodied and creative practice to synthesise the findings from the interviews. Findings suggest that the therapeutic process for treating trauma comprises several identifiable therapeutic elements: embodied resourcing, witnessing, narrative, ritual and joy. These all supported the processing, integration and relative resolution of trauma experiences. Applied embodiment and creativity were found to be empowering and seen to facilitate a manageable and paced access to traumatic material.

Rova (2017) conducted a practice-based embodied interdisciplinary study exploring 'kinaesthetic empathy' as an intersubjective phenomenon within clinical practice. The mixed-methods research included: qualitative inquiry (experiential dance work, phenomenological focus groups and questionnaires) and quantitative findings (electrical measures of brain activity using electroencephalography, EEG). The qualitative analysis of the focus groups fieldwork generated six thematic components of kinaesthetic empathy: kinetic attunement, familiarity, intersubjectivity, socio-political dynamics, embodied knowing, and mirroring. Kinaesthetic empathy as an embodied intersubjective psychosocial phenomenon seems to be related to EEA "as the bridge between lived (affective) experience and social cognition." (p.206).

Lussier-Ley (2010) conducted a self-study to reflect on own embodied experiences and the role of the body in consulting practice in sport and performance psychology with athletes and dancers. The findings of a narrative analysis of one's own emerging autobiographical experiences show the importance of learning to trust feelings, learning to let go, and learning that I matter. An embodied perspective appears to be an important part of healthy therapeutic relationships when integrated into a reflective, consulting, educational practice, which is further support for more research on embodiment within therapeutic context.

Shaw (2004) conducted a study exploring psychotherapists' somatic experiences during the therapeutic encounter. The methodology evolved from three discussion groups, which led to a series of 14 in-depth interviews and two professional discussion groups. A grounded-theory analysis generated first-order themes: physical reactions, communications, styles, and second-order themes: body empathy, body as receiver, and body management. The grounded theory of psychotherapist embodiment has revealed that therapists use their somatic experiences named 'embodied therapeutic knowledge' (p.283) to help them navigate the complexities of the therapeutic encounter. The importance of this study for EEA is the emphasis of the lived-body experience of therapists for engaging with the therapeutic encounter.

Sheedy (2013) researched what happens between the bodies of the therapist and the client in a psychotherapeutic setting. A descriptive phenomenological design was adopted using a grounded theory methodology. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 therapists about their experience of embodied interaction with clients. Five categories emerged: Body to Body, Connection, Somatic Experiencing of Other, Embodied Process, and Intersubjective Space. Based on the findings a coherent theoretical framework for an Implicit Relational Model of what happens between bodies was built, which shows that the body of the therapist registers a considerable amount of intersubjective somatic information.

Mayer (2015) conducted a qualitative study of relational understanding of embodied therapeutic relationships. Four body-focused practitioners were interviewed about their experience of embodied relating. The researcher also personally experienced a therapy session with each of the participants, which seems like a good way of gaining an embodied perspective on the research. Three core themes were identified: Embodied Awareness and Sense of Personhood, Intersubjectivity and Authentic Use of Self, and Mind-Body Connection, Disconnection and Reconnection. All four participants recognised mind-body unity as underpinning their practice as well as the therapeutic



relationship indeed being an embodied relationship. Mayer (2015) thus proposed a “reauthorisation of the body as an essential part of the therapeutic relationship” (p.5).

Tapie (2019) conducted a hermeneutic phenomenological study of seven female therapists’ experience of the intersubjective dimension within the therapeutic encounter and how the awareness of this intersubjective embodiment impacts on them and their therapeutic practice. Finlay’s and Evans’ (2009) relational centred approach was chosen as a method and unstructured interviews were conducted. The findings of this research show how therapists use their fundamental embodied interconnectedness in the service of clients by accessing a form of direct embodied knowledge, and use it as a compass to navigate the encounter. The researcher believes the findings of fundamental embodied interconnectedness challenge the current ideas on boundaries in the therapeutic relationship.

Sultan (2017) conducted a heuristic inquiry using creative, relational, and reflexive approaches to illuminate the experiences of six body psychotherapists and the perceived impact of embodiment on clients. The open-ended interviews were done from a relational and embodied perspective. The researcher kept a reflexive journal of the research process but did not include their own explorative reflection of the phenomena. Within two main themes a few subthemes emerged. (a) Meaning and use of therapist embodiment: somatic experience and bodily awareness, presence and attunement, allowing and accepting, creating a shared experience, and therapist embodiment practices. (b) Perceived impact of therapist embodiment on clients: trust, safety, and support; connection, energy, and flow; and authenticity. The findings highlighted the capacity of embodiment to support the therapeutic relationship. The more attuned and aware of the somatic experience clinicians are, the more they can use it as information to guide the therapeutic process, and the more presence and acceptance they bring to the therapeutic encounter. According to Sultan embodiment is a relational dynamic process that may be encouraged or inhibited, with implications for counsellor training and self-care.



Tweedie (2015) conducted a heuristic self-search inquiry of becoming a counsellor through learning to tolerate uncertainty. The researcher explored her own learning process to show how reflection on personal issues triggered by experiences of uncertainty in therapy helped to develop emotional availability necessary for therapeutic 'use of self'. With that she moved from a conceptual to an embodied understanding, which made her more present and vulnerable with clients. Tweedie concludes that accessing emotional awareness and bringing one's vulnerable self into the counselling relationship may be key to reaching the greatest level of therapeutic work possible, and thus this is additional support for more research on EEA.

King (2017) used hermeneutic phenomenology to explore how Openness enables the dialectic between disclosure and concealment in the therapeutic space. The study was guided by Heidegger's image of a forest clearing – a metaphor for the Openness of Being. Data was gathered from interviews with four psychotherapists, exploration of metaphor, and the researcher's anecdotal writings. The researcher discerned three broad aspects to Openness: Presence, Surrender and Mystery. The key finding of the research was that the embodied nature of Openness is presence rather than a philosophical concept applied to the work, which connects to the aim of this study to explore embodied knowing rather than an intellectual one. The transition from an intellectual understanding of Openness to an embodiment of Openness came with surrendering and learning to trust the intuition. Similarly to Tweedie (2015), the researcher "acknowledges the difficulties experienced by therapists in staying with anxiety, evoked by the uncertainty and mystery of Openness" (p.9).

All of the above-mentioned qualitative studies in one way or another emphasise the therapeutic importance of the body of the therapist and/or the client. They all seem to have a shared intent to "take the body seriously" (Willis and Cromby, 2020, p.2). An essential conclusion of many studies is the therapist's use of the information received from their own body for engaging with and navigating the therapeutic process and relationship (Shaw, 2004; Sheedy, 2013; Tapie, 2019;

Sultan, 2017). Another key finding is the importance of the embodied intersubjective relationship between the therapist and client (Lussier-Ley, 2010; Sheedy, 2013; Mayer, 2015; Tapie, 2019; Sultan, 2017). The foundational work of therapy seems to happen in the relationship between the therapist and the client, at a manifest verbal level but even more so at an implicit bodily level, where emotional match between therapist and client is important (Lodge, 2010; Brown, 2014). It also appears that the more embodied and aware therapists are, the more presence, acceptance, openness and emotional availability they bring to the therapeutic relationship (Sultan, 2017; Tweedie, 2015; King, 2017). Another important finding is the role of psychotherapy in promoting a dialogue between the client's body and mind, and thus the need for integration of emotional, cognitive, and communicational processes (Mayer, 2015).

Body-focused therapy was explored within the context of various issues like anorexia nervosa (Baillie, 2012), major depression (Danielsson and Rosberg, 2015), schizophrenia (Hedlund and Gyllensten, 2010), trauma (Dinas, 2012; Galon, 2018). The findings of these studies suggest the benefit and importance of working with the body in therapy. It helped the participants come to greater body and emotional awareness (Danielsson and Rosberg, 2015; Hedlund and Gyllensten, 2010), gain a feeling of empowerment, security and ability to protect their integrity (Hedlund and Gyllensten, 2010; Galon, 2018), and it allowed a direct access to the core of traumatic experience and the ability of manageable and paced processing and integration of traumatic material (Dinas, 2012; Galon, 2018).

It seems that contemporary psychotherapy is growing out of the mind-body dichotomy and is rather assuming a holistic way to explore human experience, including the development and promotion of a greater embodied awareness of the client and therapist (Marmeleira and Santos, 2019; Music, 2015; Mayer, 2015). Favouring embodiment within psychotherapy and research further emphasises that human being cannot be reduced to mere cognitive information processing (Willis and Cromby, 2020). All of the above-mentioned qualitative studies in some manner address embodiment, emotions or awareness within the

psychotherapeutic field, however none of them quite in the embodied way this study intends to. Although theoretically many studies adopt the non-dualist stance, it seems that practically the applied methodology does not manage to bridge the gap between body and mind. As Sela-Smith (2002) remarked, many appear to focus on thinking and observing experience rather than focussing on feeling an experience. This study intends to transcend the dualist paradigm by embodying the researched experience. Not reducing the body to a separate and abstract idea, memory or concept but instead regarding it as lived phenomena, inextricably intertwined with the whole human being, always in relation with others and the world (Merleau- Ponty, 1962). There are two important aspects of qualitative research embracing a more holistic way of exploring human experience (Willis and Cromby, 2020) that this study intends to include. Firstly, there is a focus on understanding concrete examples of phenomena instead of viewing them in generalised or abstract terms. Secondly, there is a need for conceptualisation of the relationship between felt and represented aspects of phenomena, therefore the lived experience and the manner of sharing it needs to be carefully bridged.

## **2.4 Neuroscientific Research Connected with EEA**

The thriving field of neuroscience has a wealth of research on embodiment, emotion and awareness. However, it cannot be considered without raising the question of the underlying paradigm. Natural sciences, as well as most of philosophy, have chosen to ignore the fundamental circularity in scientific method: “we are in a world that seems to be there before reflection begins, but that world is not separate from us” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, 1991, p.3). Neuroscience acknowledges the connection between the brain and the rest of our being: body, emotions, thoughts... (Brodie, 2015). However, consciousness is still seen as a function of brain chemistry and anatomy, while psychosomatic effects are mostly seen as a one-way cause and effect rather than an interconnectedness of our whole being. This indicates a dualistic paradigm

pervading neuroscientific research. Allegranti and Silas (2021) argue that cognitive neuroscience is “fundamentally reductive in nature, in that it aims to explain mental phenomena by the study of their constitutive mechanisms and functional properties” (p.2). They recognise the insufficiency of correlating only brain data with behaviour, and propose to situate it within wider interdisciplinary understanding of bodies relating.

Candice Pert (1997), in her revolutionary book *Molecules of emotion: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine*, describes her insight into the resolution of a brain versus body debate, whose origins went back over a century: “Why, it’s both! It’s not either/or; in fact, it’s both and neither! It’s simultaneous—a two-way street,” (p.337). Every change in the physiological state is accompanied by an appropriate change in the mental emotional state, and vice versa every change in the mental emotional state, is accompanied by an appropriate change in the physiological state (Pert, 1997). This was an immense step in recognising that our mental, emotional and physical selves are intertwined.

Seth and Tsakiris (2018) propose that experiences of selfhood, such as being and having a body, social self and reflective self-awareness, as well as emotional experiences (Seth, 2013), are grounded in processes of instrumental interoceptive inference in which actions are control oriented and serve primarily to regulate perceptual variables. These processes further support allostatic regulation of physiological essential variables. Interoceptive inference is hypothesised to engage an extended autonomic neural substrate with emphasis on the anterior insular cortex. Seth and Tsakiris (2018) suggest that “mind and self cannot be understood without deep appreciation of the constraints and opportunities afforded by embodiment and allostasis” (p.979), which is a form of regulation that emphasises the process of achieving stability through change. They hence show how “perception of the world around us, and of ourselves within it, happens with, through, and because of our living bodies” (p.969).

The developing field of cognitive science and specifically ‘embodied cognition’, views cognition as grounded in aspects of its sensorimotor embodiment and is

the result of a dynamic interaction of ‘nonneural and neural processes’ (Varga, 2018, p.254). Therefore “intelligent behaviour emerges from the interplay between brain, body, and the world, and that this interplay is termed embodied, embedded cognition” (Payne, 2017, p.164). Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), use the term ‘embodied action’ meaning a dynamic interaction between an acting organism and its environment: “sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition” (p.173). They describe the scientifically observed interdependence between structure and behaviour or experience upon reflection becomes interdependency of scientific description and our own cognitive structure. Furthermore, we find ourselves performing that act of reflection out of a background of biological, social and cultural beliefs and practices. But then on further reflection these are all philosophical thoughts of a supposedly embodied individual, which brings us to an interdependency of the background and embodiment. They suggest rather than adding more layers of continued abstraction, we should go back to the concreteness and particularity of our own experience. The fundamental insight of their enactive approach is seeing “our activities as reflections of a structure without losing sight of the directness of our own experience” (p.12). A pluralistic society needs to embrace both science and the truth of human experience. With this in mind, Varela (1996) envisioned connecting phenomenological and neuroscientific research within a field called neurophenomenology, consisting of two equally balanced areas of first-person and third-person research, each from its own side, bridging the epistemological gap into a unified body of knowledge.

Neuroscience is also interested in Intersubjectivity. Gallagher (2008) connects phenomenology to neuroscience by comprehending intersubjectivity as a neuronal bridge between self and other, referring to the function of a mirror neuron system. Mirror neurons were initially observed in primates and fire when an animal acts or when it observes that same action in another animal (Gallese et al., 1996). The power of ‘mirroring’ or ‘resonance behaviour’ is immense, with vast implications for psychotherapy and self-healing. It is not just in how we act, but also in what we observe, those we interact with and especially what we imagine, that triggers these neurons and makes us into what we are and

who we become (McGilchrist, 2009). Mirror neurons might as well be the neurological basis of embodiment and the process observed and experienced in therapeutic emotional resonance and regulation (Shore, 2012), as well as kinaesthetic empathy (Fischman, 2009), authentic movement (Pallaro, 1999) and dance/movement therapy (Berroll, 2006). From a more developmental perspective, Stern (1985) considers 'affect attunement' as the most universal feature of 'intersubjective relatedness' (p.138). For such parent/infant 'mirroring' and 'empathic responsiveness' to occur they must go beyond mere behaviour imitation into an intersubjective sharing of affect, which was also explored by Bebee (1973). Stern (1985) describes affect attunement as "the performance of behaviors that express the quality of feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioral expression of the inner state" (p.142). Similarly, Ammaniti and Gallese (2014) suggest that intersubjectivity is at the core of the formation of the self from early infancy, in interactions with significant others. Intersubjectivity comprises "the mapping of the other onto the self, reciprocated by the mapping of the self onto the other" (p.8). According to them it develops from sensorimotor processing of events that are coded by mirror neurons and organise into complex socioemotional and cognitive relationship dynamics. The discovery of mirror neurons opened the possibility to comprehend intersubjectivity and social cognition from a neuroscientific perspective that highlights the fundamental role of the acting body (Gallese, 2014).

Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991) concluded, "Experience and scientific understanding are like two legs without which we cannot walk" (p.14). And so, psychotherapy and neuroscientific research could complement each other. Embodiment in particular is deeply embedded within both fields, as it questions the separation between neurology and psychology, cognition and consciousness, self and other. It seems the more these fields interact with each other, the more they recognise the embodied nature of human beings and move beyond the dualist paradigm.

## **2.5 Psychotherapy and EEA**

### **2.5.1 Re-Turning to the Body**

An increasing shift in psychotherapy is beginning to acknowledge the importance of including the body as an integrated aspect of being human and therefore an integral part of the psychotherapeutic process. Totton (2005) provocatively used the term 'holistic psychotherapy', acknowledging that 'mind' does not function over and against 'body', but that the two are complementary and ultimately only facets of the same whole" (p.1). In its early beginnings, embodied psychotherapy was best known for its historic emphasis on emotional release (Reich, 1972; Groddeck, 1977). All the way into the 1990s it was pushed into the periphery of the personal growth movement (Payne et al., 2018) and the radical fringe of psychotherapy (Totton, 2005). The central reason for this was our "culture's drastic inhibition concerning embodiment, its tendency to fear and despise the body and all its works" (Totton, 2005, p.3). Lately embodiment is getting more respect and acknowledgement in psychotherapeutic circles (Marmeleira and Santos, 2019). Psychotherapists are beginning to understand that knowledge derived from the body is fruitful for healing: "embodied experience is the very source of present moment experience and cannot be replaced by thinking about a problem or situation" (Payne et al. 2018, p.10). Following is an exploration of the connection between the embodied emotional awareness and psychotherapeutic practice, past and present.

### **2.5.2 Groddeck on the Unity of Mind and Body**

Groddeck (1977) theorised about the connection between the mind and the body in his work on psychosomatic medicine. He believed the distinction between body and mind is not essential, instead body and mind are one unit, and they contain an 'It', a force which lives us while we believe we are living. He refused to



separate mind from body from world, meaning that they are inseparable. According to him we need to see the whole in the part and the part in the whole. His insight foreshadowed Merleau-Ponty's in that incarnate consciousness is the central phenomenon of which mind and body are abstract ideas. The essential idea in his approach was searching for the meaning of a disease for the person as a protective function. Groddeck also believed in the immediacy of being, expressed through the feeling and felt body, and that the more the doctor is instead of does, the more the patient can use him.

### **2.5.3 Reich on Reading Emotional Expression**

Reich (1972) had an interest in the embodied basis of emotional communication and intersubjectivity. He was one of the first who worked systematically with the bodily aspect of clients' experience, not only considering verbal association but also reading the body's emotional expressions. He believed all past experiences to be embodied in the present in the form of 'character attitudes' (p.128), and thus he was paying attention to embodied communications – language of facial and body expression. By character attitude he meant the total impression, which the organism makes on us. He had the "ability to sense others' emotions before they have manifested themselves" (Reich, 1994, p.19). Such sensing of others' emotions comes about through a process of inner imitation: "The patient's expressive movements involuntarily bring about an imitation in our own organism. By imitating these movements, we 'sense' and understand the expression in ourselves and, consequently, in the patient." (1972, p. 362).

### **2.5.4 Finlay on Therapist Being as Presence**

Finlay (2015) describes six ways of therapist Being as 'Presence' (p.173) which I will delineate briefly as each way has something in common with embodied emotional awareness. *Being open* (p.174) involves embracing a



phenomenological attitude of curiosity and humility that brackets 'knowing'. Instead there is a trust in the process and openness to be surprised and touched in it. *Being in the here-and-now* (p.3) is being present in an embodied way to co-created here-and-now moment-to-moment encounter. The focus is on immediate conscious experience and responses (related to self and other). These two ways of being open and being in the here and now seem like the prerequisite for embodied emotional awareness. *Being empathically attuned* (p.54) means that the therapist deeply and sensitively listens, resonates and kinaesthetically 'feels into' the world of the client in a fluidly responsive way. With that the therapist senses the client on various levels: emotional, physical and intellectual, and moves with the client in a contact-enhancing way. Attuning to the client's embodied experience offers a context where emotions can be expressed, mirrored and held, and where behaviour may be respectfully challenged and safely boundaried. *Being reflexive* (p.206) is the therapist's capacity to be critically self-aware of their own process, blindspots and intersubjective experiencing, as well as the wider context. It is being present to self-other-world. *Being human* (p.174) is a way of the therapist being genuine and engaged, bringing whole multi-dimensional self into the encounter. When multiple, fragmented selves integrate into a whole, the therapist becomes a multidimensional self, which allows the possibility of drawing upon their own existential woundedness, vulnerabilities and shared humanity. *Being relationally-focused* (p.174) on the embodied dialogical relationship 'between', where the intersubjective is the context for processing the intra-psychic. The therapist surrenders an instrumental desire for control or validation, seeking instead a more intimate encounter of being-with self-and-other in order to offer a relational home.

### **2.5.5 Existential Psychotherapy and EEA**

The foundation of existential psychotherapy is lived phenomena; therefore, experience is primary and out of that arises existential theory (Moustakas, 1994). From the point of experience mind and body distinction blurs into

existence itself and instead of “talking about the *body* we should talk about the process of *embodying* or *incorporating*, which always includes the mind” (Martinez Robles, 2015, p.207). Embodiedness is one of the six givens of existence outlined by Bugental (1981): “Our bodies are the always-present condition of our conscious experience, so that the fact of embodiedness permeates all phases of our living” (p.83). Furthermore, he writes, “emotionality is a unitary dimension of being” (Bugental, 1978, p.126), accordingly he focused on the emotional aspects of existential therapy, balancing emotional experiencing, cognitive reflection and creating meaning from the emotional experience. Hoffman and Cleare-Hoffman (2011) similarly write that in existential therapy clients are encouraged to welcome their emotions, experience them and make meaning from them. Van Deurzen (1997) in her theory of emotions, defines emotions as our most sensitive barometers that give us accurate information about what we value and how we are dealing with the issues in our lives. Yalom (2010) stresses, “One of our major tasks in therapy is to pay attention to our immediate feelings – they represent precious data.” (p.67). However, therapists need to be aware and comfortable with the full range of their emotions in order to be able to facilitate client emotional processing and expression (Hoffman, 2015). Self-awareness is therefore a foundation for existential therapy practice (Bugental, 1987; Hoffman et al., 2015). Even though embodiment is one of the fundamentals of existential theory (more on this in chapter 2.7), there seems to be surprisingly little research dedicated to it within the context of existential therapy and so this research will be an addition to this.

### **2.5.6 Embodied Resonance with the Client**

Psychotherapist Gerson (2010) shares her experience of how her body in conjunction with her mind assists her in understanding her clients. She argues that the body’s manifestations can be a quicker and more accurate way of seeing and understanding what is going on for a client. They provide direct access to the core of the conflict, when thought formulations and interpretations come much

later. In her practice as a psychotherapist she has gone through a process of learning to trust her body:

And far from wanting to suppress its dance, its calls for awareness, and the signals it emits, I feel grateful for what it brings up, for what it tells me, for what it can recognize long before my intellect can understand or my will is inclined to believe. ... the body is a compass in my work and in my life. I believe that it is the body, with its Dance of Life, that reminds us that we are alive and that a world of endless possibilities is open to us. (Gerson, 2010, p.15)

A therapist can deepen her empathic understanding of the client by resonating with them, not only on a cognitive and affective level, but also at a somatic and kinaesthetic level. Kinaesthetic empathy has been described as “recreation of the client’s bodily movements in the therapist’s body, which enables the therapist to sense and respond to the client’s emotional state” (Dosamantes, 1992, p.360), and also conceptualised as “innate human relational capacity, as a skill that can be cultivated in practice and as a potential socio-political intervention in health and socio-political contexts.” (Rova, 2017, p.202). In order for a therapist to develop a more embodied mode of empathic attunement with the client she can give her body enough time to naturally resonate with her client’s embodied being, she can focus her attention on her client’s somatic experiences, and she can develop a greater awareness of her own embodiment (Cooper, 2001). When a therapist is fully present in her own embodied whole she naturally attunes to the client’s embodied whole: “the therapist’s body is alive in the interaction, moving and vibrating in tandem with the client’s experiencing” (Cooper, 2001, p.4). Gallagher and Payne (2014) describe a dynamic intersubjective embodied interaction between therapist and client involving proprioception and kinaesthesia, in which “the holistic system expands to include both embodied subjects and, in some cases, behaves like one coherent body-schematic system” (p.72). As a psychotherapeutic intervention it is important, however, not only that a therapist resonates with her client at an embodied level, but that she also expresses this embodied experiencing back to her client, either verbally or non-

verbally. This helps the client become aware and process her experiences that were previously not felt or not understood. Thus, the client is able to connect to a bodily felt memory and relational experiences she could not put into words before: "Life narratives become experientially embedded by sensations of bodily signals and feelings, and new wording is found from the bodily felt content." (Samaritter and Payne, 2016, p.12).

Fuchs and Koch (2014) argue that emotions may not only be influenced by cognitive means, but also by modifying the bodily resonance (local or general bodily sensations). Emotions can be diminished as well as increased. The experience of elusive emotions may be enhanced and differentiated by carefully attending to the bodily feelings, which has a particular psychotherapeutic importance. Rogers (1951) already pointed out that entering into a sensing, reflective, and affective mode as well as giving space to integrate the bodily feedback during the process of therapy is of utmost importance. Damasio (1994), in his 'somatic marker hypothesis' (p.173), stated that any relevant decision, which is to produce genuine results, must include interoceptive and proprioceptive feedback from the body. There are other researchers and practitioners who are taking forward the perspective of therapy as an embodied experience (Boadella, 1997; Sampson, 1998; Shaw, 2003, 2004; Staunton, 2002; Totton, 2015; Brown, 2012; Leitan and Murray, 2014). Geller & Greenberg (2012) are even placing emphasis on developing an embodied therapeutic presence as central to the therapeutic encounter.

The body has become an interest within and between various theoretical, practical and research fields, not only psychotherapy but also psychoanalysis, developmental psychology, philosophy, cognitive science, spirituality, sociology, anthropology, ecology, cultural studies, neurobiology, linguistics and politics (Marmeira and Santos, 2019; Totton, 2005). One could infer that the reason is our individual and collective maturation into more embodied human beings, realising we are not only intelligent minds but intelligent beings, body and mind unified: "We do not just reside in our bodies: We are our bodies, even when we lack bodily awareness." (Marmeira and Santos, 2019, p.433). This research

builds upon the existing knowledge within the field of psychotherapy by researching, not only the body and bodies in relation, but focusing specifically on emotions and the awareness we can bring to our experience.

## **2.6 Other Perspectives Connected with EEA**

What follows delineates some ideas, practices and insights that are more subtly associated with EEA, but nevertheless significant for this research: focusing, present moment awareness, mindfulness and Jung's ideas.

### **2.6.1 Focusing**

Focusing is in some ways related to mindfulness, phenomenology and the concept embodied emotional awareness, although they also differ in many ways. Gendlin (1981) describes focusing as a “process in which you make contact with a special kind of internal bodily awareness” (p.7). He calls this awareness a *felt sense* (p.7). A felt sense is usually not simply there, it must form by paying attention to the body. In the beginning it is usually unclear and fuzzy. Through certain steps it can become clearer and also change. According to Gendlin (1981) “a felt sense is the body's sense of a particular problem or situation” (p.7). It feels unknown but meaningful; it is a body's way of providing answers in regard to issues in life. Our bodies ‘know’ so much about our situations because they are themselves sentient interactions. The sentience can come as an inward felt sense (Gendlin, 1991). According to Gendlin (1991) felt sense needs to be distinguished from emotion. The felt sense is the wide sentience, vague and indefinable. Emotion is a narrowing of that wider sense, compared to the felt sense it is intense and specific, and it already involves interpretation. Gendlin (1981) and his colleagues asked themselves the ‘taboo’ question “Why doesn't therapy succeed more often?” What they have found is that the successful

patients could be picked out in the first two therapy sessions because they know how to 'do' therapy from the start and the unsuccessful ones don't know and also don't learn during the course of therapy. The crucial difference is in 'how' they talk, which is only an outward sign of the real difference: "what the successful patients do inside themselves" (p.4). They pay attention to their bodily experience at the edge of what they can say. Gendlin (1981) has developed a way to teach people the action called focusing. He argues that the process brings change, which one recognises as a distinct physical sensation of change - a body shift. Therapy is supposed to deepen immediately with some clients if they are asked what physical sense comes in the middle of the body in relation to what is being worked on (Gendlin, 1999). Focusing is related to EEA in the way it brings awareness to the body, although it is perhaps too narrowly focused on the physical sensations.

## **2.6.2 Present Moment Awareness**

Brown (2010) refers to beingness as 'Presence'. It opens up a possibility of a radiant experience of life that he calls "present moment awareness" which overlaps with the concept embodied emotional awareness. The simplest definition is to "be present in the moment". "The emphasis isn't on the moment, but on the beingness we bring to bear on our life experience when we pay full attention to the moment." (p.5). According to Brown (2010), the reason why we are mostly not living in present moment awareness is because of our preoccupation with unintegrated past trauma and fearful future projections. He believes that balancing and transformation of any aspects of our experience requires activating awareness of our physical presence with mental clarity and emotional development (Brown, 2010), which is similar to embodied emotional awareness. "The intent isn't to 'feel good' but rather to feel what's actually unfolding within us right now. In other words, our intent isn't to feel better, but to get better at feeling." (p.22). Brown (2010) states "our task isn't to recover, but to discover" (p.23) and slowly learn to gain insights from our own

experience. Thus, awareness of our own experience becomes our teacher. Although Brown's view is quite definite it can be useful as another perspective on embodied emotional awareness.

### **2.6.3 Mindfulness**

In the last few decades mindfulness has become a widely used concept integrated into the mainstream of psychology, neuroscience, and psychotherapy, and is another similar concept to embodied emotional awareness. Several authors have emphasised that the meaning of mindfulness is subtle and elusive and that it is difficult to define it in precise terms (Block-Lerner, Salters-Pednault, and Tull 2005; Brown and Ryan, 2003). The most well-known definition of mindfulness is that of Kabat-Zinn (1994) who describes mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p.4). Similarly, Marlatt and Kristeller (1999) define mindfulness as “bringing one's complete attention to the present experiences on a moment-to-moment basis” (p.68). They also suggest that mindfulness involves observing experiences with an attitude of acceptance and loving kindness. Key characteristics of mindfulness: awareness, presence and acceptance, are considered to also be the basis of a successful therapy (Germer, 2005). From a Buddhist perspective the meditator uses awareness as a tool by which he can see through the wall of illusion and gain insight into present moment reality (Gunaratana, 2011). Therefore mindfulness as a technique or a state of mind could lead to greater understanding of EEA both in the therapist and of the intersubjective space between therapist and client. Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) propose mindfulness meditation to be considered as a kind of embodied and open-ended experimentation for exploring our own experience. Ray (2008) points out an overlooked problem in the western way of meditating in a disembodied state. He believes that full benefits of meditation cannot be experienced if we are not grounded in our bodies. Meditation taught by the Buddha originally is deeply somatic—fully grounded in sensations, sensory

experience, feeling and emotions (Ray, 2008). Thoughts are also experienced in the body and not as nonphysical phenomena that disconnect us from our soma:

In its most ancient form, Buddhist meditation is a technique for letting go of the objectifying tendency of thought and entering deeply and fully into communion with our embodied nature. And hence it leads to 'touching enlightenment with the body' or to 'touching enlightenment in and through the body' (Ray, 2008, p.65).

This is the aspect of mindfulness that could be related to EEA: opening the awareness on the present experience and understanding the world through the whole body.

#### **2.6.4 Jung on Body and Soul**

Soul and spirit are possibly the most elusive and ambiguous terms in psychological literature. The modern English word 'spirit' comes from the Latin spiritus, with a possible meaning 'breath of life'. It is distinguished from Latin anima, "soul", which nonetheless also derives from an Indo-European root meaning "to breathe" (Watkins, 2000, p.11). The breath is often seen as an intermediary between the body and the soul or spirit.

The fact so far is that a human soul cannot be scientifically observed, explored or measured. A lot of authors from the previous century used the term soul or spirit widely and each understood it differently (Jung, 1969; Kierkegaard, 1844; Nietzsche, 1969; Stein, 1989). With the refreshed embodiment movement there is a sense that the term soul is re-emerging into the conceptualisation of a human being. When soul or spirit are mentioned in this thesis, they broadly point at a transcendent aspect of being human of which Jung wrote extensively.



If the human soul is anything, it must be of unimaginable complexity and diversity... I can only gaze with wonder and awe at the depths and heights of our psychic nature. Its non-spatial universe conceals an untold abundance of images which have accumulated over millions of years of living development and become fixed in the organism...for the only equivalent of the universe within is the universe without; and just as I reach this world through the medium of the body, so I reach that world through the medium of soul (Jung, 1989, p. 387).

Jung (1969) wrote on the connection between body and soul – matter and psyche. He argued that psyche and matter are two different aspects of the same thing. He inferred this from the synchronicity phenomena showing that the non-psychic can behave like the psychic and the other way around, without any causal connection (the synchronicity phenomenon is described in detail in chapter 4.8). Jung writes “Probably in absolute reality there is no such thing as body and mind, but body and mind or soul are the same, the same life, subject to the same laws, and what the body does is happening in the mind.” (1984, p. 20). Jung (1997) believed that in order to solve a problem one needs to give equal value to the body and the soul. Our experience of dreams or psychotherapeutic analysis needs to be taken into reality and experienced through the body, because the body is always in the here and now.

Jung’s work was an important inspiration in developing ‘Authentic Movement’, largely developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow (Pallaro, 1999). The basic concepts of Authentic Movement emphasise the importance of movement as a means of communication, especially ‘authentic’ movement that is true and unlearned, emerging when the individual reaches self-sensing awareness or ‘inner listening’. Such movement can trigger powerful images, feelings and kinaesthetic sensations arising from our stored childhood memories or connecting to our ‘Self’ with a capital ‘S’ as Jung (1969) would describe it. This is the world of the transpersonal, greater than the individual – wholeness consisting of totality, aliveness, completeness.

All of the above-mentioned authors and practices profess the immense importance of the body for healing and living; they acknowledge its inherent wisdom. Just like this research they try to transcend the dualism of body and mind as well as self and other. The living body contains the secret of life, it is a plurality inside one mind but extended in space (Jung, 1988).

## **2.7 Existential Perspectives Connected with EEA**

Existential paradigm is a richly fertile ground for engaging with the idea of becoming more human. Existential thinkers have long been theorising about the body, emotions and awareness. This section is an overview of some of the existential philosophers who seem significant in the exploration of EEA, such as Nietzsche (1969), Stein (1989), Heidegger (1962), and Merleau-Ponty (1962). Throughout the thesis other philosophers are also cited who are just as important to this topic, such as Buber (1955), Husserl (1983), and Kierkegaard (1844), but are not mentioned here separately purely because their ideas are described extensively in other parts.

### **2.7.1 Nietzsche**

By exploring his own experience realized that his body is everything he is and the body is his greatest intelligence, the body Nietzsche (1969) “does not say ‘I’ but performs ‘I’” (p.62). Moving away from Cartesian dualism he believed that the self is the body and the soul is just a word for something in the body. “Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage – he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body” (p. 62). He believed paying attention to the body and listening to it is the way to become what you are: “there is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom” (p.62). His *Übermensch* (p.41) becomes reflective to the point where the body,

soul and self are truly integrated. The problem is that we erroneously interpret the body's experience; the result is doing harm with that which harms us: "we are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge – and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves..." (1968, p.15).

Jung (1988) in his *Notes of the seminar: Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (1988) pointed out "We suffer very much from the fact that we consist of mind and have lost the body." (p.251). People who are not consciously aware of the body suffer from a kind of unreality of life; what we think and what we feel in our heart or our guts does not necessarily coincide. "Zarathustra says to go back to the body, go into the body, and then everything will be right, for there the greatest intelligence is hidden." (p.370). He cautioned not to run away from the conscious relationship with the body and make ourselves unconscious of bodily feelings, because feelings are what keeps us in real life following our real way. In line with this Jung also believed some people are using spirituality to run away from the body into something imaginary. Similarly, he saw Nietzsche as a kind of modern saint: "the spiritual side got hold of him more than was good for the solution of his moral problem." (p.235). Whether that is true or not, Nietzsche's appreciation of the body's intelligence relates closely to this research.

### **2.7.2 Stein**

Edith Stein, a student of Husserl, devoted her research to the problem of empathy (1989). She posited that empathy is an act of perceiving, "which is primordial as present experience though non-primordial in content" (p.10). The content is the experience of foreign consciousness in general, however it does not have a character of 'outer perception' (p.7), we perceive it within ourselves. She distinguishes between empathy and 'contagion of feeling' (p.23). Contagion of feeling is transference of others' feelings; however, they do not serve a cognitive function of announcing a foreign experience, as does empathy.

Similar to Nietzsche (1969), Stein (1989) believed the division between soul and body to be an artificial one, “for the soul is always necessarily a soul in a body” (p.41). She conceptualised the ‘living body’ constituted in “a two-fold manner as a sensed (bodily perceived) living body and as an outwardly perceived physical body of the outer world” (p.43). She separated ‘general feelings’ from ‘moods’ (p.49): we experience general feelings as coming from the living body, whereas moods are general feelings of non-somatic nature. Stein significantly contributed to the conceptualisation of feelings and intersubjectivity, which is important for this research, although in her writing there is still a sense of body mind dualism through separation of concepts like ‘perception’ (p.7), ‘empathy’ (p.23), and ‘living body’ (p.43) into inner and outer.

### **2.7.3 Heidegger**

Heidegger (1962) suggests ‘Being-in-the-world’ (p.65) is how human beings fundamentally experience their own existence in the world. ‘Dasein’ (p.27; literally Being-there) discloses itself and the world as Being-in-the-world. He uses hyphens to point out the fundamental binding relation between Being and world; meaning that they are always in relation with each other and cannot be experienced, expressed or observed on their own. In Heidegger’s (1962) view the same kind of relation exists between Being and others, as the primordial structure of Dasein is Being with others.

