

Engaging the Resourcefulness of the Body: Transmuting Regret and Self-Doubt After Abortion

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For many women having an abortion is unproblematic. However, mixed feelings are not uncommon, and in my PhD research it was evident that for some women, feelings of regret, guilt, shame, sadness and anger lingered, even years later. Within this paper, I distil the healing wisdom of three Australian women who felt unsettled or unresolved about a past abortion. These women took part in a therapeutic research process that invited: (1) a retelling of their abortion experiences in a reflective way, focusing on how they felt about their abortion and themselves, and how they coped; and, (2) an exploration of their bodily felt sensing of their abortion experiences, described verbally during the session and then depicted non-verbally afterwards, using art materials of their choice. The research processes and findings are useful for guiding counselling and therapeutic work with women who feel negatively impacted by a past abortion experience.

Keywords: *abortion, focusing, felt sense, bodily felt wisdom, healing, resourcefulness, creativity*

Introduction

How many women are allowed to express the complexity of their feelings and experiences of their bodies, especially sex, menstruation, abortion, motherhood and birth? And if they try, will they be shamed and guilty? Where do women find positive social support and rich social symbols for the meanings of their experiences – especially their painful, angry, or frustrated experiences? (Oliver, 2006, p. 103)

According to the Public Health Association of Australia, “Abortion is a common part of many women’s reproductive experience with one quarter to one third of all Australian women having an abortion at some point in their life” (Public Health Association of Australia, 2014, p. 1). In 2015, the abortion proportion for women of reproductive age (15 to 44 years) was just under twenty per cent (19.0) in Western Australia (Government of Western Australia Department of Health, 2018). Many Australian women will have one or more abortions during their lifetime, but for each woman the reasons and circumstances that led to having an abortion will vary, as will their emotional responses.

Abortion is a hotly debated, sensitive and emotional issue that has people divided over whether or not women should

have access to abortion on demand. Those keen to protect women’s reproductive rights argue that women should have the right to choose whether or not they carry a pregnancy to term. For pro-choice women, there is some concern that acknowledgement that some women experience having an abortion as a source of “disorientation and suffering”, or that some women perceive a miscarried or aborted foetus to have personhood (i.e., to be a baby), could undermine women’s access to safe and legal abortion (Cahill, 2015, p. 56; Parsons, 2010). Within this article, I assume a pro-choice position, and argue that regardless of their ideological position on abortion, any woman who feels unsettled or disquieted by having an abortion needs access to positive social support and the space to explore her feelings without judgment or agenda.

Within this article, I demonstrate that women can find ways of resolving their inner conflict about a past abortion with reference to their own inner bodily wisdom about what is needed to be able to move forwards in their lives. Within the article I present case studies of three women who reported experiencing emotional disquiet or ambivalence about having had an abortion in the past. They all participated in both an in-person semi-structured interview and a unique Focusing and Art process. I discuss how these women came to feel better (or fine) about themselves and their abortion.

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Women's Emotional Responses After Abortion

Whether women have positive experiences or outcomes after abortion is not an either/or consideration. Within the research literature, many women who identified positive emotions or outcomes after abortion also reported some painful emotional responses and socially-derived challenges about their decision. These mixed and ambivalent findings demonstrate that nuance and complexity is often there for women who have experienced abortion (Kero & Lalos, 2000; Major et al., 2009; Weitz, Moore, Gordon, & Adler, 2008).

There are many influences on how women think about and respond to their experiences of abortion, as identified by Brenda Major and colleagues in the following quote:

Women's psychological experience of abortion is not uniform; rather, it varies as a function of their personal characteristics; events that lead up to the pregnancy; the circumstances of their lives and relationships at the time that a decision to terminate the pregnancy is made; the reasons for, type, and timing of the abortion; events and conditions that occur in their lives during and subsequent to an abortion; and the larger social-political context in which abortion takes place. (Major et al., 2009, p. 866)

There is no "typical" response to having an abortion (Major et al., 2009). In addition, women's appraisals of their abortion experiences can change over time. Rosanna Hess identified that the meaning of an abortion can alter with changes in participant's lives: "Time and intervening events can change perceptions, memories and meaning. We found that the changes in participants' lives were an essential part of their total experience" (Hess, 2004, p. 196). As part of their qualitative investigation of women's long-term experiences and perspectives on past terminations, Kathryn Dykes and colleagues acknowledged that, "For some women termination may be continually reappraised in their changing life context" (Dykes, Slade, & Haywood, 2011, p. 93). Appraisals that women make about abortion include: what pregnancy and abortion mean to them, its perceived social acceptability, their assessments of their ability to cope with their feelings after abortion and the kinds of responses to having an abortion that are acceptable within their ideological or social context (Major et al., 2009).

Satisfaction with the decision to abort a pregnancy does not mean that it was an easy choice or one without personal ramifications. Tracy Weitz acknowledged the complexity of making the decision to abort a pregnancy when she stated that: "Abortion is not an easy issue for most women. It is a complicated life decision in a situation where there is no easy option" (Weitz et al., 2008, p. 88). Carol Gilligan (1982) identified that abortion involves making a hard choice, since it includes weighing up conflicting personal needs and interests: a woman's own and those of others. Gilligan pointed out that there is also contradiction and challenge inherent in the situation of choosing an abortion, because it can raise difficult questions about responsibility, self-care, selfishness, morality and immorality (Gilligan, 1982). In summarising their interview-based research on women having abortions in Victoria (Australia), Doreen Rosenthal and

colleagues noted the difficulty of choosing abortion when a woman takes into account the needs of "the fetus, herself, and others" (Rosenthal, Rowe, Mallett, Hardiman, & Kirkman, 2009, p. 21). They pointed out that considering the needs of the foetus can render the abortion necessary, whilst also making it a very difficult decision to make (Rosenthal et al., 2009).

