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INTUITION RESEARCH: An investigation of the effects of intuitive development on women's health and spiritual wellbeing

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Where are the new doctors of the soul? Consciousness is the last and latest development of the organic and is consequently the most unfinished and least powerful of these developments. Every extension of knowledge arises from making conscious the unconscious. The great basic activity is unconscious. For it is narrow, this room of human of consciousness.

- Nietzsche

Abstract

Introduction: This effectiveness study, in the category of CAM health education, is based on the premise that intuition, health and spiritual wellbeing are interrelated; a change in one affects change in the others. Intuition as a poorly understood function of the mind and body has limited empirical research or application in the health domain. As a source for spiritual awareness, intuition continues to have limited recognition as a factor critical to healing. Nursing research identifies intuition as a valid form of knowledge. The purpose of this study is to advance understanding that intuition is a practical and reliable resource for health and is a pathway to spiritual awareness. Because women are twice as likely as men to experience depression, there is, in addition, an emphasis on advancing a transpersonal energetic understanding of depression and other factors specifically impeding women's intuitive receptivity. The research hypothesis, that intuition is a useful, practical underdeveloped skill and underutilized psychological function, informed the study design. With regular practice, it was postulated that latent intuitive skill would improve in 12 weeks as would the ability to interpret sensory input and feeling cues. As intuitive development naturally fosters self-awareness, trust in personal intuition and subsequent perceptual changes as the result of intuitive insights were anticipated outcomes. It was further postulated that intuitively perceived insights would positively affect depression, self-actualization and spiritual well-being scores on objective measures.

Methods: The principal researcher, a holistic psychotherapist, designed and facilitated six two-hour intuitive development classes. Each class included two guided visualizations. Sample size was limited to 70 women self-selected in response to a community wide request for volunteers who met the inclusion criteria. Half are assigned randomly to the intervention group based on their availability to attend the six classes; a control group was offered the classes five months later. Inclusion criteria included agreement to sign an Informed Consent, complete three sets of outcome measures over 12 weeks, maintain an Intuition Journal and attend the classes. The quantitative results of the study were measured using the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II®), Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) and Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB). Direct interview, researcher observation and personal journals provided the qualitative findings.

Results: A time series analysis using ANOVA for repeated measures indicated a significant change occurred in one aspect of self-actualization (increase in inner directed [$F(2, 49) = 3.182, p = .051 < .05$; decrease in other-directed ($F(2, 49) = 3.627, p = .033 < .05$); a comparison of composite scores between condition groups on the POI was robust and meaningful. Depression scores on the BDI showed significant improvement in the experimental group in 12 weeks. Over 65% of the women reported more reliable connection with intuition; more than 50% took action on their intuitive insights in the course of their personal lives.

Conclusions: As women in the study made a conscious shift inward and learned to discern what intuition is and what it is not, preoccupation with external influences began to have less authority over their decision-making as did over-identification with the mind. The effect of these changes led to greater attention to habits of living and environmental influences that were no longer beneficial to their health and well-being. Initial findings suggest this type of CAM health education has strong potential to affect women's health outcomes, particularly with depression. The practical application of intuition in day-to-day life, particularly in the health domain has merit. Instead of ignoring symptoms, women may be more apt to notice them sooner and take action. Intuitive development values and nurtures body and sensory awareness offering balance within a culture that has become over identified with the mind.

Keywords: Intuition, women's health, depression, spiritual well-being, CAM (complementary and alternative medicine)

Introduction

Intuition, the capacity to intuit or sense subtle impressions, is an efficient and reliable form of knowledge. A primary reason intuition has been overlooked (and misunderstood) can in part be explained by lack of awareness of a somatically integrated intelligence into living modern life, an intelligence whose engagement in the past may have happened best in the natural world (Sheridan, 1997). As a function of the human psyche, intuition can be activated on more than one dimension (Assagioli, 1965); recent research suggests intuition is experienced somatically as a system-wide process (McCraty et al, 2004). The purpose of activating intuition is to enhance growth and development as it naturally supports holistic cognition, wise minded decision-making and an approach to reality that is expanded and well grounded (Assagioli, 1965).

