

**MINDFULNESS IN MOVEMENT:  
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF  
BODY-BASED INTUITIVE KNOWING**

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**Abstract**

This exploratory research focuses on an intuitive way of knowing based on the body as experienced during mindfulness. The researcher refers to this way of knowing as Body-based Intuitive Knowing. To access Body-based Intuitive Knowing (BBIK), five women participated in a five session group where they were trained in Intuitive Movement, a meditative discipline developed by the researcher. Essential interrelated aspects of the discipline include: (a) mindful attention, and (b) the ability to differentiate “intuitive” sensations and movement impulses from habitual, consciously-directed, creative, and free-form ways of moving.

As a result of their experiences, four of the five participants reported therapeutic improvements. These included: increased body awareness and self-connection; increased self-acceptance; decreased self-censoring and reactivity; reduction of pain symptoms; more relaxation, energy, and pleasure; awareness of multiple, simultaneous levels of experience; and insights into their relationships to others.

The findings support the view that the client possesses inner wisdom, body memory, and the capacity for healing without cognitive mediation. This view expands the traditional role of the psychotherapist to include trusting the client’s ability to self-organize cognitively and emotionally directly through the language of the body. Ways to integrate BBIK through Intuitive Movement as the primary modality of treatment or as a therapeutic adjunct are discussed. Applications to clinical populations are suggested.

## EXCERPT

### CHAPTER V

#### SYNTHESIS

Body-based Intuitive Knowing (BBIK) is a way of knowing, characterized by mindful attention to present bodily experience. Experience is observed and allowed to unfold, rather than directed consciously. The result is a spontaneous “undoing” of habitual ways of organizing physically and psychologically. In contrast to ordinary consciousness, body, mind, self and life experience are not separate but intimately interconnected. The unity of knower and known creates a context that is open, receptive, and present. Like the space within a container that defines its use and function, when “*I am not the doer*” it is possible to receive “what is.”

Mystics across time and culture have described the necessity for passive, non-dual, non-conceptual awareness to reveal the presence of unity, reality and truth. Many are revered for their capacity to go beyond ordinary awareness and embrace an expanded realm of knowing and healing. In this study, four out of five participants accessed a similar way of knowing. This is not to claim that there is a short cut to enlightenment. Instead, this study suggests that *the capacity for wholeness and self-healing exists already*. Self-knowledge does not come from all the things we *do* but from uncovering who we *are*.

To explore Body-based Intuitive Knowing, five women participated in a five session research group where they were trained in Intuitive Movement, a meditative discipline developed by the researcher. As a result of their experiences, they reported notable changes in their levels of attention and their relationship to their bodies, their sense of self, and their relationship to others. They also articulated barriers to accessing BBIK through Intuitive Movement.

#### Summary of Findings

##### Use of Attention: Mindfulness.

Four of the five women described a shift in their ordinary consciousness as both a pre-condition for, and result of moving intuitively. Characteristics they identified included: slowing down, waiting, listening, being present, non-judgmental, and open to what was unfolding. They also noted awareness of multiple, simultaneous levels of experience. For example, participants were frequently aware of thoughts, feelings, images and memories, along with detailed bodily sensations, as they moved. Participants described individual movements and short movement segments as having a life or direction of their own. Participants also observed that imposed redirection or avoidance of even a single impulse could alter an entire movement flow. This level of fine tuned awareness is characteristic of mindfulness.

##### Relationship to Body

Four of the five participants reported positive changes in their relationship to their bodies. Among the themes identified were: greater awareness of and connection to one’s body; increased relaxation, animation, and pleasure; a shift in chronic tension patterns; and the relief or absence of pain while moving.