After having an abortion, women can experience a mixture of emotions including distress, sadness, regret and guilt, as well as relief, happiness and satisfaction. Tracy Weitz summed this up when she stated:

Women can experience a range of emotions, from sadness to elation and everything in between, and even many emotions simultaneously. Women can regret their abortions just as they can celebrate them. Complex feelings are a normal part of major life decisions, and having strong feelings, even negative ones, does not represent pathology. (Weitz et al., 2008, p. 88)

Women may not think about their past abortion(s) regularly, but when they do, they may need to access support. Qualitative research has identified that women mostly think about their past abortion(s) episodically or sporadically. Katrina Kimport and colleagues (2012) investigated what kinds of support women sought after abortion by interviewing and holding focus groups with counsellors from four abortion support phone-services in the United States (N=20). One of their main findings was that talk-line staff perceived women to need episodic support after abortion. That is, emotional material related to the abortion experience had been observed to emerge unexpectedly, sometimes years later and the talk line services were able to provide timely support to women (Kimport, Perrucci, & Weitz, 2012). JoAnn Trybulski (2005) identified that thoughts about a past abortion could arise intrusively and "without warning," even during mundane activities unrelated to the abortion (Trybulski, 2005, p. 568). Trybulski found that participant reports of depression, anxiety, regret and guilt were intermittent, but that they could occur many years after the abortion had taken place. She also noted that these emotional episodes prompted some participants to reflect on their abortion again, which sometimes raised issues and sometimes gave them the opportunity to develop new insights or perspectives (Trybulski, 2005).

When issues concerning a past abortion arise, women may need to access support that takes account of their ideological and social perspectives on abortion. Social influences on women's responses to abortion are well demonstrated in qualitative and sociological research conducted by Jennifer Keys (2010). Keys explored how women managed their emotional responses after having an abortion in relation to their social and ideological positioning about abortion: pro-choice, pro-life or in the middle. She found that how women managed their emotional responses after abortion and what they considered to be a "successful" response, depended on how they related to abortion debate rhetoric (Keys, 2010, p. 65). For examples, a pro-life woman may expect to feel upset and distressed after having an abortion and may have difficulty experiencing feelings of relief; whereas, a pro-choice woman may expect to feel relief and may struggle with feelings of guilt or regret. Keys identified that women in the ideological middle may have to "more actively try to resist thinking of the foetus as possessing human qualities

in order to keep themselves from feeling sad" (Keys, 2010, p. 57).

What abortion means to individual women is also influenced by social perspectives on abortion, womanhood and motherhood. Anneli Kero and Ann Lalos (2000) explored ambivalence in relation to legal abortion amongst Swedish women and their male partners one year after abortion. They found that over half of their female participants had reported feeling shameful in relation to having an abortion (Kero & Lalos, 2000). The rationale that they offered related to social influences:

This must be considered in the light of the meaning of womanhood in the current cultural context, as strongly associated with reproduction, motherhood and goodness. From this point of view, abortion becomes a denial of the essence of motherhood and therefore, in spite of the legal position, the impact of having an abortion might be difficult to integrate into the concept of womanhood. (Kero & Lalos, 2000, pp. 89-90)

Kero and Lalos also reported that over half of their female participants had experienced their abortion as a conflict of conscience. They explained that for these women, whereas social conditions may frame abortion as a necessity and a right, ethical and religious considerations may cause it to be "regarded as 'a violation of nature' and the fetus as a 'child'. Thus, abortion becomes synonymous with denying a child its life" (Kero & Lalos, 2000, p. 89). Based on their findings, Kero and Lalos concluded that ambivalence in relation to abortion is logical, given the competing frameworks that exist within the wider social context (Kero & Lalos, 2000). Indeed, Jennifer Key's observed that even pro-choice women have emotional work to do after abortion, in order to maintain their positive feelings and to deflect negative social responses (Keys, 2010).

It is unsurprising that some women experience ambiguity and contradiction in how they relate to a past abortion. Emotional support for women after abortion needs to take into account their ideological views about abortion, their life circumstances, how they feel about motherhood, subsequent important events in women's lives (such as having children or losing a wanted pregnancy through miscarriage or stillbirth), as well as social influences on their feelings and responses.

The Resourcefulness and Creativity of the Body

Since abortion takes place inside women's bodies I chose to engage with women's inner bodily responses to abortion as a powerful way to generate knowledge about healing after abortion. As this article demonstrates, a focus on a woman's bodily-felt responses to abortion can support creative and adaptive ways for her to be with a previously unsettling or discordant experience (Cornell, 2013). With reference to a woman's inner bodily sensing, this article will show that women can transmute complex and even contradictory feelings about past abortion experiences in ways that make sense to them and that help them to move forward with their lives. Attending to the bodily-felt sense of a past abortion can help women to develop life narratives (stories) that build them up and leave them feeling stronger about past abortion decisions that they have made

(Angus & Greenberg, 2011).

In order to discover how women's bodies are integral to their meaning-making about their experiences of abortion, I adopted a theoretical approach that framed women's bodies as an ever-evolving process that interacts with the world, dissolving boundaries between subject and object. The first challenge that I faced in developing this approach, was to identify how a woman's bodily knowing about her abortion experiences might be accessed and expressed through an appropriately sensitive and supportive research process. My search led me to the therapeutic work of Eugene Gendlin, a philosopher and psychologist working from within the phenomenological¹ tradition. I found that Gendlin's approach provided a way of viewing the body as a process interacting with the world; this was both refreshing and helpful, since it took into account a person's experiencing of themselves in relation to a social context.

Gendlin's view of the body is based on the assumption that bodies transact with the world and that this relationship is a dynamic one, as he explains below:

Your situation and you are not two things, as if the external things were a situation without you. Nor is your bodily sense separate from the situation and merely internal...The body-sense is the situation, inherently an interaction, not a mix of two things. (Gendlin, 1992, pp. 343-353)

In my reading of Gendlin, the practice of Focusing emerged as a skill-set integral to successful therapy. It facilitates a way of accessing new ways of perceiving and acting in the world, via attention to what is being sensed in the body. Gendlin firstly called this body-sense the "felt meaning" (Gendlin, 1962), and a couple of years later he called it "Focusing", which he stated "is the whole process which ensues when the individual attends to the direct referent of experiencing" (Gendlin, 1964, pp. 100-148). In 1967, Gendlin, as a member of Carl Roger's Psychotherapy Research Group, identified that when patients with schizophrenia attended to their "whole sense of the situation", therapeutic change occurred (Gendlin, 1967, p. 537). In 1968, Gendlin and associates found that Focusing was a key ingredient in effective psychotherapy. In a therapeutic context, a helpful alliance between therapist and client may look something like the following:

The therapist calls the client's attention to an *as yet unclear partly cognitive and situational complex* which is concretely felt by the client. The client must then be willing and able to focus his [sic] attention directly on this felt complex so that he [sic] can concretely feel and struggle with it. (Gendlin, Beebe, Cassens, Klein, & Oberlander, 1968, p. 218)

By following this "felt complex" through Focusing, the body can imply some logical next steps for a person's life.