Example from my clinical practice:

A 40-year old married mother of two, seeking assistance for symptoms of anxiety, fatigue and intermittent ovarian pain was a devoted caregiver to others while often overlooking her own needs. She found herself on a trajectory in life that lacked meaning and purpose "mainly because I was not aware of options other than what I thought was expected of me." Her family's strong work ethic also found her feeling exceptionally guilty if she was not consistently busy and productive. As physical symptoms persisted, her outlook, limited by worry and strain, was cut off from a more expansive perspective and alternative solutions. After brief exposure to intuitive development concepts and exercises, she came to recognize *on her own* via intuitively perceived insights that her life had become out of balance – all work with little play - chronically fueled by guilt about taking time to rest and relax. Solutions came forth *spontaneously*. A deep longing to design and create an herbal garden emerged and took shape during a guided visualization. She saw and felt herself taking regular naps and in one session, indicated that she had come to realize her ovarian pain was a messenger. After taking action on these and other intuitively perceived insights, ovarian pain and other symptoms resolved over time as she listened more attentively to inner guidance. This was a significant step for her to take as often some of her decisions were in conflict with what others around her expected.

Intuitive awareness naturally supports a synthesis of the external structure of reality with the inner world of the individual. By design, right and left hemispheric processing in the brain sets up a holistic

integration of objective and subjective information. Right brain intuitive function, typically experienced in the body as a sensation (e.g., tightness in the chest, constriction in the throat) or a feeling cue, is felt or sensed within. Left brain intuitive function generally arrives as a gestalt or flash of ideas in the form of thoughts, words or symbols; in its purest form, intuition is a download of information that promotes clarity, objectivity and insight (Assagioli, 1965). Schultz (2005), a neuroscientist, argues left brain dominance drowns out intuition, “the left brain frontal lobe is a censor and can dim or block intuition.” Without reliable input from right brain emotions and intuitions, a cascade of biochemical and hormonal events can ultimately trigger physical and emotional problems including depression. Excessive intuition can also increase this tendency.

An important dimension to intuition is connection to a spiritual level of awareness; a functional integration of spirit into the human body that integrative holistic professionals understand is beneficial to the creation of health. This level of awareness, when consciously integrated with the emotional, mental and physical aspects of the individual into a harmonious whole, is at the core of genuine healing. Intuitive wisdom, a specific type of knowledge, wells up from the ground of wholeness that exists in all individuals. Intuition is both innate and immanent, and when there are no blocks, is more easily experienced as an instinct – as in a gut feeling or hunch. Radin and Schlitz (2005) demonstrated that relationships generally reported between gut feelings and intuitive hunches share a common, though poorly understood, perceptive origin. Their findings suggest a “belly brain” is more perceptive than previously suspected.

As a skill, intuitive awareness precedes the acquisition of intuitive knowledge. As a practice, intuitive awareness is achieved from one or more sources: sensory awareness, from the body in the form of physical sensations, via the mind in the form of flashes of ideas and solutions and through the spirit in the form of transcendent connection, such as that often experienced in nature.

Intuition as natural skill

When women do not understand how to reliably access intuition or fail to discern subtle intuitive impressions for what they are, they may be at greater risk for experiencing health issues. A primary objective of this study was to assist women to recognize their own unique experience of intuition by direct practice and observation over a 12-week period. A secondary objective was to advance a transpersonal energetic understanding of depression in women, since the experience of depression inhibits (and in some extreme cases may block altogether) intuitive receptivity.

The decision to focus solely on women’s health and intuition was in part based on past research in the social sciences (Miller, 1976; Gilligan, 1982). Intuition is a natural skill available to everyone. The effects of contemporary living appear to be a prime suspect unique to women’s disconnection from awareness of intuitive signals. It is widely accepted in the literature the effects of emotional and physical trauma impact women’s ability to realistically assess their self-worth. Caroline Myss (1996) and others suggest a strong link exists between self-esteem and the ability to engage and trust intuitive guidance. Historically, intuition has suffered due to its association as a womanly skill, remnants of which live on in a postmodern world where logic and reasoning are predominant. In conventional scientific research, purists tend to favor logic, rational thinking and linear reasoning in their analysis and comprehension of objective reality. This bias perpetuates fragmentation that may ignore or obscure the whole. In biomedicine and psychiatry, this has contributed to a fragmented comprehension of how health and mental health is created and illness is interpreted and treated.