Each participant noted an increased sense of trust in her body as a source of wisdom and guidance. Three of the five members experienced dramatic incidents of healing during the group sessions. In one example, a chronically painful neck and shoulder “knot” was “untied.” In the second example, a repetitive

arm position gradually brought a traumatic event to consciousness. The memory of being held down by her arms allowed this participant to reclaim the strength in her arms and helped her to validate this painful life experience. The third example involved the group member who, as a former anorexic, has struggled since adolescence to sever her bodily impulses. Her discovery was that her impulses were not dangerous and that she could, in fact, experience physical pleasure, safety, and connection. Outside of group, a fourth participant radically changed her eating habits because of her work in group. Accustomed to years of “food ruts” characterized by a limited selection of primarily processed foods, this participant began to “intuitively” select foods based on being physically drawn to new foods (e.g., raw salads and fruit) and increased sensitivity to taste.

### Relationship to Self

The process of moving intuitively challenged self-limiting beliefs and behaviors and opened new possibilities for self-relationship and self-healing. Themes included: increased self-acceptance, stronger ego boundaries, and a deep sense of self-connection.

One participant discovered places of joy, resilience and self-integrity in reclaiming younger selves. Another uncovered a more integrated, purposeful, grounded sense of self. Two participants began to ease up on rigid expectations of themselves or others. They reported increased awareness and decreased reactivity to self-censoring voices. Four of the group members began to listen more closely for inner guidance and to trust their own Body-based Intuitive Knowing.

Participants redefined some aspects of responsibility for themselves. For example, one member described feeling empowered by recognizing her responsibility for holding onto tension in her physical body and in her personal relationships. Another member described her relief from an overwhelming sense of responsibility, realizing that her ego identity was part of a larger sense of self.

Group members observed that their intuitive movements were neither predicted nor pre-planned. Yet, through these movements, participants experienced a deep sense of connection to what they identified as a basic, core self. Some participants identified mindful self-witnessing as helping them to stay anchored or rooted in the experience, rather than merely channeling the movement.

### Relationship to Others

Within the group, the participants experienced several aspects of relatedness: verbal group sharing, witnessing and being witnessed, and moving intuitively in relationship to others. In the context of group sharings between movement segments, participants found increasing clarity about the process and validation to continue to explore and be present.

This research group explored witnessing others and being witnessed only once. Four of the group members were curious about the opportunity to be observed and to observe others moving intuitively. One group of three participants reported the following: feeling valued, deeply communicative while moving, having enhanced insight into one’s own movement, or that being witnessed was kinder than expected. In the second group consisting of the other two participants, one reported feeling uncomfortable and bored with the exercise.

Perhaps the most challenging exercise in the group over the five weeks was a brief introduction, during the last session, to an intuitive form of relatedness. Four participants learned to expand their mindful awareness to include the presence of others and allow subtle impulses or sensations to guide their experience. In mindfulness, fears, beliefs, inhibitions, and projections may be observed while allowing another level of self to find expression. This exercise cultivates trust in the capacity to be consciously present, whole and safe in the context of others.

The intuitive relatedness segment included only 20 minutes of instruction, 15 minutes for movement, and 45 minutes of verbal group processing. Yet, participants found it intensely rich with core personal material. Three of the four group members that participated in this exercise were surprised by their movements. Two of the three observed their bodies reaching out unexpectedly for contact. The third discovered a disturbing absence of awareness of others and an entirely different quality to her movement than experienced previously. All four were curious about their experiences and interested in pursuing intuitive ways of relating.

#### Barriers to accessing BBIK through Intuitive Movement

All five participants reported awareness of feelings or thoughts that seemed to interfere, at times, with their ability to access body-based impulses. These states of awareness included: fear of what might come up from inside; internal censoring and fear of external judgment or rejection; distractibility and heightened alertness to external stimuli; difficulty staying mindful; consciously-directed, linear or goal-oriented processing; and disinterest or disengagement.

Barriers became an integral part of the process when used as opportunities for further self-exploration. This occurred when participants were able to stay present with their feelings and thoughts or return to them again and again as necessary, without consciously-directing their actions. The capacity to hold the tension, or to balance on the edge between mindful observer and conscious director, is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of BBIK and potentially the most rewarding. For four of the women, the safety of the group, verbal sharing, bite-sized instructions, journaling, or free form movement also helped to turn barriers into “growing edges.”

#### Implications for Psychotherapy

The findings of this study suggest: (1) new perspectives on the client, (2) changes in the role of the therapist, and (3) strategies for psychotherapy processing.