Heidegger (1962) grants a central role to moods as a primordial way of disclosing Being-in-the-world preceding all cognition or will, and beyond their range of disclosure. On an ontological level he uses the term ‘state of mind’, while on the ontic (particular) level he uses ‘mood’ (p.172). One is always already in a mood, which manifests “how one is, and how one is faring”, meaning that “having a mood brings Being to its ‘there’” (Heidegger, 1962, p.173). In other words, moods reveal ways in which one surrenders to the world and is affected by the world (Moustakas, 1994). Heidegger (1962) sees a mood coming “neither from

'outside' nor from 'inside', but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being" (p.176). We do not choose our mood, instead we are thrown into it. Moods manifest in feelings like fear, threat or serenity and these in turn influence perceptions, thoughts and behavior.

Stolorow (2013) posits that moods encompass all of what is ordinarily meant by 'moods,' 'emotions,' and 'feelings' and that they always already entail an implication of the lived body. Heidegger states: "Every feeling is an embodiment attuned in this or that way, a mood that embodies in this or that way" (Heidegger, 1979, p.100). Stolorow (2013) hence argues that Heidegger has actually placed the body, along with affectivity, at the heart of Dasein's disclosedness, thus granting it an ontological significance. Although this argument is seen as quite contentious it has a relevance to this research. In the *Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger (2001) elaborates on the bodily aspect of Being-in-the-world as a "bodying forth" (p.196) which is a quality of Dasein on an ontological level.

According to Elkholy (2008) Heidegger made two important contributions to the history of philosophy, which are also important for this study; firstly, overcoming the subject/object dualism, and secondly granting the primacy to mood in his analysis of human existence. Elkholy (2008, p.4) posits: "Through mood humans gain access to their world, to themselves and to their relations with others in the world in a manner that is prereflective and unthematic.". In line with that it seems one's Being-in-the-world can be accessed through awareness of one's own moods or through embodied emotional awareness. Although Heidegger (1962) firmly states, "Dasein can, should, and must, through knowledge and will, become master of its moods" (p.175) implying a priority of cognition. Could we rather ponder about priority of awareness instead of controlling our moods? He goes on to say we can never free ourselves of a mood, with mastery we can only turn away from a mood, but that is only to another mood (Heidegger, 1962). Therefore, instead of masterfully shifting from mood to mood, we could rather master awareness of them.

Heidegger (1953) later on also coins the term letting-be-ness (*Gelassenheit*). It “literally means having been left or let, whilst it also means calm or cool composure” (Van Deurzen and Kenward, 2005, p.171). It is about releasement and opening ourselves up to what is. This is an attitude to life that opens up a greater awareness and it might also be a way of opening oneself up for one’s potential for being. In many ways Heidegger was intending to elucidate the perspective of how the world is interwoven and that our usual perspective of separating “categories of mind and body, thought and feeling, head and heart are artificial” (Todres, 2007, p.178).

#### **2.7.4 Merleau-Ponty**

According to Merleau-Ponty (1962) the body is the foundation of our existence. It forms and informs our consciousness. This could imply that our point of view on the world is our body and that our consciousness is embodied. In line with Heidegger’s (1962) notion of Being-in-the-world and through the notion of the lived body he stated, “The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world...” (p.xvii).

For Merleau-Ponty the body is fundamentally involved in the production of meaning and affect is a “part of the bodily totality that is in constant meaning exchange with the world” (Roald, Levin, and K ppe, 2018, p.211). However, our body doesn't inform our affect but it is our affect: “Our emotions are part and parcel of bodily existence—they are integrated.” (Roald, Levin, and K ppe, 2018, p.216). According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), embodiment or the perceptive awareness of one's emotions can be understood “as a sense of bodylines which may extend beyond physical limits” (2009, p. 199). This is similar to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of the lived body in which experience begins with the body but, through the process of awareness and critical social judgment, extends into the social world. Thus, this could mean emotionality does not reside inside the body or the mind based on representations or reflexes, but

is in the dialogical relation of embodied human being and the world.

Even though Merleau-Ponty wrote about the body extensively, it could be seen that he was not successful at overcoming the Cartesian dualism and remained at an intellectual level of understanding the body, not reaching the body's intelligence. He himself concluded on the issues that remained in his theory: "they are due to the fact that in part I retained the philosophy of 'consciousness'". (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.183). However, in his later work he introduces a much more holistic concept of flesh:

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element', in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea... (p.139).

With this conception he comes closer to a multidimensional embodied and overlapping view of existence intertwined with a human being: "my body is made of the same flesh as the world...and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world" (p.248).

### **2.7.5 Writing about Embodiment or Embodying the Writing?**

Each in their own language, both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger indicate, that our experience, our way of engaging with the world, depends on the way it emotionally matters to us. They understood emotions as a form of intentionality directed at something or someone and bringing meaning to the world. They both intended to overcome dualism of body and mind but the extent to which they were successful has been widely debated and criticised (Askay, 1999; Sheets-Johnstone, 2015). They may have written about embodiment but did they embody the writing? Thus, the emerging question is whether thinking, talking and writing about embodiment without being embodied can be grounded in truth? From the perspective of this research, embodiment is wholeness of

thought, emotion, consciousness, body and mind. I am a whole human being; I *am* a body, I do not *have* a body, although Merleau-Ponty (1962) indiscriminately uses having and being a body. There is not a part of me that can observe, have or own another part of me, for that is separation in duality. Our bodies “are containers of mind, emotions, a self, movement, and so on, only from a third-person, objective perspective, which is to say that phenomenologically, they embody nothing” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015, p.36).

Sheets-Johnstone (2015) writes there is ontological, epistemological and lexical issue in the way the concept of embodiment is used by academic practitioners and philosophers “precisely because they fail to provide exacting bodily grounds for the integral nature of the feature or character they are embodying, whether self, subjectivity, mind, cognition, or whatever” (p.25). There is often no acknowledgement of the significance of movement and kinaesthesia for phenomenological comprehension of dynamic realities of life and animate bodies. Husserl’s (1989) insight that “I move” precedes “I do” and “I can” (p.273) is frequently overlooked. Sheets-Johnstone (2015) posited a question: “Can empirical facts (about pathology) lead to existential truths (about the normal)?” (p.34) in terms of research relying on pathology. In terms of this study the question could be further developed: Can a disembodied mind (thinking that it is embodied) lead to embodied truth (about embodiment)? If we are mostly disembodied as a society (Levine, 2010; Ray, 2008) and that has become the ‘normal’, then all research on embodiment is based on ‘pathology’, so to speak. Therefore, we might be writing about embodiment from the standpoint of disembodied humans.

Moreover, there is the need to acknowledge the challenge of languaging experience (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009). I argue that embodiment is portrayed with the feeling behind the words and the concepts. Frequently, when I read seminal texts about embodiment the experience I get is disembodied. The words do not feel grounded in truth and the meaning does not resonate in my body. Heidegger (1962) himself asserted that every originally phenomenological concept has the possibility of degenerating and losing its grounding, if it is shared in an empty



understanding. That is why embodiment should evoke the presence of a lived experience through words: “It does not arrive at a summative 'essence', but offers instead 'good words' that describe and show, but do not kill, the sense of aliveness that they refer to.” (Todres, 2007, p.6). Therefore, words are not just ‘tools’ that are performed, but are experienced for how they feel. This is the ‘inner dimension’ of language, an aesthetic quality that is central to the process of understanding (Todres, 2007, p.176). Such language is both personal and interpersonal. Such embodied research is not only concerned with the sense-making logic, but also with the sense-making experience of individuals. In this way feeling is a form of understanding, and thus meaning is felt and not just said. Meaning is comprised of the spoken part as well as the feel of the context that is carried by the lived bodies experiencing the phenomena. And this is what makes the words, the research and the understanding ‘human’ (Todres, 2007, p.176). This is also the aim of this study: to make a step forward in writing about embodiment and embodying the writing.

### **2.7.6 Standing on the Shoulders of Giants, What is the Next Step?**

Poignantly, Van Deurzen (1997) wonders “why so many centuries of scientific and philosophic endeavor have kept us alienated from our self-awareness, from, in Nietzschean terms, the knowledge of our bodily self” (1997, p.25). Existential philosophers mentioned above do not see the way to that knowledge in employing great sources of strength to subdue our bodies; instead they mostly suggest making the effort to understand them, and with that understand ourselves in the world. As the Delphic maxim states: *know thyself*.

There is an ‘excess’ of the ‘lifeworld’ “overflowing with dimensions far more than we know” (Todres, 2007, p.178). Phenomenologists like Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty wanted to point out that this ‘excess’ of the lifeworld is related to our participation. It is not a mystical ‘out there-ness’, instead it is right here given to our experience: “So human experience has an open dimension that is ‘more than words can say’” (Todres, 2007, p.178). The whole concrete surrounding

lifeworld is “a phenomenon of being, instead of something that is” (Husserl, 1982, p.19). The lived body is where the 'more' of one's lifeworld intertwines and moves in feeling, thought, and understanding. The lived body is always experiential, before the intellect congeals it into a logical conception.

However, there is a sense that these phenomenologists made the first step of dipping one foot into the water of embodiment, the other foot kept safely on the intellectual ground, and thus merely understanding embodiment from a dualistic perspective. We can be deeply grateful to these giants, on whose shoulders we stand upon. But it is upon us, present day practitioners and researchers, to make the leap of faith and jump into these embodied waters, all the while trusting that we have been given a firm legacy grounded in rigorous phenomenological science, and moreover that we ourselves have what it takes to swim in our whole bodies, fully embracing our humanness and allowing its unfolding.

*I would like to live  
Like a river flows  
Carried by surprise  
Of its own unfolding  
(Fluent; John O'Donohue, 2011)*

With the literature review I aimed to show how the separate concepts that comprise the phenomenon embodied emotional awareness have been present in practice, research and philosophy for over a century. Embodiment, emotionality and awareness are all phenomena central to our humanness but also exceptionally elusive to grasp or research. I gather them together into the term embodied emotional awareness (EEA) because of the embodied sense and scientific evidence of them being fundamentally connected. Research and practice are discovering an intertwining of the two concepts embodiment and emotions. Adding the concept of awareness to the pair expresses an importance of not mere intellectual understanding, but also an expanded awareness of these phenomena. My own preliminary definition of embodied emotional awareness

*is: anchoring awareness into the body and feeling being alive through the body, through the sensations or emotions that arise in the moment.*

I have described psychological, psychotherapeutic and neuroscientific research that in various ways address embodiment, emotions or awareness. This served to shed light on current knowledge to date. I further on delineated how psychotherapeutic and clinical practice engage with embodiment, emotions and awareness, which brings an understanding that these concepts are essential, but not nearly enough researched. I also mentioned practices such as focusing and mindfulness, which add another layer of meaning and value to EEA. Lastly with an overview of some of the existential thought on the meaning of body, emotions and awareness it becomes apparent that they are the essence of being human. Each of the presented perspectives serves as a piece of a puzzle but there are many more pieces missing and the task of this research is not in merely putting the pieces together. The greatest question of this research is how to put the pieces together? Because this is a multidimensional puzzle. The uniqueness of this research lies in its aim to explore the intricate connection of embodiment, emotionality and awareness within psychotherapeutic practice, relying on heuristic and in-depth relational phenomenological methodology to gather and convey information in an embodied way and thus consider both human being and human research as holistically and fundamentally intertwined.

# 3 Methodology

*In true experience every expression is creative, the creation of the person one is and is becoming. There is only the exploring, spontaneously expressing self, finding satisfaction in personal being. (Moustakas, 1956, p. 3).*

## 3.1 Ontology, Epistemology, Methodology

Methodology encompasses rules that specify how research should be approached. Each methodology links a particular epistemology and ontology (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge. It seeks to answer the question: "How, and what, can we know?" (Willig, 2013, p.39). Ontology questions: 'What is out there to know?' Is reality out there objective and independent of the observer waiting to be discovered, or is it constructed? Methodology asks 'How can we acquire that knowledge?' and justifies the choice of an appropriate research method, which will provide specific procedures or techniques to answer the research question.

This research project aims to elucidate embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy. A further aim for the way this research is conducted is to consider human beings holistically. The intent is also to conduct an embodied research in an embodied way, and not just be a research about embodiment. Thus finding the appropriate methodology for that is the topic of this chapter.

It is up to every researcher to explicate their assumptions and choose methodology accordingly. I believe that reality is socially constructed and that subjective experience is primary to any form of knowing. Subjective experience can be very diverse for every individual but at the same time I am also curious

about the possibility of finding and describing the essence of experience as well as common patterns. Therefore this research is grounded in a social constructionist epistemological framework, acknowledging truth as a function of perspective, and knowledge as relative as well as socially and intersubjectively created (Ellingson, 2009; Willig, 2013).

All research arises from the body. Ellingson (2017) argues “embodiment is an integral aspect of all research processes, including qualitative, quantitative, and critical inquiry” (p.1). Embodiment has always been implicit in all forms of analysis and representation, however it has often stayed unconscious, bracketed or even denied. Ellingson (2017) frames qualitative research as an always already embodied communicative process and locates awareness of the embodiment of knowledge production amongst qualitative, feminist, deconstructive, postmodern, poststructuralist, postcolonialist, posthumanist theoretical perspectives.

Qualitative methodology is suitable for this research because the intent is to explore and describe how individuals experience and make sense of EEA in psychotherapy. Qualitative research is concerned with the quality and texture of experience, rather than with the identification of variables or cause-effect relationships, as is usual in quantitative research (Willig, 2013). Furthermore, the research question developed through my personal experience, which is an important aspect of the research; therefore qualitative methodology is appropriate as it recognises that the researcher is implicated in the research process and thus emphasises the importance of reflexivity (Willig, 2013).

## **3.2 Phenomenology**

In accordance with the epistemological foundation of this research, as well as the above elaborated research aim, phenomenology seems to be the appropriate qualitative methodology. Embodiment is one of the central themes within the

field of phenomenology, which capitalises on our species' ability for self-reflection about own experience. Phenomenology specifically prioritises first-person experience, as it is all we truly have at our disposal. It was the mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl (1983) who first pointed out that nothing can be perceived outside the field of one's own experience. He proclaimed that we should return to the "things themselves" (p.35) and this symbolically marks the beginning of phenomenology, one of the strongest philosophical movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kordeš, 2013). Husserl (1983) was well accustomed to the natural scientific method, but he found it unacceptable to neglect direct lived experience and instead merely engage with theoretical explanations. He founded phenomenology as a rigorous science for systematic exploration of experience: to consider the phenomenon as it appears to us and to investigate its essence. The aim of phenomenology is "to clarify and thereby to find the ultimate basis of all knowledge" (Stein, 1989, p.3). This is achieved with phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1983, p.66), not considering anything that can be eliminated or that is in any way "doubtful" (Stein, 1989, p.3) and thus what remains is "pure consciousness in its own absolute being" (Husserl, 1983 p.113). A science, which proposes to clarify all scientific knowledge, cannot be based on a science already existent, but must be grounded in itself. Therefore, basically everything becomes subject to exclusion or reduction (Stein, 1989). Following that the classical Husserlian phenomenology advocates bracketing the researcher's *natural attitude* (1983, p.51) by putting aside preconceived judgment, ideas, beliefs, and expectations – putting them into epoché (Husserl, 1982, p.21), so as to get a fresh perspective on the phenomena under investigation.

Contrary to Husserl (1983), who wrote about researching human experience from the point of view of a detached observer looking at objects, Merleau-Ponty (1962), inspired by Heidegger, wrote about describing human experience when one is most engaged, in the flow, coping with objects in the most skilled way – perceiving the world and trying to get a better look at it. Not simply accepting what natural sciences tell us, not even what common sense tells us, instead stepping back and really looking. Knowing precisely what we see is difficult.

Nothing can be harder than to just describe an experience – a reductionist direct account. There is a natural intuition that is just feeling things, but in order to reach that phenomenal being we need to break a sort of “crypto-mechanism” (p. 67), where by perception hides itself from itself. “But although it is of the essence of consciousness to forget its own phenomena...this forgetfulness is not mere absence, it is the absence of something which consciousness could bring into its presence” (p.67).

Van Manen (1990) argues “there is a difference between comprehending the project of phenomenology intellectually and understanding it ‘from the inside’”. We tend to get a certain satisfaction out of grasping at a conceptual or ‘theoretical’ level the basic ideas of phenomenology, even though a real understanding of phenomenology can only be accomplished by “actively doing it”, (p.8) or perhaps even better, actively being it. Instead of doing research by merely observing from the outskirts of the participant’s descriptions, why not be in the centre of the research alongside the participant exploring the lived experience?

### **3.3 Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutics is the methodology of interpretation, offering a way of dealing with issues of the interpretation of human action, texts and other meaningful material. Heidegger (1962) proposed a hermeneutic phenomenology with the focus on an existential analysis of Dasein. The meaning of Being is disclosed as a result of analysing the unique features of Dasein, and interpretation is viewed as a concrete way of being in the world. Hermeneutic phenomenology was first developed methodologically by Heidegger’s student Gadamer (2004). In contrast to Husserlian (1983) descriptive phenomenology, that attempts to discover essences of phenomena as they appear in consciousness, hermeneutic research follows more explicitly interpretative approaches in a less essentialist way. It acknowledges the intertwining of experience and understanding of researcher

and participants. The hermeneutic cycle therefore flows between parts and whole, between familiar and unfamiliar, constantly being reinterpreted in relation to each other and according to the changing horizons.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is said to be particularly suitable for the exploration of the quality, texture and meaning of lived experience, especially embodied human experience (Willig & Billin, 2012). It engages with four fundamental lifeworld themes or 'existentials' (Van Manen, 1990, p. 101): spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality. Van Manen (1990) warns about extracting and labeling themes as this can mean losing touch with the original account's emotional tone and vibrancy. This could also be seen as a drawback in hermeneutic phenomenology – the danger of getting stuck on conceptions instead of phenomenologically exploring diverse experiential landscapes, which is the intention of this study. In hermeneutic phenomenology research is not just about description, it is also about interpreting people's lived experiences – the researcher mediates between different meanings. Movement between the parts and the whole is important, to keep connected with the lived experience but to also not lose touch with the bigger picture and the purpose of the research (Van Manen, 1990). This method also gives freedom to search for meaning creatively by writing and rewriting with the use of poetic narrative in the analysis of accounts (Ohlen, 2003). After critical reflection this method seems too structured to explore in-depth the phenomenology of the elements of embodied emotional awareness as well as giving a broader perspective on the greater whole. The intention of this study is not so much to interpret the meaning of a phenomenon but more about discovering and describing the pattern and essence of a phenomenon from previously unexplored depths of awareness.



### 3.4 Heuristic Research

Heuristic research is a “search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p.40). It seems like a more appropriate methodology for this study because it is grounded in the realisation that there are no privileged realities and no inherently superior modes of knowing (Heineman-Pieper, Tyson and Heineman Pieper, 2002), which matches the study’s epistemological position. Furthermore, the research question of becoming more human through embodied emotional awareness springs from my own life project and personal transformation and heuristic research begins with a personal question or challenge, especially one that has a social or universal significance (Moustakas, 1990). It requires that one be open to one’s personal experience of a phenomenon, allowing the intellect, emotion and spirit to mingle and unify. A heuristic researcher seeks to comprehend the “wholeness and the unique patterns of experiences in a scientifically organised and disciplined way” (Moustakas, 1990, p.16). The attempt of heuristic research is to explore the nature of a phenomenon using the processes of self-reflection, exploration, and elucidation through six phases (Moustakas, 1990): initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and synthesis.

The heuristic research method was developed by Moustakas (1990) as an organised and systematic form for investigating human experience. The evolution of heuristic methodology was influenced by works of: Maslow (1956) and his research on self-actualisation, Jourard (1968) and his investigations of self-disclosure, Polanyi (1969) and his elucidations on the tacit dimensions, indwelling and personal knowledge, Buber (1998) and his explorations of dialogue and mutuality, Bridgman (1950) and his delineations of subjective-objective truth, Gendlin (1981) and his concept of focusing, and Rogers (1951) and his work on human science.

Moustakas (1990, p.15), identified seven essential concepts or processes of heuristic research, which were used in this study (further described in chapter 3.10 Analysis):

- *Identifying with the focus of the inquiry*: getting inside the research question and becoming one with it.
- *Self-dialogue*: entering into dialogue with the phenomenon, thus allowing the phenomenon to speak directly to one's own experience.
- *Tacit knowing*: is implicit sense of the unity or wholeness of something from an understanding of individual parts.
- *Intuition*: makes immediate knowledge possible without the intervening steps of logic and reasoning. "Great powers of scientific intuition are called originality, for they discover things that are most surprising and make men see the world in a new way" (Polanyi, 1969, p.118).
- *Indwelling*: a process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of phenomena. It requires holding an unwavering attention and concentration on an aspect of human experience.
- *Focusing*: pausing and clearing of an inward space to access felt responses to researched phenomena and their central meanings.
- *Internal frame of reference*: the foundation of heuristic process is placed in the context of the researcher's own internal frame of reference.

Heuristic research is a demanding and lengthy process, which is its greatest limitation, and also the source of immense knowledge (Moustakas, 1990). Some researchers critiqued the lack of clear structure and guidance in applying the principles of Moustakas's heuristic inquiry (Ozertugrul, 2017; Sela-Smith, 2002; Meents, 2006). However, it seems that not giving explicit guidance was exactly Moustakas's (1990) intention, to encourage the heuristic researcher to look for their own guidance and develop the skill through practice (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). With the right attitude and passion for deep exploration these limitations can be turned into its greatest strength: "once one begins the passionate search for the illumination of a puzzlement, the intensity, wonder, intrigue, and engagement carry one along through ever growing levels of meaning and excitement." (Moustakas, 1990, p. 55). Some authors critique the

validity of heuristic research (Anastas, 1999), however there is a growing number of researchers recognising the “self-imposed blindness of the positivist frame for knowledge, and the role of experience as a legitimate source of knowledge has been introduced” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p.82). The proposition is that the “heuristic paradigm guarantees research quality not by misguidedly instituting structural rules and requirements, but instead by relying on informed judgment (the same standard as in the hard sciences)...about research design and evaluation.” (Heineman-Pieper, Tyson and Heineman Pieper, 2002, p.26). With that the researcher becomes fully informed and empowered in deciding the best way to address their own research question and contexts. There is unruly risk in embarking on a heuristic journey, but that is a risk I am willing to take to dive deep into the most personal inquiry of my life.

### **3.5 Embodied Research**

Qualitative researchers have been ‘bringing the body back in’ (Frank, 1990, p.131) for a few decades, attempting to develop and describe a more embodied approach to research (Halling and Goldfarb, 1991; Burns, 2003; Finlay, 2005; Todres, 2007; Stelter, 2010; Brown et al., 2011; Francombe-Webb et al., 2014; Ellingson, 2017; Spatz, 2017; Chadwick, 2017). Halling and Goldfarb (1991) argue that there is a need to take embodiment seriously during the research process:

The recognition that one is an embodied being includes the acknowledgement that even in a situation of being an observer one is an involved observer— someone who is being affected by and is affecting what is taking place. Being a researcher...requires that one become fully and thoughtfully involved (p. 328).

Developing an embodied approach to research comes with ontological and methodological challenges, however the point is not in searching for precision or intellectual theories, but “rather to do justice to the complexity of embodied

experience, however difficult that proves to be” (Brown et al., 2011, p. 512). Adequate embodiment research is making central our fleshy, embodied participation in the entire process of research (Brown et al., 2011). Embodied methodologies are searching for a way to make sense of the embodied energies alive in experiences “as lived and felt in the flesh” (Young, 2005, p. 7). Chadwick (2017) suggests, “that we need to find ways of listening to and analysing the bodies and fleshy articulations already present in our qualitative ‘data’. We need to focus on moving embodied methodologies into the realm of qualitative data analysis” (p.71). Todres (2007) describes his embodied enquiry approach as a path by which embodied understanding arises, which is “humanising and is much needed in a world that too easily objectifies self and other” (p.175). Embodied enquiry attends to the relationship between language and the experiencing body, marries thought and feeling, 'head' and 'heart', with that it “opens itself to what is creative and novel – the pre-patterned 'more' of the lifeworld” (p.175).

In order to fulfil the aim of conducting an embodied research in an embodied way, the question is: what method will encourage enough embodied reflexivity to delve deep into the phenomenological concept of embodied emotional awareness while still keeping enough overview to grasp the essence of that lived experience? What method will truly allow a glimpse into the intersubjective embodied meanings between researcher and participants? Can the researcher’s embodied experience in the research help to access otherwise unreachable experiential landscapes? “The questions asked by embodied research are: What can bodies do?” (Spatz, 2017). How can we make sure we do not “congeal the living meaning out of human living – until life itself has become unrecognisable to itself” (Van Manen, 1990, p.17).

In answering these questions, heuristic research grounded in embodiment seems like a better fit because a researcher’s own embodied experience can be the central guide of the research. However there exist the problematic aspects of researchers’ overreliance on their own thoughts and emotions in the research process (Finlay, 2005) and that is why the phenomena is explored additionally

by including seven participants. Furthermore, the experience of the researcher and participants is explored in an in-depth embodied way. Finlay (2005) developed a research process called *reflexive embodied empathy* (p.272), which involves engaging, reflexively, with the participant's lived body, the researcher's own body, and the embodied intersubjective relationship between the two. This process involves the researcher learning to "read and interrogate their body's response to, and relationship with, the body of the research participant" (Finlay, 2005, p.272). This way of paying attention to the intersubjective space was opened and suggested to co-researchers during the research dialogues. The benefit of co-researchers being therapists is that they are already trained, skilled and experienced in being aware of such intrasubjective and intersubjective nuanced phenomena. "Through the web that is intersubjectivity, one comes to understand that self-understanding and other-understanding are intimately interwoven." (Finlay, 2005, p.285). This research process seems like a good addition to the heuristic method to deepen the embodied and intersubjective aspects of the researched phenomena. Furthermore, according to embodied enquiry (Todres, 2007) the focus is on attending to the way experiences are represented, in as much as possible an embodied and alive manner.

### **3.6 Relational Approach to Phenomenological Research**

*At the heart of heuristics lies an emphasis on disclosing the self as a way of facilitating disclosure from others – a response to the tacit dimension within oneself sparks a similar call from others (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p.50).*

This research springs from a wholesome view of a human being and it also intends to gather and analyse data in as wholesome a way as possible. Merleau-Ponty (1962) points out how a human being is wholesome as an individual but also as a collective of individuals: "I discover in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions...As the parts of my body together comprise one system, so my body and the other person's are one whole" (p. 354). When

the researcher and co-researcher come together, as two whole individual systems, they comprise a new whole system. Thus, in this research an interview isn't seen as information gathered from the co-researcher while the researcher is an objective observer, rather it is considered as a wholesome dialogue that is co-created in between both partners. Merleau-Ponty (1962) expresses it well:

In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator (p.354).

Gadamer (2004) makes a similar point about a conversation having 'a spirit of its own' in the following quotation:

We say that we 'conduct' a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will 'come out' of a conversation (p. 385).

Walsh (2004) suggested replacing traditional one-sided 'nondirective' interviews, in which the researcher is an objective receiver, with 'dialogues' in which the researcher is an engaged and embodied co-participant. Embodied reflexivity is "both allowing for the play of conversation and to examining the context in which the conversation unfolds." (p. 116). For the analysis part of the research this implies that the

Conversation rather than the participant's 'protocol' is the object of analysis, and that the structure interpreted is intersubjective. Hence the researcher's indelible presence within the conversation must be made explicit and remain explicit throughout all levels of analysis (p. 116–117).

An illustration of dialogic co-creation during an in-depth phenomenological interview is described by Finlay (2009). During the interview the researcher started feeling something that seemed to mirror what the participant was feeling. A way of understanding her participant's experience was to understand what she herself was experiencing. With this in mind the researcher shared with her participant what was happening to her. She was aware of the danger of re-directing the focus on herself. However, her sharing of her experience seemed to help the participant understand herself better and articulate it. Finlay (2009) concludes that the researcher and participant were impacting each other emotionally, bodily and empathically. The researcher paid attention to her bodily perceptions and checked them out with the participant in dialogue, who responded acceptingly with "that sums it up" (p.9). However, rather than seeing this as a validation process which confirms 'truths', Finlay argues that it is about "engaging dialogue towards deepening relative meanings" (p.9). Todres (2007) makes a similar point "I can check out to some degree the extent of our interembodied understanding by sharing some implications of my embodied understanding" (p. 39).

Finlay (2005) also emphasises the importance of bringing the relationship with the participant into the research process, by echoing Husserl (1983), who professed the relational space between participant and researcher is the site of disclosure of the Other and of any understanding which comes about. Similarly Burns (2003) encourages that we need methods focusing on dialogue as well as researchers and participants to reflexively attend to their mutual embodied experience.

Following this line of thought paralleled with the aims of this research the interviews are conducted and analysed in such a way to honor each individual's input into the inter-woven fabric of shared experience. During the interview process this means that I as the researcher share my ideas and experience of the topic discussed. Not to the extent of overtaking the dialogue but just in order to share whatever needs to be expressed in the specific moment in dialogue, to add my thread into the co-created fabric. During the analysis process this means I consider the input of both participants in dialogue as equally important, meaningful and valid data. The co-created research encounter can be metaphorically paralleled as the dance between the researcher and the co-researcher:

While the researcher may lead the dance at the outset, it soon becomes hard to distinguish who is leading and who is following as interactions and movements synchronise. The embodied intersubjective space between them no longer involves division but connection. So, researcher and participant engage the dance, moving in and out of experiencing and reflection while simultaneously moving through a shared intersubjective space that is the research encounter (Finlay, 2006, p.1).

### **3.7 Participants**

As usual for heuristic research the researcher is in the centre of the research (Moustakas, 1990). Additionally, there are seven participants that are referred to as co-researchers in order to emphasise the relational approach to this research (Finlay, 2015). Therefore, when I speak about co-researchers that includes me. An essential characteristic of phenomenological research is considering the participatory role of the researcher and the co-researcher as well as their relationship (Flick, 2009). Phenomenological study is characterised by a small number of participants (Creswell, 2009), there is no hope for generalisation of data, but rather it is the search for specific patterns and description of the dynamics or processes. Nevertheless, it often turns out that the experiential data, obtained by the method of the individual, in-depth (i.e. repeated and open)



research, is surprisingly general (Kordeš, 2013). Limiting the number of participants enables the researcher to devote more time to each participant, which helps to preserve the information-rich data, but may prove to be crucial for understanding the complexity of the phenomena (Creswell, 2009).

Participants have been recruited through snowball sampling (three participants) and advertising in various online psychotherapy communities (four participants) (Appendix 6.4 Advertisement for Participants). The inclusion criteria included accredited psychotherapists with an active practice identifying themselves working with a phenomenological orientation as well as emotional embodied awareness. Another important inclusion criterion was the possibility of doing an in-person face-to-face interview, thus they needed to be based in or travelling to UK for the interview. At first, I thought it was going to be hard to find appropriate participants for in-person interviews but with patience 11 interested therapists contacted me. Four of them did not meet the criteria, because they were either not accredited or not based in the UK, and the remaining seven became my co-researchers. In the following table the co-researchers are listed using their pseudonyms.

Figure 1. Demographic Data

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Therapeutic modality</b>	<b>Years of practice</b>
Alja	Female	34	White European	Phenomenological, Embodied, Existential	4
Dawn	Female	64	White British	Integrative, Humanistic	30
Luna	Female	42	White British	Existential	6
Pele	Female	74	White British	Existential, Phenomenological	26
Sana	Female	49	Mixed	Systemic Body Oriented	27
Finn	Male	44	White European	Integrative	11
Odin	Male	60	White British	Existential, Humanistic	23
Vlad	Male	72	White British	Integrative, Relational, Body Psychotherapy	15

An important characteristic of qualitative and especially embodied research is the recognition that bodies are always subjective and political, they are never neutral, they reflect the relation between identity and power (Rose, 1999; Ellingson, 2017, Alegranti, 2011b; Francombe-Webb et al., 2014). “Identity categorization is not merely social construction but has material effects on bodies, whether they conform to or defy the parameters of their categories.” (Ellingson, 2017, p.62). There is also the recognition that “research is an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p.45). Additionally, it is shaped by the interaction of embodied subjectivities of the researcher and the participants (Francombe-Webb et al., 2014; Finlay, 2005).

Ellingson (2017) suggests that a researcher “should attend to the ways in which embodied being within a cultural system of categories involves making sense of the world from specific standpoints that are always already implicated in complex power relations” (p.61). Although “bodies exist in continual flux” (Ellingson, 2017, p.76) I can articulate my autobiography: I was born white, female, able bodied, mixed nationality and mixed religion, into a socialistic country without class, however I felt I was gifted with middle class privileges. Intellect was valued much more than emotional sensitivity. Women had equal rights in theory, but not in practice. Children were expected to obey or be punished. Psychotherapy was the last means for the ‘crazy’. The co-researchers that were drawn to participate in this research are all white, apart from one being mixed, four of them share my gender, they are 8 to 38 years older than me, and have 2 or 26 years of practice more than me. One could view all of us being privileged to engage with our emotional bodies, as well as undergo, train and work as psychotherapists. Our privileges and oppressions, our areas of similarity and difference interact, relate, enable, constrain and shape how we experience and make sense of embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy. Although our experience and our ways of being in the world are never neutral, I would like to emphasise that with every co-researcher our intent was to meet in I-Thou

presence, where conceptualisations and labels dissolve into Present Being between us (Buber, 2004).

### **3.8 Embodied Ethics**

The study was designed and carried out with utmost consideration to ethical conduct in qualitative research according to BPS Codes of ethics and conduct (2018), as well as attention to embodied ethics. Institutional guidelines are of course the minimum requirement of ethical research, however they can appear to be detached, authoritative and overpowering (Preissle, 2007). Highlighting the connection of ethics and body politics acknowledges lived, intersubjective, moving bodies, offers a process view of psychotherapeutic research and aligns it with the emerging paradigm shift of a post-Cartesian and interdisciplinary age (Allegranti, 2011b). Embodied ethics suggests “it is through engaged researchers’ close encounters with participants that we come to know them and hopefully to act in their best interests” (Ellingson, 2017, p.45). As La Jevic and Springgay (2008) propose, “Ethics of embodiment is concerned with the processes of encounters, the meaning that is made with, in, and through the body” (p. 70). In the research I followed five characteristics of embodied ethics of researcher conduct (Ellingson, 2017): Being-with participants while being sensitive to embodied intersubjectivity, compassion in a caring and balanced focus on self and other, dynamic, flexible, attentive, and committed to ongoing consideration of ethical conduct, thoughtfulness and respect in revealing private bodies to the public, and embodied self-care.

Ethical approval of the research was obtained prior to recruiting participants. When the interested therapists contacted me, they received an invitation document with all the necessary information about the research procedure and ethical considerations (Appendix 6.1 Participant Information Sheet) as well as a consent form for them to sign if they chose to participate (Appendix 6.2

Informed Consent). The objectives of the study were clearly described as well as the possible advantages and disadvantages of participation.

The research has been designed to minimise any risks or disadvantages of participating. The interview was scheduled at a time and place that most suited them. They were informed that they have complete choice over what they wish to talk about although depending on what emotional experiences they choose to convey (for example, a very difficult therapeutic relationship) there is a potential for them to be emotionally impacted or distressed by participating in this research. In that case they were advised to contact any of the proposed Counselling Services.

Participants were also informed of the possible advantages of participation in the interview, which might be raising their embodied emotional awareness in their work as psychotherapists. They were also informed that the findings of this study intend on adding knowledge of embodied emotional awareness to the field of psychotherapy and that contribution of knowledge to the field could help understand the importance and improve the role of embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy and counselling psychology.

In order to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participants, all data has been anonymised. For that reason, all identifying information has been excluded or changed and pseudonyms have been used instead of their names. At the end of the research the data will be stored by NSPC in accordance with NSPC data retention policy. These protocols have been made explicit from the beginning and participants have been asked to declare whether they are satisfied to proceed on this basis and had the right to withdraw from the study until the point of the study being written up. In accordance with the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct participants have been protected from harm and their autonomy and dignity preserved. At the end of the research interview they have been given a debrief process, advised to seek support with a therapist in case of distress during or after the research, and have been given a list of helplines and therapy services (Appendix 6.3 Debriefing).

### 3.9 Interviews

Phenomenological research encompasses in-depth qualitative approaches where interview techniques are used to compose a profound, detailed and vivid picture of respondents' experiential landscape (Hurlburt, 1992, 2009; Petitmengin, 2006). The relevant question of those interviews is not 'why' but rather 'how' we experience (Petitmengin, 2006). As the central method of heuristic research, I chose to conduct co-created dialogues or semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews. For the preliminary part of the study an interview was conducted between myself and my psychotherapist, by using an interview guide (Appendix 6.5); the same guide was later on used in the interview with seven co-researchers. The interview guide was created according to the preliminary definition of EEA in order to help explore the concepts of this phenomenon in depth. The questions were all open-ended phenomenological questions inquiring about lived experience rather than preconceived concepts. This allowed the co-researchers creation of meanings about their embodied perceptions and practices in the way that felt most experientially true and alive for them, and with that prevented the possible danger of confirmation bias. Thus constructed meanings can offer abundant insights into participants' embodied worlds (Ellingson, 2017). The interviews were all 80 to 90 minutes long, including the initial instruction.