With few exceptions, past research on intuition has for the most part been grounded in an uncritically accepted linear temporal framework. These attempts have tended to break down intuition into its varied dimensions despite general agreement that it is a holistic type of knowledge. The concept of intuition is most often identified as a way of knowing, a quick and ready apprehension (Agor, 1986). Researchers have not agreed on the definitive nature of intuition in part because of its subjective

status. Intuition is impersonal and offers a wider array of creative solutions. Combined with rational thinking, intuition provides holistic comprehension.

Intuition is most commonly understood as the product of flashes of information received as images, thoughts, symbols, words, sensations and/or feeling cues. Feeling cues, different from emotions, are centered in the body and experienced intuitively in a pure state, without associated judgment. When used in combination with other incoming information, intuition has been identified by some researchers as highly rational (Agor, 1986). Fully developed as a reliable skill, intuition is a valid way of knowing that is fast and efficient (Agor, 1986).

Latent aspects of intuition are typically identified as perceptual skills such as:

- the skill of subliminal effect – knowing what something is after minimal exposure to it;
- perceptual or pattern recognition – the ability to locate a hidden object in a complex picture or to see a pattern between what appear to be disparate items or events;
- synthesis or Gestalt insight – the ability to see elements that construct a whole;
- time flow estimation or pretension – the ability to register time quickly and to know how long something takes to get to a certain point (Cappon, 1993).

These aspects tend to be internally experienced and can occur spontaneously without outside activation from environmental stimuli.

Ideational or output intuition skills are considered to be activated in conjunction with some type of external stimulus. Examples include anticipation or foresight, gut reaction or hunches in association with problem solving, hindsight and symbolic thinking (Cappon, 1993).

Typically processed unconsciously, intuition has also been considered as the essence of common sense (Cappon, 1993). Epistemologically, intuition is most consistently described as holistic and as an insight-oriented type of knowledge that favors inductive reasoning. In the context of problem solving, several researchers surmise intuition actually precedes insight. In most studies, no sex-related differences have been found to exist on intuition; everyone has the capacity to be intuitive. A common misperception is that women are more intuitive than men. More likely, features unique to girls' psychological development contributed to this artifact of interpretation (Gilligan, 1982). However, findings at the Institute of HeartMath do suggest the existence of gender differences in intuitive processing (McCraty et al, 2004).

Attempts at a unitary definition of intuition have focused primarily on its outward properties or the phenomenal experience of intuition both of which vary depending on context (Woolhouse & Bayne, 2000). Most descriptions address only fragments of intuitive processing and tend to focus primarily on what is most commonly recognized, as in somatized emotions such as "gut" feelings. These emotional traces suggest to some that intuition, as an unconscious process, can be activated through regular, more overt, conscious practice and learned recognition.

Perhaps most intriguing to consider is research in the field of human information processing that suggests intuition exists as a nonconscious cognitive process whose function occurs in a rapid, highly structured logical manner (Bowers et al, 1990). To these researchers, intuition appears to operate according to highly structured, efficient rules based on implicit learning despite what seems to be a mysterious incomprehensible process (Reber, 1989). Reber and others suggest that perceptual pattern recognition is activated automatically as patterns of incoming stimuli are recognized and increasingly associated with stored memory. The actual intuition occurs when information is re-combined and reformulated, then consciously experienced. Bowers (1990) perceives intuition occurs when this recombined information builds up to sufficiently cross a threshold into the conscious mind.

Intuition is sometimes referred to as lateral thinking. Unlike analytical processing, intuitive processing is not sequential and forward-moving but instead moves sideways (Cappon, 1993). As intuitive data is downloaded from a variety of unconscious input and externally triggered output skills, intuitive processing appears to resemble not so much an assembly line (sequential and orderly) but an alchemical process (gestaltic, synthetic and simultaneous).

Blocks to clear perceptions of intuition

Certain negative emotions are known to distort intuition. The literature indicates openness and acceptance of all emotion is requisite to success in discerning which feelings, sensations and imagery are giving correct cues (Shultz, 2005). Blame, criticism, judgment and fear block the natural flow of intuition. Subtle energies also affect health and intuition. Many skilled intuitives such as Myss, Schultz, Orloff and Emery, point out that high intuitives are by nature more sensitive. These individuals have a tendency to sense or feel a great deal of the ambient psychic energies, emotions and information around them, such that highly emotionally charged or chaotic situations can be too much to manage or absorb.