According to Gendlin, these next steps are not born of repetition, but rather, they may be drawn from some situations that the client's body has experienced and can then elaborate upon (Gendlin, 1992). The bodily felt sense includes many potential ways of being in relation to any situation. However, the felt sense does not include *all* possible alternatives for action and whilst the next steps that may eventuate for a person may be novel, they will also somehow feel "right" to them (Cornell, 2013). Gendlin explained this forward movement as taking into account what "continues" our life and what does not (Gendlin, 1992, pp.

343-353). In this way, change that occurs through Focusing is quite specific to an individual's life situation, but it also contains great creative potential for them (Cornell, 2013).

There is an important difference between what Gendlin has identified as Focusing and the practice of simply talking and reflecting content back to a client, which does not necessarily lead to effective psychotherapeutic change. Simply talking may include both internal cognitive explanations and descriptions of external situations or events, which Gendlin identified as "externalising" and "intellectualising" (Gendlin et al., 1968). Focusing within a therapeutic context takes this a step further by drawing a client's attention to their felt sensing or felt meaning. In this mode, the therapist's task is to draw their client's attention to their own understandings by offering a "reflection of feeling" whereby "the therapist will respond to the feelings the client implied" (Gendlin et al., 1968, p. 217). Doing this assists the client to focus their attention on their felt meaning, which is associated with effective therapeutic change.

In more contemporary terms, Laury Rappaport described the felt sense as another name for our inner wisdom, which "comes through the body in relation to all of our experiences in life" (Rappaport, 2013, p. 201). Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin defined Focusing as, "a simple matter of holding a kind of open, non-judging attention to something which is directly experienced but is not yet in words." (Cornell & McGavin, 2002, p. i). Focusing as a term incorporates both attending to this naturally occurring felt sense and the processes that can be taught to help people bring their awareness there² (Cornell, 1996; Gendlin, 1981). Focusing can be applied in situations outside of therapy such as creativity and problem solving and is a useful addition for any activity intended to develop us personally or deepen our bodily awareness or knowing (Cornell, 2005; Gendlin, 1981; Gendlin et al., 1968; Rappaport, 2009). In this way, it was well-suited to a research process with therapeutic potential that is designed to explore bodily knowing.

A Research Process that Promotes Healing and Engages with the Body

My PhD research (conducted between 2012 and 2016) explored how women from different ideological positions made sense of, or generated meanings about, their abortion experiences. By adopting a holistic framework for abortion, which acknowledges the bodily and spiritual dimensions, as well as the emotional and social, my research gave participants the opportunity to develop their sense of what they valued and what supported their growth. Through the research, I discovered a variety of ways in which my research participants experienced some kind of relief from internal and socially derived emotional distress after abortion, and re-established their subjective sense of wholeness (i.e., healing). I'm sharing my research process here because my participants found it helpful and effective and I believe it translates well into a counselling or therapy context.

In Stage One of the research, I asked 23 Australian women with varied ideological positions on abortion a range of semi-structured interview questions; inviting them to revisit their abortion experiences in ways they may not have considered

previously. I provided a confidential and supportive space within which they could share intimately about their abortion experiences. The interview process also made it possible for women to identify how their life narratives about abortion had changed over time. The rapport that was generated through the face-to-face interviews may be explained by the strengths of feminist in-depth interviewing generally. These include an emphasis on a conversational style where the researcher is responsive to the cues of their participant when posing questions (Hesse-Biber, 2007) and an interpersonal context where feeling for one's participants can be conveyed (Westmarland, 2001). The deeper listening and sharing that occurred within this exchange left me with a strong sense of rapport and insight into these women's experiences.

The questions that I asked each participant are listed below. If the woman had more than one abortion, I asked the questions for each one separately.

1. Please describe the circumstances that led you to terminate this pregnancy? (Prompts: You could include any situations or circumstances that led you to have this pregnancy terminated: e.g., relational, career, financial, medical, etc).
2. What was the overall abortion experience like for you? (Prompts: How did you think and feel about it? What did it mean to you given your background, circumstances, or stage in life?)
3. What was the time after the abortion like for you? (Prompts: How did you cope? You might want to include any significant markers, turning points or insights that you are aware of in relation to this abortion. Did you create or hold a ritual or ceremony post abortion?)
4. How did your experience of abortion shape your relationships with others? (Prompts: Who did you talk to about your abortion? What kinds of messages did you receive? Who helped and who didn't help?)
5. How did having this abortion impact on your sense of yourself (or who see yourself as being)? (Prompts: Did this abortion change how you thought about yourself or your life? Were there any positive or negative outcomes for you from deciding to terminate this pregnancy? How are you in relation to this abortion now?)
6. If you are a parent, did having children either before or after your abortion impact on your experience of it? (Prompt: Has having children impacted on how you thought or felt about this abortion?)
7. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you feel is important to share about your abortion experience before we finish?

These questions worked well and served to help women tell their abortion stories in a full and complete way. Some women commented that they had new insights or made new connections after reflecting on their abortion experiences in this way.

In Stage Two of the research, eight women returned after interview to engage in an individual Focusing and Art Process that invited them to go inside themselves and sense what wanted to come and be known about their abortion experiences (Author reference). At the start of the session, once the woman was comfortably seated or lying down (her choice), I read a bodily-focused attunement:

Okay, so just taking your time and maybe if you feel to just

letting your eyes close, and adjusting your body in any way to give you more comfort ... And just beginning to let some awareness come into your body. Maybe first being aware of the outer area of your body, your arms and your hands... noticing what your hands are touching and how they feel ... And being aware also of your legs... and your feet ... Noticing what your feet are touching, and how they feel. And bringing your awareness up through your legs, your lower legs, your upper legs ... Being aware of the contact of your body on the chair ... and letting it support you. And maybe letting yourself rest into that support ... And then inviting your awareness up through your back, sensing your back ... Sensing your shoulders, and your neck, your head on your neck ... and letting movement come there if it wants to ... And being aware of your head, and your face ...

And then letting your awareness come inward, inside, into that whole inner area of your body, into the whole area that includes your throat, your chest, taking in your lungs and your heart, that solar plexus area, your stomach, and your belly. And just be there. Just let your awareness rest gently in that whole inner area. And give yourself a gentle invitation in there, like you're saying, "What wants to come and be known about my abortion experience?" And then just wait ... and when you're aware of something you might let me know.