The focus of the interview was on a particular moment in therapy in an attempt to elicit more descriptive and in-depth experiential data (Ellingson, 2017; Stelter, 2010). The idea was to create a sort of an embodied interview that would not merely ask about embodiment but would gather data in an embodied way. This has mostly been achieved by focusing on what is going on in the moment of the interview between the participant and the interviewer as well as for each of them individually (Finlay, 2005). This was all explained to the co-researchers. Before answering a question, the co-researchers have been asked to firstly feel the body and let the answer come from there. A few general questions have been prepared and from there the interview was guided by the co-researcher's

interest, my embodied experience and the intersubjective embodied experience between the researcher and co-researcher. Co-researchers were encouraged to permit ideas, thoughts, feelings, inspirations and imagination to unfold and be expressed naturally as is usual for heuristic research dialogues (Moustakas, 1990).

During the interviews I felt pressured by time and the need to get through the questions or topics of the interview guide. However, I also enjoyed going with the flow of the dialogue and felt the need to explore more in depth what the co-researchers were bringing. Hence there was a dilemma of how much to stick with the interview guide and how much to follow the interest of both myself and the co-researcher, giving space to what wanted to be explored and expressed through us. I ended up taking the middle road by constantly balancing the flow of the dialogue with the structure of the themes, which may have limited the data in some way but also kept a consistency of content and time throughout the interviews.

In exploring experience, the role of the one experiencing becomes active. The co-researchers were not just reporters or an information source but were considered the experts of their own experience. The co-researchers need to have had the experience of the researched phenomena and willingness to reflect on it in detail and depth (Willig & Billin, 2012). I helped to open space into the unknown experiential landscapes by guiding the dialogue into themes that seemed to be most alive for co-researchers and were not necessarily pre-defined (Kordeš, 2013). This kind of research can be beneficial for the co-researchers as they expand their existential understanding of their own Being-in-the-world (Giorgi, 2005; Kondratyuk, & Perakyla, 2011). In the words of Petranker (2003): “At such times the investigator rediscovers that it is possible to be conscious differently, and thus to learn something new about what consciousness is.” (p.12).

At root all experiences of emotion, awareness and embodiment are ineffable: “not capable of being wholly represented using words” (Willis and Cromby,

2020, p.3). Stelter (2010) describes a method for helping participants to describe embodied experiences that are not easily expressed through language. Co-researchers were asked to remember the embodied feeling or 'felt sense' of sitting in the room with a client, and had been given a few moments to get this feeling in the present moment of the interview as much as possible. Afterwards they were asked to choose any form of description, metaphor or artistic impression that they feel best helps convey their embodied feeling (movement, words, sounds, painting, shape, colour, place, emotion, work of art, poem...). This embodied metaphor was then discussed in the interview and used as an aid in more effective and rich way of communicating and describing the elusive experiences.

### **3.10 Analysis**

In accordance with Moustakas (1990) the analysis of the data was conducted through six phases of heuristic research. I describe the phases according to Moustakas (1990) as well as depict how I engaged with each of these phases.

- ENAGAGEMENT

Through initial *engagement* the researcher explores their own passions and lifelong curiosities in order to find the research question that holds important personal and social meaning. This process requires receptiveness to all forms of knowing, including intuitive and the willingness to dive deep into one's own experience to discover previously hidden phenomena. This phase for me actually started long before I chose the method of my research. The discovery and evolution of my research question as well as reflexivity on my assumptions is described in detail in the introduction chapter. This was also the stage when I decided about the appropriate co-researchers.

- IMMERSION

Within the *immersion* phase the researcher and participants “live the question in waking, sleeping and even dream states” (Moustakas, 1990, p.28) by interviewing, dialoguing, exploring, reading and writing. Everything within the researcher’s life becomes crystallised around the question. “Virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw material for immersion” (p.28). For me this involved self-dialogue, self-searching, intuitive clues, dreams, people, meetings, dialogues, places, travels, practices, readings, nature, and animals. I kept a reflexive diary of my own experience during every phase of the research, which brought a constant connection with my self-awareness. In this phase the interviews have been conducted, digitally recorded and transcribed. A computer program NVivo (2019) was used because of the quantity of transcripts and the depth of analysis needed. NVivo is a software program used for qualitative and mixed-methods research. Specifically, it is used to organise, analyse, present and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, journal articles, social media and web content, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required.

Firstly, I immersed myself with each co-researcher individually, by listening to the interview and at the same time identifying the qualities and themes manifested in the transcript. This enabled me to construct an *individual depiction* of the experience, which preserves the language and includes examples drawn from the individual co-researchers’ experience of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1990, p.51). The themes were gathered in the NVivo (2019) program; additionally I wrote a few sentences to describe and retain the individual co-researcher’s experience that was emerging as essential. After doing this for each co-researcher individually I set the data aside for a while in order to acknowledge, process and digest each individual’s experience, their way of being and their impact on me as a researcher as well as personally. I was using *relaxation/meditation activities* (p.46) in order to facilitate processing and integration. I repeated the same course of organisation and analysis of the data for each co-researcher until an individual depiction for all eight co-researchers had been constructed and a collection of themes had emerged. The themes that



were mentioned by at least three or more co-researchers were gathered into a common collection of themes.

- INCUBATION

*Incubation* is a time for the researcher to retreat from the intense immersion with the question. Although the phenomenon is removed from immediate awareness, on another level nourishment and expansion is taking place. A seed has been planted and is now undergoing silent growth (Moustakas, 1990). For me this was a time to let the gathered data sit, while I was seemingly living my life away from it. I say seemingly because all the while I felt a deep connection with the co-researchers and the transformations they evoked within me. It would probably be more correct to say that I was living out, embodying and integrating the transformations.

- ILLUMINATION

Trust, openness, reflectiveness and time are needed to birth *illumination* or a new awareness of an experience that was not present in a researcher's consciousness beforehand. The process of illumination "is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question" (Moustakas, 1990, p.29). It can also be a modification of existent understanding, synthesis of fragmented knowledge or a completely new discovery. I started playing with the common collection of themes, moving them around in my head, in physical space on paper, clustering, pulling them apart, connecting them. The qualitative analysis program NVivo (2019) was of great help for engaging with the themes. I went back and forth, flowing between the phase of immersion with the themes and the phase of incubation, leaving the themes aside, frustrated or tired, all the while using *relaxation/meditation activities* and keeping the reflexive diary. I would let the data enter me, live with me, and transform me or better yet we would simultaneously transform each other. Until finally an illumination occurred one morning when I simply knew how to cluster them into major five themes. It felt like an intuitive illumination where I reached a higher perspective on the data and the research question in an

instant. Of course, the illumination was made possible by prolonged engagement with the previous phases.

- EXPLICATION

In *explication* phase the researcher fully examines the new knowledge gained. “The entire process of explication requires that researchers attend to their own awareness, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments as a prelude to the understanding that is derived from conversations and dialogues with others.” (Moustakas, 1990, p.31). The dominant themes were developed and described in detail so as to elucidate the essences of the experience. Eventually the complete picture of the phenomena begins to form, through the so-called “*composite depiction* that represents the common qualities and themes that embrace the experience of the co-researchers” (p.52) and by the group as a whole. From here I wrote the chapter of results that includes a table of themes, each theme described in detail, with my own language and the language of other co-researchers using verbatim excerpts and snippets of dialogues, in order to “accentuate the flow, spirit, and life inherent in the experience” (p.52). Again, the program NVivo (2019) proved of great value in accessing the raw data clustered together by the themes.

- CREATIVE SYNTHESIS

The final phase of heuristic research is the process of *creative synthesis*, a possibility for the researcher to creatively connect all the findings together and come to an illuminated understanding of the phenomena. A deep knowledge of the data, a period of solitude and meditation and openness to intuitive inspirations eventually enables creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). After months of embodying the phases of timeless engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination and explication I found myself waiting again for the synthesis to illuminate the research. None of the phases could be forced before their time and so it was with the synthesis as well. Snippets of synthesis came through meditative activities, like breathing, dancing, walking, through dreams, through conversations with other people. In line with the research topic I became the embodiment of the research and thus the creative synthesis.

Therefore, in order to synthesise the final description of the researched phenomena I needed to elucidate my own embodied experience of the whole research in all its multidimensionality, and reflexivity played an important role in this. I had to allow free rein of thought and feeling that supported my knowledge, embodiment, passion and presence and infuse the work with “a personal, professional, and literary value” (p.52). The final synthesis creatively weaves together a research experience that has profoundly affected me and holds possibilities for scientific knowledge, social impact and meaning (Moustakas, 1990).

### **3.11 Trustworthiness**

Finlay and Evans (2009) define four evaluation criteria: rigour, relevance, reflexivity, resonance and suggest, “good qualitative and relational research is trustworthy and transparent in its process and impactful in its outcomes” (p.59). The first principle of rigour was applied in methodological, systematical and critical thinking, coherence and transparency of research aims with philosophical perspectives and methods chosen. Triangulation was applied by using multiple methods of data collection throughout the research process (interviews, reflexive diary of own process, reflexive notes on the interview and analysis process) in order to gain a comprehensive scope of the phenomena (Cope, 2014). The collection of all of these elements constitutes an audit trail that documents researchers’ decisions and assumptions (Cope, 2014). The second principle of relevance “concerns the value of the research in terms of its applicability and contribution” (Finlay and Evans, 2009, p.61) which I delineate in detail in chapter 4.9. The third principle of reflexivity is explained in detail in the next chapter. The fourth principle of resonance means that the findings should be presented in a way that evokes lived experience and touches the reader. This is applied in conveying an embodied way of being through the written meaning, so that by reading it, one is brought back to their lived body’s experience and not mere intellectual understanding. It is achieved by reflexive

accounts, rich and vivid quotes from the co-researchers, parts of co-created dialogue between co-researchers, poetry, and the language used.

### **3.12 Reflexivity**

The etymological root of the word reflexive means 'to bend back upon oneself', which in research can mean thoughtful, immediate and continuing self-awareness of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and the researched phenomena (Finlay, 2003). Reflexivity is contrasted to reflection, which is defined as thinking about something after the event. As qualitative researchers we fully "accept that the researcher is a central figure who actively constructs the collection, selection and interpretation of data" (Finlay, 2003, p.5). We acknowledge that research and meaning is co-created in between the researcher, co-researchers and their relationship. Instead of trying to hide the researcher's presence, we fully embrace it and with that "subjectivity in research is transformed from a problem to an opportunity" (Finlay, 2002, p.531). Because of our primordial pre-reflective embodied being within the world, we can never detach ourselves from it but we can become aware of it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Therefore, after fully embracing reflexivity into this research, the only question that remained is 'how to do it?' (Finlay, 2003). I chose to focus on reflexivity as introspection and reflexivity as intersubjective reflection.

#### **3.12.1 Reflexivity as Introspection**

Reflexivity as introspection is implied within the chosen heuristic method, where researcher's self-dialoguing, self-reflecting, and intuiting forms the basis of research (Moustakas, 1990). Reflexivity as introspection can help us examine the impact of the position, perspective and presence of the researcher, uncover unconscious motivations and implicit biases, evaluate the research process, method and findings as well as enable a clear account of the integrity of the

research through methodological record of research decisions (Finlay, 2003). For this purpose, I have been writing a reflexive research diary throughout every phase of this study in order to keep a continuous reflexive account of the dynamic relationship between myself and the research process. Reflexivity as introspection was used to write parts of the thesis: reflexive elucidation of elaborating my research question in introductory chapter, reflexive elucidation of my embodiment process in discussion, reflexive responses within dialogues with co-researchers in results and analysis. Finlay (2003) warns that the challenge of using introspection within research is to not get lost in using personal revelation as an end in itself but instead use it to add pieces to the greater puzzle and create a deeper and more general insight into the phenomenon. Therefore, I made sure to include all personal reflexivity with this intention. To reiterate, the most important intention of this study is to convey an embodied way of being through this thesis, so that by reading it, one is brought back to their embodied emotional awareness and that could only be done by reflexively sharing my own embodied experience.

### **3.12.2 Reflexivity as Intersubjective Reflection**

Reflexivity as intersubjective reflection is the other form of reflexivity I chose to focus on in this research through dialogues with co-researchers and using a research process called *reflexive embodied empathy* (Finlay, 2005), which involves engaging, reflexively, with the participant's lived body, the researcher's own body, and the embodied intersubjective relationship between the two. This is mostly used within the results chapter in order to portray the co-created embodied reality and elucidate general patterns of experiencing. We can define ourselves and others conceptually through conceptual self-awareness but we come to inhabit ourselves via the concrete feeling and acting of embodied self-awareness (Fogel, 2008). Reflexivity as intersubjective reflection has a potential to be a valuable tool to gain otherwise unattainable insight into intersubjective responses and dynamics as well as support and empower co-researchers by opening up a more radical consciousness (Finlay, 2003).

## 4 Findings and Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy and counselling psychology. It was conducted in an in-depth embodied phenomenological way with the intent to bridge the lived experience of the embodied emotional world, and the awareness of what that experience means for psychotherapy. The bare foundation of this research was an embodied view of considering human beings holistically, rather than separating human experience on thoughts, feelings, sensations, inner/outer and so on. However, in the research process the attention was placed on particular parts or aspects of the experiential landscape in order to elucidate certain phenomena, all the while remembering that it is all part of the whole. We are intelligent beings, with the body and mind intelligently intertwined, even more so with our bodies intersubjectively interwoven.

The intent was also to convey an embodied way of being through this thesis, showing and evoking the sense of aliveness of embodied experience through words. So that the reader is brought back to their own body, back to intimacy with their own emotions and the present moment awareness. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) wrote, the lived is much more encompassing in portraying understanding than the reflective knowledge alone. This would in some way mean that it has succeeded in transcending the body mind dualism, succeeded in sharing lived embodied emotional awareness.

The intention of this chapter is to provide a clarification of the findings of this study by connecting them with the views and research findings of other scholars, as well as offering personal views on them. With that I intend to open up and delineate a perspective of embodiment that came through my own research, all the while acknowledging it is not definitive, nor is it the only correct perspective, but is instead proposed as a contribution to a developing theoretical and practical understanding of embodied emotional awareness.

The findings of the research and the discussion are interwoven in order to create a more integrated, concise and embodied presentation. The findings are the outcome of the analysis of seven research dialogues between myself as the interviewer or the researcher (Alja) and the participants or co-researchers (pseudonyms: Dawn, Luna, Pele, Sana, Finn, Odin, Vlad), as well as the research dialogue between myself as co-researcher or the one being interviewed (Alja) and my psychotherapist as the researcher or the interviewer (pseudonym: Clara). The numbers next to the names (ex.: Luna144) point to the line in the transcripts. Analysis of the texts revealed five major themes with additional subthemes.

Figure 2. Overview of themes and subthemes

<b>EMBODIMENT IS A PROCESS</b>	<b>BEING IS FEELING</b>	<b>DISEMBODIED BEING</b>	<b>MULTIDIMENSIONAL BEING</b>	<b>RELATIONAL CONNECTION POINTS</b>
<b>Body Centres</b>  <b>Sensitivity and Vulnerability and Authenticity</b>  <b>Embodied Intuition vs. Rules</b>  <b>Self-care</b>  <b>Conscious Breathing</b>	<b>Being With Feeling</b>  <b>Being Feels Allowing</b>  <b>Being in Heart</b>  <b>Being Open</b>  <b>Possibilities of Being</b>	<b>Being in Fear</b>  <b>Resistance to Embodiment</b>  <b>Danger in Body and Safety in Head</b>  <b>Embodied Emotional Disconnection</b>  <b>Being in Doubt</b>  <b>Being in Waiting</b>	<b>Awareness gives Perspective and Choice</b>  <b>Multidimensionality of EEA</b>  <b>Integration of All Aspects of Ourselves</b>	<b>Mirroring Embodiment</b>  <b>Bracketing and Discerning</b>  <b>Meet Them Where They Are</b>  <b>Pulled into Other Way of Being</b>  <b>Co-Created Space</b>  <b>Presence in Relation</b>

## 4.1 Embodiment is a Process

Recently embodiment is becoming a hot topic in research, psychotherapy, wellbeing and other areas (Payne et al., 2018). When I think about the various ways it is being researched, used, and talked about, and what it means for me and my co-researchers, I get an image of us all pointing a finger at embodiment when really the finger *is* embodiment. In the Shurangama Sutra (1977), a core text of Zen Buddhism, there is a description of how the Buddha used to teach by pointing a finger, indicating ‘I am a finger pointing to the thing. Don’t look at me; look at the thing’. In the context of embodiment, I feel there is a twist to the story: “I am a finger pointing to the thing. Don't look at me nor the thing; look at your own finger.” What am I trying to say with this anecdote? We are embodiment and any attempt at researching it or writing about it by looking for it outside of ourselves is already missing the point. Nevertheless, we have the need to write about it, to share it with others, and to expand our understanding, so the best way is to share our own embodiment. This brings me back to my own embodiment at this moment of writing about it, and finding my own way to share it. Johnson (2008) saw the difficulty that embodiment presents to philosophy and research in coming to terms with the fact of our own embodiment. Throughout this research project I felt I have been coming to terms with my own embodiment, not conceptually but experientially. In my own flesh and bones I went through a deep embodiment process (more about this in the chapter: 4.7 Reflexivity on my own embodiment process).

Throughout the analysis of the interviews with all co-researchers it became apparent that embodiment is a process. It is a gradual process of centring or anchoring awareness into certain parts of the body and eventually the whole body. From another perspective embodiment is about merging awareness with matter. It is a process of developing our own sensitivity, vulnerability and authenticity. Conscious breathing and self-care are evidently an important part of embodiment. When we become more embodied we develop a strong internal



compass or intuition that sometimes clashes with textbook rules about doing therapy.

#### 4.1.1 Body Centres

For four co-researchers the body centres or grounds into the here and now (Finn75, Sana103, Alja109, Odin74).

When Odin finds he loses his awareness he takes a moment to compose himself:

*“Orientating myself. Feeling myself in the chair. Feeling myself in the room. Feeling it squirreling around me. And not panicking, staying still, letting it dissipate.”* (Odin74).

The body serves as an anchor for centring and developing awareness for me.

*“It completely came out of nowhere, I am not sure if that is embodied in any truth, but I feel like the awareness that I can get comes through my body so that (breaths in) I breath in air and I become aware ok this is me this is where I am. Like I feel the energy of my body... And that is what centres me. Not sure I could get centred without my body, just in my head or thought or just kind of...”* (Alja110)

It is my observation that when clients get connected with their bodies through emotions or feeling or sensations, for me it can feel grounding, centring, dropping into the body: *“It felt like she finally dropped down like a balloon. Aaaah this is ...being here in myself on this Earth.”* (Alja63). It can *“deepen the process to another layer, another dimension, out of the intellectual (Alja124)...into the emotional, the embodied, the relational...”*(Alja125)

Analysis of the interviews with all co-researchers clearly shows that we experience embodiment as a process, which is in line with other literature and

research. Embodiment is experienced as a gradual process of centring or anchoring awareness into certain parts of the body, and slowly also the whole body. Fogel (2009) similarly writes “expanding embodied self-awareness is slow and deliberate in comparison to the rapid and instantaneous generation of ideas and thoughts in conceptual self-awareness” (p.47). Allegranti (2011) provides a “working definition of embodiment as a process and one that changes according to our lived body experiences over time” (p.2). Tapie’s (2019) study also showed that being embodied is not a temporary experience but an ongoing process of grounding oneself, she also found that therapists are embodied to a different extent at different times. Danielsson and Rosberg (2015) in their research found their participants having an experience of grounding themselves, feeling the weight of the body, which they compared to a ‘landing platform’ (p.8) of certainty and stability, rooting themselves in reality and familiarity. Rothschild (2000) uses focusing on body awareness when working with traumatised clients: “Awareness of current body sensations can anchor one in the present, here and now, facilitating separation of past from present.” (p.277). Ray (2008) writes that the process of becoming embodied is the ultimate human challenge and yet this process is written in the body itself, within our genes and our bones:

In journeying into the body, we are making a voyage toward our deepest selves. When we do so, we not only find ourselves more and more drawn to the possibility of realising who we are, we find ourselves already deeply engaged in the journey itself (p.41).

#### **4.1.2 Sensitivity and Vulnerability and Authenticity**

Embodiment is experienced amongst co-researchers as a process of developing our own sensitivity, vulnerability and authenticity.

Three co-researchers felt that embodiment means getting in touch with their sensitivity, paying attention to it and not being able to disregard it anymore (Luna70, Sana116, Vlad46).

*“We are realising that we are highly sensitive people and that we have many many different channels that are available to us, then becoming more human in terms of embodiment is being aware of them, and taking as good care as we do with our phones, like updating them, keeping the battery charged or turning it off once in a while, that we take care of ourselves as an embodiment as good as we do our cell phones. (laughing) amm getting rid of apps we don't use, I guess becoming more human of appreciating all these different aspects of ourselves in a way that they are not a problem.” (Sana139).*

In this quotation Sana expressed an unfortunate truth that we too often take better care of our smartphones than we do of ourselves. It is through the process of embodiment that we start to realise that we have ‘smartbodies’, which we need to pay attention to and take care of in order to use their full functionality.

*“What if we are all highly sensitive and we have different ways of dealing with it. Some people have numbed themselves to that or they invested more into their minds, other people have addictions to numb them.” (Sana116)*

Vlad (44) described his own experience in therapy that seemed to be one of the most healing experiences in his life; it was when his therapist confirmed his senses and allowed himself to be honest and vulnerable with him. Therapy can often be our only chance to have our senses confirmed, where we can be validated, and this might be more important than bracketing, keeping boundaries or objectivity. Often the most important thing in therapy is not what is being said but what is happening in between. This seems like a very important point for therapy in general which directly connects to the question about following rules or following our intuitions, sensitivity and authenticity.

Three co-researchers felt becoming embodied also means opening up to vulnerability and allowing themselves to be vulnerable with their clients (Pele4, Luna171, Vlad70).

*Vlad85: If we can be vulnerable with our clients, admit to mistakes. Then it makes it possible for them to feel they can be, in that sense it does feel really important to be able to be with...somebody's rage, meeting them in their feeling. So being more human in therapy involves being able to encompass everything, but including vulnerability. I think this idea that therapists should not be vulnerable, is not the right thing. And it gets in the way of being fully human, both for them and for their clients.*

*Alja86: And I guess vulnerable...we can only be vulnerable when we are fully in the body, right?*

*Vlad86: Yes, yes, that's true, I haven't thought about it like that, but you're right, it is not possible otherwise, because otherwise it's a simulation of vulnerability.*

*Alja87: Yes, I haven't thought about that, you can simulate it, but it's not true vulnerability. And the other body can feel it.*

*Vlad87: yes, yes, that's right.*

Tweedie (2015) similarly discovered that by embracing uncertainty in therapy she moved from a conceptual to an embodied understanding, which changed her way of being with clients into more present, vulnerable and emotionally available for therapeutic 'use of self'. Brown (2012), Tweedie (2015) and Wosket (1999) all argue that accessing emotional awareness and bringing one's vulnerable self into the counselling relationship may be key to reaching the greatest level of therapeutic work possible, which is what most of the co-researchers of this study also experience. Masters (2013) maintains that vulnerability does not have to be disempowering like it is often perceived, instead "it can be a source of strength, especially as we learn to soften without losing touch with our core presence" (p.30). He defines emotional vulnerability as being "in touch with – and transparent about – what we are feeling, sharing both its surface and its depths" (Masters, 2013, p.31).

Sana (5), Vlad (44) and Pele (2) paralleled being embodied with being authentic and connecting with others in an authentic way:

*“So if I am in my body and being as authentic as I possibly can, I am making a difference, I am making, hopefully an invitation to other people to be as authentic as they possibly can” (Sana5).*

*“But I like to look at it also in my own self, in my private life, the more I am embodied, the more I am practising this sensing, being honest and authentic then more I can protect myself from the beginning.” (Sana89)*

Other studies confirm this theme. Mayer (2015) found that authentic use of self is an essential part of embodied therapeutic relationships. Sultan (2017) also discovered the capacity of embodiment to support the therapeutic relationship by fostering authenticity in the counsellor and client, thus honouring the personhood of both individuals.

It seems there is unfathomable connection between authenticity and embodied emotional awareness. Is an embodied emotional response similar to an authentic response? When we live in touch with our embodied truth, do we experience it as authentic? In his book *In search of authenticity*, Golomb (1995) writes “the term ‘authenticity’ is used in so many different contexts that it may very well resist definition” (p.1). The difficulty in attempting to define it lies on many levels: from the philosophical nature of its meaning to the persistent view that its presence is discerned in its absence. “The notion of authenticity, it seems, signifies something beyond the domain of objective language” concludes Golomb (1995, p.1). Kierkegaard’s (1958) take on authenticity may be seen in his desire to create a way of living, a pattern of life, which would be true for him and would enable him to be true to himself:

To lead a complete human life and not merely one of the understanding, so that I should not...base the development of my thought upon...something that is called objective...but upon something which grows together with the deepest roots of my life (p.45).

Similarly, Buber (1955) writes of the free individual as free of causation and definition, meaning that he is the only one who acts in response to what has come to him from the outside: “he responds freely from the depths as a whole and conscious person.” (p.67). He sees what is new and unique in each situation, instead of only seeing its resemblance to other things. Maté (2003) argues that illness springs from losing touch with our authenticity. According to him authenticity is a sense of being ourselves, knowing who we are and what we feel. To be authentic is to be in touch with our body and our gut feelings. For him healing is about regaining our authenticity. Gendlin (1999) argued that authenticity has been misunderstood as arbitrary choice. Sartre (1943) wrote about it as a universal choice, Heidegger (1962) saw it as ontological. Gendlin (1999) saw a possibility in authenticity becoming the new ‘centre’ after the decentring by postmodernism (p. 203). “Authenticity is defined not by its outcomes, but by its kind of process” (p.212). For him “an ‘authentic’ process is the kind that carries forward what is implicit so that it is engaged and comes to speech or action” (p.207). “A process-conception of human nature emerges here, not as any definable content, not as already shared meanings, but as the newly intricate understandability that is created in this kind of process” (p.212). It becomes difficult to speak of this kind of living bodily on a much more intricate level. And this might be exactly the reason why authenticity is so hard to define and remains enveloped in a cloud of elusiveness. Understanding authenticity as a process of consistently being in touch with our body, and responding accordingly, makes it connected to embodied emotional awareness. Connecting embodiment with authenticity builds on existent existential theory of authenticity and it adds a practical embodied research validation.

### **4.1.3 Embodied Intuition versus Rules**

Four co-researchers (Vlad41, Pele3, Dawn13, Sana64) have an experience that when they become more embodied, they also develop a strong internal compass or embodied intuition that sometimes clashes with textbook rules about doing therapy, which sometimes presents as a dilemma of what to follow.

*“Don’t go over time, the boundaries and...we are bombarded with all of that so it takes time to get rid of it and to trust ourselves. We are grown-ups!”  
(Pele3)*

Vlad described his own experience in personal therapy where they both chose to follow the embodied intuition. Vlad had a sense about his therapist having a personal reaction to what he was bringing into therapy and asked him about it, his therapist honestly confirmed it was true. For Vlad having his sense confirmed was profoundly healing because he was living in a family where the truth was always hidden and his senses always mocked.

*“I think it was partially because at the time it was a relief to know that I was picking this up correctly, that I was validated. And I was glad, so pleased that he was able to admit to that rather than...rather than say ‘I wonder why you are asking me that question?’” (Vlad43)*

*“So actually having it validated was a healing, having my sense of what was going on validated was healing.” (Vlad47)*

Vlad believes we have to have some intuitive sense of what is right or wrong, that is a part of embodiment as a therapist. Otherwise the *“solution is to get out of embodiment, but that’s not satisfying. So the solution is to withdraw, to dissociate, to kind of make ourselves follow rules. (laughs)” (Vlad68)*

Sana and Dawn both found themselves in a dilemma when their embodied intuition was not in line with their minds that are used to following rules. They both chose to respond to what the bodies in the room seemed to need and this turned out to benefit the therapeutic process.

*“My mind didn’t trust it, because this is so unorthodox for the first session to say it but I couldn’t not say it.” (Sana64)*

*“But there have been a few occasions where she has been so overwhelmed by the sensations in her body she hasn't been able to stay seated. She's laying on the floor and she's asked me to come and sit beside her, and I said to you earlier I don't normally touch clients, and actually one time I held her wrists because she was hitting herself, thumping her head.” (Dawn13)*

Vlad described his ever-present dilemma about following the rules of therapy around self-disclosure. On one hand the question is about whether self-disclosure can be useful or beneficial for the client. On the other hand, the question is can we ever not self-disclose because of our body is always self-disclosing, our body is never neutral (Ellingson, 2017, Alegranti, 2011b).

*Vlad41:...when you think about being embodied as a therapist, then this intellectual decision, should I self-disclose or not, there's a lot of... it's very limited because of course you self-disclose in a way, of course you give away to some extent if they're observing.*

*Alja42: Even if you're not speaking.*

*Vlad42: Even if you don't say a word about it, yes.*

The dilemma between following rules or embodied intuitions is confirmed in previous research and practice. Johnson (2008) writes “Our embodiment shapes both what and how we experience, think, mean, imagine, reason and communicate” (p.19) and so outer imposed rules and regulations often lose their meaning and power. Tapie's (2019) study revealed that ‘listening to the body’ means taking into account information gathered through one's embodiment, as the medium through which therapists gain understanding and knowledge about their clients in a way that is other than cognitive. Allegranti (2011b) as a therapist strives to be attentive to the process of trusting her own ‘embodied knowing’, as well as working towards a ‘co-creative knowing’ with the client, all the while scrutinising the key ethical questions of a professional healthcare context (p.495). Gerson (2010) argues that the body's manifestations can be a quicker and more accurate way of engaging and seeing into her clients, as opposed to her conscious mind. She has learned to trust her body as a compass



showing her a direct way to the core of the client's issue, much sooner than her mind can understand, interpret or choose the right therapeutic intervention. Lussier-Ley (2010) also found the importance of learning to trust her feelings. Jung (1999) recognised the implicit knowledge of affective bodies when he wrote "learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul" (p. 22). He believed the symbols of the self are always arising from the depths of the living body.

#### **4.1.4 Self-Care**

Self-care is a necessary part of embodiment according to four co-researchers (Luna161, Sana113, Dawn164, Finn43), which means taking care of their whole being and regenerating energy levels by resting, eating well, movement, mindfulness activities and spending time in nature (Sana113, Dawn164, Finn43).

Oftentimes it is the body that tells us what it needs: *"So my body is telling me 'It's enough, I need a break', and then it's my responsibility to look after my body"* (Finn43).

Luna says self-care is about taking care of herself first before she can take care of anyone else:

*"So actually part of my journey as a therapist is to close myself, to have more boundaries...and to recognise when I don't want to open up and honour that, and to give myself space."* (Luna117).

Self-care is important for co-researchers as it allows them to stay embodied, connected with their sensitivity and with clients instead of needing to disconnect to protect themselves:

*"There is no point giving yourself, or being with someone else, when you can't cope with it. Cause then it's inauthentic anyway."* (Luna161).

Research and practice of psychotherapy constantly confirms therapists' self-care is one of the most important requirements of the profession. Tapie (2019) also found that being embodied itself appeared to allow therapists to feel self-supported and to be of service to clients. It is necessary to offer contact in a truthful and authentic way and as Totton (2005) writes this:

...means above all working on our own resistance to and avoidance of contact, giving ourselves just as much respect and support as we do our clients, but finding our way through to a place where we can genuinely want to be with the other person. (p.174).

#### **4.1.5 Conscious Breathing**

Five co-researchers (Luna172, Finn73, Alja105, Dawn132, Pele1) revealed that becoming conscious of breath is an important part of embodiment. In a therapy session conscious breathing serves as a direct connection between the awareness and the body; as a reminder and a tool to centre ourselves into our body, into the present moment, into being with our clients. Conscious breathing gives the ability to call the awareness into the body (Alja105, 109), to ground us into the present moment (Luna41), to calm down, to stay with what is happening, with what we are feeling even when it is uncomfortable (Luna172, Finn73, 75). Finn (74) reminds his clients to keep breathing when he notices they have stopped.

*“When we have been overwhelmed or we’ve gone into a fight-flight response. The pre-frontal cortex goes offline, the limbic system takes over. This is the primitive brain, it’s much quicker than our human brain, so there is no capacity to think our way out of that state of being, and actually, if you want to take it into physiology, the only way out is through the breath, which is to calm our nervous system down to bring our thinking mind back*

*online, and then we can be aware of internal process and external stimuli.”*  
(Finn73)

*“I don’t stop breathing but I do probably start shallow breathing and I will remind myself to come back to breathing to my belly, to centre myself and stay in contact with the client because in that moment my nervous system is getting caught up with theirs and I’m becoming anxious and so then I’m shallow breathing.”*(Finn75)

*“But if I become aware at certain point like if I can kind of wake up from it and I centre myself and (breathes) take a breath, then something happens”.*  
(Alja105)

Conscious breathing helped at bringing awareness and clarity into the research process (Alja134, 144, Dawn132). Dawn (132) used the breath to get out of her head and into her whole body. At the moment in the interview when she did that, I remember feeling the release of tension and a relaxation in my whole body. I also used the breath when I felt stuck or needed to reach a higher perspective.

*“(inhales deeply) we feel with the body.”*(Alja134)

*“Can I be very aware and not embodied? (breathes in) I don't know I am really... (exhales).”* (Alja144)

Breathing can help us calm down and stay with what we are feeling even when it is uncomfortable:

*“...be courageous enough to connect and...relax...just to be with all of it. I feel sensations. And to be OK with not being OK, keep breathing, actually that’s it, as long as you keep breathing and to recognise that you’re breathing.”*(Luna172).

These findings show awareness of breath to be a valuable and powerful embodiment tool, and it is becoming more and more recognised as such in psychotherapeutic practice. Fogel (2009) writes “an awareness of our breathing is a direct link to embodied self-awareness, a way of tuning into, localising, and identifying our current biobehavioural response mode.” (p.241). Totton (2005) posits that breathing is right on the edge between voluntary and autonomic functioning; it is on this edge where consciousness and spontaneity begin to interfere with each other. Because of that conscious attention to breathing reveals that we cannot deliberately be consistent and spontaneous. “Attention to the breath acts as a gateway into a tremendous range of experiences, which seem to self-select according to the client’s needs at the time.” (Totton, 2005, p.180).

## **4.2 Being is Feeling**

Descartes’ (1637) “cogito ergo sum” or “I am thinking, therefore I exist” (p.15) reflects an intellectual aspect of being. But when we shift to an existential aspect of being, it might be truer to say “I feel, therefore I am”. In that manner Masters (2013) writes “to be alive is to feel, and to feel is to experience emotion.” (p.1). Levine (2010) updated Descartes’ theorem to reflect bottom-up instead of top-down processing: “I sense, I act, I feel, I perceive, I reflect, I think and I reason; therefore I know I am” (p.282). As I sit here trying to write this chapter, I can be thinking through all the past associations I have about this topic and plan how to put them together into a coherent whole. Or I can be present in my body and let the flow of ideas come moment to moment. To an outside observer I am just sitting in front of the computer in both of these situations, however I am experiencing a completely different way of being, which also reflects profoundly on the way this chapter is written and the final creation. We only ever truly exist when we are present in the here and now (Tolle, 1999). Our body is always in the here and now whereas our thoughts have the ability to ruminate in the past or future. Many researchers write of embodied cognition, embodied action, embodied language, embodied self-awareness and embodied movement but not

many write about embodied feeling. Sheets-Johnstone (2018) believes this to be so because “feelings do not need packaging. They are not just present in living bodies but are experienced directly and immediately by living bodies.” (p.13). Merleau-Ponty (1962) similarly writes “The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world...” (p.xvii). Taking this further Ray (2008) believes: “to be fully embodied involves an unconditional presence to our emotional life” (p.56).

All co-researchers spoke about being and feeling from various perspectives. And so this theme is about being present with feelings, being feels allowing, possibilities of being, being open and being in the heart.

#### **4.2.1 Being With Feeling**

Six co-researchers described being with their own feelings and their client’s feelings as the key part of therapy (Luna4, Pele76, Dawn144, Finn44, Alja134, Odin28).

*“My approach is to feel what is actually happening.” (Luna4)*

Odin (28) expressed his view that we have the possibility of feeling many different things and being with them, rather than having a fixed way of feeling.

