

# EMOTIONS

## Background and Context

### **Why a lab on Feelings/emotions?**

**Reason One:** Like it or not, to be human is to have emotions. Indeed, emotions are our responses to the world around us as well as to our thoughts and beliefs. You wake up in the morning and note that you have overslept and will be late for class and you feel **anxiety** and frustration especially since today is a test day.. You rush to the bathroom, and when you go to brush your teeth you notice that your roommate once again has failed to return the top to the toothpaste and you experience **anger** (how many times have I asked her to put the top on), followed by **sadness** as you create the story that your roommate doesn't respect you. Now you are in the kitchen and for the first time since awakening you look outside and see that it is snowing hard and already the roads of covered with snow and realizing you can't ride your bike and will have to walk you feel completely **panicked**. Your roommate rushes in and says, "Guess what?" Classes have been called of and suddenly you feel **joyful**. Then she tells you that she has missed having time to talk and play with you and invites you to go outside with her and play in the snow. Now you joy shifts and you feel your **heart crack open as love pours out to your roommate**. All this in the course of three minutes!

**Reason Two:** Because at root, the ecological crisis is a crisis of feeling. We are a people gone numb, unable to feel... We have become separate from the earth that sustain us. As Ingrid Bacci, author of The Art of Effortless Living, has written, "Our world is a mess because too many of us have lost touch with the art of caring. We need to learn how to care, and there is only one way to begin doing that; to practice experiencing our feelings. We do that by feeling how we feel where feeling happens: in our bodies" (p. 116).

## Check In

**Feel your feelings.** Sit down quietly and bring your awareness into the feelings of your body. What does it feel like in your gut? When you focus on your gut, stay with the sensation long enough to really absorb it, and to let it grow or change. Do the same with your chest, your throat and any other part of your body that draws your attention.

**Avoid thinking about your feelings. When you think about your feelings, you stop feeling and start judging.** You leave your feelings behind and start getting into control. Notice if you are thinking instead of feeling. What are you thinking? Come back to just feeling, simply absorbing your visceral sensations. There will be time, later, to think. Ingrid Bacci draws this useful distinction between knowing our feelings and feeling them: "**Talking about our feelings is reporting on life, but being in our feelings is living life**" (pg. 118).

To do this simple practice is to become aware of a strange fact of life: sometimes we do not know how we're feeling until we stop to feel it. And, what of the times—perhaps, such as now—when we don't feel anything? When we stop to ask ourselves how we feel, and we come up empty? Is it possible not to feel anything? In cases where there is no feeling, try a quick body scan ... from foot to head to locate the places in the body where there *is* feeling. Pay special attention to body regions that are not open, relaxed, or fluid (e.g., where there is tightness in the body) and then put a word to the body sensations/feelings.

### **Activity One: What do you think feel?**

Whether we know it or not, it is hardly possible for humans to escape feeling. As you read each sentence of this work, you are having emotional responses—confusion, disbelief, anger, boredom, frustration, exhaustion, excitement, wonder, anxiety. Similarly, if you pause now and look around, everything you see is likely to trigger some emotional response. Consider the case of your professor, Chris Uhl:

*I stop to look at the coffee mug on my desk. Recalling that it is a gift from my partner, I have a warm feeling of well being. Next, I look at the yellow pencil lying next to the coffee mug and I feel peaceful (I like pencils, especially yellow Number 2s). Now, shifting my gaze to the ballpoint pen lying next to the pencil I feel a slight constriction in my chest. I don't like ballpoint pens; I associate them with frustration—running dry, leaking. As I do this simple exercise, I note that I have varying degrees of affinity, attraction for everything around me and that it is this resonance that I am registering as emotion. Going from pencil (attraction) to pen (repulsion), I experience in my body a change in the quality of energy. That's what emotion is—energy.*

In college classrooms across the country and in the annals of your own life, you are bound to find a student responding to the question (however it may be phrased): "What do you think?" Though different, this, here, is a simple activity with a guiding question just as simple: What do you feel?

Take a moment to direct your gaze around this room—both emotional and visual gazes are acceptable. Upon each person, place, or thing that you alight, ask yourself this simple question: "What do I feel?" Although thought requires effort, emotion does not. You will receive your answer, effortlessly, if you quiet your thoughts enough to hear it.

After a few minutes, we will break from this reverie for discussion. To be sure, if you truly feel, you will discover a treasure before you whose wealth is tremendous and whose prior invisibility is shocking.

### **Activity Two: A Feeling History**

A simple way to explore your attitudes and beliefs about emotions is to respond to a series of questions. You can do it right now by jotting down or registering in you mind your responses to the open sentences below. Simply write down the very first thing that comes to mind—i.e., avoid the tendency to filter.