(Attunement based on Cornell & McGavin, 2002, supplementary Inner Relationship Focusing training materials).

I then reflected their experiences back to them using Focusing language designed to deepen their inner perceptions, as they described them out loud during the session. This was immediately followed by an art process where participants were able to depict their inner experiences symbolically, visually and non-verbally. I had the art materials nearby and had introduced the participant to them prior to the session. They were able to choose from a range of options including: water paints, acrylic paints, pastels, clay, and items such as buttons, glitter, feathers, seeds and dried leaves. Afterwards they described their artwork and what it meant to them, in response to my question, "In your own words, how would you describe what you've made?" During this process, individual participants frequently reinterpreted or renegotiated the personal meaning or significance of their abortion(s). Within the research, women described and interpreted their own artwork. This distinguished the art process employed within the research from art therapy, since art therapy integrates creative expression with a psychotherapeutic framework involving assessment and intervention (Rappaport, 2009).

Combined, the interview and Focusing and Art Process generated verbal as well as visual, symbolic and non-verbal expressions of what each woman contacted, and these are presented within the three case studies outlined below.

Participant Experiences of Transmutation Through the Research Methods

Each of the case studies presented below includes: (1) a retelling of the woman's abortion experiences and responses described during interview (the context); and, (2) examples of the bodily felt senses that came up in relation to their abortion

experiences, their art work and their interpretation of it.

Melanie Interview context

At the time of interview, Melanie was aged between 35 and 39 years and her only abortion had taken place around 20 years earlier at 8 weeks or less of gestation, when she was aged between 15 and 19 years. She has given birth to three children since her abortion.

For Melanie, having an abortion was "kind of the lowest point I could get to without, you know, dying". Melanie described the difficult social, mental and physical circumstances that led to her needing to have an abortion as a teenager. When she fell pregnant, she was estranged from her family and was suffering with both high anxiety and poor health. She said that she didn't feel as though she could survive a pregnancy, let alone care for a baby. She also identified that because she had been brought up Catholic and her mother was "really anti-abortion," she had believed that it was "absolutely the wrong thing to do". Melanie's ideological positioning on abortion was largely pro-life.

Immediately after the abortion Melanie described feeling numb and said she just got on with things and tried not to think about it. However, she also said that she noticed that she was feeling very angry towards pregnant women that she encountered, as well as with herself, for being so disconnected from her body and for not being able to care for a child. She said that as a result she had realised that having a child was something that she really wanted. About eighteen months later, Melanie conceived again, and even though she knew she was going to be on her own with the child, she felt that she could cope this time. She reported feeling guilty that she hadn't been able to keep the previous pregnancy. When I asked her how the abortion had impacted on her sense of self, she responded:

At the time, like I said, it was terrible. My sense of self, I just felt like I was a terrible person, that I could have done this, or got to the point where I felt like I had no option, so at the time it was not good. But now that you know, it's been a long time, I'm really okay with who I am and I don't feel guilty anymore and you know, it happened and I'm not necessarily glad it happened but it definitely prompted change.

Melanie's abortion prompted her to take better care of herself so that she could have children in the future. Despite her statement that she was now okay with the abortion, her experiences in the Focusing and Art Process showed that there were still some residual feelings there that needed to be attended to.

Focusing and Art session

Melanie: I've got sort of no words actually for what's coming, but all I can see is like a yellow, it's like a yellow form (Melanie laughed) like a bright yellow form just sitting sort of in my uterus really.

Miriam: Yeah, you're sensing something like a bright yellow form that's centred in your uterus area.

Melanie: Hmm. It feels like, it doesn't feel bad (Melanie laughed) it feels quite positive and just, it doesn't feel judgemental, I don't feel judged if that makes sense ... which is funny because it's not what I thought I would feel.

Miriam: Yeah, and you're sensing something in that area there that's quite positive...

Melanie: Yeah, it is positive. It's just like a golden light.

Miriam: Yeah, it's like a golden light. Maybe you could say to that golden light, "Yes I know you're there."

Melanie: I'm saying it, I'm just saying it.

Miriam: Yeah, and then see what comes.

Melanie: [Long pause]. It's sort of like a breeze, or I can't explain it.

Miriam: Hmm. You're sensing something like a breeze there.

Melanie: It's kind of leaving (tears came).

Miriam: And there's a sense of leaving with that breeze.

Melanie: And it makes me sad.

Miriam: Hmm, something about that breeze leaving brings a feeling of sadness. And maybe just see if it would be okay to be with that. [Long pause].

Miriam: And if it feels right, you might invite it to let you know what gets it so sad.

Melanie: I don't know if this is me or (Melanie laughed), or what I'm feeling, just that it wasn't the right time.

Miriam: So you're hearing it say something like, "It wasn't the right time."

Melanie: I just feel like it wanted to be acknowledged.

Melanie went on to sense a "cooler distant feeling" vertically up her diaphragm area, with a "white sort of blue" colour associated with it. When she explored that felt sense further, she said that she felt cold all over her body.

Melanie: I think that coldness is of, like kind of what I did afterwards? Or I just put it up to get through really. Um, I think that, I know that's what it is. So that's why there's that feeling of coldness with it as well, it's like detachment or cutting something off. And I know that I'm not the same person that I was from that (tears came).

Miriam: So you're noticing a connection between the coldness that you're sensing and how you dealt with things afterwards and that kind of detachment that was there.

Melanie: Definitely. That's how I just carried on.

Melanie reported feeling better once she had acknowledged this.

Melanie: I don't think I realised that I was still sort of carrying it around with me as much as I was, I think I thought I'd let go of it a long time ago, but I don't think I had (Melanie laughed nervously)... (Tearfully) I don't think it really wanted me to feel so [guilty], well there was always guilt you know, with my other kids, so other pregnancies, it's always in your mind that there was someone else so you didn't have that baby, so you do, well I have always felt guilty, even though it got less over the years, it's always there. And like I said, I think it changed who I was a little bit emotionally, so I don't know, maybe that's it (Melanie laughed nervously and sighed a couple of times).

Next, Melanie sensed something heavy and difficult to be with in the middle of her chest, which she associated with the guilt. I suggested that if it felt right, she could invite an image, a symbol or a word that connects with that felt sense to come and be known.