*“... I am thinking working existentially I am not trying to find out what somebody ‘really feels’ and I am doing an inverted commas about what people really feel as if there was some state somewhere that we could reveal. I think existentially we have the possibility feeling many different things and often have a multitude of feelings that are often conflicting and confusing and then we have to be with that and own it and draw from it some feeling or way of being that responds to the situation and enables us to be or opens potentials for us. Rather than finding within us some core imagined self that is static and fixed. (Odin28)*

Three co-researchers talked about how sometimes being with clients can leave us with strong feelings, often long after they leave the room, which can be very difficult to be with (Alja94, Dawn144, Finn43).

*“I just felt her sadness so much...that it was almost unbearable like I didn't know what to do with it. And it stayed with me for a couple of hours afterwards. And it really brought my stuff as well.” (Alja94)*

*Finn43: I don't remember how long I carried this, but I certainly carried it for a number of hours, or a day or two until I was able to let it go. And I think that's really normal. If we choose to connect to people, we are going to be affected by people. You are sharing how you are affected by me sharing with you my stories of being affected by clients. So there is that effect, isn't there, of it being carried over.*

*Alja44: And I like your words of 'emotional contamination'*

*Finn44: Yeah, it sounds quite toxic but the work we do... with the vast majority of clients we are sitting with difficult feelings and difficult... difficult trauma and difficult experiences that they haven't given shape and form to and therefore they can't process and contain yet, so we are using our own bodies as containers and that's taxing work, it's hard.*

During the interview I came to a realisation that in order to be in a state of presence or 'being', instead of a state of 'doing', I need to feel whatever I feel in the present moment (Alja132). The following dialogue is a good representation of how I came to a fresh realisation with the help of Clara and her attentive listening and questioning; there was a new understanding being co-created.

*Clara 130. And what is that like for you as a therapist? Can you work in an embodied way and it brings a relief for you?*

*Alja 130. An acceptance of yourself with all this stuff.*

*Clara 131. Mhm*

*Alja 131. Of just being, because I guess running away, pushing it away is doing*

*Clara 132. Mhm*

*Alja 132. And we can't arrive to just being if we are not OK with everything that we feel. Because feeling is being right? It is right here right now? Feeling is being! Hahaha. So you can't be if you don't want to feel.*

*Clara 133. Mhm*

*Alja 133. Mmmmm*

*Clara 134. And tell me how embodiment fits into your understanding of that?*

*Alja 134. (inhales deeply) we feel with the body. We don't feel with our brains or our thoughts, or ideas or... yeah so we feel with the body and that is it. That is the connection, it is the being. Feeling the body. Being feeling the body.*

This theme is confirmed by Masters (2013) who writes that no matter how much we numb ourselves, there is no getting away from emotion “so we might as well turn toward emotion, regardless of how unpleasant it might be, cultivating as much intimacy with it as possible” (p.19). Brown (2010) pointed out that in order to live by being fully present the “intent isn't to feel better, but to get better at feeling” (p.22). When we are in a state of ‘doing’ we are pushing feelings away because we are not able or don't want to be with what is. Moreover, we feel with our body and thus embodiment is about becoming present with our feelings in the body. Merleau-Ponty (1962) pointed out “Just as it is necessarily ‘here’, the body necessarily exists ‘now’” (p.162). The fact that emotions are embodied was one of the resulting main themes in Brown's (2014) hermeneutic phenomenological research into emotional experience of the psychotherapeutic relationship of existential therapists. Levine (2010) makes an important connection between embodiment, instincts, feelings and awareness:

To be embodied means that we are guided by our instincts, while simultaneously having the opportunity to be self-aware of that guidance. This self-awareness requires us to recognise and track our sensations and

feelings. We unveil our instincts as they live within us, rather than being alienated from them or forcibly driven by them (p.278).

From a developmental perspective Winnicott (1958) wrote about a state of being that he called 'going-on-being', where the psyche resides in the soma. According to him it was the mother's emotional holding and responsiveness to psychological and bodily needs of the baby that enabled the psyche to rest in the body and for them to become interwoven. This is supposed to be the foundation for a relaxed state of being in later life.

#### **4.2.2 Being Feels Allowing**

In the experience of four co-researchers (Luna100, Pele75, Alja129, Odin18), being with whatever we feel brings us relief, and an acceptance of ourselves in the present moment. Therefore, embodied emotional awareness feels like allowing the experience to be as it is and not being in resistance.

*"...from my experience, something that is inside of our body, inside of us, our consciousness or whatever, is just there and we usually have spent a lot of energy and time pushing it away or running away and so if we can just be with that without doing those things (sighs) it brings a relief of not running away and not using energy to push it away anymore." (Alja129)*

Odin shared that he enjoys just being and not wanting to be fixed by himself or anyone else (Odin19).

*"But being present with you at the moment I don't feel contorted in that sense and I feel more able to be." (Odin18)*

Luna (100) shared how well her clients respond to an exercise of being with what is:



*“Typically everyone says ‘wow that was really relaxing’ or ‘wow that was ... a really deep space’ or some people will say ‘well I found myself really distracted... it was quite nice to have you remind me to come back to the breath.’ Or some people will say ‘I haven’t had that much space away from something for a long time’ or ‘I wish I could take that home with me’ there’s often a recognition that it’s something different to what they typically experience of being with themselves.” (Luna100)*

I came to a realisation that embodied emotional awareness feels good, meaning that being aware feels good, as opposed to being lost in client’s way of being or their stories (Alja105). For me as a therapist it also feels good when a client connects to their emotions (Alja65). It is always better to feel something than not to feel anything (Alja66). Below is another excerpt of a dialogue where a co-created meaning developed:

*Clara 64. And what was it like for you to engage with that sadness?*

*Alja 64. It felt good actually. Sounds very weird, but it felt good, it felt like...*

*Clara 65. What do you think sounds weird about it?*

*Alja 65. That her sadness felt good. Feeling her sadness felt good.*

*Clara 66. What is meaningful about that for you?*

*Alja 66. (silence) (sighs). That feeling feels good. Whatever it is. It is always good to feel. As opposed to not feel anything, which she says she does all the time.*

On one hand our present experience can be painful and difficult. However, our natural attitude of pushing painful feelings away is often creating more resistance and pain. On the other hand, being with painful emotions and accepting them allows them to soften and change. That allowing can feel good, feeling content in ourselves in the present moment with what is. “When embodied, we linger longer in the lush landscape of the present moment” (Levine, 2010, p.278). When we develop the ability to be more present with ourselves, we experience pleasure, wonder and wisdom in simply being. Gendlin (1999) made a similar discovery that the process of actually changing feels good;

it feels natural to the body: “The crucial move goes beneath the usual painful places to a bodily sensing that is at first unclear. The experience of something emerging from there feels like a relief and a coming alive” (p.6).

### 4.2.3 Being in Heart

Six co-researchers paralleled being embodied as a therapist to being kind, compassionate and patient (Luna146, Sana45, Dawn157, Odin84, Alja36, Pele60). Luna talked about kindness being the only thing that really matters (Luna146) and Dawn talked about love (Dawn157).

*Alja146: None of it really matters? What does matter then?*

*Luna146: Kindness.*

*Alja147: Where is it?*

*Luna147: It's in the connection. It's in how you respond.*

*Alja148: Connection of what, or who or where.*

*Luna148: Connection of understanding, connection of meeting. It's in the... it's in the nothingness. It's just...it's just...it's just...felt...when it's there.*

*Alja149: Where do you feel it? Do you think you can locate it when it's there?*

*Luna149: No not particularly located, it's just noticeable.*

*Alja150: How?*

*Luna150: It's lighter. Everything feels lighter. Everything feels kinder.*

*Alja151: How does kind feel? Lighter?*

*Luna151: It feels warm and light and understood, and not adrift.*

Compassion seems to have something to do with awareness being focused in the heart area or the whole feeling body instead of merely focused in the thinking head: “...feeling for me I put it into my heart so I feel the difference between the heart and the head” (Sana45). Three co-researchers located compassionate feelings in the chest or heart area (Alja36, Sana45, Odin84). In my experience being in the heart is a way of being where the awareness is centred in the heart

area of the body, it is opposite to resistance or disembodiment, it involves 'pure trust' (Alja36), receptivity and presence or 'no waiting' (Alja37).

Some co-researchers (Sana48, Odin83, Luna156, Pele60) have expressed the difficulty in feeling the separation and shifting between the head and the rest of the body. Luna (156) experiences that being embodied in her whole body is connected to compassionate way of being.

*Odin82: I sometimes find myself in a counselling session and I am trying not to fold my arms, not to close myself off from people and then I often have my right hand on my chest where my heart is.*

*Alja83: mmm*

*Odin83: and sometimes thinking am I holding my heart to defend it, to hold it in, to stop myself from being overdrawn by compassionate love into their world and what is happening to them and I try to keep that separation so that I am with them feeling what they feel but not fall into them.*

*Alja84: mmm, so it is here that you feel the compassion happens?*

*Odin84: yes, I think it is chest.*

The question of possibility, choice and also the difficulty of being kind or being in the heart in psychotherapy came up for me (Alja40) and Luna (160).

*Alja 40. (silence) It is hard to generalise. But I would say generally. (smiles) When someone close to me is not in their heart it is hard for me to stay in the heart. So yes, I guess most clients are not and then it is hard for me to go there or stay there.*

*Clara 41. Mhm*

*Alja 41. Amm. And what comes up is the question maybe I just go out to meet them where they are? But then wouldn't it be better if I stayed in my heart and showed them another way of being? That is a question I grapple with a lot.*

*"I notice when I'm not being kind and I find that really difficult...because that is not what...because I think kindness and openness are linked for me. And when I feel like I want to put boundaries between me and someone else it feels like I'm being unkind somehow, that I am cutting them off somehow from being with me. But that doesn't feel kind but at the same time I recognise that I don't want to be penetrated by them. So I am being kind to myself." (Luna160)*

With Luna we talked about what it means when we want to be kind to others but are not kind to ourselves and from there we ended up exploring kindness for self and how that can be one of the hardest things because it entails being kind to all parts of ourselves, even the painful ones. It was a co-created discovery that touched me to tears and she gave space to that.

*Alja162: So being kind to yourself first is kind of a prerequisite for kindness.*

*Luna163: I don't know whether it is a prerequisite but I know that what I am saying would sound like that, but I think it's really important to...it's a bit like...a clichéd metaphor, you have to put the gas mask on yourself before you put it on a child or whatever...if there is nothing in you that is feeling kind or open or... loving toward yourself then how can you...? It's a bit like expecting the heating to work when you got no money in the... how can you radiate stuff when you haven't got anything?*

*Alja163: What is it then? It's bringing out in me this question, 'cause I really saw it. What does it then mean when we or people, when they don't have kindness within themselves, or they haven't paid for the heating...and they want to be kind to others, want to give it to others. What are they then giving?*

*Luna163: I don't know, I think it will be different for each person. But maybe an escape?*

*Alja164: An escape from?*

*Luna164: I don't know, it's hard. At some level I believe that the only way to truly...I believe in serving others. I believe it is an important part of being*

*human. But I also...I think yeah, you really have to check yourself and your agenda to be aware of that.*

*Alja165: Because it could be an escape from something that... from what?*

*Luna165: You are avoiding yourself.*

*Alja166: I find myself asking: Why would we avoid being kind to ourselves? It sounds...well I think we do it all the time, but it sounds actually very stupid.*

*Luna166: Yeah I don't know...Pain.*

*Alja167: Pain. What pain?*

*Luna167: Just pain.*

*Alja168: Because...this is what is coming up for me...because sometimes being kind to ourselves sometimes would mean feeling pain.*

*Luna168: Confronting.*

*Alja169: Feeling pain that we carry, that wants to be loved. Needs to be loved out of pain. (I become tearful)*

*Luna169: You seem quite sad.*

*Alja170: Yeah, I got the sadness...but this kindness for sadness as well. How are you feeling?*

*Luna170: I'm OK. I want to cuddle you. (both laugh)*

Dawn described her continuous struggle between 'trying hard' (Dawn79), being impatient with her client's stuck way of being as opposed to being patient with her, knowing that it takes a lot of stillness and time for the client to show herself.

*"Part of me that is patient trusts the process and knows that it could take years and years and years and is in for the long haul and I have told her that." (Dawn52)*

She realised she has an internal struggle between impatience and patience with herself, which was even played out in real time during our interview:

*Alja129: yeah. Do you notice any difference between the embodiment of the emotions between up here (head) and down here (chest)?*

*Dawn129: (laughs) I don't know, I feel like my client now. Difference in embodying the emotions sort of head up or head down?*

*Alja130: yeah. (silence). What is going on?*

*Dawn130: yeah I just notice I was tight through here (shoulders and neck).*

*Alja131: trying hard?*

*Dawn131: it is about getting it right yeah. Trying really hard to get it right. (silence) And I've just put an arm around myself 'it's OK, it's OK'.*

*Alja132: yeah, I think I felt it.*

*Dawn132: and I think I've just lived it, and I don't know how to document it but I think I've just lived it. I think for me when I am trying really hard and I am really really tight it's like my emotions are more up here (head) and when I can soften and I can open and I can breathe (breathes) I've got access to the whole rest of me.*

*Alja133: mmm*

*Dawn133: so yes.*

*Alja134: So, what is the difference now that you've lived it? (laughs) I mean what is your experiential difference, I am not asking for a theory.*

*Dawn134: OK my experiential difference is that if I am trapped in my try harder got to do it right: I didn't really understand the question, oh my god I must be stupid, amm you are going to expose that I really don't know what I am doing, then I get really tense and it is all up here.*

*Alja135: Wow. But then?*

*Dawn135: But then I put my arm around myself and reminded myself that I am a very experienced therapist (laughs) and I do know some stuff and it is alright and I can soften and I can go into my body and go 'oh yeah right that feels better', yeah now I got access to 'oh I am a bit tense in my gut and little bit tight here', little bit sick when I feel like oh maybe a don't really know enough. Yeah. This is about reassurance, about 'it's ok, it's alright, you are ok, you are doing a good enough job' (laughs)*

When she was in her 'trying hard' judgmental mode I felt a tension in my body similarly to what she described. But when she 'put an arm' (Dawn131) around herself and switched to a compassionate mode I could feel the release of tension.

It was very synchronistic how this happened between us and it was astonishing how we stayed aware all the time and were able to reflect on the embodied emotions that we felt within and between us during the interview.

Kindness, compassion, trust and patience seem to be at the heart of being as well as being in the heart. When one is being in presence, in the body, in touch with feeling there is a certain quality of being that opens up. Co-researchers have described this state of being with various concepts, although it felt like they were all talking about the same phenomenon. Mindfulness as a state of being and as a practice also points to a very similar phenomenon. The intention in mindfulness is to bring one's complete attention to the present experience with an attitude of acceptance and loving-kindness (Marlatt and Kristeller, 1999). Originally Buddhist mindfulness meditation was closely intertwined with ethics – collective intention of liberation and compassion for all beings – whereas in the western world the goal of mindfulness as a psychological intervention is mostly individually oriented: healthcare, wellbeing, success etc. (Ditrich, 2013). It seems that the aspect of compassion often got disconnected from mindfulness, although it is supposed to be one of the key components of Buddhist mindfulness practice. Nevertheless, Buddhist concepts of compassion are being increasingly integrated into psychotherapy (Germer and Siegel, 2012). Kornfield (2009) in his *Guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist Psychology* lists four degrees of noble hearts that are amongst the highest possibilities of human development according to Buddhist texts. These 'Four Radiant Abodes' (brahmavihārās) are loving-kindness (Metta), compassion (Karuna), joy (Mudita), and equanimity or peace (Upekkha). The idea is that they need to be established together and in balance to give the optimal personal harmony. In fact, all co-researchers and myself feel it in our bodies that a compassionate way of being with oneself and the client is what matters in psychotherapy:

*"I think it is love and we don't usually use the love word in the therapy room. I think the work that we do is about love." (Dawn157)*

Through the therapeutic relationship clients can come to an understanding that compassion is not a weakness but a way of building courage (Gilbert, 2014). They can then use the compassionate attitude to engage with difficulties they are facing – such as anxiety, rumination, self-criticism, shame, or trauma. This can elucidate the urgency of their concerns and vulnerability, and it might be a way of coming to care for others as well. Our own suffering can open us to feeling the suffering of others. The phenomenon of compassion is a good illustration of the existential validity of Heidegger's (1962) concept of Being-in-the-world. Hatab (1997) argues that in compassion we become “decentred, desubjectivised, our experience dwells in the other, and so it cannot be understood as a subjective or objective condition, but rather as a curious, compelling, ecstatic being-with-the-other” (p.12).

Research has shown that experiencing emotion and intuitive decision-making are connected with the ability to generate and accurately perceive subtle changes in the body, called interoception, and it significantly relates to what is metaphorically called ‘following the heart’ (Dunn et al., 2010). Innovative research at the Institute of HeartMath has demonstrated that different patterns of heart activity, which accompany different emotional states, have distinct effects on cognitive and emotional functioning (Field et al., 2018). They have found that an ordered and stable pattern of the heart’s input to the brain during positive emotional states benefits the entire body, facilitates cognitive function, reinforces positive feelings and emotional stability (McCarty, 2015). Their findings show physical evidence of the heart activity. Similarly the co-researchers of this study talk about feeling the actual heart location of the body, or the whole body, not just metaphorically (Alja36, Sana45, Odin84, Dawn135, Luna158).

#### **4.2.4 Being Open**

Being open is meant here as a way of Being-in-the-world characterised by allowing, or in Heidegger’s (1935) term ‘letting-be-ness’ (Gelassenheit), which is



about opening ourselves up to what is. Six co-researchers (Dawn91, Pele48, Alja167, Luna158, Odin22, Sana89) talked about it in various ways but the common theme was an openness of our whole being or an openness to being embodied. It can also be seen as an attitude to life that opens up a greater awareness.

Dawn (91) talked about openness of body and body posture during therapy sessions. Pele (48) talked about being free and open. I personally feel that with my embodiment I bring an openness to the relationship with the client, which helps me to immerse myself with the client's way of being (Alja167).

Luna talked about openness as a way of being open in our whole body, being open to the other, not just the heart (Luna158). She compared it to being embodied and in her point of view everyone is embodied, they are just not listening, not feeling or not wanting to feel their embodiment (Luna113). She also feels it is her responsibility to remain open when she is with clients who are closed (Luna115). And sometimes it is a matter of self-care to not be open when it would not be safe for us or when we do not have the energy or the capacity to be open (Luna117,160).

*Luna113: ...There's kind of two extremes for me to being with someone who is very present or very open. It can be one where I am like 'Yeah he's into that!' they inspire my openness, there's an energetic woah, and there's another energetic bit that 'woooooaah' they can see straight through me. I can notice these two experiences that can happen.*

*Alja114: Just when you were describing I started feeling this openness here between us. What do you feel between us?*

*Luna114: well I saw you do that, I saw you physically kind of alive, open more, it's like you resonated with what I was saying. You connected to something, and it kind of opened a doorway for you and that's what I was noticing. And I think that is a sense of connection and presence and god-like stuff, when you allow...it's a feeling, it's a resonance, it's an energy...it's so hard, as soon as you start to describe it, it becomes more... a bit...*

Odin (22) talked about our own embodiment opening us and limiting us to possibilities of being.

*“It feels like a second level thing, because I am embodied first, then I become aware of being embodied. And then I can take that in two directions of the possibilities of what is my particular embodiment opening me to and how does that limit me?” (Odin22)*

Sana (89) talked about traumatic experiences closing us down and the struggle to open up again because of the fear and need of protection: *“Well it is often the people that have had really horrible experiences say why would I wanna be open, open myself up, you know because I could get hurt again right” (Sana89)*. However, Sana believes being embodied and open is the best way of getting information and protection: *“it is through the body it is not through the mind” (Sana95)*. In her experience a lot of information about our being in the world comes through the body directly, long before our minds catch up with what is happening, and so if we open up our body to receive that information we have faster, better, smarter ways of protecting ourselves at our disposal.

*“I see it like shining a light, if I try to protect that light then it stays in, but if I have this light shining then I am seeing and ... I am more aware, it opens up my awareness. I have more skills at protecting myself” (Sana90).*

*Sana92: I think because the first reaction you know is close to protect, it makes sense for maybe a moment like if you are throwing a rock at me that makes sense for that moment but then we get stuck there.*

*Alja93: When if you would be Neo in Matrix, then you would just...*

*Sana93: Yeah I would have seen you move to throw the rock and I could have gotten out of the way, right? But maybe I have an experience that I was hit blindsided and so anytime I go into that and it is just maybe learning new areas that maybe got rusty of protection.*

Researchers Hedlund and Gyllensten (2010) found that becoming aware of our embodiment increases the feeling of security and the ability to protect own integrity. Danielsson and Rosberg (2015) discovered that when their participants became more aware of their embodiment, their experiences were grasped as a process of enhanced existential openness, opening toward corporeal, emotional, temporal, and relational aspects of life. King (2017) realized that the embodied nature of Openness is presence: “Openness is borne through presence. I embody this presence as a therapist” (p.226). Finlay (2015) writes about the concept of being open as a therapist involving a phenomenological attitude of curiosity and humility while bracketing ‘knowing’, trusting in the process and open to being surprised and touched in it. Similarly, Ray (2008) writes that among other things embodiment consists of looking directly at what is arising and seeing what it really is, beyond our preconceptions: “the body receives experience in a completely open and non-judgmental way” (p.150). This theme confirmed that through the process of embodiment, we tend to realise how we normally limit our own experience, and then we can choose to let go, surrender into a greater sense of openness and with that many possibilities of being open up to us.

#### **4.2.5 Possibilities of Being**

Four co-researchers (Pele102, Alja105, Odin20, Vlad67) spoke about their embodied awareness granting them many possibilities of the way of being, being with ourselves, being with our clients, and being in the world.

Pele feels by stepping into clients’ worlds it opens never-ending possibilities of being:

*“Yeah, oh! And that is what our job is! Stepping into different worlds. Oh my god that is another way of looking at things I’ve never have thought of. So it’s never ending and I think it’s amazing.” (Pele102)*

I similarly feel that working with different clients gives me an awareness of countless possibilities of being, for myself and for clients, and that feels liberating (Alja105).

Odin placed a lot of importance on having open possibilities of being himself: *“my therapist often doesn’t ask me to arrive and be fixed, because I want to sit with the possibilities of what I might be.”* (Odin19). This was felt in between us in the interview; we allowed each other our own space and open possibilities of being.

*“...so being with you and talking I am just aware that I am floating, opening possibilities and not wanting to close them down: ‘so there you are, that’s Odin, that’s what he is like, that’s who he is, now you know him’ and interestingly in my counselling work to a degree that’s what I am doing with people but still trying to leave the possibilities there, see the dilemmas and the way things go forward.”* (Odin20)

Odin also described his awareness of himself being different with different people.

*“And my suggestion is that we all do this all the time, whatever situation we are in we adapt to that, we become a person appropriate to that setting and we relate to others, setting aside or forgetting aspects of ourselves that you would be in other places.”* (Odin35)

*“I have always had an awareness of how we can be different in different places. I don’t know if you remember being at school but when your parents come to sports day ‘you are in my school space, you shouldn’t be here, this is weird’”* (Odin59).

During our conversation with Odin there was a feeling of spaciousness and freedom. There seemed to be an in-between space that we equally filled and explored. It felt very held, safe, exciting and fresh. After the interview I felt deep peace, expansion and inspiration, my awareness expanded into different ways of

embodiment. There was a kind of 'vacuum', that he also spoke about (Odin21), but the vacuum felt good and peaceful.

*"And then on a Saturday I can kind of relax and float about and not have to be anything and then there is a bit of a vacuum because I would want to be something, but what would that be? You can take up a space for others and be things that they recognise, but what is the space that I want to occupy? Where is that space and who would I be with to create that? Talking to you about moving, being nearer family or going abroad, these are possibilities aren't they? Ways to find a way of being. So it is quite fluid." (Odin21)*

Through being with Odin and listening to his way of working I learned and experienced a new way of being with clients and others, of letting the in-between space form patiently and not jumping in or pulling someone in. It felt spacious and respectful. We both felt we connected on a deeper level than our conscious minds can comprehend.

Vlad (67) feels embodiment is about awareness or feeling our strength and possibilities and then finding our own expression of existing in the world with others.

*"...people get caught in a trap sometimes because their expressions are disallowed in some way and...or very deeply disallowed. And...so finding their expression can be really really important, but for a lot of people...it can be about finding that how do we exist with other people in relationship, how do we exist in the world, how do we manage our feelings, which might be kind of turbulent or difficult to have or... with others in our lives?"(Vlad67)*

During the interview process I and my co-researchers experienced new and different possibilities of being. By opening ourselves up to new possibilities of being, or to other's way of being, we were exploring how it is for us and others to be in the world, as well as finding our own way of being-in-the-world. Finlay and Evans (2009) similarly describe how to be present as a therapist is about opening to the other, while being willing to give of self, having the courage to

stay in 'the process' – to be emotionally present and embody ways of 'being' ourselves and 'being-with' others, as opposed to just following our intellectual 'doing'.

### 4.3 Disembodied Being

*Her mind lives tidily, apart  
From cold and noise and pain,  
And bolts the door against her heart,  
Out wailing in the rain.  
(Interior, Dorothy Parker, 1999)*

It appears that we need the embodiment process because of our disembodiment. Disembodiment might be a way of being where one is not aware of their embodiment or closed to their embodiment, or not engaging with their embodiment, or not in touch with their body. We can have thoughts and concepts about our body, but very little direct experience and awareness of our body. Furthermore, we do not know we are in a disembodied way of being until we start to become more embodied. As I am writing this, I am also reminded that disembodiment might be merely another stage on the continuum of embodiment, which is not allowing or not open towards embodiment. Disembodiment is perhaps an uncomfortable experience of embodiment. Ray (2008) sees the global crisis as the crisis of disembodiment, the disconnection with our bodies and physical existence, and our pervasive belief that our lives, our fulfilment, lie somewhere other than where we are, in some other body, other state of mind, other feeling, other personality, other space and time. Levine (2010) finds traumatised individuals are disembodied, although he further elaborates that most Westerners share an impairing disconnection from their sense bodies: "As a society, we have largely abandoned our living, sensing, knowing bodies in the search for rationality and stories about ourselves" (p.285). Have we become like Narcissus: "enamoured by our own thoughts, self-importance and idealised self-images? Have we fallen in love with a pale

reflection of ourselves?” (p.286). In this process have we lost touch with our true self? Like Narcissus have we lost our place in nature? Thus, nature within us and around us became something out there to be manipulated. Amongst other things, disembodiment is a way of disconnecting from nature. Laing (1965) was one of the first psychiatrists to use the term ‘unembodied’: “In this position the individual experiences his self as being more or less divorced or detached from his body. The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual’s own being.” (p. 69). Relying on neuropsychological evidence, McGilchrist (2009) developed a theory that there are two major ways of being in the world, related to the two cerebral hemispheres and that there is a dominance of left hemisphere within the current Western society. The world of the left hemisphere is dependent on denotative language and abstraction, power to manipulate things that are known, fixed, isolated, decontextualised, explicit, disembodied, and ultimately lifeless. By contrast the right hemisphere yields a lived world that is evolving, interconnected, implicit, embodied, and caring. He concludes “that we might have to revise the superior assumption that we understand the world better than our ancestors, and adopt a more realistic view that we just see it differently – and may indeed be seeing less than they did” (p.461).

Disembodied being was described by co-researchers to be the opposite of being in the body, in the heart, being present with ourselves and others. Instead it is being in fear or doubt, being stuck and waiting, being in resistance to embodiment. Often being in the whole body feels like a dangerous place while being focused in the head feels safer. Finn (26) thinks there is an increasing process of disembodiment happening in western society. Co-researchers mostly chose to talk about disembodied clients and Luna (109) feels that most of her clients generally are not embodied.

### 4.3.1 Being in Fear

Fear was connected with disembodiment in various ways. Five co-researchers mentioned feeling fear when being in session with clients, feeling either their own fear or their clients' fear or just 'fear in the room' (Alja21, Luna16, Sana77, Vlad60, Dawn47). The fear can be an undefined fear of the unknown, uncertainty, of being in the body or fear of feeling. Feeling fear or not wanting to feel it seems to take us out of our bodies.

When Vlad's client reacts strongly to something in the session, he finds himself alarmed, frightened, shocked, his heart rate goes up (Vlad60). Because it happens so fast, he cannot tell whether it's his own or his client's fear, he just feels 'fear in the room' (Vlad64).

Luna also finds being with one of her clients scary and horrifying (Luna16).

*"But it's very...there is a darkness to it...there is an intangible element to it and you're kind of committed and you can't really escape." (Luna23)*

I described my own experience of being with the client as disembodied. Which was further on explored and described as not being in one's own body, a feeling of insecurity, fear of the unknown 'out there' and at the same time fear of being in the body, also 'endless and pointless' (Alja21, 23). With further phenomenological exploration I described the feeling of being disembodied as 'disheartened' or not being in the heart (Alja33).

*"So anxiousness is actually a disembodied feeling, when you are not in your body and you are afraid of something out there or waiting for something out there. Being insecure of something out there that you don't know what it is and you are waiting for it and you are not even sure it is ever going to come, you are just waiting for it and you don't know what it is and you are not in your body at all." (Alja21)*



Sana (78) and Dawn (47) similarly explored that becoming embodied can be scary because it requires feeling.

*Dawn46: Mhm. In that moment she is there, but it is too scary for her to be present. I think. This is my best guess about what is going on with her.*

*Alja47: What is scary about being present?*

*Dawn47: Feelings. She grew up in a family where they just weren't addressed. People don't have feelings so you just get on with it. You just get on with it. That is what she was growing up with.*

Fear and anxiety are both well theorised and researched phenomena within psychotherapy and existential philosophy. Heidegger (1962) states that we can fear for others, especially when they do not fear for themselves. Through exploration of my own experience with clients I realised that anxiousness is a disembodied feeling (*Alja21*). Could anxiety be mostly a fear of feeling? This realisation parallels Heidegger's (1962) writing: "the turning away of falling is grounded rather in anxiety, which in turn is what first makes fear possible" (p.230). In anxiety the self turns away from itself and also from Being-with others. When we are stuck in our thinking mind and are out of touch with our feeling body and the present moment, we can experience an undefined anxiety. Moustakas (1994) writes, "what threatens is nothing, nowhere, and everywhere" (p.39). Ray (2008) observes that the rejected or unprocessed experiences dwell in a kind of "no-man's land or bardo state in our body" (p.154), where we feel them as anxiety that runs throughout our life. Thus, what we are anxious about is never the external world in itself, but instead "our own body, what it already feels and what it already knows" (p.154). Van Der Kolk (2014) writes that individuals who consistently push away feelings "develop a fear of fear itself" (p.97). Therefore, they are actually not 'being in fear' but are instead 'doing in fear', meaning they are constantly running away from fear. Sometimes we are trying to run away from fear before it arrives, even if we have to "vacate the premises: our body" (Masters, 2013, p.77). However, the more we try to escape fear, the stronger it usually gets, "occupying more and more of us – especially as we inhabit less and less of ourselves" (Masters, 2013, p.77).

Anxiety forces us “to look at things we would rather not see, to confront ourselves and to realise that we can no longer hide from ourselves or others” (Moustakas, 1994, p.38). In that sense anxiety discloses the world as it is, and it brings a great gift if we are willing to receive and unpack it, all the while being in uncertainty. Heidegger (1962) sees the value of anxiety bringing disclosure and individualisation: “This individualisation brings Dasein back from its falling, and makes manifest to it that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being” (p.235). Similarly, Masters (2013) believes that in fear lies an opportunity for transformation: “For in it there exists not only an abundance of trapped energy, but also the very testing and challenge that we need in order to live a deeper, more authentic life” (p.77). It could be considered that the resolution out of anxiety depends on our readiness to feel it fully; there is nothing else we need to do or be. The role of a psychotherapist in this could be a holding of space for the client to surrender into feeling. This theme confirms and elaborates on the concept of existential anxiety and grounds it in embodiment.

### **4.3.2 Resistance to Embodiment**

There seems to be a resistance to embodiment because it is challenging (Alja55, Luna59), difficult (Alja28) and often painful (Dawn47). Five co-researchers have noticed this resistance in many clients (Alja124, Odin31, Luna59, Dawn46, Sana75): “... *this client who I talked about, she can't go into her body; she didn't want to feel anything.*” (Alja124). Once we become more embodied the best would be to stay embodied, but frequently we get pulled out of it by other people or situations (Alja57).

*“...And it is his reluctance to own that space of himself, I am aware of that and I am treading carefully, not to have aspects of him as my responsibility and I play that out with him...And he avoids and sidesteps any attempt I make to clarify his experience.” (Odin31)*

*“But she was so resistant in sensing herself and it was after the third session when she said ‘you know I am realising I really want to learn from you but I don't want to sense myself.’” (Sana70)*

*Sana74: Because they have skills to avoid feeling.*

*Alja75: Because they are skilled in avoiding? But more skilled than us as therapists?*

*Sana75: Ah haha there are some people that have very charming strategies to feel connected without feeling. This other guy that I have been supporting for like six years now. He is so funny, he is brilliant but horribly traumatised. And when I say like ‘sense your breath’ it brings up so much stuff. But we can chat and chat...*

Four co-researchers believe the resistance and fear of embodiment is there because embodiment requires feeling and feeling can often be a ‘painful’ experience (Alja 63, Luna104, Dawn47, Sana78).

*“...it's too scary for her to be emotional...She finds it very challenging when I invite the space for her to be emotional or to get in touch with something that's difficult, beyond the idea of what she's discussing or what the plan is for that day” (Luna59).*

*“Because I think it's inviting a really deep experience of being with themselves. And a lot of people don't want to feel. And it's a defence...the laughter is a way of defending against that or its just...they'd rather be caught up in their distraction, it's more comfortable for them, apparently.” (Luna104)*

Vlad also found the interview experience challenging because of needing to look so deep within his own experience and be present:

*"I find it very challenging. Why...kind of...there's a kind of dual thing, with the depth of your questioning and being really on the spot. That's hard! Yeah, so yeah, I feel slightly sweaty." (Vlad53)*

There seems to be a push and a pull that occurs with some clients who are coming for help, mostly because they are not embodied, however they don't seem to really want to be embodied. On that note Ray (2008) wrote:

Emotions are, at root, a somatic experience: they arise out of the darkness of the body, they are felt intensely in the body, and they call us—sometimes with great insistence and even grisly intensity—back into the body (p.56).

So much of what we 'do' and what we think we 'should do' is a strategy to get away from painful feelings, "especially from feeling fully and openly – so as to not get significantly hurt, not get really vulnerable, not get rocked by relational demands – and to somehow become all but immune to suffering" (Masters, 2013, p.46). Welwood (2002) points out that emotions are often experienced as a threat because it can feel like "being taken over by forces seemingly beyond our control" (p.182). In fact, most of our Western culture historically holds a fundamental distrust of emotions: "From Plato on, the 'passions' have been viewed as our 'lower nature'" (p.182). Christianity is another strong influence in our culture that regards emotions and the body from which they arise as "the devil's domain" (Ray, 2008, p.59). Most importantly, even the fields of psychiatry, psychology and psychotherapy, that are supposed to help us understand and manage ourselves better, have developed all sorts of clever ways of helping us run away from ourselves: "Psychiatric medications seem designed to limit and control the emotional states that people go through, reflecting a medical environment in which any strong emotion is likely to be viewed as pathological and in need of 'treatment'" (Ray, 2008, p.60). Therefore, it is not surprising we hold so much resistance towards becoming more embodied, and approaching our emotions with any degree of openness or trust. Our resistance holds enormous bound up energy, that can be freed for better purposes if we approach

it with clarity and compassion, with just the right pace, neither rushed nor too slow (Masters, 2013). Otherwise we continue using that energy for separating and distancing ourselves from our whole bodies by retreating into our heads, judgements, and self-criticism. The mixture of our distrust, fear and resistance towards the manifestations of our whole bodies drives us further and further away from them, making us more and more distrustful of our embodiment. "It is a vicious cycle, then, in which our fear of emotions and our physical disembodiment fuel, reinforce, and exacerbate one another." (Ray, 2008, p.60).

### **4.3.3 Danger in Body and Safety in Head**

Five co-researchers spoke about having experiences with clients being stuck in their thinking heads and not being in their whole feeling bodies, meaning that the awareness is primarily focused in thinking and not feeling. Often, they resort to their thinking head because the rest of the body was a dangerous place to be (Vlad70, Sana70, Dawn66, Finn31, Luna50).