Some experiences of confusion, depression, manic tendencies and co-dependent behaviors may in fact be artifacts related to picking up on others' emotions. There is good evidence of the body's ability to perceive the emotions of another (Radin and Schlitz, 2005). Without conscious awareness, since the body is not able to recognize this has occurred, it will adjust to compensate for the projected or received emotions of others (Shealy and Rasor, 2005). These experiences may lead to inappropriate diagnoses of pathology in highly sensitive individuals as their mood or behaviors may be affected as an adaptive response to negative situations.

To sense energy, intuition serves a practical function in that it is not mediated by the rational mind (Orloff, 2004). Pure intuition comes from love centered in the heart (Emery, 2001). This level of intuitive awareness has an impartial, objective, detached quality and as such, when experienced without an expected outcome, is impersonal and genuine (Emery, 2001). The literature identifies a range of common signals when intuitive cues are in support of a situation such as:

- a gestalt of information received as a whole, experienced positively as a sudden knowing;
- an internally felt sense of calmness or what is described as a sense of peace.

When a particular decision or situation may not be in the individual's best interest, common intuitive signals may include a felt sense of agitation or a sinking feeling in the gut.

The most common obstruction to discerning and trusting intuitive signals appears to be a lack of confidence in one's intuitive ability (Langan-Fox and Shirley, 2003). A reliable relationship with intuition is enhanced when positive emotions are fostered. It is surmised the context in which individuals are most likely to have intuitive feelings might be in positive emotional and positive personal situations such as with close friends and family. Negative or neutral states appear not to block intuition altogether but impact whether intuitive skill can readily be engaged. One study that examined the effect of mood states on confidence in intuitive judgments suggests mood may serve an informational function thereby tuning cognitive strategies to meet situational requirements (Bolte et al, 2003).

Comparatively little is understood about intuition and the deliberate regulation of affect. Some researchers postulate that individuals may be willing to regulate affect towards a neutral state in order to achieve specific tasks (Cohen and Andrade, 2004), suggesting that perhaps choosing a mood state may have the potential to be learned as a skill.

In the current study of the effects of intuitive development on women's health and spiritual wellbeing, a transpersonal perspective was taken on women's experience of depression. The question is asked: Is depression, in addition to difficulty identifying a complicated mixture of emotions, the result of an unconscious adaptive response to disconnection from the natural flow of intuition?

Intuition and women's health

Women's health research in the U.S. has yet to explore the therapeutic benefits of intuition as a resource for health and wellbeing. Women's wellness pioneer, Dr. Christiane Northrup, has long championed the importance of feminine intelligence or intuition in relation to health (Northrup, 1998).

“Only inner guidance and emotions can reliably inform women’s understanding of how and why their bodies act as they do” (Northrup, 1998). Chief among several psychosocial factors contributing to women’s depression are extreme devotion to habits of efficiency, productivity and guilt about taking time to rest and replenish, which, Northrup (1998) argues, prevent women from slowing down enough to tune in to their inner guidance. Sufficient time in solitude and stillness are a challenge for women who do too much. Without holistic comprehension, she believes women fail to relate symptom formation to other parts of their lives (Northrup, 1998). However, with conscious awareness Northrup (1998) argues “intuition eventually trumps external influences.”

Because this study recognized the validity of subjective experience, the term "co-researcher" (Braud and Anderson, 1998) is used to identify the study subjects. This is to emphasize an egalitarian stance, since those familiar with the experiences being studied are the true experts.