Melanie: (Pause) Well it's like one of those big black cockies [cockatoos] (Melanie laughed nervously) with the white, you know, thing around the back of its neck, flying away from me into like a sun, but not a bright sun, like a setting sun. That's the image that came to me.

Miriam: Wow. So, it's showing you an image of one of those black cockies with the white crest, flying away from you, into something like a setting sun. (Pause while Melanie cried and sighed). Is there more?

Melanie: No, it's just sad because it's gone, that's all.

Miriam: You're sensing some real sadness.

Melanie: Yeah, it's just gone.

Miriam: There's sadness there that it's gone.

Melanie: Yeah. And from the image I feel like it's been gone for a long, long, long, long time ... And maybe that's what it was trying to show me (Melanie laughed nervously and sighed).

Miriam: Hmm, there's some recognition there that maybe that's what it was trying to show you. And maybe just take that inside and check that that feels okay or right to you.

Melanie: It does, because the sadness I'm feeling is for me (Melanie laughed nervously) if that makes sense. It's not, from that, it's like the baby or the spirit is okay. There's nothing, there's no sadness coming from it, if that makes sense, it's coming from, the sadness is all me (Melanie laughed nervously), but I know that that side of it is okay.

Melanie's experiences in the session helped her to make a distinction between her guilt and sadness and her sense of the 'baby or the spirit', which felt okay to her. Melanie reported feeling a lot lighter at this stage of the session and moved onto working with the art materials.



Melanie, (2013). Clay Nest. Clay decorated with seed-pods, bark, wood-nuts and feathers, 15cm x 10cm. Photographer: XX. Copyright: XX.

After Melanie had made her clay nest, I asked her what she had made.

Melanie: I think it's a clay nest (Melanie laughed) ... all I could think of was I wanted something really earthy and cosy and safe and soft inside, but sort of protected on the outside, so these (Melanie pointed to the feathers) just seem really strong

to me, so there's a real sort of strong protection around it, but it just needed something strong and warm and safe and even the colours, just earthy and nothing bright, nothing artificial ... And when I first sat down I sort of wanted to make a sort of little clay baby really, to put in it, but that just felt completely wrong once I started doing it, the thought of actually putting anything in there just didn't, I couldn't, just nup.

But I do think when I was making it, I was sort of feeling like the baby had deserved something safe and warm (tears came), and protected, but I couldn't do that.

Miriam: And how do you feel as you look at it now?

Melanie: Um, good ... it felt nice to make it ... it felt nice to give it something, something nice ... I think it deserved it ... through the whole process ... what I've just given it is all the reasons that I didn't have it, I didn't go through with the pregnancy, because I just couldn't give it this and I knew that (big sigh). Even though I would have liked to ... I couldn't give it somewhere safe and warm and cosy and protected to live or to grow up in, or be born into.

Making the clay nest for the baby or spirit³ allowed Melanie to enact what she hadn't been able to give the baby at the time of the abortion. This was the "logical step" that was within her body that had not had any expression. There was a sense of completion once the nest was made and Melanie had acknowledged the reality of it being an empty nest.

Erin Interview context

Erin was in her early thirties when the interview took place, and her only abortion had occurred between two and three years previously, between 11-12 weeks of gestation. She has had a child since the research took place.

Erin explained during interview that she didn't come from an anti-abortion background, but her mother had experienced an abortion before her birth and had always regretted it. Erin reported that her father had told her she would also regret it if she had an abortion.

Erin said that after finding that she was pregnant, she became aware of her partner's possessiveness about having a baby and the full extent of his mental health issues. She was worried that continuing with the pregnancy would tie her to this man for a lifetime, which she did not feel that she could cope with:

I kept on going, "This can work, this can work", ... but with me and [name], every time he was there or every time I thought about him, it was just like it wasn't working, it wasn't working and he was very strong in saying that he was going to be wherever his child was going to be. ... He also put a lot of pressure on me because he said that it was his last chance to have child and he had a lot of really heavy depression around that.

Erin also explained that she sought ongoing counselling and support from a reproductive health service to help her decide what to do and to support her after the abortion. She said that she had to work hard to reconcile herself with ending the pregnancy, because she had realised through becoming pregnant that she really wanted to have children and be a mother. She also explained that she had believed that pregnancy represented a child choosing to come into the world and that by ending it she was acting against life. Erin's ideological positioning on abortion was in the middle since she wasn't anti-abortion, but she did perceive abortion to be "acting against a life".

On the other hand, she also recognised her decision to end the pregnancy was the first time that she had ever said "o" to something, rather than feeling as though her choices were influenced by the opinions of others or were made by just "going with the flow". She deliberated on her decision up to 12 weeks of gestation when she had the spiritual experience of feeling that Jesus had come and taken the child and she felt as if it had already gone, and that it didn't seem right to continue the pregnancy after that.

In relation to having had the abortion, Erin said:

I don't know if I can say that I feel like I made the right decision, but I feel like I did the only thing that I could do ... I actually feel like I'd be a much better mother now than I ever, ever could be maybe, even if it was only two years ago ... that level of counselling and stuff has been quite profound in my life and I feel like I've got a bit more will actually in my life ... I feel like I don't know if I'll get the chance to have a child, but I feel like I'd really, really love to be a mother.

Erin's comments convey some ambivalence around the decision to have the abortion, even though she felt that it was the only thing that she could have done under the circumstances.

Focusing and Art session

As soon as I had led her through the attunement at the beginning of the session Erin contacted some positive and supportive spiritual presences of differing cultural origins, including an Indigenous woman in her forties who smiled at her and the presence of both Jesus and Mother Mary. Soon after being kept company by these spiritual supports, Erin sensed two quite different bodily sensations in her stomach area. My Inner Relationship Focusing training suggests that when two parts are there, it is most helpful to offer the Focuser the option of being with both or of noticing which one wants their attention more (Cornell & McGavin, 2002).

Erin: (Pause). On some level, it kind of feels quite empty inside, and then I started feeling like this weight on my, it kind of a bit feels like a baby curled up and laying on top of my stomach.

Miriam: Yeah, you're sensing something inside that feels quite empty and you're also sensing like a presence of a baby curled up on your front, on the outside, and both are there. And maybe just sense whether you'd like to be with both or whether one or the other would like your attention more.

Erin: My attention's more strongly on the baby or the sensation of the baby.

Miriam: Yeah, so maybe just see if it would be okay to be with that for a while.