#### Perspectives on the Client

The client is viewed as having: inner wisdom, body memory, and the capacity for healing without cognitive mediation. These points will be discussed briefly below.

When a client learns to access Body-based Intuitive Knowing through Intuitive Movement, she or he discovers a language already known but rarely spoken. Sensations, impulses, and movement replace words as the medium of thoughts, feelings, perceptions and meaning-making. Without effort or conscious direction, past and present experiences are embodied and reorganized. Beneath the surface of ordinary consciousness is a guide to self-knowledge and personal unfoldment. Thus, from the perspective of BBIK, the client is already wise and whole.

The client has the capacity to reconstruct life events or younger ages as if fully intact. This may challenge theories which claim that development changes life history and that it is impossible to recapture the past directly (Schachtel, 1984). Precise, richly detailed intuitive movements suggest that the body remembers even if the mind has forgotten.

The client’s experiences of BBIK can be meaningful without being understood consciously. The client may not grasp the meaning of the movement, or the body-based “knowing.” Yet, as this research demonstrates, the process can still be experienced as deeply connected to one’s sense of self, and physically and emotionally healing.

## Role of the Therapist

If as therapists, we view our clients as whole already, therapy can become a means of “undoing” the barriers to that wholeness. The role of the therapist in this kind of work involves trust in the client’s ability to self-organize cognitively and emotionally, directly through the language of the body. The therapist helps focus attention on mindful, embodied expression.

To consider the body as a key player, both the therapist and the client must be willing to address some limitations of ordinary consciousness and exclusively verbal interactions in the psychotherapeutic process. For example, ordinary consciousness and speech is usually outer-directed, linear, past or future oriented, and somewhat fast-paced. This limits awareness of habitual movement and tension patterns, images, and hidden memories that organize experience.

To help the client access BBIK through Intuitive Movement some initial instruction in mindfulness and Intuitive Movement is necessary. Moving intuitively, the client leads and the therapist follows. Therapist/client transactions become less concerned with interactions and more focused on the client’s *intra*-action, i.e., what is going on within the client. Goals and agendas are suspended temporarily so that a non-linear, internal process can unfold.

It is in the spaces, in the silences, that much of the healing work takes place. However, the therapist may use words to help the client articulate present experience. Verbal language can be used selectively during the process to help the client clarify and deepen the meaningfulness of present experience. For example, the following questions can help focus attention to what is happening here and now: As your body is moving, are there words, images, or feelings also present? . . . What is happening on your left side as your right side moves? . . . As your arms are moving, what is happening in your legs? . . . What is your relationship to the ground (space around you, others) as you are moving? . . . What do you notice as your body is still? . . .

It is important to note that the therapist is not separate from the process. Even without directly interacting, the therapist’s presence, as a witness, validates the client’s experience and becomes part of the whole. The therapist has access to more information when attentive, not only to the client, but to his or her internal experience. A slower than ordinary pace facilitates mindfulness in both the client and therapist.

## Strategies for Psychotherapy Processing

Body-based Intuitive Knowing through Intuitive Movement can be used as the primary modality of treatment or as a therapeutic adjunct. Once a client learns how to access body-based impulses in mindfulness, the practice can be used in a variety of ways:

1. Shift attention to present experience and explore what arises spontaneously. This can be particularly useful when a verbal process is stuck, when new options are needed, and when clients need increased connection in their physical or emotional sense of self.
2. Explore a specific issue. Moving intuitively, a client can explore how her body organizes around a specific issue and gain insight into her relationship to it. For example, a client can discover how her body moves intuitively around a *feeling* such as anger and loss, or past and present *relationships*, such as a parent, child, significant other, or co-worker. Images, dreams, and goals can also be moved intuitively.
3. Create experiments in relatedness. In individual therapy, or groups of two or more, clients can begin to pay close attention to physical signals, feelings, images, and thoughts when moving intuitively with awareness of others or interactively. The therapist must clarify issues of boundary management to ensure safety for each client. The intention of such an exercise is to help clients clarify their relational fears and projections and explore ways to increase self-expression, self-trust, and the capacity to be present with others.