For women in this study, many of whom were struggling with a variety of symptoms including depression, intuitively perceived insights revealed surprising solutions. One co-researcher wrote: *“While in the study, I received a huge intuitive revelation that I am overmedicated with antidepressants. I was immediately inspired to wean myself off. I am doing that under the supervision of my physician. I am now on one-third the amount of Prozac I was on and have a hundred times more energy and mental clarity, especially upon waking, than I have had in the ten years I have been on antidepressants. I am thrilled to be getting off Prozac.”*

Intuition does not take the place of intellectual and technical skills but instead adds a much needed dimension to women’s perceptions about their unique ways of thinking, feeling and being in the world (Schultz, 2005). Some researchers are suggesting changes in women’s brains are inadvertently affecting their intuitive receptivity. Dr. Mona Lisa Schultz, a skilled medical intuitive, suggests social pressures and unprecedented opportunities for women unique to this time and culture are having a serious impact on women’s ability to process large amounts of information. With a larger corpus callosum (the part of the brain that links the right and left hemispheres) and more connections between brain cells than men, women are naturally wired for multitasking (Schultz, 2005). On the one hand, Schultz (2005) argues this built-in ability to process several incoming signals simultaneously is part of intuition’s genius. On the other, more information to process at a faster pace in a busier world takes a toll on women’s ability to tune in to the more subtle dimensions of intuition.

Schultz (2005) postulates with the proliferation of more neural pathways, one adaptive response may inadvertently be to mute the right hemisphere’s lifesaving body awareness. “In other words, intuition becomes segregated as an adaptation to modern life.” As women lose touch with their feelings and bodies for a variety of reasons, the cost appears to be an increase in symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Schultz (2005) urges enhanced development of intuitive skill as one way to offset this adaptive response to the habits and pressures of modern living.

Study focus

This study proposed that women will do better if they choose to reclaim their intuitive skill as an act of self-care. Intuitive development is learning to discern through conscious awareness subtle impressions such as imagery. This level of awareness is achieved best by having regular time in solitude, preferably in nature, particularly at the beginning stage of intuitive development. Imagery, believed to precede action both physiologically and in the outside world, must occur intuitively if conscious change, either in thought, belief or behavior, is to occur (Norris, 1985). As a bridge to self-transformation and self-directed healing, intuitive development naturally supports the retrieval of spontaneously occurring images from the unconscious (Norris, 1985) such that everything needed by the individual for growth and healing is available to them.

In this study, two guided visualization exercises in each class assisted women to nurture this two-way communication between the conscious and unconscious. At first, several co-researchers noted a tendency to dismiss initial intuitive impressions, only to discover their accuracy and relevance later.

As images and mental pictures tend to produce physical conditions and external acts corresponding to them (Assagioli, 1965), intuitive insights that lead to subsequent perceptual change serves a valuable function in self-directed healing. Myss (1989) cautions, however, there are no simple formulae to interpret intuitive impressions such that each individual will need to experience their own unique intuitive cues and signals. One co-researcher wrote at the start of the study: *“I have been extremely depressed and angry. I have started looking for another job – mine seems so pointless. I lay awake at night and have trouble getting out of bed. My interests are really only for myself and those things that make me happy.”* Eight weeks after the study: *“After listening to my intuition, I took a stand at work and landed the job of my dreams.”*

In terms of profound change as the result of an intuitive insight, one co-researcher shared the following:

The most dramatic intuitive experience was about half way through our classes. For no explainable reason, I woke right up in the middle of the night with a knowing that my continuing mold allergy was a physical sign of my deep seated fear of life and the disconnection that I have struggled with all my life from a loving God. It seems after this happened I became clearer [all allergy symptoms disappeared] and I am more in tune with the knowing of myself. Now, when I am out in nature I can at last feel a loving energy that I have never felt before or at least had not been able to hold onto it. (Tears have started as I write this). I am so much more at peace with myself. I am aware now that I am drawing people into my life to move me further into more awareness and peace.

Intuition is also a pathway to spiritual attunement. Any holistic healing approach that seeks to integrate mind, body and spirit generally supports the possibility of spiritual healing as an aspect of reality. Fundamental assumptions in most of Western developmental psychology remain focused on the individual or local level of consciousness. This approach tends to perpetuate a perception of human development in which evolution of the individual is governed by incremental progress over time (Wade, 1996). Within this orientation, there is less room for other considerations, including the notion that development of the self is derived from or within a greater order and that time as it is understood in Western culture is constructed (Wade, 1996).