Erin: [Long pause]

Miriam: And if it feels okay to, maybe you could let me know what you're aware of.

Erin: I think my mind's going in and out of ... seeing this baby and having a look at its feet or its legs or just feeling how nice it feels to offer something so much safety or love. And I keep seeing the colour yellow as well, there's a lot of yellow. And I just get the sense that it's going to be okay ... and the yellow maybe helps to create space or hope or possibility or okay-ness or other things and feeling alright about where I am at with my pathway.

Erin soon moved onto working with the art materials.



Erin, (2014), Yellow Joy. Chalk pastel on paper, 21 cm x 29.5 cm. Photographer: XX. Copyright: XX

After she had completed making her art work, I invited Erin to describe it to me.

Erin: I think I'm maybe just realising that I haven't been allowing joy or something...

Miriam: Yeah, so you're sensing a lot of joy there that maybe wants more expression.

Erin: Yeah. Yeah, I think I've just been getting weighed down by all the heavy bits. It's kind of like, I was thinking about like there's no pattern or thing that my mind can get trapped into or identify with, it's just yellow, it's just all yellow. There's something just so simple and easy about that.

Miriam: Hmm, so what are you sensing in your body as you look at this piece now?

Erin: Hmm, just maybe insight into the process ... some kind of awareness that life is to be treasured and experience is to be treasured and it doesn't need to be weighed down by all these fears or analytical thoughts or patterns into thinking that this is going to be this thing or whatever, it is what it is and its miraculous and its marvellous.

Miriam: So, it's letting you know that life is to be treasured and it's miraculous and marvellous and it doesn't need to be weighed down.

Erin: Yeah, yeah, I think maybe I had too much emphasis on just all the painful parts of it. There is joy in it all.

Erin's session gave her a clear sense of needing to make more room for acceptance, joy and aliveness in her experience of life (it is what it is), as well as feeling that things would be okay. She also indicated that the simplicity of the yellow counteracted her mind's tendency to get caught up in fear and analysis. I kept in contact with Erin after the research process was completed, and am aware that yellow continued to be a significant symbol for her. There was a patch of yellow paint in the entrance of the house that Erin moved into, she continued to draw yellow rectangles and pin them up around her home, and she told me that she "felt like yellow" when her new partner showered her with the yellow blossom of a tree that she was standing under. She has since had a child with him.

Nicola

At the time of interview, Nicola was aged 45 to 54 years and her only abortion had taken place around ten years earlier, when she was aged between 35 and 39 years, at 8 weeks or less

of gestation.

The abortion took place on medical grounds as a result of an early scan (after some spot bleeding) that suggested that she had a "blighted ovum" and that the embryo was not growing sufficiently.⁴ After the abortion (Dilation and curettage), Nicola reported crying for "two weeks solid". She said that she felt, "super, super sad". Nicola explained that she wasn't "anti-abortion in any way ... it wouldn't have bothered me either if that was my choice". She said that the sadness was the disappointment of not having a pregnancy and a baby at the end of it. However, she also said that the experience gave her great clarity that she really wanted a child and she went straight back to ovulation tracking to help with re-conceiving.

When Nicola conceived again three months later and again had some spot bleeding, she was sent to the same radiographer for a scan at the same stage of gestation. He again diagnosed a blighted ovum. However, Nicola ignored the advice to have the pregnancy terminated:

... the second time I did not go into trauma and grief or anything else, I got strong and just went, "I'm not willing to accept your assessment, I want someone else", so yeah, and I didn't fall apart, you know, turn into a blubbering heap and do nothing else for three weeks, I just went, "No."

Nicola engaged a gynaecologist and got a second opinion. She went on to deliver a healthy child. In retrospect, she concluded:

Yeah, so I actually think that I quite possibly terminated a perfectly healthy child ... Based on appalling medical advice, and my own ignorance. And my own, because I immediately went into, I suppose shock and grief when I was told, and I wasn't capable then of, you know, thinking through logical steps ... all the advice I had gotten was all black and white. There was no grey discussion and that I think is their failing. It was all about, "Oh no, blighted ovum, boof, get rid of it!" ... It was full on. It was a bit rude really.

Nicola compared the two pregnancies and concluded that she "had the right kid" since the earlier pregnancy had been "high energy", which she associated with having a girl because of the different hormones associated. However, she also commented, "I don't know why, but when they told me I was having a boy, I was like, 'Oh damn, I wanted a girl'." (Nicola laughed).

Nicola concluded that the abortion was part of the journey towards getting her son, although as she discussed it, she acknowledged that the first pregnancy (baby) had been overlooked:

I don't see it as an abortion in isolation or, I suppose in some ways that's not fair, because ... I haven't thought about the first child in its own right. So, I don't think I've denied it an identity necessarily but when I think about it it's all part of the journey toward getting or having my son [name]. So maybe that's actually ... a little bit unfair and that my first baby in my mind hasn't really had its own identity.

There was a sense of something being unfinished in Nicola's observation that the ending of the first pregnancy blended in with her decision to conceive and have another child.

Focusing and Art session

At the start of her session, Nicola sensed some tension in her hands, which she identified as feeling "a little bit angry". She then acknowledged that her belly felt "all round and empty", there was some pressure in her solar plexus, which she associated with

“having no control” and a tightness in her throat which led her to saying, “There’s no voice.” She summed all of this up by stating, “It’s like I didn’t matter, my baby didn’t matter. They didn’t take the time to explore, to even think about it.”

Miriam: And where does that connect in your body now?

Nicola: My hands.

Miriam: And maybe just keep your hands company for a while and see how you would describe the sensations in your hands.

Nicola: It’s like they’re gnarled.

Miriam: Yeah, you’re sensing something really gnarled in your hands there. And maybe take that word “gnarled” back to your hands and check that that gets it.

Nicola: Hmm, it’s like they’re old and withered but they’re still angry (Nicola chuckled).

Miriam: Yeah, you’re sensing that they feel old and withered, but they’re still angry.

Nicola: Hmm. They don’t want to let it go.

Miriam: Yeah, and you’re sensing that they don’t want to let it go. And maybe, if it feels right, maybe you could take some time to sense how it feels from its point of view.

Nicola: Abandoned. Forgotten. Put to the side.

Miriam: Yeah, you’re really sensing that it feels abandoned, and forgotten, and put to the side. And maybe you could let it know that you really hear that.