*Dawn66: oh, I'm thinking of a client who even had dreams of having his head severed from his body. He and this woman that I'm talking about, both of them learned that the safe place was in the head and that you got brownie points at school for being clever, and he for example had been a very overweight teenager and he would get teased and bullied for being overweight and so it wasn't safe for him to be in his body, and so he retreated to his mind and he was very clever and that was somebody who was really aware of being disembodied.*

*Alja67: So for him you would say he was really disembodied?*

*Dawn67: Yeah and aware of it. Not willing to do much about it.*

*Alja68: Because he was safe there and happy.*

*Dawn68: Not happy but safe.*

*Alja69: Comfortable? Not even that?*

*Dawn69: Safe.*

*Alja70: Just safe.*

*Dawn70: And I think probably she has some of that too. Is that she didn't get much praise, a lot of criticism, no support emotionally and then a very strong expectation that she would do well at school, so she was the first person in the family to go to university, you know her head has been her refuge. The body is an uncomfortable and an unsafe place to be. So, what do you mean there is stuff going on below the neck you know!*

Finn described his client's mind as

*"...a mind that seems very adult but it's a mind that can't cope with feelings. It can't cope with emotions, it doesn't understand emotions so it seeks external reference points. It will look things up in textbooks; it will make sense of experiences through watching others but it isn't an embodied process" (Finn31).*

*"... but for her to be in touch with her body is uncomfortable, because her body has been used against her, as is often the case with people who have suffered abuse. So the body can be the enemy, can be seen as the enemy" (Finn31).*

Finn (74) also stressed that we need to be very careful when we start to work with the body in therapy; it needs to be done very slowly and carefully so we don't re-traumatise the client.

*"And also not only with infant and child sexual abuse but with adults as well, when there is a physiological response from the body and that can feel like betrayal, so not only has the body been unable to protect the person, the boundary of the body has given way, but also that there is also a pleasurable physiological response. It is perceived as pleasurable I think but actually it can be exciting. But then, what gets re-enacted in that person's life in order to try to overcome the trauma, trauma resides in the body, so the body is then used as a tool of re-enactment quite often." (Finn33)*

Odin (14) however had an opposite experience with his client, who was emotionally abused, but not physically. His body wasn't abused, and his body actually was then the vehicle through which he could find the strength to fight for his emotions and his mind. He could rely on his body and *"he owned his body"* (Odin15).

Disembodiment often means that clients engage with the world and themselves through the thinking mind and are disconnected from the feeling body. Coming back to the aim of this study to consider a human being as a whole, there needs to be an acknowledgement that the head is part of the body just as much as thinking is part of the whole human being. However, the phenomenological exploration in interviews with co-researchers often revealed an experience of a split between feeling and thinking, frequently using words like 'body' and 'head' to portray that separation. In order to stay close to the lived experience, these words were used for the naming of this theme, however disembodied thinking and embodied being (encompassing thinking and feeling) is probably a better conceptualisation that does not succumb to the dualism. Dinas (2012) also reports participants in the study describing how 'the interfering mind' can distract from dealing with the real issue, and that 'the telling body' was a source of genuine and important knowledge regarding a traumatic experience. These findings implicate a perceived separation of mind and body that might be a characteristic of disembodiment. Furthermore, they might be an expression of our dichotomised society and science (Johnson, 2008; Damasio, 1994), as well as a portrayal that the dualist paradigm is closely connected with our disembodied experience of being.

With trauma or just a disembodied upbringing one can learn to survive by resorting to disembodied thinking because embodiment is not a safe space to experience life, especially if they have been physically or sexually abused or emotionally neglected. Van Der Kolk (2014) writes that traumatised individuals chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies. In an attempt to control the discomfort of their visceral warning signs, they often become expert in ignoring and numbing their awareness of the body. Winnicott (1954) described that when

mother's emotional holding fails to enable the psyche to rest in the soma, the infant develops a precocious mind, which is a split where the mind negates the role of the body – its needs, feelings and functions: “The mind in such a case has a false function and a life of its own, and it dominates the psyche-soma instead of being a special function of psyche-soma” (Winnicott, 1988, p.140). When an individual survived by finding safety in thinking it can feel threatening to be invited to feel, that is where fear and resistance to embodiment come as a function of protection. Ray (2008) makes a distinction between the ‘feel’ of a life lived strictly in the head, a conceptual reality, and the ‘feel’ of a life lived in and through the body as our primary way of knowing, an experiential reality (p.48). Because we are so used to disregarding and distrusting the body, making it into a slave of our controlling thinking, we have very little chance of finding out whether the body has any inner knowing or intelligence, or “that the body might have its own designs from which—if understood—we might stand to benefit a very great deal” (Ray, 2008, p.55). Damasio (1999) states “Sometimes we use our minds to hide a part of our beings from another part of our beings” (p.40). One of the things that gets hidden most effectively is our own body.

#### **4.3.4 Embodied Emotional Disconnection**

Five co-researchers (Finn17, Sana41, Vlad23, Odin37, Luna74) described various ways their clients are disconnected from their emotional bodies. Often they also described feeling a disconnection in between themselves and the client.

*Finn17: She is disconnected from her body and as a result I am disconnected from her body...and I think she is disconnected from me as a body. Which all makes it, perhaps, terribly safe for her.*

*Alja18: So where is the connection between you two?*

*Finn18: That is a really good question. (Pause) There's an intellectual connection, there's a psycho-education connection.*



Sana (41) finds feeling tired after a session with a client a sign that she is disconnected. She would feel disconnected from her body because the client is disconnected from their body, although, if she is centred, she would become aware of that quite quickly.

Vlad (23) described how his client, not being allowed her own emotional experience in childhood, would have a lot of emotion passing across her face that he would notice but she wouldn't recognise: *"She won't experience, she will have really clear facial expressions, like disappointed or happy or angry or whatever, but she doesn't experience any of that as feeling."* (Vlad24)

Luna (74) gave an example of a client who talked about having immense erotic energy towards the world, but she couldn't feel any energy in the room of that nature. It was as if there was a disconnection. It was only after she named feeling anger in the room and he recognised it, that suddenly she could feel the erotic energy in the room between them.

Finn (31) and Odin (37) believe that being disembodied doesn't necessarily mean clients are disconnected from their emotional bodies or that they don't feel anything, but that it is more about not being able to make sense of their feelings, or that they need to self-alienate from their emotional response because of the requirements of the situation they are in. Furthermore, some clients are just not aware of being embodied, they don't have an awareness of their body.

*"Well (laughs) I suspect that we are always connected to our emotions in some way in some level, but we edit amount, so as to be something that is meaningful in the context in which we find ourselves, and that isn't always something we chose, it is something that is required of us. So, when I am being professional at work and something happens and I am distressed by it, then I self-alienate myself from my personal emotional response to it and I perform and act in a way that is professional and do what's required of me in that role."* (Odin37)

Odin doesn't like to fix or pathologise clients by thinking they are disconnected, and rather uses their experience as a way to acknowledge the resilience and awareness in them.

*“A lot of my professional career I have been working with people who are damaged...and then when we unwrap all that and we look at how resilient they have become through their trauma and their difficulties and how insightful they are and how they understand the world at a deeper level than other people who haven't had traumas or haven't yet recognised or looked at the traumas that they actually do have. You get a sense of these people as all-capable, all-aware, as able to live with the sadness and distress. And suddenly we are not playing that pathology game. I don't want to fix anyone person as more pathologised, more cut off with themselves, less able to experience their emotions than others, because that is like buying into a fixed text book version of us.” (Odin40)*

Some co-researchers would use the concept dissociated or disassociated instead of disconnected or disembodied, however upon exploration of these terms it wasn't clear whether they are different phenomena or just different terms.

*“And I am thinking of an older chap I see at the moment and he disassociates, and that is his term not mine, because I am not quite sure if I like the word. And when he is disassociated from his emotions, we have opened that up as a metaphor, when he is in a depressed phase this is 'being in a pit', the language that we jointly constructed. And when he is not in a pit he is disassociated from that person in a pit, he is kind of walking by 'hi there, I am concerned, that I am in a pit, off I go'...and I am saying 'thinking about you in that pit I've got this sinking feeling in me, I've got this longing, distressed hopefulness but oppressed, am I ever going to help this person get out of this pit?'” (Odin42)*

When embodiment is a dangerous space to dwell, the result could be embodied emotional disconnection: “to be disembodied is to be disconnected” (Ray, 2008,

p.46). Emotional disconnection, as flight from vulnerability, is not just a phenomenon a few of us are stuck in, but is a prevailing operational status of many (Masters, 2013). When one lives their entire life in their head, believing what they think is reality, disconnected from the feeling reality, then the whole world is an object to be used and exploited (Ray, 2008). This might be how some of the most horrific occurrences of modern society take place: genocide, fascism, racism, speciesism, and also physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

Individuals who have suffered trauma learned to shut down their once overwhelming sensations and emotions, and as a result they no longer recognise what they are feeling. The failure to be in touch with their bodies contributes to their lack of self-protection, revictimisation and real difficulties of feeling pleasure, sensuality or a sense of meaning (Van Der Kolk, 2014). Rothschild (2000) has found that some individuals are unable to feel their basic body sensations at all; however others may feel something but not have the vocabulary to describe the sensations. Another perspective on disembodiment is that one is not necessarily disconnected from their emotional body but unaware or unable to make sense of their feelings. Van Der Kolk (2014, p.98) calls this phenomena 'alexithymia', which in Greek means 'not having words for feelings'. Many traumatised individuals cannot describe what they are feeling because they cannot identify what their physical sensations mean. However, from a different perspective, somatic sensations are an expression on their own, and language cannot always capture their essence, which is a challenge of languaging experience (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009).

#### **4.3.5 Being in Doubt**

Four co-researchers (Dawn51, Odin79, Luna178, Alja44) paralleled disembodiment with feeling critical or doubtful about their own work with clients and themselves as therapists.

*“What went through my mind was the critic. You know the critical part of me that is sitting outside of me and saying are you actually doing anything here at all, is anything happening here at all? Should you be taking this woman’s money? Are you actually helping her at all? Has she changed in any ways since she first walked in that door?” (Dawn51).*

Luna (178) and Dawn (51) described that the doubting of themselves happens when they lose the presence in the moment with the client and go into their minds, where they start to think about what and how they are doing, what the client thinks of them and so on.

*“I mean that’s the thing as soon as I start to question myself it becomes...I lose that presence, and I recognise that, and that’s...the constant practice of ‘I’ve gone into my thoughts I’m making up a story OK come back’ as soon as I question the other’s judgment of me or what I am doing I stop being in that space” (Luna178).*

*“Just last time when she was 20 minutes late I found myself completely anxiously doubting my whole profession.” (Alja44)*

*“My social standing is in question I suppose. My professional stance, my appearance as a rational human being might be in doubt, to myself and others, I suppose...So when things whirl around for me I think it is an anxiety and a fear about loss of coherence, sense of not knowing who I am, maybe rejection, maybe having to perform roles that I don't understand and be things that I don't know what people expect from me. Disjunctions.” (Odin79)*

When Pele, Finn, Luna and Dawn embodied being with their clients they talked about feeling a sort of stuckness with them and as a result trying hard to reach them or working hard instead of them. They used metaphors like ploughing a dry land (Finn10), duck swimming (Pele19) and rowing hard (Dawn104). In my

experience when there is stuckness in the therapeutic process it can bring up doubt about the benefits of psychotherapy (Alja28, 44, 101).

*"I also always feel like I don't know if I am doing any good to her because it seems like we are just stuck and waiting so I always wonder what have we done, what have I done in the past six months at all." (Alja28)*

With Dawn (94-103) we explored in depth what is underneath the doubt. She feels it is anxiety about her ability to actually make a difference for clients. We came to a co-created realisation by being present with each other and the ideas that came to us in the moment of conversation. In our experience we feel anxious with the disembodied clients because we feel unable to reach them or engage with them. They cannot meet us in embodiment, but when we meet them in the disembodied thinking it is not an emotionally rewarding or reparative connection. Below is an excerpt of this co-created dialogue:

*Dawn97: Is that a lot of the anxiety that I'm experiencing? Is her for example thinking of this woman, her disembodiment, is that what brings up so much...Is something about...*

*Alja98: That was exactly what I was thinking, it's amazing that you said it!*

*Dawn98: Being in my body in the room with somebody who's disembodied – so disembodied and disengaged and detached and all the other words we can think of is that what brings up so much tension and anxiety and then I forget to put an arm around myself and say it's okay. Ha good question.*

*Alja99: Mhm yes because so what's the anxiety? What happens when they're disembodied? Why is that so difficult? Because I feel it's difficult for all of us.*

*Dawn102: Not being able to reach her.*

*Alja103: Reach her.*

*Dawn103: It's like she sailed away to a different shore somewhere and I don't know where the shore is. I don't know if the boat I got is strong enough or good enough or if I stay still will she come to me?*

This was a reoccurring question that came out throughout the research: how to be with clients who are disembodied? Where and how can we meet them? Soth (2005) wrote that it is essential for the therapist to become OK with not knowing, in ambiguity and conflict. "Holding all the fragments of the conflict implies, for a start, that the therapist is not seduced out of these dilemmas into a shortcut of siding with either spontaneous or reflective processes, even when under pressure." (p.51). Therefore, the answer to the reoccurring question might be to not go with them into the disembodied thinking, nor to pull them into embodiment too soon, but instead to meet them in the unknown, in the waiting.

Sometimes we are trying too hard to be kind, to please and be helpful to others, and most of the time we are not aware of it. With Luna we explored why is it that often we want to be kind to others but we are not kind to ourselves? And with Dawn we experienced during the interview what it means for her to let go of trying hard to help. Fogel (2009) described how he became aware of his excessive trying only after four years of receiving bodywork. He realised how this effort was impairing his ability to be fully in the subjective emotional present with his clients: "until I could relax into my own body and finally begin to let go of the need to please, I could not help the clients to discover in their own embodied self-awareness what lay behind their movement and emotional limitations" (p.225). When Dawn let go of her 'trying hard' mode and she metaphorically 'put an arm' (Dawn131) around herself and switched to a compassionate mode I could feel the release of tension in my body. She said to herself: "*This is about reassurance, about 'it's OK, it's alright, you are OK, you are doing a good enough job' (laughs)*" (Dawn135). She had an embodied realisation of trusting her own being in presence and process, and that rippled out into my being in trust as well. Fogel (2009) had a similar experience of eventually learning to trust, with patience and presence, that the client's breakthrough moment would occur in its own way, without him wanting or trying to make it happen. Wanting to be helpful can often be related to one's insecurity about their ability to help, which has an underlying fear of failure or rejection and an even deeper need to please and be accepted. That is why cultivating compassion for self might be so difficult; we wish to avoid it at all cost, even with the pretence of

being kind to everyone else except ourselves: *"...being kind to ourselves sometimes would mean feeling pain...Feeling pain that we carry, that wants to be loved. Needs to be loved out of pain." (I become tearful) (Alja169).*

#### **4.3.6 Being in Waiting**

Fear, resistance, and doubt might all be a way of 'doing' and not actually a way of 'being'. Four co-researchers described a feeling of waiting or being very still with their clients, waiting for them to speak, to show themselves or just to be with them in whatever they are going through (Odin56, Pele95, Dawn105, Alja23).

*"I just thought 'that's it, we are sitting in this hall together. There is nothing I can do to make it better, but she's not alone'. I think that's the basic thing, she is not alone, I am with her. I am with her, you are not alone." (Pele95)*

*"I am waiting with her for something that might not ever come, and it feels, like I said it just feels scary to be in the body but then waiting for something from outside doesn't feel the right way" (Alja23).*

With some clients I sometimes get a feeling of waiting with them, without knowing what we are waiting for or even realising that we are waiting. We seem to be waiting for something from outside, for a relief, for something in the future, basically waiting to feel better in the future. Waiting *"for a relief for someone to come save us, save her. For a miraculous saviour so that she doesn't need to come into her body." (Alja24)*

When I embodied the experience of being with my client the metaphor that came up for me was the play *Waiting for Godot*. The similarity I find between the play and the embodied experience of being with my client is *"that me and the client are almost the two characters at the bus stop waiting for something." (Alja18)*. The experience is *"really insecure and anxious and grey and disembodied" (Alja19)*.

*“Like I think there is this beautiful tree that they wait by and they don't even seem to see it or appreciate it. Cos they are just so fixated on this, whoever person Godot might be, that they are waiting for. And they are at the bus stop and they are not even waiting for a bus.” (Alja22)*

*“It is very difficult because of what I said before because I don't know whether she will join me in the waiting or will she check out (smiles). Ha. Maybe I am waiting for Godot and she is thinking of checking out because she doesn't know if it will ever come or whatever it is. Hm.” (Alja32)*

To us therapists the waiting might feel stuck, meaningless or bringing out our anxiety, but to clients the waiting might be what they need to come closer to 'being':

*“... I have this image sometimes of people who are very afraid, of being a bit like a deer in a forest you know, you've got to stay very still and then maybe they will show themselves....I often sort of sit with that feeling of 'OK, I have to be very, very still'. Maybe that brings up anxiety. (laughing) Don't move, don't fiddle, don't do anything” (Dawn105).*

Being in waiting or being stuck can be seen as resistance to therapeutic work and as such something to overcome, but it can also have a function of protection against oppression, re-traumatisation or working at a faster speed than the client is able to process and integrate. In that case we can help support the client's need to protect their integrity by slowing down and waiting with them for the moment when they feel safe and ready to move on. For exactly that reason Totton (2005) warns that as therapists we need to be aware and respectful of feelings of hesitancy or resistance. He believes that if we can help clients become aware of their own disembodied aspects, they are granted a choice to own them without shame, and begin to use them as “a resource, a doorway, a messenger – something to make life brighter and less restricted” (p.171).



## 4.4 Multidimensional Being

With this theme we come back to embodiment as an anchor to awareness, merging matter with spirit and the multidimensional relationship between the impulses towards embodiment and disembodiment, opening and closing, protection and expression.

Spirit is linked to awareness; matter to existence. We could say that 'pure awareness' cannot really exist – and 'pure existence' cannot be aware. The layers of our multidimensional onion are spread along the spectrum between these two impossible poles, but real directions, of 'pure spirit' and 'pure matter'. An embodied human being exists simultaneously in every layer of the onion (Totton, 2005, p.170).

Through my own heuristic research process and the research dialogue with co-researchers it started to become apparent that there is a multidimensional essence in our whole being. Our bodies and our awareness seem to have infinite possibilities of opening and connecting outwards and inwards. Becoming aware in our bodies in the present moment gives us multiple perspectives and from that, freedom to choose our attitude and action. Embodied emotional awareness similarly seems to be multidimensional. Integration of all aspects of ourselves is described to be the key to embodying a wholesome awareness. Krieger (2007) sees embodiment as a multilevel phenomenon entailing “the interplay between bodies, components of bodies, and the world(s) in which the bodies live” (p. 351).

While exploring the embodiment of our awareness, the distinction or the border between inner and outer started to become blurry. What is our inner world and what is our outer world? Does the body count as the inner and everything outside it outer? Where is the border? The surface of our skin? As far as our eyes can see or the ears can hear? Heidegger's (1962) concept Being-in-the-world is an attempt to capture the idea of our selfhood not stopping at the body, but

instead, stretching out beyond the body limit into the world. Our body is not just contained by our skin, it is reaching out into the world; body and world are in constant communion. Merleau Ponty (1962) placed a twist on this idea: “Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself” (p. 474). What about perception? Does the distinction between our inner and outer world lie in perception – everything that we perceive coming from outside or inside our body? Or is it our awareness? Is everything we experience inner and the rest is outer? Husserl (1983) poignantly pointed out that nothing can be perceived outside the field of one’s own experience – first-person experience is all we have at our disposal. What does it mean then when we say our whole being? Perhaps the answer to this question lies solely in the eyes of the perceiver. However, then the question could turn into whether there is a perceiver with an independent, fixed or unitary Self (Levine, 2010). This could be considered as one of the most important and interesting questions posed by a self-reflective organism: who am I as a whole being? Existential philosophers especially have been pondering on varieties of this question and this theme adds a wealth of insights to the possible answers.

#### **4.4.1 Awareness Gives Multiple Perspectives and Choice**

*The precursor and twin sister of embodiment, awareness, is the 800-pound gorilla perched quietly on a solitary rock that is difficult to overlook yet unwittingly ignored. As with many mercurial archetypes, the presence of this primal diva is confounding—enormous yet elusive. Lady awareness sits in wait, yet slips away, when we attempt to grasp for her. (Levine, 2010, p.287)*

Awareness, as Levine (2010) wittily describes, is an elusive phenomenon to explore, which has been confounding scientists, meditators, psychotherapists for as long as we know. Yet it seems to be tightly intertwined with embodiment. Awareness is described by co-researchers as a state of consciousness that is present in the moment and receiving information from all parts of our being.

Awareness is also described to vary in quantity and quality. By becoming aware of our embodiment, we gain perspective of multiple realities at once and with that we also gain the choice of thought, attitude and action (Alja106, Odin45, Finn28, Sana98, Dawn146, Vlad65, Luna137):

*Sana100: "...So I guess it is me having special glasses on or sensing that something shifted in the field. This is an important part of being it and then taking it on to a meta level and say 'let's look at this for a moment, what just happened?'*

*Alja101: So what is it that can look at this from a meta point of view? Which part of you does that?*

*Sana101: Me as a therapist or me as a person? I think awareness isn't it?*

*Alja102: Mmm awareness.*

*Sana102: Awareness. Consciousness.*

*"So I see that it is just a pattern that they are in and I can see it from afar, and then I think that that helps them because whatever I say from that perspective is something that they are not used to hearing." (Alja106)*

*"I use metaphor quite a lot. I am trying to put them back into a position of having choice. You know what they have been doing is successful so far for them in the world and they have a choice to be different, and that is going to be difficult." (Odin45)*

All co-researchers in some way or another spoke about using their own embodied experience in therapy with awareness: as information about the client's experience, as feedback information to share with clients, as a way to bring awareness into the process, and as a compass to know the direction or the next step. A straightforward way of bringing clients to awareness of their embodiment is to ask them how they feel or where they feel it (Finn28, Vlad65, Luna99, Dawn119, Sana34, Alja123). Another way is to reflect back to the client their embodied way of being with words or with one's own body (Dawn121, Odin12, Sana43). Some therapists have techniques and exercises that they

sometimes do with their clients: awareness of breath, soft-belly soft-throat soft-tongue (Finn74), grounding technique or somatic enquiry (Luna99).

*“I use this quite often with clients...‘what does anger feel like? How does your body tell you you are angry?’ and it’s almost as if there is a slight shock, and they realise ‘I got a body... OK’ and there’s a whole language around that, that can be developed so they might say: ‘I feel angry because I feel it in my tummy’ so ‘OK, so what is happening in the tummy?’ ‘It’s feeling uptight’. ‘Tight like fist gripping, tight like a steel ball or tight like something external pushing it in?’ So by using this language that is, I think, those are the first steps to start helping somebody become more embodied, more in touch with: ‘OK, I know what this is, this is a sensation in my body actually telling me something so when my stomach is tight, when my breathing is more restrictive, when my heart beat increases, when my jaw is clenched...Ah! I’m doing anger! ... And if somebody can become aware of what their body is communicating to them in terms of their physiological state, which we call feelings, then they are also able to learn how to exercise a degree of control over that so that they don’t become overwhelmed when they are experiencing feeling in their body which feel alien to them” (Finn28).*

During the research dialogue I came to a co-created realisation that there are different types of awareness: psychological, existential, intellectual, physical, personal, emotional, spiritual, and embodied (Alja146, 153, 264). The subject of awareness is immense and it seems like there is not one truth about it, instead there are many truths depending on the level and type of awareness one comes from (Alja155).

Sana (96) described that awareness helps us get out of being a victim of our feelings. Instead it helps us recognise our thought patterns and then see the options we have and make appropriate actions, so it is about naming our senses and integrating that language into our awareness: *“the felt sense comes before the*

*story making so if you could practice being the felt sense, maybe the story making could be different.” (Sana98)*

Dawn (146) said that if we become aware of what we have been left with from our clients then we have a choice to keep it or let it go, but only when we become aware of it. Furthermore, she believes coming to awareness takes “*years and years of practice and messing up on occasion and not being aware*” (Dawn168). In her view we don’t realise we are unaware until we get called back: “*and maybe that is what’s happened with the people who are unaware or detached or whatever, is no one has called them back.*” (Dawn172). However, as therapists we “*can’t make someone else’s life so alluring that they will come back to it.*” (Dawn173)

With Luna we explored various multidimensional aspects of being human, and one of them was what happens when we go from not being aware to becoming aware. She described not being aware as a closing off and not seeing clearly. On the other hand, she equated awareness as being present: feeling, seeing clearly.

*Luna136: Well he was feeling angry he just hadn’t recognised it. That’s all. He was not seeing clearly.*

*Alja137: What happens for him to go from not recognising...*

*Luna137: The veil just disappears. The story just disappears, you get brought back to the present moment, you get to feel, you get to feel, you get to see from...you get to come back into...what is actually happening.*

*Alja138: So, what’s the veil?*

*Luna138: The ego. The sense of separation. The sense of...the sense of being something as opposed to just being. I think. Well I notice it in myself all the time. So, there is a movement, but I think the movement is a fallacy in some ways if that makes sense.*

She also described her view on the awareness of all the layers of being human.

*"I don't think it encompasses it at all but if you have consciousness as the ground of all being just down here, then I think there's physical sensations about that, then I think there's perception of that physical sensation and then I think then there's the cognition or the story you make about it, and I see the cognition as the most superficial element of all of that. So although I think that physical sensations, I think it is all in the experience of being human; physical sensation is a hugely important feeling... sensations and sensitivity, and I think all that is so important that in some way it is still a distraction from consciousness. Does that make sense?" (Luna118)*

Finn, amongst other concepts, discussed the awareness and intelligence of our gut: *"...I have a gut feeling about this. And we know in an embodied sense. We feel things in our stomach and we now know that the gut has neurons in it"* (Finn73). Research shows that the vagus nerve registers everything that happens in our internal organs from our brain to our intestine. Our gut feelings signal what is safe or threatening, especially when we cannot understand why we feel a certain way. Our sensory interiority informs us about the needs of our organism. Gut feelings also receive input from the outside world and send us subtle messages about it. When we have a comfortable connection with our sensations and trust them to give us accurate information, we feel in charge of our body, our feelings and sense of self (Van Der Kolk, 2014).

Awareness in general gives us an expanded view and consequently a possibility of choice. As therapists we can help clients become aware of their sensations, the way that their bodies interact with the world around them and the choices they have in their reactions and responses. "Physical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past" (p.101) and obsession with the future. Totton (2005) writes that the fundamental tool of therapy is awareness, with its ability to unpack and transform any stuck situation. In his embodied relational therapy he places emphasis on spontaneity, and resistance to it. He believes that relaxing and allowing life to happen is what is ultimately healing: "Relaxation could be said to be the entire goal of therapy!" (p.169). This might be one of the key principles of embodiment, as we cannot force embodiment to happen – just like

life it is happening regardless of our will. However, we can allow it to unfold with ease instead of being in resistance, and relaxation might be key in this allowing, especially in a held and safe psychotherapeutic space where a client can feel they are allowed to be and feel everything.

#### **4.4.2 Multidimensionality of EEA**

The embodied experience seems to be infinite in the extent it opens us to experience the self and the other. Embodied emotional awareness joins together the body, the emotions and the awareness in a complex multidimensional way. Six co-researchers explored the complexity of being aware of all the sensations in between the client and themselves: we can feel ourselves and the other, connect with the other, be aware of the two, discern between the two, choose what to bracket or what to focus on and choose attitude and action (Sana87, Finn3, Odin70, Dawn151, Vlad29-36, Alja82, 111, 136). Awareness seems to be the muscle that allows us to flow between all of these actions (Sana87).

*“as I’m talking to you to be aware of what I’m feeling, noticing my body, noticing my feeling and my thoughts, but also be aware that you are present here as separate human being to me, which is probably why a few moments ago I checked in with you as to whether it made sense to you...” (Finn3).*

*“...can we be feeling body without awareness? Yes. So there is, awareness is another, a whole new dimension to it. When you can be a feeling body and be aware of it.” (Alja136)*

*“Ahaa, you ask such good questions! (laughs) I think embodiment is keen awareness of internal and external, it is a container that I can move in, that I can sense myself and its antennas that can move out and sense my space. So embodied means I have this vessel that is giving me lots and lots of information that I can go in with it and I can go out with it, either at the*

*same time or in consecutive ways so it is not just about going in or going out; it is really about the muscle.” (Sana87)*

Dawn (151) described her experience of being with clients who are going through difficult emotional times. She has an image of holding a ‘little baby Dawn’ so that she holds her emotions close to her. This allows her to be able to be there for the client and not succumb to her own reactions to what the client is bringing. So, it is like with one arm she is holding herself and with the other she is holding the client: *“Otherwise I would disappear into my own grief and I wouldn't be present.”* (Dawn155)

*“It is like how can I take care of myself so that I can be here for you?”*  
(Dawn158)

Vlad was saying that he is able to feel what the clients are feeling and of course able to feel his own feelings as well, and to discern between the two is actually a work of attention. So, when his attention is on the client it's their feelings, but he feels them in himself. And when his attention is on himself, they are his own feelings (Vlad29-36).

*“Two people sitting opposite each other, and there's mind-to-mind communication, there's body-to-mind communication and body-to-body communication and everything is happening at the same time.”* (Vlad51)

Sana was describing her direct experience of becoming aware of the vibrational field of a client.

*Sana105: The more I say it the more I sound esoteric but I think it is a vibrational thing because often I sense it in somebody voice, when the voice shifts, so I hear it. I sense in the body something stuck. So maybe it is, I mean we all are just sending out electromagnetic waves, maybe it is a vibrational sense.*

...



*Sana107: because I don't talk to many people about this because I think it can get like 'woooo, spooky'. But I do think that there is something with quantum physics it is starting to name this. I feel often connected into a bigger field of something and I can actually even say sometimes before I am going to see somebody, maybe a day or two before, I get information what's happening.*

*Alja108: Mmm with them?*

*Sana108: With them. With certain people, not all of my patients. I don't necessarily search it.*

*Alja109: It just comes?*

*Sana109: It comes and I have had patients before that are new in session and I can sense 'oh there was rape' or 'there was verbal abuse'. I can sense something in the field around them.*

*Alja110: Wow.*

*Sana110: Yeah, I don't really know how to use it yet so I haven't quite found a way of using that as a tool because it just sometimes comes and sometimes goes but, OK I don't understand quantum physics, but the more I read about quantum physics I think well, why not, why wouldn't I sense that, right?*

*Alja111: Of course.*

*Sana111: If I am in tune with my body as much as I can be and then I am going into a field with somebody that is opening up to me. If people come into session to me, they want something right so they are opening to me, so why wouldn't I be able to sense fine information?*

Luna was similarly describing her feeling when a client has a shift in awareness.

*"yeah for sure there was aliveness, but in terms of the texture of it... ehmm... tingling. It was energetic...it was like 'ooooh there's something' (makes explosion sound) everything became more substancy... it went from nothing to... something. The atmosphere went from this sort of clinical stale to loads of stuff in there. So there was energy but it was like...alive, yeah alive. (Luna88)*

When I am with a client I can “...create this double view or double awareness of feeling that, but being aware that I am here with the client and this is happening and focus on them” (Alja82).

Similarly Rothschild (2000) conceptualised dual awareness, which “involves being able to maintain awareness of one or more areas of experience simultaneously” (p.325). She found that traumatised clients have a diminished ability of dual awareness, processing multiple stimuli simultaneously, as well as distinguishing between perceived experiences in the body and outside of the body. Delving into traumatic memory with a client who is unable to maintain this dual awareness has a high risk of retraumatisation. On the other hand, developing or reconnecting with the capability for dual awareness enables the client to address a trauma, while being secure in the present moment awareness that is trauma-free.

The multidimensional characteristic of our being has been theorised and confirmed in parts in variety of research. We can rewire our automatic reactions in two ways: according to Levine (2010) by becoming aware of the emotions, and according to Siegel (2010) by becoming aware of our thoughts. Therefore, through our multidimensional awareness, instead of reactionary we can become responsive and consciously decide where and how we want to focus our attention. Our awareness has the power to focus attention in certain ways to shape the flow of energy and information (Siegel, 2010, p.218). Danielsson and Rosberg (2015), as well as Hedlund and Gyllensten (2010), found that increased body awareness is connected with increased emotional awareness, so that we are emotionally able to take in more of the world we experience.

Sana explored her experience and understanding of what she called a ‘vibrational sense’ (Sana105). She described how she can sense something in the field around her clients, or in their bodies; she receives information that is connected with their work together. She was hesitant to talk about this vibrational sense, because she considers that it is still a taboo in science. This

might be true in some scientific circles; however it is quite the opposite in others. For example, Sheldrake (2013) exclaimed, “we need not stay stuck in this materialist-dualist contradiction. There is a way out: a field theory of minds” (p.213). He points out that we have accepted the fact that fields exist both within and outside material objects, like the field of magnets, Earth’s gravitational field, or the electromagnetic field of mobile phones. Similarly, he suggests “that the fields of minds are within brains and extended beyond them” (p.213). Tantam (2018) talks about the ‘interbrain’ and in his view it is content-less like the internet; the interbrain is a connection that enables sharing of mental states. In her research Pert (2006) discovered a greater field where all information is stored, which she called the ‘inforealm’. She postulates higher consciousness is found within the nonmaterial, nonlocal world, which is the source of our mind, thoughts and emotions. Our neurological mind is a mechanism that connects the physical body with this inforealm. The idea of a field theory of consciousness is gaining more and more evidence from a variety of scientific disciplines (Laszlo, 2007). Physicists talk about quantum field theory (Bohm, 1980), neuroscientists talk about holonomic brain theory (Pribram, 1991), near-death experience researchers talk about wave-fields of consciousness (Van Lommel, 2013). They all conclude that the neural networks in the brain function as receivers, conveyors and interpreters of waveform information or consciousness and not as a storage system retaining memory. This confirms one of the findings of this research: the theme ‘the body centres’, where the experience of co-researchers was described as the body centring the awareness.

...our waking consciousness, which we experience as our daily consciousness, is only a complementary aspect of our whole and infinite nonlocal consciousness. This consciousness is based on indestructible and constantly evolving fields of information, where all knowledge, wisdom and unconditional love are present and available, and these fields of consciousness are stored in a dimension beyond our concept of time and space with nonlocal and universal interconnectedness. (Van Lommel, 2009, p.191)

### 4.4.3 Integration of All Aspects of Ourselves

Five co-researchers expressed that integration of all aspects of ourselves is an important characteristic of embodiment (Odin89, Finn66, Sana45, Luna158, Vlad75).

*"...I don't see the heart as separate from everything else, you know. It's all...(pause) it's all linked, all connected" (Luna156).*

According to Sana's experience she can get stuck in just being in the heart or just being in the head, but neither serves her or the client. She feels it is best when she can navigate between the two by being aware and present (Sana 45-48) and developing the flexibility or the 'muscle' of being able to move between different aspects of being (Sana87).

*"I do notice when I get stuck in one or the other. If I get stuck just in my heart it is also not so helpful, you know if I am just in my heart then I can't navigate in and out, and I am so into the system that I become one, I become merged somehow. I am an observer and that is where I use my mind to stop me from being over empathic." (Sana48)*

Finn (66) similarly stressed that the fundamental problem of Western society is heart versus head dilemma. He believes it is the function of the psyche or the awareness to stitch the two together into a 'body-mind integration' (Finn77), to make sense of both positions. According to him the psyche is not in the head nor in the heart, it is in the body, which includes both.

*"And people will often decry 'Ah! I followed my heart and I shouldn't have gone out with this guy', or 'my head tells me to do this and actually they are unintegrated positions. But often the head and the heart will be in opposition. We are paradoxical, aren't we? So, our heart might say something, and our head might say something else. We can be drawn to*

*something, we can be drawn to a particular person but we can recognise.”*  
(Finn66)

Luna spoke about the connection and importance of all parts of our body. She felt resistant to the idea that awareness is in the heart, because she experiences it all connected.

*“In all...well I feel openness everywhere. It’s not located just in the heart, I am sure there is an element of that, but it’s...again back to the heaviness and lightness...And for sure I can feel heaviness in my heart, but I can also feel heaviness in my head, I can feel heaviness in my foot, I can feel heaviness in my tummy...and you know, I can feel lightness in all those things too, you know, it doesn’t have to be the heart that is the source of all of that.”*  
(Luna158)

Odin (62) feels it is a conscious choice and constant work to become more integrated within himself: *“It is something I have to work on to be myself in all aspects of my life.”* (Odin62), *“... I am hoping of being all those different levels and aspects, that's what I am trying to do by being more myself.”* (Odin89)

Vlad talked about full embodiment as a feeling of being energised from within as he experiences it (Vlad75).