- The emotion that I have the most difficulty expressing is \_\_\_\_\_
- It really bugs me when people act like \_\_\_\_\_
- It upsets me when I am in the company of someone who \_\_\_\_\_
- I hate to feel \_\_\_\_\_
- One emotion I wish I could get rid of is \_\_\_\_\_
- When I was growing up I learned that it was definitely not OK to feel \_\_\_\_\_
- I wish I felt more \_\_\_\_\_
- When I am at my best I feel \_\_\_\_\_

-paraphrased from C. Huber, Unconditional Self Acceptance, 2005

After you have gone through each of these statements and given your answer, do it again. That is, dig deeper. There is always more to find.

**Study your answers.** What questions are hardest for you? What do you make of the fact that there are certain things that you hate to feel or that it's not alright to feel. Where do you suppose you got that message? What if emotions aren't good or bad; they just are? **One's answers to these questions reveals one's emotional conditioning.** So, what do you have to say?

### **Beware of Emotions**

As a male, I, Chris Uhl, was brought up to regard my emotions as something to modulate, tone down, keep under cover. When I fidgeted around in my seat—something I apparently did frequently—I was told to get myself under control! When I fell and skinned my knee in the schoolyard, I was warned, “Big boys don't cry!” It's as if there was a sign at the entrance of my school saying, “check your emotions at the door.” Indeed, during all my years of schooling I can't recall a teacher ever asked me *how* I was feeling or *what* I was feeling.

Looking back, now, I understand what was going on. Emotions are energy. When I allow myself to feel my emotions, they move me; I become enlivened; and my actions are based on an inner authority. But school was set up to make me outer directed; it was structured to channel my attention and allegiance toward outer authorities—i.e., my teachers. So, it is that I spent tens of thousands of hours seated, often with hands folded, in bolted down chairs, learning to pay attention, obey commands, be quiet, and through it all to stuff my emotions.

I was just a kid and I wanted to please my teachers. In my kid's head I assumed that my teachers must be right. After all they'd been around a lot longer than me. If they said that expressing exuberance or anger or sadness or fear was unacceptable, who was I to argue. **In effect, school was set up to funnel my attention toward those in authority in lieu of channeling attention, care, and respect to myself. This was a recipe for self-alienation.**

## **Activity Three: To Be Human**

### ***Optional Introduction:***

Take this as a fact: In some way, you are emotionally restricted. No matter how fervently you may or may not agree with this statement, nor no matter how apathetically, take this as a fact. In some way, you are emotionally restricted. Find inside yourself the emotion that is restricted, then choose the right color or colors to draw this emotion on a blank white sheet of paper.

### ***Introduction:***

However we are denied in feeling, we are denied in being. Whatever we are encouraged to feel, we are encouraged to be. Our emotional conditioning is specific to each of us, and it would take the entire story of our life to explain the nuances of our emotional presence. Take, for example, gender.

As we are growing up we receive subtle and not so subtle messages regarding which emotions are OK to express. Sometimes what's OK is related to gender. To explore this go through the list of emotions (below) and for each one register if, for you, this is mostly a male or

female emotion. If there are other emotions which you would like to consider, yet are not on the list, please do so.

-Anger	-Jealousy	-Joyfulness
-Silliness	-Gratefulness	-Glee
-Radiance	-Agitation	-Sadness
-Panicky	-Disgust	-Concern

Consider how the people you grew up with reacted to these emotions. Pay special attention to emotions that you have been socialized to regard as not acceptable (perhaps because of your gender). **Now, consider how it feels for you if you were to decide to let these emotions back into your life** (C. Huber, Session 3). If you are looking for a point, this is it: if you are expected to be a man, or a woman, you are expected to feel certain emotions and not feel others. Ask yourself what it would feel like if, instead of being a man or a woman, you were, simply, human. What does it feel like to be human?

Now, partner up with someone of the opposite sex (as far as the numbers permit it) ... and talk.

*The depth of our feeling life measures the depth of our life force, and if we judge, contain, or repress our feelings we repress our life force.*

-Ingrid Bacci, The Art of Effortless Living, 2000; pg. 110

### **Supplemental Activity One: Discovering one's relationship and experience with a range of emotions**

Emotions are there to be expressed, but often, as we have seen they got bottled up in the body. A powerful way of accessing and ventilating emotions is through the expressive arts. Note that I didn't say the "performing arts." Unfortunately, many of us have been conditioned to believe that "art" is something we do for someone else; art is something to be exhibited and/or performed. No wonder from an early age we conclude that "I am not an artist" and develop a fear and/or mistrust of art. What I am talking about here is soul art—art this is not performed; art that is free of externally imposed standards; art where even our Inner Critic" is set aside. If it helps, set aside the word "art" and substitute it with "play" or "exploration." Whatever you call it know that I am talking about a path to self discovery—a passport into the realm of emotions, intuition and imagination.