Nicola: Hmm. Yeah, I really hear that, I hear that lack of importance.

Miriam: (Pause). And if it feels right, you might take some time to sense if there might be more that it wants you to know.

Nicola: (Pause). Hmm, there was joy (Nicola smiled).

Miriam: Yeah, it’s letting you know that there was joy.

Nicola: And my body remembers.

Miriam: Yeah, and you’re really noticing that your body remembers that. And maybe just take some time to really soak that up. Take it in. And if you feel to you could put a hand gently there, wherever it is that you’re sensing that joy.

Nicola: (Nicola placed one hand on her belly area and rubbed it gently, and then placed the other hand on her heart area). Hmm.

Miriam: And if it feels right, maybe you could invite a symbol or an image or a word or something that connects to that joy there for you to come.

Nicola: It’s the pretty ribbons and the glittery stuff, all the girly stuff (Nicola chuckled). I know what I want to make.

During the session, Nicola acknowledged that she was still angry and didn’t want to let go. However, once she had been with that and acknowledged it fully, what emerged was a sense of the joy of the pregnancy that had been and her sense of the potential life that ended with the abortion. Since it had been unacknowledged in the way that her pregnancy ended and she went on to re-conceive so quickly, she was able to do so through the art work that she went on to make.



Nicola, (2013), Serendipity. Clay decorated with shells, wool, glitter, and buttons, 17cm x 17cm. Photographer: XX. Copyright: XX.

After she had finished making her art work, I invited Nicola to describe it.

Nicola: I hadn’t recalled there being any joy associated with it, with my baby at all. So yeah, it went from when we first started out, all I had was an empty shell and there was nothing in me and that’s all I was going to build, until we were talking and we got to the joy bit and I thought, “Wow, yeah there was joy”. And I’ve always been convinced that my baby was a girl, but like who would know, because it’s not like I was important enough to be told what kind of child I had or anything else ... And my child had no identity and no nothing, not even a gender, I think that’s outrageous. But I was convinced that it was a girl so there’s all pretty treasures in the bottom that my little girl would have loved ... it’s like a little treasure chest in there. Just like she was.

Miriam: And how is that connecting with your body now?

Nicola: My body is satisfied now.

The session gave Nicola’s body the opportunity to complete something that hadn’t been expressed for her to feel satisfied that her first baby had been fully acknowledged.

Limitations on Accessing Bodily Felt Wisdom

Two of the eight participants who completed this research process, Donna and Kristie, found it difficult to be with their bodily felt senses. One stopped the process during the attunement and preferred to sit and chat about her abortion whilst she was creating with the art materials. This woman had experienced a serious sexual assault and preferred not to focus inside her body. Her art work expressed her perspective about unwanted pregnancy and abortion, but without direct reference to her bodily felt senses. The second woman did the attunement and experienced some very strong sensations of having the room spin and feeling like she was “drunk” and might fall off her chair. She persisted with following her felt senses despite the offer of ending the session, and encountered a guardian/protector figure within her psyche that did not want her to go into the “boxes” that

she had stored in the “attic”. She drew the attic and the boxes with one opened. This box had light and two butterflies emerging from inside it, which represented her living children. Longer term counselling or therapy may have helped both women to build a sense of inner safety, but this was beyond the bounds of the research and a one-off Focusing and Art Process.

The Benefits of a Bodily Approach to Women’s Experiences of Abortion

Melanie, Erin and Nicola each reported distress or ambivalence about a past abortion during interview, but made a positive shift during the Focusing and Art Process. This occurred for two other research participants, Charmaine and Reilly, and their sessions are reported elsewhere (Author reference). Another woman, Renée, also had a full Focusing and Art session, but hadn’t experienced distress about having an abortion. Her session reflected her positive beliefs about the meaning of abortion in the context of universal cycles of life, death and regeneration (Author reference).

The discussion that follows elucidates the benefits of the Focusing and Art Process in supporting client-directed healing or relief from experiences of emotional distress after having an abortion, even years afterwards.

Moving through emotions from the past, in the present

During interview, Melanie, Erin and Nicola each described a mixture of difficult emotions about having had an abortion, including: sadness, shock, grief, anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, ambivalence, and numbness. Often these emotions were related in the past tense, such as in Nicolas’s description of feeling shock and grief when she was told that she needed to abort her pregnancy on medical grounds. These emotions weren’t always apparent in the present though.

Having interviews followed by a separate Focusing and Art Process made it possible to identify that a participant could report feeling okay about her abortion now, during interview (for example, Melanie), and yet have residual feelings of sadness and guilt arise during the Focusing and Art Process. As identified earlier in this article, women’s access to their feelings about a past abortion can be episodic. Often, they are tucked away outside of consciousness; especially since abortion is not easy to discuss and the associated feelings can be difficult to be with. Also, in our mind-over-matter society, the mental reality of our stories, thoughts and beliefs can take precedence over our bodily lived experiences; especially when emotions such as shame and guilt arise that conflict with how we’d rather be experiencing ourselves.

The Focusing process gave participants a unique and engaging way of being with feelings related to a past abortion experience in the present. By attending to the body and inviting “what wants to come and be known”, the feelings emerged as felt senses in the body, which could be described in a range of ways: (a) as physical sensations (e.g., feeling cold or heavy); (b) by association (e.g., sadness being associated with a bird flying off into a sunset); (c) through a representation (e.g., gnarled hands

representing anger that’s been held onto); or, (d) by naming the emotion that the feelings in the body imply (e.g., naming the heaviness and discomfort in the chest as guilt). Participants’ feelings, which were sensed within their bodies during the session, often evoked related life experiences that they had already had. It was common for nature, people and objects to become part of the sessions, whether they were present in the moment (e.g., a yellow shawl, shadows), remembered (a bird flying into a sunset, exploring a baby’s feet), or felt-imagined (depicting the energy of a lost child). These phenomena interacted and combined within the felt sense, and were expressed in words, symbols and metaphors that were resonant with layers of personal meaning and significance. As the women Focused on what was unfolding within them (with a non-judgmental and compassionate kind of attending), they stayed silent or described their inner experiences aloud; they also shed tears, laughed, sighed and moved their bodies around as they released emotions that had been unacknowledged, held onto, or suppressed for some time.