When Western psychology and other knowledge domains only examine intuition for its value in decision-making, the concept of intuition as a vehicle for achieving higher stages of psychological development and spiritual attunement is overlooked. Wade (1996) and others offer an alternative, based on a holonomic premise, that allows for a larger context in which to locate intuition as a pathway to spiritual awareness. In a holonomic universe, nothing passes out of being and infinite amounts of information that are processed or “transduced” give expression to a reality beyond the mind and body. In other words, if all is in a state of “what is,” then paradoxically the illusion of self developing over time now does so “enfolded” within a larger order. From this more expansive point of view, subjective intuitive experiences may be one way in which this larger order becomes manifest through individual consciousness (Wade, 1996).

Throughout the study, several co-researchers reported subtle shifts occurring, including a wide range of synchronicities and environmental cues that validated inner experiences, sensory signals and sudden flashes of intuitive insights. *“I am more aware of environmental clues. During the study I felt like pieces of me were making sense. I kept setting an intention of forgiveness [in relation to] healing something I knew I needed to do in order to move into the next stage of my life. Lo and behold, on Christmas night, when I least expected it, my ex-husband of three years called. Needless to say I was shocked and could not help but wonder about an intuitive connection with the notion of setting an intention of forgiveness.”*

There is no substitute for experience, none at all.
 - Abraham Maslow

Intervention

Each class met for two hours weekly for six consecutive weeks. The principle goal of each class was skills acquisition and dissemination of information on the relationship between intuition, symptoms and emotions. The arrangement of the room and the class format was designed specifically to foster individual subjective experience. By design, however, individuals were not encouraged to share their experiences.

The co-researchers arrived each week prepared to begin with a centering exercise facilitated by the principal researcher, a 10-minute period of deep relaxation that included instruction in pranayama or yoga breathing. This was followed by a short didactic component, a longer guided visualization, journaling and a brief question/answer period. By week three, co-researchers were instructed to “become aware of Your High Self, in whatever way this comes to you.” No other instruction was provided around this concept. They were also encouraged to notice “whatever comes into your awareness that would most serve you (or your healing) at this time.”

During two experiential exercises each week, the mood of the room was enhanced by subdued lighting and music blended with a sonic entrainment matrix (Halpern, 1992) useful for reaching alpha and theta brainwave frequencies associated with deep relaxation, meditation and spiritual development. Guided imagery selections included a range of image-evoking and sensory-stimulating exercises (Naperstek, 1997). Time for quiet reflection and journaling was provided after each exercise to assist co-researchers with capturing the non-verbal dimensions of intuition.

Guidelines for recording in Intuition journals (Emery, 2001) were organized to assist co-researchers track observations and experiences over a 12-week period. A 15-minute Power Point presentation was given each week for dissemination of concepts and information relevant to the topic. (These slides are available for review at <http://www.holosuniversity.net/dissertations.php>). In this way, co-researchers were naturally supported in each class to use left and right brain cognitive skills so as to enhance integration between mind and body. Because the researcher was familiar with outcome findings from research at the Institute of HeartMath on intuitive processing in women, guided imagery exercises specifically aimed at heart opening were used at week one and week six.

Research design and results

In addition to standardized measures, the inquiry’s qualitative findings incorporated intuition, direct knowing, feeling and body cues of the co-researchers, supplementing the commonly accepted understanding that most knowledge is obtained through sense data (Braud and Anderson, 1998). A more reliable connection to intuitive awareness naturally occurred for the majority of women over the 12 weeks of the study. Those women in the minority who reported difficulty with achieving reliable intuitive awareness acknowledged they were by nature and preference over-identified with thinking.

Efficacy of the intervention was assessed using a 2X3 repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). One subscale of the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), inner/ other-directed, indicated statistically significant change occurred between condition groups. In fact, all outcomes but the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB) demonstrated meaningful positive change in 12 weeks when both condition groups are combined.

Reports varied from the subtle to the obvious with regard to observed changes. Themes emerged, most noticeably an increase in feelings of trust in their intuitive experiences. One co-researcher

wrote: *"I feel that I give my intuitive information much more respect. I am not editing as I did before. I listen and respect my physical intuitive channel much more. I respond to its requests."*

Another noted: *"I am more confident and assertive. I know what I know and my body expresses what it and I need. I feel grounded, empowered and most of the time, confident."*

Taking action on their intuitive insights occurred during the 12 weeks for many of the women. *"I have more energy. I am being more assertive about what I am willing or not willing to do with my family and others. The class was life affirming for me. I have always known my intuition is good but have allowed others to demean its significance. My dream group told me to use my brain more and my intuition less. They laughed when I told them about the study. Last Thursday, I quit the group because my "gut" knows I need to move on."*

Conclusion

Initial findings suggest the practical application of intuition has strong potential to benefit women's health and sense of wellbeing. The majority of co-researchers demonstrated after 12 classroom hours a meaningful increase in their ability to be inner-directed and body aware. This shift naturally found many of the women more balanced in their response to external influences, suggesting increased trust in their intuitive ways of knowing.