**A good starting place for cultivating emotional awareness is** to get a box of sturdy crayons and a big sheet of art paper and to simply "draw" emotions using simple abstract scribbles of color. **This sounds like the kind of thing a little kid would do and that's exactly the point. Indeed, when you were a child, you still had access to the wide range of human emotion; you hadn't yet been conditioned to shut some emotions away.** Within the course of an hour, as a child, you were able to express joy, anger, frustration, enthusiasm, confusion, delight, sadness, and much more.

Now, using **your non-dominant hand** and via scribbling, I invite you to take a step toward that free uninhibited state. Capacchione (2006. Pg. 42) explains why it is important to work with your non-dominant hand: "*My research shows that, right-handed or left-handed,*

*writing and drawing with the non dominant hand give you greater access to the right-hemisphere functions: feelings, intuition, gut instinct, inner wisdom and spirituality. Perhaps it is because the non dominant hand was never hardwired to the language centers of the brain. It has been left free to express nonverbal, non-rational perceptions.”*

You have the crayons before you. The sheet of art paper is large. Begin with the emotion “HAPPINESS.” Now, allow yourself to access some moment—recent or past—when you felt happy. What is your experience of happiness? Where do you experience it in your body? Now go further and consider: What does happiness feel like in your body—e.g., Is it a tingling feeling, a bubbling feeling, a floating feeling? Get a somatic sense of happiness, how the energy of happiness feels in your body... Don’t report on happiness, feel it. And as you hold onto this feeling of happiness, pick a color that for you manifests happiness and then with that color, allow happiness to stream out of your fingers and on to the paper. You are scribbling free form not drawing.... There is no “right” way to do this... let the feeling of happiness in your body lead you.

Then when you are ready, we will move to the next emotion, sadness. Can you let yourself feel sadness? Go to a time or place that elicits sadness. Really allow yourself to feel it. Where in your body do you experience the feeling of sadness? What words, other than “sad” can you use to describe it? Now, using another part of your paper represent through color and “scribble” sadness. Let it literally flow from your body onto the paper.

Continue in this way, considering other emotions such as anxiety, anger, joy, peace, and desire. Conclude with love, considering where in your body you experience love, how it feels, the words to describe it?

By doing this inquiry, we discover what emotions we are comfortable with and which ones, through the socialization process, we have learned to distance ourselves from. Surprises abound. Some people discover that they actually prefer the state of melancholy to the state of joyfulness or the feeling of indignation to the feeling of love.

The second intent of this practice is to begin to notice where and what you feel for individual emotions. For example, perhaps you experience fear as a tension or compression in a certain region of the body; you may register anger as the sensation of heat in the belly and/or a constriction of the throat. The idea here is not to look to the head; but instead to look to the body—to the emotions—to discover what is true for you.

The OVERALL in these explorations is to remove all the censors that we have unknowingly become shackled by and, in so doing, to learn to express the full range of human emotion in an open, easy, clean manner. This is about embracing all of our emotions without shame instead of running from them. When we allow ourselves to experience an emotion fully, it passes through us quickly. It is when we resist an emotion or experience it half way that it can plague us, becoming lodged in our body and psyche.

## OUT-OF-CLASS FIELD STUDY: EMOTIONS

### Option 1: How now?

*"Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist Sage, suggests that we sit with our anger as we would with a crying baby—comforting it and listening to it. If we are attentive, a baby will tell us what she needs, and so will our anger. When we listen deeply to it, and honestly, we will usually be told what the real issue is." –Tamarack Song, Truthspeaking, p. 28*

Perhaps some of us have been inattentive parents—at a significant time in the past, or at times today, already—when we have failed to listen to the coo or cry of our emotions. It is true that these feelings do not speak in words, but this is not to say that they do not speak.

In this field study, you are to conduct a one-day audit of your emotions. Carry a notepad and pen, and whenever you notice yourself "feeling," **record the time, place, context, emotion, and any other note that you find useful.** Try to put a word to the actual feeling. Be so crazy as to engage it in conversation—that is, see what your body has to tell you when you ask it ... *Who are you? What do you feel? Why do you feel the way you feel? What do you want to tell me? What can I do to help you?*

If it is human to feel, and you are human, I trust you will not be underwhelmed by the opportunities for putting pen to paper. First thing in the morning—very first thing—is sure to be a time of emotion. The first morning of summer vacation feels so wildly different to a fifth grader than a Tuesday in November. What do you feel upon waking? In the shower? Chomping your cereal? Walking to class? Taking notes? Reading this sentence, that paragraph? Because there are so many moments of emotion, ***we do not expect you to record every single emotion,*** still, record as many as you can, especially those which are most important **OR** most revelatory.