Giving participants the opportunity to engage with art materials after their Focusing session allowed them to depict their inner experiences symbolically, visually and non-verbally. Art provided another opening for participants to be with their felt senses, follow them, and to represent them in a tactile and visual way. The art process provided comfort and holding as emotions were expressed whilst working with the media: clay could be pummelled, massaged and shaped; paints could be dabbed, flicked or swept onto the page; chalk pastels could be pressed firmly for bold lines or rubbed lightly for shading, etc. The women expressed care and attention to their felt senses as they worked and literally brought things to life with the art materials. Their inner experiences became manifest through creations that could be seen, touched and felt into as the women described what they had made.

Accessing growth and positive insights in relation to experiences of loss or ending

The Focusing and Art Process allowed each woman to contact positive experiences that had been overlooked or submerged alongside their difficult emotional responses to having an abortion. Melanie, Erin and Nicola each had positive associations arise naturally within their sessions. For Melanie, it was reassurance that the baby or spirit was okay and the insight that the sadness was for herself and the care that she’d been unable to express at the time. For Erin it was allowing herself to feel joy and optimism about her pathway in life; savouring the positive experiences and acknowledging what is, rather than over-analysing and getting weighed down with the negatives. For Nicola it was allowing herself to feel the joy of the pregnancy and being able to acknowledge the identity of what she had sensed her girl-baby to have been.

Within the Focusing framework, when what is suggested or implied by the felt sense happens, it is called “ ‘carrying forward’”, and is correlated with immediate physiological changes such as relief and deeper breath, and affect and behaviour changes” (Cornell 2013, p. 25). The enacting of the felt sense takes life forward in a way that makes sense and is enriching for the Focuser, and results “in a ‘felt shift’, or change” (Rappaport

2009, p. 99). For all three of these participants, being able to represent the felt sense with art also enabled them to express the carrying forwardness (Rappaport, 2009), which brought a sense of completeness or satisfaction (Cornell, 2013). Because each woman took their art work home, they also had a tangible reminder of the felt shift that had taken place in relation to their abortion experiences: "The art serves as a visual reminder, affirming movement in the direction of growth and healing" (Rappaport 2009, p. 100). Each woman was able to bring life to a more accepting, compassionate and optimistic perspective on their abortion experiences.

Focusing through the body generates spiritual connection and meaning

The Focusing and Art Process helped to underscore that healing after abortion involves being in a kindly and accepting relationship with oneself and with one's bodily senses. Being present to themselves in this generous and attentive way helped Melanie, Erin and Nicola to identify what was missing for them, to express it, and to re-establish a subjective sense of self-understanding and wholeness in relation to a past abortion that had been challenging for them. It is also noteworthy that each connected in a spiritual way during their Focusing and Art session, and that this sense of spirituality emanated from their bodily living, and runs counter to a traditional split between the body and spirit (Todres, 2007).

A "universal" approach to measuring spirituality, which includes both religious and non-religious orientations, defines spirituality as "one's striving for and experience of connection with the essence of life" (de Jager Meezenbroek, Garssen, van den Berg, Van Dierendonck, et al., 2012, p. 142). According to Eltica de Jager Meezenbroek and colleagues, spirituality includes three main dimensions: "connectedness with oneself, connectedness with others and nature, and connectedness with the transcendent" (de Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2012, p. 142). All three of these dimensions are present within the 'embodied enquiry perspective', which Les Todres based on Gendlin's work and his Focusing process. For Todres, spirituality integrates the personal, natural and the transpersonal, since:

Spirituality is a dimension that is felt as the quality of one's widest and deepest context. This deepest felt context reflects both inner and relational contexts because experiencing is not just 'inside one's skin'. But neither does it exclude the intimate 'ownness' of one's sense of interior. So even though such an openness 'goes far and wide' and responds to callings beyond the 'self' the direction of spirituality is, paradoxically, the direction of the lived body; spirituality is experienced through the body, rather than without the body...So, a spirituality informed by embodied enquiry is interested in an incarnate spirituality and the ways in which one's broadest contexts can be embodied and embraced in living a human life (Todres, pp. 184-185).

Thus, for Todres, the lived body is the opening to spirituality. For the three women whose Focusing and Art Process experiences are presented here, their spiritual sense of the "spirit" of the "baby", of their life's path, of the spiritual supports that were present in the session, of what their life would be like if they held onto the anger or the emotional detachment, and of

what connecting with positivity or joy opened up for them, was accessed through their bodily senses. Their bodily felt senses helped them to connect more deeply with themselves, others, nature, and the transcendent.

Having an abortion involves making a morally contested and existential decision, and acting on that decision with finality. Each of the women whose abortion experiences are represented here had a different ideological stance on abortion (Melissa came from a pro-life background, Erin was in the middle, and Nicola was pro-choice), and yet each woman sensed broader, unseen aspects that informed their insights, understandings and their wisdom in relation to those challenging circumstances. These broader experiences made sense to each woman, based on what she felt and intuited within her body. They provided opportunities for connection and support of varying kinds, they reaffirmed values, and they provided reassurance.

In Summary

Women's emotional responses to abortion are complex, varied and multi-layered. Beliefs, social attitudes and the circumstances in which the abortion took place can impact upon a woman's emotional responses. Difficult feelings in relation to an abortion can emerge episodically and without notice, even years later. Inviting women to connect with their bodily-felt experiences of abortion facilitates their access to a resourcefulness and a positivity that tends to be obscured through verbal accounts alone. By adopting a broader and bodily-focused framework, within which multiple dimensions of life can interact creatively and dynamically, women have the space and the opportunity to discover what gives them a sense of completion, and supports their lives moving forward. They encounter their own unique sense of aliveness and what it means to be whole.

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Brief Bio

Miriam Rose Brooker is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Edith Cowan University (Perth, Western Australia). Her PhD thesis entitled, *Lilith's daughters: Women's experiences of healing after abortion* was awarded the Edith Cowan University Magdalena Prize for Feminist Research in 2016. Miriam's thesis drew on feminist body scholarship, phenomenology, and art-based research practices to generate an innovative methodology designed to sensitively elicit embodied stories of the abortion experience and its aftermath, and the visual, symbolic and non-verbal expressions that accompanied them.

Footnotes

¹The study of the development of human consciousness and self-awareness ..." (Merriam-Webster.com, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/phenomenology>).

²I undertook Focusing training by telephone with Ann Weiser Cornell, who lives in the United States.

³I am using the language of the participant here to honour her perceptions.

⁴Nicola's GP sent her to a fertility clinic to have these early scans, due to her own relationship with the service.