Perceptual changes were reported, likely the result of several factors, including heightened sensitivity to internal cues, such as imagery, the effects of group learning with other women and exposure to transpersonal energetic concepts. Historically, women have shared a long history of benefiting from communal wisdom. It is also true that women drawn to a study on intuition are likely to have a higher than average degree of sensitivity. In this study, the majority of co-researchers reported a "positive effect" occurred after being in the presence of "positive energy" in a room shared with other women who had chosen to be in the same place at the same time to learn together. Steps to improve health habits or make needed changes in other aspects of life occurred with greater conviction for many of the co-researchers after three months of practice. This suggests further exploration is warranted as many of the reported breakthroughs involved chronic conditions.

Depression as conceptualized in the integral approach introduced in this study is understood in part as a response to interruption of the flow of intuition into the mind/body. McCraty (2006) suggests when women are cut off from their hearts (intuition), a loss of connection to the self ensues and if this disconnect persists, leads to disconnection from others and their environment, isolation and ultimately a state of depression. It is postulated this experience begins (typically unconsciously) at the spiritual level of consciousness and progresses to the psychic, mental, emotional and physical levels if negative beliefs and experiences persist.

Without heightened intuitive awareness, depressed individuals risk remaining feeling and thinking hopeless, helpless thoughts, unaware of their state of separation from their innate wholeness. Since intuitive skill is also useful for achieving higher (deeper) states of consciousness, a more conscious relationship with a Source greater than the individual has the potential to be naturally encouraged. Intuitive development thus naturally facilitates an awareness of the multidimensional aspects of self (Wade, 1996).

Past research on what factors appear to promote wellbeing in women indicates it is most often aspects of women's relationship with themselves that is a key feature (Clarke, 2006). Wade's (1996) theory on consciousness development identifies affect as an important motivator for women. Because women's brains are wired to feel in almost everything they think, say or do (Schultz, 2005), a transpersonal perspective that recognizes emotions as meaningful and mood as an informational tool naturally discourages a pathologizing interpretation when either emotions or moods arise. Instead their

role as messengers brings meaning back to their purpose as they are a reminder that disconnection from one's natural state of wholeness has occurred.

As a form of CAM health education, an integral approach to health and wellbeing that incorporates intuitive skill development has its place. For women in particular, to compete with the effects of trauma and living life in a fast-paced, high-tech culture filled with overwhelming choices, enhancement of intuitive skill has potential as a cost effective complementary and alternative approach to the creation of health.

In this study, several women stated they knew well before serious health issues erupted that "something was wrong." Women fail to recognize they have built-in psychological qualities such as intuition that are extraordinarily valuable. They also have limited understanding about the effect of unexpressed emotions on intuitive receptivity and health in general. In an integrated model of care, women who are encouraged to notice their intuitive impressions and subjective experiences stand a much greater chance of taking responsibility for their health and healing. Reliable use of intuition day-to-day is by nature impersonal and improves as the skill of detached observation is mastered. Women in this study were encouraged to have fun with their learning so as to reduce increased pressure to feel or be more intuitive. Heightened intuitive awareness integrated with logic and reasoning fosters a natural decrease in fragmentation and over time, this study suggests, less time is apt to be spent in depressed states.

Wade (1996) believes women will either take the path of doubt and reason or they will seek to understand themselves and the world through connection by way of intuition. For women whose natural proclivity favors logic and reason, intuitive skill development has the potential to enhance a more expansive perspective (holistic comprehension), particularly in relation to health. Armed with intuitive "data" and encouraged to search for the hidden meaning behind symptoms and emotions, women's health benefits exponentially from an integral approach such that women attuned intuitively are likely to be less isolated, less depressed and less apt to avoid or ignore their body's wisdom.

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