It may happen that, as the day goes on, you forget that this is what you are doing—that is, you forget to continue with this field study. To counteract this forgetfulness, devise a method of reminding yourself. It may be something as simple as a prompt written in ink across the back of your hand—"How are you feeling?," maybe just, "How now?" Or, maybe a watch to beep every half hour. Maybe a collection of suggestions: every time someone speaks to you, every time you pick up or put away a pen or pencil, every time you look at your watch or the clock.

After the day of this audit, spend some time meditating over your experience. Peruse your list for those notes which hook *you* (that they do or do not hook anyone else is not worth discussing; they must hook *you*). **Compose a response piece to this experience, and explore several of these emotional "hooks."** (To be at LEAST 2 double-spaced pages in length).

### Option 2: Using the "Felt Sense" to Figure out Personal Problems

Back in the sixties and seventies a group of psychologists at the University of Chicago led by Eugene Gendlin noted that most of the people who went to psychiatrists seeking relief from mental/emotional suffering did not experience tangible improvement. Some people, however, did benefit significantly. This led them to pose the question: What is necessary for therapy to lead to real and tangible changes in people's lives? As they pursued this question they made a startling discovery. It wasn't what therapists did or didn't do that made therapy successful; rather, the difference was in the way that the patients, themselves, were able to go inside and "focus." When working on a personal problem, this subgroup weren't up in their head,

lost in analysis; rather, they were down in their body, feeling the totality of the problem. What they were able to tap into was a “felt sense” of the overall problem. This so-called “felt sense” forms, not as words or thoughts, but, as a big round unclear feeling.

A good starting place for actually experiencing the concept of “felt sense” is to think of any two people who are a part of your life. Say Mike and Mary. Now, allow your mind to move back and forth, first focusing on Mike and then on Mary. Don’t think in terms of specific physical and personal traits or memories or images but, rather, place your attention on the totality of each person, their overall “isness.” Notice the inner body feeling you get when you bring your attention to Mike—the sense of “all about Mike,” and how this is distinct from your felt sense of Mary. The felt sense is a global feeling-texture, feeling-color, feeling-tone, rather than a discrete form; initially it is beyond words. What you are feeling is not an emotion so much as the integration of all that you have seen and experienced as Mike and as Mary over the years (Gendlin, 1981).

***Instructions:***

The same things holds true when working with a problem area in your life. So, **1) choose a "problem" in your life.** Say you are unhappy about your relationship with your boss at work. Rather than getting mired in the confusion of pain and blame—i.e., rather than going into analysis—you can **2) take a step back and allow yourself to get a sense of what the whole of the problem feels like—seeking a fuzzy sense of “all of that.”** It is “fuzzy” or diffuse at first because it is a composite of all the overlapping meanings that a given situation has for you—i.e., all the different ways you have experienced the problem. *In tapping into this blurriness we are stepping away from our patterned ways of thinking about the problem and stepping into “don’t know mind” which allows for something new to emerge.*

Once you have the felt sense, the next step is **3) try to put a word to it by asking yourself, What is the quality of this unclear felt sense?** You are looking for a handle—a word that really clicks with your felt sense. It could be a word like sticky, thick, tight, heavy, jumpy, stuck, hollow, or who knows what else. Try different things, going back and forth—resonating—between the word/phrase/image and the felt sense until you get a clear body signal that lets you know there is a fit. **4) Then, once you have a “click,” ask: What is it about this whole problem, that makes this quality (that you have just named or pictured)?** If the word is “sticky,” the question becomes, “What is it about this whole problem that makes me feel sticky?” Once the question is framed, *you will, likely, hear lots of quick answers in your head—these are the old “tapes” from your mind.* They arise when you have lost contact with your felt sense of the problem. **5) Let these first answers go and ask the question again—**What is it about this whole problem that makes me feel so sticky?—again, holding onto the felt sense. Sometimes you can go deeper by asking two additional questions: 1) What’s the worst of this? (e.g., What is the stickiest thing about all of this?); and 2) What does the felt sense need or what would it take for this to feel OK?

**6) Stay with the felt sense until something arises from within that brings a shift, or “give” or release.** The shift is in the felt sense—the body signal that some inside stickiness or stuckness has changed. The problem now feels different, less stressful, than before. In effect, the felt sense has changed which means that you have changed (Gendlin, 1981). In sum, focusing involves the dynamic interaction of two ways of knowing—that of the analytical mind and the wider integrative body mind

**Compose a response piece to this practice of weaving the analytical and the body mind.** In this piece, present and work through each of the above six steps as you experienced them. Also, be sure to include a response to the BiSci standards: What did you learn, or, How did you grow, and, What questions do you now have? (To be at LEAST 2 double-spaced pages in length).