*“Yes, I think the life force is the...is what we feel when we really are in full embodiment. We can feel the sense of it flowing and it’s often there for people in dance, and often in meditation. Kundalini experiences...and sometimes it can be there in therapy as part of healing the inability to...the kind of the lid that we keep on.”* (Vlad71)

Awareness seems to be the vehicle to a wholesome integration of all aspects of ourselves: mind, body, sensations, ideas, intuitions, thoughts, emotions... However, these are mere concepts that our minds have used to make sense of and speak about our experience. But that does not necessarily make it our

experience. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) stressed, the perception of our thoughts and our senses are not presented to consciousness as separate units but as an organised system working in unison. Our experience of who we are is much more integrated than we can comprehend. But the most important fact is that we are much more than we think we are. Awareness is the connecting point from which the boundaries between different realms of our being disappear and we can actually experience the truth of our whole being. Levine (2010) understands embodiment as “a personal-evolutionary solution to the tyranny of the yapping ‘monkey mind’. It is one that paradoxically allows instinct and reason to be held together, fused in joyful participation and flow” (p. 279). He believes that awareness is the point where “mind and body, thought and feeling, psyche and spirit, are held together, welded in an undifferentiated unity of experience” (p.279). Turp (2000) similarly wrote: “Body mind unity implies that physical and verbal phenomena are simply coexisting facets of the one thinking, feeling, imagining and embodied whole person.” (p.210). Mayer (2015), in her research on embodied therapeutic relationship also recognised mind-body unity as essential characteristic of therapists.

Kierkegaard (1844) believed we are a synthesis of psyche and body but in his view this dualism should be overcome in order to become fully human. Stretched between finite (reality of everyday living) and infinite (universal and eternal) and finding a balance in that tension is what makes us the spiritual individual in time and space. One should be able to reach out to the infinite and at the same time be grounded in the finite, so as to not get entangled in any of the two extremes (Kierkegaard, 1980).

Only that person's life was wasted who went on living so deceived by life's joys or its sorrows that he never became decisively and eternally conscious as spirit, as self, or, what amounts to the same thing, never became aware... (p.26)

In his book *Touching Enlightenment with the Body*, Ray (2008) explores what it might mean to be fully embodied. He believes it involves attending more and

more closely to the body, sensing and discovering what it really feels like. Through this process of embodiment we become more and more identified with our actual body: “the body we meet in our actual experience” (p.85) and not the one we conceptualise. The more he progressed along this path of profound embodiment, the more he realised that his actual experience of his body was the experience of enlightenment, the experience of a fully realised human being.

To be awake, to be enlightened, is to be fully and completely embodied. To be fully embodied means to be at one with who we are, in every respect, including our physical being, our emotions, and the totality of our karmic situation. It is to be entirely present to who we are and to the journey of our own becoming. It is to inhabit, completely, our relative reality, with no speck of ourselves left over, no external observer waiting for something else or something better. (p.13)

From one perspective we are disembodied beings that are becoming embodied, and from another perspective we are integrated body-mind-spirit, but we find this condition hard to manage. The latter is also the perspective of embodied relational therapy (Totton, 2005). It is in our nature to be free to express whatever wants to be lived and felt, while at the same time we find ourselves in difficult conditions and situations of needing to protect ourselves. This duality of expression and protection can leave us feeling confused as to what we feel, want and need. Through a therapeutic relationship, which is both challenging and supportive at the same time “it is possible to disentangle our doubleness and allow our process to unfold – which is what has been trying to happen all along” (Totton, 2005, p.168). That kind of relationship can enable us a space of freedom and safety to express our true nature in its whole complexity. This brings us to the exploration of the relational connection points between therapist and client.

## 4.5 Relational Connection Points

*A juxtapositioning fate, find our mutual coordinate  
Moments of clarity are so rare, I better document this  
At last the view is fierce, all that matters is  
Who is open chested, and who has coagulated  
Who can share, and who has shut down the chances?  
Show me emotional respect, I have emotional needs  
I wish to synchronise our feelings  
What is it that I have that makes me feel your pain?  
Like milking a stone to get you to say it  
Who is open? And who has shut up?  
And if one feels closed how does one stay open?  
(Stonemilker, Björk, 2015)*

One of the objectives of the research is to explore the embodied intersubjective space between the therapist and the client. Focusing on our embodiment reveals that it cannot be separated from relationship: “We grow up needing relationship, and fearing it – fearing the uncontrollable, which we locate most painfully in our bodies and in our relationships” (Totton, 2005, p.169). The theme Relational connection points is the result of co-researchers exploring various ways of meeting clients and connecting with them. It turned out that the relational connection points are sat on a continuum in the space between the therapist and the client. On one end is the client being mirrored in the therapist, and on the other end is the therapist being pulled into the client’s world. In between that there is a need to bracket and discern between the therapist and the client, and also the therapist consciously meeting the client where they are. Last but not least there is the realisation that a true connection happens in the co-created space and only through presence. Throughout the research dialogues an important question kept emerging that was not originally in the interview guide: “When you become an embodied more human being, what is the best way to be with others that are not?” (Alja56). Is there a way of being with a client who is



disembodied, meeting them, connecting with them and staying embodied? (Alja41, 57). Is there a possibility of relaxing into embodied relating? The lyrics to one of Björk's (2015) songs capture the essence of this question: *"And if one feels closed how does one stay open?"*

#### **4.5.1 Mirroring Embodiment**

Mirroring embodiment is how I named a phenomenon of feeling what the client feels, which is experienced by all co-researchers and it basically means the therapist mirroring the embodiment of the client.

*"I become them, I completely start to feel what they feel" (Alja163).*

*"Whatever clients feel I feel it with them...because she doesn't feel anything I don't feel anything and as soon as she did I did feel it. But when there are clients who feel really sad ...or lots of them very anxious, I feel that like it was me" (Alja79).*

Mirroring embodiment therefore means to feel embodied with the feelings of another that resonate with us. The sadness that I am embodying during a session is the client's sadness that I have opened myself up to receive, and it meets the sadness in myself or my sadness.

Dawn experienced herself becoming really sad and even crying with her clients:

*"Oh yeah I have done. Sitting with a young woman whose partner had just taken his own life because he was refused access to heroin rehabilitation. Sitting with that pure grief I found tears come." (Dawn124)*

When her client was expressing anger Luna would feel it *"In my body. In my tummy, in my chest" (Luna82)*. It felt like *"tension, and kind of like a hot feeling in*

*my chest, a sort of ...rage...there was a bit...there was some of the energy in the room.” (Luna83)*

Pele talked about a client that was very hard to understand so instead of trying to understand what she was saying by interrupting her she ‘matched’ her. She felt it was more important to be there with her than try to understand or follow some rules.

*Pele91: ...and I just tracked her, so it was literally through...so I just matched what she was feeling to what was coming across.*

*Alja92: Not what she was saying but what she was feeling.*

*Pele92: No, no, no – just purely physical. Because it was so powerful I didn’t need to...at the end of the session she said ‘ooh I can’t tell you how... this is the first time I feel that someone has understood me!’ (laughs)*

*Alja93: And you were exhausted? And how did you do that? When you said you tracked her.*

*Pele93: Tracked her? It is magic.*

*Alja94: How?*

*Pele94: Face. I suppose just being with her. She was upset. I was showing it. If you’re with a friend that is upset it will show.*

*Alja95: And did you let yourself feel that anxiousness?*

*Pele95: I just thought ‘that’s it, we are sitting in this hall together. There is nothing I can do to make it better, but she’s not alone’. I think that’s the basic thing, she is not alone, I am with her. I am with her, you are not alone.*

*Alja96: And when she said...*

*Pele96: First person that has understood me. In a way I can understand it, because you can tell if someone is really, really, really getting it...and is...I use this term ‘matching’, you have to allow yourself to...(sighs) to experience what she is experiencing. Yeah? You have to kind of merge like that.*

Sana talked about using her body as a mirroring instrument, although it is hard to know whether she can trust it or not. When she does trust it there is usually valuable information for the therapeutic process.

*"Then it is also that my body is really my instrument, I guess. So I could start to feel something in my neck. It happened before where I felt really tight in my neck and the woman said 'yeah, I was strangled by my boyfriend,'" (Sana61)*

Odin similarly uses his mirrored responses to what clients say by sharing them:

*"Explaining to people what comes to me in the moment and trying not to filter that too much so I can genuinely respond to what they say – so they get some immediate response. And then they need to work with me to explore why I feel like that when they say things, or what it is that it prompts in me and use myself in the space." (Odin3)*

Odin described a key moment in his therapeutic work with a client; when he mirrored his client's embodiment about a past situation of standing up to his stepfather:

*Odin11: You know that moment of standing up to his stepfather was the key, and a key moment in our therapeutic work in which I was inviting him to be resilient rather than passive in victim mode.*

*Alja12: And how do you feel it affected the relationship between you two, that you kind of mirrored his embodied way of being?*

*Odin12: Well I felt we joined each other and you know when you asked me for that image it was the kind of high five.*

*Alja13: OK, in the same team?*

*Odin13: In the same team, yeah, and we scored and we can stand up against the world (laughs).*

Vlad (29) was exploring his own experience of mirroring:

*"So it's always a bit of a paradox isn't it, because we tend to think of that we are feeling that persons feelings, and of course we are feelings our feelings*

*when we observe their feelings...so I'm kind of aware of that, and at the same time, what I experience is that feeling, as I'm watching her experience those feelings. I guess...within me."*

Mirroring also happened between myself and co-researchers during the interviews. When Finn (20) was describing mirroring an emotional state of his client I also started embodying some of it.

*Finn20: ...again I felt this sense of shock, tightness of breath, my heart was pounding. I mean I can feel a degree of it now, a tightness in the breath, a shudder went down my spine...None of which belonged to me, it belonged to her. But she was unable to locate it, but conceptually she was telling me... she was telling me something that she couldn't make sense that this wasn't quite right...*

*Alja21: So if I bring us into the now a bit, it is really interesting that I think a few moments before you started saying I actually feel now short of breath, and like something going down your spine, I started being aware feeling this sadness in my head...a kind of heaviness. And I started wondering, 'oh I wonder how it is for you?' and you said that... really interesting.*

Similar mirroring during the interview happened with Luna and Sana. While Luna (51) was describing her difficulty with a client we both anxiously started playing with our hair.

*Alja51: And do you feel.... It's funny because in my mind I started thinking of the question...do you feel the connection? And how do you feel it between you two, and when you release what happens with them...but then I noticed how I anxiously started playing with my hair and you did as well... so let's first come back to what is going on here, then we can go back to the question. So, how are you feeling right now here?*

*Luna51: ...what I said about her was reflecting what I was doing with her. And that when I was having paranoid thoughts about if she's got a knife in*

*her bag, I would then be noticing that I had that thought and that I left the room. You know, I wasn't in there, and so that's where I was thinking...*

Sana (22) was re-experiencing the excitement of working with a particular client and at the same time I started feeling excited as well.

*Sana22: there is something about it because it is so complex and this flower is gently, gently opening, that I feel refreshed and even now I am still thinking about that session and like excited how can I...*

*Alja23: It is funny because just as you were saying this I started having this feeling of excitement and energy and I was just like 'wow where is this coming from, I don't usually feel like that?' So I guess there is something...*

Husserl (1983) was the one who initially theorised that the very nature of subjective experience implies experience as inherently intersubjective. His student Stein (1970) devoted her research to the problem of empathy and posited that empathy is the source of individual experience of otherness. Following Husserl, Merleau-Ponty (1964) recognised the fundamental intersubjective quality of existence that begins from birth. He argued that two beings in immediate lived present connection operate together in unity:

Thus in today's psychology we have one system with two terms (my behaviour and the other's behaviour) which functions as a whole...Husserl said that the perception of others is like a 'phenomenon of coupling' [accouplement]. The term is anything but a metaphor. In perceiving the other, my body and his are coupled, resulting in a sort of action which pairs them [action á deux]. (p.118)

Similarly, Gendlin (1991) agrees with Heidegger in his concept of being-in-the-world; the body and environment are one system. Bodies are open to one another and they become an environment for each other. Intersubjectivity is the sense of 'being-with' another person – a direct result of the interpersonal resonance that is occurring during coregulation of movements, sensations and

emotions (Trevarthen and Aitken, 2001). In intersubjectivity one's awareness is expanded beyond the boundaries of the body and includes emotional states of the other (Tronick, 2007). Likewise, Fuchs and Koch (2014) profess emotions are not only individual, but are primarily shared states that we experience through relational interaffectivity. Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009) write about a bodily link that they call intercorporality, which allows emotions to affect the other and thus enable immediate empathic understanding. Within the field of neuroscience this phenomenon is identified as 'mirroring' or 'resonance behaviour', with the neurological basis found in 'mirror neurons' (Gallese et al., 1996; McGilchrist, 2009), as well as right-brain-to-right-brain communication, bypassing the language centres in the left side of the brain (Schore, 1994). It is also called 'affect attunement' by child development researcher Stern (1985), and kinaesthetic empathy within dance movement psychotherapy (Fischman, 2009).

Soth (2005) integrated the view of body psychotherapy and modern psychoanalysis in order to arrive at an embodied notion of countertransference, which could be compared to the phenomenon of mirroring. He describes how the therapist enters into a re-enactment with a client by a differentiated and attuned awareness to the multiple parallel processes resonating throughout the therapeutic relationship and the body-mind of both people involved: "When all the fragments of the conflict inherent in the re-enactment can be held in sufficient awareness across the levels of body-emotion-image-mind in the relationship in the 'here and now', the conflict will tend to reorganise itself." (p.50). The therapist's body-mind resonant process therefore contains valuable information about the other and might be the holding space of transformation.

Within the frame of phenomenological existential therapy, transference and countertransference are not understood as pathological projections and alike, because that would mean distorting the therapy itself (Van Deurzen, 1997; Martinez Robles, 2015). Rather these processes are always a present genuine relationship between the client and therapist. They disclose themselves to each other as human beings with their own patterns, perspectives and ways of being

in the world. By our way of relating and being who we are, we create a world inside and around us, which then, in turn, re-creates more of the same in response. We don't just imagine other people to have the same qualities that we have, we bring these qualities to the forefront in them (Van Deurzen, 2012). This theme confirms how this can happen through mirroring embodiment. The work of therapy is in clarification of these patterns and bias of both client and therapist (Van Deurzen, 1997).

It is this intersubjective human nature that enables therapists to 'tune into' their clients' way of being (Fogel, 2009). With this kind of attunement or resonance, the therapist can experience with the client what they themselves cannot identify or name. However, in order to do that with enough awareness, the therapist must embody a certain quality of openness and curiosity toward their own embodied self-awareness and that of the client (Fogel, 2009). Brodie (2015) sometimes receives information from the info-realm, which manifests as physical pain that mirrors the client's pain. Orbach (2009) calls these kinds of phenomena 'wildcat sensations'. She understands them as unconscious transmission of some physical state that cannot easily be felt by her clients. Psychotherapists often rely on being able to pick up feelings from their clients as a guide to aspects of their clients' experience which need to be addressed.

It seems that science is catching up with what mothers and psychotherapists have been experiencing all along - their worlds enmeshed and interwoven in more ways than we can imagine. Soth (2005) sees the therapeutic relationship as an "intersubjective, culturally contextualised system of complex parallel body/mind processes" (p.41). Relatedly, Payne (2017) writes that the mirror mechanism stimulates within ourselves the emotional and somatosensory experience similar to or the same as the one observed in the client: "This direct, interpersonal route of knowledge allows us to resonate in synchrony with others and makes it possible to share dimensions of experience at a nonconscious level, i.e., that of implicit inter-corporeality." (p.166)

## 4.5.2 Bracketing and Discerning

The phenomenon of mirroring embodiment calls for practices of awareness of bracketing and discernment. All eight co-researchers stressed that bracketing one's own feelings and discerning between one's own and the client's feelings is essential. Odin, Luna, Sana and Pele all describe bracketing and discernment to be a constant process of self-enquiry, and noticing the subtle changes.

*"...because I have a sense of merging, there are some levels at which that isn't easy to define. But it is my job to police that and make sure that I constantly work out which aspects of what is happening is to do with me and what might be coming from them" (Odin64).*

*"So, with the clients, because I have this thing in me, this memory of being differently with people in different ways, and I am different with you now than how I might have been if I had met you somewhere else in different aspects of my life, I can spot when I am pulled into things and what is happening for me." (Odin65)*

*"And also it's a reminder for myself to lift the carpet up, you know, to what is actually happening here and not fall into the story of...To listen to all the different things that happen, you know, to notice my reaction when she walks into the room, to notice what is like when she leaves the room. To notice and to know what is like with her in the room. You know and to sort of reflect on what is like when I'm with someone else and all those things...I don't think is as easy as going 'I know what is like' it's an on-going enquiry really and...supervision really helps" (Luna65).*

*"Yeah, I mean bracketing is for me, it means that first you have to become aware of something. It's me, my...and then that I find useful, I am not so sure to what extent...you can see it, it's still part of me, but then is slightly put to the side. It makes room for the other person, you can just drop it, it's too much me me me..." (Pele87)*



*"... yeah the bracketing is very useful when I am aware of myself being too confident...Becoming aware that either that I am assuming to understand too well. Something is too clear. And then to have to almost literally – as I am doing now – to sit back, to move back, I think 'hold on' and often I say 'hang on a minute here' I am nodding away and feeling I'm with you and... you know because whatever it is is horrible, or this or that, but I am understanding from my point of view..." (Pele88)*

Sana finds it difficult to discern between her own embodied sensations and the client's: *"It is so hard yeah. I do my best to practise as much as I can to get really more precise about my own sensations and what things trigger me in certain ways" (Sana57)*. She usually takes a minute at the beginning of the session to centre herself: *"Yeah that one minute is the restart for myself, like how am I feeling? Tired, or agitated because of my last conversation, like I try to keep that in filter." (Sana59)* *"And if I still can't discern it then I name it: 'is it yours, is it mine, are you sensing also this tension, could it be mine?'" (Sana60)*

It seems that for most of the co-researchers bracketing and discerning is a challenging task.

*"Well first of all cos I just said I feel like it was me, it is always a challenge and I always struggle to bracket myself and my own stuff and my own thoughts. Because when I start to feel that, it attaches to whatever I am going through in my life, that comes up. And so if it was sadness, I all of a sudden start thinking about the recent break up, or I don't know the fight I had with my father that I am sad about as well. So, I feel it is always a struggle to not get into, to not let that overwhelm me." (Alja80)*

*"... so I think it's that bit. I seem to be quite good, often, not always. Kind of putting the... switching off the being in the world bit. Sitting in the chair, in the room. So...but not always. Obviously there's the whole thing that the clients have issues and are in situations that are similar to things that*

*happen to me, so that necessarily brings up some memories, resonances, and I think that's the hardest bit. Because it's less clear. Whether those things have a place or not." (Vlad37)*

The way I have learned to bracket and discern is by bringing awareness into the moment and choosing what to focus on:

*Alja 91: Yeah, yeah, so the awareness does that. It kind of pushes my stuff to the side.*

*Clara 92: Mhm so that it is less embodied?*

*Alja 92: Or just that the thoughts don't go there.*

*Clara 93: Mhm what do you mean by thought?*

*Alja 93: Like so that I wouldn't start thinking about my breakup but about her breakup, but about what she is telling me and of being attentive to that.*

...

*Alja 95: Trying to first put aside my stuff and then just really go with her to where she wanted to go with it and what she wanted to tell me.*

Dawn uses imagination for discernment:

*"...the image I have is like a dream catcher and I let the stuff go through me and if there is anything that I need to take to supervision or therapy then it kind of catches on the dream catcher and I can hold on to it enough to be able to take it to...oh this thing has caught on me. Well when I first trained as an acupuncturist, I was really taking people's stuff home all the time and one of my colleagues at the time suggested imagining like a shower as I am showing them to the door or whatever. And I always wash my hands when I get home." (Dawn144)*

Finn explored how he discerns between what is his and what is his client's, and what he does to separate himself from it.

*"I felt this in my body, I used this in my mind to draw on my theory and my own sense of separateness from her and I was able to think: 'OK there is something therapeutically to pick up for us in January with this but I don't need to carry this' and I didn't carry it." (Finn40)*

*"I don't think it's an act of pushing it away, I think it just drops, it just goes. Rather than me pushing it away. Because if I held on to it then I'm caught in a re-enactment with her, there's a merge happening. There's a lack of ability to discern between who's who, and that doesn't help her." (Finn42)*

However sometimes discerning is difficult or even impossible until the moment the client leaves the space.

*"I think for now I can only truly discern once the client is gone...Only when they leave the room I am like "whoooa OK that was completely out of me" and then I can slowly get the picture of them." (Alja 160)*

*Alja47: And are you generally aware of what's going on or after?*

*Pele47: Erm, good question, quite often after. We are so immersed in what is going on that...*

*Luna43: And when they leave the room I notice this: (sighs audibly) I exhale*

*Alja44: It goes away in a sense.*

*Luna44: It's just an embodied reaction to them leaving.*

*Alja45: Of relief...*

*Luna45: Release. And I notice that I have been contracted.*

Bracketing and discerning is a well-explored topic within psychotherapy and this theme confirms their importance. According to Levine (2010) a therapist needs to find a balance between mirroring a client's feelings in order to gain information about the client but still be able to contain them and not overwhelm themselves or the client. Therapists gain this ability by becoming aware and comfortable with their own feelings. "Only then can we really help clients contain

their troubling sensations and emotions so that they can learn that, no matter how horrible they feel, it will not go on forever” (p.46). According to Husserl (1983) we need to bracket our natural attitude of seeing the world in an automatic way and instead focus on the phenomenon as it appears in our experience. Therefore, a therapist needs to bracket their own *a priori* theories, hunches and suppositions and come to own embodied experience with the client. But then it goes even a step further because the therapist needs to also bracket her own embodiment in order to discern between what is the client’s and what is her own. Likewise, Orbach (2009) writes that the therapist registers an unexpected shift of mood in herself when she is with a client and then begins a private inner dialogue of firstly checking herself out, using her body, her emotional state “as a stethoscope-like instrument for hearing what might be askew” (p.69).

Masters (2013) writes that for real compassion we need empathy and also the capacity to set an ‘empathic wall’ when we are feeling “excessively absorbed in another’s emotional condition” (p.32), in order to prevent us from fusing or “getting lost in each other” (p.32). Good boundaries make good connections. Sometimes we need to have our empathic gates wide open but other times we need them closed. The important thing is to have the flexibility and the discernment between those states. Instead of releasing, abandoning, or dissolving our boundaries, we can be expanding our boundaries so as to include the other (Masters, 2013).

### **4.5.3 Pulled into Other Way of Being**

Sometimes we are unable to stay aware enough to bracket and discern between the client’s embodiment and ours, that is when we get pulled into their way of being. All eight co-researchers described the phenomena of getting unwillingly pulled into the client’s way of being, of losing our way of being, our awareness and presence and only realising later that we lost the awareness.

*"...like this pattern of being swept over by a client into their world and their whatever they are feeling and living through. And almost like being drawn into it, not by desire but pulled into it by the gravity that they have" (Alja104).*

*"So I kind of get washed over, inside and outside and everything with what they are feeling and their way of being. And I am there and I experience it. It is like in the movies, you are there and you are experiencing it and you are feeling the emotions and you are completely immersed and then you leave the room, the movie ends the client leaves and then you can reflect on it and it is like 'Oh wow this was really heavy or sad or anxious.'"(Alja167)*

*Clara 161: So, hold on a minute, when you say 'completely out of me' do you mean that you lose yourself or you become more yourself?*

*Alja 161: When I am with them?*

*Clara 162: Yeah.*

*Alja 162: Lose myself*

*Clara 163: Is that embodied or not?*

*Alja 163: (sighs) haha, I become them, I completely start to feel what they feel.*

*Clara 164: Is that what embodiment...is that embodiment too then?*

*Alja 164: I guess it is an aspect of embodying their way of being.*

*Sana73: but I didn't really say it, I was trying to, I don't know, she pulled me in, or I was pulled into conversations about things and I was talking too much and I should have, I don't know, I wasn't disciplined enough with her I guess...*

*Alja74: How do you make sense of that? How does that happen with clients?*

*How come clients have that ability to pull us in?*

*Sana74: Because they have skills to avoid feeling.*

*"I can sense some dissonance, between how they are presenting themselves and how they apparently are and what's going on. And I find that...acutely*

*physically uncomfortable for me. So sometimes I reel back. And that's weird. It is weird for me too, and I'm thinking 'but I'm a therapist! A good therapist can deal with any of this' (laughs) And I am reeling in my chair and I am trying to look as if nothing is happening (laughs loudly)." (Vlad80)*

Five co-researchers have experienced having awareness and also losing it when working with clients (Alja160, Finn58, Sana123, Dawn146, Pele47). When we lose the awareness, it can take us a while to come back to it: *"And if I do get pulled into it, I usually make the whole circle or something, like it is not good..." (Alja105)*

Luna (67) made an interesting exploration of her experience about the 'creepiness' of some clients. She feels like there is something 'creeping into her' or 'trying to penetrate' her. It usually happens with clients that are especially challenging for her. She feels there is something about boundaries being challenged and 'enmeshment' happening.

*"I often get a creepiness with a client when I haven't quite...the word creepy comes out with clients that I struggle with...for me. And I think that it's like there is a creeping into me...there's something that I am noticing is penetrating me, or is trying to penetrate me, (stutters)...I feel it's a bit like an enmeshment...I notice...of being challenged somehow and having to really pay attention to the boundaries, to keep myself safe, but also to see what is going on with the client. And I don't know, I don't know exactly..." (Luna67-69)*

Odin (67) similarly spoke about 'contamination':

*"...so like the gentlemen that I described that I want to pull out of the pit, I can see myself being drawn into a feeling of wanting to rescue and hold this person and be concerned about them. I can feel myself being pulled into a position of being angry with them, shouting at them. I can feel myself being pulled away from them, don't want to be contaminated by this person, who is so disgusting that they wallow in their pit and won't do anything about it*

*and they are happy there. And I don't want to be drawn into being with them in that pit. I have all those things going on. And I am trying to hold myself in that space.” (Odin67)*

Dawn (139) used the word ‘forget’ to be aware with her client, because the client is so disembodied and then she ‘joins her world too much’ and becomes ‘rigid’ with her, which is not helpful to the client nor to herself.

*Alja139: But then why do you forget?*

*Dawn139: I think because she is disembodied and so I, maybe I join her world too much.*

*Alja141: But that is the question: do you? I mean that is the question because you said before that we meet them where they are because that is the only way.*

*Dawn141: Yeah.*

*Alja142: But in that way can there be too much meeting and kind of dreading along with them?*

*Dawn142: And that brings to mind Virginia Satier, the family therapist who ended up with stomach cancer and used to always say that she felt her empathy in her gut.*

Similarly to Dawn (139), I felt that being pulled into a client’s way of being can happen when they are disembodied to such an extent that they are not connected to their feelings and bodies, and often that can be such a powerful way of being that as a therapist it is difficult to stay embodied with them, and thus impossible to connect on an embodied level (Alja56).

Finn described being pulled into his client’s way of being with: “...I found him unbearable. I found his presence to be...to have a narcoleptic effect, I would feel tired, I would feel sleepy, fatigued. And I would struggle to make sense of it...” (Finn35). Which is probably what the client was feeling as well, or trying not to feel. For me personally, being present in the body is the vehicle to know about what is going on with the client, myself and in between us in the moment.

Nevertheless, in my case I reflected my client's fear of being embodied and abandoned my own body, by going into disembodied thinking, which brought us into confusion. I wasn't able to be embodied with all clients, especially clients who might abandon me, who are not embodied. And that took me out of being present for myself and for the client. I wasn't able to use my embodiment as a compass with her because her disembodiment was blocking it. It is like it was an anxiety or a block to really connecting. I was not aware of this pattern clearly until Clara helped me explore it during the interview (Alja245).

Pulled into our client's way of being is a frequent yet elusive and under researched theme, especially in existential psychotherapy. Van Der Kolk (2014) noticed that some patients tell him horrendous stories without any feeling and that is when he experiences all the energy draining out of the room and having to make a real effort to keep paying attention: "A lifeless patient forces you to work much harder to keep the therapy alive, and I often used to pray for the hour to be over quickly" (p.72). Therapists are engaging at a very intimate level with clients, whether through talking or through interacting with the body's energetic field, resonating with the waves emanating from the client and receiving information from a greater field (Brodie, 2015). It is no wonder that sometimes we lose our ground and get pulled into their world. Brodie (2015) believes one of two things can happen when we lose our centeredness when working with a client, we either get triggered into our own issues by the client's issues or we become entangled with our client's trauma and pain. When this entanglement happens continuously without realising and releasing what is not truly ours to carry and feel, we can become physically sick. That kind of sickness could be understood as our own body's intelligence reminding us that we have gone off track too much.

As mentioned before it seems that the multidimensionality of EEA enables therapists embodied mirroring or re-enactment (Soth, 2005). It could be considered that a sufficient degree of embodied emotional awareness allows therapists to surrender into a re-enactment with a client and with that lose awareness while the process is active, only to regain the awareness once the process is complete. Therapists often remember from own experience that losing



awareness in the process is a confusing and terrifying experience. Soth's (2005) premise is that the wounding relationship enters the client's perception and their experience in the therapy room, but not only that, it also enters and affects the therapist's experience of self as an inescapable and unintentional embodied process. He theorises that "it is impossible for a therapist to follow a strategy of overcoming a dysfunctional pattern without enacting in the transference the person in relation to whom the pattern originated" (p.49). He further on elucidates that the therapist surrenders into becoming a part of the client's re-enactment process, which triggers the de-construction of that same part. This is extremely difficult as it involves opening up to the full force of the client's pain, without hiding behind the therapeutic role: "This is inconceivable without the therapist risking their own subjectivity and being de-constructed not only as a professional, but also as a person" (p.50). By taking this risk no therapeutic theory, tool or technique warrants the process ending beneficially for the client – or the therapist for that matter. There is no guarantee that this process will be worked through: "There is no Archimedean fixed point by which we can lever ourselves onto solid ground: re-enactment is one of the essential features of a participative universe" (p.50).

#### **4.5.4 Meet Them Where They Are**

When we are able to stay aware while engaging with the client, we have the possibility of choosing to meet the client where they are. Being pulled into their way of being happens without our awareness and will. On the other hand meeting clients where they are happens with full awareness of stepping closer to their way of being while at the same time not losing that awareness. Seven co-researchers talked about different ways of meeting clients where they are (Pele97, Luna62, Dawn13, Sana137, Vlad12, Odin50, Alja30).

*"I've come to the acceptance that it's just about being with her in this, and that's OK, that's enough, and taking care of myself at the same time. And I just feel...although it's uncomfortable it's OK to go through it..." (Luna62).*

*"You meet the person where they are. Because there's nowhere else to meet them. (becomes emotional)...and this one woman I'm working with and have been for 18 months or something. Who is so cut off, so cut off. She doesn't make any connections. She can barely speak. And yet I know that, somewhere in me I know, I mean she said that, I do ask her why she keeps coming back honestly. Because I can't really see that much is changing. ... There's something happening on a connecting level. So, I have to meet people where they are. There's no other way of doing it." (Dawn13)*

*"I have had it happen (laughing) when the clients throw the tissue box over to me because I have been crying with them. I don't cry a lot with clients but if I am in the presence of that really raw grief I think I would have to be made of wood not to, or stone not to respond, and be moved with them. And I think actually for someone to see that what is moving them is also moving somebody else, there is a kinship and there is a real empathy in there. Connection." (Dawn128)*

*"So sometimes I would be doing, talking quite a lot intellectually. If that's where that person wants to start. Cause I kind of almost think...we can go towards the deeper stuff, but if they are not ready and they do not want to go there then it's fine, then we are just on a different mode of relating for the time being." (Vlad12)*

*Alja56: So, if that happens, and the client starts to become tearful and you would start to feel it what would you generally...?*

*Pele56: I also get emotional. Yeah...I let it be, because I feel it's visible for both of us. And for me it's natural, and also I honestly believe that tears particularly often express what words can't.*

*Alja57: So, when you say you 'let it be' what does it mean?*

*Pele57: I don't try to 'oh dear I'm all emotional' I never understand why therapists have to say the obvious, yeah, why not normalise it, here we are, both in tears, but that doesn't mean that you are weak or vulnerable or...*

*“But there is something about don’t worry about not understanding. So, I say it’s OK. It’s better not to understand, than to assume you understand too quickly. It will only be my understanding, not you know your, or shared... more exciting, then we get alongside each other, then that’s exciting.” (Pele97)*

Sometimes clients are so overwhelmed with what is going on in their lives, wrapped up in their own thoughts or emotions, that they cannot meet us or connect with us. Meeting them where they are can be helpful when they are unable to meet us in between (Alja184).

*“No but I have joined her in the waiting and that is probably everything I have done.” (Alja30)*

*“Hmmm. That it is maybe not my job to show her the tree or to be the Godot or to show her Godot or I don’t know anything of this. That maybe it is just for me to join her in the waiting. For her to feel less alone in the waiting but that is where she is right now.” (Alja32)*

*“So, I kind of met her at that awareness and I was like ‘ooooh like why do I need to go there?’ I kind of connected to her on her level...”(Alja154)*

Sana talked about becoming frustrated with one client and she shared that frustration with her, which made the client angry and leave the session. But when the client came back in the next session, she said that it made her realise her stuck way of being. Nevertheless, Sana was left wondering if she did the right thing by sharing her feelings with the client.

*“So maybe that was like I went to that level (lower to meet her) but then by the end of the session I said what is happening and where is this coming from, and we both realised or she came up with it that what is behind it is she can’t trust anybody, doesn’t even trust herself.” (Sana137)*

Odin talked about meeting his clients by allowing them their own created space. He shared that in his work he never wants to 'tread on client's toes' (Odin50) or 'be in their space' (Odin49). Which means that he doesn't want to 'drive' (Odin53) a client by guiding the session or pushing and fixing them into any set way of being, but instead allows them open possibilities of being. He believes clients create space in a session and should be left to occupy it in any way they choose (Odin52, 55).

*"Longer-term work is painful at times and when people have nothing to bring and you are sitting there waiting for them to occupy the space, to use this metaphor. But I think because I am pacier and it is more like a dance, that you make moves and then you leave a space for that person to naturally be drawn into." (Odin55)*

Meeting clients where they are may mean offering appropriate support, reflection, pacing and mirroring. With that they receive the space and time to begin feeling seen and respected, which might be the best path to opening up and enabling "the deeper levels of the body's unconscious communication system to begin to speak, both to the therapist and to the client" (Levine, 2010, p.159). If the therapist or the client tries too hard to open up, faster than they are physically and emotionally ready to integrate, their body will intensify the resistance with "self-protective somatic mechanisms" (p.160). Therapists also need to be careful not to provide a new way of being for clients, one that did not emerge from their own exploration of possibilities of being. Van Deurzen (2009) proclaims "Jumping on other people's bandwagons, such shortcuts to a wider or better perspective may simply lead us up blind alleys" (p.231) and it often ends up being the long way around. Thus it is extremely important that a therapist meets the client where they are, carefully listens and aligns with the client's ability of expansion at their own pace. Meeting clients where they are can mean 'meeting them in their feeling', their rage (Vlad85), their 'raw grief' (Dawn128) or meeting them on an intellectual level (Vlad12). Sometimes the best technique

is no technique and “the most effective intervention is just to be with the client talking about mundane things” (Rothschild, 2000, p.225).

#### 4.5.5 Co-Created Space

Seven co-researchers talked about the space in between them and the client as a co-creation, and a place where the connection happens or it might not happen (Sana120, Pele83, Dawn188, Odin28, Finn53, Luna51, Alja166).

*“...I am sure we create a common ground, it is not just them, probably I would need to ask them. And it is just there we create this energy; they create this energy. So, it is like swimming, like if you go into the water you are going to feel the water until you leave the water, you are just gonna feel the water.” (Alja166)*

*“So, the co-created space is, I think, largely unconsciously created by two equals. And we can do that because we are sitting here...at least more as two equals than if you were my client and I was the psychotherapist. But if you are a client then the boundaries dictate the space, they put the frame in place, so then we can start to manoeuvre within that and have the experience of co-creating something. Hopefully as a client gets a sense that she can co-create something with another then she can co-create outside of the room as well. So, I think the more I think about it, I think it's of profound importance and that is what embodiment is. When we all do this, we're constantly re-assessing our boundaries and the degree of contact we have with someone.” (Finn53)*

The space in between seems to be where the co-created connection happens that is more than the sum of its parts; it is new and surprising to both therapist and the client: “So there is this energy that creates, I like to call it  $2 + 2$  is 5. Ammm it is just something new that comes up in between us” (Alja170).

Pele (83) pointed out that the space in between is difficult to explore *“because we can’t stand outside of it”*.

*“Well if you think how we are, colours the space in between, in a way... that’s hmmm...but we are caught up in it at the same time, so we are both creating something together. And I think that what can happen you can feel...sometimes there is more of a connection and sometimes less of a connection. But then it also makes me wonder if that’s only looking at the space as a positive thing. But the space in between is space, whatever it... feels like...awkward. You know it could be awkward sometimes...very physical, either too far away or too close...or (pause) It’s always there, obviously.” (Pele83)*

Odin talked about a physical in between space when a client chose to sit behind a table and how that affected their space in between: *“the desk becomes a plane and she can move forward with her elbows and then I can occupy that space at the table too and a space opens up between us...” (Odin28)*, *“there is a barrier but then there is a shared space and we can lean in to it or move of it.” (Odin30)*.