4. Flexibility of Time and Setting: Clients may explore the practice of Intuitive Movement for a single five-minute segment, an extended period, or several short segments. BBIK can be explored in individual and group settings. In individual therapy, the client and therapist can verbally process the experience both during and after movement segments. A group therapy context offers more opportunities for explorations in relating intuitively, witnessing others move, and giving and receiving feedback during verbal group processing times. Journaling and drawing can be added to assist the transition to verbal processing, within and outside of session.

### Applications of Body-based Intuitive Knowing and Intuitive Movement

#### Use with Clinical Populations

The potential usefulness of Intuitive Movement to access Body-based Intuitive Knowing with clinical populations can only be inferred from this exploratory study. More research is necessary to identify the effectiveness and limitations of this technique and way of knowing.

The changes experienced by participants suggest applicability to specific populations. For example: *increased body awareness and connection and trust in body-based knowing* would be useful for clients with eating disorders, body dysmorphic disorder, and various dissociative disorders. *Decrease or absence of pain symptoms*, and *change in quality of tension* may have application for clients with chronic pain, especially when the pain is associated with psychological factors alone or with a medical condition. As a method of *increasing relaxation, energy, and pleasure*, Intuitive Movement may benefit clients with symptoms of anxiety and depression. The qualities of *increased self-acceptance and decreased self-censoring or reactivity*, may be applicable to all the above clinical groups.

Participants had the opportunity to explore various *levels of relatedness*. Verbal group sharing, witnessing others move and being witnessed, and moving in relationship to others provided a broad range of interpersonal experiences. Each participant found some ways of relating easier than others. For four of the five women, *feedback* from group members and the group leader helped to clarify the experience and increased a sense of support and validation. *Safety and clear boundaries* are necessary preconditions for mindfulness and were explicit themes in the group. Individuals who have difficulty maintaining boundaries, or who tend to be socially isolated, non-assertive, or co-dependent may benefit from the relational context of an Intuitive Movement group.

Several years ago I worked briefly with two young men with Tourettes Syndrome. Each was taught mindfulness and both showed a marked decrease in tic behavior while focused inwardly. Some months later, I came across an article by Joseph Bliss (1980) entitled, "Sensory Experiences of TS" in which he described his personal experiences of self-observation of emergent sensations. He wrote of his discovery of motor movements as intentional acts aimed at satisfying and eliminating powerful but subtle sensations and urges. His detailed description of emergent sensations and urges sounded remarkably similar to Intuitive Movement. The current treatment of TS, including medication and behavioral techniques, focuses on tic suppression. An approach that explores inner wholeness and body wisdom might offer additional therapeutic tools for people with Tourettes.

### Limitations

Access to BBIK requires the capacity for mindful self-awareness. BBIK would not be accessible to people whose cognitive or neurological deficits interfere with their ability to witness themselves. Without considerable adaptation, it is unlikely that Intuitive Movement would be useful for individuals with psychotic disorders, mental retardation and pervasive developmental disorders. Neither is this work appropriate for young children. Before the age of adolescence or formal operations, self-witnessing would be difficult to engage. Still, some aspects of the work such as differentiating between habitual, consciously-directed, and creative movement can be beneficial for younger children.

### Commentary

It is often said, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” This study suggests that the journey begins with a single impulse. Like flashes of tiny light, each intuitive body-based impulse guides the mover on a path that somehow needs to be taken. The path of Body-based Intuitive Knowing is direct but non-linear, not pre-planned but whole. Mover and journey are one.

This study has explored a way of traveling, a way of knowing, a way of being. The participants demonstrated that no special tools or skills were needed. They had only to be open, present, receptive. As Lao Tzu reminds us,

*A good traveler has no fixed plans  
and is not intent upon arriving.  
A good artist lets his intuition  
lead him wherever it wants.  
A good scientist has freed himself of concepts  
and keeps his mind open to what is . . .*

Tao Te Ching, (Mitchell, 27)