Three co-researchers talked about the quality of their awareness being connected with the quality of connection between themselves and the client (Luna51, Finn59, Sana123). Finn was describing his experience of losing awareness in sessions and he realised that the quality of his awareness is telling him something about the quality of contact that is happening in that moment and it has nothing to do with the content of what is being talked about (Finn59).

*“I tend to lose awareness not based on the content of what the client is telling me but based on the quality of contact. So, perhaps it’s back to your co-created space – if the space is not being co-created then the client may be telling me content-wise something that could be very interesting, but I find ...I zone out because there is no contact between me and the person I am interacting with so...I think the quality of my awareness is informing me actually about the quality of the contact of person I’m with.” (Finn58)*

*“And in terms of the client. I feel it in my body. We are trained to respect and encourage silences but there is no point in letting a client be silent if they are dissociating. And I’ve come to learn that when a client is dissociating, when there is silence if I suddenly realise I am thinking about something else...and then I catch myself and I come back and she is still in her silence in her space, and I ask: ‘are you still with me?’ and it’s never happened without fail that she says ‘no, no, I’ve gone off’, and I say: ‘I wonder if it’s really hard for us to stay with this’ so...” (Finn61)*

With Sana we co-created very connected space during the research dialogue. It felt like an exciting connection where the energy and ideas were easily flowing between us. I felt like the questions kept flowing into me, and when I asked something she got a spark in her eye as if to say I am hitting the right spot: *“Ahaa, you ask such good questions! (laughs) (Sana87)*. The questions were opening up space for deeper phenomenological exploration of her experience. We were able to be very present and open with each other and were able to word how we were feeling – what was going on for us and in between us. Sana believes her experience of space in between is an indication of the connection between her and the client.

*“the space in between I feel measures my connection with the person that I am with. Talking with you right now I feel aliveness, I feel like something pulsating and I feel connected. If there is something that is slower or feels tedious – it’s not pulsating in this way – then I can feel less of a connection or even no connection. There could be a dissociation happening for myself or the person with me.” (Sana120)*

*“it feels that would define the kind of connection I am having is the space in between if things are moving or if things are feeling stuck or just...I feel it like a 3D thing that could be moving three dimensionally” (Sana121).*

At one point I felt we lost the connection and I immediately pointed it out and she recognised the same, so we could reflect on what happened when we lost the connection and what was happening in the moment.

*Alja122: yeah, and I feel just now as we are talking about it, because I also feel lots of movement between us and an aliveness. But then just now I felt it go down a bit and I realised I went into my head, like I started really thinking about what you were saying instead of being right here right now. And when I move into 'right here right now' and just let everything else go I feel it kind of starts again.*

*Sana122: Yeah. And I had a moment too, so we can say who started it in a way. I was thinking 'how do I name this?', so I went into my head and I didn't feel it so there was something that went down with that.*

*Alja123: Yeah I guess we both felt it.*

*Sana123: Interesting. And sometimes I wonder if I go up into my head, am I inviting that person also? And then that is what happens and we spiral into this thing that we are both kind of disconnected. Or do I go into my head because you have disconnected and I sense 'oh I have to go somewhere else to find you'? I wonder about this, I think we have a lot of different ways that we disconnect."*

With Dawn we were co-creating a very connected, intimate, synchronised space in between, where we would be feeling or thinking similarly: *"the space is really flowing isn't it. That's when there is real connection."* (Dawn188)

Pele described how our interview space in between feels:

*"I like the feeling a lot; it's a kind of curiosity. You're curious and I'm curious and two curiosities meeting each other, that's kind of exciting...there's a kind of an electric feeling...if I were to describe what is happening between us"* (Pele106).

With Finn we also had a good connection:



*Finn59: So my sense right now is...I feel much more awake than when we began today, and I believe that is because my experience is of the quality of the contact to be strong between us.*

*Alja60: Yeah, mine too.*

*Finn60: So, therefore I feel awake and alive, there are two people in this, and there is a strong quality of contact happening between us. So therefore, I am aware, and I am aware of myself as I sit here, and I am aware of you being aware of me.*

Odin shared his systemic view of emotions as forms of communication and intersubjective processes rather than an internal individual subjective state:

*“emotions, that perhaps in the past might have driven him towards self-harm to some degree and now it is a interpersonal communication, so he won’t lock himself away and harm himself, he will be present with others and express his distress in front of them to try to get things to happen in his network of relationships” (Odin17).*

In line with this idea, Masters (2013) writes: “Emotion is the central station of communication, the connecting fabric of relationship, the currency of intimacy, the life blood of embodied sentience, both moving and motivating us, whatever our circumstances.” (p.19). It seems that the space in between is highly important because it is an indication of where the therapist is and where the client is, and whether there is a need for readjustment. Finlay (2015) writes about ‘Being relationally-focused’ on the embodied dialogical relationship ‘between’, where the intersubjective is the context for processing the intrapsychic. The therapist offers a relational home where a more intimate I-Thou encounter can take place. According to Buber (1998), dialogue or ‘The sphere of the between’ is created within the space between the relating and completely present ‘I’ and ‘Thou’. The essence of ‘The sphere of the between’ is not found in any of the partners, nor in their sum, but in the interchange of their authentic being to each other. Furthermore “limits of the possibility of dialogue are the

limits of awareness” (Buber, 2002, p.12). Boadella (1997b) wrote when the embodied therapist and the embodied client enter the room “Two breathing systems interact, two motoric systems come into awareness of each other: a relationship begins in which non-verbal communication plays a very large part” (Boadella, 1997b, p. 39). Moreover it seems that the quality of awareness in itself is information about the client, the relationship or the therapeutic process. It may be that the quality of our awareness mirrors something in the client’s awareness, their negative expectation or even our own resistance to connect with the client (Totton, 2005).

All co-researchers reflected on the space in between us (myself and them as co-researchers of our experience) during the interview. They described it with words like: curiosity, exciting, electric feeling, flowing, aliveness, pulsating, connected, open, still, present. In my experience it is about holding a certain quality of space where the other feels held, heard, interested in, and deeply connected – connected with their body, with me, with the intersubjective space and with a greater awareness. By holding ‘space’ I mean holding an awareness that is embodied in me, in the room, in the present here and now. I was always holding an intentional awareness of letting whatever needs to be expressed emerge in the co-created space of our dialogue, and giving it the space and presence that it needs to develop, be heard and felt. By waiting patiently, quietly, offering a safe space, being totally and completely present, shining the light of presence, the other can bathe in the light and choose what to enlighten. This brings me to the last and possibly one of the most important themes of this research.

#### **4.5.6 Presence in Relation**

Five co-researchers stressed the fundamental significance of presence in relation (Dawn88, Luna3, Sana5, Odin3, Alja183). Being present in the moment, in the body, with feelings, with ourselves, with the client, in a current situation, is of utmost importance to embodiment and the embodied connection in the

therapeutic process (Alja171). The I-Thou connection happens in presence (Alja183).

*Alja 183: (sighs) Buber comes to mind and that once you have experienced that relational depth, the I-Thou presence, that is the only thing that is meaningful, that is the only way you can be, you want to share.*

*Clara 184: Mhm*

*Alja 184: The problem is only, when the other cannot meet you there and don't really even appreciate. They can't appreciate because they can't meet you there. And so then, that is why I said make myself feel better. That is where my mind starts to wonder – what point is there?*

*Clara 185: Yeah, mhm*

*Alja 185: Is there a point? Well Buber says exactly that, like there is no other way, like nothing, it is about your being, it is not about the other. So, whether or not they can meet you doesn't really matter because it is about how you want to be.*

Dawn described her work as 'holding space' or 'bearing witness', which for her means *"being right here right now, relax and not try so hard"* (Dawn88) and with that enabling the client to come into presence, into their body, their being, as well as *"enabling the other person to find their way through whatever mess they currently find themselves in"* (Dawn8). She became tearful as she was describing this and said *"thank you, nobody has ever really asked this before"* (Dawn7). She was touched (and I was touched with her, the emotion in the room was intense) because in supervision she always talks about the content of the therapy process, which seems 'busy', but she rarely gets to talk about what we really do in the room, which for her is 'soul work' and 'love':

*"I think it's really deep soul work and of course not everybody realises that when they come in the room. But that's what it feels like to me. This is about how to enable people to reconnect with their passionate soul that they have lost connection with along the way. At its very best that's what it is."*

*(Dawn8)*

Most importantly she felt that I was holding space for her to be able to explore how she holds space for others.

*“And there is something, you know you have instantly created a still space by talking about being in our bodies, about the space between us, about making sure we were present and connected. That instantly made it still.”*  
(Dawn12)

During the interview with Odin we explored and experienced the difference between us being present with each other or being somewhere else in some other time. When he was thinking about his clients I felt interested at what he was saying but not engaged, on the other hand when he came into the here and now and was fully present in our relationship I felt much more engaged.

*“yeah, just as you said that I felt excitement as well and it feels like when we come into the here and now, it is almost like for me the feeling is...kind of I see you being somewhere there in your clients and in your thoughts and in your stories, and I am kind of mhm (listening) and then when you say well the here and now, I am like mmmm (with interest). And it is not like the other things are not exciting but this feels like there is a special electricity of excitement of just being here and now.”* (Alja59)

Odin, Luna, Dawn and Sana all talk about their own experience of presence in therapy sessions with clients:

*“Psychotherapy, my approach I would call it, in the last couple of years I have coined the term ‘Radical Presence’...I feel there is more, it is not just therapy, it is about presence, very political I guess.”* (Sana5)

*“I noticed when I was doing the longer term work, my approach is embodied. I am thinking about it, sometimes feeling a bit trapped in the chair, a bit static and held in someone’s gaze and listening and not wanting*

*to move because it would disturb the other person's space and presence.”*  
(Odin3)

*“...the way that I then approach being with another is probably linked to all of that, but also how I feel them in the room, how I feel myself in the room. So, I can't say I have an approach to it, other than be with... and it will be with us, be with them be in...honest to what is happening in that moment”*  
(Luna3)

Unprocessed stressful and overwhelming emotional situations in the past or future can take our awareness away from the present moment (Alja172). When clients come into presence in therapy, they can connect with their embodied emotional being: *“I notice when she's more present with me...If she breaks her agenda. She laughs, or she bursts into tears or...she feels what actually emotions...”* (Luna58).

Dawn talked about presence being scary for clients:

*Dawn44: Occasionally she might actually look at me. And then there is a moment of contact.*

*Alj45: what do you feel in that moment?*

*Dawn45: She is there.*

*Alja46: She is there?*

*Dawn46: Mhm. In that moment she is there, but it is too scary for her to be present. I think. This is my best guess about what is going on with her.*

Sana (5) believes psychotherapy is about presence and she calls her approach 'Radical presence'. She (127) expressed that rather than meeting the clients where they are or being pulled into their way of being, she meets herself and stays centred in her way of being, and with that enables the client to meet her at a higher awareness: *“so I have this image now that I stay on my own level and they float up. If I can really stay where I am at, I am sort of shining the light in a way that can bring that person up.”* (Sana127). When she shared this with me in

the dialogue, I felt the excitement of receiving an important piece of the research puzzle about how to be with clients.

In my research dialogue a completely new co-created understanding was born about what it means to be present and available for the other and yet still be present with myself: *"Yeah because it is someone who is able to be with them but not be with them. (laughs) Paradox, to be with them but still stay with myself"* (Alja108). In that way I do not lose myself in the other and the other does not lose themselves in me. It is a 'paradoxical present' of suspending my beingness and connecting with the beingness of another, but in order to do that I need to be present rather than absent. Soth (2005) similarly formulates the therapist's contribution to the transformative possibility of the therapeutic process as paradoxical: it requires of the therapist both active involvement and passive waiting, working "both relationally and holistically, with the multiple resonances of parallel process as body/mind phenomena in the here and now, being in the relationship whilst having an awareness of it" (p.53). Only in presence can we make ourselves available to the client. Although it is an availability that doesn't dominate, we are not inviting the client into our way of being, instead we are surrendering our way of being so we can really be with them and really feel them. Most importantly we bring our embodied self along: *"Yeah exactly you bring the presence and the awareness and the body, but you leave your stuff, your story behind (smiles)"* (Alja178). That is the phenomena of the embodied emotional awareness that is so multidimensional and powerful in psychotherapy:

*"So it is actually a really, (sighs) a chemical, magical work, that you can step so much, in a sense so much out of yourself and into yourself...So much out of your story and your way of being into a completely present and empty in a sense, awareness of the other."* (Alja180)

Coming into presence can be difficult or even scary for clients who have learned to survive by blanking-out, not residing in the present, in their bodies. For them it is difficult to feel truly alive right now. Van Der Kolk (2014) stresses therapists

need to help them to live fully and securely in the present and in order to do that, they need help reconnecting with their bodies. Kennedy (2002) questions: "How else can they be present to one another if not through their bodies?" (p.37). In his view the presence between the therapist and the client has to be a bodily thing. The basis of recognition, of true meeting in presence, is perceiving in the other an extension of themselves: "They see one another, they hear one another, they feel the presence (or absence) of one another. This is not a matter of inference or reasoning – but of bodily immediacy." (p.37). That is fertile ground for the client to feel seen and empowered to enter alienated parts of their existence.

Presence has become such a clichéd concept, while the meaning can only be grasped through direct experience. Being here in our bodies and now in this moment is the only place and time that we truly exist and yet we hardly ever arrive to it (Tolle, 1999). Mostly we live in regurgitating the past and scheduling the future, where the insecurity of the unpredictable present is controlled. Living like that we are not only absent to the present moment, to ourselves, to our bodies, but also to the other person. We can only truly meet another in presence. That is why presence is one of the most fundamental requirements of therapy. The relational depth only happens in presence (Alja183). In Buber's (2004) ideology this is called an *I-Thou* meeting, that happens when two stand in relation in a manifest presence, not trying to experience it, explain it, use it or conceptualise it. Buber's (2002) poetic language best captures a moment like this:

Only when he who himself turns to the other human being and opens himself to him receives the world in him. Only the being whose otherness, accepted by my being, lives and faces me in the whole compression of existence, brings the radiance of eternity to me. Only when two say to one another with all that they are, 'It is Thou', is the indwelling of the Present Being between them. (p. 35)

For a genuine meeting to unfold, Buber (1998) writes about three necessities: not to give into seeming, not to impose oneself on the other and making the other present in one's personal being. This is the overlap of genuine meeting and psychotherapy. Finlay (2015) describes a therapist Being in the here-and-now as being present in an embodied way to co-created here-and-now moment-to-moment encounter, where the focus is on immediate conscious experience and responses related to self and other. It is only when the partners in dialogue are fully present that they can synchronise their being into a co-created flow of meanings. Buber (2004) claimed there is no method or prescription that can lead us to the meeting "as only acceptance of the Presence is necessary" and "nothing can any longer be meaningless" (p.95).

The great big realisation of my journey into EEA in psychotherapy is that the most beneficial and true way to be with others is in presence and awareness in the whole being: "The hereness of the lived body in a felt bodily presence is thus initially a stillness, a here-presence that is unchanging, hence an atemporal spatial presence" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2020, p.33). Then we don't need to meet clients where they are or be pulled into them. When we are in aware presence we are naturally centred and thus can stay where we are, but also be with them. Therefore, it is a paradoxical presence, or maybe it is not paradoxical because presence is zero-point consciousness, it contains all in a point of time and space, it is multidimensional. To "flesh out the zero-point tout court... is a beginning phenomenological description of the lived body that shows it to be a dynamic spatio-temporal presence anchored in the tactile-kinesthetic-affective body" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2020, p.39). Thus, when we are in that zero-point we are centred in ourselves but also there with the other person. So, in a way we do meet them where they are but we also meet ourselves where we are. And that is where I-Thou meeting happens, where we hold and meet in intersubjective space. It is a present conscious space where the other can be met and meet themselves and explore their pertinent questions and answers. That is raising awareness in relation. We as therapists cannot make clients understand anything of importance to them, we can only help them reach greater awareness so they start to experience and understand what is true for themselves. We cannot help



or save anyone, we can only shine the light of awareness, be in presence together with them and then they can help themselves, if and however they choose to. Being embodied in presence and awareness as therapists is not a new perspective, however this finding confirms its importance.

## **4.6 Creative Synthesis - Becoming More Human**

### **4.6.1 Answering the Research Question**

*And I searched the world for answers  
Till they turned into questions  
That shone light upon the answers that had been there all along  
And I spoke my words till they were no longer words  
Till they sounded no different than the songs sung by the birds  
It was there all along  
The underlying unseen song  
(Unseen song, Samara Jade, 2018)*

What does it mean and how does it feel to be human? Are we fully human? How do we become more human? These were all my initial musings that gave birth to the research challenge of exploring Embodied Emotional Awareness in Psychotherapy. Hitting the deep and promising problem ended up being half of the discovery, as Moustakas (1990) rightly predicted. Throughout the research a lot of these questions got answered, evolved, or transformed. What does it mean to be a human is a question that each individual needs to answer for themselves and learn how to be a human (Kierkegaard, 1958). In the end all the deep diving exploration eventually brought me to a new understanding, and more importantly, a new experience of what it means to be human and how it feels to be an embodied human being – especially in a psychotherapeutic relationship.

The preliminary definition of embodied emotional awareness was: *anchoring awareness into the body and feeling being alive through the body, through the sensations or emotions that arise in the moment*. This definition was developed in order to focus the research as well as help me be transparent with my bias from the start. At the end of the study the definition didn't change, moreover it was confirmed and expanded into a greater experiential knowing of what it means and how it connects to becoming more human. Embodied emotional awareness is a way of being where we allow ourselves to feel everything in the present moment and at the same time stay aware. It also revealed that embodied emotional awareness is merely one aspect of embodiment. Embodiment is a process of integrating the multidimensionality of our whole being and bringing awareness into it. Embodiment means bringing presence into our body. Being really aware in every inch of the body, here and now. Being with what is, in order to deeply feel and clearly see: *"...be courageous enough to connect and...relax...just to be with all of it. I feel sensations. And to be OK with not being OK..." (Luna172)*. Being so present, so open, so embracing that we don't close off to any form of feeling and being but instead allow it all to lead us into embodying more of who we are. All co-researchers were asked the question 'What does becoming more human mean to you?' at the end of the interview. Finn, Vlad and Luna believe becoming more human is about being able to be with what is, whatever it is: *"Come to terms with our own limitations, come to terms with the limitations of the world" (Finn77)*.

Sincere search for our own truth is an essential first step. Re-examining our cultural and social conditioning is imperative. In the process of embodiment challenge and disillusionment on every level is inevitable. When we start to truly inhabit our body the intelligence of the whole body opens up; we start to feel everything through the body, and everything becomes clearer. Sana and Dawn expressed that becoming more human is about becoming aware of our sensitivities, accepting and appreciating them; *"...So becoming more human for me means becoming more emotional, emotionally intelligent, conscious, dare I use the word embodied...Yeah it is becoming a full human being...getting the whole human experience..." (Dawn191)*.

Suddenly we access an expanded awareness we never even imagined existed. We tap into an embodied knowing that is far greater than just intellectual understanding. It doesn't mean absence of thoughts, rather thoughts are intertwined with the body, with the present embodied experience. Embodiment is key to awakening and appreciating greater levels of sensitivity, anchoring higher awareness, reconnecting to our own authority and guidance as well as regaining greater protection that is based on openness instead of closedness. When we find greater connection within, it naturally extends without; we rediscover a deep connection with nature and other beings.

The body presents a very different way of knowing the world and of being in it. To be embodied, to be in the body, is to be in connection with everything. When we begin to inhabit the body as our primary way of sensing, feeling, and knowing the world, when our thought operates as no more than a handmaiden of that somatic way of being, then we find that we as human beings are in a state of intimate relationship and connection with all that is. To be in the body is to know our sense perceptions as opening out into a sacred world. To be in the body is to feel our connectedness with other people as subjects (Ray, 2008, p.47).

Exploring the metaphor of the experience of being with a client proved to be immensely fruitful for all co-researchers, as it created a whole new vocabulary and symbolism with which we could better express how we feel with clients and what is the meaning. With the help of the metaphor 'Waiting for Godot', I came to an expanded awareness of the meaning and purpose of being with clients. I also started to question whether there is a better way of connecting with clients.

The puzzle of what becoming more human means to me slowly came together. It started with the question "*when you become an embodied more human being, what is the best way to be with others that are not?*" (Alja56). The answer was immediately known, as if I had it within me all along but it just never occurred to me to ask it. So, the answer that came from my whole being was: that the best

way is to always stay embodied if possible (Alja57). Upon further exploration and creating space for the unexpected, it continued with an insight that connecting with yourself and with others in an embodied way is an enriching more human experience (Alja156). Finally it finished with a realisation that becoming embodied makes us able to be with the other in an I-Thou presence, and once we experience that kind of relational depth, that becomes the only meaningful way of being (Alja183, 185).

*“Yeah I think that's where lately I am really committed in expressing things that maybe are a little bit edgy, or I think might sound weird, or I don't know, maybe being more human is to share our humanness.” (Sana143)*

#### **4.6.2 Integration of All Multidimensional Aspects of Being Human**

*By opening to the consciousness of our bodies  
we can awaken our full intelligence  
and come home to our wholeness,  
bit by bit.  
(Shepherd, 2010, p.7)*

Throughout the research process I realised I not only had a bias that I explicated at the beginning, that we are primarily focusing and functioning through thinking intelligence, but I was also favouring the body's intelligence, especially the intelligence of the heart. With the help of my co-researchers and their honest and open sharing I came to a realisation that no way of being serves us better than another (being in the heart as opposed to being in the mind), if they are not connected and integrated into a more coherent whole. Becoming more human, becoming more embodied is about integration of all multidimensional aspects of ourselves. Odin, Finn and Sana consider becoming more human to be above all else about integration of all aspects of ourselves and the world we live in: *“So it is a self-acceptance with an acceptance in all those dispersed aspects of myself”*

(*Odin86*). Radically it is about integrating all aspects of existence. Even what we might not consider parts of us, get knitted into the fabric of a fully embodied human being: all parts of our body; head, heart, gut, limbs, all aspects of our being; cognitive, emotional, spiritual, moral, sexual, behavioural, all lines of development, all aspects of society, culture, all paradoxes of being human; embodiment and disembodiment, trust and anxiety, love and fear, and so much more. Embodiment is a process of integrating the multidimensionality of our whole being and bringing awareness into it. The breath is the thread that sews everything together, the breath is the energy flow, such a powerful life force that we are still realising and learning how to truly access its full potential for our alignment and the benefit of the world.

And, as we have seen, the human heart is not personal: the more we fathom our own hearts, the more we find there the being of others and, beyond that, the very heart of the world itself (Ray, 2008, p.444).

### **4.6.3 Contagiousness of Embodiment**

Mirroring embodiment turned out to be a distinct characteristic of EEA, and furthermore embodiment itself seems to be in some sense contagious. This is an insight developed in the creative synthesis phase of analysis. When we become more embodied, it has a rippling effect on the world and other beings, who automatically start to become more embodied. It goes the other way as well; disembodiment is contagious in the same manner. That is why it is so difficult to stay embodied with disembodied clients. This is also the reason why it is important to stay present and centred, embodied as a therapist. To hold paradoxical presence of meeting the client where they are and yet meet ourselves in our centre at the same time; to not get caught in it all. Lewis, Amini and Lannon (2000) in their *General theory of love* write that the client doesn't become healthier; instead they "become more like the therapist" (p.186). In the perspective of this research we could say rather that when the psychotherapist is embodied, the clients become more embodied. The psychotherapist knows the

actualising forces that have shaped and still shape him, and trusts their effect in the struggle against the counterforces. Existential communication between one who is an 'actual being' and the other who is in a 'process of becoming' turns into a genuine dialogue that 'opens out' potentiality (Buber, 1998, p. 72). That is why the therapist needs to essentially trust in the effect of the genuine embodied meeting, which gives her the strength to persevere in the unknown, without a method or a goal, and thus is able to leave the client really to himself and see where he is being drawn. Embodied healing takes place when there is trust of one whole person to another whole person as they honestly acknowledge to each other that they are both reeling in chaos (Buber, 1957).

*"I have used the metaphor of surfing...So there is this bit of a wave...that sustains your weight and propels you forward. And if you are with a client, all that chaos is going around, all that emotional upheaval is welling up and you can sit at that point of the wave and ride it. Or you can lose your balance, feel unsure and you can crash and that wave of emotion crashes you. And then you are lost. But if you practise then you can hold yourself in that moment." (Odin70)*

Vlad, Luna and Pele believe becoming more human is becoming more vulnerable and not being afraid to show it: "...if we can be vulnerable with our clients, admit to mistakes. Then it makes it possible for them to feel they can be" (Vlad85). Embodied healing does not mean healing of only a certain part of the client as through insight or analysis, rather this is healing of the client's disembodied being-in-the-world. In this and many other ways, "human beings are self-regulating and self-healing" (Totton, 2005, p.181), we just need to support what is already trying to happen. "Ultimately, it is not the therapist who contains the client, but the experience of spontaneous, co-created transformation" (Soth, 2005, p.53). In order for that to happen the therapist needs to be able to work relationally and holistically, staying embodied, present and aware amidst the chaos of multiple processes happening synchronistically inside and in between the two individuals involved in the relationship. Other studies have also found that the more embodied and aware therapists are the more presence,

acceptance, openness and emotional availability they bring to the therapeutic relationship (Sultan, 2017; Tweedie, 2015; King, 2017). Soth (2005) suspected that in a couple of decades we would move beyond the embodiment vs. disembodiment juncture into an integral-systemic-parallel process view of the 'fractal self' (p.55), or what in this research I called the multidimensional being. The implication for psychotherapy and counselling psychology from this perspective is that the job of a psychotherapist is simply becoming more human, more embodied, more themselves. That is going to be transmitted to the client and that is all the support the client truly needs to "be more bodily here" (Todres, 2007, p.184), to become more who they are, to become more human: *"Going from an all-knowing therapist to unknowing human" (Alja99).*

The suffering that comes from separateness is only relieved when you are present with another person. So, the whole game of helping another human being becomes about realising whether or not you're busy being the 'helper', and making them the 'helpee'. If so, you've just created suffering. Isn't that bizarre? With the very act of helping someone you have to jump out of it and ask, 'Who's helping who anyway?' (Ram Dass, 2019)

## **4.7 Reflexivity on My Own Embodiment Process**

*Look at life as your main career and as a divine classroom. Your spirit is in human form to learn what the body and emotions can teach about love, including how to overcome a slew of obstacles (Orloff, 2009, p.71).*

To this day I remember when I was eight years old writing in my diary these words: *"I wish I wouldn't have feelings!!!"* I always had intense emotions and they made my life difficult. Now I know I am not the only one having difficulties with emotions. I also know that I am, what Orloff (2009) describes as an empath: *"highly sensitive, finely tuned instruments when it comes to emotions. They feel*

everything, sometimes to an extreme, and are less apt to intellectualise feelings.” (p.196). I used to believe emotions get in the way of dealing with external life; they get in the way of our cognitive mind that likes to control things by way of will. I did not understand them and I didn’t like them controlling me. When I stepped into the psychotherapy world I started realising that the emotional world has depths and levels I never knew about, but most importantly I became aware of the immense inherent intelligence of our emotional bodies. To discover the significance of emotions we cannot approach them only with our thinking mind but with our whole feeling being. It is like trying to think outside the box when thinking is the box. All the knowledge doesn't mean much until it is embodied. By embodied I mean until we fully feel it and experience it through our every action, feeling, thought. Intellectual knowledge is like explaining to a child how a spaceship is made. He can understand it but he cannot build it. He does not have the experience, training and the means. But he can dream or intend to someday make it.

*If I hadn't made me  
I would have been made somehow  
If I hadn't assembled myself  
I'd have fallen apart by now  
If I hadn't made me  
I'd be more inclined to bow  
You should make amends with you  
If only for better health  
But if you really want to live  
Why not try and make yourself?  
(Make yourself, Incubus, 1999)*

This was the song that I would listen on repeat when I was a teenager. Now I know it wasn't a coincidence. This embodied way of living is what I have been longing for all my life. How to become embodied being and how to keep choosing that way of living every moment. Becoming embodied means feeling everything, not controlling my experience but allowing it, reading my emotions, observing



my thoughts. A shift from thinking my thoughts and observing my feelings, into observing my thoughts and feeling my feelings, letting them move me. Embodiment is the direct connection to our power – the power of our emotions, sensations, inspiration, and imagination. Rather than running away from our experience, from our predicament of an embodied being, instead owning it, honouring it. Whatever it is, it is an immensely powerful instrument.

However, the challenge is letting ourselves fall into the full experience of the body so that we can move through and become aware. Or stay aware while falling, while feeling? It is often difficult to stay aware through the uncomfortable feelings, we have got very good at shutting down our awareness and abandoning our bodies in order not to feel.

My own psychotherapy process allowed me to experience the emotional world on many levels but most importantly it also gave me an awareness of my own emotional landscapes. For me this was a new kind of awareness where I can be feeling a certain emotion but at the same time be aware of feeling it. This gave me enough distance from being completely overwhelmed by emotions to start developing an appreciation and understanding of their intelligence. Presently I understand emotions more as a trustworthy guiding system of my body. If the body could write a love letter to us it would read something like this:

I am a gift for you, far more than you know. Think of me as a personal navigation system that guides you toward what can unfold within you, including the depths of pain and beauty. I am the map you have been yearning for, a free GPS system (Snowber, 2011, p.251).

Similarly, Orloff (2009) writes of emotions as “a path to spiritual awakening, a way to break through to the light inside you” (p.70). When I came to the embodied awareness of how life is perfectly designed as our own unique journey, I could let go of trying to help or teach people out of their journey. Everyone is on their own journey, and they cannot be told or shown or healed or

taught how to get through it. This is because it is a journey of embodiment, of feeling it ourselves, figuring it out ourselves, helping ourselves, freeing ourselves. The whole point is in the journey. At the same time I also began to be able to hold two opposing energies within me: holding myself or the client in discomfort, uncertainty, hurt, when things are not OK, and also holding the trust that things are OK as they are, trusting in myself, my body, my soul, perfection of existence just as it is right now and here.

There is an emotional truth to everything; it is hidden out of sight and frequently out of awareness as well. Turning away from this truth was the high price of survival. That is why embodiment is such a vulnerable, challenging, painful work, because it touches the core of our being, of our survival and the feeling of safety to live. It is like a thorn that keeps itching and hurting, but we keep it safe from the world so it wouldn't get moved and hurt even more. We mostly feel unsafe to be who we are because of this emotional wounding, and we are running away, covering it up and searching for something to make us feel better, to distract us. Tending to the thorn is not our desired first choice. It certainly wasn't mine. However, I realised it was not a matter of choice. Embodiment is a process that is happening to all of us, just like breathing. Within that we have a choice of how much engagement and awareness we bring to it and how we allow it to unfold. Having the support of an embodied facilitator can be of immense help, as someone who is more embodied gives the client the possibility to be more embodied. Now I am allowing the process of embodiment into remembering more of who I am and with that I can be an embodied example for others – to remember to embody their souls back to living fully human souls.

## 4.8 Reflexivity on Multidimensionality and Synchronicity of Heuristic Research

*The Body is, as Body, filled with the soul through and through. Each movement of the Body is full of soul, the coming and going, the standing and sitting, the walking and dancing, etc. Likewise, so is every human performance, every human production (Husserl, 1989, p. 252).*

From the moment I started doing this doctoral research I felt that I embarked on a journey. For the longest time I did not know where or how I was traveling. I see now it is a journey into the uncharted waters of the mystery of existence, where I touch upon the collective sea of being. On this journey every stream, river, and meander is guiding me in a perfect way and with perfect timing. When I truly realised how impeccable, multidimensional, and synchronistic this research journey is, I wrote the following passage into my research reflexive diary:

*“Life is a journey of soul into embodiment.  
Everything that happens to us, everything that we feel, think, intuit is a help to move us deeper into embodiment.  
Psychotherapy is a journey into embodiment.  
My thesis is a journey into embodiment and into making sense of it.  
Making aware the awareness process. Elucidating it.  
That is why I am the central part of the research.  
That is why it is multidimensional and I need to document this multidimensionality and synchronicity, as it is an important part of it.  
I need to document every intuition and idea I have. No matter how crazy it seems to the linear mind.”  
(Alja, reflexive diary entry, illumination phase)*

I am using Jung's (2010) concept of synchronicity, meaning events that are not connected causally, nor are chance events, but have an acausal connecting principle, which is a subjective connection existing only in relation to the individual who experiences it: "The synchronicity principle asserts that the terms of a meaningful coincidence are connected by *simultaneity* and *meaning*" (Jung, 2010, p.69).

I cannot speak for every research but my heuristic research became intimately intertwined with my life and my whole life became a research process. Every aspect of the research entwines with every aspect of life in a complex and multidimensional way. It is so subtle and complex that one can easily overlook it. That is why the last sentence from my diary: "*I need to document every intuition and idea I have. No matter how crazy it seems to the linear mind*" was crucial in becoming aware of the elusive multidimensional layers of heuristic research, which can otherwise quickly be disregarded by the logical causational mind. Husserl (1983) was the first one who professed suspending our natural attitude of scepticism to see the phenomenon as it really is. He was able to 'get away' with describing body as 'full of soul' (Husserl, 1989, p. 252) within empirical sciences exactly because he was dedicated to precise phenomenological method for researching our own intimate experience. It is with the opening of our whole being to the present moment experience that we get insight into the mysterious fabric of life. The spiritual and mystical dimensions of life begin to emerge in our renewed comprehension of the explored phenomena (Rothberg, 1994). A fully grounded and embodied self-inquiry does not get lost nor does it dampen the living dimensions of mystery of life: "Living mystery twinkles most at the deepest and widest spaces of the 'more than can be represented'. The embrace of the body gives such mystery not its knowability, but a feeling of its palpability" (Todres, 2007, p.185).

*"I soon received an answer in my dreams: 'The answer to the question how to be in touch with yourself is love'. I didn't understand it intellectually but on another level it made perfect sense. Maybe the correct question is how to stay in touch with love? Answer: loving. Do I need to first love myself, accept*

*myself, to be able to inhabit myself, get to know myself and listen to myself?"*  
(Alja, reflexive diary entry, immersion phase)

I started to perceive this heuristic research as an interactive process of embodiment, of becoming more human. Gadamer's (2004) idea was that the question must be lived and that the researcher must embody the question. By embodying the question I did not merely find the answer, instead I became the answer, I became the embodiment of the answer. I started experiencing more and more of embodied emotional awareness and the life situations I was living through were guiding me into it. Suddenly new people started coming into my life, that were somehow connected to my research, giving me information and signs to follow, to dive deeper. I also became more connected with the people who were already in my life and were able to help me through the research. There were books, articles, workshops, movies, music coming into my life synchronistically at the perfect time and space to give me a clue, to move me further. My dreams aligned with the research by giving me information and experiences I was not able to get consciously. The co-researchers were perfect for the research and how they got drawn into participating seemed synchronistic as well. At first, I was worried about how I would find the therapists as co-researchers, but when I switched to trusting they actually found me. My personal therapy process, my supervision process and even my clients, all aligned with the research so I got the appropriate experiences and insights at the suitable stage of the research process.

*"I was going through a very long passive incubation time and active incubation of trying to make sense of interview transcripts, of feeling very foggy and not myself, as if I was going through a decomposition in order for a new composition to come together. But this morning I woke up feeling an inner trust and knowing that something new is birthing. It wasn't quite there yet but I was certain it was in the making. There was a deep sense of peace and intuition, also excitement, and joy. I played around with the themes I had on paper and suddenly, as if out of the blue they came together: embodiment, resistance, feeling being, meeting point and*

*multidimensionality. They spoke to me, they seemed important and meaningful to me personally and for the project. It was amazingly easy and intuitive. It felt like they always wanted to be put together like that. I just didn't see it so far because I was too worried about missing something or doing it wrongly. But this was a new level of awareness about the data and the topic. It was truly an illumination and a shift in understanding, a shift in consciousness. There is a peace, centeredness and clarity to it. I literally had to jump from linear doing to intuitive being. It feels like that inner shift birthed the themes.” (Alja, reflexive diary entry, illumination phase)*

Most importantly my body itself was guiding me into embodiment; every desire for food, nature, rest, every illness, every emotion or sensation was a sign on the path. I felt guided in so many ways when I was willing to follow, just as much as I felt pushed in many other ways when I was in resistance or stuckness. At certain times I truly felt like I was birthing this thesis into being. I had stomach pains and sickness, which would come up while writing or just thinking of writing. Furthermore the stomach pain felt like the body was making sure I stay embodied, because every time I would go out of the body and get stuck in my mind, worry or fear, it would start hurting. It was a constant reminder to stay present in the moment and grounded in the body.

From the beginning of this research, I knew I was taking on the challenge of how to stay embodied while writing. Writing is such a disembodied intellectual process, at least for me it was. I would either be in the body, having all sorts of intuitive ideas that were not coherent, or I would be in my mind, thinking and writing linearly. So, the big challenge for me was how to integrate the two together. Synchronistically, the solution was presented to me just as I started writing the results chapter. The breath is the connecting point and the integration path.

Conscious breathing was somehow present throughout the whole research process. During interviews it helped at centring me and my co-researchers into our bodies, into the here and now, and into staying connected with each other. It

helped with bringing awareness and clarity. During the writing process, conscious breathing helped me through states of anxiety, fear and doubt. One night, I woke up at 4 am with a racing heart and shallow breathing. I decided to start writing and the chapter to be written was the one about conscious breathing. So, while I was writing I was being reminded to breathe deeply and consciously. It felt like the thesis was teaching and helping me while I wrote it and went through challenges of writing it. It felt like we were synchronously helping each other be and become. I was being reminded to stay embodied even through the uncomfortable feelings and thoughts that come up when engaging with the material of the thesis. Relax. Breathe. Embody. Inhabit the body fully with the breath.

*“I am not going to do this thesis; I am going to be it. I have doubt and judgment of how I am going to get this important multidimensional project and message across. I am first going to be it, to let go of the fear and doubt, to stand in my power and trust, to accept fear with love. It is a terrifying thing and it is OK if I feel scared and overwhelmed. But above all I have to trust myself and my whole being, my body, my emotions, my mind, my soul and spirit that they all need to work together to get this thesis life force materialised.” (Alja, reflexive diary entry, incubation phase)*

Time was an important variable, because often I would plan and want for things to happen in a certain way, or in a certain time frame, but so frequently they wouldn't. They would happen when certain variables and life circumstances aligned, and mostly when I was ready to embody another stage, another lesson. It all felt designed for me to truly 'get it', not through intellect but through embodied living. “There does seem to be unlimited knowledge present in nature, it is true, but it can be comprehended by consciousness only when the time is ripe for it” (Jung, 1995, p.339). We can have an inkling of an idea for years but can only grasp it clearly when the world or we are ready for it. I started comprehending and accepting time not in the linear causal way, which we are accustomed to, but rather I experienced time as a dimension of existence that allows us to experientially live out ideas and knowledge. Jung (2010) considered

“synchronicity as a psychically conditioned relativity of space and time” (p.19). Time stopped being a goal point in the future that I was desperately trying to catch. Time rather became an ally in creating and aligning the right circumstances and ways of being with the right space.

*“I just need to get out of the way so the story of this thesis can come through me. It will, in perfect way in perfect timing. But not when or the way I think it should. I need to be embodied and integrated when I write it, otherwise I am not in the right energy to connect to it and let it come through.”*

*(Alja, reflexive diary entry, explication phase)*

I arrived at a renewed comprehension of research as a form of life force, that goes out into the world with a rippling effect – on the researcher, co-researchers, other people, their ways of being, ideas, attitudes, practice and life experience. In one sense conducting a research is like giving birth to this life force in order to concretise it. “The heuristic researcher through the incubation process gives birth to a new understanding or perspective that reveals additional qualities of the phenomenon, or a vision of its unity” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29). It is about making space for it in the world, in the agreed social reality. If it is birthing new knowledge then the world is probably going to push back. So, when I say that I felt my thesis helping me while I was writing it, I don't mean the future 3D printed version of the thesis helping me, rather this life force that is helping me, because it is this life force that wants to be birthed. Everything I learned, read, heard, experienced, realised throughout this research process are all pieces of the puzzle that I am putting together. My final job is to integrate all of it into a whole. Just like embodiment is integration of all parts of ourselves into one. Conducting heuristic research is a selfish and a selfless process at the same time. It starts with me; however, it is not only about me, but about giving the world new knowledge. So, the world fundamentally supports it in many ways. Many times I just needed to get out of my own way, trust in presence, surrender the outcome and allow the process to happen.



*“As I start to think about how to write this chapter I get caught up in my head, thinking about all that I need to include and how the discussion should look like when it is written up. The thinking, the not knowing, the lack of control, the need for perfection fuel my anxiousness. Then a sharp nauseating feeling in my stomach brings me back into my body. I am reminded that I am a being with body sensations, emotions, thoughts, momentary inspirations and ideas. Then I start to be aware of breathing. In. out. The belly relaxes. I get a warm feeling in my chest. The breath connects all of me into the here and now. With that I am reminded that I have lived in the past and will live in the future but the only place I ever truly exist is the present moment. This is where I am embodied, feeling and aware. This is where I am inspired, creative and active. This is the only place I can write from. And this is the only way that feels right to write the final part of this research on embodied emotional awareness: integrating all aspects of this research and all aspects of myself, by staying aware of my embodied emotionality. When I embarked upon this research journey, I knew deep down in my belly that I am also accepting a challenge. It is a challenge of transcending the dualism of body and mind, the challenge to take into account the whole human being. In order to meet this challenge, I feel I need to pay attention to my whole being during every stage of this project.*

*As I feel, decide and write this down, tears of release flood my eyes. I get an overwhelming feeling of sadness and joy at the same time. I realise I have arrived. Arrived into my body, my breath, my presence, my connection with all life. I have an inner knowing that I have just arrived from the short yet the most difficult journey I have ever embarked upon. The path from being stuck in my time limited ‘doing’ to being free in my present and connected whole ‘being’. The world around me is somehow more colourful, beautiful and feels alive. The nauseating feeling and anxiousness transform into gratefulness to my body for reminding me to come back to the breath, back to presence, back to trusting myself. Trusting that in presence I always know what to write and how to write it. Not a moment earlier and not a moment later. Being connected to my body in the present moment unlocks*

*the greater intelligence of my whole being. It is also my true desire to convey that way of being through this thesis, so that it brings an embodied way of being to the reader as well. So that by reading it, connecting to it, one is brought back to their own body, back to intimacy with their own emotions and the present moment awareness. This will mean that I have succeeded in transcending the body mind dualism, succeeded in sharing what embodied emotional awareness truly is."*

*(Alja, reflexive diary entry, synthesis phase)*

## **4.9 Value of the Research**

One of the evaluation criteria for qualitative research is the principle of relevance of the research in terms of its applicability and contribution (Finlay and Evans, 2009). The findings of this study add knowledge of embodied emotional awareness to the field of psychotherapy and counselling psychology. The discoveries elucidate embodied emotional phenomena from an in-depth phenomenological perspective, which can help psychotherapists become even more aware of embodied experiences and manifestations in the therapy session. In the world we live in today, with the social economic pressure of efficiency and productivity pushing us into becoming more robotic, it is deeply welcomed to be reminded of the importance of becoming more human. After all, psychotherapy might be one of the rare practices and professions that aims at creating safety, human warmth and a space where one can listen to body senses and connect on a deeper intersubjective level.

The findings of this study could be of interest to the public readers as well, giving them a better understanding of the meaning, benefits, and consequences of becoming more aware of our emotional embodiment, as well as the benefits of psychotherapy where they can explore that part of themselves in a safe and holding environment. The consumerist market is creating more and better ways of inviting us out of our bodies. In contrast, the findings of this study can help

with understanding the significance of reconnecting and staying connected with our bodies, as well as recognising and appreciating how fun and fundamentally beneficial it is to be embodied. Not engaging with our embodiment is like having a really good car but never turning on the engine and not experiencing what it is like to drive it, so it might do us good to start using the full potential of our bodies instead of relying solely on external technology.

Existential therapy emphasises the importance of engaging with our emotions and using them for the benefit of living a meaningful life, instead of running or hiding from them or living in bad faith (Hoffman and Cleare-Hoffman, 2011; Van Deurzen, 1997; Bugental, 1978). As Kierkegaard (1844) put it: “Whoever has learnt to be anxious in the right way has learnt the ultimate” (p.155). The findings of this study likewise speak of the importance of being with our emotions, for they are the stuff of which we are made and the stuff of our interconnectedness. Only when we have the capacity to allow emotions to be, to fully feel them as they are, no matter how uncomfortable, will they be able to play the role of an accurate compass in our lives and become one of the most valuable assets of being human. This research has gratefully stepped on the shoulders of existential philosophers who were previously writing about embodiment, intersubjectivity and consciousness (Kierkegaard, 1844; Nietzsche, 1969; Stein, 1989; Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). And in order to further develop their views it needed to take a leap into embodied research of embodiment. With that it expanded the field in new ways by revealing the multidimensional nature of being human, the importance of integrating multidimensionality, the role of the breath in integration, and the centrality of embodied presence. This research has shown that multidimensionality of embodied emotional awareness seems to be a fundamental human trait, and therefore it should be an essential part of psychotherapy if its intent is to develop wholeness of being. Not many existential researchers engage with embodied emotional awareness on such an in-depth experiential level. Thus, this research demonstrates a need to start creating more space for embodied emotional awareness in existential research, practice and theory.

The findings of this study showed a multidimensional connection between therapist and client; where therapists receive embodied information about the client and the therapy process, which is a conclusion of other researchers as well (Shaw, 2004; Sheedy, 2013; Tapie, 2019; Sultan, 2017). Yet therapists are often confused as to whether they should trust this information and how to use it to benefit the client. This knowledge and the possible ways of working with it is generally not addressed in the education of therapists, as Shaw (2004) concluded in his exploration of the therapists' somatic phenomena within the therapeutic encounter. There is clearly a need to research this topic more, and include it in the psychotherapy training curriculum. The significance of this study for psychotherapy practice and training is clear, and far too important to ignore, but it will need a restructuring and making space for the body, where previously only the mind was allowed: "It is time to bring the body in from the cold" (Shaw, 2004, p.285).

#### **4.10 Validity, Limitations, Difficulties and Challenges of the Research**

*Problems cannot be solved at the same level of awareness  
that created them.  
Albert Einstein*

Embodiment contradicts the dualist paradigm and it is very difficult to grasp with our usual way of top-down thinking and conducting research. The greatest challenge of the study that intends to research embodiment is whether it is able to emerge beyond the dualistic paradigm by bringing existential phenomenological knowledge of embodied being into practical lived research, and thus open to a new level of awareness. Petranker (2003) argued for an approach that can make consciousness available to first-person inquiry in the face of theoretical commitments:

What is most fundamental to consciousness is not the contents of consciousness, but the activity of being conscious...Knowledge of consciousness at this fundamental level has nothing to do with theories, hypotheses, accounts or explanations. It depends on being conscious differently (p.4).

Described research design, analysis and representation of data is a leap into that direction of being conscious differently and doing research differently. It is a way of addressing and including the whole being in every stage of the research instead of splitting the body into compartments of thinking, feeling, sensing, intuiting. Furthermore, researcher and co-researchers are considered partners in research and co-creators of an embodied awareness. Reflexive transparency in every step is imperative for an embodied validity and integrity of the research. As with every research, the best intentions and attitudes were employed, however there are always some limitations that cannot be overcome, difficulties that were not expected and challenges that were not met.

According to Moustakas (1990), the question of validation in heuristic research is one of meaning, and whether the delineation of the phenomenon is derived from one's own rigorous exploration of self and others' meanings and essences of experience. The judgment of research validity is made by the primary researcher, who is the only one who has undergone the heuristic inquiry through all phases. Commitment to rigorous phenomenological and embodied research, transparency in every phase, personal and intersubjective reflexivity as well as resonance between lived experience and shared findings, were all applied in this research in order to comply with qualitative research evaluation criteria and trustworthiness (Finlay and Evans, 2009). Continuous engagement with the research through long periods of time is another mark of validity (Creswell, 2009). I have been living and embodying this research through cycles of immersion and incubation, clarity and uncertainty, imagining and writing, for over four years, continuously intending to live and write only a genuine and valid truth of the lived phenomena.

Characteristic of qualitative studies is that the number of participants does not allow the information gathered to be generalised to a larger population. However, there are some qualitative studies encountering a paradox, that the individual in-depth data shows to be essential in human experience: “the more intimate we get, the more general our findings are becoming” (Kordeš, 2013, p.373). There is an intention and a real possibility that in-depth self-inquiry in the end brings us to a “level transcending individual specificity” (p.373).

In qualitative research we “build an explanation through a deep exploration of how processes work in particular contexts, under certain sets of circumstances, and in particular sets of social relations” (Mason, 2012, p.29). It is undeniable that the results of this research process were the researcher’s and co-researchers’ personal realisations of our own experiential space, built on systematic research of this same space in all its detail, complexity and richness. Although we can’t establish frequencies, we were able to find a range of responses (Baker and Edwards, 2012). It is an idiographic approach, where we “build a broader argument from an understanding of particularity” (Mason, 2012, p.30). Nonetheless we cannot argue that our interviewees ‘represent’ similar categories of people in the wider population (Mason, 2012).

As mentioned before, an important characteristic of qualitative and embodied research is the acknowledgment that bodies are never neutral, always subjective and political, reflecting the relation between identity and power (Rose, 1999; Ellingson, 2017, Alegranti, 2011b; Francombe-Webb et al., 2014). Another limitation of this study is its lack of cultural diversity, as most co-researchers come from the same ethnicity and cultural background and so does most literature. One could criticise it as the power and privilege of white knowledge production. There is evidence that “the experience and expression of emotion is highly influenced by culture, including influencing whether an emotion is perceived as healthy or problematic” (Hoffman and Cleare-Hoffman, 2011, p.1). Therefore, the findings of this study are possibly culturally biased due to the fact that Western approaches to psychology as well as the whole culture at large

often understand most emotions as problematic or even pathological (Hoffman and Cleare-Hoffman, 2011; Ray, 2008; Welwood, 2002).

Although this research was conducted and written in as much of an embodied attitude as possible, the difficulty of truly transmitting the essence of embodied emotional awareness remains. The intention for the reader to get a feeling of embodied emotional awareness on an experiential level instead of merely getting an understanding of it on an intellectual level was met as best as possible, however there certainly are better more embodied ways. The difficulty of expressing and sharing embodiment with words is the limitation of the interview method but also the limitation of writing up an academic piece of research, when trying to portray lived experience that is beyond thought, time and space. Miller (2012) sees an interview as an artificial procedure that does not tell us what people actually do. He cautions against relying solely on interviews and language. Although this research relied on metaphor and reflexive embodied empathy (Finlay, 2005) alongside interviews, the representation was still only through language. In hindsight the limitation of this study is not including image, sound, movement, and not paying more attention to embodied details, gaze, and gestures during the interviews, as that would have enhanced the embodied representation of the explored phenomena.

Ellingson (2017) persistently criticises qualitative researchers' "unwillingness or inability to include the mistakes and mis-directions that inevitably constitute actual research; we neaten up our stories of 'what happened' to sound credible and get published" (p.31). I have kept reflexivity and transparency of my bias and mistakes throughout the whole research process. Coming to terms with the fact of our own embodiment (Johnson, 2008) also means accepting the messiness and elusiveness of researching it. But as Agatha Christie (1933) said: "The supernatural is only the natural of which the laws are not yet understood". It is the quest of science to venture out into the unknown in order to make it known, and maybe get a little bit messy on the way.

## 4.11 Ideas for Further Research and Dissemination

My main suggestion for further exploration of embodied emotional awareness or any of these phenomena individually stems from the need to make research even more embodied, even more phenomenological and even more experiential. Behind it is the premise that most of our research is still based in Cartesian epistemology with methodology focused on cognitive knowledge, while omitting the embodied knowledge. The design of this study was aimed at gathering data in an embodied way; however, this could be further developed into a much more rigorous embodied method.

An existent method that could prove to be appropriate is the Descriptive Experience Sampling technique (DES) (Hurlburt, 1992), which trains the co-researcher in observing and reporting on their experience so that they truly become expert in exploring their own experiential landscapes. Systematic and persistent training in observation of the experiential landscape is necessary as was suspected by Varela (1996) and later empirically proven by Hurlburt (2009; Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2011). For this kind of in-depth research to produce any kind of genuine data it has to be iterative, which is achieved by repeated interviews using the so-called elicitation interview technique (Bitbol & Petitmengin, 2013; Vermersch, 1994).

Another important variable in any research of this kind is the question of how to make sure that the researcher and the co-researchers are connected with their bodies to their maximum capabilities. The idea is to do an embodiment practice before the interviews in order to get in touch with the body. Another area of exploration is how to support embodiment through the use of the intersubjective field. This would help therapists explore and learn how to sustain and nourish their own embodied sensing when they are faced with disembodied clients, as well as how to create a space for their clients to trust in the possibility of feeling, knowing and relating through their own bodies. In this research all of this was



done with the help of reflexive embodied empathy (Finlay, 2005), however this could be further developed and deepened.

In agreement with Shaw (2004) a way forward could be investigating the intersubjective embodied phenomena between therapist and client, in order to develop better ways of embodied management strategies for therapists and include them in psychotherapeutic training. This could be explored by verifying with clients their embodied emotional awareness at moments when embodied mirroring happens for therapists, thus validating if there is meaning and benefit in engaging in intersubjective embodied phenomena.

A dissemination of the findings of this study could potentially be a workshop or lecture for psychotherapists and counselling psychologists who have an interest in understanding and developing embodied emotional awareness. It would explore questions such as how to become more aware of our own and other's embodied emotionality, how to become aware of the co-created space and the embodied influence we have on each other, and how can that awareness be used to benefit the therapeutic process. The workshop would also introduce a phenomenological existential therapeutic approach to working with embodied emotional awareness. The aim of the workshop would be to offer attendees additional personal experience and understanding of EEA that they can include practically in their work.

Throughout my struggles of control, resistance, letting go and finally surrendering to the process of heuristic research, I also came to an idea of helping students and researchers into a more congruent experience of their own research. I kept hearing from other researchers of their similar struggles when writing a thesis, while also being reassured that it is normal to experience all the anxiety and difficulty of the process. Although a part of me agreed and accepted my present experience as needed and valid, there was also a part of me that wondered whether all of this struggle was truly necessary. I believe we can have a pleasant experience of the research journey. With this in mind I am inspired to develop a way to support and guide future researchers into a more embodied,

trusting and flowing process of their research. Thus, merging the theory and practice of heuristic research with embodiment in order to benefit academic researchers.

## 4.12 Conclusion

*Be what you are, and be this now. There is no time for delay, no need for preparation. You have spent aeons becoming all that you are, and this is encoded deep within you (Tompkins, 2016, p.17).*

This research springs from a holistic embodied perspective on human beings. The aim of the research project is to elucidate embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy by conducting a heuristic phenomenological research that bridges the lived experience of the embodied emotional world and the awareness of what that experience means for psychotherapy and counselling psychology. A further aim is to consider human experience holistically rather than separating it into thoughts, feelings, sensations, and intuitions. The intent was also to conduct an embodied research in an embodied way and not just a research about embodiment, by designing and conducting a study that attends to the relationship between knowledge and experience. Putting experiences into words in such a way to share a more human, embodied, interconnected world, where understanding and feeling, self and other, inner and outer, head and heart, are intrinsically intertwined. I hope to have conveyed an embodied way of being through this thesis, so that readers are brought back to their own body, back to intimacy with their own emotions and the present moment awareness.

This carefully designed and conducted heuristic research lead to new insights and meta-knowledge that can contribute a wider and more connected view to the existing scientific body of knowledge of the researched phenomena. Existential phenomenological ideas of embodied emotional awareness were applied into practical embodied research and in this way a new level of

awareness was embodied, one that hopefully transcends dualism and thus honours a more wholesome view of life. The findings show the important and multidimensional connection between the body, emotions and awareness within psychotherapy. Five themes emerged from the analysis of data, each having three to six subthemes.

*Embodiment is a process* is a theme about a gradual development of one's own sensitivity, vulnerability and authenticity. Conscious breathing, self-care and trusting our bodies' intelligence proved to be important parts of embodiment. With that we develop a personal compass or intuition that sometimes clashes with textbook rules about doing therapy. The essence of this theme is about allowing and trusting the process of embodiment to unfold and open up a new way of being, a new way of knowing, an expanded awareness.

*Being is feeling* is a theme that brings together being and feeling. It is about being present with feelings, being feels allowing, possibilities of being, being open and being in the heart. This theme is basically a reminder that the world is much more than what we think, and that we come closer to the truth by what we feel. Becoming a more embodied human being is quite possibly about becoming more present to our emotional world.

*Disembodied being* is a theme about a way of being that is closed to embodiment. It is being in fear or doubt, being stuck and waiting, being in disembodied thinking, and being in resistance to embodiment. It seems we don't realise how disembodied we are until we somehow get reminded by our body or events in our life. That is so because disembodiment is a general disconnection from feeling ourselves and the world. Many clients possibly come to therapy because somehow in their life and their way of being they feel not quite right. In that sense therapy could be seen as a journey into embodiment. This theme is essentially a reminder of all the ways we can be unaware, closed or hiding away from our embodiment as human beings.

*Multidimensional awareness* is a theme about the multidimensionality of our whole being. Embodied emotional awareness seems to be multidimensional in giving us infinite possibilities of expanding and connecting, as well as contracting and disconnecting. Becoming aware in our bodies in the present moment gives us multiple perspectives and from that freedom to choose our attitude and action. Integration of all aspects of ourselves appears to be the key to becoming wholly embodied. Essentially what this all means is that the body is the grounding place where we integrate all multidimensional aspects of ourselves and evolve into an embodied emotional and more aware human being. Embodiment in its core is a process of integrating the multidimensionality of our whole being and bringing awareness into it. This is probably the most original contribution of this research, in the way it expands the current theory and research on embodiment into a whole new dimensional perspective on human being, becoming, and relating.

*Relational connection points* is a theme about the embodied intersubjective space between the therapist and the client. It seems that the relational connection points are sat on a continuum in the space between the therapist and the client. On one end is the client being mirrored in the therapist, and on the other end is the therapist being pulled into the client's world. In between that there is a need to bracket and discern between the therapist and the client, and with the therapist consciously meeting the client where they are. The final realisation of this theme is that a true connection happens in a balanced co-created space in between the therapist and the client, and only through presence. The essence of this theme is the insightful comprehension that as embodied beings we are fundamentally intertwined with others, and as we become more aware of our embodiment we automatically become more aware of how we mutually affect each other in immense ways. The profound implication of this finding for psychotherapy is that as therapists we could be aware of this and use it to our own and the client's benefit, rather than struggle and resist it. The bottom line is that psychotherapy needs to reintegrate the body into its vision simply because the body belongs there: "without it, the picture just doesn't make sense" (Totton, 2005, p.6).

Another expansive realisation that was birthed through this research process is the multidimensional nature of heuristic research. I started to perceive heuristic research as an interactive process of embodiment; as it became intimately intertwined with my life, my whole world became a research process. Every aspect of the research entwined with every aspect of life in a complex synchronistic and multidimensional way. I started experiencing more and more of embodied emotional awareness and the life situations were guiding me into it. By embodying the research I did not merely find the answer – instead I became the answer. I became the embodiment of the answer: “I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently” (Polanyi, 1962, p.143). This heuristic research process will forever “serve as a reminder of a lifelong process of knowing and being” (Moustakas, 1990, p.56). For me personally the greatest outcome was my own embodiment process and thus maybe the essential result of this research is not the written thesis but myself becoming more human while conducting it. Likewise Sela-Smith (2002) sees the strengths of heuristic inquiry in “self-transformation and the creation of a story that generates potential for transformation in others and in society” (p.82).

The intent of this research was to communicate an aliveness of the phenomenon, which allows the reader to relate to it intimately in unique ways, while also engaging with the shared essence: “This play of the 'unique' and the 'shared' characterises the humanised essence of embodied understanding” (Todres, 2007, p.183). It has been my profound longing for the reader to get a feeling of embodied emotional awareness. Through research design, dialogues, analysis and research, self-embodiment and embodied writing, I truly hope that I am successful in portraying and sharing an embodied knowledge, one that is humanising and greatly needed in a world that too easily disembodies and dehumanises us.

Social-economic-cultural and environmental deviations at this time are pushing us into a disembodied way of being. Modern media and the means of communication have a profound disorientating effect on us and thus the

significance and experience of the lived human body cannot be overstated (McLuhan, 2015). With all of the chaos, misinformation, confusion and fear entrenched in our society, it seems like a good idea to come back to ourselves and find our own truth. We can and should open ourselves to the guidance of our own navigator and trust that our house, our body will show us our true place (Vos, 2015). Kierkegaard (1958) believed that the individual does not need any fundamental change in his being in order to access the truth. What is needed is a personal reflection that uncovers the universality of truth. “It is the divine side of man, his inward action which means everything” (p.45). When we break through the automatic way of being and seeing the world, disconnect from the cultural conditioning, when we become intimate with ourselves, aware of the present moment, then we can access a greater embodied knowledge. It is a spotlight into ourselves but also opening us up and shining ahead of us into the universal awareness. It is alive; it is there to meet us, when we are open to meet it. Coming to greater awareness and understanding of our embodied emotional selves could help us improve the role of emotions in our lives and our culture in general. Furthermore, it could help us come to greater awareness of our embeddedness with all beings and nature, fundamentally changing the direction of the development of humanity.

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish it but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind (Einstein, 1950).

As one of my co-researchers stressed, embodiment is political and ecological: *“how there are so many new movements happening now, but it needs an embodiment to it...feels like the way we are on this planet isn’t sustainable anymore. So I feel like I am committed to having embodiment with the individual to affect the community and the community to affect the world”* (Sana5,6). The body has been mostly absent in academia, politics, economy, ecology and even

medicine – all the major aspects of our society. Can we imagine what it would be like to have fully embodied intellectuals, scholars, educators, politicians, and doctors, who not only speak about the body but also live from the body? “What would it mean to lead by the pulse of the body? Could the body come in to the boardroom or the administration of the academy? Could attention to the body affect decision making or policy?” (Snowber, 2011, p.250).

Psychiatrist Orloff (2009) believes that people with unresolved emotional trauma are more apt to wage war: “It's daunting to grasp that one emotionally damaged person in a position of power can inflict cataclysmic planetary harm” (p.546). Truly comprehending the power of maturing emotionally, not just intellectually, of embodying an inner peace is of crucial significance for creating an outer peace in this world, which was already stressed by Einstein (1950). At this tipping point in history, when we as humanity are living through a pandemic, many of us are painfully realising that we don't need more disembodied intellect, more empty success, more useless products, not even more happiness. The current pandemic could be understood as a truthful reminder of our collective disembodiment. With this enforced reflective experience, hopefully many are starting to feel what the world needs right now is more sensitivity, more compassion, more awareness, more wholeness and more reconnecting with the body of Earth, other bodies and our own bodies. In line with the philosophy of 'Deep Ecology', Shepherd (2010) calls for deepening of our questioning and commitment but also expanding of our sensitivities to include all the world around us. Damasio (1994) envisioned an embodied mind in which soul and spirit, with all their dignity, fragility and human scale, become complex and unique states of an organism. Perhaps the most indispensable thing we can do as human beings, as we move on living into a post-pandemic world, is to remind ourselves and others of our multidimensionality, vulnerability, finiteness, and uniqueness. Trusting that we already have everything to heal ourselves and the planet.

Our bond with one another, our bond to the world, illuminates the vision of the whole. Carve out a space within where intuition and love can abide.

Trusting what's inside so fervently will allow you to have a fully embodied life (Orloff, 2009, p.548).

The intimate realisation I had through this heuristic research is that connecting with myself and with others in an embodied way is an enriching more human experience, and becoming embodied makes me able to be with another in an I-Thou presence. That quenched my core longing to become fully, freely and completely who I am, and share that with another human being without doubt, reservation or holding back. Once I experienced that kind of intimate and relational depth, that became the only meaningful way of being: of trusting and allowing myself and the other being exactly what we are meant to be. And thus becoming more human for me is not about becoming something else, something other than what we are, but instead coming to an embodied awareness: remembering, acknowledging that we are already fully and wholly human just as we are in this very moment. Being in psychotherapy with that awareness radically shifts the whole game.

*“mmm well it is a lifelong journey. That I am able in the counselling session to be myself, use myself, be present and I have more acceptance of myself than I had ten years ago. Know myself a bit better.” (Odin86)*

As I take a deep breath and allow the last reflective words of this thesis to emerge, I remember to tune in with my heart beating through my whole body and acknowledge that everything I shared is ultimately my intimate and unique perspective on the world, only one of many out there. With that said I am not diminishing it but instead inviting the reader to play with both the unique and the shared and to find their own truth in between the words written, because that is where the mystery lies.





Waiting for Godot – Illustration by Peter J Carey

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# 6 Appendices

## 6.1 Participant Information Sheet



*The Department of Health and Social Sciences  
Middlesex University  
Hendon  
London NW4 4BT*

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Date: 1.12.2017

**Title: Becoming more human: A phenomenological exploration of embodied emotional awareness**

### Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully and ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

### What is the purpose of the research?

This research aims to elucidate embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy from a phenomenological point of view. This research springs from an embodied view of considering all experiences holistically rather than separating them on body and mind. Specifically, it aims to explore how therapists experience and work with embodied emotions in both themselves and the client.

### Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because of your orientation to working with the body and emotions in therapy and so your perspective is uniquely valuable for helping to explore this topic.

### Do I have to take part?

No. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary (but would be greatly appreciated). You may choose not to answer any question during the interview, which is also perfectly acceptable. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time before, during, or after the interviews without justifying your decision.

### What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to be involved, you will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interview will last approximately

90 minutes. It will be conducted in a private consulting room at a location suitable to the participant. The in-depth interview will help us to explore your experience of embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy as well as how you use it for therapeutic aims.

#### What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?

This research has been designed to minimise any risks or disadvantages of participating. The interview will be scheduled at time and place that most suits you. You will be offered a debriefing interview should you require it. Depending on what emotional experiences you may choose to convey (for example, a very difficult therapeutic relationship) there is a potential for you to be emotionally impacted or distressed by participating in this research. In that case you are very welcome to contact any of the proposed Counselling Services.

#### What are the possible advantages of taking part?

Your participation in the interview might be raising awareness of yourself and your embodied emotional experience in your work as a psychotherapist. This might bring you greater understanding and help you in your work. On a greater scale the findings of this study will be adding knowledge of embodied emotional awareness to the field of psychotherapy. Contribution of knowledge to the field could help us understand the importance and improve the role of embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy and our culture in general.

#### Consent

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and asked to sign a consent form prior to taking part in this research. Your consent covers your consent to participating in the interview and the recording of the data as outlined below.

#### Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised and funded by the researcher and it is part of researcher's doctoral training on the joint programme run by NSPC and Middlesex University.

#### What will happen to the data?

Your participation will be kept confidential and your data anonymised. The interview will be digitally recorded by the researcher. Your name will not be in the recording and a unique anonymous code will be assigned to each recording and transcript. The digital recording of the interview will be transcribed directly by the researcher. The full anonymised transcript will only be reviewed by the researcher and her supervisor, unless requested for inspection in the course of an institutional audit. The consent form you will be asked to sign gives you the option to request for your data not to be included in any institutional audit. Short excerpts of the transcript may be published verbatim within the research as anonymous examples. Data (the digital recording until transcribed, and the written transcripts) will be kept in a secure locked environment or stored on a computer with the password known only to the researcher. At the end of the research the data will be stored by NSPC in accordance with NSPC data retention policy. Should you withdraw from the study at any time your transcript will be immediately destroyed.

Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by the NSPC Ethics Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Middlesex University Ethics Committee.

Your decision to partake in the study will be greatly appreciated and in this case you may contact me via email: [research.eea@gmail.com](mailto:research.eea@gmail.com)

Researcher: Alja Lah, [research.eea@gmail.com](mailto:research.eea@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Dr Simon Cassar, [simon@simoncassar.eu](mailto:simon@simoncassar.eu)

NSPC: [office@nspc.org.uk](mailto:office@nspc.org.uk)



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## 6.2 Informed Consent

**Title: Becoming human: A phenomenological exploration of embodied emotional awareness**

Researcher: Alja Lah

Supervisor: Dr Simon Cassar

- I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.
- I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.
- I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and I provide my consent that this may occur.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign Name

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**To the participant:** Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Health and Education Ethics committee of Middlesex University or NSPC, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: Alja Lah, [research.eea@gmail.com](mailto:research.eea@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Dr Simon Cassar, [simon@simoncassar.eu](mailto:simon@simoncassar.eu)

NSPC: [office@nspc.org.uk](mailto:office@nspc.org.uk)





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## 6.3 Debriefing

**Title:** Becoming human: A phenomenological exploration of embodied emotional awareness

Researcher: Alja Lah

Supervisor: Dr Simon Cassar

Thank you for taking part in this research and making a valuable contribution towards the aims of this study and psychotherapy in general. Should you be left with any questions or concerns about the research and your participation in it or should you like to discuss your experience please feel free to contact me.

Should you have any questions, concerns or difficulties as a result of this research study, please contact me, my research supervisor or NSPC. All contact information can be found below.

Should you experience any difficulties or distress by participating in this research you are advised to speak to your clinical supervisor or therapist. You may also contact any of the proposed Counselling Services.

The Samaritans also offer a 24-hour free helpline where you can discuss your difficulties. Contact Number: 116 123

If you would like an alternative longer-term therapeutic intervention, you might find the following websites useful to find a therapist:

- UKCP: <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist>
- BACP: <http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/therapists>
- MIND: <https://www.mind.org.uk>

Your information will now be kept safely and will remain confidential. When the research is published, I will make sure that neither your name nor identifying details are used.

Researcher: Alja Lah, [research.eea@gmail.com](mailto:research.eea@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Dr Simon Cassar, [simon@simoncassar.eu](mailto:simon@simoncassar.eu)

NSPC: [office@nspc.org.uk](mailto:office@nspc.org.uk)

## 6.4 Advertisement for Participants

Would you like to contribute to a  
Doctoral Research Project  
by deep diving into exciting realms of  
**Embodied Emotional  
Awareness**  
in Psychotherapy?

Are you working with a phenomenological orientation?  
Are you also focusing on Embodiment?

**Embodiment** as the intelligence of the body that we can access by anchoring awareness into the whole body and feel being alive through the body, sensations, emotions, ideas, intuitions that arise in the present moment.

With a phenomenological interview we will explore your lived experience and meaning of embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy.

If you are interested and you are an accredited psychotherapist or counsellor with an active practice, you are kindly invited to take part in a research interview of 60-90 min at a time and place convenient to you.

Please contact Alja at  
[research.eea@gmail.com](mailto:research.eea@gmail.com) for more information.

Research supervisors: [simon.cassar@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:simon.cassar@yahoo.co.uk); [catriona@catrionamay.co.uk](mailto:catriona@catrionamay.co.uk)

This research is organised by the researcher and it is part of researcher's Doctoral Program in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling Psychology on the joint programme run by New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling with Middlesex University, from which it has received full ethical approval.

Data will be kept in accordance with NSPC data retention guidelines and the GDPR.

## 6.5 Interview Guide

I am interested in the embodied emotional awareness in psychotherapy.  
Before we look at the research topic, we'll start with just a couple of questions about you...

How would you describe your approach to psychotherapy?

How long have you been practising?

Age brackets

This interview is designed to gather embodied information in an embodied way that is why I will ask you to pay attention to your body while we do this interview. Before answering any question take a moment to check with your embodiment (sensations, emotions, feelings) and then answer. Feel free to close your eyes or anything else that might help you with that.

(I will pay attention to my body and the space created between the two of us.)

1.)

Can you remember the embodied feeling of sitting in the room with a client? You can focus on a particular moment from your past. Take a few moments to get this feeling in the present moment as much as possible. Then I will ask you to choose any form of description, metaphor or artistic impression that you feel would best help convey your embodied feeling (metaphor, movement, words, sounds, painting, shape, colour, place, emotion, work of art, poem...). This will then be discussed in the interview.

>follow up:

Why did you choose this client? Past/present? Difficult/easy?

What is your experience of embodiment in psychotherapy? How do you make sense of it? What aspects are there?

What does embodiment mean to you?

2.)

What are your embodied sensations / emotions right now? What is the embodied relationship between us right now like?

3.)

Are you aware of your body and/or emotions during a session?

>How? When? How do you engage with it?

> Can you describe an experience where you had a strong embodied response to a client?

> can you locate it?

>aspects?

4.)

How do you feel and engage with emotions/feelings in your work?

>now?

>what aspects are there?

(this includes all emotional aspects – the therapist's feelings, how s/he experiences the client's feelings and the emotional relationship between you)  
>heart /head difference?  
>can you locate it?

5.)

How do you bring your clients to awareness of their embodiment?

- >Can you describe an experience of when you used embodiment in your work?
- >How did you come to it? What happened? How did it develop?
- >What impact does it have on your clients/process/relationship?

6.)

How do you discern between your own embodied sensations and the client's embodied sensations? (>transference, countertransference)

- >right now?
- >follow up: Can you step out and step back into it? Switch between being embodied and not?
- > what is the difference between being embodied and not being embodied, can you describe it, explore it?
- >how does it impact the relationship?

7.)

Are you aware of the space in between you and the client? Can you describe it?

- >now?
- >What is it in the therapy session that enables the embodied connection or inhibits it?

8.)

How do you experience awareness in a session?

- >now?
- >aspects/types?
- >location?
- >expanding/contracting?

9.)

What does 'becoming more human' mean to you in the context of everything we talked about?